

A Quick Course in Finding the Right Job

By Clay Parsons

There is nothing magical about conducting a thorough and effective job search. The following are a few practical guidelines that will bring you results.

First, some questions need to be answered.

Who are you? What is your "career identity"? Know yourself.

- What is it that you offer the marketplace?
- What are your saleable skills? What are your transferable skills — those that you can move from job to job?
- What are some of your most important career accomplishments to date?
- What are your workplace preferences and personality, i.e., the kind of work environment you enjoy, the kind of people you like working with, and the way in which you like to operate? (Everyone is different!)

Take some career assessment tests if you are unsure of the answers, and consult with a career professional. Remember, this job search is all about you. Make sure you are included.

What is your career/job search focus?

- Based on your personal career assessment, where do you fit in the world of work?
- What kind of job do you want?
- What role do you want to perform?
- What kind of organization do you want to be a part of?
- What do you want to get out of it in terms of salary and benefits?

Research your options. Use the Internet, career center resource materials, and the library. Be accurate and realistic. Consult with people already in the field, or ask your colleagues. If necessary, do some informational interviews. Remember, if you don't know where you are going, you won't get there.

Prepare your promotional materials.

Develop a complete package of personal promotional materials to use in your job search. This includes, at a minimum, the following:

- An updated resume
- A personal career biography
- Business cards

It can also include a list of major career accomplishments to discuss during an interview. The resume presents all the relevant career details, the biography provides the reader with general career information, and the cards tell how to contact you. All three together give the right impression — specifically, this person has his/her act together and is a serious job prospect.

One final note. Make sure that your resume and business cards show an email address. If you have a personal web page include the URL address. A personal FAX number is also a good idea. Remember that resumes are all about images.

It's who you know that matters.

Build a network of personal and professional/business contacts in your chosen occupation. Get your name out there. Join professional associations. Volunteer to help out. Get to know the movers and shakers. Research new firms and organizations. Do informational interviews as a means of adding to your knowledge base and expanding your list of contacts. One good personal contact, in the right position, can be worth more than a hundred impersonal mailings. By the way, this guideline applies to introverts, even introverts who are reluctant to make phone calls.

Develop an action plan.

Develop a comprehensive job/career search action plan and implement it. This includes all the steps you need to take, the people you need to meet, the informational interviews you need to conduct, the association or group meetings you need to attend, sources of job opening announcements you need to review, career/job-related research targets, and volunteer work opportunities, etc. It's easier to do if you have it down on paper. Remember, keep moving. Thinking about it never accomplished anything.

Prepare for the formalities.

Interview preparation is important. While you have the time, prepare answers to some difficult interview questions that you anticipate. Examples might include gaps in employment or job loss issues, or anything that makes you uncomfortable. Do interview role-plays with a partner or colleague. Take it seriously. Get comfortable with the idea of being interviewed. How you feel is 90% of the game.

Money and benefits matter.

If you are like most people who avoid this subject, make sure you research salary information early in the job search process so you will be knowledgeable about what you should be paid for your work. Also, research comparable benefit practices. Conventional wisdom says that if you are asked about salary early in your initial interview, you should avoid answering directly. In reality, it depends on the situation. Consult with a career professional if you are nervous about handling a salary negotiation effectively.

Go for it!

Remember you are working for yourself! Be persistent. Finding the right job will take some work.