If you’re currently unemployed or facing a layoff, I have a secret: the nonprofit sector will have the strongest employment numbers.

In the great recession that started in 2008, the nonprofit sector enjoyed increases in employment annually and average wages rose every year. In fact, many workers who lost jobs with for profit companies a decade ago found financially and personally rewarding work in the nonprofit sector.

**Don’t believe me? The numbers below tell the story.**

From 2007 to 2012, nonprofit jobs increased 8.5% while the for-profit sector trimmed the jobs by 3%. The sunbelt states experienced nonprofit job growth rates of a healthy 5% - 10%, while the nonprofit sector in rustbelt states saw employment skyrocket by up to 15% (Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics - <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2016/article/nonprofits-in-america.htm>).

While nonprofits are not recession proof, there are a number of reasons why the nonprofit sector enjoys healthier employment growth during recessions:

* Federal and state governments increase grant funding
* Many foundations and major donors step up their annual giving
* Industries that are needed most during a recession have a strong nonprofit presence (workforce development, social services, healthcare, education, etc)
* Nonprofits enjoy a tax-exempt status that encourages reinvesting surpluses into services

**Is the nonprofit sector a good recession career choice for you? Answer these 5 questions:**

1. Is my skill needed in the nonprofit sector?

The good news is that almost any for-profit job also exists in the nonprofit sector. Nonprofits need accountants, HR professionals, customer service representatives, managers, business development associates, IT managers, marketing professionals, warehouse workers, attorneys, data specialists, etc.

1. What additional training or experience will I need to compete for a nonprofit job?

Some positions, such as an IT manager, may not need any additional training. But some jobs may require a bit of additional training. As an example, an accountant with a company will need to learn about nonprofit accounting. In most cases, a competent and experienced professional could learn these additional skills through an online course or even through on-the-job training as a contract worker with a nonprofit.

1. Will I need to take a pay cut or accept a lower position?

It depends. An attorney working at a “downtown firm” will undoubtedly take a pay cut. An SEO Director with a for profit company is unlikely to join a nonprofit as the chief development officer, and may enter the organization as a marketing manager. But a nonprofit might fill its HR Director position with someone who was an HR Manager at a Fortune 500 Company. A technical writer might make more money as a nonprofit grant writer.

1. What size nonprofit is right for me?

Nonprofits come in all shapes and sizes. Some nonprofits have tiny budgets, while other charities generate more than $100 million a year in income. Additionally, most nonprofits focus on a city, state or region, but many have a national or international scope.

If you’ve worked in the for-profit sector for 15 – 20 years, ask yourself what types of companies you’ve most enjoyed working for. If you loved the structure, support and security of being at a fortune 500 company, then focus your job search on large nonprofits that resemble big corporations. If, on the other hand, you were most energized while working for that small 50-person startup. If you loved the scrappy employer where job descriptions were permeable and “job experience” was one of the best perks, then definitely focus on small- and medium-size nonprofits.

1. Will it be okay if the nonprofit job feels like work?

I’ve often seen professionals transition to the nonprofit sector with the expectation that they and their colleagues will come to work every day on fire for the mission. They truly believe that their zeal for changing the world will overcome any obstacles or quirks of the organization they’re joining. After the first few months, these same professionals realize that nonprofit and for-profit sectors share some things in common: office politics, too many meetings, stifling policies and procedures, and, of course, occasional disappointment. **This doesn’t mean you can’t find joy in the work, but finding joy is an active pursuit. It doesn’t come to you.**

If answering these five questions helps you realize that the nonprofit sector might be the right career choice during the recession, the next step is finding the perfect job and organization for you. Obviously, you’ll network with friends and colleagues; polish your resume and linked in profile; and scour the online job boards (like Indeed.com, Idealist.com, and WorkforGood.com).

But stand-out candidates do more. In fact, they’ll research employers to learn as much as possible.

Would you be surprised to know that the nonprofit job seekers can gather significantly more information about potential employers? Here are a few resources every candidate for a nonprofit job should use to gain a competitive advantage:

1. IRS Form 990. Every nonprofit is legally required to submit this tax form annually, and it is publicly available at <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/>. You’ll find lots of great information on the Form 990, including:
* Total revenue and expense
* Whether the organization is generating a surplus or deficit most years
* Salaries of the highest paid staff members
* Largest donors and funders
* And more!

1. Charity Navigator. CharityNavigator.com provides a good summary of the most recent 990. To better understand historical data, however, you’ll want to us the Propublica link above.
2. Blog and newsletters. Most nonprofits have a blog or newsletter at their website, and these publications are far more forthcoming than publications produced by businesses. If you scroll back several months (or even years), you’ll learn a lot about changes in programs, staff and fundraising.
3. State Registrations. Some states require that charities register to fundraise, and reviewing their charitable registration will provide even more information to help in the interview process.

This publicly available “insider information,” will help you prepare for the interview. Your thorough research will also impress the hiring manager and set you apart from other candidates.

Good luck as you embark on your nonprofit job search!

About Dolph Goldenburg

Dolph Goldenburg started Successful Nonprofits® in 2014 with a mission to help nonprofits thrive in a competitive environment. Over the past six years, Successful Nonprofits® has grown into a national nonprofit consulting practice providing executive coaching, strategic planning facilitation, board development and interim services. Dolph also started the weekly Successful Nonprofits® Podcast, which has over 165,000 downloads. You can find Dolph and the podcast at dolph@successfulnonprofits.com.

If you found this blog post helpful, here are a few Successful Nonprofit® Podcast episodes you will enjoy:

* Recession Proof Your Career with Gary Hines: <https://successfulnonprofits.com/portfolio/jobs_Hines/>
* I’ve seen your resume, show me YOU with Kevin Chase: <https://successfulnonprofits.com/portfolio/kevin-chase-three/>
* Job interview questions and answers with Evan Piekara: <https://successfulnonprofits.com/portfolio/job_interviews_piekera/>