

9 Keys to Job Search & Career Success

In recent months, the job market has become increasingly competitive. But even as the economy slows, and there are increasing numbers of job seekers in the job market, there are many professionals who have been incredibly successful in conducting fast, effective job searches. These former job seekers have achieved new jobs that are personally, professionally, and financially rewarding. What do they have in common? How are they doing it? Here are nine tips to speed your own job search and drive it to a fast, successful conclusion.

Know what you want and go after it. Starting a job search without knowing what you want will almost certainly end in frustration. Think about it: If you don't know what you want and what your job target is, how will you know who to contact and how to conduct your search? If you are uncertain about your career goals, it is critical that you spend some time and energy now - before launching your search - on self-introspection and analysis. Knowing what YOU want, what YOU are passionate about, and what YOU bring to the table will provide you with a confidence that simply can't and won't be matched by many of your competitors in the job market. This is the crucial first step to any job search and is essential for long-term career success as well.

Know and sell your personal brand. When you think about your next career move, how would things be different for you if employers and recruiters actually sought you out? Personal branding (the process of clarifying and communicating what makes you and your unique value proposition different and special) allows you to make a name for yourself. It differentiates you from your peers and helps to position you as a leader in your field - as a specialist and an authority who knows how to do a job and fill a particular niche in the workplace better than anyone else. Once you are clear on your personal brand, you can use it to project a cohesive brand image and value proposition throughout all your job search activities, and do so in a way that addresses the specific concerns of your target audience. By knowing and promoting your brand, you achieve instant, precision-like focus that positions you as the ideal candidate for the specific type of opportunity that interests you. You gain immediate competitive advantage.

Be able to clearly articulate who you are and what you have to offer. While this may feel uncomfortable to you, the simple truth is that a job search is a sales and marketing campaign: a sales and marketing campaign in which YOU are the product. Through the process of personal branding (recommended above), you must identify what differentiates you and paint a compelling portrait of your unique value proposition. But, don't stop with just promoting this in your resume and then become tongue-tied when someone asks about you and your candidacy. You will hear the "what do you do?" or "tell me about yourself?" questions over and over, both during your job search and throughout your entire career. Don't wing it! Preparation is the key to confidence and the key to making a lasting, positive, and memorable first impression. Be ready with a 30-60 second pitch that immediately and confidently conveys to the listener who you are as a professional and what it is that you offer.

Make their first impression your best impression. Take a hard look at your resume. Like it or not, your resume is your first introduction to most employers, and your only chance to make a good first impression. Effective resumes are highly focused marketing pieces that are strategically written and designed to sell YOU as THE best solution to a potential employer's needs and problems. Your resume should be written to convey and illustrate your unique value proposition, with succinct "stories" that differentiate you from your competitors in the job market. Does your resume accomplish these goals? Is it focused effectively? Does it accurately present you in the way that you wish to be presented? If not, it is time to rewrite.

Network, network, network...and then network some more. The statistics are very clear, and while they vary slightly from survey to survey, they are also remarkably consistent. It is safe to say that at least 80% of all the jobs are found through the "hidden" job market, also known as the "unpublished" job market. These are jobs typically landed through word of mouth and referrals as opposed to the hit-or-miss method of answering ads, posting your resume to internet databases, or other techniques meant to target the remaining 20% of all jobs in the published market. It stands to reason that if the vast majority of the jobs are to be found in this hidden market, that you should spend the majority of your job search time working to crack it. There is no more effective job

search technique than networking. So, even if it feels a little uncomfortable at first, just get out there and do it. Make networking a part of your daily routine and plan to spend the majority of your job search time on networking activities (approximately three-fourths of your time is a good estimate). The more you network, the faster your current job search will come to a successful conclusion and the faster and more successful any future job searches will be.

Plan and execute a multi-pronged job search campaign. Yes, networking is essential, but other job search techniques are also important. An effective job search campaign is a multi-pronged one that includes the strategic, planned, methodical use of a variety of job search approaches. Answering ads alone is almost never enough. Neither is working with headhunters, using internet job search sources, or researching and targeting specific employers. But, when you combine all these approaches with networking, carefully evaluate and prioritize the approaches based on relative effectiveness, and then launch an integrated, multi-pronged job search campaign, you will always come out ahead. The best job search is one in which the job seeker approaches it as if it was a job itself.

Build a support team. While your preparation will certainly ease the whole process, job searching can be a grueling and very stressful experience. So, I want to remind you that you don't have to go through it alone. You should build a support team around you of people who can help you stay motivated and on track while giving you honest feedback and helping you stay accountable to the goals you set for yourself. Family and friends, past and present managers, your peers and colleagues, financial advisors, and professionals in the careers industry such as career counselors, coaches, and resume writers all make excellent people to add to your team. By assembling a good mix of people to support you, from a diversity of backgrounds and professions, you will receive a variety of different perspectives, ideas, and insights that can be very helpful. You should consider joining a job search support club or group - a local one if one is available or an online one. If you have been provided with outplacement services by your former employer, by all means take advantage of the office space and resources offered. The point is that you don't have to and shouldn't conduct your search in isolation. Surround yourself with a team that will help and support you. Above all, recognize when you need support and don't be afraid to ask for assistance and guidance.

Always follow up. Following up on all of your contacts and your activities can do more to influence your success in achieving your job target than anything else. A hand-written thank you note or a more formal, typed thank you letter after speaking with a networking contact, attending an informational interview, or after attending an actual job interview can make a lasting positive impression that gives you a distinct competitive advantage. A follow-up phone call on every resume you send, whether it is a resume sent cold, in response to an ad, or based on a referral from one of your networking contacts can make all the difference in whether your resume is actually read and considered or not. A consistent method of follow up is key and you must make the time in your schedule to do so. Follow up will positively influence decision-makers, it will help key the process moving along, it will show your interest and your professionalism, and it will position you above the competition.

Adopt a "failure is not an option" attitude and make finding a job a job itself. Celebrate your accomplishments daily and weekly, but recognize that a successful job search requires persistence and consistent effort. The more "feelers" you put out, the more contacts you make, the more resumes you put into the hands of hiring authorities, and the more face-to-face interviews you go on, the faster you will achieve your job target. It can be difficult to remain motivated when you don't immediately see results but remind yourself that job searching is a process and that it takes time. Reward yourself not just for the results, but for the effort.

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