Alumni Job Search Intensive – Job Search Strategy

Transcript

Slide 1: Welcome to week 3 of the job search intensive. This week we focus on strategies and resources for conducting a proactive job search. This topic has many components, so I’ve broken it down into several mini-webinars, so you can view by topic. Here we’ll focus on an overview of search strategy.

Slide 2: This webinar is meant to be a checklist, or series of tips, designed to help you determine whether you’re doing everything possible to be successful in a job search. So first, determine where you are with your search. If you’ve been in a job search for a while, or even if you’re just starting a search, it’s always good to do an assessment of the search process itself, taking a look at what’s been working, and what hasn’t, in terms of return on investment for your efforts, and also where you feel most stuck in the process. If you’re just starting a search, a review of the job search process and resources you will use will help you conduct an organized, effective search. Consider these questions, and be honest with yourself about any obstacles, whether perceived or real, that might be holding you back from achieving success. After this assessment, you’ll be able to move ahead with a fresh attitude, ready to maximize your job search.

Slide 3: A successful job search follows a plan, with specific steps and goals. Too many job seekers just throw together a resume and start applying to all the jobs they can find, thinking that if they apply to enough jobs, they are bound to get results. A better approach is to start at the beginning. Determine your goals, or what do you want to achieve now, and work through the steps that will get you there. We’ll discuss each of these in detail.

Slide 4: Conduct an organized job search. An organized job search contains these elements. You have to project plan and manage your search as you would any other major project you undertake. The self-assessment and research you’ve done should provide you with a focus, or a targeted goal that you’re moving towards with all your search activities. Organization is key to keeping you focused, so whatever method of organization works best for you – whether keeping paper records and logs, or using a computer database and spreadsheet – rely on this to help manage your search activities. Manage your time well, by keeping a calendar filled with your activities, including networking appointments, time for research, applying for jobs, and follow up. Giving your tasks a spot on your calendar will help keep you focused. Break tasks into manageable steps – individual action items; they will be less overwhelming. Set SMART goals, in other words make them specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. Take time to evaluate your activity and efforts regularly. Celebrate your accomplishments, even if they seem insignificant to you, and determine if what you’ve been doing is moving you towards your targeted goals. If something is not working, why not, and how can you change things to get back on course?

Slide 5: Here are some tips for your job search plan. Remember that a job search is a full-time job in itself, and takes constant time and effort. It helps if you take the time to create a schedule, remember we talked about putting activities into your calendar – and then sticking to it. Set specific tasks to accomplish on both a daily and weekly basis.
Take advantage of technology, and automate your tasks where you can. Things like newsfeeds and alerts, and search agents that you can set up ahead of time to notify you about jobs and news items on your targeted companies for example, can leave you more time for other activities like networking.

Focus on the task itself. You will have good and bad experiences throughout this process, and if you take things personally and focus on the fear, of going to a networking event and talking to strangers, for example, you will be more apt to avoid doing things that may help you. Don’t take anything personally and just keep going.

It can be helpful to do what you enjoy first, and save tasks you don’t like for specific times during the week. Again, plan and schedule these, so you can’t avoid them altogether. Doing what you enjoy can give you confidence to also accomplish your less palatable tasks.

Slide 6: We talked briefly about the importance of self-assessment to your overall job search plan. If you understand your key strengths and skills you can work more effectively and productively, and enjoy what you do. You’ll be better able to identify the kind of work that will allow you to perform at your best, and have the confidence to sell yourself to your targeted companies.

So before choosing a career field, company or job, take some time for self assessment. In doing assessment, start by making an inventory of the following categories: interests, values, talents, skills, strengths, weaknesses and accomplishments. Once you’ve determined who you are and what you have to offer, you can better determine where you’ll fit in, and can better conduct a targeted job search.

There are resources available to help you do a more formal and in depth self assessment; if you’d like more information you can email me. If you’re stuck with this step, need more direction, or are thinking about changing careers and not sure how to get started, we have two career counselors in our office who can work with you on the self-assessment process. Email me if you’d like to use this service. There may be opportunities in your community for career counseling as well.

