

# Managing Your Job Search

By John Granger  
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- **Introduction**
  
- **Defining Reality**
  - What boxing and job seeking have in common
  - Gaining confidence
  - Marketing YOU
  
- **Developing a Plan**
  - Preparation
  - Networking
  - Direct Marketing
  - Want Ads
  - Search Firms
  
- **Staying Motivated**
  - Accountability
  - Support groups
  - Continuous learning
  - Keeping it in perspective

## INTRODUCTION

- Hope you don't mind the crib sheet. I promise not to read to you word for word, but I'm a bit dazed after spending most of the past week talking to people I've never met. You see, I'm a job seeker. I've found that being successful in a search means talking to more people in a month than I would typically meet in an entire year.
- I want to share with you today a few ideas that I have found particularly useful in my search. Some of them I've learned in books, job search classes, and support groups like this one. Others have been gleaned from the successes of other job seekers, or through painful experience. While I don't claim to be an expert at this, I am like you an "active learner".

### Point #1: DEFINING REALITY

By way of brief introduction, I have been employed in the technology arena in a management capacity for practically my entire career, roughly 25 years. I have been unemployed exactly twice, the first time in the mid-90's after over 18 years with my first employer; the second time occurred this past year after nearly 6 continuous years of employment.

Both times have been a challenge, and it doesn't seem to get any easier the second time around. I seem to experience a reality shift, like the job search suddenly feels like an out of body experience. Has anyone here felt the same way? Let me give you an example of what I mean.

There was once a young boxer who asked his coach for some advice before his first fight. His coach smiled and told him "everybody has a plan when they first step into the ring. Everything works just fine until you feel that first punch in the face."

So... It's one thing to learn about, analyze, intellectualize about the job search, it's quite another thing to actually DO it. WHY?!

**First, it requires that you build up your confidence at a time when your self-esteem may be at an all-time low. This means you'll be interacting with others while hiding in a cave may seem an attractive lifestyle alternative.**

For most people, with the possible exception of sales professionals, the job search requires that we call upon skills that we have seldom used in our career, or at least not to the extent that these skills are required in the job search. These include making lots of phone calls, often to people you've never met; attending lots of meetings, meeting people you've never met. And perhaps the most daunting: thinking of yourself as the CEO of a company that is marketing a single product: YOU. This requires that you think of yourself in a way that most people are unaccustomed to. It takes time to get there. This involves a certain amount of marketing research: resume refinement, developing interesting stories about yourself, and your accomplishments. But it all starts with doing the homework, before the rubber meets the road with your first phone call.

You will need to adjust, fine-tune, and personalize what you learn in order for these techniques to become effective. Until you get a few "wake-up calls", you won't have the opportunity to make these adjustments.

The sooner you get to the point where you feel that first punch, the faster your search will gain traction.

**The second major challenge in mounting a successful job search requires that you develop a workable plan. Finding a job is the Most Difficult Job Any of Us Ever Perform.**

It has been said that the average job seeker spends only about 2 hours a day on his or her job search. In reality it's like any large project you've ever attempted...just magnified in terms of difficulty by a factor of 10 or more. Once you've confronted and accepted that it's difficult, you can begin to conquer it. How? As you would any complex project: by dissecting it and breaking it down into smaller, manageable parts.

## **Point #2: HAVE A PLAN**

Despite getting all this great information, you wake up in the morning and say, "where do I start?" **It is ESSENTIAL to have a plan.** Without one, it's too easy to become distracted and spend time on activities that make you FEEL like you're busy but don't pay off. Like going to the supermarket, washing the car, doing laundry, cleaning the bathrooms...two and three times.

You develop a plan by dividing the job search into five distinct areas, identifying tasks associated with each one, then prioritizing them. These five areas are:

1. Preparation
2. Networking
3. Direct Marketing
4. Want Ads
5. Search Firms

The basic idea is to identify tasks in each area, then prioritize them each week and do the most important, or "A" tasks, first: 1A, 2A, 3A, etc. Then the "B" tasks: 1B, 2B, 3B, etc. Prioritizing helps keep your efforts balanced.

### **1. Preparation**

#### **The first step: Know what you're looking for**

- **Identify your transferable skills.**  
Over time you've probably forgotten about some key skills, particularly those that are intangible: the soft skills. **A great way to research this is to go onto a few Web sites and review job descriptions.** Many of these "wish lists" go into excruciating detail about the qualities of the ideal candidate. You can identify many of your "long lost" skills this way.
- **Research job descriptions to identify possible job titles**  
Job titles are not consistent; you need to know the range of possibilities. The Careers section of company Web sites are great for researching this too. Based on your transferable skills, you think you might make a great program manager. But how do you find out? Read the description, talk to people who are doing it for a living using the informational interview.

