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# Taking Control Of Your Job Search

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## Taking Control of Your Job Search

by Kathleen Gage

The days of getting a gold watch at the end of a career are long gone. In the current job market you can be assured the job you get hired for today will probably not be the job you are doing tomorrow. In order to stay in control of your career and have a sense of security in uncertain times, the greatest key to your success is to treat your career as if it were a business – because in essence, it is a business and you are the product.

One of the primary reasons a business fails or succeeds is due to the attention to planning. It is essential to have a good business plan in place. In addition, it is important to be flexible during changing times because even with the best-laid plans we cannot anticipate some of the changes in direction that are likely to occur.

The same is true about career transitions. A primary reason people fall short of their desired outcome in a job search is because they have done very little, if any, preplanning.

In the job search, you are the product and the job search is the marketing plan. The three primary stages of the job search are:

1. Planning your search
2. Prospecting (generating leads)
3. Presenting the proposal and closing the deal

To succeed, you must have a plan and take action on that plan. Until you get out of the planning stage, you have not started your job search. Just like

running a successful business, the job search is a proactive process. Great jobs don't just come to you. There are specific actions you must take.

As with a business, in the job search you must define your target. When you define your ideal career or job there are some important considerations to make. What are the tasks you are skilled at and would enjoy doing in your ideal job? What would your job title be? What industry do you want to work in? What level do you want to be at? What salary range are you capable of achieving?

You can base a lot of your answers on your past experience, education, hobbies, volunteer activities and values. The two most common causes of failure for job seekers are lack of focus and lack of direction.

Another powerful way to define what you want is to imagine a job where you use your favorite skills and abilities daily. Picture a work environment where you are rewarded for doing what you enjoy. Visualize a career where your compensation motivates you, making you feel more successful and more valued. Envision being excited by what you do for a living and feeling like your career is full of possibilities. That is what it is like when your work "fits" you.

Once you know your product, it is essential to envision your target audience. The hiring manager is a big part of that audience, as well as your function and industry.

When the target audience is determined you must develop a strong resume. Your resume is a

marketing document, not merely an exhaustive work history. The biggest mistake most people make is they send their resume in response to an ad in the newspaper or on the Internet. The most powerful way to use your resume is as a “leave behind” after you have met with a prospective employer. You can consider your resume to be just like a business brochure. Think about the last time you got something in the mail without any upfront introduction to the product or service the company was soliciting. Chances are you thought of that marketing piece as junk mail. It is the same with your resume. It is considered junk mail until you have created interest in who you are and the value you would bring to your potential employer.

Most people use their resume for the traditional job search. The problems that arise with the traditional job search is that people tend to spend a lot of time in a reactive mode, rather than proactive. In the reactive mode, people are simply responding to job postings which puts them in competition with dozens, hundreds, even thousands of other individuals. This leaves people feeling frustrated – negatively impacting their self-esteem. In addition, there aren’t many desirable positions available in the traditional job search. Only 20 percent of positions are filled via postings or recruiters. The chance of jobs being the lowest paid, least desirable positions is high when the job is posted for the general public.

With the proactive (nontraditional) approach you are positioning yourself in a very positive way. A proactive mindset means that you should take control of your job search. You should initiate every action, not merely react to others. A big part of the proactive job search is to connect with the right people. Over 80 percent of all jobs are filled through connecting. The average American knows over 250 people that could be considered a part of their network. How many do you have?

A great way to connect with people is to network. What organizations and associations could you get involved with that would have members who may be able to help you in your job search? Keep in mind, it is not a one-way street. As people help you to achieve your goals, you will also want to help them achieve their goals.

Once you have connected with the right people you will want to set up interviews. The key is to ask for the interview or meeting. When most people think about interviews, they picture a one-sided question and answer interrogation—a stressful, out-of-control, unpredictable situation. As with all aspects of the job search, you should take a proactive approach to your meeting with the employer. A proactive appointment or meeting is never one-sided. You both interact as equals. Remember that you asked for this meeting, therefore you should be prepared to be an active participant in it.

The initial goal of your meeting with the employer may not be to get a job. Instead, at first you want to get to know each other and see if there is potential for an employment relationship. The mistake a lot of people make in the initial interview is they go in with a sense of desperation. This will not reflect well on your interviewing ability. The more prepared you are the better you will do.

If you find the job is not a fit, the best thing to do is thank the person(s) who shared time with you and leave. When you find there is a fit, let them know you are interested in taking the next indicated step. Regardless of the outcome of the initial meeting, be sure to send a thank you card or letter. It is amazing how many people forget this simple step. And, it is amazing how appreciative people are of receiving a thank you note.

Once you realize there is a strong possibility of a fit for you and the company you are now ready to negotiate. You should always negotiate first those

things most important to you. Hiring Managers have only so many “yes’s” in them. Prioritize your negotiation “wish list” from most important to least. That way, you’re more likely to get the things that are important to you. Some of the things to negotiate are job description, title, responsibilities, income level, benefits, schedule, flex time, tuition reimbursement, and vacation. You must determine what is important to you before you go to the table to negotiate. The more prepared you are, the better your outcome will be.

For anyone who truly wants to succeed in business or in a career transition, the primary key is planning and commitment. How often do we hear of the people who are successful, “Oh, they are just lucky.” Luck is a matter of effort. The more focused effort you put into anything, the more “lucky” you become. The more “lucky” you are the more successful you are.

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