Slide 7: We’ve discussed developing a strong brand in week 2 – please see the webinar on Branded for Success for in-depth information on branding. It’s important to have a consistent and solid brand that best represents what you have to offer employers, and you have to be comfortable and confident of your brand to successfully sell it to others.

In simple terms, your brand is who you are and what you have to offer. It’s the perception that other people have of you, compared with similar people.

Companies use branding to sell their products – when you think of Nike or Coke you immediately know what the attributes and qualities of those products are and why you would want to buy them.

The same holds true with you and your brand. You want to stand out as the best candidate for the job.

You have to target your brand to the industry, field and even the type of position you want, so you’ll need to determine your target audience and what they’re looking for, so your brand can be a good match for their needs.

Branding then becomes building a name and reputation for yourself, showcasing what sets you apart from the competition and describing your added value.
Remember that your brand needs to be consistent throughout all aspects of your search – all your marketing materials, including your resume, cover letters, LinkedIn profile, 60 second commercial or elevator pitch, any other social media you use, like Twitter and Facebook, and then in your interviews as well. You need to be a complete, consistently branded package.

Slide 8: We also covered developing targeted marketing materials in week 2, and you can view the corresponding webinars on these topics. Be sure they are consistent to your brand, and are the best representation of your qualifications as they relate to your targeted industry, field and the companies you apply to. We won’t go into details on each specific material, but can discuss any questions you have, and have more in depth information on our website and through other webinars on these topics.

In general terms though, you want your resume to be targeted to each specific company you apply to, especially at the experienced level. Start with a profile or summary of qualifications section, and focus on your accomplishments; you want to demonstrate a record of success. Cover letters should be targeted as well, and match your qualifications to the job, so that the company can see you in that position. Your LinkedIn profile, and your profile on any other social media you use, including Facebook and Twitter, should be branded, using the headline and summary areas to emphasize your strengths as they relate to your targeted field, and differentiate yourself from others. Fill your profile with relevant keywords that ensure you’ll be found by recruiters. Find and develop the appropriate supporting materials for your field, and be sure enhance your brand and qualifications. Develop a powerful elevator speech that introduces you and your brand, tells where you’ve been, why you’ve been successful, and where you want to go. You’ll use a form of this in networking situations and sometimes during an interview, when the recruiter asks you to “tell me about yourself.” Be sure your interview skills are polished; if you’ve been out of the job search for a while it’s important to practice so that you sound confident, and again, able to sell your brand. We can do a mock interview with you if you’d like.

Slide 9: The last job search tool we’re going to talk about is a marketing plan. This is comparable to a business plan for a company; it’s a plan for selling a product, which in this case is you. A marketing plan addresses the key points of marketing yourself, product and placement, and is your strategy to get from thought to action. It combines your qualities, skills, and competencies with some targeted industries and companies from your research. See our mini-webinar on marketing plans for more details on this process.

Slide 10: As part of a proactive search it’s helpful to determine your targeted companies by conducting in-depth research on the industry and field in which you’re interested. You’re trying to determine your fit within the industry, so such knowledge is essential. When you have your targeted companies, research on their environment, products and services, at the least, is critical before applying and prior to interviews. Use all available resources to gain this knowledge, including the ones listed here, and then add this information to your marketing plan.

Slide 11: A few thoughts on references. You’ll want to secure at least 3-5 references; some people recommend up to 10, so that you can choose the most appropriate for each job you apply to. They should be a mix of supervisors (past or current), and co-workers, and maybe faculty, if you’re a recent graduate. Be sure you always check first, to make sure people are willing to provide a positive reference for you – if you don’t ask, you may find people have a different opinion of you than you thought, and may give negative information to employers. In fact, it’s good to ask references what they would tell a prospective employer about you so that you’ll know in advance. Manage your references
by keeping them up to date on your skills and accomplishments, letting them know what jobs you’re applying to and that they may get contacted by employers, and grooming them to determine exactly what they’ll say about you to each employer. People have lost jobs through negative references, so keep control of this important aspect to your search.

