
A collection of sage career search advice

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Cairns story

I spent the majority of my career in a large corporation with multiple divisions. I struggled with what to tell people what I did for a living. Not because I did not know, or that I was ashamed of my job. It was just explaining it was not that easy. I struggled trying to state it in an easily understood way. I would generally reply that I was in human resource management. That was a good start and easy because after all that was what was on my business card. Yet, what continually got everyone's attention was when I stated that I worked for NBC. That was always fun and good for a few follow up questions. Like, do you know Tom Brokaw or Jay Leno?

HR is the kind of profession that after people ask you what you do for a living and you attempt to tell them they still do not fully understand it. When they hear things like change management, succession planning, talent development, organization staffing, and six sigma, etc., it is Greek to them. What does it all mean? Many people think HR is the place you go when you need benefit forms and to reconcile problems with pay. In can be however, it is a whole lot more.

The function of HR management has evolved dramatically in the past 10 to 15 years. When I first started in HR, it was called Personnel then it was Industrial Relations and Employee Relations and today some are even calling it People Division. These are not name changes but rather represent a metamorphous that has occurred in the HR function. Managing human resources has become more complex. You have Boomers, Matures, Generation X, Y, and Z all converging in the workplace with differing needs. So how do leaders balance the needs of their employees and the needs of the business, not to mention shareholders, community and customers, etc.? What HR does is help leaders create solutions to these complex issues. Simple enough, so why can't you just tell me what you do for a living?

A couple years ago, my wife and I took an Alaskan cruise. At one port, the city sent out their Captain to help navigate the ship to dock. It was not because the cruise Captain was not skilled but because they needed someone who had expertise and knowledge of the local waterways. So using this analogy perhaps the best way for an HR professional to answer the question is to say we provide leaders the advice and counsel they need to guide an organization through a series of twists and turns to achieve success

Make job search easier

I can't believe I Googled "define career search" and failed to come up with a definition. Yet, by googling "define job search" I was able to find "the act of looking for employment." It is interesting that the definition of career is "chosen pursuit; a profession or occupation." Another meaning of profession is job and the same is true of occupation. However, apparently people look for job's not career's. Is there a difference?

This sounds like a case of the chicken and the egg, which came first? Some say emphatically the chicken because you cannot have an egg without a chicken. Others say just as certain the egg because you cannot have a chicken without an egg and on it goes. I heard a preacher recently say it was the chicken because God created the chicken first. Case closed. I guess.

Do you need a chosen pursuit (a career) in order to find a job? The answer is no. However, do you need a career in order to find the "right" job? Aah, that is different and the answer is yes. For recent college graduates you are most likely interested in finding a job and will worry about a career later. In my opinion, job search becomes easier when you know what you want to pursue.

It starts with your passion

Someone recently asked me what's your passion? I thought about it for a moment and started rattling off the things I had done in my HR career and my interests. They said that's fine but what is your passion? I thought I had just answered that but clearly I needed to go deeper so I started describing in detail what I liked to do and enjoyed. Their response was again what's your passion?

I became a little frustrated and tried to figure out what they meant by passion. I knew I had passion yet, for some odd reason I was not describing it right. I remained patient though and attempted several more times to satisfy them but I never did. I was baffled and began to question what was wrong with me that I could not intelligently tell someone what my passion was.

It turns out I found my answer as I was reading *Pour Your Heart into It* written by Howard Schultz, the Chairman and CEO of STARBUCKS. In the book Howard describes his passion in just one word. Can you guess? Sure, it is coffee. Everything Howard has done with STARBUCK's evolves around this one, solitary passion for coffee. Not just any coffee, but one that is prepared from a dark roasted coffee bean. As I thought about this I realized that passion is more than a strong feeling or emotion, which is the definition of passion. It starts there but goes far beyond that. For example, coffee beans that are dark roasted at the highest standard of excellence are just one of STARBUCK's 6 guiding principles.

I had a light bulb moment, ah hah! Behind every passion are 3 important elements and without these 3 elements you do not have true passion. The three things are preparation, desperation, and perspiration. People with a passion for something, whatever in it is, spend time preparing to be the best. They are desperate (not despair) with a sense of urgency that drives them to achieve. In STARBUCK's case that was to be a National Company. Thirdly, it takes tremendous effort to overcome the obstacles you will face fulfilling your passion so without perspiration and endurance you will give up. That is one way to know it was not a real passion in the first place because passionate people do not give up.

So, what's my passion? Ironically, it took a frustrating conversation and a coffee bean for me to adequately describe what was so obvious. My passion is people. What's your passion?

