



Job Hunting in a Down Market

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It is in all the papers, on all the airwaves, we are in the worst recession in years! Run for the exits! So what are you to do?

First of all, stop reading and stop listening to all the naysayers. White collar unemployment is still under 4% and the long term demographics still look good so the sky is not falling. The economy will recover, my crystal ball is broken so I can not tell you when, but it will. This means that it is NOT impossible for you to find a job if you are laid off, or even find a new job if you are unhappy in your current position. Opportunities will continue to present themselves to candidates who use a strategically targeted campaign, versus shooting from the hip. Landing a dream job has nothing to do with luck. It's all about making sure you are prepared to meet opportunity as it presents itself.

Based on my 25 years as a successful professional recruiter in a variety of economic situations, I have the following advice for anyone serious about finding a new position.

Finding a job is a full time job so plan on focusing 40 hours a week on your job search if you are unemployed. If you find yourself unexpectedly laid off, be sure to begin your job search *immediately*. Do not allow yourself even a moment to wallow in self-pity, do not enjoy the severance package, and get started ASAP. I highly recommend you treat your job hunt like a JOB; establish a schedule, create a workspace at home, get up and get going, and hold yourself accountable to certain activities every day. It is even better if you can leave the house to work on your search so find out if your company provides outplacement, go to your local library, or bring your laptop to a coffee shop with Wifi and free refills.

Network, Network, Network! It's not what you know, it's who you know. Cast a wide net. Do this first, even before you work on your resume and then do it every day for as long as you are looking (and actually continue networking after you have found a new position). Use every resource available to you: alumni groups, business networking groups, volunteer organizations, church, tennis club, alumni and professional directories, social media like LinkedIn, Plaxo, Facebook and Twitter. Keep your antenna up everywhere you go. LinkedIn and Plaxo are very good for networking with business contacts and Facebook is good for networking with personal contacts.

Pay it forward. While casting your net, remember Zig Ziglar's famous advice, "You can have everything in life you want, if you will just help other people get what they

want.” Cultivate a “serve then sell mentality.” Help others with their networking, with their job searches.

Think about and document why someone should hire you. What are your accomplishments and who can use them? First develop a list of your accomplishments and what you excel at. Pull from this list when you are developing your resume, use the list to decide what companies / industries could utilize your expertise and then use it again during your interviews. Where might you be able to step in and assist a potential employer from day one of your tenure? What do you bring to the table? Why are you right for the job? Why should they hire you?

When answering these questions, it is critical that you answer with regard to your past behavior and not from the ego and “what a great person you are.” Emphasize things like, “I reduced scrap from 15% to 2% over 4 months,” rather than, “I am organized and detail oriented.” Hiring managers are looking for evidence that you can do the job based on the assumption that the best indicator of future performance, is past performance. If you have examples of how you have dealt with a soft economy in the past, be sure to highlight them.

Market Yourself as an MPC (Most Place-able Candidate). Even if a company isn’t actively hiring for an open position, management will always have questions about how they can improve. If you have particular expertise that is needed, that’s a great way to get in front of a hiring manager. Sometimes it is best to work with a professional recruiting firm, like ours, because we have access to such a wide network of hiring managers and other professional recruiters we are affiliated with throughout the country.

Consider a geographical change. Are you in a position to relocate? Is there another area of the country where your industry is flourishing? Do you have skills that are transferrable to an industry located somewhere you’d be open to living? Please do NOT say I will look locally for 6 months, regionally for the next 6 months and then nationwide; if you will ever be open to relocation then start out considering relocation. Instead of doing it by months, allocate your precious time by geography. So spend 50% of your time looking locally, 30% of your time looking regionally and then 20% of your time looking nationwide.

Discuss this with your family. This is especially important for relocation. We placed a candidate once at a location that required relocation. After he accepted the offer his high school daughter spend the next 2 weeks crying every night and he decided the night before he was going to start that we was not going to take the new job. Discuss your options with your family; are they willing to relocate, are they willing to give up some things if you decide to take less money (consulting, different position or industry, etc.)?

Don’t forget you and your family. Don’t forget to take care of yourself, make sure you are getting enough rest and exercise. Now is the time to look and feel your best, it will give you the energy for the search and will also help you in the interview. Don’t let the stress of being unemployed and living on a severance package take a toll on your health. Set time aside every day for quiet contemplation, stay hydrated, eat healthy. Steer clear

of no-brainer activities like computer solitaire. Work during the day; spend time with your family during the evening and weekends.

Alternative Strategies

Get creative and remain open to side gigs. Many firms are cutting fixed costs by outsourcing to niche consultants. Interim or contract positions can help you draw income and stay on your tools. It can also put you in a position for a full-time hire once business conditions improve. Our firm has a large contract business so consider registering as a candidate with us or other contract firms and indicate that you are open to an interim situation. You can always go into consulting if you feel you have the contacts but it is very hard to find time to market yourself when you are also doing the consulting.

Can you work in another area of the country by telecommuting? Are there free-lance or contract services you could offer from a home office? We have found that here in the Midwest clients are resistive to this approach with new employees but it is used occasionally here and more often in other parts of the country.

Reinvent yourself. If you have a skill set in a particular industry, see if it can transfer to another. You may have to take a step back to enter a new arena, but long-term, you'll be better rounded.

Be a big fish in a small pond. If you find yourself outsourced from a large corporation, consider trying to get in front of a smaller or firm that may be in need of your executive skill set.

Think lean. Companies will be looking for any way you can use your skills to help them get lean and mean. If you can help cut costs and save money you will be sought after. Think about how you can cut costs in a department you'd like to enter.

Continue your education. Obtain professional certifications that put you head and shoulders above your peers. There are many continuing education courses available in most professions that can help keep you up-to-date and qualify you to approach a potential in a more consultative way. Getting more education will not always help but it can not hurt.

If you think you can or can't, you're right. Be sure you are not using the soft economy as a reason for your own failure. That may sound harsh, but it is only natural some times to seek the relief of a scapegoat during uncomfortable circumstances. Make sure you are honest with yourself about the time and effort you are putting into your job search. How realistic are you being? Are you doing the same thing over and over expecting different results? What are the things that you know if you did them every day, without fail, would get you where you want to go? What is keeping you from doing those things? Are the obstacles real? How can you get around them?

This IS a tough economy so work at this full time and you CAN improve your situation!