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# Strategies for Job Hunting in the Current Marketplace

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**F**or the last few years the economy has put plans for job changes on hold for many. Concerns about the stability of the marketplace and the housing market kept a lot of us from considering a change. In the interim, you may have experienced your career stalling because of a lack of opportunities with your current employer to move up the ladder, an inability to move into a different area of interest, or a downsizing that has (or will) leave you without a position.

The best strategy for finding a new position in today's marketplace can be summed up in two words—be realistic. This seems simple enough, but most of us have unrealistic expectations about our job search. We think the perfect opportunity will show up in our backyard when we are ready for it. Unfortunately, just because you are in the market for a new job doesn't mean the local companies will be in a position to hire you. If they do have an opportunity, it may be at a level too junior or too senior.

Put yourself in the position of the human resources person or the hiring manager who would be looking at your résumé and ask yourself honestly how your résumé and cover letter match up. Would you consider yourself a good candidate for the position? Companies are less inclined to "invent" a position for you in this economy and if there are a lot of others looking for positions in your local area, the positions that are available will be very competitive. Your strategy must include compelling reasons for the hiring managers to consider you over the other potential candidates.

The first step in entering the job market should be having a clear idea of why you are looking for a new position. Are you looking for a better career path, higher compensation or a more stable environment? Are you being downsized or is your position in jeopardy? Your specific reason will affect your strategy.

If you are looking for a new position because your career has stalled and you have exhausted the

opportunities with your current employer, your first consideration is whether you are willing to relocate for the right opportunity. If you are not willing to relocate, it may be challenging to find the right opportunity for advancement. The greater your geographic flexibility the more opportunities will be available for you to explore. Another area in which you need to be realistic is the potential for telecommuting with companies outside your local area. Most companies are not actively looking for telecommuters. It is a large leap of faith for companies to hire someone new and then have them telecommute full time. It is far more likely that they will allow someone who has been with the company to telecommute. If the position has significant supervisory responsibilities, telecommuting may not be a realistic alternative. If you absolutely cannot move, you may want to consider commuting home on weekends and living in the new location during the week.

If you are looking for a position because you are out of work or know that you are being downsized you may decide to spend the first few months of your job search only exploring local opportunities. Again, if there are others who have been affected, the jobs will be very competitive. After six months or more without a position, you may have to open up your search to other locations, but you are now starting from scratch with a significant gap in employment. Consider opening up your geographic range from the start if you are out of work.

If you are looking to move into a new area of expertise, the challenge will be to convince hiring managers that you can bring value with your current skill set. Carefully review the job descriptions and formulate a cover letter that fully explains how your skills can be applied and any parallels between your experience and their needs. If you are looking for a new direction, you may want to explore those opportunities in your current company, or consider companies that could use your current skill set, but may be able to move you into your area of interest in the future.



If you are out of work and need to stay in your local area, you may be tempted to apply for every position that is available locally, even if the job is too junior, too senior or out of your area of expertise. At this point, you need to put yourself in the shoes of the human resources person and the hiring manager. Take a cold, hard look at your résumé and your experience and ask yourself if you would consider yourself a good candidate for the position.

Does your résumé speak to the job description? You may have to point out specifically how you feel you could bring value to the company. If you are

looking for an opportunity to change your focus, you need a compelling reason why the company should hire you versus someone who already has that background. If the position is much more senior you need to be able to give specific examples of why you would be successful in the position. If the position is more junior, with less money and less responsibility, what would keep you from leaving if a better opportunity presented itself in six months or a year? It is critical to address these questions from the start. You also want to be aware that if you send your résumé for every position a company has open, you will quickly lose your credibility and be less likely to be seriously considered for a position that is a good fit.

Although challenging, the current market is consistently improving. Excellent opportunities are available for individuals looking for new challenges and the best strategy for securing a new position is to be realistic about your expectations. ●

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