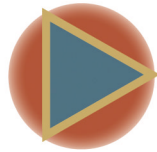


TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Michael Epifanio



The Talent Mentors

Put your resume into play

You only get one shot on making a great first impression!

Cutting edge principles on promoting your background and getting in front of the decision makers!

Why do we need another write up on self promoting and Interviewing?

I have been an executive recruiter for the past 14 years. I have literally spoken with thousands of people who are looking for work and those who are hiring these job seekers. I have recruited in many different industries and at all levels. And the techniques and strategies that you employ when looking for a job is the same no matter what level position you are looking at. There are thousands of books job search techniques and interviewing strategies- why do we need another one. WHY NOT! Most of the books that I have read are long and somewhat academic in their approach. My goal is to give you real world ideas and techniques that I use on a daily basis in my business to prepare candidates for their roles (*yes I did say roles*) in the play called **“I want that Job”**.

Let’s get real here- if you’re young and green guess what life is about → putting on a performance. You have heard the line **“all the worlds a stage and we all must play a part”**. Well I am here to tell you (**actually confirm the obvious**), that we play many roles in life. Think about all the roles you play:

Student, Mother, Father, Worker, Son, Daughter, Friend, Counselor, Girlfriend, Boyfriend, etc. you get the point. In each one of these roles we think differently, act differently and get our inspiration for playing these parts from different sources. We typically learn our roles, by watching others play their parts coupled with our own personal make up. And the great thing about playing these roles, we can improve and become better and better! Same principle holds true as we prepare for interviewing for a job, you need to prepare for the role by learning from others, and bringing your brand or style to the part. And guess what, if you know what the director wants and you have the right inspiration/motivation, you will deliver the performance of a lifetime.

Have you heard the expression, “there is more than one way to skin a cat” I apologize to all you cat lovers out there, but I could not come up with another common expression we have heard all our lives! There are many ways to approach your interview; my simple offer is to show you a way not the only way! However since I have been self diagnosed with ADD, I can’t deal with a lot of fluff, get to the point and give me the goods. That is what these pages will attempt to do. Give you the goods without a lot of words and build up just to have an e-book with a lot of pages of irrelevant material. I will however weave my philosophy and approach into the content. I can do what I want it’s my material! You may be asking what does philosophy have to do with getting a job- EVERYTHING! Who you are and how you think permeates every aspect of your life. You need to find the hidden voice inside you that snaps you to attention and drives you to your destination. You have absolutely responsible for the successes and failures in your life.

Enjoy the ride.....

Michael Epifanio

You just graduated college and you need to find a job
(Reality has just set in, schools out forever!)

You just lost your job, and after the sinking feeling in your stomach goes away, it's time to look for a new position.
(My dad never had to look for work; he retired with a gold watch and a pension!)

You dread going to work everyday, it is just not the right job for you- whatever the reason you know you need to make a move.
(I want to be happy and fulfilled in my career, I most likely will need to work for the next 25 years!)

Does this sound familiar? Do you fall into anyone of these categories? Have no fear Interview help is here! If you are college student just entering the work force, the competition is fierce. For recent college grads, or even those with a couple of year's experience, it is smart in an interview to emphasize all that you know about the company, industry, products/services, etc. Mark experienced a couple of interviews that went extremely well, including the one which led to his present position, because he was so well-prepared and had learned so much about the company and its industry. His research and gained knowledge compensated for his lack of actual work experience and impressed the interviewers tremendously.

In this market, one should be willing to consider nontraditional, creative job-search approaches like this type. Other opportunities include internships and contract jobs. The latter, although similar to temporary jobs, tend to focus on a particular project. Keeping an open mind will enhance and increase your chances for success.

Don't rely on resumes alone. Andrea's experience in applying for jobs in this market taught her that companies do not always respond to submitted resumes, even if they have advertised available positions. The increase in candidates has created a dearth of resumes to firms that often don't have or don't make the time to respond.

Mark came to the same conclusion after using the Internet to look for jobs. He discovered that the Internet can work against, as well as for, candidates. Although it is a great resource to learn about available jobs, companies are deluged with responses to their online job postings. The number of competitive resumes submitted makes it hard for yours to stand out in any way. Mark realized early in his search that, in this current economy, there are many more candidates seeking employment than there are available jobs. Again, the supply-and-demand equation has shifted

Telephone Interviewing Tips (Pre-screen)

Today, more and more companies are conducting Telephone Pre-Screen Interviews, and with good reason. It saves time and provides the opportunity to conduct face to face meetings with qualified candidates. A telephone pre-screen allows the hiring manager to find out more about you. Additionally, a pre-screen allows the candidate to learn about the company and the specifics of the position being discussed. Be sure to go to the company's website and explore what is going on in the organization. Look for news clips or press releases. This will help you formulate your questions and also show that you have take initiative to learn more about the company. Some of my favorite sites for research, in addition to the company's website:

www.yahoo.com Yahoo Finance

www.freedgar.com

www.hoovers.com

Whenever conducting a formal or informal telephone interview, always go in with a "**goal**" in mind. Talk to yourself before you interview and see yourself having a good interview and getting the job or the second interview. To capture the proper mental state, you **MUST** arrive early (if a face to face interview). Sit in the care and review your best interview ever. Rehearse this over and over in your mind. Get ready for a winning interview. Each of us has had one great interview in our lives where everything worked. I don't know what interview that is for you but there's one in your history that you will want to find then run back in your mind several times before you go in.

Your goal should always be to get to the first interview (face to face), or if conducting a final interview, close for the job. Some examples of a close are:

- I like everything that we talked about today. I'd like to take the next step. I am available Wednesday or Friday of this week. Which would you prefer?
- I like everything I've seen and heard so far. When can we get together for a face to face meeting?
- I like everything that we talked about today. I'd like to work here. What's the next step?

Never conduct a Telephone Interview over a speakerphone.

If you cannot talk at work when a hiring manager calls, be poised and request an off-hours time when you can speak freely.

In summary, be **ENTHUSIASTIC**, and always have your "prepared questions" (see Asking Questions) and closing statement next to the telephone. Lastly, without exception, always **CLOSE** the hiring manager and ask for a face to face meeting.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

1. Make sure you understand the questions.
2. Respond concisely – don't ramble.
3. Avoid "yes" or "no" answers.
4. Do not bring up salary or benefits unless the interviewer brings them up. Know what an appropriate salary range should be,
5. As you answer questions, avoid use of negative terms.
6. Take advantage of the opportunity to sell yourself.
7. Answer questions with specific examples - avoid generalities.
8. Evaluate the position for which you are interviewing. If the company is hiring for a light level position, don't market management level intentions.

9. If you want the job, ask for it!

FINAL QUESTIONS

- **Where do I stand relative to the rest of the (Development candidates) you have seen? (This question is a must).**
- When are you going to make a hiring decision?

RESERVATIONS AND STALLS

Be prepared to handle some tough reservations (things that are correct about your background). All interviewers put reservations in front of candidates either consciously or subconsciously to see how they answer tough questions under pressure. Minimize the reservations and start talking about other things that you will bring to the table. For example: "My ideal candidate would have five years of.... and you don't. Why should I hire you?"

- Although I am short on experience, I am long on enthusiasm. I am the kind of individual that will put 250% of my time and effort into learning your products and 250% of my time and effort into selling your products. This is what sets me apart from the rest of the candidates you will be seeing. That's why you should hire me.

QUALIFY

Remember to qualify; this leads to a natural close. Qualifying also demonstrates your sales and communications skills. In addition, it allows the interviewer to get out any reservations they might have with regard to your candidacy. It also allows you the opportunity to overcome any reservations with regard to your background. First, tell them that you like the opportunity then qualify the opportunity by putting yourself in the third person, using your first and last name. Interviewers always have less trouble talking about candidates in third person. Never say, "what do you think of me?" For example:

- I am very impressed with everything I have seen here today. What's your impression of Cathy Candidate (use your first and last name here)?
- If you had 48 hours to make a decision and it was solely your decision, would you hire me?

CLOSE FOR THE JOB

Always remember to close and ask for the job. If you don't ask for the job, you most likely won't get it. First, tell them that you like the opportunity, then close for the position. For example:

- Let me reiterate my strong interest in the position we have been discussing. I am very impressed with everything I have seen here today and I want to work here. What's the next step?
- Having recently evaluated several other opportunities, this ranks as my #1 choice. I want to work here, What's the next step?

In summary, to maximize your chances of landing the best job, be ENTHUSIASTIC (this is absolutely the most important aspect of an interview), ask good questions, answer questions completely, and finally, ask for the job.

Thank you Follow Up Letter

Send a thank you letter after every interview (make sure you get the contact information of the interviewer email, phone etc.) Send the letter electronically after you had time to digest the interview.

SAMPLE:

May 5, 2008

Martin J. Robert
Vice President
ABC Company
277 Rider Avenue
Anytown, North Carolina 27284

Dear Martin,

I thoroughly enjoyed the interview last _____. The position we discussed is a tremendously challenging one. After reviewing your comments about the position, I am convinced that I could make an immediate contribution towards the growth and profitability of your organization.

Since you are going to reach a decision quickly, I would like to mention several things which I feel qualify me for the position we discussed.

- *(Put in here those skills that make you the ideal candidate for this job.*
- *For example, 7 years Major Gift Fundraising, Hired and trained a team of development professionals etc..*

I am also a self starter and a fast learner with an intense desire to do an outstanding job in anything I undertake.

Thank you for the time and courtesy extended to me, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

(Your Name)

INTERVIEW CHECKLIST FACE TO FACE

This checklist has been designed specifically to help you have the most successful interview possible. It represents years of combined experience of placement professionals and should be looked upon as a list of MUST DO'S..... – not merely suggestions to leverage your career opportunities.

MINDSET: The very first area you must examine before an interview is your mindset.

ALWAYS INTERVIEW WITH THE INTENT OF GETTING AN OFFER

You are selling yourself - your personality, appearance, work habits, skills, and experience. An interviewer will not automatically know your worth. He/she will form impressions based upon your presentation. By actively selling yourself, you can control the interviewer's perception of your value.

Wouldn't it be nice to **CHOOSE** whether or not you want the career opportunity?

You won't get the chance if they don't extend the offer.

Always interview with the intent of getting an offer!

Interviewing is a six-step process

- Asking questions about the position
- Making a presentation of your background relative to your questions
- Answering tough interview questions
- Qualifying
- Closing
- Sending a hand written follow-up letter /note and an electronic thank you.

