



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

The Stepping Stone

November 2013 – Issue 52

10 Easy Steps to Your Next Actuarial Opportunity

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You've decided that it's time to move on to a new job. Maybe you have found a lack of upward mobility at your current company, dissatisfaction with management or the company's path, or perhaps you are currently unemployed. No matter the reason, once you have made the decision, it's time to make a plan. A new job is a major life change, and most people don't approach the task with a plan of action. Think of a job search as a project, and like all successful projects, it needs to be managed from start to finish. Take the time to review these simple steps to finding a clear path to the next step in your career.

1. What Do You Want in Your Next Position?

As a recruiter, when I ask candidates what they are looking for in their next job, I often hear that candidates want "something different" or "something nontraditional" or "I'm open to anything." Broad statements like these aren't going to help you in your job search. The first step in your job search should be determining what you find lacking in your current job, and getting a clear idea of what you want in your next role.

- By something different, do you mean you want the same type of position but with the opportunity to manage, or are you looking to move from insurance to consulting?
- Do you want to be part of an entrepreneurial, but risky, start-up?
- If you want to do something different, like moving from a financial position to a product position, are you willing to take a step back in compensation?
- Can you make a compelling argument for why a company should pay you equivalent to your current position so they can teach you new skills?

2. The Basics—Position, Compensation, Location.

Give significant thought to what it would take for you to change jobs. You don't want to waste your

time (and the interviewer's) pursuing positions that you will not take. Ask yourself the important questions, such as:

- What type of position do you want?
- What title are you looking for?
- How much do you want/need to make and where would the job have to be?
- Are there locations that are deal breakers?

It doesn't make sense to start the process on a position that you know you will not take, and it causes bad feelings with the companies that are interviewing you. You certainly don't want to burn any bridges with companies you may want to pursue in the future.

3. The Job Descriptions.

Carefully evaluate the job descriptions and ask yourself if you fit the criteria. In this marketplace, you are going to be up against candidates who have exactly the background the company is requesting. Just because you want to do something different doesn't make you qualified to do it. If the job description is outside of your experience, you will need to develop a compelling argument for why you should be considered. Perhaps you can show how you were able to quickly learn new skills in the past, or that you have had exposure to the type of experience for which they are looking.

If a position is a large jump in title, responsibilities and/or pay, you will also need to have convincing reasons why you should be considered. It is not in your best interest for companies to see your résumé over and over for jobs for which you are not qualified. If they do, chances are when the right job comes along, they won't consider you.

4. Dealing with Constructive Criticism.

The interview process is a learning experience. When things don't go well, you should be receptive to receiving feedback that will assist you in improving your performance. It's never easy to hear negative

feedback, but if you are defensive and unable to take the information and learn from it, you may find yourself getting the same feedback from others. There is no point in arguing or being defensive; the impression the interviewers came away with is what you need to address, so make an effort to listen without emotion. Take the information and make it work for you.

5. Employed vs. Unemployed—Managing Your Mindset. There is a distinct difference in how candidates approach their job search depending on whether they are employed or unemployed. If you are employed, you may be looking passively at positions, waiting for the perfect opportunity. If you are unemployed, you will want to be back in the industry quickly and you may even be considering taking a step back in order to get back to work.

If you are employed and looking passively, are your goals realistic? Chances are that the perfect job with a 50 percent increase in pay and a shorter commute will not materialize.

If you are unemployed, are you applying for positions that are outside your skill set, with the hope that they might consider you? It is helpful to put yourself in the hiring managers' shoes and look critically at your background and the job description. Would you then consider yourself a good fit for the job?

6. Repositioning Yourself When You Are Not Seeing Results. Albert Einstein said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." If you are getting the same feedback from every interview and not getting an offer, you need to take a hard look at your interviewing skills. Are you reaching for positions that are too far beyond your current skill set? Are you preparing for your interviews? Are you presenting your skills in the best way? This is a good time to go back to the basics and review interviewing materials or revamp your résumé. Preparation is the key to successful interviews!

7. Managing Your Timeline. When you are searching for a new position, timing is critical. You may find that you are getting an offer from the company that is your second or third choice, while your first choice has made it clear they will not be making a decision for several weeks. Are

you willing to walk away based on the possibility your first choice will come through? It is important to keep all of the companies you are working with informed of your progress so they can adjust their timelines. If you have an offer and the other companies can't accommodate your timeline, it is a good bet that you were not their first choice.

8. I Have an Offer! For some candidates, this is where panic starts to set in. The reality of changing jobs and possibly moving to a new location may cause you to question whether you are doing the right thing. Be assured, almost everyone is uncomfortable with change. Remember why you were looking for a new position in the first place and why this new position is appealing. You can also alleviate some of the stress by making sure you have considered all your questions at the start of the process, instead of at the end! Make sure you have discussed the job and the relocation situation with your family in advance, so everyone is on board.

9. Counteroffers and Exit Strategies. Giving your notice is nerve-racking, especially when you know that it will come as a shock to your employer. The best way to handle it is in person, with your

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supervisor. Keep it short and don't make excuses—just let him or her know that you have been offered a new opportunity that you feel is the right move for your future. Let them know that you have enjoyed your time with the company and you appreciate the opportunities you had to learn and grow.

It's best to keep the name of your new company confidential until after you have started your new position. This avoids any arguments from your current supervisor on why your current company or position is better. As far as counteroffers go, it is not in your best interest to accept a counteroffer. You have to ask yourself, "Why should it take another company seeing your value to motivate your current company to give you a higher title and more money?" In addition, there will be a loss of trust and in the future, every time you take a day off they will think you are interviewing!

10. You've Made Your Decision—What Happens Now? This is a good time to send some emails to

your new boss and the Human Resources person letting them know how excited you are about becoming a part of the team. Read your offer letter carefully and make sure you take care of all of the necessary homework, such as drug screening, background check paperwork, contacting their relocation specialists, etc. Make sure you know where to go and what time to be there on your first day. Remember, you are still making a first impression!

Leaving your current employer and taking a new job is a life-changing event and should be treated as such. If you take the time to plan out your job search, you can bypass some of the common obstacles. Treat your efforts with the same respect you would any important project and the planning will pay off! ●