

Job search strategies

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Do you have a strategy for finding your next role?

Whether you looking to take a promotional step, seeking career change or are in transition, you need a strategy to get to that next position. This article shares strategies for securing a new role from three different but related perspectives:

- Candidate
- Employer
- Recruiter

The candidate's perspective

The first step in the search process is to **set clear objectives** for the next role you are seeking:

What is your ideal role? Is it as a line executive, expert, program manager, consultant, etc?

Is it a technical, line of business or more of a 'hybrid' role that you are seeking?

Will it be in a particular industry sector or service area?

Would you prefer working in a large corporate, non-profit, start-up, etc?

What lifestyle and environment are you seeking? For example, overseas travel opportunities, flexible hours, a dynamic or a more stable workplace?

Having clarified your objectives, the next task is to **differentiate yourself**. It is critical to determine what makes you a unique candidate.

"Ask what is it that you do better than others?" (Feldman, 2007) For example, you may be great at developing strategy, leading a team or managing complex projects. Or perhaps you are at your best in crisis or turnaround situations. There may also be a particular experience set that differentiates you, such as knowledge of the pharmaceutical sector or the merger and acquisition process.

It may be helpful to gain feedback from past employers or trusted advisors on your core competencies and what you can improve upon in order to land your desired position.

Once you've set your objectives and differentiated yourself, you're ready to develop a **search strategy**. A key task is to figure out how to allocate your time.

"Your job search activities should be roughly divided as follows" (Adams, 2007):

- Networking (15-20 hrs/wk)
- Internet searches (5-6 hrs/wk)
- Research (3-5 hrs/wk)
- Contacting agencies (2-4 hrs/wk)

In other words, around 70% of your time should be spent in the marketplace on networking activities. Your networking interactions will be facilitated by research and Internet searches. They will increase your awareness of the marketplace and make you look well prepared when speaking with peers and potential clients.

Since networking is the most valuable job search activity, how can you build it into your strategy?

a) Help other people get what they want

This is one of the best, and most frequently underutilized, networking tactics. Rather than constantly focusing on your needs, take the time to be a resource to others – particularly those who may be able to refer you in your chosen field.

b) Keep track of your contacts and refresh them periodically

Use different methods to stay in touch, including phone, email, snail mail, sending articles, invitations, or face-to-face meetings, according to the recipient's preferences. Ask your contacts for advice, introductions and information - but not directly for a job. Inquire about any "gatherings that they could invite you to as their guest, such as the Chamber of Commerce, Toastmasters or the Rotary Club" (Capell, 2007).

c) Look for commonalities with others

Investigate function and industry-specific groups that you could join. Attend meetings and get to know members. Consider volunteering at events or in other ways to develop relationships and establish trust.

d) Stay in contact with employers who didn't offer you a position

Maintain a relationship with individuals with whom you established a rapport but didn't reach an employment agreement. Don't let a good relationship slip away because the timing was off for hiring you.

e) Most importantly, don't wait around for a company to post a position that is perfect for you

The first candidate to impress the decision-maker often has a competitive advantage. Be the one to create a new job for yourself by targeting and introducing yourself to desired employers. Seek out companies where you are confident that you can make a positive impact. "Cite ways you can save money, save time, retain customers, reduce costs, or increase sales or profits" (Feldman, 2007).

The employer's perspective

What are employers looking for and how can you present yourself in the best light?

Employers are looking for you to meet the core job requirements, demonstrate relevant skills, experiences and leadership qualities, show enthusiasm for the job (and company) and be a good "fit". Fit includes cultural, logistical and financial considerations.

They key is to make it easy for prospective employers to spot your fit. Make sure that the value and unique contribution that you can bring to the company are easy to spot in your cover letter, resume and oral communication.

Unfortunately, the best credentials in the world may not be enough. Personal chemistry and trust play a key role in hiring decisions. The following suggestions for interviewing will help you make a solid impression with prospective employers and aid in underscoring the value that you bring:

a) Dress appropriately

Find out what the dress code is, e.g. is it conservative versus less conservative? That way, your appearance will be consistent with company norms and won't raise any red flags.

b) Ask questions

Figure out what is important to them so you can address their needs and calm their anxieties. Don't wait until the end of the interview to ask your "allotted" questions. Rather, take advantage of any opportunities throughout the interview to reap valuable information.

c) Pay attention to body language

Concentrate on "maintaining the right amount of eye contact" (Mattioli, 2007), avoid fidgeting, be conscious of posture while standing or sitting, and resist "closed" body language. Ensure that your body language is consistent with your spoken words

d) Provide relevant examples

When answering behavioral questions, rather than saying how you "would" do something. Provide an example of how you *actually* responded to a similar situation in a prior role. Nothing beats actual experience and performance to demonstrate that you can deliver.

e) Follow up

Don't underestimate the importance of writing a tailored thank you note. This is your last chance to reiterate your best qualities and why you are an excellent fit for the firm.

The recruiter's perspective

Recruiters evaluate the overlap between an employer's requirements and the candidate's profile on a number of criteria, including skills and experiences, leadership qualities, and fit. Your job is to evaluate where that overlap exists and then to demonstrate it.

The recruiter spends a significant amount of time getting to know the client. S/he talks with company leaders and stakeholders in order to understand the company culture, work environment and the role to be filled. Recruiters also aim to uncover inconsistencies between the client's perceived requirements and actual requirements.

So how should you work with recruiters to maximize the outcome of your relationship?

a) Be selective

Select recruiters that work in your chosen industry or occupation. Expect a high level of expertise and integrity. Keep track of your communications and view the relationship as long-term.

b) Be professional

Treat the recruiter like you would any other prospective client. S/he is acting on behalf of the company. Good recruiters will work with you to improve your candidacy if they perceive you as a professional and serious candidate.

c) Provide feedback

Share your interest level and “your thoughts about the interviewer, the rundown of the interview process, and the next steps agreed to by you and the company” (Matias, 2005). Even if the position at hand does not work out, your communication may pay off in the long run. The stronger your relationship, the more likely you will be “front of mind” as other suitable opportunities arise.

Summary

This article discussed strategies for securing a new role. As a candidate you will need to set clear objectives, differentiate yourself, and develop a search strategy. The majority of your efforts should be focused on networking and targeting those companies where you can add the most value. Make it as easy as possible for companies to spot your fit in your cover letter, resume, interview, and follow up activities. Finally, be selective in choosing recruiters and build relationships to keep you “front of mind”.

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