



Playing Offense When It Comes to Your Career

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In today's marketplace, job seekers must take the initiative when it comes to finding employers and career opportunities. If you sit and wait for the opportunity to come to you, chances are it won't. No matter where you are in your job search, take charge of your career now!

Playing Defense: Why a Typical Reactive Approach Doesn't Work

The average job search is reactive, not proactive. Most professionals do not think about their career or job searching until they are forced into the job market; and at that time their focus is on finding a job, not on their next career move. Additionally, most rely on responding to interesting postings as the heart of their search strategy; when in fact, sending a resume in response to an ad is one of the least effective methods to securing a new position. This approach does not work:

- It is too restrictive. You are putting your career in the hands of someone else: the person who posts the job openings.
- It is highly competitive. You are not the only person responding to a job ad. It is hard to stand out amongst hundreds of respondents.
- It relies on chance. The right opportunity for you may not ever be posted.

Playing Offense: Utilizing a Proactive Approach to Your Career

Those professionals who effortlessly glide through job transitions do so because they have taken a proactive approach to their job searches. Follow these guidelines to initiate a proactive career methodology:

- **Identify your long-term career goals.** Know where you want to be in five years, and set annual goals to reach that destination. Perform a continual "gut-check" to make sure they still feel right. You must also be prepared to respond to the long-term goals question during an interview. Turnover is expensive; employers want to ensure a perfect fit when selecting a new hire. They will consider, as part of their evaluation, whether or not they can meet the candidate's short-term and long-term needs.
- **Create an action plan.** Nothing happens intentionally without a good plan. Map out the steps that will help you achieve your ideal career goals. Ensure that every action you take will put you one step closer to reaching your target. Review your plan weekly and modify as needed to reach your goals.
- **Determine your priorities.** Don't be more concerned with finding a job than finding a job that is right for you. Think about the qualities you are looking for in an employer, and identify those organizations you want to target based on factors such as geography, benefits, telecommuting opportunities, etc.. If you are leaving your current position, understand your motivation; this will assist you in deciding whether or not a potential position will be a good fit.
- **Stay at the top of your game, educationally and professionally.** Take advantage of opportunities that boost your industry knowledge. Invest your time and money into position-specific certifications and seminars that will give you an edge.
- **Continuously build relationships.** Networking is the most successful job search strategy. To keep your options open, always be out there planting seeds. Employers want someone who can begin their role with little-to-no ramp-up time; networking helps candidates communicate their skills in the employer's language. This makes it easier to be seen as a good match.
- **Educate yourself on your target employers.** Visit their websites; check various web resources (Yahoo! Finance, Bloomberg, and CNN Financial) for financial information; and search Business Wire and PR Newswire to view press releases distributed by your target companies. Learn about the process each organization uses to fill job openings. Regularly check their

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websites for job postings, and contact their HR departments to initiate the official job application process, if appropriate.

- **Cold call.** Think of cold calls as a favor to an employer: you are saving them time (reducing the amount required to locate a new hire) and money (decreasing the amount spent on advertising, as well as the loss of productivity by those who must interview potential employees). Cold calling is also a live demonstration of your assertiveness and proactive nature; two qualities employers are always seeking.
- **If you do respond to a job posting, send a qualifications letter instead of a resume.** This short letter compares your qualifications against the employer's job requirements. List only those credentials that meet or exceed the outlined expectations. This type of response actually saves the employer time because it quickly displays the bottom line, bypassing the process of matching qualifications from your resume with the job description.