



Search for the dream job

by Sophie Toomey

The job your heart desires rarely falls into your lap. You have to chase it.

We've all heard the last 18 months have been boom time for job-seekers. But no matter what the jobs, complacency will never pay off when it comes to getting your dream job. Those who get the jobs have done their research, and put in the effort to make sure that where they want to go is exactly where they end up.

Kylie Hammond is director of Kylie Hammond, Executive Coaching and Search Group. Hammond coaches executives looking for work and says that in any job search it pays to be targeted and focused: to not sit back and wait for someone else to do the work. According to Hammond, the most common mistake people make when searching for a job is to be too broad and sweeping in their approach.



"Sending out hundreds of applications without any kind of targeted or structured job search approach is simply not productive," Hammond says. She recommends job-seekers develop a "top 10" list of who they would like to work for rather than applying for every job that vaguely resembles their ambitions.

Hammond says a job search should be more than just a search for the next job. "Put a long-term career plan in place and then you can really zero in on the jobs that will help you get where you want to in line with your plan."

Amanda Burke, team leader of sales and marketing for Talent2 recruitment, agrees with Hammond that a lack of strategy and focus is the worst mistake job searchers make.

"They apply for everything rather than applying relative to their background. Because of that, they don't research or really think about what they are doing and they don't actually have the skills to be competitive anyway."

Burke says one of the advantages for job searchers in the current skills shortage is that companies that were once very picky about the set of qualifications they required or desired are now more open-minded. "People can now look to what they are good at or would like to develop in their career. It is possible now for someone who has a background in business development to look at a job in the telecommunications sector which matches their skills set, rather than just what they have done in the past."

Burke says five years ago companies had the option of being picky when it came to applicants. "They could get away with saying, 'I want specifically this background'. Now they are forced to be open and far less prescriptive." This is good news for those who want to move between areas.

For candidates this necessitates carefully honing their skills so that they can clearly demonstrate transferability. They must have a clear list of what it is they have to offer that will fit a position for which they are not necessarily the tailor-made candidate.

However, says Burke, "don't make them do the creative thinking. Go in with your brief clear." Burke advises researching careers and companies, not specific jobs.

"You may find a job description that fits what you are looking for if you look beyond your obvious job title." Hammond says after broad-brush applications, the biggest pitfall is lack of research.

"People just don't do enough research into a company that they are looking for work with. They think they can just wing it, which amazes me."

Burke agrees that lack of research is fatal. "Do background research before going to recruiters so you will have ideas for them as a starting point." Burke says that research will allow you to either target the jobs you want yourself, or help a recruiter to do it for you. "You can be clear about how flexible you are, or are not, which is going to be invaluable - particularly if you are not currently employed."

Burke says being flexible about how you will work can also get you in the door. "If you will consider part-time, consulting or contract work then say so, because that might get you in the door. Once you are there you might end up moving in permanently."

Burke advises against limiting yourself just to company websites which can give you job information and a feel for the company, but not necessarily equip you with up-to-the minute information that might be the vital missing piece in your search.

"Talking to people in the industry and your contacts can give you insight that a website will not."



In addition to keeping in touch with those in the know, Burke says reading newspapers will give you valuable information (particularly business and finance pages, as well as those directed at those in the industries of interest to you).

"They will keep you abreast of industry changes and shifts. You will find out about take-overs, expansions, overseas moves and also downsizing that are vital for you to know about. If a company is expanding, clearly that's a good time to call."

Once your research is done and you have a clear vision of what you want, and from whom, there is no substitute for a focused assault. Hammond frequently sees people reap the benefits of persistence.

"I know one candidate who really wanted to work for one of the big banks. He was a very senior manager working in another bank, but for whatever reason the recruitment firm wouldn't shortlist him and his approach to the company's HR department had fallen on deaf ears."

The candidate persisted. "He went to a lunch where the CEO was speaking and introduced himself following the presentation. He is now one of the bank's executive general managers."

Hugh Fitzhardinge is a creative director at Sydney advertising agency Ward6. He says he well remembers the days when jobs were not as thick on the ground as today. "It was extremely difficult to get a foot in the door in advertising."

Fitzhardinge said not only did one have to be creative with the search, but also prepared to go the extra mile for the company. "You generally had to offer your services for free for at least a couple of months to prove your worth."

Fitzhardinge says for those who wanted to get into the creative side of advertising, imagination in the job hunt was considered a must. "You virtually had to do stunts to get noticed by the creative director who did the hiring."

Fitzhardinge recalls one candidate who was prepared to risk life and limb to get noticed. "He masqueraded as a window cleaner and washed the creative director's windows on a ladder while he was in the room. He started showing examples of creative work to the CD through the windows until he finally got asked to come inside, and landed the job."

Fitzhardinge says he recalls times where his own persistence verged on excessive.

"You do have to be careful not to cross the line where being creative and persistent actually resembles stalking. I dropped creative ideas off in a creative director's home letter box every night for two weeks. I think I might have crossed the line, but I did eventually get a job. Once I got the job I used to put ideas under the creative director's door every night until eventually he saw something he liked and promoted me."

Now a creative director himself, Fitzhardinge favours creativity and persistence in candidates. "It does make them stand out from the pack. The reality is when you see 20 candidates for a job, extra creativity will be remembered."

Hammond says the moral of both these stories is that a few knockbacks must never be enough to put you off.

Burke says to never underestimate the value of networking. "We don't have the sophisticated business networking sites that there are overseas, but that doesn't mean that you mustn't put yourself out there to meet people. Business functions, social networking and business networking are all important. Go to functions and seminars and mix in your industry."

Burke says it is also important to keep track of those you have worked with, or under.

"They might have moved to companies you are interested in working for, or know of jobs in companies that they are working for or with. Make phone calls and meet for a coffee. You never know what kind of fascinating information you will get."

Hammond concurs. "People who network well are very rarely out of a job. Most big companies these days have internal referral programs and encourage employees to refer good candidates for jobs. It is a matter of tapping into the unadvertised job market, because so many jobs never make it to the job boards or recruiters."



Hammond says being shy won't pay. "You would be amazed how many doors open if you request help and approach people in the right way to ask for advice."

Saul Timms, a UN information officer now working out of their Africa offices, says that he has never got a job via an advertisement. He landed his current role talking to someone at a dinner party, who knew someone at the UN, and recommended he call him for a coffee while in Australia. "I met this guy for a coffee and the next week I was on a plane. I didn't have any specific overseas experience but I was prepared to uproot my life and live in Angola for two years, and I was an excellent writer and communicator - which was what they were looking for."

And finally, your calling card. Hammond says that creative job-searching will do no good at all without an excellent, well-crafted CV, tweaked to circumstance.

Burke favours professional help with a resume, or at the very least consult someone in a relevant professional position for advice. "Don't ask your partner or best friend. They will never ever be brutal enough."

Sophie Toomey
The Weekend Australian, March 2008