Tarzan the Career Coach

For anyone who has ever helped someone in transition or been in transition you know one of the first things to do is forget about the circumstances that lead to the transition and focus on the future. The sooner a person can do that the more productive their job search will become. However, this is easier said than done. I was helping an executive deal with this and I was searching for another way to tell them they needed to move on I thought of something I used to do as a kid.

I grew up in a neighborhood where you played outdoors. Most of the time we played whatever sport was in season but we would also head to the nearby woods to build tree houses and swing from tree to tree like Tarzan. A vine or rope would hang from a tree branch. We would take a running start; grab the rope, and swing to the other side.

Our swing crossed a small ravine. The distance from one side to the other was about 15 feet although it seemed like 30 feet. As we would take turns swinging inevitably some would fail to

jump off on the other side. They would swing back and start over. Others did not have enough momentum to get back so they ended up hanging over the ravine. We would try to pull them back but they usually fell into the ravine. We never lost anyone but we did experience a few bumps and bruises.

The key was getting a running start, a good grip, swinging as fast as possible and letting go at the right time. The same is true about career transition. You have to be fully committed to it. The best way to let go of something is to grab on to something else. In job search, that something else is focusing all your time and energy on moving forward.

Walk backwards to move forward

Can you walk backwards and talk at the same time? If you can, you have met one of the requirements to be a Page at NBC.

One of the initial job responsibilities of a Page at NBC, on the West Coast, is to conduct guided tours of the Studio in Burbank, California. That is just one of the things they do as they learn the aspects of network television (for more <http://www.nbcunicareers.com/earlycareerprograms/pageprogramwest.shtml>).

In order to conduct Studio tours the Page must walk backwards while pointing out areas of interest. It takes concentration, muscle development, and eyes in the back of your head to avoid any safety hazards. Not everyone can master it but if you can one of the side benefits is you are great at moonwalking.

The Page benefits from conducting Studio tours because it exposes them to the all areas of network television production. They are also walking where other people walked before achieving much success in the entertainment industry. Some of the famous names are Kate Jackson, Ted Koppel, Regis Philbin, and Michael Eisner to name a few.

I wonder if learning to walk backwards helped these famous people in their careers. Did they learn:

1. To go forward you need to go backwards. The traditional career ladder may not exist and maybe a bridge or require a detour.
2. To be successful you need skills others do not have.
3. To navigate unseen obstacles you need to anticipate.
4. To be heard you need to say something that matters.
5. To satisfy your customer you need to smile when things are going the wrong way.

If you master these, it may be safe to walk and chew gum at the same time.

Planning your next adventure

Boomer, Generations X, Y and Z and beyond, now is the time to be planning for your next adventure following retirement. I know some of you have a long way to go but the job market will have changed by the time you get there. Here are some things I believe you should do to be "ready" for retirement and possible reentry into the job market.

Do financial planning early. The time to start planning for retirement was the day you first started working. If you neglect to participate in a company sponsored retirement plan and/or thrift plan, or your

own 401K you are in trouble. However, if you do participate do not wait until you are about to retire to find out your benefits. Most companies provide projections of what the value will be at retirement age. Review those regularly. Seek the advice of a financial planner. Make sure you have a diversified portfolio. A friend of mine told me that retirement is about the economics, the economics, and more economics. He is right. Know this, your retirement check will be less than you are currently earning but that does not mean you cannot continue to enjoy a good lifestyle. There are tradeoffs. Do the math now.

Treat your retirement as a Career Transition. Most people who retire want to do something like golf, sit on the beach, fish, travel, knit, volunteer, etc. However, just like financial planning if you wait until you retire to start planning that is too late. You have heard people who have retired say I have never been so busy. I know for people still working that is hard to believe. The question to ask is busy doing what. Most people plan their finances and think that is all there is to retirement planning. Not true, seeking a new adventure has the same feeling it did 20 or 30 years ago except, now you have a wealth of skill and experience to offer. How do you want to use it?

Assess your career interests. It may sound weird to assess your career interests after working 20 to 30 years in a career. However, most people who retire want to do something different from what they were doing. I had a former boss of mine who retired. He liked books so he opened a bookstore. It failed. He then bought a hearing aid business. That failed. We do not know why these failed but it does point out that everyone has interests but you need to make sure they match your skill set.

Most companies do not provide career transition counseling for people retiring but there are a number of great books, tools, and resources available. For example, CareerLeader developed at the Harvard Business School. You can check it out at www.careerleader.com.

Inventory your employment and life journey. Elvis sang "Memories, pressed between the pages of my mind. Memories, sweetened through the ages just like wine." To hear the rest of the song visit <http://www.barb-coolwaters.com/e003/memories.html>.

