

# Aim, Shoot, Get Hired!

The Best of the Berman Larson Kane Newsletter

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## ***Acknowledgments***

As president of Berman Larson Kane, I would like to thank all those who have contributed to our newsletter over the years. It is this foundation of employment fundamentals and innovative insight that keeps our firm true to our mission of offering "The Best Staffing Options."

Special thanks to the Berman Larson Kane Recruiters who have requested many of these advice pieces to assist in coaching the many job seekers they speak with daily. They are truly the backbone of the BLK success spirit. A few of the BLK names that come to the surface are: Amy Alvarez, CPC, Lindy Brownell, Susan Cocchiaro, PHR, CTS, Carol Shea, Joanne Ellerman, PHR, Patrice Foresman, Marla Magluta, Marcie Marsh, Michele Meusner, Debra Quiat, Lori Sachs and Cheri Warren. And not to forget the rest of the BLK crew that research our clients requests, process our contractor and temp payrolls and organize and maintain our cyber candidate library. This team's hard work allows everything to materialize into the superior staffing service we provide.

And an extra thanks to my wife Lynn & 3 children (Eric, Robin & Rebecca), who have blindly supported and believed in me for the past 25 years as I pursued this career of helping people with their careers. I can't thank them enough.

Bob Larson, CPC  
President Berman Larson Kane



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## ***Introduction***

This is not a step-by-step process of how to write your resume, interview and advance your career. Your local library or bookstore will have many how-to manuals to read or to purchase.

This book is an assortment of several Berman Larson Kane articles that have appeared in our monthly newsletter. Our recruiters have identified these articles as the questions most often asked by job seekers. We have attempted to group the questions into six sections. Some of the short articles, however, could appear in more than one section but are only printed here once.

Although you could read this book cover to cover I would suggest that you browse the table of contents and skip to those career topics that interest you the most. If you don't find the question you are looking for addressed here please visit our website at <http://www.jobsbl.com> for additional career information. If you have a question not covered, we are always interested in ideas, so feel free to submit suggestions to [larson@jobsbl.com](mailto:larson@jobsbl.com).

We at Berman Larson Kane just celebrated our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the staffing business and are very proud to stay true to our mission statement of offering "The Best Staffing Options". I trust you will find some value in at least one of these reprints and can benefit from our years of experience.

Just a reminder: your job search is a journey with few absolutes, so if one of our suggestions enhanced your pursuits we have done our job.



## **Section I:**

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*Job Search / Resume Launching*



## TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE COVER LETTERS

It's common knowledge that the resume you send a prospective employer should always be accompanied by a cover letter. What isn't common knowledge is that the cover letter, in many situations, is as important as the resume itself, if not more so. In the book, *Job Hunting for Dummies*, Max Messmer provides some important advice about cover letters. Here are some of his observations and recommendations:

Writing an effective cover letter takes time, thought and effort--all of it highly worthwhile. You should begin with a strong opening paragraph, which will accomplish two things. It should announce the purpose of the letter and give the reader a compelling reason to read on. One of the most effective openings includes using someone's name as an introduction--to make the connection between you and the person you are writing to. Of course, the name has to be legitimate and has to be respected and recognized by the person you are writing. For example, you might state: I'm writing to you at the suggestion of Joseph Jones, who felt that you might have a need at your organization for a person with my background and qualifications.

Another way to start a cover letter is to demonstrate your knowledge of the company. The idea is to work into your opening paragraph a fact or observation about the company that isn't common knowledge, such as a statement that tells the reader you've done your homework. For example, you could write: I read with great interest an article about your company in *The New York Times* and thought I might be able to help your company to continue to grow.

After you've taken care of the opening, you're ready to focus on the meat of the letter. This section normally consists of two to three paragraphs that do the following: explain briefly your current situation--whether you're presently working, out of work, on assignment, and so on; tell the reader what you're looking for and why the position you're writing about interests you, expand or call attention to one or two points in your resume, and explain, if necessary, aspects of your resume or background that are not obvious.

As you write the middle section of your cover letter, one thought should be foremost in your mind: "Here is what I can offer you." What this means, practically speaking, is that the letter should not focus on what you want and what you are interested in. Rather, it should focus on what your mix of skills and experience can contribute to the company.

There's much debate on whether to mention the "S" word--salary--in your correspondence with prospective employers. There are variables, but in general, you should postpone salary discussions as long as possible. Only if a Want-Ad

requests salary history or requirements should you include that information in your cover letter.

One situation that may warrant a more proactive approach is when you are qualified for a position but are willing to accept a lower salary than you would normally expect, based on your salary history. In this case, you can mention the salary range you're interested in and possibly deflect any concern that you'll be overpriced for the job.

In closing, you should communicate some reasons why you want to work for the company and that you feel you have the relevant experience, and the personal characteristics, to be a highly valued and productive employee of the organization.

If you are writing directly to an individual at a company, as opposed to responding to an ad, say that you would like to meet with him or her to demonstrate how you can help their company. Tell the person you will follow-up by a specific date and include your phone number (both day and evening, if possible) in case they may want to reach you.

A well-crafted and persuasive cover letter can help immensely to open doors; it can also be highly-effective in paving the way for getting the job you really want.

## **DON'T INFLATE YOUR EXPERIENCE**

Many overanxious job seekers oversell themselves nowadays in an effort to set themselves apart from others in a highly competitive job market. They exaggerate their accomplishments or markedly minimize their weaknesses. According to an article in *The Wall Street Journal*, workers who do this can place themselves on very thin ice.

Take for example a young man who last year landed a job as an entry-level recruiter for search firm Kaye/Bassman International, partly because of his enthusiasm for making cold calls. Shortly after joining the Dallas-based concern it became evident that he was phoning fewer possible clients and candidates than was expected of him. Needless to say, he didn't last very long in the job; his performance didn't match what he thought he was capable of doing.

"Overselling gets you into far more trouble than the anxiety that goes with looking for the job that's the right match," said Jim Lake, senior vice president of corporate human resources at Comerica, a large Detroit bank.



But you can avoid such troubles through an ongoing assessment of your strengths and weaknesses, the article pointed out. You can also ask a spouse, career coach, friend or former staffer of a potential employer to play devil's advocate with you. Urge them to challenge your arguments about why you think you're the perfect prospect.

Then, when you're on an interview, only promote prowess that you can prove. By admitting a shortcoming you can demonstrate integrity, but be sure to offset it by immediately describing an asset.

Consider what happened when a New York public-relations firm asked an applicant whether she could integrate teams at three different agencies for a big corporate client. She tried to oversell herself by citing prior experience involving multiple divisions of a business. The problem: the scope wasn't comparable and "they knew it," she recalled. "I couldn't think fast enough" to offer better evidence. The firm picked a different contender.

Overselling also came back to haunt a job seeker who was close to being hired for a \$100,000-plus middle manager position at a major financial-services firm. In recounting her college studies, she sounded like she had completed her degree," a senior executive said. "She never mentioned that she was still going to school."

But when officials scrutinized her resume, they learned she wouldn't graduate for two more years. The woman later explained she concealed her lack of a degree during interviews because the information seemed irrelevant. She could have turned this shortcoming to her advantage, though, by emphasizing her ability to work and attend school simultaneously.

Another way to reduce the risks of overselling yourself is to have a good grasp of your target's culture. "Do your homework and ask a lot of questions," because "every organization is different, even in the same industry," suggested Challis Lowe, an executive vice president of Ryder System, a Miami transportation-services provider.

While employed elsewhere several years ago, Lowe hired a successful marketing executive. However, she soon discovered he had over-estimated his ability to adapt to his new workplace. Veteran insiders "didn't share information readily and rejected outsiders," she remembered. "He felt that [his] functional excellence would prevail," but he lasted only six months.

If you do oversell yourself into a job, how can you handle the sinking feeling that you're in over your head? The answer: By recognizing your limitations and seeking help right away.

Sympathetic colleagues may be willing tutors, the article pointed out. Demonstrate your mastery of a key skill, though, before telling your supervisors that you're struggling with certain other duties. Propose a specific remedy, such as outside training. Most bosses will help because they "look pretty silly if [they] hired someone who's not qualified," noted Comerica Lake.

For sure, experience can be a great teacher. A major online brokerage house laid off a product manager several years ago--only a year after she was hired--because she oversold herself. The 29-year old manager found herself heading large technical teams and making high-level, formal presentations for the first time. "I didn't want to be a leader," she recollects, adding that she welcomed the layoff. "I had a hard time going into work every day," she said.

She now realizes the fallacy of promising employers too much. "Eventually," she told *The Wall Street Journal*, "they will find out."

## **SPAM BARRIERS DEFLECT RESUMES**

As companies have tightened e-mail filters in recent months to keep out spam and a spate of damaging computer viruses, they also unintentionally have blocked all sorts of legitimate e-mail, according to a report in *The Wall Street Journal*. Few companies are talking about it, but recruiting-technology experts say e-mails containing job seekers' resumes are among the files commonly being deleted.

"It seems to be a huge problem," said Mark Mehler, a principal of CareerXroads, a recruiting-technology consulting firm in Kendall Park, N.J. "People have been trained that if they put their resume into an e-mail, it gets through. Today, they might be stopped at the front door."

It is difficult to gauge how widespread the problem is—in some cases neither companies nor job seekers are notified about e-mails that simply are deleted by spam-filtering systems. Yet, since many employers now advise applicants to send resumes via e-mail, the issue is becoming a big headache for job seekers as well as companies, the article pointed out.

Resumes, along with other legitimate e-mail, most commonly are blocked when companies set spam and virus filters too high, according to Dan Nadir, a vice president with FrontBridge Technologies Inc., a California-based company that provides spam-filtering and virus-protection software.

E-mail filtering systems typically scan the content of messages for particular words that are common to spam. The mere presence of words such as 'free,' 'expand,' 'trial,' 'mortgage,' or exclamation points or colored backgrounds—all of which might be used by resume writers—could trigger some filters, Nadir added.

Front Bridge's filtering technology contains 20,000 rules to keep out unwanted e-mail. Messages containing attached files sent from unknown addresses can be automatically deleted, for instance. Companies also can block vast numbers of suspected spam senders whose addresses are on "blacklists," or deflect mail from an Internet-service provider known to be used by spammers.

This appears to have caused a problem for Elizabeth Michaud, a 48-year old technical writer who tried to send her resume to Cadec Corp., a transportation-technology company in Londonderry, N.H. She told *The Wall Street Journal* that she received several error messages in response to e-mails and worried that her resume didn't reach the company. Cadec said Michaud's resume did, in fact, reach the company. But a spokeswoman said e-mail from certain addresses is automatically set aside and reviewed to determine if it is spam, which could have caused a delay.

In some cases, according to Mehler of CareerXroads, resumes that get through the front door disappear when e-mailed from one employee to another—such as when a manager wishes to alert another to the resume of a promising candidate. And resumes also can go astray when passed from recruiters and job boards to hiring companies.

Tim Bishop started to worry about spam filters after he e-mailed a resume in February. He was shocked to discover 30 minutes after hitting the send button that a copy he sent to himself turned up in his own spam folder. Today, Bishop, a 42-year old president of a software-development company, runs every resume and cover letter through three spam filters on his computer before e-mailing them. "I figure if it passes those three filters, it's probably OK," he said.

Further complicating matters is that job seekers have been coached for several years to include key words in their resumes to get picked up by electronic systems within companies that match resumes to particular job openings. Examples include words denoting expertise or educational honors. Now, resume experts warn that a seemingly innocuous word or phrase taken out of context, such as educational honors, might trigger spam filters.

Dylan Hunter, 34, of Northborough, Mass., noted on his resume that he received a master's degree in business administration from Babson College, in Wellesley, Mass., in 1999 and graduated magna cum laude. He sent his resume to a consumer packaged-goods company and received an automated e-mail response

that said his resume had been deleted because it contained a specific obscenity, which the response detailed. The problem was triggered by "magna cum laude," so Hunter changed this to "with high honors," resubmitted the resume and received an automated reply thanking him for his interest in the company.

"The unique thing was that it actually told you what word it was bothered by," Hunter told *The Wall Street Journal*. "I have no idea how many times my resume has gone straight to the circular file."

Considering all of these obstacles, how can job seekers best deal with e-mail spam filters? According to Job.hunt.org, here are number of suggestions:

- Send resumes in plain text, not as attachments, unless the employer asks otherwise
- Don't attach compressed files (.zip, .sit, .tar)
- Send e-mail to only one company at a time
- Keep words such as 'free,' 'trial,' 'singles' and 'cash' to a minimum
- Avoid subject lines with punctuation, all-capital-letterwords, or the spam buzzwords above
- Don't use colored backgrounds
- Make sure there is a valid address in the 'reply to' field
- Don't use an e-mail address with too many numbers

## GET THE RIGHT REFERENCES

If you're like most people looking for a new job, you probably haven't given your references as much thought as you should. Instead, you've placed most of your focus on networking, preparing a good resume and building interview skills. But as you near the end of your interview process, the focus shifts. Suddenly, a potential employer wants to check your references and you've got to provide them with names.

This shouldn't be a problem if you've got a perfect job history, but few of us do. So a major concern during your job search should be the quality of your references and recommendations from past employers, because they can make or break your chances of getting the job you desire.

According to Terra Dourlain, managing director of Allison & Taylor Reference Checking Inc., about half of all references that get checked give "mediocre to poor" responses. So it is very possible that the great job you lost out on, at the last moment, had nothing to do with a shortcoming on your part. It could have

had more to do with what one of your references or past employers said about you.

First and foremost, references are used to verify a person's work history; people aren't always honest. But, more importantly, references are used to gain some idea of a candidate's skills, work habits, communication abilities and motivation. So you want to be certain you have references who you are confident will paint a favorable picture of you to a prospective employer.

### ***Identify References Early***

Many career counselors advise that three strong references are sufficient for most people looking for a job. But for higher paying jobs or jobs requiring extensive experience, you should have five to ten names, according to an article published by Jobcircle.com. In fact, if you are up for a good job at a visible company, you can expect a tough screening process and a very detailed check of references.

Prospective employers will most certainly want to speak with at least one former supervisor and possibly more, depending on your experience level. If you were fired from a job or left under bad circumstances, and you don't feel comfortable having a particular former supervisor as a reference, consider asking another senior executive who was familiar with your work and with whom you did have a good relationship.

Other individuals that can be good references are former colleagues and subordinates, clients, suppliers, and teachers and professors. One character reference is also good to include, such as a mentor, a member of the clergy or a good friend.

Whoever you select, though, should be identified early in your search. You should meet with them, call them, or drop them a note to inform them you are job hunting and that you would like them to serve as a reference. Show them your current resume and describe the position you are seeking. Also, refresh their memory about the solid results you have produced in your career and update them on what you are doing now.

### ***Stay in Touch***

It is also advisable to call them when a specific offer is on the horizon. Let your references know the name of the company you are speaking with and that you are using them as a reference. When you do this, your references will feel more comfortable about returning a call in a timely fashion. And make sure you follow-up with your references. When you get a new job, call them and tell them about it.

To make the task of calling references easy on your potential employer, give him or her a sheet of paper with the name, title and company of the person to call along with the phone number and the best time to reach that person.

In Richard Nelson Bolles' employment bible, *What Color Is Your Parachute?*, he writes: "Experts now estimate that one-third of all job hunters lie on their resumes. Now, if you were an employer, how much faith would you put in a piece of paper where you know there are lies on one-third to one-half of them. Not much."

With resume credibility slipping these days, references have become more important than ever. So you want to have a stellar, and honest, resume as well as people who can support that. Employers take references seriously. You should too.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF JOB-SEARCH BUDDIES**

These are days when a job hunter's hours can be long and lonely, according to careers columnist Patricia Kitchen of *Newsday*. That's why it's extremely important to have job search buddies--friends, colleagues or acquaintances who are also laid-off from their jobs. By teaming up with others who are also seeking work, said Kitchen, you can greatly strengthen your own efforts and, in turn, shorten the length of your search.

While the fellowship may not completely replace those developed at outdoor smoking areas and gatherings at the coffee machine, she said, having buddies in the same boat staves off the job-search blues.

"It's a cool thing" senior computer operator, Karen Kantor, told *Newsday* about her job-search buddy group. "We're all watching out for each other." The group has stayed in touch via e-mail and monthly lunches at a diner in Melville, Long Island. They also attended job fairs and 'pinkslip parties' together. "If I start getting depressed, I say, 'Hey guys, what's going on'" and her e-mail mailbox starts filing up with responses.

Among Kantor's job search tactics: studying the help-wanted ads, both online and in the newspapers, as well as registering with two employment agencies.

How do job hunters find a job-hunting buddy? One way is by contacting former colleagues who got the boot along with you. There are also workshops or other programs for the unemployed, such as those given by one-stop career centers.

Frequently, job searches "consist of nothing but rejection," Orville Pierson, senior vice president with a New Jersey-based outplacement firm, told *Newsday*. When the rejection is over, it means you've gotten the job. In the meantime, the normal human reaction for most people can be to "get discouraged, depressed and put in less effort." Teaming up with others who are seeking work can greatly strengthen that effort, he said, and in return, shorten the length of the search.

While you can create a whole team of buddies, the process seems to work just as well with two. That was the case with friends, colleagues and roommates Hope Newman and Heather Miller, public-relations professionals in Manhattan, also spotlighted in the article. On the same day last May, both were laid-off from the agency where they worked.

"I was devastated at first," Miller said, "but Hope was there right away. She insisted I go out that night with her and some of the others who had been laid-off. If I stayed in, I would have been miserable. But we were laughing about it all night long."

After that, the real relationship began. "While one of us was finding out how to get unemployment checks, the other was revising resumes," Miller added. They shared job leads, helped each other pick out interview suits, conducted mock interviews and called each other after every interview. For both, their neighborhood Kinko's became home away from home.

It was a big help, Newman said, because each had someone to cheer the other on and to commiserate with--"Someone who's pushing you. Someone who's not your mother."

For those hoping to establish their own teams or partnerships, here are some suggestions on how to do so, offered by outplacement firm executive Pierson:

- Each person should read a different book on job searching or making a transition to "raise the knowledge" of the group.
- Come up with a way to measure progress. For example, tally the people contacted and spoken with in a week. Many job hunters mistakenly chase after job openings, while the real target should be the people who are in the position to hire you.
- Don't let the discussion drift to other subjects; you want the group to be task-oriented.
- And, most importantly, set up a regular meeting time each week and show up whether you feel like it or not.

## E-MAIL FAVORED FOR SENDING RESUMES

E-mail has fast become the preferred form of sending resumes, according to many recruiters across the country. It's faster, more convenient and more efficient to have applicants e-mail their resumes than mail them, they say.

"People who have a computer at home and who are connected seem to find the whole convenience of bang and its gone much easier than having to fold up a resume, put it in an envelope and put a stamp on it," says Texas-based personnel director Mark Connolly in article on the subject in the *Dallas Morning News*.

Companies say they find e-resumes to be more efficient because their recruiters can do keyword searches and focus on the resumes they're interested in. It's also better for the applicants because they have a pretty good idea that at least their resume will be considered at some point, as their skills are needed for a particular job.

The speed of e-mail also offers advantages especially in the competitive high-tech industry where employees usually have a very small window of time between jobs. You've got to move quickly if you're going to compete, recruiters point out.

But there are drawbacks to e-mailing resumes, as well--the main problem being that they can easily be overlooked. Some experts recommend sending the resume via e-mail and then following up with a hard copy and a cover letter. In the cover letter you should point out that you e-mailed your resume and are following up with a hard copy. (Some experts even recommend that you also should send a cover letter along with the resume you send electronically, providing the opportunity to explain why you feel you are qualified for the job.)

Another drawback is that there's also the chance that the applicant and the recruiter won't have compatible e-mail programs and word processors, which can ruin the look of the resume or make it unreadable. Bulleted items are especially susceptible to the vagaries of electronic transmission.

Yet, recruiters and hiring managers, in general, seem to like e-resumes because they're easy to store in an electronic database. They say they will go to those resumes first when trying to fill a job and scan against them to see if they can find the right skill sets.

Such speed, they say, is the essence in locating, luring and landing the right candidates.



## DON'T TAKE REJECTION TO HEART

Far too often, job seekers take rejection too much to heart. They are quick to turn a prospective employer's "no" into sour grapes, and cross that company off their list of future job sources. Yet, especially in today's incredibly competitive job market, no job seeker can afford to rule out an employer just because someone at the company decided not to hire him or her the first time around.

According to an article in *The Wall Street Journal*, being rejected from a company rarely stigmatizes a job seeker, say hiring managers. Indeed, many concede that in the hurly-burly of today's hiring process they might not even recognize a former candidate.

So if you feel good about a company and really want to work for it, you shouldn't let a job rejection deter you. A failed first attempt can bring advantages for a second go-round, including potential networking contacts and a sense of a company's culture that can enable a job seeker to plan a better strategy.

But how long should you wait before reapplying to the same company? And what should you do differently the second--or third, or fourth--time you apply?

There are no hard-and-fast rules about when to resubmit your resume, the article pointed out. Factors to consider include whether you were in fact rejected, or merely never heard back from a company; how far you got in the process; the size of the company, and whether you are applying for a position in the same or a different department.