PREPARATION:

Schedule a to-do-list for your interview. Make sure to allow enough time to complete pre-interview tasks

Copies Have 2 copies of your resume, references and other support documents.

Note Pad/Folder to take notes during the interview or to carry your resume, references, and questions for the interviewer

Homework - I have...

Analyzed my resume for strengths for the position. Look for such things as:

- Career progression - each job further enhanced your skills
- What you "Bring to the Table" for this position Technically/Leadership

Quantified/qualified all of my answers and claims.

- I have managed "x" amount of people and responsible for "xyz" projects which resulted in....

DONT DISCUSS:

Pre-Interview – Don't discuss your impending interview with your co-workers. Why? Word can get out and your current position could be jeopardized. Also, give yourself the opportunity to assess the new company without being swayed by others' opinions.

During the interview DON'T...

- Don't ask salary/Benefit questions... you will be given this information if offered the position
- Don't speak negatively about current/previous employers
- Don't talk too much – don't talk about personal matters
- Don't state specific desired salary - we will handle your salary negotiations. Keep in mind; your stated amount will probably be too high (knocks you out of consideration) or too low (you don't get fair value). If asked, merely reply, "I'm sure you'll make me a fair offer." Or I'm very interested, however there are other factors in this decision other than dollar and cents – **I'm open to your best offer.**
- Don't make demands such as special schedules, hours, etc.

Don't Cancel:

It is imperative to your professional image and career advancement potential that you **SHOW UP PREPARED AND ON TIME** for your interview. Even if something comes up at the last minute and sounds like a reasonable excuse, a prospective employer could partially or totally discount you for a last minute cancellation. **If you absolutely must reschedule, do the following things:**

TARDINESS is also unacceptable. Give yourself plenty of time - 30 to 45 extra minutes to reach your destination. Double-check the location and directions.

Formulated positive reasons for leaving other positions.

- I left for a better opportunity – XYZ Company offered me the chance to gain broader experience in the manufacturing area.
- I was offered a supervisory position at XYZ Company.

Come Prepared with 6 open ended question

Always come prepared with at least six open-ended questions. For example:

- Michael Epifanio has walked me through the job description and the opportunity, can you tell me a little more about the culture of the organization?
- Oh, by the way, what is your background?

- How long have you been with the XYZ company?
 - Why is this position open?
 - What are the three primary tasks you want this professional to perform?
 - Are there any accounts in the territory that have ongoing revenue flows?
- What are the key elements and strengths you are looking for in a successful XYZ candidate for the XYZ Corporation? (this is the most important question you can ask)

Formulate positive answers for employment gaps.

- I relocated
- I did temporary work as an accountant while seeking a full time, permanent position
- I had a child and was able to stay at home for several months

Define 2-3 Positive weaknesses

- I am somewhat of a perfectionist
- I sometime lose track of time. I get involved in a project and want to see it through to completion

Interview schedule.

Make sure that you have no appointments or job related activities that will impede keeping the appointment. Write down basic interview information- position, location, company, contact, counselor's phone number. Immediately make arrangements for needed time off. Make travel arrangements if necessary (plane reservations, hotel, car rental). Complete your interview "To Do" list/schedule

DOUBLE CHECK DIRECTIONS TO THE INTERVIEW - YOU DON'T WANT TO GET LOST OR BE LATE!

Arrive 10-15 minutes early for your interview

After the interview, send a hand written thank you note as well as electronic email.

INTERVIEW TIPS

1. Know why you're interested in the job.
2. Assess your strengths and weaknesses.
3. Assess your major accomplishments.
4. Be prepared to discuss your job responsibilities.
5. Evaluate your skills and experience as they relate to the position requirements.
6. Prepare your questions about the position.
7. Research the company – know what you are walking into. Do you wish to work there?
8. Make sure you are ready to make a professional presentation - both in appearance and verbiage.
9. Write a good resume that accurately reflects your education and work experience.
It should be neat and should not have typing and spelling mistakes.
10. Compose a thank-you letter that you can send immediately after your interviews.
Thank the interviewer for the opportunity to interview and ask for the job.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

10. Make sure you understand the questions.
11. Respond concisely – don't ramble.
12. Avoid "yes" or "no" answers.

13. Do not bring up salary or benefits unless the interviewer brings them up. Know what an appropriate salary range should be.
14. As you answer questions, avoid use of negative terms.
15. Take advantage of the opportunity to sell yourself.
16. Answer questions with specific examples - avoid generalities.
17. Evaluate the position for which you are interviewing. If the company is hiring for a light level position, don't market management level intentions.
18. If you want the job, ask for it!

FINAL QUESTIONS

- Where do I stand relative to the rest of the (Development Director candidates) you have seen? (this question is a must).
- What is the next step in the process?
- When are you going to make a final hiring decision?

RESERVATIONS AND STALLS

Be prepared to handle some tough reservations (things that are correct about your background). All interviewers put reservations in front of candidates either consciously or subconsciously to see how they answer tough questions under pressure. Minimize the reservations and start talking about other things that you will bring to the table. For example: "My ideal candidate would have five years of.... and you don't. Why should I hire you?"

- Although I am short on experience, I am long on enthusiasm. I am the kind of individual that will put 250% of my time and effort into learning your products and 250% of my time and effort into selling your products. This is what sets me apart from the rest of the candidates you will be seeing. That's why you should hire me.

QUALIFY

Remember to qualify; this leads to a natural close. Qualifying also demonstrates your sales/marketing and communications skills. In addition, it allows the interviewer to get out any reservations they might have with regard to your candidacy. It also allows you the opportunity to overcome any reservations with regard to your background. First, tell them that you like the opportunity then qualify the opportunity by putting yourself in the third person, using your first and last name. Interviewers always have less trouble talking about candidates in third person. Never say, "what do you think of me?" For example:

- I am very impressed with everything I have seen here today. What's your impression of Joe Brown (your full name)?
- If you had 48 hours to make a decision and it was solely your decision, would you hire me?

CLOSE FOR THE JOB

Always remember to close and ask for the job. If you don't ask for the job, you most likely won't get it. First, tell them that you like the opportunity, then close for the position. For example:

- Let me reiterate my strong interest in the position we have been discussing. I am very impressed with everything I have seen here today and I want to work here and add my value to this team. What's the next step?
- Having recently evaluated several other opportunities, this ranks as my #1 choice. I want to work here and be a part of the future growth, What's the next step?

In summary, to maximize your chances of landing the best job, be ENTHUSIASTIC (this is absolutely the most important aspect of an interview), ask good questions, answer questions completely, and finally, ask for the job.

BEN FRANKLIN CLOSE

“As you know, we Americans have long considered Benjamin Franklin one of our wisest men. Whenever Ben found himself in a situation such as you are in today, he felt pretty much as you don about it. If it was the right thing, he wanted to be sure and do it . If it was the wrong thing, he wanted to be sure and avoid it. Isn't that about the way you feel, too?”

“Here’s what old Ben used to do. He’d take a plain sheet of paper and draw a line down the middle. On the one side he wrote YES, and under that he’d list all the reasons favoring the decision. Then under NO, h would list all the reasons against the decision. When he was through, he simply counted the columns and his decision was made for him.”

“Why don't we try and see what happens? Let's see how many reasons we can think of that favor your decision today.”

After you have listed all the Yes's here's what you say:

“Now let's see how many reasons you can think of against it.”

SHUT UP. It is not part of your business to help him with the negatives. When that is completed, move forward with:

“Now let's count them.” (Do it out loud) The yes's should vastly outnumber the no's. “Well, the wise decision is pretty clear, isn't it.?”

*Think about these and
try to come up with a response*

50 QUESTIONS YOU COULD BE ASKED ...WILL YOU KNOW HOW TO ANSWER?

1. **Tell** us about yourself.
2. **What** are your goals?
3. **How** do you plan to reach those goals?
4. **Why** do you want to work for us?
5. **What** do you know about our company?
6. **What** are you looking for in a job?
7. **What** are your greatest strengths/weaknesses?
8. **What** makes you think you are qualified for this job?
9. **How** does your company measure performance?
10. **What** is your individual performance rating according to the company criteria?
11. **What** is your management philosophy?
12. **Why** should we hire you?
13. **How** long would you stay with us?
14. **What** makes you a good manager?
15. **What** would people who have worked for you say about you?
16. **Did** you ever fire anyone? What for? How did you do it?
17. **Why** are you considering leaving your present job?
18. **How** did you get along with your supervisor?
19. **How** do you feel about your previous employer?
20. **What** did you like most (least) about your last job?
21. **How** much money have you been responsible for at one time?
22. **What** do you consider to be the ideal job for you?
23. **What** have you been criticized for in the past?
24. **Do** you consider yourself a "self-starter"? Why or Why not?
25. **Can** you work under pressure?
26. **Have** you had to work in a heavy overtime environment?
27. **How** much do you think you should earn in this position?
28. **How** much money have you earned at any one time?
29. **Why** have you not made more?
30. **Did** you ever consider changing jobs before?
31. **Why** has it taken you so long to find a job?
32. **Where** do you want to be 5 years from now? Ten years?
33. **Describe** your personality.
34. **Are** you primarily a "numbers" person?
35. **Are** you creative? In what ways?
36. **How** do you evaluate our company as a place to build your future?
37. **How** do you feel about relocating?
38. **What** other jobs (companies) are you looking into?
39. **Are** you a good listener?
40. **Why** didn't you do better in college?
41. **How** do you feel about minority group people?
42. **How** do you feel about working for a woman?
43. **How** does your family feel about your business traveling?
44. **What** projects did you work on?

45. **What** was your contribution to those projects?
46. **Did** you help in the planning of those projects?
47. **What** tools did you use in those projects?
48. **How** would you begin the task assigned to you?
49. **What** is the most difficult part (for you) of being a manager?
50. **Will** you be after your boss's job?

How to stand out from the crowd...

To start, write down a short description of your career-defining accomplishment. This would be the best work you've ever done. If you don't have a major accomplishment like this you can boast about quite yet, write down a project or an assignment you worked on that made you very proud.

Now, imagine you're sitting across the desk from me and I ask you to tell me about this accomplishment. If, over the next 10 to 12 minutes, I asked you the following additional questions, how would you answer each one?