Reviewing your career is not just a walk down memory lane for nostalgia. You have had more accomplishments than you can possibly remember. Take your time recalling responsibilities, outcomes, lessons learned, friends, and colleagues, etc. This will help you focus your interests and can be effectively be used to construct a resume and bio.

When you get to this point you will be able to answer the question what do I want to do. That leaves the final question where do you want to do it.

30 million reasons why you need a compelling resume

Is a resume an important aspect to getting a job interview? If you think yes, then why do so many people spend so little time preparing one? If you think no, then read no further.

A resume is essential for two reasons. One, it helps you tell your story to potential employers. Two, it helps potential employers match your qualifications to their needs. Your story is unique. No two resumes are alike and the person whose resume best fits the needs of the employer will get a call for an interview. How can you be sure your resume will result in an interview?

1. Only submit a resume for positions that employers have posted as open. Avoid sending or emailing resumes to employers that do not have job openings. That tactic may occasionally result in a job

interview. However, the majority of time employers will discard it. If you want your resume to be considered you need to respond to positions that the employer has posted as open.

2. You need to make sure your resume closely matches the requirements of the job that is posted.

This is not accomplished by copying the requirements listed in the employer's job posting and pasting it into your resume. This is making certain that your background, qualifications do match the job requirements, and that your resume reflects this match clearly and concisely.

Your resume may be one of several hundred that an employer receives. It will pass through an initial screening generally processed by a computer. Think of it this way. You are going to do a search on Google. You type in "why do I need a resume." The search produces 30 million responses. How many of these responses will you actually read? The first two or three, without a doubt, you will not read all 30 million. The same is true of your resume. It will be screened along with hundreds of other resumes. The ones that most closely match the requirements of the job posting will surface near the top and the employer will read those.

Improving the chances of your resume being read is not a matter of simply being a good wordsmith. If that is all you do, it may get past the first screen but the employer is smart and it will not make it much further. The purpose of carefully reviewing the job posting is to determine whether you have the qualifications for the position and how well do you match the requirements.

Employers do not expect that applicants will match 100% of the job requirements. The rule of thumb is you should match approximately 80% of the job requirements. The remaining 20% may be what the employer considers the most critical requirements but you have no way of knowing that. Use your best judgment. If you match 70-80% of the requirements, you should apply. Avoid the temptation to stretch your experiences to match 100% of the job. The most important thing to remember is you need to be honest with yourself about your qualifications and ensure you are honest on your resume.

This does not mean you need to tailor your resume for every job opening. For example, the requirements for a financial analyst are similar from one company to another. You may need to tweak your resume when applying for a position apart from that you can be certain that your resume will not be at the bottom of the hundreds of resumes an employer receives. If you possess the qualifications then make certain it is obvious to the potential employer.

Getting your resume to the top of the stack is the first step to landing a job interview. Then the real fun begins.

Just words on a resume

I recently received a phone call from an MBA student I was helping pursue a change in career path. These kinds of changes typically take longer and you have to be patient. You also need to have a resume that grabs a potential employer's attention and convinces them there are sufficient transferable skills for them to invite you in for an interview. In an interview, you will have the opportunity to elaborate on your experiences and demonstrate how they are directly relatable to the position.

My student was excited because she was offered a new opportunity that represented the career change she desired and she was positioned to grow that career. She not only was changing careers but also industries. She went from retail to non-profit education. These transitions are also infrequent. So what

helped make this possible? What in her private sector retail experience peaked the interest of a non-profit education organization? Surprisingly it was her profit and loss (P&L) experience.

Profit and loss is the ability to understand income and expense and adjusting your strategies and operation to changes in either in order to produce a profit. It is more than reading financial statements or reports. Not that many people have true P&L experience and those who do know what it takes to run a department or business.

In the 7 years my student had been in retail she was able to obtain P&L experience so I suggested she include it in the summary of her qualifications. The statement was "Significant P&L experience managing and leading teams consistently delivering results." Of the 455 words on her resume, these 12 words or 85 characters (that would fit in Twitter) were what helped get her the job. She was excited and so was I. Obviously, the words alone were not enough but she was able to articulate a skill she had that a potential employer needed.

Thinking through what you have to offer a potential employer starts with what you believe a potential employer needs. This student did not know that P&L experience would be relevant to a non-profit but the operational nature is a transferable skill. Focusing on transferable skills is especially important when making career or industry changes. Sometimes in the case of this student, you find an employer who is seeking you more than you are seeking them. It is a perfect match. The employer wins and you win.

