

Career Steps

The Best Way to Do a Job Search: It's High-Touch, Not High-Tech

WENDY WERNER | Many believe that the process of finding employment has been forever transformed by the Internet and the ease of online communication. But that is not the case. Regardless of your expertise in searching the Web and communicating quickly and efficiently online, tapping into personal contacts is still key to finding the right job.

Lawyers who are looking for new jobs continually tell me they've been searching all the online job boards, local and national, but they haven't found much that's appropriate for them. Frankly, though, if your search consists primarily of looking on the Internet for posted positions, you are taking the most passive approach to finding a job that matches your skills, experience and interests.

Younger job hunters especially may be lulled into believing (falsely) that their savviness with the Web will lead them to the right position. However, particularly in these economic times, it is important to get your job search out from under the cover of your laptop and into the open through a more face-to-face set of activities.



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The Snag with Paper-Meets-Paper Scrutiny

When employers post a position online, they are looking for someone whose background and experience strictly overlays their job description. And, because they are basically opening it up to all comers when they post a job on the Web, you can assume it's because they haven't been able to find that "one right person" through their normal networks. This makes it that much more likely that they are seeking a tight match to their posted requirements. Essentially, they are looking for a response from the perfect candidate. So if your experience or background does not closely match the job description, you will not get an interview.

In contrast, candidates found through a network or referral process are not necessarily subjected to the same kind of paper-meets-paper scrutiny. Prospective employers are more optimistic about being able to train someone who comes to them through a known party, rather than hiring a candidate they know of

only through an online application. Consequently, becoming known to prospective employers through a face-to-face networking process naturally opens up more opportunities for job seekers and increases their chances of being hired.

Better still, studies indicate that people who find a job through a networking process like their job more and stay in it longer than those who find a job through a more standard application process.

The Importance of Branching Out

As valuable as networking is, when thrust into the process job seekers often lament that finding a job is all about who you know—what they fail to recognize is that it is also about who you *meet*. This is a situation that proves the strength of weak ties, in that jobs are not likely to be found through a single referral. The process requires following up on multiple leads and referrals before landing a position, which typically comes far afield from the person with whom you originally started.

Importantly, this branching out needs to be a high-touch, not a high-tech process. Rather than measuring progress by how many resumes they've sent to job sites, candidates should focus their attention on widening their circle of contacts and setting up face-to-face meetings. Although inner-focused lawyers initially recoil at this

advice, taken to heart it can result in a shorter and more successful search—and it will also result in added relationships along the way that may bring you other benefits in the future.

Easing the Way

Many people are, understandably, averse to contacting strangers about their job search. When encouraged to broaden their contact base, they think of how unpleasant it will be to pitch their skills to people they don't know. This, however, is not what is being recommended here. Instead, when you are starting out in this process, you want to begin with those you know best and move *outward* from those initial ties through a consecutive referral process. Don't short-circuit the process by asking your contacts if they can help you find any open positions. Doing so might just end the conversation. In reality, what you are looking for are more eyes and ears in the marketplace who can alert you to opportunities.

Of course, people cannot direct you to the right kind of opportunities if they don't know what you are looking for, so when you start this process, you need to have a clearly articulated description of the kind of position you are seeking. You want to make sure that the people in your contact group will be able to spot such an opportunity if they have one, or learn about one. This is part of the reason why the initial part of the job search is an internal rather than external process.

Once you've described your job goal to your closest contacts, ask them who else you should be talking to and if you can use their name when contacting the recommended parties. Then you are ready to start moving outward tie by tie.

Adding to Your Circle

When contacting your friends' contacts, remember at all times that you are asking people for things they can say "yes" to. You are not going to strong-arm your friend's contacts about position openings. You are going to meet with them as recommended resources that might have some information you could use to connect with others, and ultimately with job opportunities. When setting up meetings with them, clearly state these things:

- The source of your referral
- Why you want to meet
- Your objective of getting more connected in the market
- The amount of their time that you want, asking for no more than 30 minutes

Make sure you spend at least half of the time in these meetings learning more about your new contacts. In addition, ask if there is anything you can do for them. Making this a two-way street is a good way to foster the relationship going forward. If you want the person's opinion about your resume, send it as a follow-up, although you should keep a print copy on hand in case it's requested during the meeting. Ask for recommendations about who else you should meet, associations you should join, and if the person has other suggestions for making contacts or gaining expertise in your given field.

Be sure to send a written thank-you note after the meeting, too. It's surprising how few people do it, and it makes you stand out as a person with integrity and a willingness to make an effort.

Continue to build your circle outward and you will see the results in your job search. The simple fact is, ultimately, people would prefer to hire someone they know rather than hiring a stranger. So one of your major

goals in the job search is to become a known entity—a candidate they've heard about before you ever walk into the interview. It's also the best way to be able to bypass some aspects of a detailed job description found online.

Using Technology Wisely

Of course, this doesn't mean that you should ditch technology in an employment search. In today's world, it only makes sense to use technology when job hunting. Among other tactics, you can (and should) create a LinkedIn account and populate it with as many people as you know professionally. If you have a good meeting with a referral source, add them to your social networking circle, too. This can grow your contact group and link you to people that you may not know directly, but to whom you can garner an introduction through others. Create a spreadsheet or a grid to monitor your contacts with individuals. Set up Outlook alerts to follow up on a meeting or create a reminder process.

Look for groups to join on LinkedIn and other social networking sites that align with your professional interests as well. And yes, learn your way around Twitter, but focus on searching out and following conversations that may lead to information about job openings.

But in the end, make sure that technology is used to follow your job search, not lead it. ^{LP}

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