Fact-Finding Questions: Clarifying Major Accomplishments

- What were the three or four big challenges you had to overcome?
- What were the actual results obtained?
- When did this take place and at what company?
- How long did it take to complete the task?
- What was the situation you faced when you took on the project?
- Why were you chosen for this role? Did you volunteer? Why?
- What was your actual title? Who were the people on the team? What was your supervisor's title?
- What technical skills were needed to accomplish the task? What skills were learned?
- Describe the planning process, your role in it, and whether the plan was met. Provide details of what went wrong and how you overcame them.
- What was your actual role in this project?
- Give me three examples of where you took the initiative. Why?
- What were the biggest changes or improvements?
- What was the toughest decision you had to make? How did you make it? Was it the right decision? Would you make it differently if you could?
- Describe the environment--the pace, the resources available, your boss, and the level of professionalism.
- What was the biggest conflict you faced? Who was it with and how did you resolve it?
- Give me some examples of helping or coaching others.
- Give me some examples of where you really had to influence or persuade others to change their opinion.
- How did you personally grow or change as a result of this effort?
- What did you like the most and least?
- In retrospect, what would you do differently if you could?
- What type of recognition did you receive for this project? Was it appropriate in your mind? Why or why not?

BEWARE OF COUNTEROFFERS

National Business Employment Weekly

You've been approached by another company and offered a position with growth potential and a moderate increase in compensation. You've analyzed and agonized over the decision to leave a good (or bad) job for what could be a better one, and have accepted (or decided to accept) the offer. However, upon resigning, your current boss asks you to stay. This appeal is known as a counteroffer or buyback.

In recent years, counteroffers have practically become the norm. "It's almost like a part of the accepted divorce proceedings, and allows the boss to save face with his boss," explains one departing Texas-based executive of a major airline. "And it sometimes has to take its course."

But while buyback offers can be tempting, take care not to fall into the trap or be blindsided to your own detriment. Career changes are tough enough as it is, and anxieties about leaving a comfortable job, friends and location and having to reprove yourself again in an unknown opportunity can cloud the best of logic. But just because the new position is a little scary doesn't mean it's not a positive move.

Since buyback gestures can create confusion and buyer's remorse, you should understand what's being cast upon you. Counteroffers are typically made in conjunction with some form of flattery. For example:

- You're too valuable, we need you.
- You can't desert the team/your friends and leave them hanging.
- We were just about to give you a promotion/raise, and it was confidential until now.
- What did they offer, why are you leaving, and what do you need to stay?
- Why would you work for that company?
- The President/CEO wants to meet with you before you make your final decision.

Counters usually take the form of:

- more money
- a promotion/more responsibility
- a modified reporting structure
- promises or future considerations
- disparaging remarks about the new company or job, and/or
- **guilt trips.**

Of course, since we all prefer to think we're MVPs, it's natural to want to believe these manipulative appeals, but beware! Accepting a counteroffer often is the wrong choice to make. Think about it: If you were worth "X" yesterday, why are they suddenly willing to pay you "X + Y" today, when you weren't expecting a raise for some time?

Also consider how you've felt when someone resigned from your staff. The reality is that employers don't like to be "fired." Your boss is likely concerned that he'll look bad and that his career may suffer. Bosses are judged by their ability to retain staff. When a contributor quits, morale suffers. Further, your leaving might jeopardize an important project, increase staffers' workload or even foul up a vacation schedule. It's never a good time for someone to quit, and it may prove time-consuming and costly to replace you, especially considering recruitment and relocation expenses. It's much cheaper to keep you, even at a slightly higher salary. And it would be better to fire you later, on the company's time frame.

"We've made counteroffers on occasion, if a good person approaches the issue professionally," says a former senior partner of a Big Six accounting and consulting firm. "But usually it was a stopgap measure because we couldn't afford a defection at that point in time. We didn't count on those people long term, and usually they'd burned bridges two or three levels up, if not with their immediate manager. It definitely put them in a career holding pattern."

The senior partner cites a long conference he once attended with his boss and two subordinate managers, in which they approved a counteroffer and raise to an employee two levels down. "Immediately after that meeting, my boss called me and said, 'We can't afford to lose him now, but our No. 1 priority is to find a replacement, ASAP!' "he says."And we replaced him within a few months."

Another senior executive from a major Dallas-based bank says, "If it's a real 'hitter,' I'll try to get him to stay. But to be honest, any additional compensation is 'stealing' from his future earnings, and I'll always question his convictions, knowing he can be bought. Further, I'll wonder if I can really count on him (which equates to limited future opportunities). In other words, the damage is done."

While your employer may truly consider you an asset and genuinely care about you personally, you can be sure that your interests are secondary to your boss's career and your company's profit or survival. Thus, flattering offers and comments are attempts to manipulate you to act in your employer's best interests-which aren't necessarily your own. In other words, they're not about you.

Accepting a counteroffer can have numerous negative consequences. Consider:

- Where did the additional money or responsibility you'd get come from? Was it your next raise or promotion-just given early? Will you be limited in the future? Will you have to threaten to quit to get your next raise? Might a (cheaper) replacement be sought out?
- You've demonstrated your unhappiness (or lack of blind loyalty), and will be perceived as having committed blackmail to gain a raise. You won't ever be considered a team player again. Many employers will hold a grudge at the next review period, and you may be placed at the top of the next reduction-in-force "hit list." As one executive who requested anonymity says, "Like an adulterous affair that's been discovered, the broken trust is never fully recovered."
- **Apart from a short-term, band-aid treatment, nothing will change within the company. After the dust settles from this upheaval, you'll be in the same old rut. A rule of thumb among recruiters is that more than 80% of those accepting counteroffers leave, or are terminated, within six to twelve months anyway. Half of those who do succumb reinitiate their job searches within 90 days, recruiters say.**

"They butter you up, give you more money, but nothing really changes. In fact, they can get worse," says one insurance executive in Utah who accepted a counteroffer. "My immediate boss was really agitated, since his boss interceded. At raise time, he told me that none had been budgeted (since I had already gotten a raise), and that if I wanted, I could negotiate with the president as before." This executive, by the way, left the company within months.

To be sure, recruiters have a vested interest in candidates not accepting counteroffers, since they can't complete their search assignments without willing candidates.

- Attempted buybacks can demonstrate disrespect for your well-thought-out decision and commitment to the new company. Should your current employer decide to eliminate your position or pass you over for promotion, successfully countering their decision is unlikely.

Besides, you've analyzed, accepted and committed to the new company, which has sure made plans and accommodations around you and counting on you.

Finally, when making your decision, look at your current job and the new position as if you were unemployed. Which opportunity holds the most real potential? Probably the new one, or you wouldn't have accepted it in the first place.

Some of my favorite Recipes... Eat well before you Interview!! I'll show you how. Some of my favorite recipes from my glory days of Cooking and running my own restaurants!

Connie's Peasant Pasta

The story- My grandfather was born in Naples Italy. He grew up on a farm and each day the family would cook pasta and a meat dish for the farm workers. The leftover pasta and meat course was never thrown away, instead the leftovers would be sautéed the next day in a hot skillet and topped with mozzarella and provolone and baked in the oven. At my restaurant in NY, people would travel 100 plus miles for this dish!

“Fried Ziti”

Heavy Duty sauté Pan that can be transferred into the oven

- 1 # Ziti
- 2 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/4 tsp. coarse pepper
- 1/2 cup Marinara sauce
- 1 Tbsp. butter
- 4 whole scallions, chopped
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. oregano
- 1/2 cup mozzarella, grated
- 8 Fresh Basil Leaves Chopped
- 1/2 Cup provolone grated
- 4 Tbsp Pecorino Romano Cheese

Cook Ziti drain and refrigerate to chill. Transfer ziti to a cutting board and chop coarsely. In a large skillet, heat butter and olive oil, add scallions and garlic, sauté briefly. Add chopped ziti, basil and sauté until somewhat browned, stirring and shaking the pan back and forth, until pasta is golden. Stir in salt, pepper, oregano and sauce mixing well add the Pecorino Romano cheese mix in. Top with grated mozzarella and provolone evenly over the top.

Bake in a preheated oven 400 degrees cook pasta for 20-30 minutes until brown and a bit crisp on the sides. Serve with some garlic bread and enjoy!

You can add any one of the following ingredients while you are sautéing the scallions:

- *Pepperoni*
- *Mushrooms*
- *Sausage (Cooked and Sliced)*
- *Meatballs (Cooked and Sliced)*
- *Sun dried Tomatoes*

In an interview, I've been asked to "Tell me a little bit about yourself"....Is there a right response to this vague question?

Absolutely. Asking someone to tell a bit about themselves can appear vague, but in reality represents a real candidate opportunity. This question, however, should not be miss-interpreted to be an opening for a 45-minute autobiography starting with "I was born in a log cabin." If answered properly, this ice-breaking request should result in a dialogue between the two of you—not a monologue. Consider this to be your chance to start off the interview by directing the interviewer toward your strengths and accomplishments. This introduction can be a golden opportunity for a 60 to 90 word personal infomercial on who you are as a businessperson.

Here are our **TIPS** on how to be successful creating your own **SHORT** infomercial:

1. Articulate strengths by using business nomenclature that crosses industry and disciplinary lines. Think in terms of describing your skills with words and phrases used in a performance appraisal; i.e., decision *making* skills, *interpersonal* skills, *problem-solver*, presentation/*platform* skills, *facilitator*, etc....
2. Next, make a list of key words that you may use to describe yourself from a business perspective; such as **coach, mentor, planner, leader, manager, implementer, developer, team-player**.
3. Now, when you have a list of those broad skill sets and key words, add key action words and adjectives to highlight these strengths. For example: *analytical* problem-solver, *decisive* manager, *innovative* presentation skills, *creative* facilitator, etc....
4. So after giving your short pitch on yourself and your skill-sets –Stop and ask, "Did that answer your question?" inviting the interviewer back in to the conversation.

By using action-oriented adjectives to describe these broad skill sets, you leave an experienced interviewer the opportunity to follow up with questions, such as

"Can you give me an example of using innovative problem-solving techniques?"

and

"Provide me with an example of how decisive management skills were beneficial to you in your career"

or

"How has being a creative facilitator assisted your team in being successful?"

This approach allows you to highlight your accomplishments while allowing the interviewer to hone in on the attributes that they feel are most important. Keep in mind; the ultimate goal here is to create an informative dialogue between you and the interviewer that will leave a compelling impression.

Infomercial Example

In a snap shot, I am originally from Buffalo, NY and moved to Chicago in 1990 because of a job opportunity. I have been involved in sales and marketing my entire career to include experiences in several different industries.

