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Get your job search to take off

Experts offer advice as employers begin to look at hiring again

Monday, July 05, 2004
Christopher Montgomery
Plain Dealer Reporter

It has been a long, cold winter for job-seekers everywhere, and particularly in Northeast Ohio. Make that a few long, cold winters.

But with most economic indicators pointing to an uptick in hiring activity this year, it might be time whether you've been unemployed for a while or are considering a job switch to thaw out some of those old job-searching skills.

As a start, you've got to know yourself and what it is you really want to do, said Todd Bermont, a career coach, consultant and author in Chicago. Bermont's most recent book is "10 Insider Secrets to a Winning Job Search."

"What's the first thing you do when you go on a driving vacation? You determine the destination, get out a map and figure out the best way to get to that destination," Bermont said. "That same rule should apply to job searches. If you don't know what you want, how do you expect to get there?"

Taunee Besson, a Dallas-based career counselor and author, said it helps to come up with your ideal job description.

"It doesn't mean that you'll get the ideal job, but if you have an idea about what you're looking for, it's much more likely that you'll hit the target," Besson said.

Network, network, network

Once you've done all of the requisite soul-searching, Besson said, you'll be best served by continuing your job hunt outside the slew of

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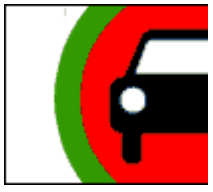
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Internet job banks and recruiting sites. She estimated that 60 percent to 90 percent of jobs are filled through networking.

That means, whenever possible and whether or not you're actively job-hunting, you should set up informational meetings or lunches with potential employers, friends, neighbors, clients, vendors, even your accountant or lawyer. You never know where those contacts might lead.

"The Internet has made it much easier to do research on particular companies or industries, and that can be very helpful," Besson said. "But when it comes down to how people find jobs, I don't see that that has changed. It's still through people who know people."

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job you're applying for, said Tina Fisher, a career counselor and owner of CareerComm

in North Royalton.

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The paper game

Of course, at some point the lunches and informal chats will have to give way to prepping your résumé. Bermont said it's best to think about résumés as 30-second movie commercials.

"That's a very small window to showcase a two-hour movie," Bermont said. "So they don't show any dull and boring scenes. It's only the best scenes."

The analogy is particularly appropriate, he said, because most hiring managers and human resources personnel spend only 30 seconds, tops, looking at résumés that cross their desks. Job-hunters need to make sure their most notable, quantifiable accomplishments are highlighted at the top of their résumés and not buried beneath unnecessary chronology and previous job descriptions.

Résumés should be short - two pages at most - and should be tailored to the job you're applying for, said Tina Fisher, a career counselor and owner of CareerComm in North Royalton.

"I see a lot of clients with résumés in that seven- to 12-page range," Fisher said. "That can be a real difficulty with people who have a lot of

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experience. They're very attached to details that aren't really helping them."

Keeping it short and sweet also applies to cover letters, Fisher said.

"They need to be crisp. Get three quick bullets in there about academic accomplishments or other successes that encourage them to move over to the résumé," she said.

Mail your résumé and cover letter to both the human resources department and the person who will ultimately make the hiring decision. You should then follow up with a phone call within a week or so, said Barbara Burk, a career counselor who has a practice in Beachwood. And if you don't hear anything in return, she said, don't hesitate to call again.

"Find reasons to call them back. Ask additional questions about the job or the industry," Burk said. "What you're doing is showing interest. You're extending the relationship. The interviewer is really putting themselves at risk by selecting someone, and you want to make them feel comfortable about selecting you."

Interview and beyond

You've networked. You've put together a shiny gem of a résumé. And now you've scored an interview.

Now it's time to prepare for the questions: Why should we pick you? Why are you interested in this job? Why are you the best candidate?

Lorelei Lanum, author of "The Procrastinator's Guide to the Job Hunt," said you should also be ready for an oddball question or two. Lanum said a friend of hers was once asked this question during an interview for a Silicon Valley job: "If you were a frog, what type of frog would you be?"

"All she could think of was red and green and spinning in a blender, she was so angry," Lanum said.

If you're eventually turned down for a job, or several jobs for that matter, you need to keep your chin up, said Taunee Besson, the Dallas-based career coach.

"I know this probably sounds like Pollyanna talking, but if you're not picked for a position, it's probably not the right one for you," Besson said. "There's usually some sort of mismatch there."

Lanum said that as big and unwieldy as the job-hunting process can be, it's important to take it day by day and to be proud of your small accomplishments along the way. Lanum's book was the product of her own grueling, 10-month search for work after she lost her job as a technical writer for a software company in 2001.

"Break up everything into manageable chunks," she said, "because it's very easy to get overwhelmed."

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