

Tips and Tricks for Launching a Successful Job Search

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Below are a few of the top techniques savvy technical people use to find new positions within the shortest time possible.

- 1. Resume preparation must begin years before your job hunt starts.** The strongest resume that you can have must be planned far in advance. However, it's not too late to start now. Envision what you want to write on your resume, i.e., what you want your background and skill set to be, and work to make it happen. Then as these job skills, experiences and milestones are acquired, rewrite your resume. As a rule of thumb, your resume should be updated at least once a year. Think of it as writing an annual report on yourself. Once a year you not only list your accomplishments but, also, plan the additional skills you want to acquire. In this way you will build a strong resume...and have it available whenever it is needed.
- 2. Resume writing--make it readable, make it concise and let it show your professionalism.** Make it either functional or skills/experiences based. Sometimes a mix of these two types of resumes works best depending on your background. Write it yourself; a friend or relative can help with formatting but does not really know the work and the skills you have and will inevitably leave a number of important items off. Your resume is your calling card; if it is organized, focused, readable AND has the content an employer wants, you go to the next step. If not, only employers who can't read between the lines will notice you.
- 3. Network with former co-workers and supervisors first, then...** make new contacts through attendance and participation in professional and business organizations. Again, this should be done as an ongoing activity long before leaving your current employer. Talking with people can give you your best leads for new positions matching your skills. Showing genuine concern and providing help for them and their professional careers will go a long way toward building trust, a bank you can withdraw from when needed.
- 4. Compile a list of professional references just before you leave your position--** people who know your work and can vouch for your professional abilities. Ask those people what kind of reference they can provide just to make sure there are no surprises, read that "bad references", in your background. Have your best references write letters of recommendation. Written recommendations are powerful sales tools because someone else is selling you. Remember that it is far better to have a disinterested third party sell you than for you to have to sell yourself directly. Make sure that all your references are professional in nature, are people you reported to and people who depended on you for good quality work. Do not use personal references or anyone who is not familiar with your work. Personal friends, neighbors, ministers and insurance agents are for people who have no good professional references.
- 5. Focus on the job skills you do best and target those positions.** Trying to get a job in an entirely new area is laudable for broadening your skill and knowledge base but it is

probably not going to get your foot in the door with a new employer. If you want to go into a new area, make the move with your current employer or get retrained through an institution having a certified academic program AND an accompanying work-study program.

6. **Make follow-up calls and person-to-person verbal communication.** People often ask me when or how often follow-up calls should be made. There seems to be some reluctance to follow-up, and I'm not sure why--perhaps it is our nature to want to hear only good news. Perhaps it is because follow-ups take energy and time and are not the easiest path to take. It's far easier to just move on to the next cold application. The right thing to do is to make that call--and do it when it feels right to do it. Develop a sixth sense for following-up. If you are wondering what happened to your resume, pick up the phone and ask. When you find the person who really knows that answer, talk with them about your prospects for employment. If it is good, ask them how you move to the next step--an interview, either by phone or in person. You must find out what you need to do in order to get hired by them. You'll either find out you're a match or you'll find out you're not. Either way, you win.
7. **Keep a positive and energetic attitude even in the face of adversity.** This is essential when you write cover letters, send emails and speak with people on the phone during your job search. I've been watching the Salt Lake Games and nearly all the interviews shown with the Olympic athletes display a positive and sportsmanlike attitude even in the face of adversity and enormous competitive pressures. If you feel off-key, DON'T write or talk to anyone until it passes. Colin Powell has several rules addressing just this: #1 It ain't as bad as you think. It will look better in the morning. #4 It can be done. #10 Remain calm. Be Kind.....and.....my personal favorite: #13 Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier.
8. **Continue professional development as a conscientious self improvement program** while you are currently working AND while you may be out-of-work. Make sure that this comes across on your resume or in your cover letter AND show how you have used this knowledge to accomplish the work you have done in the past by listing/discussing project applications.
9. **Finding a company needing someone with your work skills is difficult at best during a market slow-down but not impossible.** There are essentially two approaches: 1. Locate and contact companies not advertising for help and...2. Locate the advertisements of companies searching for personnel.

First, to find companies not advertising, research possible organizations in your geographical area by going to the public and university libraries for industry classifications (SIC codes) that match your background, then locate the company names

- a. Talk to friends, neighbors and professional organization associates for companies that are financially stable. Take drives into business industrial and office parks to locate names and to scope company premises. Then make contacts with as many hiring managers as possible always asking for additional leads at each contact.

Responding to advertisements from hiring companies is easier because companies are asking for your reply but harder because you have competition and usually must be a perfect fit for the advertised position. The key to this step is to locate the companies trying to fill openings now and to do so with less competition. You can either locate their advertisements or find their recruiting agents. Advertisements are found in all the area newspapers and magazines, online at job boards-- for-profit or non-profit/government sponsored—either locally or nationally, in person at local job fairs, and at the local university career centers and alumni centers. Advertisements from staffing agents and

personnel recruiting firms are valuable leads into hiring companies and should be seriously considered.

- 10. Interview preparation and finally communication during the interview should be the easiest part of the process.** After all, you know your abilities and accomplishments better than anyone else. However, you must know the basics of interviewing backwards and forwards to be successful.

First, determine the type of interview that will be conducted—one-on-one, group/team interviews and whether or not technical skill tests will be administered—and prepare yourself for the interview format so that you'll feel confident in the meeting. I once sent a candidate to a group/team interview in which he prepared by reading a book on getting through various types of interviews—he was a smashing success; the company called me to hire him on the spot. It's impossible to be over-prepared.

Second, make yourself available to interview at any date or time that the hiring company requests. Do not try to fit them into your busy schedule; change your schedule to fit them and show responsiveness. This one always seems to trip even the best of us probably because we are busy and plan our schedules far in advance. But when a company wants to talk turkey, drop the prior commitments and make yourself available. And, be early for the meeting by at least 10 minutes.

Third, dress professionally. This means for men, crisp shirt, tie, dress slacks, suit coat or sport jacket and best leather dress shoes. And for women, wear conservative dress, blouse and skirt with jacket, or pants suit and best leather dress shoes. Your dress is an indication of your professionalism and companies use this indicator constantly. Even though the interviewer may be dressed business casual, you may not. If you dress casual, you can be assured that there will be no job offer.

And, lastly, be relaxed, learn about the position, the company and required duties by listening and asking questions. Then answer all the questions they may have about you—describe how prior work accomplishments and education have trained you for this position, describe your ability to complete tasks on time and how you are able to think on your feet. Have a number of examples to back you up. Bring your references and a number of resumes in the event you talk to additional interviewers. Bring a portfolio if you want to show prior engineering design or analysis work. Thank everyone for their time, make yourself available to interview again if needed, find out when a decision will be made, and ask if you may make a follow-up call.

As always, continually practice and develop your skills. At some point in the future, you will need them again. Good luck.

About the author:

JM Tarpoff, PE launched Tarpoff Moore Engineering, Inc. in 1999 after a successful ten year mechanical engineering design and analysis career with Bechtel Bettis (formerly Westinghouse Electric) in Pittsburgh and a successful two year career in manufacturing / mechanical engineering at P&G in Cincinnati gaining nearly \$2 million in savings from process improvements. The author has been an adjunct instructor of mechanical design courses through the University of Cincinnati's Applied Science College as well as having won numerous patent disclosure and design awards.