I hold a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration from Syracuse University in Syracuse, NY.

My accomplishments have included the development of plans and strategies for the largest Rx to OTC product introduction, the proven ability to turnaround under performing sales organizations, the insight to recognize problems and opportunities and then initiate action

plans to capitalize on those and the ability to work effectively with and through associates to achieve organizational objectives.

I believe my management style, which employs coaching, counseling and mentoring in combination with my analytical problem solving and ability to turn opportunities into substantive results, are important resources for any organization.

Did that answer your question?

RESEARCH ESSENTIALS

Tools

Watch This Page- www.watchthispage.com

Jigsaw- www.jigsaw.com

Virtual Rolodex-<http://www.otiscollier.com/linkedin/linkedin-resources.html>

Jott- www.jott.com

Emurse- www.emurse.com

Bookmarklets-

www.bookmarklets.com/tools/categor.html

Microsoft-<http://adlab.msn.com/keyMut/default.aspx>

Broad Look- www.broadlook.com

(On Broad Look, use Contact Capture)

Job Leads- Aggregators

Indeed www.indeed.com

Just Posted www.just-posted.com

Simply Hired www.simplyhired.com

Jobster www.jobster.com

Relocation

FAS Recolation- www.fasrelo.com

Salary

Indeed Salary Comparison- www.indeed.com/salary

Recruiting Resource Groups to Join

Multiple Groups- www.hireability.com

People Search:

Zaba www.zabasearch.com

Wink www.wink.com

Pipl www.pipl.com

Search Engine/Meta:

Dog Pile www.dogpile.com

Live www.live.com

Google www.google.com

Vivisimo www.vivisimo.com

Exalead www.exalead.com/search

Zuula www.zuula.com

Clusty www.clusty.com

Networking

LinkedIn www.linkedin.com

Spoke www.spoke.com

My Space www.myspace.com

Facebook www.facebook.com

Orkut www.orkut.com

Fast Pitch www.fastpitchnetworking.com

Ecademy	www.ecademy.com
Ryze	www.ryze.com
Konnects	www.konnects.com
H3	www.h3.com
Card Browser	www.cardbrowser.com
Naymz	www.naymz.com

Reference Letter Request email.....

Dear,

I am in the process of starting a job search, and I would appreciate you taking the time to complete the attached reference check on my behalf. This will help me as present my background to organizations. By sending you this reference check format this will allow you to thoughtfully consider what you'll share in your reference check on me, and do it at a time that is convenient for your schedule, versus at the office during your busy work day.

I would ask you to reply to each of the questions candidly, and with the necessary detail.

Should you have any questions, **WHAT SO EVER**, please don't hesitate to call or email us. Thank you in advance for your help, and please remember that this is a **CONFIDENTIAL** request. We ask that you respect _____'s request to keep his current career status strictly confidential, and not discuss his current reference check request with anyone without requesting permission from us first.

Reference Check

Your Name	Date:
Company name:	Address:
Phone:	
Reference Name:	Relationship to Candidate:
Position held:	Length of employment:

1. Give me one or two words that best describes _____?

2. What role or position do you think would be best for _____ at this point in their career?
What has been _____ most significant career responsibilities?

3. What is the _____ management style (if applicable)?

4. What would you characterize _____ strong points?

5. Can you provide a specific example of how _____ used this strength in their job?

6. What weakness should we be aware of to avoid any potential “bad fits”?

7. Please describe significant accomplishments _____ made that would be pertinent for future opportunities

8. What did clients (internal or external) think of the candidates work?

9. Why would you work with _____ again?

10. What is the reason one of our clients would hire this candidate over a candidate with a similar background? What makes this candidate top of their class?

11. Should the appropriate opportunity present itself, would you hire _____ for your own organization?

12. What advice would you give a future manager of the candidate?

How to stand out from the crowd...

To start, write down a short description of your career-defining accomplishment. This would be the best work you've ever done. If you don't have a major accomplishment like this you can boast about quite yet, write down a project or an assignment you worked on that made you very proud.

Now, imagine you're sitting across the desk from me and I ask you to tell me about this accomplishment. If, over the next 10 to 12 minutes, I asked you the following additional questions, how would you answer each one?

Fact-Finding Questions: Clarifying Major Accomplishments

- What were the three or four big challenges you had to overcome?
- What were the actual results obtained?
- When did this take place and at what company?
- How long did it take to complete the task?
- What was the situation you faced when you took on the project?
- Why were you chosen for this role? Did you volunteer? Why?
- What was your actual title? Who were the people on the team? What was your supervisor's title?
- What technical skills were needed to accomplish the task? What skills were learned?
- Describe the planning process, your role in it, and whether the plan was met. Provide details of what went wrong and how you overcame them.
- What was your actual role in this project?
- Give me three examples of where you took the initiative. Why?
- What were the biggest changes or improvements?
- What was the toughest decision you had to make? How did you make it? Was it the right decision? Would you make it differently if you could?
- Describe the environment--the pace, the resources available, your boss, and the level of professionalism.
- What was the biggest conflict you faced? Who was it with and how did you resolve it?
- Give me some examples of helping or coaching others.
- Give me some examples of where you really had to influence or persuade others to change their opinion.
- How did you personally grow or change as a result of this effort?
- What did you like the most and least?
- In retrospect, what would you do differently if you could?
- What type of recognition did you receive for this project? Was it appropriate in your mind? Why or why not?

Top 10 Tips for Salary Negotiations

Negotiating a better salary package has put more than a few stomachs in knots over the years. Remember, we all go through it sooner or later. Keep these 10 basic tips in mind when it's your turn to ask for a sweeter deal.

1. Be Persuasive

It's hard to force your boss to increase your compensation, and trying to do so can potentially damage your working relationship. Think about the process as trying to convince him that it might benefit the organization to pay you more.

2. Aim High, and Be Realistic

Many researchers have found a strong correlation between people's aspirations and the results they achieve in negotiation. At the same time, you want to suggest ideas to which your boss can realistically say yes.

3. Start Off with the Right Tone

You want to let your boss know you will listen and try to understand his views. At the same time, you expect your boss to do the same for you so you can work together to address this issue. Avoid ultimatums, threats and other coercive behavior.

4. Clarify Your Interests

Your compensation should satisfy a range of needs, not just salary. Make sure you have thought about other points of value to you as well -- like profit sharing, stock options that vest immediately, a bonus, greater work responsibilities, a quicker promotion schedule, increased vacation or flexible hours.

5. Anticipate Your Boss's Interests

Just like you, your boss has needs and concerns. To persuade him to say yes, your ideas will have to address those things that are important to him.

6. Create Several Options

Joint brainstorming is the most effective way to find ideas that satisfy everyone's interests. It works best when you separate it from commitment -- first create possible solutions, and then decide among them.

7. Focus on Objective Criteria

It is far easier to persuade someone to agree with your proposal if he sees how that proposal is firmly grounded on objective criteria, such as what similar firms pay people of like experience or what others in the company make.

8. Think through Your Alternatives

In case you cannot persuade your boss to say yes, you need to have a backup plan. Part of preparation is creating a specific action plan so you know what you'll do if you have to walk away from the table.

9. Prepare Thoughtfully to Achieve Your Goals

This is the only aspect of your negotiations you can completely control. To take advantage of all of the above advice, you have to invest a significant amount of your time and energy.

10. Review to Learn

The only way you can really improve your ability to negotiate is to explicitly learn from your experiences. After you finish negotiations, reflect on what you did that worked well and what you might want to do differently next time.

Your Job Search Call Sheet

Plan your calls the night before and hit the phones early- It's your job now to find a job!			
NAME	PHONE #	COMPANY	RESULTS
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MARKETING

In this section you will learn about making contact and developing relationships with company executives, professional recruiters and corporate Human Resources departments.

Do You Know Your Brand?

You've already discovered what type of employee you are from the exercises that you've done so far. Now you need to develop an effective way to communicate who you are to a wider audience.

It's imperative to have more than just keywords on your resume. You get noticed and to be taken seriously today, you must quickly distinguish yourself from all other candidates for the job you want; you need to generate *specific interest in you* on part of people you've probably never met. Not an easy task!

If you want some good insight into how to do that these days, walk up and down the aisles of any grocery store. As you traverse the cereal aisle, for instance, you'll see dozens of products that have fought for shelf space and are now fighting for your attention and asking you to purchase them.

- **Wheaties** (“The Breakfast of Champions”)
- **Rice Krispies** (the cereal that goes Snap Crackle and Pop”)
- **Quaker Oats** (“Lowers your Cholesterol”)
- ...and so on.

These slogans, trivial as they seem, are all “Positioning statements” or “Brand Identities.” A positioning statement is a short punchy, easy to remember slogan or tag line about a product that describes a unique property that separates one product from all the others. By the way, there are probably over a thousand breakfast cereals on the market, so competing for your hard earned dollars is serious business. Only a few brands will dominate your attention and consistently outsell the rest.

How do you choose? Even if you've eaten these products for many years, what is it you remember? Most likely, it boils down to a tag line such as “*Breakfast of Champions*” that always sticks with your mind.

So what does this have to do with job search? *In a word everything!*

Most job seekers today give scant thought to how they are perceived in the bigger world or how they compare to the hundreds of competitors they face. They address only their own skills-which is like saying that Wheaties is made from whole wheat. *So what?*

Most resumes say this about their owner: “I have skills; I'm a good, smart person and I'll work hard for you.” That describes you and about 2,000 other applicants.

You may be the greatest candidate for the job, but if that's all your resume has to offer, no one is likely to remember you or invite you for an interview.

And what if an employer does call you-*what will you say that will cause you to be memorable even five minutes later?* You're not the only person with great skill sets who's available for hire. Even though you're not selling breakfast cereal, you *are* selling *yourself*, and that means you need to develop a systematic way to package and promote yourself to a bigger world.

Skills aren't enough these days because they're just a feature of what you offer. What you really need to promote are *benefits*.

The “Elevator Pitch”

You've probably heard a version of this example from Sales or Marketing:

Imagine walking into an elevator with a hiring manager or high level executive from an attractive company and she asks you what you do for a living. You have about 20 to 30 seconds to make your pitch. What will you say in the brief time?

Fact is, this is about as much time as your resume has to make an impression before the reader moves on. It's also about the same amount of time you'll receive at the networking function for your listener to form a first impression of you.