Slide 12: Make sure you are using all available resources for your job search. Many people just apply to posted positions and wait to be contacted. A job search should be a proactive process, involving many varied resources, some of which are shown here, and which we’ll discuss in more detail. First of course, the importance of networking can’t be overemphasized. Everyone you know, or knew at some point, should be considered a potential contact. Social networking has become a very important resource; some recruiters source all their candidates from LinkedIn and other social media, so you need to be conversant with the top sites and know what they offer for job seekers. Don’t forget recruiters as well; third party or headhunters, contract and consulting agencies, even temporary agencies for your industry can be a source of opportunities. Online job listing sites can be a resource, just not your only one. Career or job fairs are a good opportunity to connect and network with companies. Company websites often list available positions, and you can do other research that may lead you to connections within the company to pursue for potential opportunities. Don’t forget newspapers – not just the want ads but the business section to learn more about companies who may be moving into the area or expanding, and trade magazines. Professional associations often list jobs just for their members, and also allow you to connect with other members for networking, that can lead to opportunities. See our mini-webinar for more information on resources.

Slide 13: Another tip – be sure to follow up appropriately. You want to control your follow up, instead of passively waiting for a response. Here are some key follow up activities. Call or email after you send your resume if you have a contact name; this allows you to further promote yourself, to make a personal connection, and to inquire about opportunities for an interview. This doesn’t always work, but taking the initiative can often make the difference. Be sure to send a thank you note after all interviews, and to all people who interview you. This should be done within 48 hours of the interview, and can be through email, or sent through regular mail. This allows you to not only express appreciation for the interview, but to reiterate your top strengths and why you’re the best candidate for the position. You should send thank you notes to your informational interview contacts as well. You also want to keep in contact with your informational interview contacts; update them on your progress, especially let them know if you’ve done something they suggested, and also see how you can help them – remember, networking is a two-way street.

Slide 14: Like most things, much of a job search deals with your attitude, how you present yourself to the outside world, and how mentally prepared you are for the challenges you will face. These next tips address this important area. First, be honest and ask yourself what kind of a search are you conducting. Are you being proactive, using all the resources we’ve discussed, seeking out the hidden jobs, and constantly expanding your network? Or do you passive respond to posted jobs and wait for a reply? The effort you put into your search determines the results you get out of it.

Slide 15: When in a job search, you must always present yourself in a positive way, even though you may not be feeling particularly positive, energized or enthusiastic. Again, you never know when you will meet someone who will lead you to your next job, so you always have to be prepared. Have a positive attitude, with no negativity towards your situation or especially your former employers. Prepare what
you will say if and when someone asks you how you feel, what happened at your last job, or anything related to your job situation. Prospective employers will be looking for resilience and your ability to handle adversity. Take the opportunity of unemployment to update your professional image – get a makeover and update your wardrobe, and to update your skills and maybe learn some new ones relevant to your field or industry. Project confidence, and this comes from being comfortable with your brand and all related marketing materials. Be prepared to address any potential concerns prospective employers may have – if you meet them head on instead of trying to cover any up, they will be less of an issue.

Slide 16: This tip goes along with breaking into the hidden job market, by becoming someone that gets noticed by people in your field. Here are some ways to get noticed, and many of them are online, through the various social media sites. First have a strong profile, loaded with the key words for your industry, because recruiters searching the sites are looking for those key words, and the closer a match you are, the more you will be found. LinkedIn and Twitter also offer the opportunity to demonstrate your expertise, by contributing to or starting group discussions, and commenting on posts by the key players in your industry. So if you’re online, don’t just lurk – participate! Professional associations are great opportunities to get noticed, both in person by taking on leadership or volunteer positions, and attending and participating in events, but also online by contributing to the association’s website, or newsletter. And don’t forget your volunteer organizations, which are a great place to get noticed, by volunteering for a leadership role, or by solving a problem.

