

Conscious Careering



There's an ocean of opportunity in Puget Sound; job seekers just need to learn how to tap into it!

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For every Microsoft, there's a Micronics, a Micropower, and a Micro Com Systems. For every Starbucks, there's a Star Roofing, a Star Design, and a Star Pacific Headwear. The bottom line? If you're looking for a job in the Puget Sound area, don't limit your efforts strictly to those "household name" companies with which you're already familiar. Dig deeper and investigate the thousands of hiring opportunities available in the small-to-mid-size sector, as well.

For over 14 years now, I've been conducting intensive data mining sweeps of the Puget Sound economy, seeking to steer my clients to job leads and target company possibilities they may have previously missed. And to this day, nothing puts a smile on my face faster than when my research uncovers yet another small company rising through the ranks or bursting onto the local scene. What gets me so excited about these discoveries is that, to me, each one of these up-and-coming firms represents another ray of hope for some unemployed (or underemployed) individual in need of a better job or steadier paycheck. My rationale? The belief that behind each new company that gets launched in this region, you'll find yet another entrepreneur with hopes, dreams, and ambitions for the future—and who won't likely be able to accomplish these dreams without facing the need at some point to hire additional help.

My own optimism notwithstanding, it can be challenging at times to get job seekers to recognize the desirability of pursuing small-to-mid-sized businesses as an employment target in the first place. When left to their own devices, most Puget Sound residents invariably end up spending their time trying to get recruited by the "big boys" in town such as Microsoft, Starbucks, Washington Mutual, Costco, and the like. And if you ask them to name any specific companies beyond these usual suspects that might interest them, especially smaller businesses, you'll find that the list usually dries up in a hurry!

If you're actively job hunting or considering a career change, therefore, my advice is to dream big, but think small. Tap into the wealth of cutting-edge web resources out there such as www.superpages.com, www.zoominfo.com, and www.linkedin.com to assemble a set of smaller

companies here in town that are highly relevant to your skill sets and interests. Not only will you find the competition level for jobs at these companies greatly reduced, since they don't usually show up on peoples' radar screens, but smaller firms also generally allow you to spread your wings and work in a variety of different capacities—compared to larger organizations, where work tasks are often more regimented.

Want to know another sneaky trick for locating small companies? Try using the online job boards, themselves, as a company research tool. While most people approach these types of websites (e.g. Monster.com) in the exact same way one would approach help-wanted ads in the Sunday newspaper, the fact that you can search these sites dynamically, using keywords, makes them a different animal altogether. For example, if you have many years of experience selling products to large retail chains, try searching the job boards using relevant phrases such as "retailers", "big box", and "department stores" to see which companies around town might have products or services connected to the retail world in some way. Or if you're looking for a company that might be a better fit with your quirky, fun-loving personality, try searching with words like "sense of humor" or "outside-the-box" to see which local employers have a corporate culture that would be right up your alley.

Sounds simple, I know, but the key to finding great little companies to work for is to avoid focusing too much on the actual job leads and titles, themselves, and to train yourself instead to recognize the opportunities that lie *behind* each published listing. After all, for every formal job advertisement you'll find posted out in the employment marketplace, there are dozens of opportunities filled through word-of-mouth and direct employment solicitation. So if a smaller firm is only advertising for a receptionist at the moment, and you're a project manager, don't let that deter you. If your research reveals that this company has something in common with your professional background and career goals, go for it! Reach out, introduce yourself, and strike up a conversation about the value you feel you could potentially bring to their efforts.

In the end, most great jobs are simply the result of individual candidates and entrepreneurs stumbling across one another and recognizing the benefits of working together toward a common interest. And here in Puget Sound, luckily, we're lucky to have an ample supply of both ingredients!

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