The USP

Your **Unique Selling Proposition (or Presentation)**-your **USP** -describes *the single most unique benefit or value that you offer to an employer. Consider this 20-second commercial about yourself. On your resume, it's a short statement that stimulates the reader's desire to know more about you.*

A good USP says, “***Here's what I can do for you***” by highlighting *one major benefit* that you bring to this employer.

- This is what you will tell an interviewer during your first phone screen.
- This is what you will tell an interviewer during the beginning of your face to face interview.
- This is how you describe yourself in any networking meeting you

attend.

- This is what will get you remembered and put you at the top of the pile to “call back”

Once you develop your own USP, boil it down to one short sentence that’s both easy to read and easy to speak.

Building Your USP

As direct marketing expert Perry Marshall says, “If you have a USP or branding statement to offer the world, you’re not a commodity any more.” In fact, he wasn’t talking about some tangible product when he said that -he was talking about *job seekers*. As with marketing products or services to a huge audience, you must think of job search as marketing the product called “You”.

The key is to rise above the masses and to know how you can do something that not everybody else can do. What that “something” is, only you can figure out. Nobody can tell you what your USP is. You’ll have to “soul search” to identify it for yourself.

Avoid This Common Mistake

Let’s use the example of Carol, an administrative assistant. Carol is competing against dozens-if not hundreds-of other administrative assistants, many of them highly skilled. Since the employer has ample candidates to choose from, how does Carol stand out? . . . ***with a Unique Selling Proposition***. How can she be different enough to stand out?

Typical tasks for such employees might include answering the phone for the boss, as well as performing various data entry and record-keeping functions. Most people who perform these duties would say something like this: “I’m an administrative assistant with 20 years experience,” Or, “*I’m an administrative assistant who answers phones and knows Excel software.*”

Here’s the problem: These are just features. They don’t tell the interviewer a single thing that makes these candidates unique from everyone else interviewing for the position. Not one benefit has been mentioned that will be realized by the employer from hiring either of them.

Interviewers aren’t psychics. You have to sell yourself. Remember, companies only hire employees who are *assets*. With that in mind, let’s develop a USP for Carol that sets her apart from everyone else and shows how one “special” trait or skill benefits her company.

Carol is really good at talking with people; answering their questions and making them feel at ease. Some of the people she talks with are current clients calling for more

information on her company's products. Others may be looking for the support department or even wanting to speak with someone in sales to purchase the product. As a phone person, she's developed a knack for talking with such people and putting them at ease.

Carol's major duty-answering telephones-is just a skill. No big deal.. Everybody can answer the phones, right? But Carol can go further and transform that simple skill into a *unique benefit* to her prospective employer. Remember, Carol has in many cases and for many clients, become the “*voice of the company.*” Callers readily identify with her and she can demonstrate that many often ask for her by name.

So, how about this to better describe what she *really* does?

“I do relationship-building with clients on the phone.”

Now, let’s spell out the benefit. We want to show how Carol's particular advantage has specifically benefited the company she has been working for, and we also want to answer the “So what?” question and put an end result to her advantage. Here is the start of what she says:

“I help to cement solid relationships between our clients and my company...”

... and she could actually take this benefit a step further and add:

“and I consistently strengthen the sales link between them and us.”

By framing her USP in this way she leaves no doubt about the nature of how she has benefited her prior company. And guess what? Carol, the administrative assistant, now helps *make money* for her company!

Now here is how Carol's USP might sound:

“I'm a seasoned administrative assistant whose specialty is client phone relationship-building, creating a solid bond with our clients that strengthens the sales link with my company.”

~ ~ ~

Isn't that a whole lot stronger than what we started with?

Here's another quick example. Linda is a Safety and health Coordinator for a government agency. Her role is to:

- *Co-ordinate all safety-related training for 1000+employees*
- *Ensure compliance with DOT regulations*
- *Co-ordinate and preside over department safety meetings*
- *Institute and implement various programs and procedures to improve worker safety and reduce injuries*

That's all very important stuff, but nothing in this list is going to grab the attention of a potential hiring manager. Linda must go further.

Since some of this activity helps save her agency money, she focuses on one of her most important activities. She lowered workers' compensation claims by 37% over a four-year period by her continuous, unwavering enforcement of safety requirements and by training employees at all levels while implementing accountability from the bottom to the top.

By specifying and quantifying, Linda's USP can now become:

“I am a Safety Coordinator with strength in training and program implementation that helped reduce workers' compensations claims by 37% over a four-year period for my current employer.”

Your Personal USP

Now let's get started on your own USP. You will build your own unique USP by answering the two questions we posed a few pages ago when you completed your Skills Inventory and applied priorities and actions to each skill:

- 1. What are (were) the biggest (most important) roles, duties or projects that you performed?**
- 2. For each of the items you recorded, how did your employer gain of benefit?**

Here are some examples of how your story might develop.

~ ~ ~

Success Story: *Jim developed a test program for a semiconductor ship that identified flaws six months faster than previous tests, resulting in company saving of \$200,000.00 in engineers' production time.*

USP becomes: *“I develop test programs for semiconductor chips that identified flaws up to 6 months faster than previous tests and saved my employer over \$200,000 to date.”*

~ ~ ~

Success story: *Betty developed an employee referral program that resulted in three new hires in six months saving the company \$90,000.00 in recruiters' fee and Internet job board postings.*

USP Becomes: *“I have strength in developing employee referral programs that resulted in 3 quality hires in 6 months that saved my employer \$90,000 in extra hiring costs.”*

~ ~ ~

Success story: *As a field applications engineer, Sunil communicated modifications to his company's software product that were requested by his client. This resulted in a new, improved product that brought in \$3 million in revenue to his company.*

USP becomes: *“As a strong applications engineer, I was able to quickly identify my client's technical problems and relate them to my design engineers, resulting in an improved product and \$3 million revenue for my employer.”*

~ ~ ~

Bonus Tip

Always state your USP in terms of money, Money, money. Either money you made for the company, money you saved for the company or time you saved that could be translated into money saved by the company. Always try to monetize it (put it into dollar terms). Money gets everybody's attention.

You may have one major strength to develop into a success story and USP, or you may have several that are strong enough to at least consider. Pick the strongest or most impressive one or two and go with them for now. Later you can do the rest, thus adding to your stock of “value added propositions.” use the next two pages to complete the first two statements.

Write a Draft of Your “Success Story” #1

And Outline Your Unique Selling Proposition #1:

Write a Draft of Your “Success Story”#2:

And Outline Your Unique Selling Proposition #2:

Next, polish your work and be ready to use it. It will become what distinguishes you from your competitors-because they probably can't articulate their most basic benefit. And remember, you can do has many of these as you can develop.

Here are some more sample USP's to help stimulate your thinking:

"I'm a seasoned HR manager with strength in developing employee referral programs that have nested three qualities hires in the last six months, saving my employer \$90,000 in recruitment cost."

"As a seasoned Financial Manager, my strengths combine both Finance/Accounting and Financial Systems used in designing a budget and forecasting model, which saved my employer \$65.5 million in 10 years."

"I am an Account Analyst, strong in new account development, from which vantage point I prospected over 8000 accounts, generating \$29.3 Million in approved loans for my employer in 15 months."

"A seasoned Sales Manager, my strength in creative sales and marketing techniques generate \$500,000 in brand new revenue for my employer in 12 months."

"I am a veteran Director of Software Engineering whose strength in planning and execution of large web-based solutions in healthcare & telecom industries has saved my previous two employers 20% in development cost."

"as VP of Human Resources, my double strengths in organizational development and people changes enable me to develop and execute a talent acquisition and management program resulting in sales revenue increase of 60% for one of clients and \$32 million savings for another."

"I have over 13 years of experience as a Mortgage Loan Officer, and my strengths in client relationship building and sales brought in more than \$500 million in the past three years and added 3,300 new customer accounts to my current employer's servicing portfolio."

“In the CFO position for more than six years with my current employer, I have become strong in streamlining and automating financial and accounting procedures, saving my firm over \$400,000 to date in consulting and personnel cost.”

Congratulations! You have just completed the first two of what perhaps become many Unique Selling propositions that you can use from this moment forward.

You now know how to communicate in proud but accurate terms the most important attribute(s) that you can bring to a company.

Making First Contact

The Letter of Introduction

Up to 80% of job hires do not come from the internet postings. They stem from referrals, hence the extreme importance of your Letter of Introduction.

What It Is

A letter of introduction (LOI) is your first point of contact with the outside world. Though some people might confuse this with a letter of qualifications, a letter of inquiry is a stand-alone marketing piece designed to attract *attention*, create interest in your achievement(s), and whet an employer's *desire* to know more about you.

Remember, you're looking for a qualified buyer for your talents. An LOI serves to pre-qualify your reader's interest in your achievements, and its true objective is to win a later phone conversation with your reader.

How You Will Use It

A letter on introduction is designed to be used without a resume in situations where there is no specific job listed. Your goal is to establish initial contact with potential hiring authority or manager within a company, someone with whom you want to explore employment opportunities. The content of the letter must generate interest in your achievements and imply that you can do the same for this company.

Here Are the Three Vitaly Important Things You Are NOT Doing with Letter:

- *You are not asking for a job*
- *You are not asking whether the company is hiring*
- *You are not asking for an interview*

Some authorities in job search will suggest that you include your resume, but they miss the point. The LOI is intended to pave the way for your phone call, which you will make within a few business days of sending your letter.

Using the Letter of Introduction

Never send a generic letter. Always address it to an individual, by name, if at all possible. Never send this to HR (unless you're applying for a position in the HR department). You will put this letter in an envelope, address it, put a stamp on it and send it by way of your country's mail service.

Here are the reasons why you are going to do this:

- E-mail is considered SPAM, and if it's not already blocked by the corporate SPAM Filters, it most assuredly will be deleted by your intended reader. Managers and execs probably receive 50 or more emails to every piece of correspondence that was physically mailed.
- Mail is usually distributed in the early part of the day and physically left somewhere on your target manager's desk waiting to be opened. There will be a curiosity element attached to your letter.
- The fact that you actually wrote, signed and mailed a letter to this one person by name sets you apart from the rest of your competitors. Your letter will most likely get opened and read. If you've included all the noted elements in as succinct and concise a manner as possible, you will most likely be remembered.

The Elements Your Letter of Introduction Should Contain

- **Always personalize the address**
Do your research. Send it to a real person, not some title such as “Director of Engineering” or worse yet, the dreaded “to whom it may concern.”
- **Introduce yourself with your USP or branding sentence**
This can come straight from your exercise in developing your USP.

