



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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10 Secrets to Landing Your Dream Job (Part 1)

by John West Hadley

1. Know Your Target

Describe your dream job as specifically as possible. Don't stop at the job title. Think about these questions:

- What title do you have? What are your duties and responsibilities?
- In what department or functional area is it? Who do you report to?
- What types of support do you have on the job?
- Are you a manager? Of how large a staff? What types and levels of people report to you?
- Where is the job located (geographically)?
- How much travel is involved? Local, regional, national or international?
- What type of company is it, in what industry? What products does it make?
- How big is the company, and most importantly, what is it about that size that attracts you?
- What is the company culture like?
- Are there any specific companies you are particularly interested in? What is it about those companies that attracts you?
- What level of compensation / benefits do you require?
- What level of compensation / benefits does this position typically command in the market?

Use this as a scorecard against which to measure all opportunities. You can still be flexible as other opportunities present themselves, but this will help you stay on track and avoid wasting time chasing the wrong possibilities.

Job seekers are often afraid to focus their search too much. They talk to a networking contact or even a potential hiring manager, and are worried that if they are too specific about what they are good at, and what they are interested in doing next, they will miss out on some unspecified potential opening that might have been available. They are doing what I call the "Job Search Shuffle," waiting for the other person to give them an indication of the right answers.

What they don't realize is that the other person senses this, and immediately starts to lose interest. When they finally do commit, the other person is skeptical whether they really are that qualified or passionate—this dilutes the impression they might have made, and they end up blowing the opportunity right in front of them!

Potential employers appreciate and are impressed by focus. As a hiring manager, I want to see that you are a good fit for and passionate about what I have to offer. I'm impressed if you are confident enough to put a stake in the ground and tell me what you are good at and what you want to do next. Once you have my attention, if that isn't an exact fit with what I'm seeking, but **YOU** have impressed me, I'm willing to explore whether there are ways to create a fit, or other positions that might be a better fit.

2. Make Sure It's the Right Target

During a visit to Boston College, I was struck by the similarity of a statement by the admissions officer to something I often tell clients:

*"We believe strongly that students need to first explore what they are really good at, and what they are passionate about, **then** consider whether the world needs that."*

I firmly believe that the greatest success comes from first aligning what you are best at with what you love to do. That is where you are going to bring true passion to your career, where you can really set yourself apart from others. Only **after** you have determined where those intersect, should you concentrate on figuring out how to achieve your life goals within that area. My experience is that with a little creative thinking you can **always** figure out a way to satisfy your life goals if the first two criteria are met. (Sometimes this is partially through the realization that doing something you are passionate about is so important that some of what you previously might have assumed were your life goals just melt away from your consciousness.)



John West Hadley is a career counselor who works with job seekers frustrated with their search, and professionals struggling to increase their visibility and influence at work. He can be reached at John@JHACareers.com or 908.725.2437. His free *Career Tips* newsletter and other career resources are available at www.JHACareers.com.

For example, many would say that I am now on my third career. I fully enjoyed my first 20 years of actuarial roles. During that time, I found that I loved recruiting, interviewing, training and giving presentations. I also always found myself drawn to the systems elements of my work, taking personal responsibility for an increasing variety of systems-related projects. I was no longer particularly drawn to one of the natural aspirations for many younger actuaries—to be chief actuary of the company. (I actually had that experience in my last corporate job, which served to confirm what I had long known.)

My next move was to seek a systems-related role that would take advantage of my actuarial background. I had the advantage of an executive outplacement program to aid me in that transition. As I went out talking to people about my new passion, I came across selected positions that very well fit my passions, skills **AND** compensation goals. Ultimately, this led to a successful consulting practice that was much more systems-related than actuarially based, career number two.

The outplacement program also led me to my current practice, as I found that what they were teaching came quite naturally to me, and I began helping some of the other people there with their own transitions. I wasn't yet ready to make it my new career, but it began germinating in my mind. During the next five years, I continued to help selected people with their career searches as a sideline to my consulting practice, essentially as a hobby. And although I really enjoyed my systems consulting work, more and more I found career search counseling calling to me, and a new 'passion' required me to embark on my third career.

This didn't mean simply jumping into the unknown with total disregard of my life goals, but moving forward aggressively with goals in mind, and checkpoints as to where I needed to be to have confidence that it would support our needs (and ultimately, our wants). Naturally,

that has meant continually examining what I am doing and how I am doing it, being open to change and opportunity. And it has led to expansion of what I originally saw as my core competency and practice as I saw opportunities to apply my skills in new, but related, ways. Thus I grew beyond career search counseling into the broader arena of coaching professionals to be more effective in their chosen careers, and even into business coaching. (I was very pleased the first time I began coaching a client on how to grow her clients and revenues, and was told that I really "think out of the box," something I'm not sure I was often accused of during my 20 years as an actuary!) While career search is still the cornerstone of my practice, the expanded areas have allowed me to serve clients even more effectively, as they shift focus between whether they want a corporate role or their own business, or even simply getting ready for the next move sometime down the road.

We often worry about providing our children "the best" of everything. But where in that equation is providing them the best of you? What message are you sending to your children about their futures if you regularly come home from the office feeling drained, and showing little enthusiasm for what you do? And how much energy do you then have left to invest in family, hobbies and your true passions? With risk comes rewards, and even if you ultimately need to compromise on more traditional measures of success like income level, size of house, age of car, what is "happiness" worth to you?

So figure out a target that first matches your passions and your skills (or skills you can develop), **then** worry about how to make it fit your life goals. □

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Editor's Note: Watch for Part 2 of "10 Secrets to Landing Your Dream Job" in the April 2008 issue of The Stepping Stone.