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EXECUTIVE SEARCH

Be in the Top One Percent of a Job Search

By Jim Montembeau, Partner of Bell Oaks Executive Search

With the exception of The Great Depression, we are living in unprecedented times as far as economic conditions and job search are concerned. There are basic fundamentals for every job search regardless of the economy but today, given the number of professionals out of work, economic globalization and an aging workforce population, it is even more critical to differentiate yourself from all the others in transition. This paper is meant to provide information on the different tiers of job search and how to be in that top one percent or “Tier One” career seekers.”

As a Partner in an executive search firm, I have collected significant insight from more than a thousand candidates I’ve interviewed over the years. There are the many highly-qualified people who have shared their techniques on finding that next career. There are the clients (hiring companies) who have shared what they look for in people, resumes and the ways they have connected with the people they eventually hired. From this and additional research, I have identified the three tiers that job seekers fit into with regard to seeking that next opportunity. Which one are you?

What Most People Do to Find a Job

About 99 percent of job seekers fall into the Tier 3 and Tier 2 career search categories. Most simply don’t know what they don’t know. They aren’t informed on what is available so their search activities are based on what they hear from others and what seems like common sense. Or, they know what to do and simply choose the path of least resistance. Yes, that’s right! Laziness is a significant barrier to finding a job. Tier 3, about 80 percent of job seekers, typically involves job search activities involving internet job boards and sending resumes to friends and associates. Tier 2, about 19 percent of job seekers, is the same as Tier 3 but includes more sophisticated activities such as the use of collaborative tools like LinkedIn, Marketing/Target lists, and active networking via groups and introductions.

Does this sound like most unemployed people you know? Likely so. It is easy, it is safe, and it is rarely effective. This may work on occasion or by chance (luck), but for most, it is a vicious cycle of rejection and monotony which can wreak havoc on your overall attitude. In some cases, it has lead to depression.

Tier 1: What’s Luck Got to Do with It?

By my unofficial estimates, only 1 percent or less of job seekers reach Tier 1 level of job seeking. Much of this Tier has to do with increasing your luck through proper exposure and attitude. I use the term *luck* because it seems to resonate with people in transition. All too often, people who have been out of work for some time say, “I just haven’t had any *luck* finding a job.” In actuality, luck has nothing to do with it. It’s all about increasing probability and making the most of it when the opportunity is presented.

Exposure is emphasized because the position you’re seeking is available even in a down economy. One thing is certain: there is direct positive correlation between candidate exposure and attaining interviews. *Attitude* is also emphasized in Tier 1 because a negative attitude affects your motivation to get more exposure and your ability to play your “A” game in an interview. Improving proper exposure and attitude requires more focus, more discipline, more activity, and more guts than Tier 2 and Tier 3 job seekers. Here’s how to step it up a notch.

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NetWeaving

NetWeaving is a term used to describe networking with a pay-it-forward approach and attitude. The term “netweaving” was coined by Robert S. Littell, Chief Netweaver. According to his book, *Power Netweaving*, it is the process of serving as a strategic matchmaker and acting as a gratuitous resource provider for others. NetWeaving works because it builds your personal brand as someone people should know, it instills an unintended sense of obligation by the recipients to return the favor, and it improves the Netweaver’s attitude.

The way to go about NetWeaving is not complicated. When you are at a networking event or meeting someone one-on-one, go into the meeting with the intention of helping the other person(s) without expecting anything in return. Just by carrying on a conversation, actively listening, and asking some basic questions, you can master NetWeaving. Just ask questions related to how you can help the other person, what challenges they are currently having, and who they would like to meet. While conversing try to think about someone you know who would benefit from meeting or knowing this person. There are several other suggestions and techniques mentioned in the NetWeaving series of books and I consider them a worthy and quick read. Give NetWeaving a shot. I truly believe it is a worthwhile investment of your time that will provide both short term and long term benefits.

Contra-networking

Another twist to networking is what I call Contra-networking or “big fish/small pond” networking. This is networking in groups and at events with people unrelated to your industry or profession. Have you ever attended an event where you were one of many unemployed people in the room? It was a waste of time because all you were meeting were people in the same situation. The point of Contra-Networking is to be one of the few rather than one of the many.

For example, if you are an unemployed CFO why go to events where you are one of the many unemployed CFOs? Keep in mind that every one of us knows people (relatives, neighbors, teammates) outside of our profession. If you are that unemployed CFO, try attending an event for IT healthcare professionals or a seminar for marketing executives. The point being is that we all know people outside our given industry/discipline therefore people at these events may know someone and be able to connect you with that one person that lands you your next career.

Get an Accountability Partner

Career searching is a lonely process. You are accountable only to yourself. It takes a tremendous amount of self-discipline and objectiveness. When a company has a reduction in force (R.I.F.) often times they will engage outplacement service firms to help those who lost their jobs with career transition services. In general, these firms act as a career coach, an advocate, someone to keep you accountable for activity goals. If you have the means, they can provide valuable advice and services to help you secure your next position faster.