A word about changing careers

I recently received a phone call from an MBA student I was helping pursue a change in career path. When we first started working together, I told her that career changes typically take longer and you have to be patient. The reason is most employers take the easy route and to use a sports metaphor they draft candidates by position rather than the most talented athlete. I know employers will say they are looking for the best and the brightest (as if there is another choice). However, in reality they focus on people with experience in the field they are recruiting.

In my years, as a human resource executive one of the toughest decisions we had was to select a person with direct experience or someone without direct experience but was obviously one of the best and brightest. I remember one executive faced with this decision saying I do not have time for a Liza Doolittle project right now, a reference to My Fair Lady, today it would be Sandra Bullock in Miss Congeniality. This is true for most employers so we went with someone who had the experience. This is not wrong it just means if you are seeking to change careers that you have to find ways to sell your experiences.

To do that you need a resume that grabs a potential employer's attention and convinces them you have transferable skills applicable to the position they are recruiting. You will then have to elaborate in an interview and demonstrate that you know there are things you will need to learn specific for the job and that you can do that quickly and effectively. Hopefully, you will have a track record that will substantiate that.

The student I was working with was excited because she was changing careers and industry at the same time. She was going from retail to non-profit secondary education. Transitioning to a different sector is also difficult for similar reasons. You would be surprised how many employers still want industry specific experience, but that is the subject for another discussion. So, what helped make this career change possible? What was it in her private sector retail experience that peaked the interest of a non-profit educational organization? Surprisingly it was her profit and loss (P&L) experience.

The following 12 words (that would easily fit in Twitter) were what started the ball rolling: "Significant P&L experience managing and leading teams consistently delivering results." Obviously, the words alone were not enough. The employer needed to understand how an individual with this experience could help them. How did an executive in secondary education know anything about the value of P&L experience?

Fortunately, for my student the executive had prior private sector experience. However, assume the executive did not and they dismissed the P&L experience as not applicable in a not-for-profit. It is 12 words on a resume that were wasted or maybe not. Some say tomato others say tomato. On paper it is the same but can be pronounced differently, but it is still a tomato. This is a simple example of the importance to seek understanding. Both are talking about the same tomato. The same is true of job skills. P&L is a good example of a skill that on the surface seems applicable only in the private for profit sector. However, when you peel it back you find project management skills which are transferable and in demand. In today's job market far too many resumes are seen only by a computer. Makes you appreciate the ones that make it through with 12 words that make a difference.

Emigration and other Job Search Strategies

I read an article in Business Week entitled The New Generation Leaving Ireland by Kerry Capell. I found the article like something out of a science fiction movie. The subtitle "Some 170,000 jobs vanished last year, and the lack of employment is driving a generation away" was alarming. Ireland could lose a whole generation of college graduates as many Irish graduates are considering emigrating to find employment.

Australia is one destination and that country is very active extolling the benefits of emigrating Down Under where unemployment is low. For the first time in 15 years, more people left Ireland than immigrated. In the United States, our unemployment rate is high but I suspect we are not in danger of losing a whole generation of college graduates or are we?

The fact that U.S. college graduates are not emigrating does not mean our graduates have found work. I believe most have not. However, if they have found work how many are underemployed. I suspect most. The longer the recession continues and hiring remains soft what will be the long-term effect on this generation of college graduates. Will they catch up or give up? This is not to imply this is a generation of quitters. No, the opposite is true and I believe most of them will find meaningful employment. At least that is what I hope.

We live in a global society and emigration is a job search strategy. Perhaps more should consider it. Another option is to join the military. Before you dismiss that, there are benefits to it. Another option is public service. Before you dismiss that, you may want to check out National & Community Service. You may be surprised. Remember adversity is the mother of invention

Application Purgatory

What do you think is the most frustrating aspect of job search? I believe not knowing the status of your application. I call it application purgatory.

In my opinion, very few employers do a good job of staying in touch with applicants. Oh sure, they may provide a computer generated response letting the candidate know they received their application. That is good but what happens after that. Your guess is as good as mine is. For not often does the applicant know the process and timeframe of next steps, and even if they do, it is seldom adhered.

What is the right amount of time to spend in application purgatory before you start wondering am I being considered or have I been rejected. When I was with the federal government, they did a study and learned that 80 days was as long as a candidate would tolerate. In the private sector, I believe people give up long before that.

Why don't employers frequently update their candidates on their status? Is it because they are overwhelmed with applicants and do not have the staff to communicate to candidates. Or don't they think it is necessary? Is this any way to treat a customer? After all, isn't an applicant a customer

Now is the time to get your house in order

If you ever sold your house, condominium, townhouse or just plain moved from your apartment you know getting your stuff together is no easy task. You discover things you forgot you had. We all accumulate more than we need and we have trouble letting go.

