

THE JOB SEARCH

by Karen Kaplan, March 2nd, 2003

If you're looking for a job, YOU need to keep one thing in mind throughout the process: Nearly all the rules have changed. Executive coaches and career professionals around the nation say the faltering economy has given rise to new must-dos -- and must-nots -- when it comes to landing a position you want. What may have been acceptable and effective during a job hunt 10 or even five years ago -- say, sending out a few-dozen resumes, or only looking in the local paper's classified section -- almost certainly no longer works. You have to develop as many contacts as you can, as well as ways to set yourself far above and apart from the masses -- because today, the competition for a single position is much tougher.

Predictably, recruiters and other career professionals recommend hiring a job coach to guide you through the oft-confusing process. According to some coaches, fees typically run in the \$1,200 to \$1,700 range for a few sessions, but in some cases, if that's beyond your budget, you can get help for free by talking to a coach on the phone.

If you prefer to go it alone, professionals agree it can be done, but add that you should pick up a couple of recent books on job-hunting (one coach suggests a series titled "Knock 'Em Dead") -- and, perhaps even more importantly, network constantly. The pros say you should first talk to anyone and everyone you know who's recently landed a job -- and anyone who recruits and hires -- so that you can get a concrete sense of what employers are seeking these days in a candidate. "Talk to other people who are going it alone and get their experiences. Then talk to people that hire. Maybe Uncle George does, and he probably had to hire someone within the last six months," says Janice R. Worthington, executive director of Worthington Career Services in Columbus, Ohio. "He may be hiring cleaning ladies, and that's not what you do, but it's the mentality. Find out what the mindset (for hiring) is."

As part of the network-developing process, Worthington also recommends phoning people you don't know who were recently hired for a new position in an area firm, to talk to them about how they got their jobs. She points out that many newspapers publish this information and says it is acceptable today to call "cold" -- without an introduction -- and interview the person on the phone.

Most people, she says, won't balk when receiving such a call. Networking also comes in handy when you're actually deciding where to apply, coaches say.

You should still include the traditional route of looking for postings in the local paper's classified section, and you should also visit such job Web sites as , hotjobs.com, Flipdog.com, directemployers.com or , hotjobs.com/careerbuilder.com. But letting as many people as possible

know that you're looking for work in a certain industry, even with a certain company, tends to be far more effective today when it comes to finding out who's hiring, the pros say.

ften, they say, many jobs aren't advertised or posted outside the company. Job coach Peg Cheng of Seattle, Wash., suggests you attend association and industry trade meetings to start developing regional contacts within your chosen field and get important information about available jobs first-hand. She says you should also get in touch with everyone you know -- either by phone or e-mail -- to ask whether they have any contacts within the companies and industries where you want a job. These contacts can get you the names of company directors and officers, and once you get those names, Cheng says, you should call to ask for an interview.

Your goal here, she says, isn't necessarily to ask directly for a job but rather to have a chance to discuss the company and find out what it might be seeking in a candidate when it does start hiring. Eventually, says Cheng, all this will pay off in a job offer. "Let everyone know what you're looking for," Cheng says. "Don't be shy about it -- people can't help you if they don't know what you need." Steve Baraban, a principal job search adviser for Jobsearch Solutions of central Massachusetts and a corporate staffing consultant, recommends finding names of company executives by going online to Dun & Bradstreet, Yahoo! Finance or other financial sites. Private companies often list company principals directly on the site.

Baraban also believes you should bypass human resources and recruiting departments and go straight to the manager of the company division where you want to work. He suggests preparing a script for your phone chat, because you could ruin your chances for an in-person interview if you stumble over what you're saying, he says. But if you never do actually make contact with the person, don't be disheartened, Baraban says -- as long as you've sent at least several e-mails to the person and tried calling a few times. "After (that), they'll push you onto someone else or take your call," Baraban says. "This isn't a bad thing, because you may get a chat with the actual line manager who you may be working for. Or, that person will walk your information to HR and tell them to follow up, and then you're getting in (for an interview)."

Once you actually land a job interview with the executive or hiring professional, coaches say, this is your best opportunity to make yourself stand out as the top candidate for the position. "The person who gets hired isn't necessarily the best person for the job, but the one who knows the most about how to get hired," says Joel Garfinkle, an Oakland, Calif.-based job coach and founder of hotjobs.com www.14daystoajob.com "Don't blow it -- be very prepared," he says. "Do all your research about the company -- try to find out what would make you stand out through researching the company and the department.

(Think about), 'What makes me great at what I do, what are my strongest strengths,' and bring that out. Have a story that shows you're the right

person for the job, with every point you make during the interview." And finally, don't shrink back at the point where it's most important to step up. "Ninety percent of people don't actually ever ask for the job because they're too afraid of rejection," Garfinkle says. "Ask for the job."

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