

The

Secrets of Executive Search

Professional Strategies for Managing Your Personal Job Search

Robert M. Melançon

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Since its inception, the company's commitment to excellence in helping clients solve their leadership capital requirements, has earned it the reputation of being one of the most highly regarded executive search and consulting firms in the Southwest.

Acknowledgments:

Noted German poet, novelist, playwright and scholar Johann von Goethe once wrote, "I owe so much to so many that if you took it all away, there wouldn't be anything left of me!"

As a young boy growing up on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, I was fortunate to benefit from the wisdom of my dear grandmother, Lorena, now in her 106th year of sainthood, whose wealth of adages have proven ever more meaningful with each passing year. As I set about the task of writing this book, one, in particular, comes to mind, "Tell me with whom you associate, and I will tell you who you are." (Spoken first by Goethe in 1819.) All of us are but a reflection of those with whom we associate. And it has been my good fortune to be associated with the very best! It is with sincerest gratitude that I acknowledge the following for their invaluable contributions:

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Introduction:

Re-Engineering Your Career

Success in today's workplace demands new and innovative strategies. The traditional business model is out of sync with reality, and job security has gone the way of the buggy whip. According to the most recent statistics, nearly 700,000 job cuts were announced during 1998 — an increase of 56 percent from 1997, and the highest this decade. And 1999 is on pace to eclipse that number with ease. It's become an age of free-agency, and there is precious little allegiance by either employee or employer.

Call it what you like — restructuring, re-engineering, downsizing, rightsizing — the reality is that more professionals than ever are finding themselves "in the market" for a new job. And even if you're among the fortunate who haven't been directly affected *thus far*, you probably see the writing on the wall — BRACE YOURSELF! For most of us, the days of the "gold watch," or even a 10-year job anniversary party, are gone.

The Federal Department of Labor reports that occupational half-life — the rate at which an employee's knowledge and skills become obsolete — has

decreased from between 12-15 years in 1970, to around 30 months today. Those who are unwilling or unable to adapt or re-train will fall by the wayside. But for those who are able not only to embrace change but also harness it to their advantage, the future has never looked brighter! Opportunities abound! So, even if your job has not already left you, there are a host of other compelling reasons why you may want to seek a new opportunity. Perhaps this explains why the average tenure for professionals has decreased from 20 years just a decade or so ago, to five years or less today.

Ironically, many of the very best, most talented professionals are so focused on their work, and have had such little experience with the job search process, that they're actually the most poorly equipped to manage their own campaign. That's why I've written this book.

It will show you how to develop the *correct* long-term career strategy, empower you to reinvent yourself as "Me, Incorporated" for the new millennium, and teach you the techniques the pros use to identify and capture the very best opportunities, in the least amount of time, with the fewest mistakes along the way. Not just "another" position, but the *right* position, in the *right* location, for the *right* salary; the kind that you'll not find advertised in the newspaper or trade

journals, or posted on the Internet. You'll discover how to think strategically about your career, and make the moves that position you like a champion.

The Secrets of Executive Search features insider tips on how to properly package your background and experience, how to market that package most effectively, and how to separate yourself from the competition. It covers such key aspects of the job search process as:

- Networking strategies that cause the job to find you.
- The importance of coaching *secondary* references.
- Writing the "absolutely sure-fire, can't miss resume and cover letter."
- How to identify the *key decision-makers* in a target company.
- Techniques for turning interview *traps* into interview *triumphs*.
- Little known secrets on negotiating strategy.
- Advice for maximizing your impact during the *critical first few weeks* on the job.

The book is based on more than 35 years experience in human resources and executive search — helping people just like you secure the best positions at the best salaries. Having held key human resource management positions at three of the country's leading Fortune 50 corporations, coupled with more than 20 years

experience in executive search, I've been involved with career management from all perspectives. I'm keenly aware of how top companies go about identifying executive talent, and I know the best way to prepare and position you to capture those opportunities. I've counseled countless executives on their personal job search strategies, and I know the most effective techniques for conducting an efficient job search. I have to. That's my job, and my success as an Executive Search Consultant depends upon it!

And, to ensure you're getting the broadest perspective possible, I've even added additional insights from several other executive search and career management experts.

In the absence of your own personal career management consultant, this book can serve as your *virtual coach*. Its objective is to help you work smarter and more confidently, while avoiding the mistakes and miscues that cause so many other candidates to "come in second." By putting these secrets to work on your behalf, your career will not only be destined for the right track, but also for the fast track!