When it comes to job search, there are areas where we have accumulated more than we need and it is time to get our house in order. Those areas include social networking sites (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, etc.), personal and professional references, and background checks.

Most are aware that employers are checking social networking sites to screen job candidates. In 2009, a study conducted by Harris Interactive for CareerBuilder.com showed 45 percent of employers were doing this. Can you imagine what that figure must be now? However, what is interesting is that social networking goes both ways. Job candidates can check potential bosses, etc. Not too many executives have thought that one through. It may be time to do a little house cleaning.

References, the house is full of them, former bosses, customers, clients, suppliers, peers, colleagues, friends, etc. Most try to limit their references to people who have nothing but good things to say about them. However, in doing so they often overlook that references serve a strategic purpose in addition to their tactical value. Specifically, what is it that a potential employer needs to hear about you that can best be said by a third party? Once you think this through you then need to determine the best person to deliver it. That is when you will understand the value of keeping your network in order.

Lastly, background checks, the majority of which are for criminal activity but one area that is becoming more prominent is debt, outstanding and delinquent. I was surprised to learn that a majority of Americans have no credit card debt. That is a good thing. However, there are other ways to accumulate debt such as a mortgage, school loan, auto loan, home equity loan, and other

loans where you are a cosignatory, etc. We generally think about our credit rating when we need to borrow money. I would suggest you think about your credit rating before applying for a job.

What you have accumulated and let go in these areas may influence whether you get the job offer.

Take expert resume advice with a grain of salt

I am in the business of giving job search advice. However, I try not to be too authoritarian in my recommendations thus, implying you have to do it my way or the highway. Some would consider my opinion as expert advice. I humbly like to think of it as the voice of experience. I have been a student and practitioner of career search for a long time. Whether my suggestions are tried and true, at least they have been tried.

One area of job search where people need a lot of advice is preparing a resume and no two resumes are alike. There are basic ingredients that all resumes must have. The difference is how you combine a pinch of this and that, and whether you add other ingredients. You cannot get too carried away because it still must pass the taste test.

As a resume chef, I work with the basic ingredients but will occasionally add other ingredients as appropriate. One of those ingredients is an Objective. Other resume chefs believe this ingredient is:

"Point blank, bad form, self-serving and will get you nowhere in this job market. Instead of telling the employer what you want, show them what you can do."

This statement sets my chef's hat on fire. I believe an Objective is appropriate and helpful in certain instances. For example, college students or people seeking entry level positions. For many college students they struggle with job search because they do not know what they want to do. On the other hand, if they do know they are uncertain what jobs to pursue. An Objective forces them to seriously consider their career objective and target their job search to positions that match their interest. To be effective the Objective should state a specific position or career path. Can this be accomplished without putting it on their resume? Certainly, however, to say it is bad form, self-serving and will get you nowhere is just...not Iron Chef material. A resume is supposed to be self-serving. Take expert advice, including mine with a grain of salt.

Should you consider relocation

In a tough economy with companies going under and others reducing staff, searching for a new job or your first job, for recent college graduates, is a challenge. One aspect of job search that I believe not enough people seriously consider is relocation. Companies are slow to hire and to limit your job search to one or two geographic areas is to do just that, limit your possibilities.

Everyone searches for jobs that are in their backyard. However, even if your backyard is large like Los Angeles or New York City, is it big enough? Probably, but not without a lot of pain and perseverance. What if you could land an ideal job, in less time, in a great area but it required you to relocate, would you consider it? If the answer is no read no further.

If yes, then we have established you are open to relocation and conducting a nationwide and even global search is appropriate for you. We all have geographic preferences and I am not suggesting you pursue jobs in areas where you would never move. What I am suggesting is that you be aware that such opportunities exist and make a conscious decision not to pursue them.

I have never lived in Bentonville, Arkansas and it is not one of my destinations of choice. However, I know people who have and somehow they have survived. I have lived and worked in Miami, Philadelphia, New York, Washington, DC, and Los Angeles. All great cities, would you agree? Well, apparently not everyone agreed and perhaps that is what helped me get those jobs

Preparation H for interviewing

If you ask someone who is going on a job interview, are they prepared for the interview, they most likely will say yes. If you then ask them how they prepared you will likely get a variety of responses ranging from I reviewed my resume, I researched the company, I bought a new suit, I prepared responses to anticipated questions, I practiced in front of a mirror, and on, etc. The truth is if they did some or all of these would be more than most people.

If you asked the person who was doing the job interview if they prepared for the interview, they most likely would say yes. If you then asked them how they prepared you, will likely get I reviewed their resume, I called someone who knew them, I have been doing this for a long time and have my list of favorite questions, no big deal.

