



The Career Center

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Taking a Detailed Look at the Job Search Process

One of the most significant changes in today's job search process which affects people in career transition, is the necessity of knowing where you want to go and what you want to do. It used to be that because you knew you were looking for a job, you would focus on finding job openings. In today's job market you must identify your functional strengths (what you have to offer) and your industry preferences at the very onset of your job search. No longer can you prepare resumes and cover letters that simply present who you are and what you have done. Now they must be marketing materials that clearly communicate to prospective decision-makers what you can do to make a difference for their company.

The following is an outline of steps you could take as you begin your job search.

I. Develop a List of Companies in Your Targeted Field.

Begin taking notes of the names of specific companies that interest you. Company databases like Reference USA, Lexus Nexus – Business, Career One-Stop, Hoovers online, and Wetfeet can help you build your list of options.

II. Rank Your Choices.

A. Obtain enough information (number of employees, sales, primary products or services offered, and key decision-makers) to rank the companies A - Definite Fit, B - Possible Fit or C - Not of Interest. You need only enough information to determine whether each company can be ranked as an A, B, or C. There is no sense in doing in-depth research on a company, only to find out that they see no point in talking with you. Learn enough about the company to determine if they are a good target. Save the in-depth research for when you get an *interview*. Is it as big as you'd like? Are its sales revenues and net income increasing? Does it have a unique product? Is it in a location you would like?

B. Many job hunters start by looking in the phone book for local companies in their targeted field. Call for an information packet and get the Reference Librarian to help you find information on the company. The library will have any published articles and annual reports. However, you may be able to access information more quickly over the internet or by calling the company direct.

C. Compile your list of targeted companies:

A's -- companies that interest you the most;
B's -- companies you might want to pursue later;
C's -- companies to drop or eliminate.

D. Work on your A's in alphabetical groups of between four and ten at a time unless they rank themselves for you in another way, such as location or fit with your background. Go to the library and find any articles written in the last three years, copy them, and bring them home to read. Create a file for each company.

III. Prepare your Marketing for each of the Primary Industries.

By marketing we mean the resumes, cover letters, job applications, portfolios, and reference letters that you will need.

IV. Target Key Decision-Makers not HR.

Obtain the address and phone number of the key decision-makers at the company where you want to work. To do this go to their website, find their site map, look for places where they hide the list of officers and their contact information. A common place is their automated email list. Often there will be a search function on the website. Search for the department which interests you the most. You might need to call information [(area code) 555-1212] to find some of the numbers. Try calling the 800 number operator first [800-555-1212] to see if they have a toll-free number.) The Directory of Corporate Affiliates and Ward's Business Listing of Private/Public Companies lists many of these headquarters; ask your librarian for help if you do not find a listing. Go to online resources like Hoover's (www.hoovers.com), Vault (www.vault.com) and WetFeet (www.wetfeet.com) and research the companies.

V. Conduct Your General Networking.

A. Talk to the customer service or public relations department about the company's products or services.

B. Talk to a sales representative.

C. Talk to a dealer or distributor and ask if you can evaluate the product personally.

D. Research both horizontally and vertically for contacts. Horizontal contacts are those contacts who are in the same or similar industry. Vertical contacts are those people to whom you would *provide* products or services, or from whom you would *purchase* products or services. Get creative developing vertical contacts. Most people find more vertical contacts than horizontal ones. Don't limit yourself to the business contacts; brainstorm the vertical contacts you have in your personal life as well (dry cleaners, hair dressers, day care centers, etc.).

E. Add any customers, suppliers, vendors, or competitors of the companies you've discovered in your research who might be doing well. If you don't know how they are doing, add them to your list and call their headquarters for an investor or public relations package.

F. Look up on the internet or call the Chambers of Commerce and Economic Development Groups in the towns that interest you. Ask for the industrial recruiter who is responsible for talking to new companies, and request his/her help. Does he/she know of any fast-growing companies in the area?