I've presented the material in an abbreviated format to make it easier to use as a reference guide. I hope you will refer to it often as you take a proactive role in

managing your search...and your career. We is see moving pretty fast once we get into the "secrets" themselves. But first it's important to understand how these techniques and the job search process itself, fit within the context of your overall career/life plan.

So, let's get started!

FROM THE SEARCH FILES:

"Sam" had a strong background in Corporate Finance, but had just been "released" from his third Assistant Treasurer position in the last seven years. The first two times, he assumed that the problem was with his employers. But now he wasn't so sure. Rather than initiate his typical job search "one more time," he decided to seek the help of a professional career counselor. When she asked why his previous assignments had all turned out the same, he thought for a moment, then replied, "I'm really not sure, but I know that I was extremely unhappy in all three!" The counselor then assisted him through a series of self-evaluation exercises.

Through this process Sam realized that the duties in each of his previous positions were pretty much the same, as were the personality types of his bosses. Finally, it dawned on him that he had not really changed jobs at all. He had only changed desks!

Sam's introspection enabled him to refocus his search exclusively on opportunities offering a less structured environment, with a broader range of responsibilities, and more freedom to act. Within weeks, he accepted a position as Business Manager with a medium-sized law firm. It was just what he had always dreamed of doing, and where he has now been happily employed for the past eight years.

If we're not careful we can become victims of our experience!

Chapter 1

Introspection:

"If You Don't Know Where You're Going, You Might End Up Somewhere Else"

As mentioned in the Introduction, there can be myriad reasons why you may want to find a new position. But regardless of the motivation, once you've crossed that emotional bridge, it's time to take action. For many people, this means updating the resume, making reams of copies, acquiring mailing lists, stuffing envelopes, and beginning a mass mailing campaign. But beware; it's a trap — the activity trap. Staying busy only makes you feel as if you're accomplishing something. You're really just spinning your wheels!

While this type of activity may lull you into thinking you're heading in the right direction, it's a false impression, and a terribly inefficient method of locating the job that's *right for you*. If you fall into this trap, the worst possible situation begins to happen — you start getting invitations for interviews! The more resumes you send out, the more you compound the problem. You're suddenly confronted with

Secret #1

Beware of the activity trap.

an internal dialog of questions you're completely unprepared to answer. "Which interviews should I take?" "Should I entertain out-of-town interviews, or wait to see if something develops locally?" "Should I interview

with company X when I really would rather work for company Y or Z?"
"Could I make more money elsewhere?"

You can't properly answer these questions without first going through the extremely important process of *career/life planning*. If you ignore this step and fail to consider whether the opportunity will take you closer to or further from your career objective, odds are that you'll soon find yourself back in the process of looking for another job. A position that's just a port in a storm is very unlikely to bring you nearer the desired destination. Your career becomes like a pinball machine, with you as the ball. Bounced and bumped from place to place, you ring up a few points, set off a few bells and whistles, but eventually drop into a hole, ending the game. Wouldn't you agree that your career deserves a better strategy?

Career/Life Planning

Your occupation has a tremendous impact on your life, as well as on the lives of your family members. In his book, If You Don't Know Where You're Going, You'll Probably End Up Somewhere Else, David Campbell, a leading specialist in vocational testing and career guidance, writes: "The most important influence on your lifestyle is your occupation. It will determine not only what you do every day, but it will also greatly affect how you live, who your friends are, what clothes you wear, where you take vacations, how much money you make, how long you

have to work, etc. Most important, your work will have an enormous impact on how you think about yourself because we identify more closely with our occupations than with anything else."

Self-Reflection

Having an understanding of who you are as a human being, not just who you are as a professional, is critical to self-fulfillment. Embrace and appreciate your role as husband, wife, daughter, son, mom, dad, neighbor, and friend, in addition to your role as a professional.

Self-reflection and analysis are key to making the right career decisions. There are numerous tools available to help you through this process, including the ever-popular book, *What Color Is Your Parachute?* You may even want to consult with a professional career counselor.

This soul-searching requires you to dig deeply into your psyche, and since it's often easier to avoid dealing with these tough questions, many people simply fall into the activity trap. In fact, it's reported that professionals spend considerably more time planning a vacation or computing their taxes then they do planning their careers. Yes, it requires a significant amount of discipline to work through

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