In a case where you never heard anything back, career coach Don Sutaria advised candidates to reapply for the same position after six weeks. "People get zillions of resumes," Sutaria, president of CareerQuest in Union, N.J., told *The Wall Street Journal*. "It may not have reached a decision-maker; it may have gone into a garbage can."

He advised writing a second cover letter in which you say that you haven't heard about a position yet and have taken the liberty of enclosing another copy of your resume. "The worst thing that can happen is it did land on the right desk [the first time], and the manager says, 'Gee, this sounds awfully familiar,'" Sutaria said. He doesn't recommend waiting at all when applying for a different job at the same company.

Others are a little more cautious. "I may wait 60 or 90 days," before reapplying after a rejection, said Allen Salikof, president and CEO of Cleveland-based recruiting firm Management Recruiters International Inc. If the same hiring manager is involved in the second position, Salikof recommended dropping a

note that essentially says, "Even though I was rejected, I feel that I am better suited for this position, and here's why." After a second attempt, "I think it's another six to 12 months," he added. "What you don't want to be is a nuisance."

Candidates, though, need to walk a fine line between being persistent and being outright pests, the article noted "I would look down on it if we see their name on every position that we have open," said Brenda Franklin, human-resources manager of a large bank in Fargo, N.D., who added, "That does happen."

But she noted that the best applicants often slip through the cracks in the hiring process, and recalls one person who only got hired because he called the human-resources department and was able to clarify his application. "If he hadn't made the call to me and taken that risk, he would have never gotten the job," Ms. Franklin said. "The same thing could have happened in the follow-up."

Finally, always make sure you send a thank-you letter in response to a rejection, the article pointed out. This is a far too often neglected tactic, and hiring managers admit such a gesture makes a runner-up seem gracious in defeat. Such people often come to mind when a new opening crops up.

## **TAKE CARE OF YOUR REPUTATION**

Hard work, technical skills and education are important ingredients for career success for information technology professionals, according to an InfoWorld article from last year. But in addition to your abilities and experience, industry experts agree that your reputation counts just as much. So whether you are striving for a promotion or simply want to be heard at meetings, InfoWorld suggests you may want to try beefing up your public relations efforts instead of signing up for another technical seminar.

"Too often, IT professionals do not realize how important their reputation is," Beverly Kaye, a Sherman Oaks, Calif. career development authority, said in the InfoWorld article by Paula Jacobs. "Reputation is a critical and valuable commodity. Too many IT professionals push it aside. It is not just about your technical skills - it is your political know-how and personal savvy."

Many IT professionals may prefer to shun office politics. But if you plan to succeed, the InfoWorld article states, you can't hide in your cubicle. "You must be able to sell ideas and concepts," the article quoted Dave Fontanese, director of information services at Citicorp Development Center, a division of Citicorp. "You must have a lot of support for building consensus," he added. "You have to be a politician, diplomat, and marketer. It is not for the faint of heart."

"People tend to spend so much time on their technical thing that they don't spend enough time being involved with other people," Bob Murphy, president of Human Resource Partners (Natick, Mass.) told InfoWorld. "Technical people tend to be so focused on technical things that they don't think about the rest of the business."

### ***Get an Honest Assessment***

According to the InfoWorld article, sometimes a major event - like being passed over for a promotion you thought you deserved - will make you realize you need to take stock of what others think of you. If this happens, the article stated, ask your manager for an honest assessment of your strengths and weaknesses and what is required for you to reach the next level. But even if you are happy with your job, InfoWorld pointed out, it is also a good idea to periodically evaluate your reputation.

The article goes on to say: If you want to know what others think of you, begin by asking yourself these questions: How often do your colleagues request your help, invite you to join key projects, and listen to your suggestions at meetings? Do you find it difficult to obtain project resources? Would others call you a team player?

Next, ask your colleagues and customers what you can do more of, do less of, and continue doing in order to meet their requirements. And in doing so, make sure you are a good listener, listening for the truth embedded in a criticism.

Whether you determine that your reputation needs help or you just want to make sure it stays good, it is best to start with the basics. To influence managers and peers, you must demonstrate strong communication and strategic thinking skills, business acumen, and ability to view issues from both the business and technical perspectives. And, most importantly, make sure to deliver results and let others know about your efforts by developing and maintaining a strong support network.

### ***Be Perceived as Competent***

Dave Opton, executive director and founder of Exec.U.Net, a career management service and network for senior executives, told InfoWorld there are several key factors in getting promoted. "The number one thing on your list is you must be perceived as competent," he said. "You must also actually be competent, of course, and your job needs to be visible to those above you."

The InfoWorld article added: Don't stand around waiting for opportunities to present themselves. Instead, take the initiative and be as resourceful as possible. Network outside of your department. Create your own opportunities. And find a

mentor who will guide you. Volunteer to help out, particularly on high-profile projects. You will contribute to the organization and show your team spirit, while enhancing your own reputation, your manager's, and that of your department.

Bob Peterson, an IS manager at Addison-Wesley Longman in Reading, Mass, said in the article that IT professionals should do whatever possible to enhance their skills and increase their visibility. He suggested improving your presentation skills by joining an organization such as Toastmasters, as well as taking advantage of every little opportunity, even accidental elevator encounters with executives or members of other departments. And when you are asked to provide extra technical support to the executive staff, consider it an opportunity rather than an extra burden.

Taking all things into consideration, whether you call it "office politics," "public relations," or "reputation management" to get ahead, the InfoWorld article emphasizes, you will need to step out of your cubicle. That means picking up on subtle clues and asking your manager and trusted peers for constructive feedback. Then, work to apply what you have learned.

## **STRETCHING THE TRUTH IN THE JOB SEARCH**

There have always been job seekers who have stretched the truth on interviews and resumes. But now, with millions of unemployed Americans in the tightest labor market in years, lying about background and experience in the job search process is becoming more common, human resource professionals and business consultants report.

"There's so much pressure on people to find jobs, I see a lot of embellishment," Amelia Tess Thornton, chief administrative officer of business performance management company Hyperion, told *USA Today* recently.

Most common among the offenses, according to surveys, were misstating the number of years in a job and exaggerating academic achievements. People also lied about how many people they managed, claimed to have degrees when they hadn't finished college, inflated previous salaries and omitted some jobs.

Now, though, in this post-Enron and 9/11 environment, more companies are cracking down, checking out job candidates more carefully, as well as doing background checks on current employees who may have misrepresented themselves to get hired, *USA Today* reported. So job seekers should beware.

"Those who have lied are quaking in their boots," said Kristin Bowl of the Society for Human Resource Management, in the same article. "It's a return to morality," added Tom Coughlin, chairman of telecommunication firm Alliance Group Services.

Charles Ford, author of the book *Lies! Lies! Lies! The Psychology of Deceit*, told KRT News Service that the truth-stretching reflects a mindset similar to the one that led Enron executives to create a face of profitability that fell apart last year. And although the energy company's meltdown is an extreme example, Ford maintained that lying is rampant in many American businesses.

"It happens more often than one might realize," added Tim Bostick, a principal at Ray & Bernsted, an executive recruiting firm in Texas. "People will over-exaggerate their education. There are times when accomplishments are over-exaggerated. There are times when there is misleading in terms of dates of employment."

For example, a recent contender for a senior-level post falsely claimed to have a master's degree in business administration, Bostick told KRT News Service, even though the degree wasn't a requirement for the job. "When confronted, the applicant was defiant before finally confessing."

Michael Kramer, a professor at the University of Missouri who has studied workplace deception, pointed out that while job candidates are expected to cast their experience in the best light, some applicants can go too far in "selling themselves," especially when they are desperate for employment.

"At what degree does stretching and enhancing your qualifications become lying about your qualifications?" Kramer pointed out. "Different folks would have different definitions of when you've crossed that line."

Indeed, how employers respond when they find an employee has lied varies depending on a company's policies, the worker's value, and the organization's culture, the *USA Today* article stated. Many companies, in fact, say they're willing to overlook some degree of inaccuracy.

But some inaccuracies do go too far. Employees who say they have certain experience, skills, and academic achievements when in fact they do not, would certainly cross the line. Also, investigations that reveal misdemeanors or felony convictions that applicants had not mentioned would be grounds for job offers to be revoked.

## THE 10 BIGGEST JOB-HUNTING MISTAKES

Job-hunting is never an easy job. And what can make the job tougher than it should be is when people aren't attuned to common job-hunting mistakes. Recently, we spotted an excellent article on this subject from the Saint Paul Pioneer Press in Minnesota, in which careers columnist Amy Lindgren listed what she felt were the "10 Most-Common Job Hunting Mistakes." While there are many others that could be on the list, we feel she's right on the money with her list of no-nos and decided to share them with you in this first issue. Here they are:

1. Sending out dozens or even hundreds of resumes without calling any of the recipients to schedule an interview. This is like going into the direct-mail business without getting paid.
2. Sending cover letters for jobs you really want without getting a name first. You're going to call back for "Sir or Madam" to schedule an interview?
3. Relying only on want ads for job leads. They're one source, not the only source.
4. Not networking at networking meetings. So...why did you go?
5. Conducting a "secret" job search. Who can help you if they don't know you're looking?
6. Not researching companies before the interview. How do you know if you really want to work there?
7. Not practicing for interviews. If you haven't practiced, you're just not ready.
8. Not negotiating salaries. Why would you assume the employer made the best offer?
9. Accepting a job that's too far away. You can learn to get along with icky co-workers, or to live on a little less money, but you cannot turn a 60-mile commute into 30-miles. And you will have to make that commute every day you work there.
10. Accepting a job that offers nothing but money for your time. Your time is worth more than money, and your future depends on you taking a job that will build skills, boost your morale, give you contacts or at least add something of value to the world.

So the next time you're looking for a new job, keep these job-hunting mistakes top-of-mind. We're not promising it will get you a job quicker, but we do feel quite strongly it will make your job search much easier.







## **Section II:**

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### *The Interview*



## WHAT TO DO WHEN A RECRUITER CALLS

What do you do if a recruiter calls? In this tight job-market, you probably react like you've won a lottery—especially if you're out of work or trying to find a better paying job because you're stalled in your current position. But before you start rushing ahead and thinking about all the extra money a new job may bring, you should slow down and listen closely to what the recruiter has to say.

"That's the most important thing to do when a recruiter calls," said Bob Larson, president of Paramus-based Berman Larson Kane. "And even if you're happy where you're at, you should hear what the recruiter has to say anyway," he added. "If it looks like there's a fit and you have some interest, you should at least pursue the next step, which would be to send in your resume."

To help field calls from headhunters more effectively, Larson said workers must narrow their career objectives. "If you don't have that down, you're going to be caught off-guard," he added. "People feel thrilled to be called by a recruiter, but many times they don't think carefully about the job and whether or not it's right for them."

If you're not interested at all, Larson suggested you listen and then try to provide another name for the recruiter to contact. The idea is to keep the door open and stay in the recruiter's good graces for future openings. You might also use the opportunity to talk about your career aspirations. If you have a specific interest in a different type of job, or if the timing would be better later, share that with the recruiter. He or she may call you back in the near future or know of another position that is more suitable for you.

If the job does interest you, though, ask for more specifics, such as: What's the company's culture? What products and/or services does the company provide? What is the financial position and growth rate? What's the company's strategy? What's the management style? And how is the company regarded in its marketplace? This information will help you determine your fit for the job.

Should you be among the unemployed, the most important thing to do if a headhunter calls is to be positive and upbeat. Let the recruiter know you are very actively seeking new work and that you would be very interested in learning more about the position. But again, if the job isn't right for you, don't push for it just because you're out of work. The recruiter will respect you for that and it could pay off in the future.

In any conversation with a recruiter, always be honest about your education, job experience, and current salary, Larson emphasized. Most companies do scrupulous background checks and exaggerating information may derail your job

prospects. And speaking of salary, don't be eager to raise the subject with the recruiter; instead let the recruiter provide you with that information about the job under discussion.

"You don't ever want to give the feeling that salary is all that matters to you when you start talking to a recruiter," Larson said. "Granted, the salary question is probably the most difficult question to navigate in a job search. But if it's a good fit and a good company, the salary will be there."

Larson also recommended against playing a recruiter's job offer against a current job. "That's the biggest mistake in the world," he said. "If you have to manipulate your boss to get a raise, you've got the wrong boss, anyway. That's just playing games."

Very importantly, if you get a call from a recruiter you are unfamiliar with, it's imperative to check up on the search firm or the individual—before you start providing information about yourself. Ask how they were referred to you. Reveal little about your employment or salary history until you know more about the recruiter. Simply say it's not a good time to talk now and ask if you can call them back later in the day.

"At the very least," Larson said, "talk to the references the recruiter provided, check the firm's website and ask some business associates you can trust if they know anything about the recruiter. Always make sure the firm or the individual is reputable in order to protect your privacy. With any headhunter you deal with you should always expect confidentiality."

Interested job candidates should send recruiters information quickly when they learn of a good opportunity. "If you take a few weeks to get me a resume, the job may be gone," Larson notes. "Keep your resume up-to-date and you'll be able to respond promptly when the recruiter calls."

And what if you're ready to talk to recruiters, but they just aren't calling? You can mail your resume to a host of search firms. But sometimes a more effective way is to raise your visibility in your industry. "Be active in a trade group, network with others and make sure your accomplishments are known within your company and within your field of work," Larson advised. That could bring the search firms beating a path to your door.

## STRATEGIES FOR PHONE INTERVIEWS

Phone interviews are becoming increasingly common these days especially in the fast-paced information technology industry, where companies are regularly involved with numerous job searches to fill open positions. In many cases, there's just no time for face-to-face initial interviews to screen a variety of candidates. But the phone interview can also be a very stressful encounter, especially if the call comes in when it's not a good time for the candidate to talk. On top of that, many people just don't like phone interviews period.

Careers columnist Amy Lindgren is one of those people. She dislikes them so much that she devoted a recent column to the subject, carried by Knight Ridder Newspapers, offering strategies for people to employ to make phone interviews work to their benefit. If you haven't had a phone interview as of yet, chances are you will sooner or later. Here is Lindgren's advice on how to best deal with them.

With rare exceptions, never launch into an interview from another conversation. For example, if an interviewer calls because you have sent a resume, and then says, "Why don't we talk for a few minutes right now," you are being asked to participate in an interview. When the call comes in, your first line of defense is to gain an equal footing. If you agree to the conversation, request a time later in the day or the next day when you will be more fully prepared. Yes, it's possible you'll lose the chance to talk, but there's an even better chance that you'll miss an important point if you talk when you're not prepared.

Use whatever time you have to lay some groundwork. If you don't have any information about the company, conduct some research in the time you have. At the very least, look for the company's listing in the Yellow Pages, and check the company's site on the Internet Pages. Then, prepare a brief list of questions, and a list of relevant experiences that you want to share.

Find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted. Put the phone on a table or desk and put your files and a notebook nearby. A headset is a wonderful tool for these situations; if you anticipate several phone interviews it might be worth the investment. If you have a call-waiting function on your phone, and are able to turn it off, do so. You don't need the distraction of the beep-beep in your ear.

As the interview begins, check to see that both parties can hear the other clearly. Agree on a length for the conversation and the expected outcome. Avoid three-way conversations and speakerphone interviews at all costs--they simply are not to your advantage. As the interview comes to a close, request an in-person follow-up and ask to set a date. You may not be successful, but it's better to try. And thank the interviewer just as you would in a more conventional interview.

As a follow-up, in addition to the standard thank-you letter, it's a good idea to include a few paragraphs summarizing the conversation and your main qualifications for the job. This will provide a good reminder later as the interviewer looks over phone notes from other candidates.

Of course, employers usually won't hire you without seeing you. But this initial conversation is just a way to determine if you are worth seeing. So make sure you're prepared so that you can put your best foot forward. If you don't like phone interviews, you can certainly try pushing for an in-person meeting, even offering to meet the employer before the workday begins or at some other convenient time at or near their office. If that doesn't work, accept the inevitable with grace, and vow to use a little strategy to keep the tables turned in your favor.

## **HIRING MANAGERS RELYING MORE ON PHONE INTERVIEWS**

With ever-greater numbers of resumes piling up on their desks, many hiring managers are increasingly relying on telephone interviews to weed out candidates. Some job seekers take comfort in that since it seems less nerve-racking than a face-to-face interview. But, as an article in *The Wall Street Journal* points out, that comfort can be very deceptive. Clearly, it's much tougher to stand out from other candidates as a voice on the other end of the phone.

"The telephone interview is probably the most tricky and difficult interview to do because you're eliminating one of the key parts of the interview, which is body language," Kevin Dolan, a senior vice president with outplacement-consulting firm Right Management Consultants, told the newspaper.

For that reason, careful preparation is crucial—as much as it is for an in-person meeting. Be sure to know the latest on the company and know how you're going to present your strengths and qualifications. Dress professionally—you'll feel more confident than if you're running around the house in shorts and a T-shirt—and find a quiet room in which to conduct the interview.

"The telephone interview calls out the skill set and lets us know if the person has the technical skill to do the job," said Joanne Wagner, manager of corporate recruiting at Staples Inc., the Framingham, Mass., office-supplies retailer. "Bringing them in lets us know if they're a cultural fit."

Since the interview starts as soon as you pick up the phone, have your "interview voice" ready. You have only about 10 minutes to make a good impression," said Lois Frankel, president of Corporate Coaching International, a Pasadena, Calif.,

consulting firm. Smile while you're talking and stand up—you speak louder and more concisely when doing so.

Take advantage of your ability to use reference materials during the interview, the article noted. Have your resume on hand so you can talk about your job experience, but avoid the temptation to write things down in advance and read from a prepared script. "It impedes the flow of conversation," New York career coach Carol Kanarek told *The Wall Street Journal*. Indeed, listening and responding to what is said is absolutely vital in a phone interview.

In addition, have a list of questions ready. Don't wait until the end of the interview, though, to ask them or else the interviewer may feel interrogated as you rattle them off. Instead, ask them sporadically throughout the interview, giving the discussion the air of a casual conversation. It will set the hiring manager at ease and help you feel more in control.

The interviewer will most likely have made a decision about you as a candidate by the end of the conversation. So it is okay to ask about the next step and when second interviews will take place, as well as what else you can offer. You can also find out if it is acceptable to call or e-mail if you haven't heard from the hiring manager by a certain date.

One more thing: If you have call waiting, ignore it as long as you're in an interview--even consider disabling it. Keeping someone on hold is almost a guaranteed kiss of death.

## HOW TO SUCCEED IN A JOB INTERVIEW

Okay, so you've finally secured an interview with the company you've always wanted to work for -- a well-admired company with excellent benefits, a reputation for treating its employees very well, and a convenient location from your home. Now all you have to do is make a strong impression with the person interviewing you so that your interview will lead to your getting hired. What steps can you take to help you succeed?

Richard Nelson Bolles devoted 11 pages to the subject of conducting a successful job interview in his marvelous book, "What Color Is Your Parachute?" We've included some highlights here covering a variety of recommendations, which Bolles says will increase your chances of getting hired early on in the interview process.

The first thing you should do before going on the interview, Bolles says, is to research the organization. This, he says, will put you ahead (in the employers mind) of other people they talk to. Go to the company's web site and read all of the information offered. Also check the Internet or go to your local library for help in locating newspaper articles or other information about the organization. Finally, ask all of your friends if they know anyone who is working there, or used to work there. If they do, ask them to *please* put you in touch with them.

You want to become familiar with the organization's history, purposes and goals, Bolles says. If you come in, and have done your homework, this immediately makes you stand out from other job-hunters, and dramatically speeds up your chances of being offered a job.

### ***Don't Hog the Interview***

When you actually get to the company, Bolles recommends, do not hog the interview. Studies reveal that, generally speaking, the people who get hired are those who mix speaking and listening fifty-fifty. Studies have also shown that when it is your turn to speak, you should not speak more than two minutes at a time, if you want to make the best impression. In fact, Bolles says, a good answer to an employer's question sometimes only takes twenty seconds to give.

Stay focused on what you can do for the employer, rather than on what the employer can do for you, Bolles advises. You want the employer to see you as a potential *Resource Person* for the organization, rather than as simply *A Job Beggar*. You want to come across as a *problem-solver*, rather than *one who simply keeps busy*.

Also, Bolles suggests, think of what a bad employee would do, in the position you are asking for - come in late, take too much time off, follow his or her own agenda, instead of the employer's, etc. Then emphasize how much you're the very opposite; your sole goal is to increase the organization's effectiveness and service and bottom line. During the course of the interview, he adds, you need to make it clear that you are there in order to make an oral proposal, followed hopefully by a written proposal, of what you can do for them, to help them with their problems. You will see immediately what a switch this is from the way most job-hunters approach an employer! Most companies want a resource person, and a problem-solver.

### ***Illustrate Your Skills***

Bolles advises to be sure to illustrate in the interview whatever it is you claim will be true of you, once hired. For example, if you claim you are very thorough in all of your work, be sure to be thorough in the way you have researched the



organization ahead of time. Employers know this simple truth: most people job-hunt the way they live their lives. Also, try to think of some way to bring evidence of your skills to the interview through samples of your work. Employers most prefer to hire from within, or to hire someone whose work he or she has seen. By bringing evidence of your work you are following the employer's preferred strategy.

