

THERE ARE NO HARD AND FAST JOB-HUNTING RULES



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This article was written before the web became the primary tool for job seeking. Editorial additions and commentary are interspersed in parenthesis to both update Mr. Falvey's guidance and provide complimentary insights.

What's the best way to make a career transition? Write a letter, (send an e-mail) or make a phone call? Answer ads or talk to friends? Submit 100s of on-line resumes? (You're your resume on several Job Boards and corporate websites.) Create a one-page resume or multi-page summary? Send a broadcast letter or target search firms? Relocate or stand fast? Lower your sights or hold out for what you deserve? There are thousands of alternatives, and typically the experts' opinions conflict.

One thing is certain: there's little or no science to the process. You can do everything according to the book (any book) and get nowhere. You also can ignore all the "rules" and land a great job.

No Rules??

Why is that? The answer is that no standard prescription can possibly take into account all the variables that affect an individual's career situation. What's right and works for one person may be all wrong for another, even if they're in what seems to be an identical field or profession.

So what's a job hunter to do? Despair isn't a very good option. Hiring (or seeing) a personal career counselor will provide a coach (and can provide you great support and structure within a complex process), but it won't change the game. Waiting for the economy to turn, the government to create jobs or divine intervention aren't good strategies either, although the third option is better than the other two. Even if you decide on prayer, fasting and clean living as the way to go, at least stay busy while providence selects its time to act on your behalf.

Get Yourself in Front of People

Some efforts do have higher percentage returns than others. For example, a high level of activity will work better than low or no activity. We all have our ups and downs, but each day offers a chance to begin again. Face-to-face meetings with people are more productive than other types of communications. Many job seekers believe that something good will come out of working a video screen (or computer monitor). However, (software and websites) don't hire people; people hire people. Applications and research, if not done face-to-face, will provide minimal returns. (Web or print research is still mandatory as preparation for face to face encounters.)

Endlessly refining your resume and seeking some inner voice to guide your future are exercises in futility as well. And trying to perfect all the magic tricks of the job search by hiding your age, the fact that you were fired, or that you've been out of work for 36 months aren't worth the effort involved.

What's Your Value to an Employer?

You might as well accept the fact that you are who you are and get on with the real work of getting where you're going. (Determining your objective and focus your strategies towards its accomplishment is part of the success equation)...but this strategy can also eliminate many promising options. You and your desires aren't the (main) determining factor; what someone else wants, needs and will pay to have done is what will get you indoors and productive again.

Thus, selecting biotechnology as the field of the future and collecting every article and annual report in the industry won't do much to assure your future. In fact, that kind of activity may well postpone your future for some time.

Using People in Your Personal Network is Still the Best Strategy

The kind of information you need is micro, not macro. Having someone tell you about someone who's leaving a company, thus creating a vacancy is infinitely more valuable than reading about a product breakthrough or merger or acquisition in the business press.

It's long been known that a company's best source of new hires is referrals from current employees. Who you know is an old game, but it's still the best game in town.

Some people can and will be of great help to others if asked. Other people won't. Of course, rejection isn't something many of us enjoy. A fear of rejection keeps people from asking others for meetings, help and referrals. We all hope against hope that someone will somehow discover our perfectly packaged career credentials and recognize us as the answer to their departmental or divisional needs. That kind of wishful thinking is a dangerous delusion. Reality must be dealt with, aggressively if possible, on a continuing basis. Putting it off doesn't change it.

Even in a slow- or no-growth economy, there's always movement and activity. People who don't get along with their bosses quit or get fired. People accept transfers across the county, creating openings when their spouses resign positions to go along. Every day and in every state, new businesses are started. All of this mundane activity creates opportunity. The point of networking isn't to hope that someone in your network hires you. It's to have feelers and tentacles into as many situations as possible to pick up the vibrations that signal a potential opportunity.

Keeping yourself alive within a network of a couple of hundred people (or 10-20 for college seniors) is almost a full-time job in itself. Between writing thank-you notes, following up on referrals, generating additional leads and creating progress reports, you can keep the flow of market information coming your way. If your net is big enough and you don't let holes grow in it, you might just pick up the lead you need.

Being Uncomfortable is Good

Someone once said that if you want to get hit by lightning, you have to spend a lot of time out in the rain. It's cold, wet and uncomfortable out there, but that's where the lightning is.

Actively generating face-to-face meetings with working professionals will produce information and referrals to others. The time to focus is when an opportunity surfaces and not until then. The action is outside in the cold and wet. If you want to find a new career home, you can't do it by staying inside and at home.

Life has always been a treasure hunt. It often gets discouraging. Go at it any and all ways you can, but be sure to stay in the hunt. Let the experts debate the advantages and disadvantages of their techniques and systems.

You're the Head of Research and Sales

Meanwhile, get as many people as you can to help you generate information and leads. (When you get meetings or even conversations, go in there with deep and rich information about their products, services, programs, culture---and plenty of good questions. Your main objective is to show them you are intellectually curious about their work---and your questions and knowledge show it. In the end, it's always and in all ways, about what you can do for them; how well you're able to make the "business case" for adding value to their bottom line. Period.)

Follow up and follow through (personally and often but with sensitivity to their schedule) as best you can. (Trust yourself. Trust your friends. Trust your advisors. Trust your faith. Trust the process you're working. You only need one YES---it will come. Sooner---or later. But it will come.)

Job hunting is the hardest of work---use the Career Development Center's many personal, technological and printed resources to help you plan, gain support, learn successful strategies and contact employers.

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