

Job Search in Tough Economic Times

Conducting a job search in tough economic times requires preparation, definitive action and succinct follow-up. There are many “players” in the job market and a large number have similar or greater levels of skill and experience. How do you differentiate yourself in a crowded field? What makes you the right choice? How do you get your message across without appearing desperate or even “salesy”?

Here are a few tips to consider:

Establish and maintain a relationship with a solid career “advisor”. This would ideally be a person who knows how the job market works. A career coach, mentor, or other trusted colleague is an important part of the growth and the continuation of your career. Job search techniques can be learned quickly, yet you should not wait until you are forced to look for a new position to prepare for the job search process.

Refresh your resume. Update your resume regularly with quantified accomplishments. Your written communication skills are evident in the resume and should not be taken lightly. Your resume is your first “impression” to someone who knows little or nothing about you. Articulating your “personal brand” in a clear, concise, succinct style so that the reader can easily understand your message is essential.

Demonstrate your value-oriented work style. What value do you bring to a business? What skills and abilities do you bring to a team? Your resume should outline accomplishments and true value-add. At the same time, you should be prepared to discuss specific examples of your contributions during an interview. An interviewer should clearly understand where you fit and what you bring that is new, different or complementary.

Grow your network. Constantly expand your pool of professional contacts. Not only will you have broader visibility to new opportunities throughout colleague organizations, but also you can provide job search assistance to your network in a time of need. Many positions are filled based on pre-existing relationships, or at least references, from other trusted advisors.

Know your elevator pitch. The ability to communicate the characteristics of your personal brand in a clear and concise manner is essential. Most people do not have time for or interest in a long oration. Verbal communication skills are essential in the interview process and every encounter is an impression. Define your message. Refine your message it. And test it.

Define your boundaries. One reality of today’s job market is that the best position may not exist in the town or city in which you live. So, do you move the family? Do you uproot the kids in the middle of the school year? What about your spouse’s job and commitments? Consider the options, make your pros and cons list, and evaluate the opportunities when they arise. There is no sense worrying about this dilemma until an offer is on the table, but it is something to consider nonetheless.

Plan for the long term job search but deliver in the short term. Variables, such as candidate competition, fewer jobs in your industry, and fewer firms growing and expanding their work force, are just a few impacts that can lengthen the job search. The consolidation of company responsibilities, organizational downsizing, and scaled back operations diminish the pool of jobs available during tight economic times. The overall hiring process is also extended at most businesses due to tighter budgets and more candidates to review. Patience and persistence are skills that will be tested. Maintain focus with a methodical, deliberate work ethic. Finding a job is hard work and must be a full time effort. If you are in a role, continue to deliver while pursuing the next opportunity.

Refine your core business skills. Learn Excel. Learn PowerPoint. Learn the key ins-and-outs of the Internet and email. These are skills that are expected in today's work force.

Take action now to make any potential future job search efforts smoother. Differentiating yourself from the field is critical to your long term success. Define and understand your personal brand so that you can effectively communicate the value you bring to the table.

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