Another key point Bolles makes is to never speak badly of your previous employer(s). Badmouthing a previous employer only makes this employer worry that were they to hire you, you would end up badmouthing them.

And finally, Bolles emphasizes, every evening after an interview sit down and write a thank you note to each person you saw that day. This means not only employers, but also secretaries, receptionists or anyone else who gave you a friendly helping hand. Use the thank-you note to underline anything that was discussed during the interview, or to add anything you left out that was important, he adds.

The thank-you note is crucial. If you want to stand out from others applying for the same job, if you want to speed up your getting hired, send thank-you notes to everyone you met there that day, he says. And treat every employer with courtesy, even if it seems they can offer you no job. If you made a good impression with them, they may be able to refer you to someone who can

## **ANSWERING THE TECHNICAL QUESTION YOU DON'T KNOW**

The one difference between a technical job interview and other interviews is that the interviewer has an assortment of questions with tangible answers. These black and white answers leave little room for the job seeker to use their creative abilities. Therefore the best way to handle the technical question you don't know is with the following simple reply - "I DON'T KNOW."

The reason for such a blatant admission of "not knowing" is to build a feeling of trust between you and the interviewer. If you bluff, guess at the answer, or make false claims that become more evident as the interview progresses, you will lose credibility and all additional or previous non-technical questions will become suspect. And who will make a job offer to a person they don't trust?

However, if the opportunity exists, one technique that can be used to build trust, confidence and give the potential job seeker an opportunity to capitalize on his/her knowledge, is to ask the interviewer for an EXPLANATION AND EXAMPLE

OF HOW AN UNKNOWN TOOL IS USED. During the reply, listen very carefully, absorbing as much information as possible. After you have questioned the interviewer thoroughly and are confident - and I stress confident - that you understand the answer, relate the use of this tool to an aspect of technology you have worked with. For example, suppose you are being questioned on a function of Sybase - you might respond with similar concepts you've used with Informix.

The point to make to the interviewer is that you understand the unknown technology and can adjust to it with little difficulty. The interviewer will know that you are bright, a quick learner, and will not bluff when the heat is on.

## **DRESSING FOR THE INTERVIEW AT A BUSINESS CASUAL ENVIRONMENT**

Today is your big interview for the job you've been dreaming about your entire life. Your best suit is fresh from the cleaners, white shirt is pressed, new tie selected, shoes polished, hair freshly cut and you're really confident. However, the people interviewing you will be dressed in blue jeans, boat shoes and the occasional clean tennis shirt. Should you change into your best jeans or stick with the Brooks Brothers uniform to get the job?

In today's world of business casual, dress down attire and beach-wear office days, you probably have at least a fifty percent chance of this situation being a reality. So what should one do? Dress like your potential new employer or follow the traditional interview uniform?

The answers from talking with many of those in the staffing industry is pretty clear. The traditional interview uniform is recommended by ninety percent plus of the employers we surveyed. The majority lean towards the traditional blue suit, white shirt/blouse, conservative dark shoes/pumps with appropriate tie/scarf. Comments include, *"Dress like the traditional IBM sales representative".* *"The potential employer will treat you with respect if you dress for business."* *"During the interview you need to exude confidence and a blue suit is part of the confidence costume."*

One counselor suggested that the interviewee explain to the interviewer ahead of time that the typical dress in his or her current work place is one of either business casual or formal business, and then arrive for the interview in typical current employer's attire. This will help discount the dress and allow the new employer to judge you better on merit.

However, the following story from the Bergen Record discounts this theory:

A former men's wear clothing company executive recounts the story of an interview he conducted to hire a personal assistant three years ago.

The incident is still fresh in his mind because he was, in his words, "appalled by the candidate's personal appearance," as were the support staff who saw her when she went in for her interview.

The candidate arrived in a pink sweat suit, conscious from the moment she walked in that she looked inappropriate. She proceeded to apologize for her "casual" outfit by explaining that every day at her current company was casual day. She was "afraid to dress up" as she felt it would be noticed, and that her co-workers would know that she was going on a job interview.'

Despite her apology, the executive didn't hire her.

"You know," he said, "it's really too bad. She was intelligent and very qualified, but I just couldn't get past what she was wearing. She just didn't fit the image of what someone who is trustworthy looks like to me."

Another recruiter offers the following advice *"Dress in the attire that you look your best in. Some of us have better jeans physique than blue suit bodies."*

For example, the other day I attended a great sales presentation given by a major software vendor. The representative was dressed in chinos and a tennis shirt. It was one of the best, most professional demos of a product I've ever attended. Could it have been that because of the casual dress, I trusted the content more? Would I have been even more impressed if the presenter was dressed in traditional business blues? I don't know. But I do know that I bought the product.

On a lighter note, maybe you could interview in your pajamas. The interviewer will never know. **It's a phone interview.** Polish up that voice. At least you won't get caught in the wrong designer jeans. Does anyone wear them anymore? Even if you decide to go the pink sweat suit route, a smile and good eye contact work wonders in any environment. Good luck! and for now, stick with the blue suit!

## BE AWARE OF CHANGES IN HIRING SCENE

Now that hiring seems to be picking up, many people in the job market, and other so-called discouraged workers who have given up, finally may be encouraged about the prospects of landing a new position. To be successful,

though, it helps to recognize that significant shifts in hiring attitudes have occurred in recent years, as have ways that companies use recruiting technologies, according to a report in *The Wall Street Journal*.

"People have to keep in mind that it's really a whole new environment, and if they do it the old way with their old techniques, they're going to be stuck looking for a long, long time," said David Schmier, president of Gethired.com, a New York company that teaches job-finding skills.

That said, here--as detailed in the report--are some major trends that have impacted the job market in the past few years and advice for job seekers on how to navigate some new challenges they face in today's hiring scene:

- **Picky Hiring Managers:** As many job seekers have discovered, many hiring managers are looking for extremely close matches between the skills and experience on a resume and what is called for in a job description. Additionally, an abundance of talented job seekers has given hiring managers the freedom to be choosy.

To deal with this challenge, job seekers need to draw from their experience but also carefully tailor a resume so that it closely matches what an employer states is required for the job, Schmier advised. Similarly, if a candidate is trying to switch fields, it's often better to gain experience in a temporary capacity or at a nonprofit so that you can first build your resume.

- **Temporary hiring:** More companies are deciding to "lease with an option to buy," explained Anne Maxfield, president of Project Solvers Inc., a New York staffing agency. Cautious companies are, therefore, filling more openings with temporary employees, and then deciding to convert successful workers to full-time status.

"This gives companies a chance to see potential employees when they're not on their best behavior during an interview," Maxfield said. As a result, in some cases, workers have a better chance of gaining a full-time position by going the temp route. If you're interested in working for a particular company, find out which staffing agency the company uses and approach the firm as you would any other prospective employer.

- **Online networking:** Jobs boards have been around for about a decade, but they continue to evolve, and so do the ways that recruiters and job seekers use them. In the past few years, so-called niche sites and industry association sites increasingly have become destinations for recruiters and therefore more essential for job seekers, said Peter Weddle, publisher of

Weddle's Guides, a series of guides to Internet job sites.

Consequently, more job seekers are turning to sites for career advice, mentoring and networking on chat rooms and discussion boards, Weddle added. If you're only searching for jobs on sites, the way you might scan a newspaper, you're missing a lot of what these sites have to offer.

- **Workplace ethics:** The corporate scandals of the past few years have led to an increased emphasis on hiring ethically sound candidates. As a result, companies are doing more thorough checks on everything from a candidate's professional background to credit history.

Candidates need to "understand the cultural change that has happened because of the scandals," said Sean Bisceglia, chief executive of Corporate Project Resources Inc., a Chicago staffing company. He advised candidates to let a hiring manager know during an interview that you have kept current with the news, as well as with your industry, through trade publications and associations.

In summary, the article pointed out, that most people get discouraged during a job search by relying too much on strategies that have a low success rate, such as applying to ads posted on the Internet, said Diane Wilson, author of *Back in Control: How to Stay Sane, Productive and Inspired in Your Career Transition*. Instead, focus your time on finding a position through a personal referral.

Your best bet is to spend most of your time networking, many career experts said. To stay positive, Wilson also advised job seekers to surround themselves with supportive people and to avoid others who ask if you have a job yet. "If you approach it from a perspective of strength and that you have a contribution to make, then the whole process is different," she added.

## TAKE SPECIAL CARE IF INTERVIEWER IS FAR YOUNGER THAN YOU

Normally when a seasoned executive meets with an associate young enough to be his child, the older person has the upper hand. But what happens when the older person is interviewing for a job by someone a quarter-century his junior? According to a recent article in *The Wall Street Journal*, it is happening more often as older executives change jobs more frequently and baby boomers swell the ranks of senior job seekers.

Indeed, the age gap brings additional tension to the job interview, an experience already fraught with plenty of anxiety. Among the difficult balancing acts for the candidate: You want to come across as confident and experienced, but without seeming like a know-it-all who can't be managed. Your long work history should be an asset, but can become a liability if you dwell on early experiences so much that you seem ancient.

On top of that, the article pointed out, these younger interviewers--many of whom have achieved wealth and status at an early age--sometimes lack their elders' polished manners and treat candidates rudely, recruiters say.

Hal Reiter, chairman and chief executive of New York executive search firm Herbert Mines Associates, cautioned older job candidates not to expect the royal treatment from a much-younger interviewer. When you arrive for the interview, don't expect to be greeted on time, Reiter counsels. He recalls one candidate who waited an hour and a half to be seen. Finally, the interviewer's secretary came out. Her boss was on the phone and wasn't likely to get off soon. The candidate left, saying if the man needed to see him, they could schedule another meeting.

Once you actually have an interview, your young questioner may not be fully prepared. Perhaps he won't even have your résumé, Reiter cautioned. And don't be surprised if he hasn't heard of a company that would be well known to someone older.

No matter how lousy your interviewer's manners are, though, stay calm and professional, the article noted. Often younger interviewers aren't the ultimate decision-makers; you may eventually interview with their older boss. But the younger people are gatekeepers and have a say in the hiring process, so you can't ignore them. "Understand these people have the keys to the kingdom," Reiter said. "The candidates just need to suck it up and wait till they meet the head guy.

You also need to pay attention to younger managers' insecurities. Trudy Schultz, a career coach in Bethel, Conn., told *The Wall Street Journal* that you should assure your would be boss that you're not a threat to his job. A young manager may feel that such a talented, experienced executive couldn't possibly be satisfied with the duties of this particular job. What you are really after, the manager worries, is his own job. So address that concern directly.

Schultz was interviewed by someone about 15 years her junior. He ran a division at a big communications firm; Schultz was interviewing for a job to manage a group in the division. Soon after the interview began, she said: "I'm coming here

to help and do my job as well as I can, but I'm not gunning for your job," she recalled.

The interviewer hadn't mentioned that he felt threatened, but Schultz sensed he needed to be reassured because he was younger and lacked Schultz's expertise in some areas. "He needed somebody like me, so I tried to sell my qualifications in a way that he could see the benefits I would have to him and at the same time say, this particular job" -- and no other -- "is why I'm here." After she brought it up, "he looked more comfortable," she said. Schultz was offered the job.

Steve Dempsey, vice president of recruitment for staffing firm Corporate Project Resources Inc. in Chicago, says older executives also need to show they are willing to be managed. They need to counter the fear that seasoned executives may be stubborn and refuse to submit to a boss's preferences. He suggested talking about how you've worked with past managers, emphasizing your flexibility.

Heather Shively Goldman, a partner at executive-search firm Rhodes Associates, said one mistake older candidates often make is explaining their work history from the beginning. With such a long résumé, a chronological explanation makes you seem old and doesn't give you enough time to talk about more recent, relevant accomplishments. When your interviewer asks you to tell him about yourself, "stick to the highlights," she said.

## **COMMON JOB INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Recently, on Careerbuilder.com, we spotted a list including some of the most frequently asked job interview questions and suggested ways to respond. We've included the list here for your review. While we are not proposing that you prepare and memorize answers to the questions, we do recommend that you familiarize yourself with each question and the suggested ways you can approach your responses.

The most important thing to remember is, don't approach an interview overly concerned about what you are going to say and do. Instead, remember that people want to hire people who enjoy their work. So respond to questions in an extemporaneous manner by describing experiences and challenges with love for what you do. By doing this, and keeping some basic response guidelines in mind, you will find doors opening to opportunities you never even dreamed of. It is entirely possible to come away a winner even in situations where other candidates have more appropriate skills.

So study the list and read it again and again right before an interview. Use it strictly as a guide. Take every suggestion seriously but also concentrate in an interview on being yourself, avoiding any canned or phony responses, which can make you look "plastic" to a professional on the other side of the desk. Each of the questions below has been known to make or break a potential career opportunity. You would be surprised at how many highly experienced workers leave interviews without an offer because they were stumped over one of these basics.

***"Tell me about yourself"***

Make a short, organized statement of your education and professional achievements and professional goals. Then, briefly describe your qualifications for the job and the contributions you could make to the organization.

***"Why do you want to work here?" or "What interests you about our company?"***

Few questions are more important than these, so it is important to answer them clearly and with enthusiasm. Show the interviewer your interest in the company. Share what you learned about the job, the company, and the industry through your own research. Talk about how your professional skills will benefit the company. Unless you work in sales, your answer should never be simply: "money." The interviewer will wonder if you really care about the job.

***"Why did you leave your last job?"***

The interviewer may want to know if you had any problem in your last job. If you did not have any problems, simply give a reason, such as: relocated away from job; company went out of business; laid off; temporary job; no possibility for advancement; wanted a job better suited for your skills. If you did have problems, be honest. Show that you can accept responsibility and learn from your mistakes. You should explain any problem you had (or still have) with an employer, but don't describe that employer in negative terms. Demonstrate that it was a learning experience that did not affect your future work.

***"What are your best skills?"***

If you have sufficiently researched the organization, you should be able to imagine what skills the company values. List them, then give examples where you have demonstrated these skills.



***"What is your major weakness?"***

Be positive; turn a weakness into strength. For example, you might say: I often worry too much over my work. Sometimes I work late to make sure the job is done well.

***"Do you prefer to work by yourself or with others?"***

The ideal answer is one of flexibility. However, be honest. Give examples describing how you have worked in both situations.

***"What are your career goals?"***

The interviewer wants to know if your plans and the company's goals are compatible. Let him know that you are ambitious enough to plan ahead. Talk about your desire to learn more and improve your performance, and be as specific as possible about how you will meet the goals you have set for yourself.

***"What are your hobbies?"***

The interviewer may be looking for evidence of your job skills outside of your professional experience. Also, the interviewer might simply be curious as to whether you have a life outside of work. Employees who have creative or athletic outlets for their stress are often healthier, happier and more productive.

***"What salary are you expecting?"***

You probably don't want to answer this one directly. Instead, deflect the question back to the interviewer by saying something like: "I don't know. What are you planning on paying the best candidate? Let the employer make the final offer. However, it is still important to know what the current salary range is for the profession. Find salary surveys at the library or on the Internet. And check the classifieds to see what the comparable jobs in your area are paying. This information can help you negotiate compensation once the employer makes an offer.

## **MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION**

You never get a second chance to make a good first impression! That bit of powerful advice is communicated regularly by many career counselors, including those at Berman Larson Kane. We've chosen it as our first feature article because we feel strongly that making a good first impression is critical in all

phases of our life, especially in our careers and particularly when looking for a new job.

In his best-selling book, "Success Is A Choice," Boston Celtic basketball coach Rick Pitino stresses the importance of making a good first impression through a good appearance. Pitino feels it is critical that if you're serious about getting ahead you should *always* try to look your best -- even in casual environments. How you look, how you dress, how well groomed you are, are often the first impressions anyone has of you, Pitino says. This does not mean making a fashion statement or appearing on any best-dressed list, he adds. It simply means trying to capture the essence of being organized.

How you dress is your perception of yourself, Pitino says, and you should never forget for a second that people form opinions of you based on that. What you're trying to do is make a habit out of being physically and mentally ready to make a great first impression *anywhere* you are, Pitino advises. Your goal, he says, should be to present yourself in the best possible light. What you should try to accomplish is to come across as yourself, while also giving off the impression that you have your act together, that you are someone with discipline.

You never know when someone is watching you and forming a first impression, Pitino says. This happens all the time -- in elevators, in cafeterias, at meetings and conferences. People see you in certain situations and make judgments about you that could affect your career based on very little knowledge: what you wear, how you act, how you carry yourself, what attitude you convey, he adds.

Some of this, obviously, might be very misleading, and people might end up with a much different impression of you once they get to know you, Pitino says. Unfortunately, too often you don't have that luxury, particularly on job interviews. All of us are frequently judged quickly and by superficial criteria, Pitino points out. That's just the way it is, and you have to deal with that reality. So, he says, you must always be conscious of being on guard -- what is called in sports as "being on your game" -- for you never know when you might miss an opportunity.

A good appearance, Pitino advises, inspires trust in the people who you deal with. So whether you're interviewing for a new job, attending a meeting at work, or spending the day working away in your office or cubicle, try to heed the advice of Pitino. Always try to look your best. You never know who will be looking at you.

## DON'T FORGET THE THANK-YOU LETTER

Sending a thoughtful thank-you letter to a hiring manager, after an interview, costs no more than a little time and the price of a stamp. And sending a well-worded e-mail costs even less. Why, then, do so few job candidates even bother to send thank-you letters?

Career experts say they believe it's because most job candidates simply don't realize the importance of a thank-you letter. "People tend to focus on getting the interview, then they focus on answering questions," Ron Krannich, author of "201 Dynamite Job Search Letters," recently told *The Wall Street Journal*. While it's hard to believe, Krannich estimates only 10 percent to 15 percent of interviewees send thank-you letters.

Yet thank-you letters often can be a deciding factor in determining who gets hired—an especially important point to keep in mind in today's extremely tight job-market. In a few short paragraphs you can convey your enthusiasm for an opening, your social graces and even something about your personality. "The thank-you letter is the ultimate kind of follow-up mechanism that allows you to express yourself in ways you can't on a resume, or might not during an interview," Krannich added.

And even if you send a thank-you letter and don't get the job, your token of appreciation may start a relationship with a fresh contact that could lead to a future position. Keep in mind that many managers hang onto such missives for files of future prospects.

For those job seekers who do decide to send thank-you letters, the first question that often confronts them is whether to send an e-mail or a hard copy. Career experts say the choice depends on the circumstances. Ann Humphries, founder of a business-etiquette consulting company called Eticon, Inc., told *The Wall Street Journal* that in some very technical fields, a handcrafted note could appear behind the times to companies. "They could view it as 'manual' and they would say we need 'digital,'" she explained.

Even so, in most cases, she recommended paper, which allows a candidate to stand out in an era dominated by e-mail. She advises clients to develop a stationery "wardrobe," analogous to a business wardrobe, and to pay attention to the smallest details, such as affixing a stamp on the envelope. "A metered envelope doesn't look as good," she cautioned.

Humphries also recommended, in cases where people decide to send a note via e-mail, to write a draft first on paper since the e-mail informality often leads to sloppiness. "The process of putting it on paper sometimes forces the discipline of making sure the tone is right," she said.

It's also important to limit the letter to a few paragraphs, expressing thanks, and reinforcing your strengths and enthusiasm for the position, the article pointed out. Personal touches—and even humor—can be powerful ways to build rapport with a hiring manager. Also, avoid over-familiarity and have someone read your letter to check the tone. Above all, the letter is a chance to showcase your business-communication skills. "You don't want to be too aggressive and you want to make sure it's very employer-centered," Krannich added.

In most cases, it's appropriate to type your thank-you letter. Make sure, though, that the letter is flawless in grammar and image. You can go overboard obsessing over what quality of paper to choose, but even a typo can negate a positive impression. The letter should also be free of coffee stains, white out, cross-outs and smudges; blemishes signal a lack of care. Be sure to also get the full correctly spelled name and title of the person you're addressing.

Much as it seems like entering a minefield, a good thank-you letter can make a positive impression and nudge the hiring process along, confirmed career counselor Judith E. Price in *The Wall Street Journal* article. She advises clients to always state in a thank-you letter that they will follow-up with a hiring manager. "You have to show that you are pro-active," she said. "Don't wait for the hiring manager to call you." Just knowing a candidate will be calling can force a manager to make an evaluation.

And very importantly—timing counts. Many career counselors advise sending a "thank you" the same day of an interview, or at the very latest by the following day. This way a hiring manager will receive the "thank you" within a few days. If you wait too long, the manager could very well view the delay as a lack of sincere interest in the job.

## **BE AWARE OF CHANGES IN HIRING SCENE**

Now that hiring seems to be picking up, many people in the job market, and other so-called discouraged workers who have given up, finally may be encouraged about the prospects of landing a new position. To be successful, though, it helps to recognize that significant shifts in hiring attitudes have occurred in recent years, as have ways that companies use recruiting technologies, according to a report in *The Wall Street Journal*.

