

Conscious Careering



While plenty of good career help is available, be wary of those who suggest you can "buy" your way into a new job

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As a member of the career coaching profession, I spend most of my time sitting on the sidelines of the job search process watching the “real players” play the game—the individual candidates who must head out into the market, daily, to forage for quality opportunities.

In doing so, however, I can’t help but notice that the majority of professionals today, especially senior executives, are more or less rookies when it comes to the career transition and re-employment process. As one might expect, they’ve been spending their time and energy on much more productive pursuits over the years, such as analyzing financial statements, developing exciting technologies, building new companies, and the like. They *haven’t* needed to focus on becoming experts in the re-employment process or on keeping up with the exploding array of career resources and tools available in the market today.

This lack of experience in the modern job search arena, unfortunately, makes many people vulnerable to a number of predatory services that make their living cashing in on the fear and desperation of unemployed professionals.

What type of companies would do such a dastardly thing? Who could possibly sleep at night after bilking large sums of money from people already feeling the sting of a missing paycheck? Sadly, there are many such culprits out trolling the marketplace today. There are career marketing firms, for example, that charge astronomical fees (\$10,000+) to out-of-work professionals based on the promise that they can deliver “hidden” job leads or connect people directly to hard-to-reach hiring managers. Additionally, there are dozens of Internet-based career tools that claim to dramatically improve the interviewing rates of job seekers by “zapping”, “blasting”, or “rocketing” (pick your exciting action verb!) huge batches of resumes to employers and recruiters via electronic mail.

Are all of these types of services fraudulent and/or ineffective? I honestly don’t know, since it would be impossible to keep up with each and every fee-based resource in the market. Over the years, however, I’ve heard countless stories from clients who have been taken in by these kinds of services and learned the hard way that

the old axiom “if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is” applies in spades to the unregulated frontier of the career services sector.

The best defense to avoiding job market scams is to therefore apply a “common sense” test to each service you come across. Hidden job leads not available anywhere else? Instant access to dozens of key decision-makers? High rates of interviewing based on shotgun mass mailing campaigns? Get real. Hiring new employees is an extremely important decision, with mistakes being prohibitively expensive, which means that companies scrutinize candidates more carefully than ever and allow for few shortcuts. At the end of the day, you’ve got to take responsibility for getting out there, selling yourself, and lining up your next assignment. It’s just not realistic to try and “outsource” your job search—or to throw money at it, hoping it will go away!

Unfortunately, basic capitalism dictates that there wouldn’t be a market for many of the sketchier services being offered if there weren’t people out there willing to fall for them. As one of my recruiting friends puts it, “there are thousands of out-of-work professionals out in the market hoping they can pay somebody to represent them, like a sports agent, but it just doesn’t work that way.” And while there are definitely organizations that can train you to be more effective in your job search techniques, and lend a helping hand along the way, nobody can do the true heavy lifting of the job search for you. For better or worse, each of us is responsible for building our own professional network and convincing employers that our talents are worthy of a steady paycheck.

So if you’re actively in job search mode, my advice to you is to keep your guard up. There will be many services and cyberspace denizens seeking to part you from your savings in exchange for the promise of “instant career gratification” in various forms. Educated consumers, however, won’t give a dime to any career assistance provider, including myself, without conducting a *serious* amount of due diligence up front. Ask tough questions, check references, read the fine print, and run a few Internet searches on the company’s name to see what turns up. At the end of the day, any reputable service should be able to prove their legitimacy to your complete satisfaction—and will be happy to do so without pressuring you, scaring you, or giving you a guilt trip.

And if you’re ever promised access to “hidden” anything in the job market, run away!

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