Tell them why you're writing

It needed no more than a few words such as. “feel that my skills can further enhance your growth and accomplishments.”

- **Flatter them**

Explain why you're interested in this particular company (a specific reason). It may be general and you only need a few words at most. It could be about their production line, any recent news such as “I have been impressed with your company's strong position in your market.” Whatever you decide, be sure to include this sentence or phrase, ideally including the actual name of the company.

Add one or two solid but brief examples to back up your USP

These should be short benefits statements, preferably monetized, that you can cite from your current or previous employer.

Close

Let them know that you will follow up by *phone* within three to five business days.

On the following three pages are several sample letter for you to use as models.

Sample Letter of Introduction #1

Dear _____,

As a seasoned Director of Software Engineering, my strength in planning and execution of large Web-based solutions for the healthcare and telecom industries has saved my previous two employers 20% in development cost. After researching your organization. I am impressed with your accomplishments in (specific example). I feel that my skills can further enhance your growth and accomplishments.

For example, while in my most recent position as Director of Software Engineering for Stratus, I was challenged to build, train and direct a strong team of developers and managers in a short period of time. Not only did I rise to the challenge and deliver a quality product on time, but we also cut development cost by \$1 Million. A 50% reduction.

Previous to that, while at GE Medical Solutions, I helped save three months' development time by advocating Agile Software process with the development teams located overseas. This increased productivity by minimizing misdirection and communication latencies. This resulted in a savings of \$500K.

I will contact you within the next five days to discuss ways that I might achieve similar results for your team. Should you have any questions before that time, please feel free to call me at 704-555-5555 or email me at [name@domain.com](mailto:_____@domain.com)

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Samir Vankat

Sample Letter of Introduction #2

Dear _____,

As a seasoned marketing manager, I have additional strengths both online advertising that have resulted in 1.2 Million in added revenue for my employer in only six months' time. After researching your organization, I am impressed with your accomplishment in (YYY). I feel that my skills can further enhance your growth and accomplishments.

For example, while with Selmer Group I was charged with creating and maintaining the daily operation of a new retail website for Rockway Shoes. I was able to increase Web sales from \$300,000 to over \$1.5 Million in less than six months for Selmer. While with Vantage, I created and implemented six new niche markets including one idea that increased the draw into our trade show booths by 150 percent.

I will contact you within the next five days to discuss ways that I might achieve similar results for your team. Should you have any questions before that time, please feel free to call me at 704-555-5555 or email me at name@domain.com

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
James Langford

Sample Letter of Introduction #3

Dear _____,

As a seasoned Project Manager, my strengths in identifying and solving problems have saved my employers over \$10 Million while completing over \$35 Million worth of projects during the past 9 years.

After researching (your company), I am impressed with accomplishments in (*). I feel that my skills can further enhance your company's bottom line, since my various roles are those of “Problen Solver”, “Diplomat/Leader” and “Project Professional”.

For example, while in my recent position as Project Director for Ultra Tech, I provided key leadership to drive \$31 million worth of projects to finish on time and under budget. I achieved this with my ability to identify problems early.

I also saved a \$17 Million investment in prior project by winning over key staff to the project methodology.

I will contact you within the next five days to discuss ways that I might achieve similar results for your team. Should you have any questions before that time, please feel free to call me at 704-555-5555 or email me at name@domain.com

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Calvin Firestone, MBA, PMP

Dealing Effectively with Human Resources

Avoid Being a Lemming

Doesn't the term "human resources" have a deceptively nice ring to it? It conjures up images of generous, helpful administrators eagerly conducting matchmaking services between wannabe employees- such as you- and harried hiring managers, totally overwhelmed with hundreds of resumes for the job. Unfortunately, in most cases, nothing could be further from the truth.

The fact is, human resources personnel are not paid to your friends. Their job isn't to open doors of opportunity for you. Frankly, most of them don't care a twit about you. They're paid to process thousands of resumes that are entered into their company's databases through such sources as Internet ads, the company's websites, job fairs and goldmines such as Monster and Career builder.

The goal of human resources is not to find the best, brightest, or most qualified candidate for an opening. Rather, HR is more about maintaining its own domain (weather functional or dysfunctional) within the corporation. It's about protecting their turf and perpetuating their own authority or fiefdom within the organization. To do this, they've created a dysfunctional system where all funnels must go through them.

Many Human resources departments employ contact recruiters. These are individuals hired on a contract basis to recruit for specific job openings. They also fish the internet and job fair waters for resumes that often add to their own private resume databases. When many of these contract recruiters leave to take contract recruiting jobs with other companies, they take this database of resumes. It's not uncommon for both HR personnel and contract recruiters to "source" the resume owners for the names of other candidates.

Additionally, a human resource managers wears many hats. That person's responsibilities are not limited to hiring new employees. Their duties include dealing with issues such as employee benefits and compensation, employee assistance programs, diversity programs, employee training, and complying with numerous government reporting programs involving affirmative action and statistics on the company hiring practices. The truth is, the hiring process is a system set up to keep the system itself thriving, not you.

Face it. You are just a piece of paper to someone in human resources. It would be counter to our message to instruct you how to play their game. It would consist of how to put the proper keywords onto your resume, how to get past indifferent, sometimes hostile human resources personnel. And how to ingratiate yourself to get your resume placed in the short pile, etc.

Instead, our message is that playing by traditional rules of job search will not get you the job you want. We encourage you to *break the traditional good boy/good girl behavior of job search* to lead past human resources and everything they represent.

A successful job search involves innovation, not playing “by the book.” It requires creativity, not mind-numbing, half-committed attempts to find a job by going through the process that others (mainly human resource directors and managers) have dictated to the masses in order to hire people on their terms.

If you really want to succeed-to take a different direction from the job hunting lemmings who leap when they're told to leap, turn when told to turn, speak when prompted, shut up when directed, and place their job search in the hands of authority figures-don't even consider talking to human resources personnel.

The best recruiters in the business refuse to work with human resources. They expect and achieve direct contact with the hiring managers in order to find and place top-notch candidates in hard-to-fill openings. *Why shouldn't you also expect to deal with a hiring manager, at least during the critical initial aspects of your job search process?*

Human resources should not dictate your career path. You are in charge of your search process. The sooner you own this process, the sooner you'll be successful. We are encouraging you to own the process from the beginning. Don't turn it over to the HR staff. It's your employment future that's at stake, not theirs. No one can possibly care about your job search more than you do. The buck stops with you, it also starts with you.

Our advice is to avoid dealing with human resources, at least during the early stages of your contact with a company. See them as hurdles to jump over, effortlessly, as you achieve your job search goals.

Are you a “Job Seeker” or a “Job Hunter?”

If you aren't in the human loop, you are forever locked into playing the game of outsider always looking in. You're trying to shove your resume into the “In Box” to be intercepted by some HR admin type and buried along with the resumes of hundreds, if not thousands, of other lost souls. This is the endless fate of most job seekers.

After all, the Internet and the job search industry still sells this idea that job search is as easy as booking a hotel or a flight on Priceline. They promote this fallacy because they want to be in control. They don't want to be overrun by advancing Mongol hordes, so they set up all these barriers and hoops to jump through.

Most job seekers gladly comply, take a number, and wait in line. When it starts to dawn on you, the job seeker, that this is *your career and your life*, then you'll end your complacency and start playing a new game- the game of becoming a ***job hunter***.

To move from job *seeker* to job *hunter* requires concerted work. Job seekers are passive “point and clickers.” They've become addicted to sending resume to Monster and all the usual job posting watering holes and then sitting back and waiting, hoping their prey will venture into their lap by virtue of a phone call. Contrary to the advertising, that's neither a fun nor empowering process.

A job *hunter*, on the other hand, will go out and actively entice his quarry (with a letter of introduction) and be armed and ready for a response. To evolve into a job *hunter* means getting into the muck of putting yourself out there, taking a small chance and actually developing a conversation with someone you most likely don't know.

Consider this: Resumes don't win interviews. It's the conversation that wins the interview. In fact, it's the conversation (phone screen) that wins the actual interview. In fact, it's the conversation that wins the ***job***. A resume may open the door, but it's always the conversation (phone screen) that wins the actual interview. The reason is that people hire people. They don't hire pieces of paper. They want to know about that person before they will commit to them as a possible coworker.

An employer's first choice is to interview and hire people they already know. When that's not possible, they interview referrals from people they know. When a hire from inside is not possible, their last choice is to interview strangers off the street who may have submitted to resume online.

Job search remains a human high-touch process and will always be so. People like to hire people they know and feel comfortable with. That doesn't mean hiring managers hire their best friends and acquaintances, but it does mean that they almost always prefer to hire people they either know directly or who were referred by someone they know (and Trust).

Since it's likely that you don't have a large Rolodex or hefty network in place, you need an "in" that can put you in the loop with a company that you target. That's why you're targeting individuals work at the companies you chose. You'll first send them your marketing piece-the letter on introduction cover earlier-briefly explaining why you are writing and the biggest benefit you offer to this company. This sets the stag for step two, your follow-up phone call.

Phone Presentation

The purpose of a phone presentation is to engage in a conversation with a company insider. This person may or may not be a hiring manager. It doesn't matter because being an insider, they have information and that information can be very helpful to you in your job hunt. They also have the poser to refer you to another decision maker within the company. If you've done your job well, that person won't be HR.

You *could* avoid this stage. You *could* send a standard letter of introduction along with your resume and then sit back and wait-but you won't get the conversation with these people. You won't get the leads and the inside information. You won't develop any relationship with any of these people. In short, you will miss out on a large number of potential opportunities by not tantalizing them with your short letter and calling them a few days later.

Why Do I Need to Call Them?

When we say that job search is marketing, this is not some empty phrase. This implies a total shift *away* from the traditional passive *job seeker* approach of merely sending your resume and waiting for someone to call you. Marketing means finding a customer or a user of your talents. A *job hunter* approach is going to consist of a one-two punch that very few, if any, of your competitors are doing. The first stage is your direct marketing piece-your letter of Inquiry, which we have already discussed and illustrated, and the second stage is your personal follow-up by telephone.

The act of actually picking up the telephone and calling someone you don't know can seem terrifying to you, if you've never done this before.

Assuming your targets have read the letter (and there is good chance of that), they will have some familiarity with whom you are and will probably remember at least a little bit about you and your branding USP statement.

