

The Interview, Part 2: Taking Charge of Your Campaign

Contrary to recent articles in the press, networking to find your next position is not dead nor has it lost its usefulness. I have seen a recent article or two commenting that many job seekers have burned bridges with their contacts and that we must now find a new job search model. Networking contacts become annoyed mostly if you call them relentlessly with the same questions. Try a different approach. Add to your network and call your contacts to share industry news and insights as well as update them on your search. Some day you will be working and they will be the job seeker calling you. Set an example for them to follow.

The continuing slow job market is causing most of us to send our resumes to nearly any lead that comes up. You have a natural tendency to broaden your search to aim at more targets not previously considered. One of our Connecticut members, Erin Cody, took the exact opposite approach. She knew what she wanted and focused on a select group of target companies. She landed well, about a mile and half from her home. In a future newsletter, I will focus on this approach and reprint her Success Story. Is this counter-intuitive? Maybe, but this focused networking approach worked for her and it has worked for others. Rather than waste time, they sought out only the jobs they really wanted.

On the other hand, the name of the game has been survival for some time. I have always cautioned people not to accept a position if it doesn't feel right. If you take a job which does not fit you well, at least be honest with yourself about it and know that your tenure may well come to an early end. Don't try to fool yourself that you can make a new position into something it's not. Nowadays, if you're lucky enough to have an offer, and you need to put food on your table, you probably should take the job, as the next offer may be a long way off. Even if you know that the job will only last a year or so, at least it pays the bills and gives you a chance to catch your breath. I am choking on these words because I am a long-term thinker and I have always advised candidates not to confuse long and short-term priorities. If you follow this path, understand that it will be a short one.

Virtually everyone is telling me stories of sending out scores of resumes with little or no response. Emailed responses to any job listing require little effort, but your emotional cost may be higher than you think. I would not ignore the listings that we share within The TENG, the on line boards and whatever else you use. But don't let that be the primary effort of your search. You may derive greater benefit by planning and executing a focused networking campaign with specific targets and goals. You then become more proactive than reactive and filter out all the jobs that may be peripheral or non-fits.

To network in such a focused manner you must be fully aware of the value you bring to any future employer and a solid understanding of the work you enjoy and what you don't. Please see last week's newsletter (Vol. 3, No. 18). Once you understand and are able to

succinctly communicate your value and your passions, you must then do some research based upon your skill set, industry specialty and geographical preferences, and develop a plan to target a select group of companies. These are the firms you believe will best serve your career passions, and where you think you will best demonstrate your value. Your goal is to penetrate them via as many networking contacts possible in order to reach the decision maker. A daunting task, yes, but timing is everything and you want to be on someone's mind when the need to hire arises.

How do you execute? Review these steps:

- Assess your strengths and your passions. What are you best at doing? Consider the following areas: management / leadership, technology, industry specialization(s). Be able to summarize yourself in a value statement or elevator speech of about a minute duration and in a brief and direct cover letter.
- Where do you want to put your passions and strengths to work? Are you attempting to switch industries, career focus or company size? These questions may seem unusual in our present been there, done that market, but I have encountered a member or two who have landed senior IT positions, though they lacked specific industry experience. They networked with senior executives who appreciated people that were innovators and change agents with a passion to solve complex business problems.
- Weigh your business skills against your technology expertise and market yourself accordingly. If you have been a CTO and love building infrastructure, are you chasing the CIO job simply because it's there and will get you more money? If you have been a CIO, do you really want to take a lesser position for a few years? Be honest with yourself.
- What are your geographical limitations? You must seriously consider your personal needs. It certainly helps any senior IT executive to be available to at least a broad regional area, as opposed to one city or part of a state. Nonetheless, the job of your dreams could turn into a nightmare if your spouse, significant other or children are unhappy.
- What business environments will be the most supportive to your future success? Do you want a large or small company, a services firm, casual or more formal, the ad hoc approach of a startup or the process of a larger enterprise?
- What industries are you targeting? Build a list of companies whom you feel would be your ideal potential employers.
- If you have any experience searching on the Web, you can use industry "buzz words" to pull up Web sites of companies within a given specialty. A good place to start is the Web portal: <http://www.ceoexpress.com> Most of us know <http://www.google.com> as a favorite. I have also found that using <http://www.hoovers.com> offers valuable information, but at a price. Once you start visiting company Web sites, you can, in most cases, find the names of the CEO and other key executives.
- Search your industry's trade associations. Some will have their entire roster of member companies posted on-line. Others may offer actual hot links to member Web sites and a few may have contact names for member companies.

- Trade and industry conferences usually have Web sites. You may be able to obtain a list of conference attendees or the names of the major conference speakers, who are typically senior executives and thought leaders in an industry.
- Visit your college Web site. Many colleges have searchable alumni databases and provide Email links.
- Many colleges and universities will grant free access to their libraries, even if only for a limited time. Those that offer a business degree(s) will have company directories in their reference libraries. I have found that nearly all reference librarians are only too glad to help you find what you need. Ask them if they have the latest Thomas' Register, Hunt Scanlon or any other business directory that lists the names of the corporations' top executives. If a good business school is not close by, many public libraries will have this information. Seek out names of the CEO, President, COO or CFO.
- Build a list of contacts within your target companies. Send each one of them a brief cover letter with your resume. In your letter, say that you are in the job market, but that you have no reason to believe that they can be of immediate help. State that you will call them in one week to determine if they can provide you with any leads or names of top executives who could potentially have an interest in your background. Keep a log of the letters sent and live up to these calls. When you call, you will probably reach an Administrative Assistant. More than likely, your letter will have been passed to them. They may invite you in for a meeting, set up a conference call, provide you with the names of some leads, or say that they can't help you. Be ready for anything and be sure to tell them you will call back.
- This is a numbers game, and you are looking to win by showing up at the right time. You're not going to care how you find your next job, but simply that you found it. Don't be too proud to try any network venue and don't forget businesses and lives are dynamic. There may be five companies out there who need you, because an incumbent executive just terminated or is about to be fired. Your resume may arrive at this moment. If you have the right skill set and the company can avoid paying an expensive retainer, everyone wins. A company that says no today may say yes in two months.
- You gain a strategic and emotional advantage because you now have a process that you can control. Make it your business to send out a fixed number of these letters every day, in addition to answering ads and postings. It will increase your market penetration and may help you to land some valuable business contacts.

If nothing else, this process will help to relieve the tension of waiting for the phone to ring. It will give you something to control and do that will directly benefit you. You may find it to be frustrating, but the potential for reward is there. This can make you the CEO of your job search. Call me any time with your questions.

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Ed Pospesil
Chairman
Technology Executives Network GroupSM

Vice President
Bruner Consulting Associates, Inc.
33 Elizabeth Street, 3rd Floor
Derby, CT 06418
epospesil@brunerconsulting.com
www.brunerconsulting.com
Phone: 203-732-7084 / 866-566-2224
Fax: 203-732-9033

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