

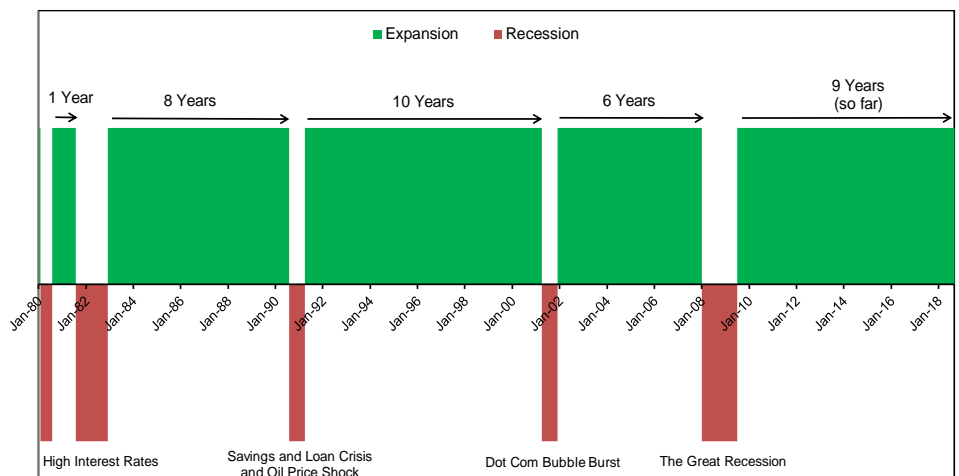
Recession Preparation – Lessons Learned from the Great Recession in Oregon

With a focus on being better prepared for the next economic downturn, in 2015 the Oregon Employment Department began a project to analyze and document our reaction to, and work through, the Great Recession. In Oregon, the Great Recession resulted in the loss of 147,000 jobs by February 2010 and by mid-2009 unemployment rates that reached 11.9 percent.

Technical, front-line, and management staff from each section of the agency were interviewed including the Office of Administrative Hearings, the Employment Appeals Board and our agency partner, the Office of Workforce Investments. Each of the interviewees experienced the Great Recession at the agency and/or the aftermath firsthand.

The majority of staff interviewed were excited that the project was undertaken. Documentation of the information that they shared will help the agency avoid repeating some of the difficulties that we experienced and

capitalize on the successes we achieved in the past. As the interviews progressed, the following four common themes emerged:



Source: Oregon Employment Department based on NBER Business Cycles

Communication:

Over the course of the Great Recession, communication between different parts of the agency improved to a point that was better than prior to the onset of the recession. However, that communication got off to a slow start, which caused some problems for the agency. Communication with external entities was very proactive throughout the recession.

Staffing:

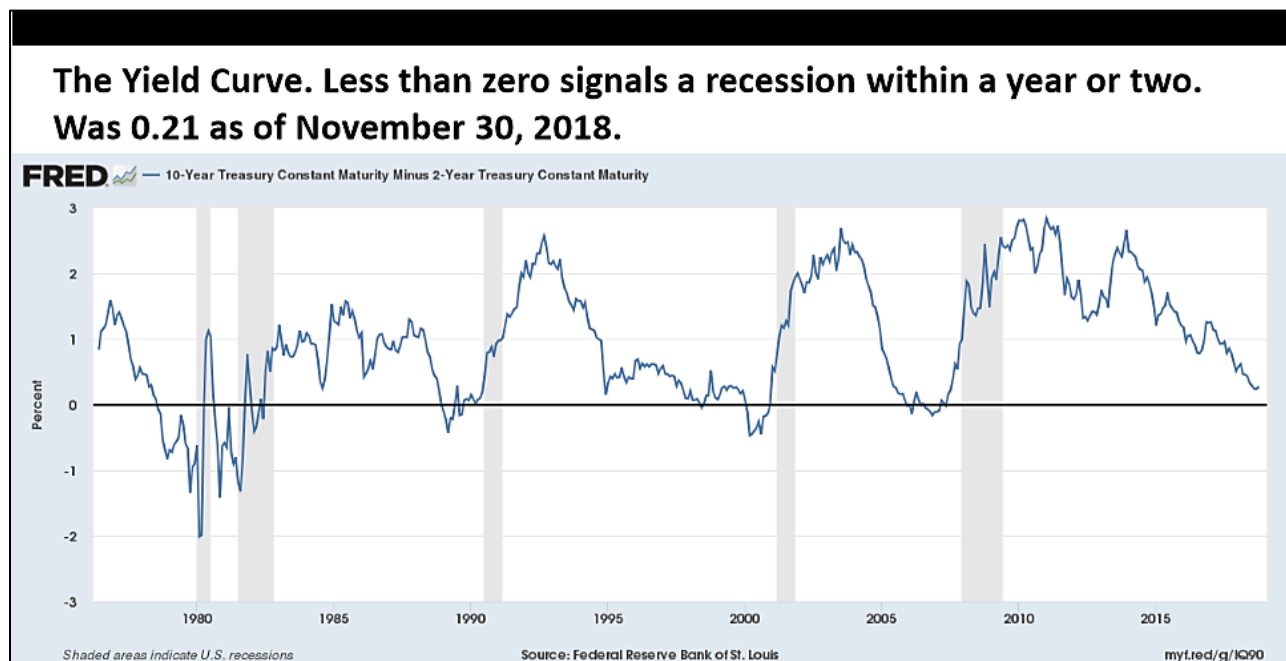
It was clear that the additional staff that were brought on during the recession made a huge difference in our ability to help customers and work through the increased workload. However, in almost every section it was mentioned that either not enough staff were brought onboard, and/or they were not hired early enough to properly address the increased demand for services.

Training:

Overall the agency did well with the tools that we had in place. However, we failed at properly training staff in a timely manner. Employees were very passionate about this topic and several individuals stated that we are still experiencing problems caused by the training that was provided during the Great Recession. The agency is designing more flexible training, ongoing refresher training, and cross training plans to mitigate this issue in future recessions.

Commitment to Service:

There was an overall consensus that our commitment to service was steadfast throughout the Great Recession. Customer service was kept at the forefront of decision-making and as the customer population became more frustrated with the economic situation, supervisors did a good job of deescalating complaint calls and reminding staff to stay positive and put themselves in the customer's shoes. Teamwork was emphasized, backing up co-workers was encouraged, and there was an increased initiative for sections to work together to solve problems. There was also increased promotion of programs such as Training Unemployment Insurance and Self-Employment Assistance to help our customers find long-term employment solutions.



If you would like more information, or a full copy of the report, contact:

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