G. Determine whether your target industry has an annual trade show. If so, this is a good source of contacts. Make plans to attend. Ask for a copy of the attending companies and try to match the list with your targeted companies. Don't expect to have serious interviews for jobs. Your goal is to network and set up "meetings" (not interviews) for the future. Introduce yourself with the goal of discovering the needs, problems, and challenges of the company, learn anything you can and collect business cards to make future contacts easier. You are still only researching and evaluating. Successful job hunters do not spend

the majority of their time chasing down jobs where the competition is intense, or where the company is not stable or growing.

H. Call the university career services and alumni office and ask what information they have on employers in your targeted companies. Call those contacts in your industry for advice.

VI. Contact the Decision-Maker at Targeted Companies.

A. Start by calling the decision-maker on the phone and asking for a “meeting”. If he or she gives you a meeting spend that time focusing on the needs, problems, and challenges they are having not on the fact that you are looking for a job. Follow these steps in making each call:

1. Share your background and find a common ground to establish a relationship.
2. Ask a series of probing questions that will identify the needs, problems, and challenges of the company/department.
3. Provide stories that relate how your past accomplishments are relevant to the company's needs.
4. After at least 5 minutes (but no more than 20 minutes), suggest that you would like to get together face-to-face to talk about these issues in more depth and offer two specific days in the near future when you could meet with them. (“I would really like to get together with you face-to-face to talk about this in more depth. I plan to be in your area in the near future. Would Tuesday, March 16th or Thursday, March 18th be better for you?”) Set a specific time for a meeting (not an interview).

B. If they won't give you a meeting, put together a customized cover letter that highlights your functional strengths, briefly describes one or two of your accomplishments, and presents the ways in which you could benefit the company. Mail it along with a copy of your resume to the decision-maker (NOT the HR department).

C. About four days after you mail the letter (seven if sending it out of state), call the decision-maker again.

D. If after five unsuccessful attempts to reach the decision-maker, spaced over the course of the day, leave a message. If after leaving messages for three days in a row, the decision-maker still won't call you back, ask the assistant or secretary for help. Try to schedule a time in the decision-maker's calendar for another telephone conversation. Rejection is hard to take, but hang in there. In most cases, hiring managers are not disinterested, they are just busy.

E. Proceed with a phone conversation. Ask for a next step. Uncover any concerns the hiring manager might have. If there isn't a possibility of a position now, ask whether he/she thinks there might be one in the next year.

F. If you are unable to meet with the decision-maker, ask for referrals to other people with whom you can speak -- people in other departments within the company, in a competitor's company, or perhaps customers who may be interested in someone with your talents.

VII. Keep Yourself in the Running After a Meeting.

A. After your meeting with the decision-maker, put together a three paragraph "After Interview Thank You" letter in which you thank him/her for taking the time to meet with you to emphasize:

1. What you can do to make a difference, in light of the problems you identified;
2. Those aspects of your background that seemed of particular interest;
3. Your sincere interest in being a part of this "team".

B. Tell the decision-maker that if you haven't heard from him/her in about ten days, you will call back to see "how the hiring process is going."

C. If after about ten days you haven't heard back, call to reaffirm your interest. It is important to keep your name in the forefront, and look for an opportunity to get together for another meeting. Express your interest in discussing in more depth ways you could help solve their problems or bring about needed change.

D. Keep checking back until you receive a definite yes or no. Ask how often you should check (they might be interviewing other candidates). If you are not being scheduled for a second interview, your chances at this point are small, so get your campaign back in high gear and continue your job search.

E. Sometimes the company is just not able to create a new position and must wait until the new budget. In that situation, the time it will take to generate an interview will be longer. If you get the impression that they are interested and do want to hire you but cannot do so at this time, look for ways to stay in contact. For example, you might fax a copy of a recent article you found in the library (a "just-thinking-of-you" fax).

F. STAY IN TOUCH. Call and check in about once every three months. If you haven't had any success after a year, drop them from your list.