
On the Bridge to Your Next Job

60 Tips You Can Use

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Preface

Over the past year, I have participated in a number of career workshops, advised a number of individuals about their career choices, and completed several executive search assignments. It occurred to me that in many job search situations, the discussion always centered on the same issues. This inspired me to begin developing a comprehensive collection of job search tips for individuals. This collection is organized into various steps during the job search process. It is intended to be a complement to the myriad of existing career books, web sites, and newsletters available to the job seeker.

Although this list is geared toward experienced professionals who are out of work, the content really applies to any job seeker at any point in their career.

I welcome suggestions for additional tips as well as any success stories you would care to share. I can be reached at sbalogh@pontusone.com.

Career Advice

1. “If you think of yourself as a _____, you will always be one.”
Be prepared to “reinvent yourself”.
2. Clarify what’s really important to you, and focus on what you really love to do. Know yourself and your “unique selling points”.
3. Always be learning – invest in improving your work skills; stay relevant by being current with the changes in your field of interest.
4. Develop a mentoring/support person or team.
5. Ask yourself: “What does the future job market offer to me in opportunities and what can I do to uniquely market myself?”
6. See yourself as a “company” and your skills as “assets”.

Career Advice cont'd.

7. In your current job, don't relax – always be contemplating the next step. Ask yourself: “What am I doing to improve my employability?”
8. Each day ask yourself: “What did I learn today?”
9. It's okay to “take a step back” to move forward so long as you are following your passion.
10. Develop a “specialty” that is recognized by others (branding); assess where your brand is of highest value; build your presence in that arena.

Moving On

11. “You are not your job title” – separate your life from your work. You are not the company you worked for. Concentrate on the industry experience and job skills you have acquired.
12. Move past the “shame and blame” to “celebrate” the chance for a new direction. Pick yourself up and move on. Accept that your next job may not be your dream job. Think about how the next job can be the bridge to a new industry, function, company, or one of your personal passions.
13. Stay in touch with your friends – it’s okay to ask for their support. Start your own personal support group – an advisory team that you can be accountable to from time to time. Don’t be shy about making your interests and needs known. If your friends know what you’re looking for, they can give you a call if something turns up.

Moving On cont'd.

14. “Don’t let the silence get you down” – the most frustrating thing is not rejection, it’s the lack of response to your inquiries, letters, and submissions. Focus on what you want and pound the pavement to develop the necessary connections to “get in the door”. Try to connect to target companies/individuals at trade shows, professional events, conferences, and at career workshops (i.e., don’t be shy).
15. At the end of each week or month, reflect on “lessons learned” in the past period (perhaps with your support team) and set a plan of action for the next period.

Targeting

16. If there's a company you want to work for, develop a fresh idea about how it might address (with your help, of course) one of the challenges it faces.
17. It's okay to "challenge" someone you want to work for as a way to get his or her attention. Respond to a quote, an article, or a presentation by a person from the target company. Just be sure you have done your homework.
18. Consider doing a survey, research paper, case study, or "white paper" on a topic of interest to the target individual/company. Use it as a way to get in to talk to them and see what develops. The ability to make an impression is key.

Targeting cont'd.

19. If you know exactly who you want to talk to, don't create a contact "plan" – just call them! Usually, if you are honest and up-front in your message, people will get back to you. Be direct, and be nice!
20. "Perfect timing" may be a great way to catch someone's attention. Be aware of the latest news, quotes, etc., and be prepared to respond to your target with your offer to "help".
21. Be an active learner of what's of interest to you.
22. Surfing the proliferation of job sites can be a waste of time. Target those specific sites/companies that are of interest to you. Don't waste time searching on the Internet. Use it for research and communication.

Working with Executive Search Firms (Headhunters)

23. Remember, they work for their clients and not for you – don't expect that they are going to “champion” your resume within their firm.
24. Make it easy for them to read your resume – you may get ten seconds to catch their attention. Be sure you have a “personal summary” on the top of your resume.
25. Get to know several recruiters in firms/departments that are targeting your areas of interest.
26. Be prepared to *give* information in order to (maybe) *get* something later.
27. Always return a recruiter's phone call – be courteous and offer to help (even if the job isn't for you).

Working with Executive Search Firms (Headhunters) cont'd.

28. Also get to know a researcher in a top recruiting firm that is in your area of interest. They may be more in your peer group and open to a “mutual aid” relationship.
29. Search consultants have off-limits issues – no firm works for all companies in any one sector.
30. Honesty and openness are crucial.
31. Firms generally do not gamble on an “external” candidate – search firms are retained to find candidates who meet the job specifications.
32. Remember, firms always take references and check them – be sure you know what others will generally say about your accomplishments.