If money is tight, then find someone at your professional level, in a similar situation, that you can partner with to act as mutual accountability partners. The goals are to keep each other on track with weekly activity check-ins, assist in networking, and act as an objective adviser. Industry and professional networking events are a great place to find an advocate. There is no shortage of people also in transition there so the chance of finding someone you can help and reciprocate is fairly high. Word of caution: when you do find an advocate, set ground rules early and ideally give more than you receive. Being generous with your time and network contacts will go a long way in building or maintaining your personal brand.

Public speaking

There is no better way to obtain great exposure to a captive audience than in the public speaking arena. This is really where you can differentiate because, in general, people fear speaking in public. Also, not all professionals have a topic on which they can present but if you are an expert in a particular area or are passionate about a topic, public speaking may be for you. Opportunities to present are abundant. Networking groups, social clubs, churches are just some of the possible venues. Webinars are also a great option. A simple Google search on webinars will result in millions of hits. Narrow that search using your own areas of interest or expertise and you just might find an opportunity to present to a vast audience. In addition to immediate exposure, it will have a positive effect on your attitude and credibility. The ability to include on your resume "Frequent guest speaker on the subject of ..." adds credibility to your professional expertise and leadership potential.

Getting the Most Out of Search Firms

Search firms have a market perspective; uniquely sitting between a large candidate base and a large client (company) base. Since their census is truly across the board, they can provide you with information from a view that is not readily accessible to candidates or clients. All search firms differ in specialty, process, career level and reputation. Some are good and some are not so good. Some search firms are very transactional and are focused on speed and volume. Others are more focused on accuracy through proper vetting and due diligence with both clients and candidates. Since a firm will be acting as your agent, it is important that you meet face-to-face. If the firm does not take the time to truly get to know you professionally and personally then be aware that you are relying solely on your resume to represent your entire professional career.

To get the most out of a search firm, ask the firm representative you are meeting with to be critical in their assessment of your skills, search process and presentation. All too often, people (search firms included) will say what they believe the other person wants to hear to avoid confrontation. Don't be offended by what you hear. If you tell them up front that you want honest, unabated critiquing, you just may hear something you can improve upon.

Exercising in the morning

Now this one may seem strange, but follow my line of logic here. Exercising, especially in the morning, can help you get a job. People in transition are typically not feeling as confident as when they are gainfully employed. Exercising will crank your metabolism up and make you more alert throughout the day. Additionally, the sense of accomplishment you get by completing a workout is key to completing other activities throughout the day. Getting something done early in the morning gives you a sense of accomplishment. Small successes boosts your morale, which in turn give you more confidence and that confidence is conveyed to people you meet and during an interview.

Getting in shape also boosts your morale and breeds confidence. According to Sam Lorenzo, M.D., currently in a fellowship program studying the effects of aging, "*Exercise plays a key role in a person's psychological well-being. It is recommended that individuals who have depression be counseled to exercise at or above the minimum recommended levels. Related to the improvement of depression with exercise is the increase in the natural opiates which causes an improved sense of well being.*" One of the key characteristics that I have found is that people who find jobs sooner are those who are more confident. Anything that has a positive effect on your attitude and confidence can only help in landing your next role.

Personal Definition of Success

Use this time to evaluate what you really want in your career and life. Not by what society deems as success but you deem it to be. If you put all of the pieces of your life's puzzle on a table, what would it look like? What would you want it to look like? Everyone's definition of success is different. If you had to prioritize the following words in what order would they be: salary, intellectual stimulation, commute, title, religion, time with family. What are you willing to compromise to get more of the other? Would you take a lower salary to spend more time with family? There is no right order, there is only YOUR order and whatever you decide is acceptable. The key is to seek out a position that enables you to prioritize in a manner befitting to you. The "Work/Life balance" idiom has now been replaced with "Work/Life integration." This means that today's "success" can be defined by how well life's ingredients mesh with your personal definition.

This self-reflection can have a positive effect on your attitude in that it brings focus. One recent financial services candidate who had been looking for work for several months, went through this exercise. I asked him several probing questions regarding what he was passionate about and what made him happy. Like many, he was attracted to the high compensation potential of his previous positions. During our discussion, he revealed that he always wanted to get involved in his Hispanic community. This refocusing enabled him to target a different networking group. A couple of months later I received an email from him: "*You have no idea how valuable your advice was two months ago. Here I am doing exactly what I want to do in the non-profit world with my Hispanic community. Thank you!!! Harold - Regional Development Director, Hispanic Scholarship Fund.*" Harold may or may not reach the same financial level he once achieved, but in his mind he is even more successful.

Regardless of the position you seek there is no greater component to finding a job than activity. Irrespective of tier level, the more active you are in the job search, the more exposure you will get. As you get more exposure, your attitude will improve not only by meeting more people but also by the sense of accomplishment of completing more activity. In essence, activity equals greater exposure equals improved attitude equals a job.

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