Given this scenario, who is the best positioned to ace the interview? The person who uses Preparation H, the H is for homework. You didn't really think it was the other Preparation H.

The problem most people have preparing for job interviews is they do not know where to start. Google has 45 million results for Tips on Job Interviews and bing.com has 32 million. There are so many resources available for job applicants that it can be overwhelming.

For me, it starts with the basics, the very foundation that resulted in you being invited to interview in the first place, the job or position description. I know, duh! Nevertheless, this is often overlooked. Job candidates think their resume is where the interviewer is going to focus. True, but your resume will not address every aspect of the position description. Unless the interviewer is skilled, and most likely they are not, they will not know how to mine for the additional information. Preparation H would go a long way to assuring you cover the important aspects of the position description, describing how your qualifications and experience match their need.

Your resume and the position description provide the script you need to prepare for a job interview. There is more that must be done to win the Best Picture award but without a good story there is no hope. A new suit might help; just remember to cut the tag off the sleeve. I forgot to do that once.

Evaluating a job offer

You made it through a tough interview process and emerged as the top candidate. They are about to make you a job offer when panic sets in. What will you do if the offer is not what you expect?

Before you make yourself crazy, you need to know that the potential employer wants you to accept their offer of employment. If the employer does their job right there will be no surprises and you will accept. Below are some factors that employers use when constructing a job offer.

1. The base salary range for the position. The range is usually narrow and separated by \$10,000 or less. For example, a range of \$80,000 to \$90,000, or \$120,000 to \$130, 000
2. Your past compensation i.e., base salary, bonus, annual increases, car allowance, stock options, benefits, vacation, etc.
3. What you are asking. Generally employers will make their first offer the best offer. It will be cloaked in terms of a "total package" of base salary, bonus, benefits, etc. It will be an offer you can accept. The issue is do you accept or negotiate. Here are some things to consider.

Is the total compensation less, the same or more than what you were earning? If it is less, where is the gap, how large is it and why? Start with the base salary. Is it on the low end, in the middle or top? If the offer is on the low to middle of the range (assuming it is narrow) you may have some room to negotiate. However, if it is at the top that means there is little room for negotiation, if any. However, that does not mean there is no wiggle room or that they may not consider a one-time lump sum signing bonus.

If the gap is not in base salary but in bonus, car allowance, vacation, etc., you have some options. You can ask for a one-time lump sum signing bonus to cover the difference or ask to be considered for an early salary adjustment (in less than 12 months). You can ask if they have any special bonuses or awards due to outstanding performance. Vacation and other items are generally dictated by company policy but even there they may have some limited flexibility. The tricky thing is do you ask and risk someone thinking you are more interested in time off than working. However, it is common to get to 3 weeks vacation in 5 years with most companies.

When you are considering a job offer remember that base salary always trumps a bonus that is not guaranteed. A gap that is greater than \$10,000 may be too great to reduce means you have a serious decision to make because that may be too great to overcome.

I generally dislike asking an employer for their final offer. You can achieve the same thing with less drama by simply pointing out the gaps and asking if that is the best they can do. Remember the employer wants to satisfy you if they can.

Evaluating a job offer part 2

I received some follow up questions to my blog "Evaluating a Job Offer" and thought I would share my responses to them.

- You mention the salary ranges, is it normal for companies to tell you this information. In the majority of instances, the company will tell you in advance the salary range they intend to pay for the position.

The range is usually narrow and separated by \$5,000 to \$10,000. If not, then how does one get that information to know where the offer stands?

There are resources available that you can search on the internet. A website like Job-Employment-Guide is one example (<http://www.job-employment-guide.com/job-salaries.html>). There are others. However, use it as a reference point not as an absolute. There are similar websites to give you information on the different cost-of-living for different areas. Again, this is reference. While an area may be more expensive to live in a Company may not offer any additional wage adjustment. It will be up to you whether you can live in that area at the salary the Company is offering. Despite what some people think, you can live in most areas. I have never seen someone go homeless.

How do you not price yourself out of a position, as many now seem to ask/require you provide an "expected salary or minimum salary"? This is the opportunity to ask what the salary range is for the position. Past salaries are a reference point for the new Company. If you are earning below their salary range they are offering an employer may consider your experience not sufficient or that your former employer did not pay sufficiently. Since most people change jobs to move up an increase is more the norm. However, there are instances where your salary may be above the range the new Company is intending to pay. The first thing we often hear is that the person is overqualified. That may be true but there may be a valid reason why someone might accept a lower salary i.e., changing industries, a growth opportunity, changing career, etc. Again, it is a point of reference.