Networking

33. Networking is fundamentally “hunting and gathering”; it’s also about building relationships. It’s a lifelong process for mutual support and advice.
34. When you make a connection with someone, maintain it. You never know when the contact can again be of value in your search/next job.
35. Do your homework – investigate a company, their competitors and/or customers before you approach them. Check out who in your network knows something about them.
36. Don’t call a contact only when you need something. If you speak to them regularly, when you call to ask a favor, it won’t seem out of place.

Networking cont'd.

37. Asking for advice on any topic (including a restaurant recommendation) allows the person to feel like an authority. Be sure to thank them and provide follow-up, if appropriate.
38. You must be a proactive networker – that is the most important personal commitment you can make.
39. There is more than one way to network – be open to all the “person connections” you have: friends at church/club, your doctor/dentist, neighbors, relatives, classmates, vendors, customers, etc., etc., etc.
40. Don't conduct a job search as a one-time process – keep in touch with your network(s) even after you find a job.

Networking cont'd.

41. Make four lists:

- Ten companies you'd like to work for
- Ten high-level people you'd like to contact
- Five positions you'd like to have
- Five cities you'd like to live in

As you meet with people, go down the lists and ask them if they know anything about the companies, people, etc. Use the lists as a prompt for “hunting and gathering”.

The Resume

42. Make your resume “user friendly” to the reader – put yourself in their perspective (to assess your resume). What would you want to know about yourself?
43. Be clear and concise – no more than two pages. It has to survive the “ten-second look” in order for you to have a chance with most employers. Be sure to have a “personal summary” of your skills and experience at the top of your resume. It will set the stage for your initial “pitch”.
44. A chronological resume format is preferable. Focus on the *value* you created in each position, not the *volume*. Use short, punchy, focused statements to highlight your experience. Don’t fabricate a reason to fill a gap – be honest and straightforward about your experience.

The Resume cont'd.

45. In their brief inspection of your resume, recruiters are generally looking for:
- Breadth of experience
 - Reporting relationships
 - Path of promotions
 - People management experience
 - Results (use cause and effect to highlight your accomplishments)
 - Reasons for moves
 - Education
46. If a contact doesn't request a copy of your resume, one way for them to get a quick look at it is to ask for a quick critique. Be "politely aggressive" – when you receive their input, make the appropriate improvements, and send them the new version.

The Resume cont'd.

47. In your cover letter, stick to the basics:

- I am _____
- I am seeking _____
- What sets me apart is _____ and _____
(two maximum)
- My requirements are _____
- Call to action/follow-up

Do all of the above in no more than one-half of a page.

48. If you really want the position, then follow up an e-mailed cover letter and resume with a hard copy of both.

The Interview

49. Know the company well! Research the company before you go – know structure, strategy, investors (if early stage), management, and latest news.
50. Be prepared to start the interview with a brief “pitch” that explains your unique strengths and experiences. Demonstrating very good interpersonal/teamwork skills are especially important in your discussions.
51. People are looking for passion in the candidates they interview.
52. Be honest without dwelling on your weaknesses. Be honest and straightforward about any gaps in your employment.

The Interview cont'd.

53. Remember to prepare some questions for the people you meet – you are also judged by the questions you ask.
54. Be a good listener – don't just focus on selling yourself. Keep the conversation going by being able to have a two-way dialogue.
55. Story telling can be an effective way to answer a question. It can paint a picture of *how* you work and provide evidence to support your qualifications.
56. Remember people's names – when asked, “Who have you met today”, be prepared to answer.

The Interview cont'd.

57. Consider a “soft interview” approach. Ask what they are looking for in an employee and how best to stay in touch (so when there is a job opening, you’re on their call list).
58. Don’t run out of business cards. Every interview is a “sales call”.
59. Thank you notes are mandatory! *Tell* them thanks; *express* your interest; *establish* next steps.
60. Finally, don’t forget to thank the contact who got you the interview in the first place!

About the Author

Steve Balogh founded PontusOne, a company that provides executive search and career services to individuals and organizations in transition. He was previously Managing Partner of David Powell, Inc., a Silicon Valley based executive search firm. Since joining the firm in 1997, he focused on recruiting management teams for early-stage companies focused on software, hardware, e-commerce/Internet, communications, and data networking.

Prior to joining David Powell, Inc., Mr. Balogh served more than twenty years in various managerial positions at Raychem Corporation. He was Raychem's first-ever Corporate Vice President, Human Resources. Earlier, he was General Manager for Chemelex, a worldwide division of Raychem. Mr. Balogh's extensive global business experience with Raychem includes expatriate assignments in both Brussels and Paris.

Mr. Balogh has served on the Board of Advisors for the Center for Effective Organizations at the University of Southern California, and chaired The Conference Board Human Resources Council. He presently contributes to the Business Advisory Council for IMD (International Institute for Management Development) in Lausanne, Switzerland. He holds a BS, Chemical Engineering from Cornell University and an MBA from the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

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