#### **The second step: Researching 20 – 25 companies that may be able to use your skills.**

- **What kinds of companies are likely to hire you?**
  - Companies in your Industry
  - Competitors
  - Vendors

Example:

- Funded Startup (search business periodicals for news of startups)
- Government (County, City, Federal)
- Technology companies
- Management Consulting companies
- Companies that plan, organize events
- Staffing companies
- Professional Employer Organizations

- **How can I identify these companies in San Diego?**

- Warm Contacts
- Internet Search
- Hoovers.com (\$49 per month) or books available in library
- Fellow Alumni
- Librarians
- San Diego Business Journal Book of Lists
- UCSD Connect Directory
- Associations, User Groups
- Professional Directories
  - San Diego Creative Directory (under “Communication”) (Blue Book Publishing)
  - San Diego High Technology Directory, Alexander Publishing
- Yellow pages

## 2. Networking

- **The best way to uncover the hidden job market.**

- Gather information about potential employers, which leads to...
- Identifying the best potential employers which leads to...
- Conversations with people who work there which leads to...
- Opportunities as they arise.<sup>1</sup>

San Diego is not only America’s finest city, it’s the smallest big town in America. Forget “Six Degrees of Separation”. Try TWO!

- **How to start a networking call?**

- Email your contacts a brief “networking letter” to provide a little background and prepare them for a conversation. Describe the kind of information you are looking for so they can be thinking about it ahead of time.
- Use your list of 25-50 companies as a conversation starter
- Ask for information about the company, people they know there
- Offer information in return
- Get 3 or more referrals.
- Be persistent – call back and reschedule if required.

- **These techniques produced a list of over 100 new contacts within over 50 businesses on my target list in less than one month!!!**

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Hecht Harrison Career Transition Manual: “Networking, the Number One Job Search Technique”

### **3. Direct Marketing**

Involves making contact with hiring managers and executives in target companies.

#### **Informational Interview**

1. Referrals from warm contacts, or people they know.
2. Contact first by mail or email, then phone them.

#### **Targeted Hiring Manager**

1. Referrals from warm contacts, or people they know.
2. Contact first by mail or email, then phone them.

### **4. Want Ads, Internet**

#### **Advantages:**

- Find out who's hiring
- Job description research
- Broad distribution of your resume

#### **Disadvantages:**

Lots of competition

#### **Still...A few key Web sites:**

- FlipDog
- Help Wanted San Diego
- HomeTown Careers Network
- JobSniper
- JobStar San Diego
- Monster
- SignOn San Diego Joblink
- SignOn San Diego Career Wire

**If you do apply online, follow-up the application with a letter to the hiring manager.**

### **5. Search Firms**

- Verify reputation, then choose carefully. Best way is to find out through warm contacts who has worked with which firms.
- Remember that search firms work for the client company, not you.

## Point #3: Staying Motivated

- Find someone or some group who will hold you accountable for your progress (e.g., Forever Employed Monday Breakfast Club).
- Quantify your goals for the week.
- Carve out blocks of time, quiet locations. Explain your schedule to your family & friends so they can help support you. (Tom T. commutes to his neighbor's office)
- Keep a Journal: you'll have a sense of accomplishment
- Have a consistent method of tracking information
  - Contact Notebook
    - Contacts This Week
    - Contacts Next Week
    - Rescheduled calls
  - Store contact notes in Outlook or ACT
  - Excel spreadsheet List of Target Companies, with contact people listed underneath and links to Word documents that profile each company.
- Keep your pipeline full. The interview process goes like this: NO-NO-NO-NO-NO-NO-NO-NO-NO-NO-NO-NO-YES! Continuing to schedule appointments and interviews so that, when you hear the inevitable "NO", you can look forward to the eventual "YES"!
- Continue learning, but don't overdo it. Schedule learning activities, such as taking classes, outside of your "primetime" job search hours. Respect the requirements of your job search routine as you would a paying job.

The San Diego Metro Career Center offers free, quality classes in a variety of technical subjects. I know a friend who was depressed about his lack of success in his job search. I mentioned these classes to him and now he's gone overboard, taking 7 classes concurrently which leaves him little time for job searching. But at least he's doing something constructive with his time, and he seems to have a plan now; the classes may lead to certification, which in turn may lead future job opportunities.

- **Be good to yourself**

The job search is a stressful time, but there are lots of positives:

- Meet lots of terrific people.
- Introduce new friends to old friends (you never know what could happen).
- Gain clarification about your life and career goals.
- Time to exercise.
- Time to re-discover that life offers many simple pleasures that cost very little or no money.
- Invite friends you haven't seen in a while to a home-cooked dinner.
- Go somewhere you've always wanted to go but never took the time to do.

**Stay balanced, and remember that serendipity occurs when preparation meets opportunity.**