

Job search for uncertain times

By Carole Brown, Director and Principal Consultant, Individual Career Solutions



More than two thousand years ago, the great Aristotle is credited as saying:

Where the needs of the world and your talents cross, therein lies your vocation.

It is interesting I think how these words still remain so applicable to our careers and job search today. After all, looking for a job is really about connecting our skills and talents to the labour market or needs of the world.

Or to put it a different way, job search is a sales campaign in which *your personal brand is the product on sale* – that is, your **clearly distinguishable combination** of skills, experience, knowledge, reputation, character and style.

However, as we all know, looking for a new job whether you are currently employed or between jobs can be very challenging and a test of resilience. This is even more so when the labour market is tight and opportunities seem thin on the ground.

Finding your next job requires focus, a positive mindset, commitment and organisation. There are **four key areas** that in my experience help people to fast track their job search, maintain a positive mindset and give attention to what really counts, in order to find that place where their talents, skills and labour market needs cross.

START WHERE YOU ARE.
DO WHAT YOU CAN.
USE WHAT YOU HAVE.

–ARTHUR ASHE

First, be clear about what work you are looking for

Many people start their job search only vaguely knowing what kind of work they are looking for. This may help to a point, but with a bit more focus you will achieve greater clarity about where to target your job search and therefore be more efficient. This is just as true for people truly desperate for a job right now, (any job will do!) as it is for those who have more time to plan a transition.

So I encourage you to step back, take perspective, and give yourself even a little amount of time to reflect on where you are currently at in your career and **what you really want** from your next job.



To help you do this consider the following questions:

What DO you really want from your next job?

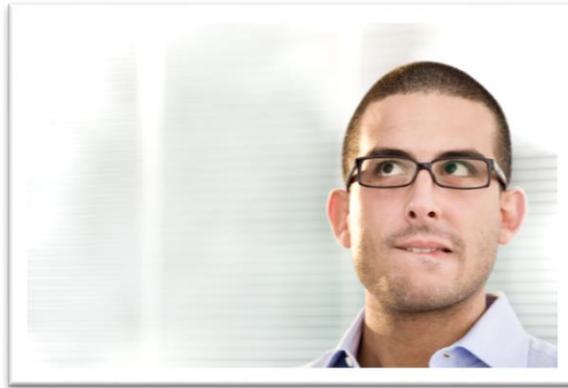
What do you want to contribute and with whom? Everyone has a different set of work values. They can relate to income, security, flexibility, work-life balance, team work, work culture, career progression, learning opportunities and so much more. They are very important to identify and try to achieve, at least for the most part, in your job. Use them as a reference point or a compass in your job search.

What are your key skills sets?

Conduct a real and objective assessment of your skills. Check this with someone who knows you well because most people tend to chronically underestimate their capabilities. Note the skills that you really like to use and want to develop. Importantly, remember that many of your skills will be transferable into other jobs, organisations and even industries such as communication and technical skills. Ask yourself, what are you really good at that sets you apart from others? Your unique skill set will help to differentiate yourself from other job seekers.

Where do your interests lie?

Who would you like to work for? What do you want to do? Do you have favourite brands or organisations? What activities and environments provide you with most motivation? **When are you at your best?**



Changing jobs is a perfect opportunity to think expansively about your job interests and be open to suggestions and possibilities. What you have done in the past is not necessarily what you need to do in the future. In a world of multiple job changes, it is very likely that what you first qualify in will not be what you are doing a few years later.

By doing the above you will have some good signposts towards what you are looking for. This means that your job search can now be **targeted and efficient**. Then, find a good fit for 'product you' by keeping up to date with the current labour market. This is so important to job search success.

Second, know the labour market

In this time of budget cuts, job losses, redundancy payouts and career uncertainty, a question at the top of many people's minds is *where are the jobs?* Labour market intelligence is a really important part of job search.

Here are **six key sources** of labour market and job information which you can use to further identify job trends and fast track your job search.

1. **Newspapers and media** – look out for articles in the newspaper and on-line that keep you up-to-date about what is going on. Is an industry planning an expansion? Is a new store moving into your neighbourhood? What is the government planning to spend its money on? Are there new businesses coming on-line?

2. **On-line job boards** – use their search functions to give you a picture of the sorts of jobs available in the industries and organisations you are looking for. Register with a number of them and sign up for alerts. You'll get insights into what the market is paying and what skills and experience are required

3. **Recruitment agencies** – register with those that are experienced in placing people with similar skills to you. Speak to recruitment staff, review their vacancy lists. Even if there aren't the vacancies there for you now, by being informed about what may be happening down the track you will be much better placed to take advantage of opportunities. As they say, knowledge is power!

4. **Professional associations and industry groups** – contact them for information about their industries and where the demand for jobs are. Some even have specialist career advisers. And local business and community groups can be a good source of intelligence about what is happening at grass-roots level.