As a rule of thumb, you should consider applying for positions that are 20% more than you are currently earning, unless it represents a promotion. If the position is paying 20% less than you are currently earning you should consider not applying or be prepared to be hit with you are overqualified. Most employers do not like to offer someone less than they are currently earning. That is because if the person accepts they are likely to leave when someone offers them more.

- You also discuss a gap in fringe benefits. How does one come up with a signing bonus counteroffer that will cover you sufficiently? I do not know that you will be able to cover the gap completely. Evaluating benefit plans is complicated. Health insurance is the most common that people want.

Obviously, not every plan is identical (thus the health care debate) but most employers believe their benefit package is competitive and they have determined to offer nothing more or less. Very few employers offer to pay for the entire premium for health insurance. You may find one that pays more than another does but the plan might be different. You need to make sure you understand the basic benefits that are being offered before you can determine if there is a gap from what you had previously.

As we all know, the pyramid gets narrower as you reach a certain level and promotion is not that easy anymore. What is an acceptable request for signing bonus? You first have to find out if the employer has a practice of offering a signing bonus and you need a reason to ask for one. Most employers that offer a signing bonus do so in order not to increase the salary beyond a certain level or there is another one-time reason i.e., to help pay for relocation, college loan, cost-of-living, etc. Depending on the circumstances and need, most signing bonuses are below \$10,000 and are taxed.

- One you did not mention, is it common to request/get the position elevated to the next grade in order to open up the salary range a bit? At the end of the day, most employers know it is about the salary and they will stretch. However, there is a fine line between need and greed. You do not want to cross that line. However, it is reasonable to ask about the ability to advance in the position and what the timeline might be. Is it acceptable to request this? I have had people do that but if we felt they were qualified for that level, we would have offered it.

Who is in your network?

Almost 200 million job seekers in 2005 visited Monster.com worldwide. Approximately 40,000 new resumes were posted daily to Monster.com for a total of 16.4 million new resumes in 2005. Job postings on their site were viewed 2.1 billion times. Monster is probably one of the most widely known. CareerBuilder.com is another with over 21 million unique visitors monthly. Altogether, there are more than 1,500 employment career sites on the Internet and growing.

What does this mean for the individual job seeker? It might represent tremendous opportunity or it could mean the odds of landing a job through the Internet are insurmountable. The truth is the majority of jobs are filled the old-fashioned way by who you know.

You have heard it said, "it is not what you know but who you know that matters." In the case of job search it is both. What you know is a combination of education, work, and life experience. Who you know are the people in your network. Think of it as the MySpace of job search or MySearch (there actually is such a site although not dedicated to job search).

How do you build a network? Most job seekers believe it takes a lot of time, energy, and work. The perception is you attend a bunch of networking meetings to meet people. The reality is most networking occurs one on one, which may seem even more daunting. How do you meet people you need to know if I do not know them?

The most straightforward way to start is with the people closest to you, your family (most of them are or were employed) and move outward to friends, students/colleagues, alumni, professional associations and recruiters/search firms. These represent your six degrees of separation from you and the job you want. Your message should be clear and concise. You are seeking knowledge about the job market and your corresponding interests.

What most job seekers do not realize is that potential employers are doing something similar. Whenever they have a job vacancy they network with the people they know who are colleagues, friends in the business, alumni, professional associations, and recruiters/search firms. What you as a job seeker want is for your network to intersect with the network of a potential employer. That is when opportunity meets availability and hopefully leads to employability. As a general rule of thumb you should have at least 100 people in your network. Obviously, the quality of your network is more important than the number. The Internet can assist you in finding friends, alumni, colleagues, associations, recruiters, etc. There are more free resources available on the Internet than one job seeker can possibly use. Find what is right for you and use it to build an effective network.

How to Increase your network immediately

The circumference of the earth is approximately 25,000 miles and the world population is almost 7 billion people. With numbers like this, why is it that so many people have trouble building a network.

Maybe it is because not everyone is on a social network site like LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, or MySpace. Combined these sites account for approximately 350 million members, approximately 30% of the people on the Internet but less than 5% of the total population.

Okay, some of you may think these numbers are big. However, they are nothing compared to the number of people who own cell phones. That number is over 4 billion or almost 60% of the world's population.

Therefore, you may be a member of some or all of these social network sites and most likely own a cell phone. Yet, the number of people in your network is nothing compared to what it could be. The numbers are there.

Yet, the number of people in our network is not what is important. The quality is what matters. At least that is what we tell ourselves.

This limitation is not the big problem. The real limitation is that each of us has more than one network. We have a network for job search, business, school, friends, family, neighbors, restaurants, retailers, church, community, etc., and we treat each network as mutually exclusive.