"People have to keep in mind that it's really a whole new environment, and if they do it the old way with their old techniques, they're going to be stuck looking for a long, long time," said David Schmier, president of Gethired.com, a New York company that teaches job-finding skills.

That said, here--as detailed in the report--are some major trends that have impacted the job market in the past few years and advice for job seekers on how to navigate some new challenges they face in today's hiring scene:

- **Picky Hiring Managers:** As many job seekers have discovered, many hiring managers are looking for extremely close matches between the skills and experience on a resume and what is called for in a job description. Additionally, an abundance of talented job seekers has given hiring managers the freedom to be choosy.

To deal with this challenge, job seekers need to draw from their experience but also carefully tailor a resume so that it closely matches what an employer states is required for the job, Schmier advised. Similarly, if a candidate is trying to switch fields, it's often better to gain experience in a temporary capacity or at a nonprofit so that you can first build your resume.

- **Temporary hiring:** More companies are deciding to "lease with an option to buy," explained Anne Maxfield, president of Project Solvers Inc., a New York staffing agency. Cautious companies are, therefore, filling more openings with temporary employees, and then deciding to convert successful workers to full-time status.

"This gives companies a chance to see potential employees when they're not on their best behavior during an interview," Maxfield said. As a result, in some cases, workers have a better chance of gaining a full-time position by going the temp route. If you're interested in working for a particular company, find out which staffing agency the company uses and approach the firm as you would any other prospective employer.

- **Online networking:** Jobs boards have been around for about a decade, but they continue to evolve, and so do the ways that recruiters and job seekers use them. In the past few years, so-called niche sites and industry association sites increasingly have become destinations for recruiters and therefore more essential for job seekers, said Peter Weddle, publisher of Weddle's Guides, a series of guides to Internet job sites.

Consequently, more job seekers are turning to sites for career advice, mentoring and networking on chat rooms and discussion boards, Weddle

added. If you're only searching for jobs on sites, the way you might scan a newspaper, you're missing a lot of what these sites have to offer.

- **Workplace ethics:** The corporate scandals of the past few years have led to an increased emphasis on hiring ethically sound candidates. As a result, companies are doing more thorough checks on everything from a candidate's professional background to credit history.

Candidates need to "understand the cultural change that has happened because of the scandals," said Sean Bisceglia, chief executive of Corporate Project Resources Inc., a Chicago staffing company. He advised candidates to let a hiring manager know during an interview that you have kept current with the news, as well as with your industry, through trade publications and associations.

In summary, the article pointed out, that most people get discouraged during a job search by relying too much on strategies that have a low success rate, such as applying to ads posted on the Internet, said Diane Wilson, author of *Back in Control: How to Stay Sane, Productive and Inspired in Your Career Transition*. Instead, focus your time on finding a position through a personal referral.

Your best bet is to spend most of your time networking, many career experts said. To stay positive, Wilson also advised job seekers to surround themselves with supportive people and to avoid others who ask if you have a job yet. "If you approach it from a perspective of strength and that you have a contribution to make, then the whole process is different," she added.

## POST-INTERVIEW FEEDBACK: VALUE OPEN TO DEBATE

Most job hunters know the agony of enduring a job interview and then hearing nothing back for weeks, or ever. At least getting some post-interview feedback will end the suspense. But, according to a recent article in *The Wall Street Journal*, whether the feedback has much value beyond that is open to debate and depends on the willingness of the hiring manager to cooperate.

For Daniel Flak, a 54-year old software manager from Greensboro, N.C., any post-interview feedback he's ever received has never been particularly helpful. "I was told things like, 'We were looking for someone with more big-company experience,' or 'This other guy had more engineering experience,'" said Flak who has been laid off three times in three years. "I was kind of expecting the answer I got in most cases. And there was nothing I could have changed had I known this before the interview."

Others insist, though, that even vague or negative feedback can be helpful. The key is how you interpret the information you get, said David Schimer, president of Gethired.com, a New York job-skills training company. Rather than get upset or depressed about what you're told, figure out a way to use it to your advantage.

Although most hiring managers won't even bother giving candidates who weren't hired post-interview feedback, many career coaches encourage job seekers to make every effort to seek out information and follow-up, perhaps two weeks after the interview has taken place. Their belief is that post-interview feedback can be a helpful way to propel your job search.

"The more data you have to collect as to how others see you, the better chance you can hone your job search," Richard Koonce, a career counselor in Northampton, Mass., told the newspaper. "Sometimes we learn best from our failures and near misses as opposed to our hits."

By Paresh Bhavsar, a software marketing-manager for Conshohocken, Pa.-based Synygy Inc., happens to be one who loves providing post-interview feedback to candidates. He discusses his perception of their abilities, why he thinks they are weak and sometimes even gives them a chance to prove him wrong. "If I were on the other side of the table, I would want to hear why I didn't get the job," he said.

But some who have been on the job market have found that managers can be unusually, even painfully, blunt. Frank Dadino, a 43-year old accounting clerk from Riverside, N.J., has been out of work since May 2001. After he had one interview with a payroll company and was granted a second, he was told he was "too aggressive" in setting up that meeting. (He had to call five times to reach the hiring manager who was scheduling the second round," he said).

After a phone interview at another company, a hiring manager told Dadino he had too many jobs on his resume, dismissing him as a "job hopper." In both cases, he believes the feedback was completely rude and unnecessary. "I guess there's got to be an excuse, but those excuses were so petty," he said.

While some employers won't offer any specific reason for why someone wasn't hired because of possible legal ramifications, there is a way to approach the interviewer in such cases that will lead to helpful advice

"If you ask, 'Hey, why didn't I get the job?' they're going to feel uncomfortable and put on the spot," said Linda Matias of CareerStrides, a Smithtown, N.Y., career-development firm. "But if you ask sincere questions about your

interviewing skills or any related skills, they're more apt to answer in an honest way."

## **Taking the Initiative**

If you don't get the job you're interviewing for, here are some questions to ask the interviewer that might help you with your continuing job search:

- What were the deciding factors in choosing another candidate?
- What might I do better during the interview process for a position like this one?
- Are there other openings now or in the near future for which you would recommend me?
- What job search advice can you generally provide me with?
- If you are selecting someone from inside the company, how will you fill the position that person is leaving?
- Could you tell me the names of other people at your level in the company who might need someone with my qualifications now or in the future?
- Would you like for me to stay in touch with you in some systematic fashion, such as every six months or so?







## **Section III:**

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### *The New Job*

## How To Resign From A Job

Changing jobs can be one of the most stressful events a person can experience, and dealing with the resignation process contributes to a major portion of that stress. According to Bob Larson, president of Berman Larson Kane, you can reduce much of the stress by approaching your resignation in a positive manner and by making plans to exit from your job gracefully.

First of all, Larson says, plan to give your employer at least two weeks notice regarding your departure. For the majority of information technology professionals, two weeks is adequate, with three weeks being the maximum. If your employer should ask for more, offer instead to make yourself available for telephone consultations after you leave the company.

"After you've made the decision to change jobs, stick to it and move forward," says Larson, who strongly suggests employees consider a week's vacation between jobs. "It's a great time to relax, put the headaches of your old job behind you and the excitement of a new job ahead of you."

Another key issue to address is how to approach your boss (always your immediate supervisor) regarding your decision to leave. Larson suggests starting a conversation by saying "I've accepted another position," then explain the reasons that led to your decision. Keep all statements on the positive side (e.g. better opportunity, excellent prospects for career advancement, the new job will make me happier). Whatever you do, though, do not bring up problems on your present job. Remember, your boss is partially responsible for your well being and your resignation is often a reflection on his or her managerial style.

Should you put your resignation in writing? "Absolutely," says Larson, "you should definitely put your resignation in writing." But keep in mind that the resignation letter is not the place to praise your current employer and organization. If they were so great, you wouldn't have been looking for another job to begin with. The letter should be kept simple and as short as possible, including the date the resignation is effective and a short sentence describing the chance for advancement your new employer is offering. A long "thank you" is not necessary.

And what if your current employer decides to make a counter-offer? Larson advises that you give them the courtesy of listening to their offer. Although promises of more money, opportunities for advancement and new projects on the horizon are very flattering, ask why your resignation motivated such interesting possibilities, and inquire whether you have to resign again in six months to get additional rewards.

Larson says you should take a night to think it over and examine recent turnover at the company. "Maybe your boss' job is in danger because of high turnover," he says. "Possibly, your employer has an urgent need for your technical skills and will dismiss you as soon as a replacement can be found.

"Yes, it happens," adds Larson. "The word on counter-offers is caution, since it has been our experience at Berman Larson Kane that it's the rare exception when counter-offers work for the betterment of your career."

So remember, place your energies on the expanding horizon. Whatever you do, don't second-guess the decision you've made and don't focus on guilt, friends and conveniences. The key is to be positive in everything you say and do as you plan to make your departure -- even if you don't like or respect your employer. Be assured it will make a big difference in your future.

## **EXIT INTERVIEWS OFFER MUCH VALUE**

More and more employers are finding exit interviews are windows into how their operations "really" work. The details departing employees reveal as they walk out the door are invaluable and can be - and often are - catalysts for change. Just as importantly, exit interviews go a long way toward helping employers retain workers. To help gain a better understanding of the importance of exit interviews, here are a number of key questions and answers on the subject adapted from two online articles written by Karen Girard, a Human Resources expert:

### ***Why do companies have exit interviews and why should you attend?***

Most organizations really do want to know why people are leaving their company. They are looking for situations they can improve and for ways to reduce turnover. It is in your best interest to attend an exit interview, especially so that your employer knows you are leaving the company on good terms. Even if you don't want to discuss why you are leaving, there are other reasons you should go to the interview. The employee exit interview is a good time to discuss things such as benefits, COBRA, severance packages and unemployment benefits (if applicable). This is also a good time for you to request a "reference."

### ***Who will be interviewing you?***

Sometimes, exit interviews are conducted by a third party--an agency hired by the company for an objective look at the situation. Some organizations will actually conduct these interviews a short while after you have left the company.

These types of interviews are likely to be completely confidential, with the agency turning in reports every quarter, so that a departing employee cannot be identified as having made specific comments.

If you don't have a third party exit interview, then someone at your company will probably interview you--most likely a person who hasn't been your direct supervisor or co-worker. It would be more difficult for an employee to be completely honest in that situation, so companies want to have a trusted objective person conducting the interview.

***What kinds of questions will they ask?***

The Human Resources Department will be looking for information on the following topics:

1. Recruiting and indoctrination practices
2. Benefits and compensation (Are you leaving for more money?)
3. Corporate culture (Problems with management? Don't fit in?)
4. Career opportunities (Leaving for better position? Not promoted soon enough here?)
5. Management issues

One of the main things they want to know is what could they have done to keep you. So before you go to your exit interview, think about why you first started to look for that next job-and why you decided to leave.

***What do you say when you are leaving because you a bad experience at work or when you are unhappy with the company or job?***

Obviously, you will be reluctant to say anything negative about the company since you may need a reference for a future job. Instead you might want to say that you did not consider yourself a fit for the organization, that the corporate culture was just not right for you--this does not put the blame on anyone else, but answers the question while giving you an out. Another option is to tell them that you have been working hard at growing, but that the opportunities to progress in your position were not there and you needed a greater challenge. Whatever you do, though, don't criticize the company, your manager or any of your associates. While you want to be honest, you also don't want to burn any bridges.

### ***Should you expect anything else?***

YES! This is the time where you will be discussing continuation/termination of benefits such as insurance. If you are not going directly to another organization, or you don't have immediate coverage, look into the possibility of extending your coverage--sometimes this can be accomplished by you assuming payments. You can expect to complete routine paperwork, and your company will also want to make arrangements to get back the keys to the office, and any company property (cell phone, pager, etc.) that you may have.

The exit interview really does have a valuable use to most organizations, and many of them do actually consider your input when they evaluate their policies. For example, in the case of a high rate of turnover because of salaries/benefits, some companies have been known to increase what they've been offering. Your comments, while they may not help you personally, could prove valuable to the rest of your co-workers.

Remember, whatever you do, wherever you go, you never know when you might run into these people again. Your boss now may one day turn out to be your new boss's wife's brother-in-law...it is, indeed, a small world. Leave with dignity and grace whatever the circumstances. Never do something that will cause you to look back with regret

## **THE FIRST 90 DAYS IN A NEW JOB**

Why are these first 90 days crucial to your success at a new company? Because they usually mark your probationary period, a time when the employer evaluates your performance and can terminate you without cause. So what can you do to ensure your continued employment with your new company?

First off, you will impress your boss by adhering to a short list of "to do's" during this probation. In fact, your career can only benefit by applying these tips, offered by the University of Baltimore's Career Center, throughout your work life. They include the following:

- Stay busy doing the company's work. Do not allow personal calls or errands to interfere with your workday. If you complete an assignment, ask for another job, or suggest one yourself.
- Go the extra mile. Volunteer for assignments, stay late or come in early.
- Be timely in completing all assigned projects.

- Be aware that you will make mistakes - after all, you're human. Own up to your mistakes and learn from them so they won't occur again.
- Your boss doesn't want you to bring problems to him or her. Your boss will appreciate it if you identify a problem and suggest solutions.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Clarify your assignments so you know what is expected of you.
- Periodically inform your boss of your progress.
- Be discreet; don't gossip about anyone at your new company, or your old company for that matter.

### ***Getting Along With Others***

It is important for you to establish good relationships with as many people in your new company as possible. You will be considered a team player if you build alliances and relationships within your department, in other departments, and with organizations outside of your company. Here are some guidelines.

- Be pleasant and positive with every contact you make.
- Don't complain about a problem or situation. It is much more professional to address a problem with constructive suggestions.
- Don't use humor that is racist, sexist, or off-color.
- Participate in office and company activities including parties, picnics and luncheons.
- Don't agree too enthusiastically with any one particular criticism. You don't know what anyone's agenda is and you may find yourself in a sticky situation if you align yourself with disgruntled co-workers.

### ***Dress for Success***

Your appearance plays a tremendous role in defining how others view you. Impressions regarding your competence and intelligence are made on how you present yourself to the world. You made a good first impression in your interview; otherwise you would not have been offered a position. It is now your job to create a lasting impression to enhance your professional image.

It is important to pay close attention to the culture of your new employer. For example, although your company may have a "dress down Friday" policy, their definition of "dress down" may include wearing a blazer and banning jeans. Even if you are permitted to wear jeans on dress down day, you can be sure your supervisor will not be pleased if you wear them on the same day that you have an important meeting scheduled with a client. Just because you can dress



casually does not mean you should dress casually-use your discretion when choosing your business attire.

You do not need an extensive business wardrobe to make an impression. Be sure your clothes are cleaned and pressed. They should fit well-not too snug or loose. Polish your shoes, keep jewelry to a minimum and tasteful, and do not wear overpowering cologne or perfume.

If you follow these steps, guess what? You should pass through your probationary review with flying colors! These tips and guidelines offer a foundation for creating a good relationship with your new employers. Don't stop here through. Continue to practice these skills and develop and hone other skills that will make you an outstanding, valued employee.

## WORKING WITH A NEW BOSS

Usually the start of a new job comes with a new boss with his or her own management style, habits, pet peeves and vision. Adapting to a new boss may not be as stressful as some other workplace hurdles, but it's nothing to take lightly. In fact, managing the transition to a new supervisor can enhance your career if you play it right, or it can be fraught with peril if you bungle it.

According to the book *Managing Your Career for Dummies* by Max Messmer, it's critical that you and your boss get off on the right foot together. Good chemistry - how easily your personalities mesh - can help tremendously, especially if you both have similarities in your backgrounds, similar values, and a similar sense of humor. It doesn't hurt either to share a passionate concern for the fortunes of a local sports team or a deep involvement in the same hobby. But even if the chemistry is great, Messmer says, you still need to make sure that you share a common understanding of the following job-related issues:

***Your Basic Responsibilities:*** What's expected of you and where does your job fit into the scheme of things, based on your company's strategic goals?

***Values and Standards:*** What is the basis for measuring your job performance? Does your manager have his or her own standards in addition to those of the firm?

***Work Process:*** Particularly with respect to projects you and your manager will be working on together, what are the processes that shape workflow and efficiency?

***Basic Rules and Procedures:*** What are the formal rules that affect performance? Are you encouraged to introduce innovations in procedures or are you expected to do everything strictly by the book?

Don't underestimate the importance of reaching accord on each of these issues just mentioned, however fundamental they may seem. A mutual understanding of these matters can go a long way to preventing many of the problems that underlie troubled manager-employee relationships.

Before you start your new job, though, try to find out some background about your new boss. If possible, interview your new boss's former colleagues to find out about his likes or dislikes, idiosyncrasies, favorite sports or charities. Find out about the companies where he's worked, his successes and failures. And don't overlook his approach to corporate culture. Is he a risk-taker or conservative?

Answers to these questions will help you adjust to the new management approach, says Emory Mulling, head of the Mulling Group, an executive coaching firm in Atlanta. In particular, he says, you should focus on the new boss's communication style. Does he prefer that you casually drop by his office, or does he want you to make an appointment? Are rough drafts fine or does he like formal memos?

If you take the wrong approach, Mulling adds, you can turn off your new boss very quickly since first impressions are crucial. Your new supervisor will be sizing you up during your first meetings, so it's essential that you appear open and eager to be an important part of the new team. During your first meeting you should concentrate on listening to what the boss wants to talk about, not on laying out your own agenda. This is when you can draw on your homework by knowing what to emphasize when it's your turn to speak, and also what to avoid.

Your manager's wants, needs, and priorities should always take precedence over yours, Messmer says. The best way to remind yourself of this is to always think of your boss as a client or customer. Also, try putting yourself in your new boss's shoes. This will help you be more empathetic. It also could help you anticipate your new supervisor's needs, which in the end would advance your most important goal: being seen as a contributor in your new boss's eyes.

You'll also need to be willing to stake out a position different from the new boss's, drawing on your own body of knowledge and expertise, advises Mulling. The key, though, is to do so tactfully and not in a manner that will threaten your supervisor. You can ensure your own success by providing useful and candid information.

And finally, how well you work with your boss will have more bearing on your ability to put your skills, knowledge, personal attributes and motivation to the most effective use in your job. It will also have more bearing on how much you learn in your job, how much satisfaction you derive from it, and how successful you are in achieving your own goals.

## AT WORK, LITTLE THINGS MEAN A LOT

No matter how well you do your job, your co-workers rarely notice when you accomplish your primary functions. You're expected to get the big things done, and done right. More often than not, it's the little things that count toward making a positive impression on your superiors and co-workers. That said, according to Careerbuilder.com, here are 10 easy things you can do that will go along way in helping you set a good example and, at the same time, enhance the environment in which you work:

***Stay positive and don't complain.*** Maximize your willingness to take on new projects with enthusiasm. Learn to find something enjoyable in each project, even if at first it doesn't look interesting. Minimize making excuses and complaining about how much work there is to do. Everyone has too much to do. Keep the negativity to a minimum.

***Lead by example.*** If you want things done a certain way, you must demonstrate that yourself. If you want those who you work with to be successful, show a willingness to work hard for that success.

***Offer recognition.*** Be generous, but not insincere, with compliments. Never hesitate to tell someone they have done a good job. Recognition goes a long way.

***Be prepared and do your homework before meetings.*** Prepare questions to ask and review background regarding the topic to be discussed. If you're organizing the meeting, make handouts and agendas. It helps you mentally become more prepared.

***Keep your desk neat. It makes you appear organized and in control.*** Instead of having a huge stack of things you need to read or look through sitting on your desk, you should designate a drawer and put them in there. Then you should work hard not to let that drawer overflow and make a constant effort to keep your desk tidy.

***Return phone calls and e-mails promptly.*** It makes co-workers and customers feel valued. You also demonstrate that you place a priority on responding to people who contact you.

***Be on time, even early.*** This one should go without saying, but it may be the most important trait in appearing dependable and a good employee.

***Share information.*** Print or cut out articles you see relating to your business and forward them to co-workers or post them on the bulletin board. It shows you're on the ball and helps others learn as well.

***Help boost morale.*** Organize a weekly lunch or after work gathering. Your co-workers will be happy to take part and it will position you as a leader, even if the activity is more social in nature.

***Be a good and trustworthy listener.*** Even if you don't gossip, someone will occasionally bend your ear. If you can't escape, be sure to listen and then keep the information to yourself.

## LISTEN CLOSELY – AND GET AHEAD

Listening is one of the most important of all the communication skills. That's the opinion of many career experts, and we at Berman Larson Kane couldn't agree with them more. The simple truth is, if you don't know how to listen you're not going to get ahead.

Knowing how to listen is crucial in *all* relationships - especially those in today's competitive business environment, according to a *Reader's Digest* article on the subject. Without this skill, the article stated, you can't receive the information you need to act. Successful professionals know that careful listening can reveal unseen problems, identify new trends and opportunities and lead to creative solutions, the article pointed out. They also know, the article stated, that listening will help them build solid working relationships. And getting along with others, most career experts agree, is the single most important determinant of success.

