

# Conscious Careering

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**Spend less time searching for great jobs—and more time searching for great organizations!**

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Looking back on your own career history and employment experience, how much time would you say tends to go by between the point a company decides it needs to hire somebody new and the actual date they get around to filling the position in question? One week? Two weeks? Several months?

Based on my own experience, as well as conversations I've had with dozens of hiring managers over the years, I'd say that the latter estimate of several months tends to be the most accurate—and may even be a touch conservative in a large number of cases!

The fact of the matter is that companies have a lot of stuff on their plates, pretty much all the time. Hiring managers and HR professionals are just as subject to getting distracted as the rest of us, and despite their best intentions, they often allow positions to go unfilled for months at a time before they get around to taking the definitive action needed to bring a new candidate in the door. Sometimes it's a question of getting the appropriate budget approval. Other times it's the logistical barrier of getting all of the powers-that-be into a room together at the same time to concoct an appropriate job description.

Whatever the case may be, these significant slowdowns in the hiring process signal the word "opportunity" in big, loud letters to the savvy job seeker who is paying attention! They create a window for proactive job candidates to inject themselves into the running for positions well before their competition—and before the company's "shields" go up and candidates are suddenly required to jump through a serious of formidable, pre-defined hoops in terms of skills, qualifications, and industry credentials.

So if your job search consists primarily of picking over the published ad section in your local paper, or visiting a few employment sites on the Internet, it's time for a significant change in strategy. It takes a pretty special candidate, after all, to consistently land quality jobs through the published advertising channel. It's far and away the most competitive route, with hundreds of candidates applying to any new lead that sticks its head up in the Seattle Times, on Monster.com, or in any of the other major published ad venues available. Ads are also

something of a last-resort hiring channel for most employers. Despite various employment laws and regulations, the best positions usually still end up going to internal candidates or to "insiders" who are referred in by one of the company's current employees.

So while I'm not suggesting that you completely give up on ads, *per se*, I *would* recommend that you shift your emphasis to a certain degree. Concentrate less on the companies who already are advertising for a candidate like you, right now, and focus instead on building relationships with the most likely "customers" who will need your skills in the near future. If you can start building bridges with these organizations now, before they get around to publishing a suitable opening, there's a greater chance you'll be able to short-circuit the hiring process and get considered before any of your competitors even realize that a potential opportunity may be afoot.

In sales terminology, this is the difference between "chasing a lead" and "creating an opportunity." The same philosophy works in my business, as well. By the time a corporate layoff has been announced in the paper, I usually figure a company has already lined up a suitable outplacement vendor to work with their departing employees. If I've gotten to know the company in advance, however, and have built a positive relationship with the right people, there's a far greater chance I'll be first in line to win the business when the time comes.

So let go of the tendency to reflexively chase leads all the time, and see if you can start developing some appropriate opportunities with the right companies, instead. Here are a few suggestions of how you might go about this:

● **Retool Your Networking Strategy.** Instead of constantly pestering people for job leads, ask your contacts instead for useful referrals and for help in brainstorming the names of local companies that are growing, expanding, and delivering a successful product or service. Don't let people off the hook easily. Give them lots of juicy clues that might help them connect your unique talents with a quality employer in the area. Mention key industries you'd like to penetrate, specific problems you'd like to solve, and examples of target companies that your research has shown should belong on your radar screen. In most cases, people will be much better resources for suggesting company names than they will be in identifying actual "live" hiring leads.

● **Scour the Internet.** Instead of using the Internet exclusively to find published job leads that fit you, use it as a target company research tool, as well. For starters, tap into the dozens of corporate research databases available such as [www.business.com](http://www.business.com), [www.hoovers.com](http://www.hoovers.com), and [www.kellysearch.com](http://www.kellysearch.com) to uncover suitable employer possibilities. Don't neglect the power of the Internet job boards, either, as a potential customer identification tool. Want to work for a

company that offers a fun environment? Search [www.monster.com](http://www.monster.com) and similar sites using key phrases like *fun*, *sense of humor*, and *play hard*. You may be surprised at the organizations that turn up—and you can then visit their websites to gather additional research and formulate a strategy for making their acquaintance.

● **Stop and smell the ads.** While the correlation isn't always a perfect one, it's generally safe to assume that a company spending a lot of money on advertising will often have additional dollars earmarked for new hiring. If companies are actively seeking to grow their revenue base, it's almost a given that they are likely to need additional workers within a relatively short time frame. So if you happen to notice a company that has launched a new promotional campaign, or you drive by a new billboard on your way home one day, stop and consider whether the company in question might at some point have a need for your skills. If their marketing campaign pays off, they may need some help gearing up their operations and taking care of their new customers!

● **Scan the local press.** In any major metro area, companies come and go every day, a fact that suggests you'll never run out of potential employer targets as long as you pay regular attention to the business community. In addition to the many other benefits of investing in a "well-furnished" mind, scanning several local news sources each day will help you get a quick jump on brand-new organizations which are coming to town—as well as existing companies who have announced plans to add staff or expand their facilities.

While it can take a little bit of practice to get out of the habit of chasing short-term leads, and to view the market instead as a swirling sea of unpublished opportunities, experience tells me this latter approach will make you more successful in the long run. It not only parallels the process that professional salespeople go through to get results, but aligns more effectively with the true nature of corporate hiring and the fact that most employment opportunities linger around organizations for months before they ever get advertised. Isn't it better to be proactive, and to get your foot in the door early, so that you don't have to get in line with everybody else down the road?

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