One way to increase your network immediately and maintain the quality is to merge these networks into one. In fact, I believe they already are. Look at the contact list in your cell phone. Everyone in your cell phone is important to you. Don't limit the role they play in your life. Think of your network as one fully integrated network.

The competition is inside

One of the toughest jobs to fill in an organization is the top job. People have a strong opinion about the top person's leadership qualities and capabilities and the results achieved. If they believe the predecessor did a great job they will likely want someone with similar qualities. If not, they will seek the opposite. Either way, the choice is the same, someone inside, or someone outside the organization.

The choices are simple but agreeing on which is not that simple. Here are some advantages and disadvantages to each that may help.

- The Advantages of an Insider
- They know the organization
- You know their results, strengths, and weaknesses
- They may have been identified through a succession plan
- Organization stability, you can fill the job immediately

The Disadvantages of an Insider

- Limited number of qualified candidates.
- It will a stretch job, they will need to grow into it
- They may do things differently then you thought
- Good performers may leave if they do not get the job

The Advantages of an Outsider

- Previous experience as a top executive
- They are not tied to any internal politics
- They offer strong results
- They can sustain but are best when they change things

The Disadvantages of an Outsider

- They will need to learn the organization
- They will bring their own team and some good performers may leave

- The will have weaknesses that you do not know
- It will take longer to fill the job

There are similarities and differences between the two choices. If all things were equal, and they seldom are, which choice would be yours?

Your disappointment is someone else's success.

Although you have strong credentials and experience, you are not one of the people selected to move forward. Most likely sometime during your career these words or similar have been directed to you. At first, you are numb and react as professionally as you can but the truth is it hurts and takes the wind out of you. Provided it was a job, you were seriously interested in pursuing.

Ivanka Trump writes in *The Trump Card* "your success is someone else's disappointment." The reverse is also true. Your disappointment is someone else's success. It is hard to take and you can experience a number of emotions including thinking something is wrong with you. You have been rejected. Your background and experience do not match what they are seeking. At least that is what someone has decided. What is difficult about the situation is you never got to tell your story. If you had perhaps you would have convinced them to consider you further or then again maybe not. In any event, neither you nor they will know for sure.

I am not suggesting that companies interview every candidate in order to make sure they do not overlook the ideal candidate. However, I do recommend companies objectively examine their screening process to make sure they are not weeding out candidates who should be weeded in.

Most companies review resumes and applications to see how closely they match their needs. Today that may be done electronically. As an experiment, I responded online to a search Google was doing for an HR position. One I felt I was qualified to perform. I wanted to see what would happen. I received a nice email and the following response.

"Our staffing team will carefully assess your qualifications for the role(s) you selected and others that may be a fit. Should there be a suitable match, we will be sure to get in touch with you."

I have not heard a thing. I was weeded out or maybe they knew it was an experiment. Those Google people are smart. Algorithms are good and necessary and I am certain they found a match but do they know what they missed in the process. They missed me, HR Warrior.

Before you think a human process is better consider this. The average human being that reviews a resume may do so for a full 30 seconds. Not much time to impress. What are they looking for? They know it when they see it.

My disappointment may be someone else's success but my disappointment could also be the companies disappointment as well. At least that is how I choose to think.

The Race

The phrase "hit the ground running," means to get off to a brisk and successful start. I recall an episode of *Seinfeld* where Jerry meets a high school track rival. Jerry had defeated him in a race

where Jerry was crowned the fastest runner. Jerry, of course, basked in the adulation he received and flaunted his status throughout high school.

However, there was one problem. Jerry had jumped the start gun and that split second advantage had propelled him to victory. This was before electronic monitoring. His high school nemesis had always suspected Jerry of a false start but was unable to get anyone to agree with him.

Years later, he sees Jerry and challenges Jerry to a rematch. Through a series of complex circumstances, the race day is set; a crowd is there, including Jerry's former track coach. As the coach raises the gun to start the race, a car backfires. Jerry immediately hits the ground running and wins "The Race." It is epic and his nemesis is forever crushed.

Other than great comedy writers, why did Jerry's nemesis fail to run when the car backfired? Are there any life lessons we can draw from "The Race?" Consider the following:

1. Take control. We sometimes believe our circumstances are different from someone else. The reality is they are more similar than dissimilar. The differentiator is in how we deal with them. You cannot begin something that you do not start (something Yogi Berra might say).
2. Make sure you have people cheering for you. Surround yourself with people who have your best interest and are a positive influence.
3. React proactively. You have heard the saying "stuff happens" well it does. You be the person to make it happen.
4. Do not stop once you have started. Perseverance is responsible for more success than failure.
5. Finish strong. Too many fail at the end. How you finish "The Race" matters as much as how you run the race.