Slide 17: And our last tip is to encourage you to acknowledge and admit what might be holding you back in your job search and to find ways to deal with these obstacles. So really, this is a soul searching thing, to think about what is really keeping you from achieving success in your job search. Some of these obstacles that are common might include ageism, or fear of being discriminated against due to your age. Maybe a fear of the job search process in general. Maybe you’re an introvert and don’t like networking. Procrastination could be another common obstacle. Maybe you’re feeling overwhelmed and not knowing how to get started or getting stuck at a certain step and you might have other obstacles on your own that we haven’t talked about. But it’s important to realize just how much your attitude affects your success or lack of success. Recognizing the obstacles is the first step in overcoming them. Your advisor in our office can help in this process as well, to kind of unstick you. Make sure you do use your support system as well, all of your family and friends, they are all there for you when you’re in the job search mode, members of your professional association, colleagues and former coworkers. If you are feeling depressed, you might need counseling. Don’t hesitate to take advantage of all the resources that are available to you.

Slide 18: I wanted to say a few words about a common concern among more experience job seekers. Many experienced candidates are worried about being perceived as overqualified, and/or too old. However, it is a legitimate question for a company to ask anyone who has done work similar to the being applied to. They have their own concerns about any worker they hire and invest in, but sometimes especially with older workers. Here are some of the common concerns. It’s important to recognize these potential concerns and address them head-on with an attitude and responses that are honest and show your determination to get the job. For example, if you know the company is comprised of mostly young people, you can prepare an answer that shows how you are able to take direction – and prove it with a specific example – and that your experiences and accumulated knowledge will help add to their team’s success.
Slide 19: Keep these things in mind when selling yourself to a recruiter. Attitude is everything – maintain a positive, enthusiastic attitude that shows you’re focused on the future, not stuck in the past. Show you’re keeping current with technology and that you enjoy learning. Emphasize your skills – not just the ones that directly relate to the job, but also the transferable skills you’ve gotten from previous jobs and life experiences; communication, leadership and teamwork skills are always valued. Emphasize all your experiences; for example, a leadership role in a volunteer organization is valuable also. If you’re more experienced, keep a positive attitude and emphasize the qualities you have that will be valued by an employer; you have a history of dedication, commitment and maturity that a new graduate does not have. Combined with flexibility and openness to new situations, this makes you a valuable candidate, and if you believe it, you can convince prospective employers also!

To allay concerns that you won’t stick around or feel challenged in the role, be upfront and clear with the hiring manager. Tell them exactly why you want the job and your motivations, and let them know you have every intention of taking the job seriously. Ask the manager what they’re looking for in a perfect candidate, so you can gain insight into what qualities and skills the employer is looking for, and can alleviate these concerns.

Slide 20: Here are a few other tips for experienced job seekers. Ultimately, you’re trying to demonstrate your fit and match for the position above all else.

Slide 21: All of this speaks to the necessity for a new, positive attitude towards your job search. You want to be seen as a key leader for the field, so share your insights, ideas, and trends – let them know you’ve been doing your research and keeping current. Increasing your visibility helps in this regard.

Think about how you can expand your focus; keep abreast of new industries that can use your skills, and don’t box yourself in on just replacing yourself in a position that might no longer exist.

During your search, offer to help colleagues you meet and talk with; take focus off you and your job search and adopt a wider outlook. This is the wider purpose of networking.

Ask your contacts – don’t expect them to keep an eye out for you and your career – ask for something specific – whether a referral to one of their contacts, advice on or further information on a trend in the industry.

Slide 22: It will be hard to stay motivated all the time, but rely on your support system to help you stay positive. Keep your regular routine and life outside of the job search – eat, sleep and socialize as you normally would. You will also experience rejection, so have a plan to deal with it – it is ok to grieve, but don’t let it hold you back from future job search activities. To the extent that you can, get feedback that will help you become a stronger candidate.

Slide 23: Here are some final tips for job search success. Always emphasize the perfect fit between you and a job and a company. Keep your technology skills current for your industry. Show that you’re continuing to learn and being on top of things. Focus on your experience, on your problem solving skills and on your work ethic. These are very valued and important to employers. Demonstrate your skills and strengths through solid examples. Remember, focus on your accomplishments and achievements, and your brand, or what sets you apart from the competition. And be flexible, and open to new opportunities. Don’t be stuck on getting one job that you think you have to have. Your skills and
qualifications might fit in a lot of different opportunities that you haven't thought of, so be open to them.

Slide 24: That's it for this webinar. As always, contact me with any questions, or to be connected with your career services advisor.