The importance of this phone follow-up can't be overstated. Contacting people by phone has a much higher rate of success because *fewer people do it*. This initiative action on your part demonstrated that you've done all your homework and are sincere and determined. It separates you from the pack, which is what you should strive to accomplish throughout your job search.

Remember, it doesn't matter what you can do or how good you are at what you do. **What matters is *how well you communicate what you do*.**

Phone follow-up separates you from the masses, making you more noticeable, and even more importantly, it also gives you an opportunity to tell a prospective employer what you do and how good you are.

As you've already learned, the “buyers market” approach put you in a one-down position. You cater to someone else's process, which can be dysfunctional to start with. You dance to their tune and have a little leeway. The more productive and assertive “seller's market” approach—the process we are discussing here—puts you in control. Yes, it requires that you get in the muck and get your hands dirty by making the first moves and by displaying a little “courage.” And yes, you will put forth more research and self-packaging effort. But the results will be almost certainly be more rewarding.

Ideally, you will create your own position! At the very least, you will have timed your contact so that you are on their doorstep solving their problems before that problem becomes a crisis. This is especially important because no manager wants to face and have to overcome difficult situations, particularly when they're centered around people. A hiring crisis will cause management to spring into action with job requirements and as, involving HR and the whole bureaucracy, which will throw you, and every other potential candidate, into a buyers market. Don't let this happen.

Let's move forward now and talk about what that phone call should be like.

Your Initial Phone Call

Your phone call is a “high touch” part of your job search, the factor that separates you from all other “job seekers.” It demonstrates that you know who you are, what benefits you offer, that you've done your homework, and that you're serious about your career. It's what gets you the conversation with the corporate insider.

Here's something important for you to chew on. Although your phone follow up to your Letter of Introduction is, in a way a “first contact,” it's not actually a “cold call” because your Letter of Introduction has provided a very strong introduction. You've told briefly why you were making contact and why you're interested in their company. You also described yourself with your USP and backed that up with one or two brief accomplishments that have benefited your current employer.

Oh, and you did one more thing. You promised them that you'd follow up by phone in a few days. *That makes this a “warm call.”* Depending on the person's situation and workload needs, it could be a very warm call, and that's good for you.

You may have trouble believing this, but most business people read the mail that's delivered to their desk. There's a very good chance they will have read your, and your letter was designed to make a favorable impression. It wasn't braggy, tacky or over the top; it was simple, straightforward and brief. If this person read your letter it will remain in the recipient's memory for the few days until you call. Of course, you should never

expect the recipient to call you. But if it happens (and sometimes does), rejoice. It means they've seen something in your communication that they need *now!*

By the same token, don't wait two weeks to follow-up. Not only will they have most certainly forgotten you by then, but even worse, you will have left a promise (to call them in three to five days) unfulfilled-and they probably *will* remember that (unfavorably to you).

It's also possible that they did not read, or have forgotten your letter, but even then you won't lose all the advantage because there you are, on the line, and you should be prepared to tell them exactly what your letter said you had done in the past and could do for them in the future. At the very least, if the party on the other end of the phone pleads "too bust to talk now," you can offer to re-send the letter, then repeat the follow up call in another three days or so. We guarantee that if that happens, you will be remembered (favorably).

Regardless of the actual course of the call, remember that you must be clear in your mind about your primary objective. You want one of three outcomes.

1. You want to set up a face to face meeting you will talk further. . . or
2. You want to set up a time to talk more in depth on the phone with either this person or with another decision-maker. . . or
3. You want to get the name and contact information of someone else who may have an employment opportunity either open or forthcoming within the company.

While the chances of outcome 1 (an interview) happening might seem remote, don't discount it entirely. However, it's more likely that either outcomes 2 or 3 will occur. Consider yourself "a winner" when any one of those occurs.

The Conversation Itself

When you're on the phone, paint a brief picture of yourself. You'll want to state clearly your ***Unique Selling Proposition (USP)***. This is what separates you from your competition. You should have only one or two sentences that are ready-made to describe yourself and your accomplishments. Take them from your letter and be ready to enlarge upon them, should you be asked. Remember, these people are busy, yet they are open to being tantalized-so tantalized them. You want to say just enough to get them to ask questions.

Remember the A.I.D.A. Formulas we discussed earlier? This is the desire point. If you can get them to want to know more, you know you've already won some positive outcome. After that, you'll close (ask) for outcome 1,2, or 3 above.

Let's cover this conversation in easy pieces.

First, introduce yourself and ask permission for their time. It can go like this:

“Hi, Mr. Roberts my name is Christine Talbot. I believe you received my short letter of introduction a few days ago.”

He'll either say “yes” or “no, I don't remember.”

If he says “no,” offer to resend the letter and ask for his correct address.

If he wants to know more now, proceed as if he answered “yes” to your question.

Start with your biggest bang, your USP:

“I'm a seasoned Financial Controller whose strengths in both P&L/Balance sheet analysis plus financial modeling have been able to save my previous two employers \$57 Million over the past 7 years.”

Now reconfirm his or her willingness to talk for a few minutes; this is a true that will not go unrecognized:

“Did I catch you at a good time (or, do you have a few minutes to talk now)?”

Always show respect for their time. If you ask, they will almost always give you the green light for at least a few minutes of phone time.

Now get into detail about your potential value to the hiring company:

“After research your company, I'm impressed with the fact that you recently added pork rinds to your impressive product array. I especially feel that my skills can further enhance your growth in this area. For example, while at Morgan Stanley, I revamped the allocation process and improved the cost allocation accuracy. This gave business added transparency into their costs. It also created an on demand model that allowed for better pricing, versus purchasing it directly.”

Personalize every conversation by making it a point to use their name. None of us ever gets tired of hearing our name spoken. You want to generate enough interest on their part to desire *more information about yourself*.

If they answer in the affirmative and ask further questions about your background, you already have their *attention and interest*, and now you've stimulated their *desire* to know more.

The contact may ask a number of questions. This is good because each new question is, in a way, a buying signal. Learn to recognize this signal. It usually comes as a request for more information on your specific background, such as, :how many years

experience do you have?” or, “What's your formal education?” These questions indicate an interest in your experience and a need to find out more about you.

Get enough of these, and you are ready for the final closing question:

“Would it make more sense to arrange a face-to-face meeting now, or would you prefer to schedule another phone call when we might have more time for a conversation?”

Don't use the word “interview.” it may carry too much baggage. Use less threatening terms such as “meeting” or “a time to get together.” At this point, they will either agree to one of the above options, or they might refer you to another more appropriate contact to approach (a lead).

Or they may say they are not interested in pursuing further talks at this time. If this is the case, politely ask if there is someone else in the company who might be hiring, and if they would object to your following up with that person at a later date. Of course they may volunteer this info, but once again, the onus is on you to come away with one of the three objectives we set forth a few pages ago:

- A face-to-face meeting (interview) where you will talk further
- A time to talk more in-depth on the phone with either this person or another decision-maker
- A lead (name) to someone else who may have an opportunity within the company, or with another company

Even if the answer is “no,” it should be possible most of the time to achieve one of the first three objectives. They might still have a lead for you, or they might be open to future discussions (so it's just a timing issue).

There is always the possibility that you will be referred to HR. If this happens, it's important to ask two questions:

“Is there an opening for (target position) that you know about?”

If the answer is positive, say this:

“I'll be happy to follow up with HR. Do you know who the hiring manager for this position will be?”

What makes this strategy so powerful? And why on earth would a perfect stranger ever want to answer leading questions like these?

People usually want to help other people. All you have to do is ask. After all, you just had a conversation with someone who is a likely fountain of information about the industry and who now knows a little about your background.

Know this: The person you are talking to has, in effect, turned you down even though that person has given you added, perhaps vital, information. He or she wants to

end the conversation on a positive note, so take advantage of your position in this game and your knowledge of human nature.

Don't try to memorize these questions. Write them down! Make them your own by putting them in your own words. The pick the one or two that you feel the most comfortable with. Write these down as part of your phone script and keep the others handy so that you can play your game, if you feel like it, when you're in the phone.

After you've done this a few times and feel more comfortable with the on-the-phone relationship commit them to memory. You'll be amazed at the amount of support you get when you ask.

When you get a lead, thank them, and always ask if you may use their name when you call to speak to the lead.

If, when you talk with the HR Department, you run into a gatekeeper, such as overly ambitious administrative assistant who asks the nature of the business, simply say:

“I recently mailed Mr. Roberts a letter regarding a sales (or accounting, or whatever your profession is) matter. He's expecting a follow-up call from me. Would you put me through, please?”

Shore up Your Network

Are you looking for a new or better job right now? If so, you should be familiar with the term “networking.” Why? Because most jobs are filled from the inside through personal “word-of-mouth” referrals. Referrals can be the gateway to that 80% job market we've already referred to as “hidden.” This means hiring people who employers, already know as a referral from managers, employees, professional organizations, and any other connections that might have the ear of an insider.

Referrals are effective for companies because they produce better candidates and the cost is minimal. By contrast, a good recruiter will cost upwards of \$20,000 for a quality placement. It's no wonder that a company's first choice in making a hire will be by first asking the question, “Who do we know?”

Network Now

The power of using the “grapevine” can't be overstated, yet most of us think of networking-building as the plague. The very word “networking” sounds so business-like that it may stifle more than a few of you.

If this is the case, try thinking of networking as just another extension of relationship-building. Think of it as making some new friends. No pressure to perform, just having fun.

With that in mind, here are five action areas to help you take full advantage of your personal and professional networks:

1. Make a List of People You Already Know

Make a list of friends, colleagues and neighbors you haven't seen for a while. Go through your list of contacts and pick out five to ten to reconnect with. These individuals should be people you haven't seen in the past six months to a year or more.

E-mail is OK for these people, but if your relationship was solid why not call them?

Be honest and up front about your situation. Ask permission to use them as a reference when the time comes. Assuming the say “of course,” take it a step further. Tell them about your search. Explain to them what kind of opportunity you're searching for and ask them to keep their eyes and ears open for anything they might hear about.

As usual, follow up with a thank you note, then follow up every couple of weeks to ask about potential opportunities, any hiring that might be taking place and who is doing so.

Ideally, you want the name of a hiring manager, someone on the inside. It's important that you foster a relationship with as many contacts as you feel comfortable with, and then go a little further. Ask if they've heard of any companies that are hiring. If they can come up with a name within the company, that's great! Otherwise, the name of a company may be all you need to get your first break.

