Timesharing of Jobs Could Cure Unemployment

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As the nation continues to sled through this employment recession, the Obama administration, Congress, governors, mayors and economists grasp for job creation strategies.

Indeed, the nation is experiencing by far the most dismal performance of job generation following any of the 12 recessions since the Great Depression. The country has 5 percent fewer jobs today - a loss of 7 million jobs - than it did at the start of the recession in December 2007. Millions of unemployed Americans are teetering on the precipice of permanent unemployment.

As a partial cure to this plight, I propose the creation of what I'll call "timeshare jobs." I'll admit, the thought of "timeshare jobs" may sound drastic. But drastic times call for drastic measures. And it's about time we admit that what we're doing - or not doing - isn't "working."

If 200,000 new blue-collar and white-collar jobs are created next month, imagine how the timeshare model in the vacation home industry could radically and favorably redefine job creation and "employment." Let's apply timeshare to half or 100,000 of those new jobs. Timesharing each job would allow 400,000 currently unemployed Americans to fill those 100,000 jobs as timeshare employees, with each person having 25 percent ownership of the salary, health care benefits and 401(k) package as they work one quarter (one season) per year. Timesharing jobs would pave the way for a quantum leap in job creation by tripling the number of people who would be "employed."

Four timeshare workers would fill one full-time position through seasonal rotation. This would be coordinated, consensual musical chairs by the timeshare employees and their employers.

With an oversupply of unemployed top talent in all industries and fields - 13.7 million unemployed Americans - there would be plenty of timeshare candidates for companies to choose from. Seasonally timing health care benefits might become an easy art for timeshare employees, especially scheduling some non-elective surgeries for family members. An overarching goal of most timeshare employees would be to gain the equivalency of traditional full-time employment by being a timeshare worker for a different season (one quarter) at four different companies.

Companies that create timeshare telecommuting jobs could advance this goal. Alternatively, outstanding timeshare employees might find themselves well positioned to be promoted into full-time traditional positions at a given company.

To entice companies to hire some timeshare employees, Congress could pass tax-break legislation to reward those firms that, say, hired at least 20 percent of their new workers as timeshare employees in a given year. This timeshare model would assure unbroken, 12-month productivity because timeshare employees would not be eligible for vacation time. Timesharing jobs would significantly increase employee diversity in the workplace, a worthy goal that both corporate America and the Supreme Court have recognized.
On the productivity front, companies might stand to benefit from timesharing jobs because 30 percent increased output over one person doing the same job full-time might be achievable. Job sharing (two part-time executives rotating half a week in one job) research suggests this result. A UK study in 2001 produced by the British Psychological Society revealed that 70 percent of job sharing senior executives were perceived to have 30 percent increased output over their full-time equivalents, and received high rankings on problem solving, teamwork and flexibility.

Some U.S. research suggests that job sharing improves employee retention and reduces stress. In the U.S. job sharing has been a popular career path option for some women executives facing work-life balance challenges. The 2008 National Study of Employers found that 29 percent of organizations allowed some employees to share jobs, which seems to reflect the confidence that some U.S. employers have in the job sharing paradigm.

Corporate culture and human capital innovators like Google, Apple, Facebook and Microsoft should pilot the timesharing of jobs. New Jersey should be at the top of the list for pilot testing this concept because it presents a very ripe field for timesharing: In 2010, New Jersey lost the most jobs in the nation and is still suffering job losses.

Timeshared jobs might allow millions of unemployed Americans to seasonally reap the benefits of full-time employment and not let their talent grow stale or their confidence wane even further. Many college grads from the classes of 2009-2010 also are balancing themselves on this jobless tightrope that could trip them up into permanent joblessness.

Timeshared jobs might just be a timely stabilizer that could further mitigate this jobs recession.

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