5. **Personal and professional networks** – given that most jobs are not advertised, your networks are critical to finding out where the jobs are. They are often the source of specific job leads and market information that you would otherwise not have access to. Adopting a networking 'lifestyle' of connecting to and helping others, will help you find out about job opportunities, make valuable connections in your chosen field, and stay focused and motivated during your job search.

6. **Data** – access information from internet and newspaper vacancy reports; surveys of employer expectations; and graduate employment outcomes can help you to understand labour market trends. I recommend taking a look at the Australian Government's **Labour Market Information Portal** - it leads you to an amazing range of information.

Third, access job opportunities efficiently

Recent data from the Australian Department of Employment shows that the three most common methods of finding jobs are on-line job boards, direct approaches to employers and referral through networks and contacts. While this may not be surprising and is useful to know in regard to where to focus your attention, it really matters a lot **how you go about leveraging** these opportunities.

There are many job seekers who unfortunately subscribe to the 'more is better' philosophy which sees them submitting multiple (sometimes hundreds) of applications through job vacancy sites. The problem is that these are usually the same resume submitted time and again for many different kinds of jobs. Unsurprisingly they have a very low success rate, because they do not take into account **what the employer is looking for**. It is much more efficient to take the time to

prepare targeted applications for each and every job you apply for. And, ensure these jobs are a good fit for your skills, values and interests.

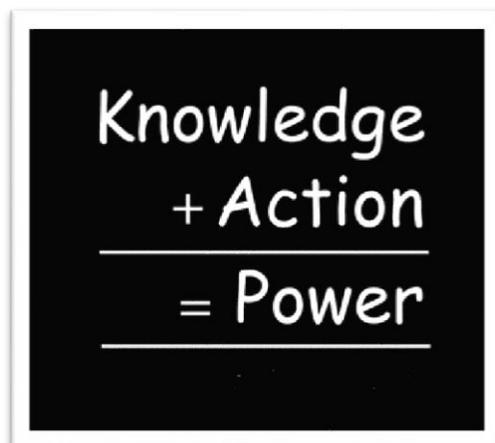
Make sure your **applications are well-written** and your interview skills are polished. Your résumé is your essential “calling card” that needs to be ready and up-to-date as soon as you start to canvas opportunities. The best résumés are targeted to each position, show a decent amount of research and thought, are positive in tone and professionally presented. Keep them brief – 3-4 pages is more than enough for most jobs, although check what is requested. There are many good examples of résumé and CVs available through reputable job search sites. Remember to tailor each application to individual jobs. Of course these days, lots of recruitment occurs through social media, so make sure your profile/s is up to date and presents you in the way you want an employer to notice you!

Connect to your networks. People need to know that you are looking for a job or considering a change.

Identify and approach employers that need people with your expertise and attributes. Be clear about how you can add value and help them solve the problems they are trying to solve.

Recruitment agencies and on-line job boards are also obviously very important. Search for the ones that best match your needs. And, **use social media to your advantage.** In particular update your LinkedIn profile to highlight your key skills and experience.

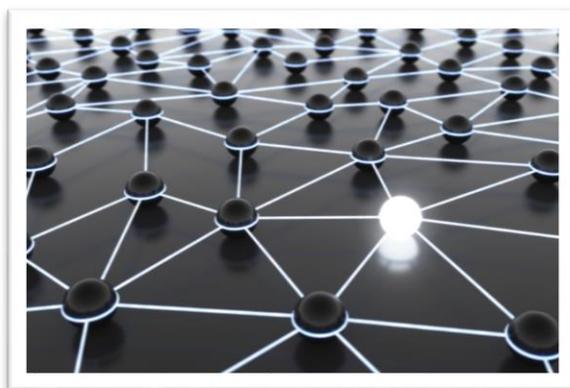
It is almost too obvious to mention, but whether it is through applications or interviews **be the best you can be.** For most of us who find interviews nerve-wracking and to be endured rather than enjoyed, then preparation and practise is the key.



Fourth, enlist your support crew

Job seeking can be challenging, confusing and take longer than you want it to. Experience shows that those who have a good 'support crew' have the best chance of maintaining the resilience and focus needed to succeed.

Some of the best support comes from **trusted friends, colleagues and family** who are there to encourage you, proof read applications and generally listen to your plans and ideas.



Professional networks are also important as they are often the source of job leads and market information. Aim to be well connected through a variety of networks and be active in keeping healthy and diverse professional relationships beyond your immediate work place.

As important, can be a **qualified career coach** who will improve your efficiency in the professional world, provide expert advice on how to plan your career, and be 'on your side' as you plan and implement your transition. In all of the leadership and career training that I have managed, coaching has been the single most valued element by participants. If I have never worked with a career coach before, now may be the time to try. You can find a listing of qualified career coaches at www.cdaa.org.au

I'd like to conclude with a quote from that other great master – Leonardo Da Vinci - that really sums up for me the positive endeavour required in job search that inevitably results in success - even in difficult times.

It had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things.

It is interesting I think how these words also still remain so applicable to our careers and job search today. After all, looking for a job is really about actively connecting our skills and talents to the labour market or needs of the world.

Good luck with yours.