Nevertheless, most of us don't know how to listen. Studies show that we absorb only a small percentage of what is said. We are wrapped up in our thoughts and emotions. "We spend years learning how to read, write and speak," Stephen R. Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, told *Reader's Digest*. "But we hardly get any training in listening."

Fortunately, it's never too late to improve our ability to listen. So if you want to get ahead, we at Berman Larson Kane suggest that you make a top priority of improving your listening skills. To help you get started, we've listed below some excellent tips on becoming a better listener, offered by *Selling Power* magazine. Try practicing them on a regular basis. We guarantee you'll start seeing some positive results.

1. **Listen to understand, not to reply.** You may be tempted to think your response while the speaker is talking, but resist the urge. Give people all the time they need to speak and listen for understanding by concentrating on what is being said, how it is being said, and any nonverbal signs. You can then respond in a way that shows you truly value their input.
2. **Make eye contact.** Looking anywhere but at the speaker tells them they don't have your complete attention. Even if you are taking notes to remind yourself of important points later, glance up often enough to show the speaker they haven't lost you.
3. **Ask questions.** Good listening requires you to interpret what people are saying to you and read between the lines. Make sure there are no misunderstandings by asking questions to clarify points you don't fully understand. Instead of interrupting, make a brief note of your questions as you think of them and ask when it's your turn to speak.
4. **Repeat important points.** Reviewing what you perceived to be the most important issues, wants, needs, or problems the speaker mentioned serves several purposes. One, it shows the person how well you listened; two, it ensures what you thought was important agrees with what the speaker considers important; and three, repeating the important points using the speaker's language may help prevent objections later.
5. **Stay focused.** Minimize external distractions and pay close attention to what the other says. Bear in mind that interruptions, the speaker's speaking style, and your own beliefs, prejudices, worries and interests can hinder effective listening.
6. **Listen actively.** To absorb and process everything someone says, active listeners keep their brains engaged while they listen. Listening may be a physically passive skill, but your brain needs to be as active as the person speaking. Learn to absorb and interpret more of what a person is saying to you and you'll learn more critical information and get more out of every conversation.

## MAKE THE BEST OF EVERY MEETING

If you don't like attending meetings, you're not alone. Most workers feel there are simply too many meetings to attend on a daily and weekly basis, and that many of them are entirely unnecessary. But meetings don't have to be that way, says Richard Carlson, Ph.D, and author of *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff at Work*, who has two secrets to making virtually any meeting both interesting and productive.

The first is to use the meeting to practice being "present moment-oriented." In other words, try to absorb yourself in the meeting - and don't allow your mind to wander. This deliberate attempt to be focused will allow you to get as much value out of the experience as possible.

You can spend your time daydreaming or wishing you were somewhere else, but that doesn't help you in your job or in your career. Meetings provide an opportunity to show your superiors and coworkers that you are really a good listener. This will help you be highly responsive to whatever is being discussed. That way, if there is something you can contribute, you can make a strong impression with your answer.

Carlson says that by employing the "present moment" technique he has found meetings to be far more interesting. Additional insights come to mind and he feels as though he has more to offer. He has also noticed an increased sense of respect from others. They may not be consciously aware of it, but it seems that when those present in a meeting sense that you are truly paying attention, they want to listen to you as well.

The second secret is to tell yourself that you are going to learn something from each meeting. Listen intently to what is said and try to hear something you don't already know. Rather than comparing what you're hearing to what you already believe, search for new wisdom, a new insight, or a new way to do something.

Carlson says he has found that when his intent is to learn, he almost always does learn something. Instead of saying "Yeah, Yeah, I already know this stuff," try to clear your mind and allow yourself to have a beginner's mind.

The best-selling author reports that since he has begun doing this, the results have been quite impressive and significant. His learning curve dramatically increased, and meetings became fun again. "I've learned to make the best of it. The way I look at it is this: I'm at the meeting anyway. Why not spend the time in a productive, healthy way, practicing valuable emotional skills instead of wishing I were somewhere else," he says.

Try practicing what Carlson suggests. By doing so, our bet is that you'll make your work life more interesting and effective.

## BOOST YOUR PRODUCTIVITY ON THE JOB

As workers have been laid off in droves, many of those who remain in their jobs have found themselves busier than ever. If you're one of them--in order to surmount a never-ending workload and continue to advance in your career--you need to boost your productivity by increasing your efficiency and effectiveness. An article carried by USAToday.com offers the following strategies to help you accomplish this:

**Prioritize prioritizing.** Workers should begin their day by prioritizing, said Bill Macaleer and Jones Shannon, partners at the Pennsylvania-based Growth Management Strategies, a firm specializing in organizational effectiveness. Employees should match their goals with their bosses' top concerns, and work on those things first. In order to do this, communicate with your boss to understand what he or she expects from you.

"You can't prioritize unless you know what is expected of you," added Marcus Buckingham, author of the book *First Break All The Rules*. "The most important thing is to go to your manager and ask what defines success in your job."

**Create a "hit list."** Make a list of tasks to do each morning, advised Ray Voegeli, founder of New IQ, a Delaware training company. Voegeli said he keeps a list with three categories: general things to remember, tasks to work on, and problems to solve. That way, when he finishes one thing he knows what is left to do, and doesn't waste time trying to figure out what his next step is. "A lot of times you focus on the problems that are in your face and most demanding," he said. "But the hit list keeps everything in front of you."

**Organize your workplace.** If your desk is a mess, you waste time looking for things. "When someone has files piled to the floor, you have to ask how that person gets anything done," Shannon said. "You must have a system." A system might involve files, in- and out-boxes or some sort of controlled mess. Finding things quickly is the key to efficiency.

**Stay clear of time wasters.** Anyone who has spent time in a cubicle knows the feeling: It's mid-morning and the "work blahs" start to set in. Instead of finishing a project, there's an urge to make personal phone calls, send silly e-mails and check sports scores. In today's work environment, it's critical to resist

these time wasters. Otherwise, you'll find yourself playing catch-up later and your performance is bound to suffer.

***Understand your weaknesses.*** If you know you're not a morning person, work on the most challenging tasks in the afternoon. If Friday afternoons are generally unproductive, get things done early in the week. The best way to work on your weaknesses, according to author Buckingham, is to discover what they are and "stop doing them."

He suggests finding a partner at work who is strong where you are weak, and developing a system to help you get your work done quickly. Don't waste time being frustrated with what you can't do; spend time figuring out how to do it. Or else, Buckingham said, "You will spend time doing things you are not good at."

***Understand your strengths.*** Look at yourself in a realistic light and try to figure out what you do best. "It's important to understand a situation from your own experience," Macaleer said. "You have to be somewhat reflective and have a certain amount of introspection."

Jones and Macaleer cited a study in which people who "ran into a wall" in their careers were asked about their personal strengths. Most of the people whose careers derailed in one way or another described themselves in a different way from those who knew them. "They looked in the mirror and saw something else," Macaleer said.

***Don't waste time communicating.*** Understand how others like to communicate. If your boss works best using e-mail, then e-mail your boss with important questions and requests. If he or she never checks their phone or e-mail messages, make sure you communicate in person. In addition, clean out your e-mail and voice mail in-boxes frequently, so messages don't get lost. Tag items you have to do right away so you don't forget about them.

***Control information flow.*** Tell co-workers exactly what you need from them, so you don't waste time correcting or changing work they give you, and make sure you know what others need from you. Always keep the lines of communication open, too. "Always be talking to people," Voegeli said. "Always be looking for the information you need."

Most importantly, though, in order to reduce stress and reserve energy for tougher workdays, don't overextend yourself if it's not necessary. "You need to understand what's good enough for the situation," added Jones. "Understand how much you really need to do."



## CAST A WIDE NET TO FIND A MENTOR

Most people in business want to have a mentor—someone to provide counsel, serve as a reference, and offer tips on career advancement. But the process of finding a mentor who will invest in you can be difficult. Although some mentor relationships evolve naturally, others require a more direct effort. In a Q&A feature carried by *The New York Times* last year, careers columnist Cheryl Dahle offered the following insight on the topic of mentoring:

***Q. How important is it to have a mentor in the workplace?***

**A.** It's crucial to have a mentor if you have significant ambitions to develop your skills and to be promoted. But it's not necessary—or in many cases seen desirable—for that person to be your boss, according to Kim Wise, founder and chief executive of Monitor Resources in Sausalito, Calif., which provides mentoring services for companies and individuals.

"Mentoring and managing are really two different things," Wise said. "A manager is responsible for a whole host of company concerns aside from you. A mentor who is outside your company or work group is removed from that. He or she can provide perspective and can also be more helpful if the very thing you're struggling with is your boss."

You could certainly look inside your company for a mentor, particularly if you plan to stay there for several years. But you shouldn't assume your boss is the optimal candidate, Wise said.

***Q. How do you find a mentor?***

**A.** First, think about what you want from a mentor. Old-style mentoring was about networking and access to the corporate elite, but mentoring today is most powerful when focused on building skills and developing careers. You should have a clear idea of your own strengths and weaknesses.

Sue Raiche, a manager of corporate facilities interior design at the Carlson Companies in Minneapolis, spent several weeks deciding what she needed in a mentor. She polled colleagues and her supervisor about where they saw her career in five years and drew up her own list of goals, which included learning more about finance and corporate strategy. That homework made it clear she needed to find a high-level executive with experience in many parts of business. She wound up with a chief executive from a hospital supply company.

***Q. How do you enlist someone to be your mentor?***

**A.** Some companies have formal mentoring programs that you can ask to join. Some career services companies accept individuals as clients and will match you to a mentor outside your workplace for a fee. You can find someone on your own, too. Once you have your list and goals, send it to friends and business associates who may be able to recommend a good mentor.

***Q. Why would an executive outside my company agree to spend time with me as my mentor?***

**A.** Typically, mentoring partnerships wind up being useful for both parties, according to Lynn Sontag, chief executive of Menttium, a company that develops corporate mentoring programs for women. "Mentors often get as much out of their relationship as their protégés," she said. "They get a different perspective on their management style and communications skills than they might get from direct reports."

***Q. Does it matter how many levels above me the mentor is?***

**A.** Two levels above is optimal, but that is secondary to finding the skills you are seeking, Wise said. Keep in mind that the best mentors have a different work style and personality from your own. Don't look for someone who's a version of yourself 10 years down the road.

***Q. How is the mentoring relationship structured?***

**A.** A standard guideline is to meet for at least six months, and preferably for a year. Keep in mind that all the responsibility—for managing the logistics of meetings, setting agendas and establishing time lines for goals—belongs to you, not the mentor. You should leave each meeting with a to-do list. If you're trying to develop your public speaking skills, for example, you might sign up for a presentation class. If you're working on leadership, you might leave with the directive to have that tough conversation you've been avoiding with a subordinate.

***Q. Should you have just one mentor?***

**A.** For an intensive partnership, one at a time is plenty. But it's a good idea to collect several mentors and stay in touch with all of them, even after your formal relationship ends. Think of it as assembling a personal board of directors, with a variety of mentors whose judgment you trust.

Joe Nemmers Jr., a senior vice president at Abbott Laboratories in Abbott Park, Ill., says mentors can come from any level. "I have a set of mentors, both people

who are at my level and below in the organization, whom I can just pick up the phone and call to get their take on a management level question or strategy issue," he said.

His two most influential mentors were also his supervisors, a fact he credits to the culture of the company, which has extensive internal mentoring programs. But even for employees whose companies don't offer such access, Nemmers said, finding a mentor is worthwhile. "It's one of the most important parts of your career growth path," he said. "If you don't have it, you'll definitely be at a disadvantage."

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF A SENSE OF HUMOR**

What's the number one reason people aren't liked in business? Zig Ziglar, the noted author and motivational speaker, says it's because people take themselves too seriously and have no sense of humor. So if you want to increase your employment security, says Ziglar, lighten up, smile, and make humor a part of your life.

"Humor shows that you are human, and the records clearly show that all of us prefer to work for people who are human," Ziglar says in his highly inspirational and motivational book, *Over the Top*. For seven out of ten people who lose their jobs, Ziglar notes, the cause isn't lack of skill: It's personality conflicts. As an executive reaches middle management and beyond, he says, the primary criteria for advancement are communication and motivational skills rather than job performance. Relations with superiors and peers are also critical; historically, top management promotes people it likes, he adds. And more than likely, the people it likes are the people with a sense of humor.

"The benefits that go with humor and laughter are well known," Ziglar says, pointing out that a sense of humor gives us many advantages. As an example, he references a study at the University of Michigan, which concluded that people with a good sense of humor tend to be more creative, emotionally stable, realistic and self-confident.

Ziglar advises that one of the easiest ways you make humor a part of your life is by sharing humorous incidents from daily experiences, even poking fun at your own mistakes. He says by doing so you'll have fun and make friends at the same time. So look for funny things happening around you. It's that simple. But the book warns flatly against any humor that involves sarcasm, ridicule or slander.

### ***Humor Sparks Energy***

Medically speaking, Ziglar says, we know that laughter releases chemicals in the brain that energize us, increase our endurance, and act as nature's painkiller. When you hear something really funny, Ziglar hopes you will laugh out loud and not try to hold the laughter in.

In his book, Ziglar quotes Dr. John Maxwell on the subject of a sense of humor: "A person who can laugh at life and at himself, will have less stress in life. If you have a good sense of humor, you'll climb the ladder faster and enjoy the climb more. It increases your effectiveness with others because people who have a sense of humor have good relationships; team spirit is enhanced, and productivity goes up."

Ziglar's book also points out that in a corporate setting laughter and a good sense of humor can enliven meetings and presentations, increase our persuasion effectiveness, and let people think more clearly. The book also states that the most positive use of humor in the workplace may be to create a spirit of social equality by stripping away pretension. Using humor, Ziglar adds, can also make people feel relaxed, comfortable and at ease.

A recent issue of the *Zig Ziglar Newsletter* reported that a Robert Half International survey of 100 vice presidents of major corporations revealed that 84% thought employees with a sense of humor performed better than employees with little or no sense of humor. In another study of 737 CEOs, the newsletter reported, 98 percent said they would hire a person with a good sense of humor over someone who lacks a sense of humor. The newsletter also pointed out that humor can improve our business relationships because customers like people they feel comfortable around and people do business with people they like.

### ***No Excuse for Seriousness***

To further help get a better sense of humor, Ziglar highly recommends finding and listening to humorous cassette recordings, which he says relaxes us, relieves stress, is good for our health, and does wonders for our attitudes. He especially encourages readers to listen to good, clean humor the last few minutes of their drive from work. They can put you in a marvelous frame of mind and make you easier to get along with, he says. Ziglar also suggests reading something funny. He especially likes the humor sections in *Reader's Digest* and the daily newspaper comics.

In addition, you might want to make a habit of watching a few favorite television sit-coms and some good comedy films. Talking about some of the funny scenes

and dialogue are sure to provide for some humorous conversation with friends and co-workers. Also consider memorizing a few good, clean jokes to tell once in awhile at an appropriate time around the office. And learn to appreciate jokes as well. It's always amazing how a good joke can help lighten the atmosphere.

Now, we're not suggesting that you try becoming the office comedian - far from it. There's a time and a place for humor in business. And there's a time and place for seriousness - like when someone has a problem, when you enter a new company, or when you're attending an important meeting or seminar. But we all should know when it's time to be serious and when some humor can be appropriate. There's no excuse for total self-absorbed seriousness in business. It's boring and it pushes other people away from you.

So if you don't have a sense of humor, start developing one right now. The benefits of doing so will extend far beyond greater profits. You'll also have the privilege of feeling better yourself and making those around you happy as well.

## **COPING WITH CUBICLES**

For many otherwise happy workers, the cubicle can be one of the most annoying aspects of the modern work life. Although cubicles give the illusion of privacy, anyone who has worked in one knows that those small walls are easily penetrated by neighbors' incessant sounds and conversations. And not only is a lack of cube etiquette a problem, but spending most of your workday sitting in a cubicle can make you feel like your muscles have seeped into your ergonomic chair.

According to an *MSN Careers* article on cubicles by Susan Bryant, anyone who has resided in Cubeland knows how difficult it is to work while trying to block out coworkers' conversations. For example, Mary Rasher, a photo editor and cube dweller for the past 10 years, said "there is always someone who doesn't quite get that if he can hear me, I can hear him. I am forever overhearing domestic tiffs, weird bodily functions, etc. I've been reduced to wearing earplugs so I can concentrate. Even then, someone's voice manages to cut through the foam."

These complaints are common, said Hilka Klinkenberg, founder of Etiquette International, a firm specializing in business etiquette. Consequently, Klinkenberg feels that professional etiquette in a cube environment must be elevated to a higher standard than in a traditional office because of workers' close proximity. To help make your office more cube-friendly, she offered the following guidelines:

- ***Give your cube mates a sense of control over their space***

When visiting someone's cube, knock on the walls (even if this is only symbolic on a foam wall) before saying hello. Ask permission to enter someone's cube, instead of barging in.

- ***Don't loiter in hallways***

Your conversations freefloat among people trying to make phone calls, read or write important documents, and concentrate on their work.

- ***Realize that odors know no boundaries***

Your lunch, although appetizing to you, may make someone else's stomach turn. If you eat at your desk, take your trash out promptly.

- ***Be more aware of what you are saying and how loudly you are saying it***

Assume everyone within a four-cube radius can hear you. If you need to discuss a sensitive matter discreetly, try to find an empty office or private area.

Another common complaint among cube dwellers is the feeling they are getting "cube body." What kind of effect does long-term sitting have on you? Mary Ann Paviledes, a registered nurse and massage therapist, said in the article that her clients who sit for an extended period of time often have experienced these physical repercussions:

- Lower-back strain due to poor posture from being seated too long
- Upper-back strain from scrunching your neck and shoulder together while talking on the phone
- Muscle tightness in the chest area from leaning into a desk to type on a computer
- Sluggish circulation in legs from prolonged inactivity

Fortunately, combating these problems is easy. Pavlides recommended the following exercises for relief:

- Get up and walk every half hour. This keeps your circulation going, gives your eyes a break from your monitor and lets your whole body move.
- Stretch your arms back over your head and arch your body into a "C." This helps reverse the hunched-over posture you may sit in.
- Stand up and roll back and forth in your heels and toes. This stretches leg muscles that cramp from too much sitting.

- Find a doorway and place your forearms against the frame. Lean into the doorway and stretch your muscles. Don't hold this position too long, though, or you might strain yourself.

Also, make sure you have an ergonomic chair with armrests you can raise and lower to get the right fit, and your desk or table should also be adjusted to a comfortable level.

Even if your cube mates are a bunch of annoying Neanderthals, and your boss thinks ergonomic chairs are for wimps, cube nirvana is still possible. Angela Houlton, a communications administrator and resident of cubeland for 11 years, maintains that cube happiness requires a "bloom where you're planted" philosophy.

"I keep a lot of framed photographs on my desk and favorite places I've visited," she said in the article. "I also am referred to as the 'Plant Lady' because of all the greenery at my desk. I'm even considering a small Persian-type rug to place at the entrance of my cube to cozy things up a bit. The way I see it is, if you have to live in a cube, you might as well make it comfortable."

## SOFT SKILLS GIVE WORKERS AN EDGE

With payrolls shrinking, workers are finding that it's never been more important to command soft skills—those non-technical abilities such as speaking in front of groups, working in teams, and inspiring the confidence of superiors.

In fact, according to an article in *The Chicago Tribune*, soft skills are so important in today's workplace—a survey by two University of Massachusetts economists found—that 86 percent of employers considered them among the most important hiring criteria.

"It's had such a huge impact that it's reworked how we go about looking for employees," said Steve Armstrong, vice president of Kelly Services, one of the largest temporary employment agencies. That's because a prospective employee's soft skills often better determine whether he or she will fit into the job environment than do hard, or technical skills, he pointed out.

"You really have to play to peoples' soft skills in where you place them," Armstrong told the newspaper. "When someone leaves an organization, how often do you hear people say, 'They just didn't fit in,' or 'They just didn't work out?' That's generally speaking to some deficit in the soft-skills side."

Employees looking for an edge are driving demand for training that teaches them how to stand out with personal as opposed to practical qualities. For example, Ryan Neary, who works for Aon Corp., never liked to speak in front of groups. But when his boss said he could use some improvement in that area, he got serious.

In a daylong course on giving presentations, the technology analyst learned the importance of relaxing his arms, walking confidently to the lectern, and controlling his vocal tones. "I have a lot of interaction with different business users," Neary said. "Trying to articulate and be more confident is important. Public speaking is hard to convey over a resume, but even your body movement and vocal qualities are going to play a big role in whether or not they like you."

Neary attended a workshop led by Kirstin D'Aurelio, an actress who helped launch VoiceScape, a small presentation-skills company that uses the techniques of theatre to help people perform in the business world. D'Aurelio instructs her students to form a bond with the audience when they give presentations, to make their gestures purposeful and, above all, to relax. "Channel your adrenaline as a performance enhancer," she advised.

If you're standing before a large group, D'Aurelio suggested, presenters should check their posture, make sure their feet are shoulder-width apart, loosen their knees, distribute their weight equally, and straighten their heads so they don't tilt to one side. "These are the little things that can really matter when you're standing up there and whether people decide to be impressed with you," she said.

Labor market experts say the kind of self-presentation skills D'Aurelio emphasizes is just what employers look for, *The Chicago Tribune* reported. "A lot of employers think that the soft skills are more important than the hard skills," said Wilhelmina Leigh, a senior research associate at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in Washington, D.C. "If someone has the right attitude, comes to work on time, is a good team player – that's more important than knowing how to use the right software."

Among the unemployed, developing the right communications skills has taken on added urgency in today's continued tight job-market. Ron Taylor of Executive Network Group, a support group for out-of-work executives, said: "The nature of communications and business is something in which you have to be better at than ever. Good communications can help people get out of unemployment."

Taylor, who has become more aware of everyday interpersonal interactions since undergoing presentation-skills training himself, added: "Networking is the way that about 80 percent of employment opportunities come to seasoned managers



and executives. And networking cannot be effective without good communications.”

## How To Ask For A Raise

Most people ask for a raise at least once in their lives -- some even face this issue yearly...and dread it every time. Why? The answer is fear. We worry about the outcome. We're afraid of rejection or a negative response. We may even fear we actually don't deserve a raise. For a multitude of reasons, we even allow past negative experiences or our own made-up fears to stand in our way.

But if you feel strongly that you deserve a raise, and that others in similar jobs in your industry are making more money than you, by all means step up to the plate and ask for one. If you don't ask, you'll never get an answer, and you'll keep on making the same salary and not feel happy about it. According to the book *Negotiating for Dummies* by Michael C. Donaldson and Mimi Donaldson, you can take the dread out of asking for a raise by employing six basic skills. Read them over and then start planning for a time to ask your boss for the money you feel you deserve.

### 1. Prepare

Before approaching your manager for a raise, the authors recommend, prepare yourself internally. *Very importantly, though, you must know you have earned the right to ask for a raise and that you are valuable to your employer.* Gather documents to prove you have made an important contribution to the organization and that your absence would be detrimental. If you don't believe you deserve a raise (and you very well may not) no one else will. After you are emotionally prepared for the negotiation, prepare your case on its merits.

- Know how much your company's budget can afford. Get a feel for how well your company is doing.
- Know in general the going rate for your services.
- Know specifically what people in your geographic area are earning for doing the same work.

When you've gathered the data, the authors say, tell your boss you'd like to schedule a meeting about your salary. Don't ambush your boss. Approach him or her in-person or via e-mail. Say, "I'd like to speak with you about my salary. I need about 20 minutes of uninterrupted time in your office. When will it be convenient?"

### 2. Set Your Limits

Decide on the amount you are willing to accept, and the maximum you can hope to receive, the Donaldsons point out. Most importantly, don't

walk into your boss and ask for the moon. Also, decide what you will do if the company does not meet your minimum expectations.

- You may bide your time looking for another job.
- You may quit on the spot.
- You may just stay with the program and be a less cheerful worker.

3. **Push The Pause Button**

Keep your emotions in check, the authors advise. Never resort to an emotional plea about putting food in your kids' mouths. Most companies have evidence that they are in line with the norms. You need to build your case on objective evidence. Make sure management knows that keeping you around and keeping you happy will pay off.

4. **Listen**

You may have to let your boss vent about shrinking budgets, executive compensation and even personnel problems, the Donaldsons explain. Letting your boss empty out will clear a space for you when you talk. Ask about your own performance the same way. If you don't clean up any discrepancy immediately, then it's futile to talk about more money when the company thinks you're not performing up to snuff.

5. **Be Clear**

Set forth what you think is fair and why, and spend plenty of time on the why, the authors advise. Let your boss know about the research you've done and present all the evidence of the special value that you bring to the company. You want your boss to feel good about the raise you are going to get.

6. **Close The Deal**

This may be the first time your boss has been made aware of your worth to the company, the authors say. Your boss may have to think about the issue. That's fine, but be sure to set a date for a final decision.

Of course, you'll need to carry all of this out very graciously and you'll need to have a fallback position in case your request is denied. If a raise is not in the immediate picture, ask your boss what you need to do to earn the money you feel you deserve. This way, at least you'll know where you stand with your employer and what he or she is expecting of you. If you're not happy with the answers you get, it may very well be time to look for another job.





## **Section IV:**

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### *Holiday, Vacations, & Work Balance*



## **MAKE GOOD USE OF HOLIDAYS TO FIND WORK, ADVISE EXPERTS**

While the period between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day is largely considered one of the toughest times of the year to find a new position, career experts say that, in many ways, it is often one of the best, according to an article in *The New York Times*.

"The notion that job searching is tough going during the holidays is a huge myth," said Richard Bayer, economist and chief operating officer of the Five O'Clock Club, a career coaching and outplacement firm based in New York.

In fact, December is a good time to look for a job, Bayer told the newspaper, because many people are not. "Most job seekers think, 'I'm just going to kick up my heels and wait until the first of the year,'" he said, "so half of your competition drops out of the race."

At the same time that fewer people are looking for employment, many companies are getting a head start on January hiring, said Jeff Taylor, founder and chief executive of Monster, which operates the Monster.com Web site for job seekers and employers. Since many companies have new budgets that begin Jan. 1, Taylor said, "the most proactive" human resource managers begin looking in November and December to fill new positions.

Taylor pointed out that for the last three years, more employers have listed jobs on Monster.com in January than any other month of the year. He estimates that annually, postings by employers jump by 15 percent from December to January.

Another benefit of holiday job-hunting is that employers may be more accessible, said David R. Carpe, a principal of Clew, a human resources consulting firm in Lexington, Mass., who also runs a networking group for jobseekers on Yahoo.

Carpe typically recommends that job seekers bypass a company's human resources department between Christmas and New Year's Day to try to reach executives directly. "Nobody has any deadlines to meet on Dec. 24 or Dec. 31," he told *The New York Times*. "If an executive is in the office, he is doing menial stuff like cleaning up his desk, and is probably amenable to talking."

Job hunters should be aware, though, that there are challenges to conducting a job search during the holidays. For example, some executives who make hiring decisions may be on vacation, or may seem distracted during the interview process. Waiting for an answer on a job may take longer, as well.

"If a company tells you they'll let you know in 10 days, it might actually take 20," said New York executive recruiter Sunny Bates. "It's just because everyone's running around everywhere. It's no reflection on you."

And while some job hunters may not be in the right frame of mind to search for employment during the holidays, putting off a search until January can hurt. "Finding new employment is a biggie on the New York's resolution list," said Monster's Taylor. "So if you wait until Jan. 1 to start looking, you're going from being in a distinctly noncompetitive landscape, to being in the busiest hiring time of the year."

## 'TIS THE SEASON TO NETWORK

Forget the popular misconception that the holidays are a dead time for job seekers. In fact, the season offers plenty of ways to keep your job search moving forward—especially some of the best chances to network you will find all year, according to a recent workplace column in *The Wall Street Journal*. And with the nation's unemployment rate now at an eight-year high of 6 percent, it's no wonder more career experts are telling job seekers to treat December like any other month, when it comes to job hunting.

Lisa Derrenbacher, for one, is taking the advice very seriously. The unemployed Reston, Va. resident told the newspaper she's scheduled to go to three parties, thus far, this month—one with friends from the gym, another with former colleagues, and a third at her financial planner's home. A former senior systems analyst, she plans to tell people she meets that she's out of work and looking for any help they can offer. On New Year's Day, she will attend a holiday recovery party and make her pitch there as well.

"I've got to try to get out there and meet some different people to find work," says the 45-year old Derrenbacher, who hopes to take further advantage of the holidays by adding even more events to her social calendar before the year is out. Clearly, she recognizes that networking is a powerful and important job-hunting technique.

At this point of the year, though, job seekers need to take a cautiously aggressive approach when networking, the newspaper article pointed out. At holiday parties, for example, it's best to act casual, since the setting is meant to be informal and festive, experts say. Most advise against bringing a resume, for instance.



"The holiday party is the perfect time to build rapport, and the pressure is off," says Diane Darling, chief executive of Effective Networking Inc., a networking-consulting firm in Boston. Her primary piece of advice is to maintain a professional image while keeping the conversation informational. "It seems like small talk, but that's how you get to know someone," she told *The Wall Street Journal*. "And that's how people get hired. She also recommended sending holiday cards to keep personal and business contacts fresh.

Kate Wendelton, president of Five O'Clock Club, a New York career-counseling and outplacement company, said it's okay to ask for someone's card at a holiday party, but you don't want to start having a meeting with them right then. "If you give them a card, write on it something memorable from the conversation that you can reference in a follow-up letter," she said.

Wendelton added that it is totally irrelevant to ask if someone has a job opening right now. But, she said, you *will* have an advantage if you meet a hiring manager in December, when many hiring budgets are being approved, prior to when jobs are even advertised.

During the holidays, people are also apt to be "smitten by the tone of the season" and to give more freely of their time, added Herb Rappaport, a professor of psychology at Temple University and author of the book *Holiday Blues: Rediscovering the Art of Celebration*.

A.J. Lawrence, for one, is hoping the holiday spirit will make his new networking scheme a success. He told the newspaper that on behalf of himself and about 100 other unemployed people who are friends and contacts, including many he has met online, he is sending out an electronic letter that begins, "Dear Santa, help me find a job..." It will be sent via online networking groups to several thousand other contacts, who can in turn click on an Internet link to provide industry resources or offer other assistance.

The 33-year old Lawrence, a former business development director at a New York consulting company, says he got the idea when he was joking with his girlfriend and asked, "Am I too old to send a 'Dear Santa' letter?" The answer: obviously not.

To help job seekers further in their December networking activities, here are some other tips on how to make contacts at holiday parties, according to *The Wall Street Journal* article:

- **Dress appropriately.** No flashing holiday ties or novelty antlers. Remembering that some events are formal, find out what's appropriate to wear so you can make a good impression.

- **Don't drink too much.** Is there alcohol in that eggnog? Just to be sure, go easy. Maintain a professional presence at all times, despite the temptation to cut loose at a holiday party.
- **Know how to introduce yourself.** Even if you're having a blue Christmas, depict your situation in an upbeat manner that's in keeping with the holiday cheer.
- **Keep the conversation casual.** You're not going to cut a deal at a holiday party. Instead, offer to exchange business cards and continue the conversation later.

Good luck and happy holidays!

## TOP TEN CAREER RESOLUTIONS

Several times a year we at Berman Larson Kane make a list of resolutions - specific goals we set to enhance our business and the way we serve our clients. Keeping resolutions takes determination and hard work, but when we achieve our goals we have a great sense of satisfaction. Whether you're looking for a new job or trying to make some improvements in your professional life this year, we strongly suggest you make your own list of career resolutions. To help you get started, here's a list of ten career resolutions we recently spotted in an article from Careerbuilder.com. We highly recommend considering any or all of them.

1. **Re-evaluate your career.** This one should top your list. Before you vow to make any other changes or improvements, you should sit back and take a look at your present career situation. Take time to assess your skills, aptitudes, likes and dislikes.
2. **Continue to educate yourself.** Education does not end after high school or college; it continues throughout your life. And the beginning of a New Year is the perfect opportunity to step back and look at what areas you want to brush up on. Without lifelong learning, you will become stagnant and not feel fulfilled or satisfied in your work.
3. **Manage your time.** After the busy holiday season it will probably become painfully apparent that you need to learn to schedule your time and develop methods to become more efficient. Be on the lookout for a quicker, more efficient way of tackling tasks. This simple commitment to become efficient will get you noticed and help you balance your work and private life.

4. ***Go the extra mile in your job.*** It's so easy to fall into the "doing your time" rut of a 9-to-5 job. But not only is this not satisfying to you, your employer will notice sooner or later. So take this time of year to infuse your day-to-day job with new enthusiasm. Go that extra mile and when you are done with an assignment, don't sit and wait for something to be handed to you. Instead, be proactive and positive. This attitude will get you noticed and maybe even promoted.
5. ***Listen to feedback.*** Make a vow to listen to what people at work are saying to you. You'll be surprised at how much you can learn about how people perceive you. Then work to make changes or-if the feedback is positive-keep doing what you are doing. Also, try to learn how to take feedback. If the feedback is positive, accept it by replying, "Thank you." If the feedback is negative, never become defensive.
6. ***Stay on top of emerging trends in your industry.*** Keeping on top of what's going on in your industry is vital to furthering your career, but we often don't take the time to do this. This New Year, resolve to read professional publications and attend conferences and workshops in your field. Check out the business section of newspapers and magazines. They are filled with information about new trends. Staying current and being able to discuss trends and issues intelligently will help you stand out and enhance your position.
7. ***Find out your worth.*** You only need to do this every few months and the start of a New Year is a perfect time to benchmark your worth. Once you do it, you will be able to determine how it is changing and what you need to do to grow it. Research into similar positions in your company, or a related one, will quickly reveal the financial worth of your position. When you realize that your worth gives you favor in the eyes of your employer, you might be able to negotiate a raise or a more advanced position.
8. ***Build good relationships with other professionals.*** Be supportive and open with those you work with and never spread rumors or gossip. Be known as a person of integrity. Also make an effort to contact other professionals outside your company. Join local or state chapters of your professional organization. You might also consider becoming involved with community organizations.
9. ***Work on your people skills.*** Building relationships may also require you to work on people skills. Be known for your firm handshake and smile. Warmly and sincerely greet people you see every day, only occasionally,

or think you may never see again. Learn to be assertive and open. This attitude is respectful to both yourself and those around you.

10. ***Always make time for yourself.*** You have to take care of yourself because nobody else will. Schedule time for what restores you. Take a friend to lunch, read a book, go to the fitness center, get a massage, or go to a movie, the beach or an art show. Do whatever it takes to put you at ease and regenerate. Only then can you be productive.

## ENJOY THE VACATION, BUT STAY IN TOUCH

Increasing numbers of employees are being required to keep in touch with their employers during vacations this year, due to staff cutbacks and heavier workloads, and more workers are foregoing vacation entirely because of financial concerns or just too much work, a USA Today article recently point out.

At Crossbow Group, a Westport, Conn.-based marketing services firm, for example, all employees are being asked to leave contact information. They must also let the firm know where they are going to be. "As a senior manager, I don't go anywhere I can't be reached," Jay Bower, president of the company, told the newspaper.

Similarly, at Mindbridge Software in Worcester, Mass., a Web site has been established that vacationing employees can use to connect to the office. They can tap into their calendar, for example, or shoot instant messages to co-workers in the office. "It's important for the company that no one is really ever out of touch," said Scott Testa of Mindbridge. "The dark side is, some people may feel, 'It's vacation ... I take it to get away from work.'"

"The days of taking a full seven days off and then coming back (to work) are over," added Rich Schultz of Duluth, Ga., a vice president of industry marketing at Teredata, which specializes in analytical solutions. Because of time demands, he's cutting the time he'll spend this year at a family vacation in Florida.

According to a May survey by the American Management Association, 40 percent of managers are now required to leave their itinerary or contact information with the office while on vacation, the USA Today article reported. That's up from last year, when about 35% were required to leave such information.

And, according to a study by Stamford, Conn.-based market research firm Insight Express, two of five Americans will not take a summer vacation this year. The major reason: tight household budgets due to the recent downturn in the

economy. Also cited were heavier workloads at the office, unemployment, use of vacation funds for other necessities, and an unstable economy.

"The reason people aren't taking vacations isn't due to threats and security issues," Lee Smith, chief operating officer at Insight Express, told the newspaper. "That's what surprised us."

Some experts say there are real dangers with the practice of keeping tabs during a downturn, though, especially as the requirement spreads from the managerial ranks to the employees, the article noted. "There are fewer people to do more work. The person who covered for you on vacation isn't there anymore," said Robert Morgan of Spherion, a provider of customized staffing solutions based in Fort Lauderdale. "Burnout is a real danger. People need to refresh."

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF A VACATION**

At least once a year many of us will be turning our attention to vacations--at the shore, at the lake, or at some other destination where we can relax, enjoy activities with family or friends and, most of all, re-charge the batteries. If you're one of those who always lets work get in the way of vacations, do yourself a favor and take some time off this summer--even if it's a week at home.

The value of a vacation, whether it's in the summer or any time of the year, lies in the change of pace itself--getting your mind off daily worries. "It's taking time out from the everyday, relentless stressors," said Brooks B. Gump, PhD, an assistant professor of psychology at the State University of New York, who co-authored a study last year on the health aspects of vacations.

"Even anticipating a vacation can ease stress levels," Gump said in a WebMD Medical News report on the subject. Vacation rids us of the bad habit of being "on guard" for potential problems or threats in our lives, particularly in business. Said Gump: "On vacation, you can let your guard down. You can stop worrying about what could happen."

Also, vacations have their unique, restorative powers. "It's those health-protective effects from social support of family and from exercising more," he said. "Those things are particularly helpful if done in the context of no stress."

But a true vacation, according to Gump, means really leaving the office behind. "Bring along your pager or cell phone, and you won't get the full benefit of the vacation. You're constantly on guard for potential stress." In fact, it's what psychologists call "rumination"--those circulating, stressful thoughts that can

extend the effects of stress. "Ruminating while you're running, for example, defeats the benefits of the exercise," he added.

A vacation can truly give the stressed-out worker some sense of mastery over his universe--and that in itself brings relief, says one psychologist.

"A lot of stressful things in the work environment are chronic, and mostly people don't have control over them," said Steve Jex, PhD, author of *Stress and Job Performance*. "If you have a boss you don't like, there's nothing you can do about it. The only way to get relief is to get away. Get out of that environment for a while. That may be the best thing for you.

According to Dr. Gump's study, people who take annual vacations are less likely to die young--especially from heart disease. In fact, the study found that people who reported taking no vacation for five years were at much higher risk of heart disease and even death further down the line.

So the message is clear--don't skip your annual vacation, especially if you're entitled to time off. Grab the car keys. Check a travel web site. Whatever it takes, get away from the job and find a nice pleasant spot to relax. You'll feel a lot better when you get back to work and you might even come up with some creative ideas you would have never thought of--if you didn't get away from the office for awhile.

## **WORKERS RETHINKING PRIORITIES**

Across the nation, at nearly every level of the work force, a subtle but far-reaching shift in priorities is underway in the aftermath of the events of September 11. According to a column in *The Wall Street Journal*, values that were pre-eminent for many people--career, status, money, personal fulfillment--are now taking a back seat to more fundamental human needs: family, friends, community, and connectedness with others. The change will color workers' decision-making for months, if not years, posing both risks and opportunities for employers.

In her "Work & Family" column, reporter Sue Shellenbarger pointed out that many workers are experiencing the tragedy as a profound loss, not only of lives, but of national security and personal safety. Huge losses tend to spark a change in priorities. Now, a similar shift in priorities is occurring on a mass scale. "An entire nation has experienced a life-changing event. All of us are reprioritizing at the same time," Marci Koblenz of MK consultants, of Evanston, Ill., told the

newspaper. "People will move toward spending their time and energy in a manner consistent with their priorities."

The change crosses geographic, socioeconomic and generational lines. Josef Blumenthal, director of worldwide public relations at Concord Communications, of Marlborough, Mass., had this to say in the article: "Before all this, the press release I was working on seemed so important. Now, going home to hug my kid—that's important."

Changing course is especially jarring to gen-Xers, at a stage of life not usually given to such concerns. In the column, a 28-year-old Colorado market-research manager described herself as "very driven" and intent on acquiring things. But after Sept. 11, her old preoccupations—selling a previous home at a good price, getting her car repaired correctly—fell away. "Maybe I don't need all this stuff," she said. "Maybe I need to concentrate on enriching my life with my family."

For sure, the tragedy turned life upside down for many people. It brought the need for safety, security, belonging and affiliation into sharp focus, supplanting fulfillment, recognition and even achievement for many workers, *The Wall Street Journal* reported.

Bosses who ignore or rebuff employee's new priorities will see employee commitment and output fall. "What the economy needs is for employees to dedicate themselves whole-heartedly to their work," Koblenz added. "But they're not going to be able to do that if employers don't give them space and support to rethink the way they live their lives."

Managed correctly, the shift can foster teamwork and loyalty, said David Strum of Aon Corp.'s Loyalty Institute, in the article. It's an opportunity to strengthen employees' sense of affiliation through a common vision, a common mission, to help feel it means something to belong to the company, he added. Many employers are already starting to adapt. After the terrorist attacks, DuPont urged managers not to discourage small gatherings of employees, and to let employees take a day off for prayer and personal time. S.C. Johnson in Racine, Wis., stepped-up intranet communication to fortify employee bonds.

Executives looking for historical parallels to guide a long-term response, though, have failed to find them, the column noted. The retreat to home and hearth after World War II comes up most often; that's what spawned the 1950s. Donna Klein of Marriott International predicted the terrorist attack "is going to shine the spotlight on family (once again) as a key core component of society."

But this time, Klein added, there's a larger role for employers because families generally are weaker, more scattered and more deeply involved in the workplace

than they were 50 years ago. "After World War II, there was a hearth and home to return to," she said. "The role of corporate America is going to be, 'What can we do to recreate some sense of a safe place? Does that involve more flexibility, and more recognition of families as the key segment of society? I think it does.'"

## THE FUTURE OF WORK

A recent *Business Week* report, entitled the "The Future of Work," pointed out that changes in the economy in the past few years have made some workers more valuable and secure than ever while pushing others—even those with skills regarded recently as highly valuable—to the margins. What makes the difference?

New research by economists at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University conclude that the key factor is whether a job can be "routinized," or broken into repeatable steps that vary little from day to day, according to the article. Such a job is easier to replace with a clever piece of software or to hand over to a lower-paid worker outside the United States.

By comparison, jobs that will pay well in the future will be the ones that are hard to reduce to a recipe, the article pointed out. These attractive jobs—from factory floor management to sales to teaching to the professions—require flexibility, creativity, and lifelong learning. They generally also require subtle and frequent interactions with other people, often face to face.

The good news is that a substantial majority of jobs in the U.S. economy are non-routine. And when you think about it, that has to be the case. In the relentless pursuit of productivity, the United States has already demolished millions of routine jobs in manufacturing, clerical work, programming, and other fields. So it stands to reason that people who have survived are doing things that downsizing experts haven't figured out how to reduce to software or ship abroad.

### ***People Skills Rank High in Importance***

According to the article, as the economy evolves, two kinds of jobs will remain impossible to routinize, write Frank Levy of MIT and Richard J. Murnane of Harvard, in the forthcoming book, *The New Division of Labor: How Computers are Creating the Next Job Market*. One involves complex pattern recognition. Such skills as spotting business opportunities or repairing a complicated machine fall into this category. The other relies on complex communications skills, such as



those needed to manage people, devise advertising campaigns, or sell big-ticket items. "If you can really write down the whole job on paper, then someone else can do it," Levy told *Business Week*.

Viewed through the lens of routine vs. non-routine work, the debate over job growth and the future of jobs takes on a new hue, the article noted. It suggests that Americans looking for good jobs would do well to bet on such constantly varying occupations as manager, entrepreneur, or artist, and jobs such as teaching, lending, and sales that require lots of people skills.

At the same time, some jobs that are highly compensated could soon be routinized as powerful computers, advanced software, and speedy communications continue to increase the vulnerability of routine work. Well-paid legal researchers, tax preparers, and accountants, for example, are seeing their jobs outsourced abroad. Those jobs require intelligence and technical knowledge, of course. But because of the highly standardized procedures involved, well-educated workers in distant locations are willing to do the work for far less, the report stated.

For example, computer programming is a routine job that used to pay well because few people could do the work. Now, part of the work has been taken over by clever software, and part has been exported to lower-wage nations connected by fiber-optic networks.

The people replaced from those jobs are now shifting to jobs that can't be so easily standardized. And clearly, the growing importance of non-routine work and the fear of outsourcing have increased the value of education, as college graduates have steadily increased their lead over the less-educated in earnings and have more stable employment.

"Fear of outsourcing is absolutely a key factor in driving our enrollment," said Todd S. Nelson, CEO of Apollo Group Inc., parent of the University of Phoenix, which caters to working adults across the country through campuses in 30 states and online courses. The university's enrollment soared nearly a third in 2003 to 186,000.

### ***Still Plenty of Demand in Parts of IT***

And while the debate over the future of work pervades the whole economy, information technology is where it's most relevant now, according to *Business Week*. That's because the IT sector is beginning to split in two. More routine tech jobs, such as programming, are vulnerable to automation or outsourcing. In

contrast, there's still plenty of demand in the United States for people who combine technical skills with industry-specific knowledge and people skills.

Says Robert O. Best, the chief information officer of UNUM Provident Corp., the disability insurer: "You used to be able to get away with being a technical nerd five years ago. Those days are over." Now, he said, "We're looking for softer skills, like the ability to work with others, change direction quickly, and understand the business."

To be sure, automation and globalization will be tough on those people who prefer comfortable, routine jobs, or who lack the education to tackle challenging new tasks, the article pointed out. Some of those will find work as barbers, truck drivers, hospital orderlies, or waiters. While those jobs will be protected by the fact that they can't be done in a foreign country or by software, wages will be depressed because so many people will be competing for slots.

Still, there's no reason that automation and globalization have to create an underclass. In time, people displaced from routine jobs can study up for more challenging occupations. Harvard's Murnane, an education professor, pointed out that a century ago, half the U.S. population worked in agriculture, and many people didn't know how to read or write.

History has proved that they and their descendants were capable of much more, though. Murnane, who spends a day a month observing Boston public schools, told *Business Week*: "I'm cautiously optimistic," about the ability of Americans to rise above the routine. Those who can will find that computers amplify their powers and globalization extend their reach."

## **WORKPLACE STRESS IS GETTING WORSE**

Workplace stress is nothing new but, these days, more people seem more stressed than ever. Career experts say the most obvious reason is the recent round of layoffs, but they also point to other corporate upheavals, increased workloads from staff cutbacks and, most of all, the continued growth of the information age.

Two recent surveys support this view. One by Yankelovich Monitor reported that 33 percent of 2,500 workers said they were feeling an increase in stress from a year ago, compared with 31 percent making the claim in 1998. Another survey by Penn Scheon & Berland reported that 70 percent of Americans surveyed last year reported high or moderate workplace stress, and 57 percent said they worried their heightened anxiety would cause health problems.

An article in *The New York Times* recently pointed out that the recent economic slowdown and stock market slump are giving many the jitters. Even the lunch hour is being blamed for workplace malaise, the article stated, since it represents

the frightening realization for many people that half the day is over and yet there's much more work to do.

The information age is a major culprit because many people feel trapped by the very technology that was supposed to set them free from much of their workload, career experts say. "We have beepers, cell phones, and pagers so that people can reach us all day long, even at lunchtime when we're supposed to take a break." Marlin Potash, a clinical psychologist, told *The New York Times*. "Psychologically, that's a dangerous phenomenon because it means we're not in control and our jobs are running us."

Of course, any kind of frequent or prolonged stress can damage health, the National Institute for Occupational Safety said. Research likens stress to ailments ranging from heart disease to muscle, bone and immune system disorders.

So how does one relieve work stress? Vigorous exercise naturally is a time-honored break from the office grind. Everyday, untold thousands of workers troop off to the gym or go to the nearby park for a quick jog or walk. At lunchtime, some people seek spiritual solace by going to church, others meditate, or wander through stores aimlessly - anything it takes to work off the stress of the morning and prepare them for the frustrations of the afternoon.

Behavioral specialists say it is important that you shift gears - do something so radically different that you'll put work out of your mind. Change the pace, the type of activity and your environment - even if it's for 15 or 20 minutes. If you can't leave your office, then leave the room or switch chairs. Put your head down for 10 minutes. You'll get several hours of renewed vigor from that.

Involvement in other roles, including family, friendship or volunteer work, can ease stress at work, too. The rewards of a balanced life cushion the damage that layoffs and job setbacks can do to one's self-worth. Cultivating certain mental habits do help, and believing in your ability to turn change to your advantage is a good coping strategy. Keeping workloads in check is crucial. Even in a satisfying job, any stress can quickly turn bad when work hours balloon out of control.



## **Section V:**

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### *Market Trends*

## BLOGGING GROWS IN JOB MARKET

Five years ago, few people had heard of blogs—online journals that are commonly used to chronicle the lives and opinions of their authors. Now, with more than two million Americans using blogs, according to a study cited in a recent article in *The New York Times*, blogging is spreading to the job market, say hiring managers and experts who follow the topic.

"It's a trend on the rise right now, especially for employers, who get a much better sense of a person this way," said Michael Gartenberg, a vice president and research director at Jupiter Research in New York, who covers blogs. "Résumés and interviews are a very scripted process; read someone's Web log and you get a good sense of that person's thinking and perspectives."

Gartenberg told the newspaper there is no conclusive data on the spread of blogs to the job market, largely because they are difficult to track. But based on anecdotal information, he said, people are using blogs on both sides of the job search process.

Jobs seekers use blogs to establish a strong online presence, display their skills and advertise their availability, the article pointed out. For many just out of college, the blog is an essential networking tool because it is common for bloggers to link back and forth to others with recent posts. Corporate recruiters, in turn, use blogs to draw qualified candidates, and they search for potential hires by reading bloggers who write about topics relevant to a particular industry.

Berman Larson Kane recently started its own Blog, which can be accessed on the company's web site at <http://www.jobsbl.com/indexblog.html>. The firm's blog deals with issues of interest to both client companies and job candidates and provides an exchange for recruitment and staffing from various perspectives. BLK President Bob Larson calls blogs "a great informal venue to share ideas, feelings and information."

Commenting on the blogging trend spotlighted in *The New York Times* article, Larson said: "Right now recruiting this way is somewhat of an invisible process, but I think soon you'll see blogs become a much bigger part of job searching and recruiting."

A driving factor behind job market blogging is the search engine Google, said Elizabeth Lawley, associate professor of information technology at the Rochester Institute of Technology. "If you are thinking of interviewing someone, it's almost standard now to Google them online and see what you find," Lawley told the

newspaper. "If that person has a blog, it's usually the first thing that comes to mind."

Official corporate blogs are still rare, said John Palfrey, executive director of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at the Harvard Law School, largely because "corporate marketing and branding is often an exercise in hypercontrol of a message, and that doesn't work well in a blogging context." Some businesses do allow their employees to blog individually, however, provided they make it clear that they are operating independently of the company.

About 50 of 600 employees blog at ThoughtWorks, a Chicago-based company that builds business software systems, and any industry-related topic—other than the core intellectual property of clients—is fair game, the article noted. Its employee blogs have attracted a dedicated readership—and some job applicants. "It's a little like a prescreening," said Roy Singham, the company's chief executive. "We're looking for needles in haystacks, and the blog is like a massive magnet."

At Microsoft, there are several hundred employees who blog, using a portal hosted by Microsoft Communities. The company has no official blog or blogging policy, but the unofficial practice has been a boon to the company's recruiters. "I have great candidates in process that have resulted from blogging," wrote Heather Hamilton, a senior marketing recruiter at the company, who posted her note in May on Heather's Marketing at Microsoft blog. "Personally, I think blogging is going to change the way companies recruit."

According to *The New York Times* article, for unemployed job seekers, there is little risk in announcing a return to the job market through a blog. But for those currently working but searching for a new job, there are risks. "The rule of thumb is, if you don't want anyone at the company to know you're looking, don't post it on your blog," said Alexander C. Halavais, a professor in the School of Informatics at the State University of New York at Buffalo, who studies blogs. "It's one of the biggest mistakes employed job seekers make."

Job seekers who prefer to look at others' postings can find blogs relevant to them using search engines, or Web sites like Bloglines.com. Another approach is to simply blog intelligently about your work or industry, Professor Halavais pointed out. "Those looking to hire will notice you through your blog as a passive candidate, and that's often a much better way to find a job," he added.

That is the approach taken by Hugh MacLeod, creative director at Alcazar, an advertising agency in Newcastle, England. MacLeod's blog, grapevine.com, contains his cartoon work and blogs about the advertising industry and other topics. "The blog has started lots of conversations about jobs," McLeod told the

newspaper. "It's like flypaper, and now I'm in the midst of one of those conversations with a large advertising firm in Manhattan. They saw my site and blog and contacted me."

He added: "That's the advantage of blogging—if you do it well and have interesting things to say, people pay attention."

## **BOOMERS EMBRACE CONTRACT WORK**

Much to the dismay of senior, experienced job seekers, many hiring managers have a commitment problem. But there are ways to get around the reluctance to tie a knot. According to a recent article in *The Wall Street Journal*, a growing number of baby-boomers are trying to get around the problem by becoming contract workers.

"We are definitely seeing an increase in the number of mature workers who are doing contract and temporary work," said Ray Roe, chief executive officer of Adecco Staffing North America in Melville, N.Y. Sean Bisceglia, chief executive of Corporate Project Resources Inc., a Chicago-based marketing staffing firm known as CPRi, concurred. He said that 80 percent of the firm's applicants today are baby boomers—up from 40 percent a year ago.

Numerous people are doing this by default because they've been laid off and have had trouble finding permanent work, the article noted. But others just simply want out of the corporate grind and see contract work as a chance to gain greater flexibility and potentially make more money, especially as companies continue to squeeze raises for permanent staffers.

For years, of course, senior workers have worked on their own as consultants. But for some, signing up with a contracting firm is an easier route because you don't have to line up your own assignments.

Contract work can be even more lucrative than a permanent full-time job if your skills are in hot demand, the article pointed out. Such workers can hop to different assignments and earn higher hourly rates than they would have under salary at a permanent job. But these people must be confident in their skills—and the market for them.

Other contract workers take pay cuts, but find contracting arrangements less stressful than a permanent corporate role, and simpler than consulting on their own.



Alexander Swan, a 56-year-old market researcher who lives in McKinley, Texas, is a perfect example. He was laid off from his post as director of market research at a big beverage marketer in early 2003, according to *The Wall Street Journal* article. He chose not to start his own consulting firm because he doubted he had a big enough network of business contacts to bring in steady work.

"You have to have so many jobs lined up before one of them hits, and the way you get compensated is such a delayed process," he told the newspaper. In hindsight, he said, he probably should have networked more aggressively while working at his former employer.

A more realistic option, he realized, was working through a contracting firm. He signed on as a market-researcher for hire with CPRi in December 2003. The firm works with clients to find them staffers from its worker pool, so Mr. Swan doesn't have to worry as much about finding work on his own. He also gets health benefits through the firm, which he says are comparable to those offered by his former employer.

According to the article, he landed a 13-month assignment with a large consumer-products company and found it to be a refreshing change from the more traditional role in corporate life. He didn't have to deal with company politics, for one, because as a contractor, he wasn't concerned with climbing up the management ranks. "You just do the work; you don't worry about the next career path," he said. "You don't necessarily have to play the political situations that you have to otherwise."

He worked fewer hours, too—usually about 40 hours a week, with Friday afternoons off in the summer, compared with about 55 to 60 hours a week at his old job. He had more time for his personal life, and lost about 20 pounds playing tennis and working out. He also spends more time with his friends. "When you go home, you don't take the job with you," he said. "You can pursue your hobbies."

He's making only about two-thirds of his former income, the article noted, but hasn't minded cutting back his spending. Recently divorced, he has moved to a smaller home and spends less money on restaurants. Expressing the thoughts of many who have embraced contract work, Swan said: "It really would take a very remarkable situation for me to go into a full-time situation again."

## OLDER, WISER JOB-HUNTING

If you're over 50--or even over 45--you've probably encountered some form of age discrimination if you've been looking for a job. In fact, age discrimination, despite being illegal, appears to have become more common in the past few years, according to a new survey of senior executives.

*Fortune* magazine reports that a new survey by ExecuNet, a career networking and job-search service, found that 82 percent of senior managers, almost all in their 40s and 50s, consider age bias a "serious problem" in today's workplace, up from 78 percent in 2001. And a startling 94 percent of those managers said they believed their age resulted in their being cut out of the running for a particular job, although it was usually impossible to prove.

Strange, when you consider how rapidly the U.S. population is aging, the *Fortune* article pointed out. According to the Census Bureau, the proportion of Americans who are at least 55-years-old will grow by 46.6 percent between now and 2010, making them 38 percent of the population and by far the fastest growing segment of the workforce.

So what gives? Do baby-boomers discriminate against each other? Maybe. Even a fifty something manager might prefer to sign up someone younger. The ExecuNet study also suggests that, in a kind of vicious cycle, such large numbers of 50-plus managers have already been put out to pasture through layoffs and early-retirement programs that the only people left to make hiring decisions in many companies are, well, young enough to think 50 is older than dirt.

But the main culprit, it seems, is the rotten job market, according to the *Fortune* article. Says ExecuNet CEO David Opton: "When job seekers outnumber the available jobs, employers use age as one way to quickly screen out candidates." Getting past that brick wall isn't easy, but there are steps you can take to deal with the problem. "Forget about the cosmetic surgery and dying your hair," said David Carpe, a principal at Clew, a human resources consulting firm. "You'll just look desperate." Instead, he urges well-seasoned job hunters to stay physically-fit, energetic, and upbeat. He recommends exercise, eating right, and getting enough sleep.

"I see people in their 70s who are vibrant, energetic and in great demand", added executive coach Tom Massey in Oklahoma City. "I also see 'old' 50-year-olds who are burnt out."

The biggest advantage you can give yourself, though, is research, Opton told *Fortune*. "With any kind of age bias, whether it's age, sex, race, or what-have-you, there is a spectrum. Some people are totally open-minded, while at the

other end of the range are those who are so prejudiced that you will never change their minds."

If you go into an interview with detailed research, showing that you understand the business, the challenges it faces, and what problems need solving, Opton said interviewers will tend to look past your age and focus on your ideas. "I believe people in their 40s and 50s have a strong work ethic that younger workers often lack--and your willingness to do thoughtful, in-depth research will demonstrate it."

## **FIT IN FITNESS AT THE OFFICE**

Today every publication seems to include an article on the merits of exercise. But with so many professionals working long hours and complaining of having too little time to get work done, going to a health club before heading to work or after work is often not possible. So if you're one of those people with hectic schedules, and you want to maintain a regular fitness program, there's really only one alternative: Try to stay fit while you're at work.

There's a wide variety of ways you can accomplish this, with a little creativity and some firm scheduling, but the bottom line here is - move! No matter what you do on a particular day, find a way to incorporate movement into it. Making exercise a priority will keep you physically and mentally alert, refresh you, and decrease stress.

To help you along the way, the American Heart Association offers these suggestions:

- Discuss business with a co-worker during an afternoon walk or jog. Walking for one hour can burn 200-600 calories, depending on your weight and the speed you walk.
- Use stairs instead of the elevator.
- Walk to deliver a message or document, rather than phoning or e-mailing.
- Take a break each hour to stand and walk around.
- Make appointments in your calendar to exercise each day--and stick with them. Recruit co-workers to remind you or--even better--work out with you.
- And if you're lucky enough to have an exercise facility on the premises of your office, join and use it, even if you have to utilize your lunch hour a few days a week. If you do go mid-day, plan ahead--take care of projects and meetings first. Bring the proper clothes and toiletries. You might also

consider getting up a little earlier and using the health club as soon as you get to the office.

- If you're leaving your office for a period of time, let your boss know where you are, don't just disappear. If he or she disapproves of your leaving mid-day, discuss arranging your schedule so you can exercise at a time that is right for both of you.
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If you're the type who doesn't feel exercise is worth the time if you don't break a good sweat, you are wrong. According to the American Council on Exercise, if you take a 10-minute exercise break every 90 minutes you're at work, you can burn just as many calories in four of these breaks as you can in one 40-minute session.

Exercising, even in small increments at your desk, ultimately will make you healthier and happier. It will also help reduce weight, blood pressure and anxiety. You'll feel better and you'll be more productive as a result. So regardless of your age or career path, don't sacrifice your health for a job. If you are, or if someone expects you to do so, it's time to re-evaluate your job priorities.

## **PRIVACY ISSUES IN TODAY'S BUSINESS CLIMATE**

Increasingly sophisticated technology that is easily available to business owners and managers is creating a number of interesting privacy issues for employees that were unheard of only a handful of years ago. More than three-quarters (77.7 percent) of major U.S. companies keep tabs on employees by checking their e-mail, Internet, phone calls, computer files or by videotaping them at work, according to the American Management Association's annual survey on workplace monitoring and surveillance.

Companies are doing so because there are increasing concerns involving productivity issues, liability issues, and security issues, said Eric Rolfe Greenberg, director of management studies for the AMA, in a Gannett News Service report.

According to the AMA, which surveyed over 1,600 large- and mid-sized companies earlier this year, 63 percent monitor workers' Internet connections, up from 54 percent a year ago, and 47 percent store and review employee e-mail, an increase from 38 percent in 2000. Meanwhile, 40 percent block Internet connections to unauthorized or inappropriate sites, up from 29 percent.

More than one quarter of surveyed companies, or 27 percent, say that they've even fired employees for misuse of office e-mail or Internet connections, and 65 percent report some disciplinary measure for those offenses, Gannett reported.

"Privacy in today's workplace is largely illusory," Ellen Bayer, AMA's practice leader on human resources issues, told Gannett. "In this era of open space cubicles, shared desk space, networked computers and teleworkers, it is hard to realistically hold onto a belief in private space. Work is carried out on equipment belonging to employers who have a legal right to the work product of the employees using it."

The report also pointed out that the overall monitoring surveillance figure-up 73 percent last year-includes such measures as video recording of employees on the job (15 percent), recording and reviewing telephone messages (12 percent) and storing and reviewing voice mail (8 percent). Other forms of surveillance include: telephone numbers called and time spent on the phone (43 percent), logged computer time (19 percent) and video surveillance for security purposes (38 percent).

In previous years, the growth in monitoring went hand in hand with increases in the share of employees gaining access to e-mail and the Internet. This year, however, the average share of employees with office connections hardly grew at all, while monitoring those activities rose by nearly 10 percent.

## **MORE COMPANIES MONITOR EMPLOYEES**

Employers are ratcheting up their efforts to monitor employees, in more cases adding staff whose job it is to read workers' outgoing e-mail, according to a recent report in *USA Today*. In fact, about 55 percent of companies retain and review e-mail, a 2005 survey by the American Management Association (AMA) and The ePolicy Institute revealed, up from 47 percent in 2001. A quarter of these surveyed companies have fired workers for e-mail abuse.

Leakage of trade secrets is a main concern for companies' electronic monitoring and surveillance, the article pointed out. This has led more than 60 percent of companies with 1,000 or more employees to hire, or make plans to hire, staff to read or otherwise analyze outbound e-mail, according to a 2005 study by Proofpoint, which specializes in e-mail security and content issues.

Some critics, though, say personally reading outgoing e-mail is too time-consuming to be effective, as well as a violation of workers' privacy rights. One of them is Gary Steele, CEO of Proofpoint, based in Cupertino, Calif. "Employers are taking a much more aggressive stance. The findings (of our survey) are a little astonishing, and, for employees, quite scary."

Employers are also investigating specific employees they have concerns about, said Manny Avramidis, vice president of global human resources for the AMA. In an investigation, a supervisor will monitor phone records, e-mail and Web activity, and check how often an employee has used a key pass to enter and exit a building. "The obvious concern," Avramidis said, "is lost productivity."

Productivity concerns have also sparked more companies to block instant messaging and employee access to personal e-mail accounts, according to a survey by the Society of Human Resource Management and Career Journal.com. Some employers are also tracking content, keystrokes and time spent at the keyboard.

Indeed, the increased monitoring and surveillance should be a warning signal for workers looking for new jobs. As pointed out in our February 2005 feature article, "How To Keep Your Job Hunt Secret," never depend on a company's equipment and e-mail when you're involved in a job search.

Employers say electronic monitoring and surveillance steps can make good business sense, the *USA Today* article noted. At Array Networks, an application networking company based in Milpitas, Calif., outgoing messages are monitored with an e-mail filter to ensure that no trade secrets are sent out.

"We check to see the content of what's going out," said Lawrence Lu, the company's chief technology officer. "Everyone is very professional, and we don't have a big problem, but we do check it to make sure the traffic is good."

Another reason for concern: E-mail can come back to haunt employers if lawsuits are filed. Messages must often be divulged as part of the discovery process. One in five employers has had e-mail subpoenaed by courts and regulators, according to a 2004 AMA and ePolicy survey. "Concern about litigation is a big issue," Nancy Flynn, executive director of The ePolicy Institute, told the newspaper. "E-mail is the electronic equivalent of DNA evidence."

Some employers say they don't monitor e-mail because they believe doing so could hurt morale and erode trust. "When it comes to monitoring, the company is 'hand offs,'" said Nicholas Jacobs, CEO of Windber Medical Center in Windber, Pa., which does have policies in place prohibiting certain types of e-mail, such as pornography. "It's absolutely a trust basis, and we deal with sensitive things. I haven't been burned yet."

On the other hand, Conqwest, a Holliston, Mass.-based security assessment and solutions company, has found employees planning Disney cruises and sending jokes to executives and board members. One time an employee stored X-rated pictures in his e-mail and sent them by mistake to two customers. He was fired

and one customer left. "It's amazing that these things are still happening," said Michele Drolit, CEO of Conqwest.





## **Section VI:**

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### *The Positive Layoff*



## TEN STEPS TO TAKE IF YOU'RE LAID OFF

If you've ever been laid off from your job, you know it can be an upsetting experience. In today's soft economy, numerous companies across the country have been paring their staffs as one means of dealing with the economic downturn. Should you be one of the workers who has recently been given a layoff notice or fear that you will get one soon, the following advice, offered by syndicated careers columnist Amy Lindgren, will provide some steps to take to secure a soft landing.

### **Pre-Layoff (if you have been given advance notice):**

1. Go through your work area with an eye toward future employment. Take samples of your work to show new employers (with your supervisor's permission, if needed), as well as copies of your evaluations and positive letters you may have received.
2. Meet with your manager or a human-resource representative. There are several things to discuss, including your actual date of layoff, the possibility of severance or an outplacement package, permission to use your manager as a reference, the potential of receiving a letter of recommendation, and the possibility of reviewing your personnel file.
3. Connect with your major customers or vendors, as well as employees in other branches of the company. Send a brief, professional e-mail or letter explaining your departure and the contact person who will be handling their business. Don't be shy about including your home contact information, particularly if you would like to discuss future job openings.
4. With the help of your human-resources representative, evaluate as many financial details as possible, including retirement plan rollovers, stock options and health insurance coverage. Now is also the time to consolidate debt at home or refinance your mortgage for lower monthly payments.
5. Change professional memberships and magazine subscriptions to your home address (if you've paid for them yourself) and establish a personal e-mail address if you don't already have one.

### **Post-Layoff:**

1. If at all possible, take a short break to clear your head and help you focus on the next chapter of your life.

2. Put together your resume, portfolio of work samples and references and your lists of business and personal contacts. Do this in the first month after the layoff, while things are still fresh in your mind. (You should also start contacting a few recruiters you know and target some companies you'd be interested in working for.) This is also a good time to unpack boxes from work, although you should resist the temptation to throw away much. Wait until you have a better idea of your next career.
3. Sign up for unemployment benefits, even if you expect you'll be re-employed quickly. Also, ask your unemployment office to refer you to a "dislocated worker" program, which may provide funding for retraining, resume assistance and career counseling.
4. Bring your family into your planning. Go over budget ideas, revise vacation plans, schedule short breaks to rejuvenate, and share your thoughts for future careers you're considering.
5. Before the first month is done, create a daily schedule that replaces some of the structure of your job. Include "appointments" with yourself for exercise, social interaction, rest, job-search activities and a part-time or volunteer job. Follow a career-exploration or job-search process on a steady basis. Progress can be difficult to measure at first, but slow and steady is an easier pace to maintain over the long haul and helps you to avoid some of the emotional peaks and valleys so common to unemployment.

## **WORKING FOR A DOWNSIZED COMPANY**

While many companies are downsizing their staffs these days, some of these same organizations are also hiring selectively. So what should you do if you're looking for a job and one of these businesses offer you one with an attractive salary and benefit package?

According to Joann S. Lublin, author of the "Managing Your Career" column in *The Wall Street Journal*, in a sluggish economy you can ill afford to ignore an attractive offer from any business. If you take the job, though, you should do it with your eyes open. You just don't want to take the risk of being the one laid off if the company decides it needs to downsize again.

So before plunging into such high-risk employment, advises Lublin, make sure you can answer several crucial questions.

First, is your potential employer relatively healthy despite the reductions? Grill any acquaintances working there. Pore over analysts' reports. Ask competitors about the company's weaknesses. This is an environment where the more informed you are, the better decision you will make. 'Due Diligence,' writes Lublin, will enable you to separate candor from baloney.

While some companies are recruiting for posts in certain growth areas, you also need to determine if the company might need to make further layoffs--if an industry slowdown persists. Which raises a related question: what professions, job levels, departments or regions bear the brunt of your would-be employer's cutbacks?

Lublin writes that you're often better off being a relatively inexpensive new hire at a concern that has just laid off its high-paid veteran staffers and that is adding personnel selectively and deliberately. But a business dismissing many highly experienced employees may lack enough "corporate memory" to get the lights back on when things get better, warns a high-level career consultant in the article.

Further, you should try to uncover the rationale behind the layoffs and management's fallback position in case the moves do not trim expenses fast enough. If the answer is the possible sale of the company, you may not want to join. You also need to know whether your hiring manager views your skills as a critical source of future corporate growth.

But perhaps the most important question you should ask before betting on a downsized business is this: How much job-security risk can you tolerate? The answer will depend on your age, marital status, preferred standard of living and prior employment. Whatever you decide, though, the important thing to remember is this: If you are a good performer and you get laid off, be assured you will be hired again.

## **BOUNCING BACK FROM A FIRING**

Bouncing back from getting fired is one of the biggest tests many workers are likely to face in their career, a recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* pointed out. That's because being individually fired from a job carries its own particular sting, often blended with shock and damage to one's self-esteem and finances. For some, it can be an invitation to sink into despair; others are able to quickly reel themselves out of the depths and find an even better opportunity.

What separates the two-outcomes? Well-known career guru Harvey Mackay believes the first ingredient is simply the ability to move on. In his latest book, *We Got Fired! ... And It's the Best Thing That Ever Happened to Us*, he asserts that getting fired actually

can propel a career forward. If that kind of optimism at first seems cavalier, there is no denying that a resolutely positive outlook almost always beats a gloomy one, the article noted.

Mackay fills his book with interviews with well-known business executives, sports figures and celebrities, including Michael Bloomberg, Larry King, Jamie Dimon and Robert Redford. The one thing these superstars have in common is that through some force of will, or ego, they didn't let adversity destroy them—or even hold them back.

"Many of them were not successful when they got fired—that's the big break that they had," said Mackay, who is chairman of Mackay Envelope Co., in Minneapolis.

Other tips from Mackay: Don't hold a grudge or burn a bridge with your former employer. Be sure to exercise regularly to clear your mind, lighten distress and keep in shape. And be prepared for the possibility of a job loss by developing a robust professional and personal network that you can tap when you're suddenly out of work.

According to the article, one of the biggest stumbling blocks people face is how to characterize a firing in future interviews. Many people are pushed out for a confluence of reasons—they tend to be average or below-average performers and run up against interpersonal problems that can't be resolved. Others lose jobs in a power struggle or culture clash that has nothing to do with their performance.

So be honest with yourself: Take the blame for your own poor performance, if necessary, and then demonstrate that you have become stronger through the experience.

Most career experts advise people not to use the word "fired" during an interview, the article noted. Stay away from negative comments about past co-workers, too. Instead, talk about ways that you helped your previous employer. "There's always something good that you've learned from your past employer and position, even if you hated that job," said Kathy Sanborn, a career coach and author of *The Seasons of Your Career*.

If there wasn't a lot of enmity when you left, Sanborn recommends that you get a letter from the boss that fired you, including some positive points about what you contributed to the company. Failing that, you can ask a former co-worker to write an impressive letter or recommendation for you.

"Armed with proof that someone at your old job thought you were a good employee, you can go into your next job interview with more confidence," Sanborn told the newspaper.

Not giving up also means using the time away from work to reassess your career. You can seek out new opportunities, including nonprofit work, where you can develop a fresh track record and meet new contacts that can serve as references.

Take Mary Gilleece of Cambridge, Mass. for example. After losing her job last year as a database administrator, she has been helping a friend start a technical school during her time off. She hasn't made a cent from the work, but there have been other rewards, such as the satisfaction of being part of a project and surpassing even her own expectations. Said Gilleece: "I've done things I didn't even know that I could do."

## TAKE STEPS TO AVOID A LAYOFF

Even as the economy slowly expands, payrolls at some companies continue to shrink and potential layoffs remain a concern for many workers. Downsizing, re-organization, a shift in strategy – whatever you want to call it – can make going to work seem like a game of musical chairs. But, according to an article on *USA Today.com*, there are proactive measures you can take to ensure you're not left standing at the end of the road.

For sure, companies rarely select employees for layoffs randomly. Performance is the number one factor employers use to determine who to shed and who to hang onto, a study by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) revealed. Other major considerations include job function and skills.

Unlike length of tenure with your company, though, these are areas where you can exercise some control by making yourself indispensable. And while no plan of attack is layoff-proof, the sooner you start your offensive, the greater your odds will be. "You just can't turn the switch on and say, 'Okay, I'll be good now,'" warned Debra Cohen, director of research at SHRM. What you can do is start working right now to convince your boss that the company can't afford to lose you. Here's how:

**Keep your chin up.** "When word starts getting out (that there will be layoffs), people tend to feel less motivated to help the company," said Chris Jones, owner of PoliTemps, a staffing agency in Washington, D.C. But as bad news circulates, it becomes more important than ever to resist a workplace slump in performance. Managers are looking for people willing to tackle extra responsiveness after staff reductions. Pitching in and working beyond your job description shows you're competent, efficient and flexible.

**Find a safe haven.** Look around you. See any new faces? If so, you may want to join them. Many companies hire in areas that are bringing in revenue while they trim staff in departments that aren't meeting the bottom line. "Try to migrate to the area of the

company where there's growth," Richard Bayer of the career counseling and outplacement firm, the Five O'Clock Club, said. If you can identify the organization's prioritized operations, you may be able to follow the company resources to a safe zone.

**Look for needs.** To anticipate the company's shifting directions, track industry trends, talk to the firm's leaders about their goals, sit in on meetings and read about the company. But, of course, simply locating to safer waters isn't enough. "Take a look at where the organization does have needs, and determine if you have some talent or skill that they could use," Cohen said. To get the ball rolling, ask questions about new initiatives, discuss your related skills and experience, and volunteer your extra time.

**Brush up.** Sharpening your skills could also save you. "Once the ax is falling it can be too late. Before that time, if you see trouble on the horizon, make sure your skills are on the cutting edge," Bayer said. Enhance your expertise by taking classes at night, utilizing on-the-job training opportunities or volunteering for new projects. Joining professional associations can also keep you current. Plus, it's great for networking – if your preemptive strike fails to protect your position.

**Create a buzz.** "You have to manage your internal PR," Bayer said. "Take control of the way people see you." Consider this scenario: You meet the head honcho in the elevator and he or she politely asks how things are going. What do you say? 'Fine' is the wrong answer. Instead, use the opportunity to mention a project you're working on or a recent accomplishment. Don't talk the boss's ear off, but exude enthusiasm and give them a concrete reason to remember who you are.

"Project an image of someone who is up-to-date in their career," Bayer added. "You're respected in your profession. You're a member of associations. You bring outside information into the company. You're a person who takes initiatives."

**Behave yourself.** Managers may use layoffs to rid themselves of staff with personality problems—those with whom they have conflicts, or who have trouble getting along with others. So always try to be collegial, don't take credit for other people's work and be known as someone who supports other people. And most importantly, amid layoff pressure and stress, keep your temper in check.

## **SURVIVING AS A MANAGER AFTER 50**

Feeling threatened by younger, hipper, faster-moving colleagues is a rite of passage for every maturing generation, an article in *The Wall Street Journal* pointed out late last year. But baby boomers are feeling particularly squeezed as they see the corporate



definition of "over-the-hill" getting younger -- to the age when managers used to feel they were just coming into their own.

For many, retirement is out of the question, the article pointed out. They have had children later in life and haven't saved nearly enough to get by without a steady paycheck. Even if they don't have children to support, most aren't emotionally ready to stop working. Plus, they are far more fit and younger looking than their parents at the same age, and they think of themselves as just hitting middle age.

Take for example 52-year old Pat Garvey, a team leader at an apparel manufacturer in Greensboro, N.C. When a financial planner told him to start thinking about retirement, he said, "I told him to wait a minute. I have a nine-year old daughter and school bills to pay." For sure, Garvey is far from alone.

So how can managers like Garvey survive in the current business environment? According to David Noer, a Greensboro, N.C. consultant: they have to pace themselves like marathon runners. They also have to connect with people who can help them, and "who usually aren't their old cronies."

That also means communicating openly with young people and learning technology, the article stated. Garvey, for example, is willing to learn from his younger colleagues rather than insist he has all the answers. He also suggests trying to leverage in new ways the skills you have acquired over decades.

Garvey must also constantly prove his worth to stay in place at work. His past experience of handling a variety of jobs at a number of big companies has helped him to be flexible and adapt to change quickly.

In fact, according to the article, those who have bounced around among a number of companies stand a better chance of knowing how to read different corporate cultures and adjust to different management approaches. Many survivors live by the mantra of being portable, adaptive, and in charge of their own career. They are not looking for someone to take care of them for rest of their lives.

Frank Morgan, 57, global director of executive development and leadership at Dow Chemical is one of them. He never expected lifetime employment with one company. After graduating from Princeton, he left a doctorate program in clinical psychology for a job in human resources at General Foods. Later he worked at an art-supply company, managing its business in Latin America and Europe. But after realizing he had to stop traveling if he wanted his marriage to survive, he left the business world for academia.

Two years ago, after he was tapped by a recruiter, he joined Dow Chemical, moving from the South to the Midwest. Then, following Dow Chemical's acquisition of Union Carbide, he witnessed some of his peers laid-off. What he found especially painful, he said, was that many of these people had never worked anywhere else-and now felt stranded.

So if you're a manager approaching 50, in your 50's, or even 60 and over, pay close attention to Frank Morgan and Pat Garvey--and people like them--and try to learn from them. Broaden your horizons daily, be flexible and adaptable, be open to continuous education, build networks which can help you, look for new challenges and, most importantly, work hard at proving your worth every day.

There's always going to be someone coming up behind you, but if you regularly demonstrate your value to your employer, no matter what your age, you can survive in the business world for many years to come.

## **LAYOFF SURVIVORS MOVE UP FASTER**

Despite all of the bad news stemming from the economic downslide, there *has been* an upside: Some employees who have outlasted job cuts at their companies are advancing up the career ladder faster than they ever expected.

According to an article in *USA Today*, workers are getting promoted or are taking on new job responsibilities because downsizings have created room at the top. Middle managers are becoming top-level executives, while rank-and-file employees are suddenly being catapulted into supervisory roles.

"It's a mixed blessing," Barry Lawrence of CareerBuilder, a provider of job listings and career advice, told the newspaper. "There are negatives but there are also many positives. When there are layoffs those left behind get more chances to spread their wings and apply new skills. There are many more opportunities."

The advancement, according to the article by Stephanie Armour, can mean more work. Some employees are being promoted to handle jobs that were previously done by two or more other workers. "It's been a learning experience for me," said DanaWyn Sherman, 43, of New York, who was a project manager promoted to director of sales support at her entertainment web site. "It's a job three people were doing before. I had the good fortune, though, of not replacing anyone I was friends with."

Advancement can also mean more experience as survivors learn jobs and make contacts that they may have had to wait years to achieve had downsizing not occurred.

Damien Bruno, 27, of New York, used to focus mostly on Internet marketing, he told *USA Today*. Since his boss was laid off, though, he's getting more traditional marketing experience. He said he always expected to be promoted, but "it wouldn't have happened at this speed" without layoffs at his firm.

There are also new challenges occurring for workers. Layoff survivors may feel uncomfortable taking jobs once held by friends or colleagues. They also can face resentment from co-workers bypassed for promotions. "It's a manifestation of a larger problem of survivor guilt," said Peter Cappelli, author of *The New Deal at Work: Managing the Market-Driven Workplace*. "It's even worse if you find yourself profiting from a friend's demise."

Opportunities are also coming at firms that have dodged layoffs but imposed hiring freezes, giving employees more responsibilities, the article pointed out. For example, at Highpoint Solutions, a Tacoma, Wash.-based Internet strategy and design firm, a receptionist was promoted to senior associate producer.

"It's been wonderful because we've really had to stretch people into different capacities," CEO Steve Brock said in the article. "People have grown in their roles and exceeded all of our expectations, as well as their own."

But there can be risks if enough training isn't provided, experts maintain. "It's important to be very upfront with everybody," said Bruce Tulgan, a management consultant in New Haven, Conn. "Decisions can be made because of lack of resources and haste, and that can be a problem."

## FINDING A JOB IN A TOUGH ECONOMY

So how do you find a job when job openings are scarce? According to Richard N. Bowles, author of the world's best-selling job search guide, *What Color Is Your Parachute?*, the key is you have to work harder at it.

"When people say it's a really tough economy, what they mean is they're going to have to spend a lot more time trying to find the jobs that are out there," said Bowles in a recent interview with *USA Today's Careers Network*. "There are always jobs, but in bad economic times you have to spend more time looking for them."

Bowles said you also have to be very proactive in your job-hunting techniques because many jobs don't get readily advertised. He recommends having a goal of visiting at least three places every day, even to just make contacts. "The average job hunter does

not want to go face-to-face... but what has been discovered is that there's a tremendous percentage of success when you go face-to-face," Bowles said.

It's also important to recognize that the rules of the job hunt have changed. In the past experts would have recommended taking some time off to regroup and strategize about the next move. Not anymore. You need to be aggressive, especially in promoting yourself, and look for a new job right away.

"You should be both pressed and urgent to get it done," said John Challenger, chief executive of Challenger, Grey & Christmas in a recent *Smart Money.com* article. "This is a game of musical chairs, and the situation will get worse before it gets better." In other words, if you don't take one of the few spots now, you could be out of work a lot longer than you expect.

Career counselors and headhunters universally say the most important attitude job hunters need to adopt in a recession is flexibility. If you can't find the right job in your immediate area of interest, you'll need to expand your search. If you aren't willing to relocate, you'll have to be flexible about function, or even industry, advised Jamie King, associate director of the Ford Career Center at the University of Texas at Austin, in the same article.

Job seekers may even have to settle for a lesser position than the one they lost. "We are already seeing people taking roles and positions that are not the same caliber that they might have been offered a year ago," Steve Zales, president and chief executive officer of Spencer Stuart Talent Network, told *Smart Money.com*.

So instead of worrying about whether a new job is a rung higher or lower on the career ladder, take something you'll enjoy and that allows you to learn new skills. A step down or sideways also might be more palatable if it means you're joining a solid, growing company that will offer opportunity for advancement.

So where are the jobs? