

HIDDEN JOB MARKET SECRETS

Want Back in the Game? Use Your (New) Network Purposefully™

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There may be as many different reasons why as there are stories about how executives re-enter the job market. Empty nests, dwindling funds, boredom, hunger for another big win, conclusion of personal or family leaves may prompt searches for new career opportunities. Those changing careers, switching industries, or seeking a new position following years with one employer often experience job searching challenges that are similar to classic re-entry candidates.

One job search technique has been proven universally effective for candidates who do not fit into standard job descriptions. They have to network purposefully. This means to intentionally connect with hiring decision makers at target companies and meet with strategically chosen industry figures who are recognized as reliable referral sources. Keynote conference speakers, academic thought leaders, published authors, and former target company executives are among this group. In today's competitive environment, skills, talent and knowledge are not sufficient to attract employers and command their attention. Being in the race early can mean the difference between getting interviewed and being ignored; sadly it can be a numbers game that cuts off after "x" resumes rather than evaluating the universe of all applicants. With the hiring process being increasingly complex, job seekers today must follow up to promote themselves periodically so that if or when an employer has a need, that decision maker thinks first about who they know and gets in touch. Timing is critical; being recommended for a position can transform a content employee into a prospective new hire when they are not actively job hunting sparing them from a formal job search to find their next challenge.

Automated candidate screening and tracking processes which don't accommodate and can't appreciate exceptions are increasingly used to manage the massive volume of resumes generated by web-based postings. Most re-entry candidates will rarely be included among a short list of candidates matching an employer's ideal requirements. The challenge for those who can't fit precisely into a round or square hole is to attract hiring decision makers. The solution is to connect through a mutual contact.

Gerry Crispin and Mark Mehler of CareerXroads in their annual surveys have documented that employee referrals continue to be a main source of new hires. How can prospects get an insider to champion their candidacy and usher them in the door? Ask explicitly for help specifying the individual to be contacted and provide a clear value proposition that the intermediary can relay to the decision maker that will promote interest in the candidate's inquiry. A recommendation might be the only way a candidate will ever be considered. Networking contacts usually can facilitate a telephone or inperson meeting to start the process and allow a candidate to interact one on one with a hiring decision maker.

To establish good interpersonal rapport and demonstrate their credibility, serious candidates develop models or white papers or presentations that show in quantifiable terms how they will decrease expenses, increase profits and add to the bottom line.

After getting comfortable with a candidate's abilities, the employer may decide that the prospect can adequately fill an opening or they may create a new job just for this individual. Notably, the ideal candidate and the ideal employee may be different. Only the hiring decision maker can bend the requirements, reorganize resources and do what it takes to make an offer.

Beyond an immediate job offer, a positive impression might yield still more networking which in turn delivers other potential job leads. Getting on the hiring decision maker's radar screen is essential. Staying top of mind is just as important because organizations are dynamic and new opportunities result from restructuring, vacancies, retirements, etc. With patience and persistence, developing and nurturing networking relationships with appropriate (i.e., possess hiring authority or access to decision makers) contacts affiliated with target companies is the surest way to find a job. For candidates with a break on their resumes, personalized introductions explain unusual circumstances and pave the way for meaningful dialogues with prospective employers.

Networking has multiple benefits for prospective candidates: developing influential relationships, acquiring insights from the employer's perspective and gaining knowledge to focus on target employers most likely to be interested in them. Smart executives make a lifetime habit of managing their careers to obtain exposure to possible new opportunities in advance of official announcements. Network connections are usually an advantage over similarly qualified competitors and others who more closely match the selection criteria. Networking is career insurance.

Here are some tips to re-enter the job market with a running jumpstart to accelerate job search progress.

- First define skills, expertise, and knowledge. Next identify a potential employer market likely to value such talents and capabilities. Then find key decision makers/hiring managers and establish contact, preferably an introduction by a mutual contact.
- Create a plan that includes a strong value proposition to unmistakably benefit prospective employers based on quantifiable contributions, specifying target companies/hiring decision makers likely to appreciate this message.
- Focus: choose a niche of expertise that is remarkable, distinctive and memorable. Go to resources/experts, command more attention.
- Communicate interest clearly and persuasively in a flawless written format and compelling elevator speech presentation.
- The unadvertised or hidden job market is the largest source of new career opportunities. Access is available through personal connections, not official job postings. It's not just who you know and what you know, but who knows you.
- Emphasize networking purposefully, connecting with decision makers or individuals especially those affiliated with a target employer who are well positioned to not only hire, but also make introductions and expand connections to other hiring decision managers.
- Job search is a marathon not a sprint. Invest the time and effort to develop strong trusting long term relationships. Velocitize positive

campaign results by consistently using the right strategies. Continuously fine tune positioning, documentation, etc. based on feedback.

- Remember to show appreciation and to give back willingly to help others. What goes round comes round. Good networking is reciprocal and not restricted to job hunting-related activities.
- Follow-up, follow-up, follow-up! Be persistent but not pesky. Courteously persevere and keep the ball in play. Don't be deterred by effective gatekeepers; it's their responsibility to filter contacts—make sure they understand that there is more at risk excluding you than setting up a meeting or phone appointment.

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Debra Feldman is the JobWhiz™, a nationally-recognized expert who designs and personally implements swift, strategic, and customized senior level executive job search campaigns, banishing barriers that prevent immediate success. Her gift for cold calling, executed with high energy and savvy panache, connects candidates directly to decision makers, not HR. Network Purposefully™ with the JobWhiz, and compress your job search into mere weeks, using groundbreaking techniques profiled in *Forbes* magazine. In addition to her private practice, writing featured columns and conducting exclusive workshops, Debra is a recommended resource to alumni of top-tier business schools. Contact Debra @ www.JobWhiz.com to expedite your executive ascent.