Should someone give you a name to call, get permission to use your *referrer's name, if possible*. Maintain contact. Follow up periodically. Thank them for assistance. When you do get a job, let them know. Stay in touch periodically afterwards, since you never know when you might need their help again. Also, when you might be called upon to return a favor.

2.Uncover Networking Events You Can Attend

There are probably one or two networking events you can identify from your local newspaper that you can attend this month. Check out an association in your fields; investigate the many business group available. Check out your local trade or throwaway papers for events listed. Try the local Business Journal's Top 25 list, if that exists in your city. You can find the latest copy in your library.

Research the lists of associations and professional networks in your local area. Call them and find out the date and time of their next meeting and ask if you might attend. Get there early enough to spend some time mingling before the speakers starts. Push yourself a bit and spend some of your time there with people you don't know.

Although it may feel more comfortable to want to hang with just your gender, introduce yourself to people of both genders at these events. You may not be a member of this particular organization but you do have connections and experience to share. It's natural to feel uncomfortable at first, but be assured, many others who are there are going to be a bit uncomfortable as well.

3.Social events on Your Calendar?

You may already have several social events lined up on your calendar. It could be your spouse's company picnic, and after hours party or a church mixer. Have a brief conversation with a few new people. A word of caution: these are social occasions. This is not the time to pass out business cards. That's a networking no-no, anyway. Go there to meet new people and be open to the possibilities that can develop later. Keep your resume at home and just be open to making one new friend.

4. Are You a Member of a Professional Association?

Almost all industries, trades and professions have at least one professional organization that represents the profession, fosters a high standard level and explores new developments that might define or affect the industry or profession's future. You may already be a member of one or more associations related to your

profession. In addition to having constant contact with others in your field, you'll quickly learn who your local players are. Often there is some newsletter or website that you'll have access to. Some will include a special section for their members that lists "Jobs Available" and "Jobs Wanted." An added benefit to membership is that you receive access to a current directory of names and contact information. You can use this as a starting point to make direct inquiries about opportunities that might be open in your area. You already have the professional connection as well as being an association member.

Introduce yourself, outline your biggest strengths (USP would work great here) and then ask if they might have an information about current opportunities and developments that could result in an opportunity. To check out possible associations, you may want to review a resource called "Associations Unlimited," which profiles approximately 460,000 international and U.S. National, regional, state and local nonprofit membership organizations in all fields. Find it in your library or possibly access it online with your library card.

5.Are You a College Alumnus?

Most of us graduated from college with our degree and move straight to the work world, leaving our college days behind. This can be a big mistake, as most schools have an alumni association. In fact, if you went to a major college or university and you live in or near a large metro area, the chances are good that there is an active alumni organization in your own backyard. Usually social in nature, these chapters will offer get together on a regular basis throughout the year, and it may be a good way to make new connections with other graduates.

Check with Alumni Office of your school to see what activities and services it provides. Join the alumni organization and investigate their resources. Many alumni seek other alumni when they need to hire for their own company or organization. These members are aware of opportunities and could be open to connecting with fellow alum, but you have to get yourself in the loop first.

Finally, don't forget *other job hunters*. Look for support groups already set up in your area that might be beneficial. Think of churches, community centers and corporate outplacement services. What about online? Do an online search for company groups such as ex-IBM.com groups, for example. (<http://groups.google.com>)

Golden Rule of Networking: "Give Rather than Take"

Typical networking goes something like this: "*Hi, My name is _____.* What do you do?" And then it's off to the races with the "Big Sell" and handing out business cards. No wonder networking has a bad image.

Instead, do this. Introduce yourself. Have a low-key chat asking questions about the other person. If there seems to be a chemistry, look for ways that you can give before you take. Why not follow up by sending your conversational partner an

interesting article or pass on a piece of helpful information? You'll be surprised at how little gestures like this will make their way back to you.

More on Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites represents a fairly new development on both the recruiting and job search scenes. This is sophisticated software that provides its members a convenient way to find colleagues of specific background and to network on line.

Social software is changing the way executive recruiting is conducted. It also has the capacity to change the way online job hunting can operate. This makes use of the number one maxim that we already know: People prefer to hire (and work for) people that they already know.”

Typically, social software networks operate on the principle that when you join, too. The governing principle is that persons of influence will be selective about passing along references.

You can use social software in two ways.

One way is to stay within the network to make direct contact with individuals that you wish to target (such as hiring managers) by way of intermediary contacts. We examined that possibility earlier. And of course, the more contacts you have, the more connections you can make. This is especially true with both LinkedIn™ and Facebook™, each of which has grown exponentially over the past two years.

The second way is to use people you know as “leverage” to contact people *they* know but *you do not*. This approach is less direct but often quite effective and can be measured in “degrees of separation.”

First degree = you make connections within your own immediate circle.

Second degree = you can extend your range to include a connection through a friend of one of your friends.

Third Degree = you can reach further out and attempt a contact with the friend of one of those friends.

Chances become much less effective at the 3rd degree level, so it's usually best to build your own core network with people you truly know and trust-but don't ever overlook the “degree” channel; it might be just what you need to make the “right” connection.

Let's look at the first way to use this network: to find people you already know, either inside or outside of LinkedIn™, and invite them into your network. It's always efficient to deepen your primary contacts in social networking situations.

Later on, as you look up managers and decision-makers from companies you'd like to work at, you may notice that contacts within your network, or friends they know, may have connections with the people you'd like to contact. You can send off a request for introduction through your network, and if the connections are strong, you may gain an inside connection through your "first degree" friend and eventually develop a direct e-mail connection with this "second degree" or even "third degree" person.

One of the downsides of LinkedIn™ approach is, as more and more people see benefits of establishing a personal network, invitations are being sent to people with whom they have only a slight acquaintance.

You can also use this network as a huge source to locate people and titles within any particular company or organization.

You'll soon find social networking to be an indispensable and powerful tool, greatly enhancing your search. With its ability to locate the names and titles of actual contacts-employees, project leaders, hiring managers-within-virtually any company you choose, you'll soon have a good sized, focused list of *relevant* contacts that you now call and speak with.

There are other networking sites, including Ryze.net™, Tribe™, and Spoke™, to name just a few. They don't yet have the user numbers or business usefulness of LinkedIn™. As mentioned earlier, both Facebook™ and Myspace™ have huge potential for possible business networking possibilities. Right now, the big gamer in town remains LinkedIn™.

Summary

When you build your network, you increase your chances of locating and winning the inside track to hidden jobs. Don't always expect your contacts to put you in touch with hiring managers who have specific job opportunities you may match. This rarely happens.

Remember. People know other people. As you tend to your network, you'll notice rewards in the form of inside information or a dynamite referral that can get you an inside track to the job you would love to win.

Dealing with Fear

There are many ways of approaching fear in the context of career change or job loss. However, since fear is such a personal issue, most approaches focus on the individual. There are various ways to deal with your own fear, including

1. Becoming aware of it.
2. Identifying the ways you express fear.
3. Recognizing the situations which trigger fear (*in this case a job change*)
4. Using behavioral techniques and developing a strategy to reduce fear and stress.

Overcoming Bad References

Q: I got fired a few months ago, and I think my references are getting in the way of me landing a new job. What should I do?

First, let's look at this from the other side of the desk. The worst job any manager has to do is to terminate an employee. Termination is not only a distasteful job for a manager; it's an admission of failure to hire and manage productively; something that doesn't look good on their performance reviews. A manager who consistently makes bad hires or who loses employees through poor management skills or because of inadequate performance effects his own reputation. Think of the analogy of the coach of the ball team. Ultimately, that poorly performing team will result in the coach losing his job. It never happens without warning and, like it or not, you had some role in the termination and bad reference.

So, if you have been terminated with cause, the first step is to take responsibility for your actions and recognize your own role in the events that have occurred. If you don't take responsibility for inappropriate performance or behavior, the result will be continuing terminations for cause and a truncated career that ultimately will make you unemployable in your chosen profession.

If you can take responsibility for your actions, you have a chance to clean up the mess and move forward. If the reader can recognize that the manager had to terminate him, perhaps because of excessive tardiness and time off, he may be able to go back and clean up the situation. But it does require a clean understanding and acceptance of the causes of your dismissal. Given that, you can call up the prior employer/boss and say something along the lines of, "Mr. Jones, this is Mark Stevens. I'm sure you remember that you had to terminate me about eight weeks ago. I'm calling to apologize. It was a very awkward situation at the time, and I really wasn't taking responsibility for my actions. I've had time to think about it, and I realize that you really didn't have any choice in the matter. So I wanted to call and let you know how sorry I am for what happened and to let you know that looking at the situation calmly, I had a great opportunity working for you and I really gained a lot from the experience."

Almost any manager will accept such a *mea culpa*. You can then go on to ask, "Mr. Jones, I'm looking for a new job, and I'm wondering what you might feel comfortable saying about me in a reference that won't stop me from getting a new opportunity." You have a good chance that given your recognition of wrong doing, the manager will give you, if not a glowing reference, one that at least won't stand in the way of you getting a fresh start. When you do get that fresh start, it's important to have learned from your mistakes and to change the behaviors that have plagued your career up until this point.

On a practical note, we should also recognize that references don't get checked nearly as frequently as we might imagine. First of all, employers need your written permission to check your references (1972 Fair Credit Reporting Act). You normally give this

permission when you fill out an application form and affix your signature to the bottom above that tiny block of type you can't read.

So, not only does an employer need permission to check your references, they have to find the time to actually do it. In a post 9/11 security conscious world, employment and salary verification, professional references, along with criminal and driving records are increasingly checked. Today, offers are typically made contingent upon completion of thorough background checks. It's important to know this because any fudging of employment history or untruths about your salary is cause for dismissal, and then you're in the same boat as our reader who got dismissed for cause; and just as you need to know your financial credit history, you need to verify your professional "credit."

If you are concerned that references or background checks in any of these areas might be dogging your job search, there is something you can do about it. You can get your own references checked for you. Such a check will tell you how many calls it took to get through, the tone of voice of the reference and their answers to a comprehensive professional or executive reference check.

When you check your references, 50% of the time you'll be able to set your mind at ease. If on the other hand, there is something being said about you that's clearly impeding your search, you will know what it is and be able to strategize tactics to overcome or circumvent the problem.

In cases where the reference is unwarranted, you'll have objective third party verification of the situation, and some ammunition to seek counsel, if conversation fails to serve.

When you do discover problems, move slowly, carefully and diplomatically and a good percentage of the time your reference problem can be solved.

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