



5 Tips on Finding a New Job

Tapping your personal network and promoting your brand are two ways to do it

By Katy Marquardt

The jury's still out on where the job market is heading, but one thing is certain: Employers have put the brakes on hiring. Job creation fell by 17,000 in January, the first month of decline in more than four years. Hard-hit industries like banking and real estate are already seeing layoffs and hiring freezes, and that means more qualified applicants are chasing fewer job openings.

Given that backdrop, job seekers should be prepared to dig a little deeper, says Cheryl Lynch Simpson, career coach with Ricklin-Echikson Associates. "The quality of your job search skills becomes more critical in an uncertain economic climate," Simpson says. "In a nutshell, your skills need to be better, you need to be more aware of career branding, and you must be more strategic about approaching employers." Here are five tips from the pros on how to land a job in this turbulent market:

Don't count on the job boards. Online search engines and résumé banks are seductive in their promises to connect job seekers with dozens of potential employers. Some career advisers call these sites "résumé black holes," which may be a stretch, but job boards do have significant limitations.

For one, many companies prescreen résumés using software that hunts for key words relating to skills, training, degrees, and experience. Even if you are a perfect match for the job, "your résumé may never get to someone who could decipher your potential value," says Debra Feldman of JobWhiz, an executive job search consultant.

An even bigger issue is that the vast majority of jobs are never advertised—online or anywhere. Says Feldman: "That's why you should put almost all of your job energy into networking and proportionally very little time submitting résumés online."

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Tap your network. Ideally, you already keep in touch with an assortment of former colleagues and industry peers who will notify you about job leads before they go public. "More important than what you know is who knows what you know," Feldman says. "Make sure you're on the radar of people who have access to the kind of job leads you want."

If you're looking to work for a specific company, the key is to connect with a current employee. That might mean asking contacts in your network to leverage their network. An easy way to accomplish this is through a networking site like LinkedIn.com, where you can essentially connect with your friends' friends. "First, ask for an introduction," says Penelope Trunk, author of *Brazen Careerist: The New Rules for Success*. "Then, if you're at a lower level, the social etiquette is to say you want an informational interview. If you're at a high level, say you want to talk about the market and where the industry is going."

Offer to help others. Stay in regular contact with your network so you're not asking for a favour once every couple of years, Simpson says. "Periodically pass along a tip or an article," she says. "Think of it as putting money in the bank."

If you must contact someone out of the blue, offer something in return, such as an invitation to a lecture or a link to a website that might be of interest, Feldman says. "Chances are, if you had a warm relationship, people are happy to rekindle it," she says. "If you never had one at all, they might be startled, but they'll also likely be flattered."

Leverage the blogosphere. Find blogs relevant to your industry that are written by professionals at the top of their career, says Trunk, and become a regular commenter. "The great thing about the blogosphere is that it rewards ideas and passion, so you're not judged based on your résumé," she says. Once you've developed rapport with a blogger, ask about career advice and job leads.

Promote your brand. Forget modesty: Establish yourself as an expert in your industry. This might be as simple as volunteering your skills for a community project, participating in an online forum, creating a website, or—you guessed it—blogging. You could also try your hand at writing for an industry trade journal or an alumni newsletter. "Almost everyone can be a published author," Feldman says. The idea is to build credibility in your field and set yourself apart from the competition.