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The Four Legs of an Effective Career Search

by John Hadley



I do a lot of speaking on what separates effective from ineffective career searches. And, by the way, I call it a career search for a reason—if all you are doing is looking for a job, you are already headed down a slippery slope unlikely to lead to your best career options!

The analogy I generally use for an effective career search is the three-legged stool:

1. Your Passions
2. Your Skills
3. Your Life/Compensation Goals

The mistake I see people making all the time is to start their search by focusing on the third leg, instead of the first.

Passion is critical—it provides the energy required for success, to sustain you through the hard work and frustrations of any career search, to give you the drive to work on any skills (the second leg) you may need to develop to be successful, and to open your mind up to possibilities you had never before considered that let you achieve your life/compensa-

tion goals (the third leg) while doing something you are really excited about.

Think back to your experience with the actuarial exams. That was a grueling process, and when I took them, generally only one in four who started out ever followed through to achieve their FSA. It took a lot of commitment, and a lot of excitement about what the FSA would do for you, to keep putting in the effort required over five or more years.

If you start out by focusing on leg number three, you are very likely to rule out some of the most interesting and fruitful prospects for career and personal growth. This is the core of brainstorming techniques—throw everything out on the whiteboard without any judgments, so that ideas feed on each other and lead to a bigger whole, before ever starting to filter them out by practical considerations.

This is how I ended up starting a successful systems consulting practice without any of the traditional credentials, and then six years ago went in a completely new direction and started a career coaching

practice from scratch. I listened to my passions, and where I wanted to be headed in the future, instead of focusing on skills and goals that had driven me in the past.

There is a fourth leg that is critical to a successful search, and is a natural outgrowth of that focus on passion: Confidence.

If you don't project confidence in yourself, why should I believe in you?

As a hiring manager, I'm seeking someone who can help me achieve goals that are really important to me (or my company), and who will produce critical results. If you struggle to present those confidently, or even just to express results clearly, then I'm not going to take a chance by entrusting such vital issues to you.

Confidence is closely related to the first leg of the stool. The more passionate you are about an issue, the more you tend to project natural confidence when you speak about it.

On the other hand, even if you are supremely confident in your abilities to produce in a certain role, if you have become blasé, if you're yawning while you present yourself, or if you seem bored, I'm going to take a pass. You may be great at it when you apply yourself, but I'm going to wonder if you really will put in the level of effort I need.

Confidence is a funny thing, though. Sometimes just acting confident re-stocks our supply. I learned this in elementary school. I found that if I was in a bad mood, I could either act that way, or choose to act as if I was in a good mood. If I started to 'pretend,' pretty soon I felt better and then was no longer pretending.

The same can happen with confidence. You can wallow in a lack of self-confidence, and let it feed

upon itself, or you can choose to act decisively. The more you act like you have confidence, the more you will project it, and the more you will see positive reactions that create a feedback loop, helping you to feel more confident.

This is much more difficult to do in an area in which you lack passion. People can sense that you are just going through the motions, and then you don't get the positive reaction you seek.

So what do you do if your passion is for something in which you have little experience or formal education? Unearth the commonalities between what you've done or studied and that passion. Make the strongest case you can for why you would be a good candidate, and let your passion show. People are much more willing to listen if you seem excited. And when they listen and brainstorm with you about something you are really passionate about, they are likely to give you ideas you haven't even thought of as to how to achieve at least a substantial part of what you want to do.

Listen carefully to the feedback you are receiving, but don't just accept it at face value. Seek critical input to see how you can make a stronger message, what gaps you might need to fill in around your background and accomplishment stories to be more believable, and whether there are alternate approaches that might make the path a bit easier.

Just don't give up! Keep pressing to get to a role you are passionate about, even if it means temporarily choosing Plan B, so as to fill in some of the critical gaps that enable you to pursue Plan A in another year or two.

And if you are really ready to take your career search to the next level, try filling out this short survey and see where you fall on 11 activities critical to an effective search: <http://www.TinyURL.com/CareerSearchSurvey> ●



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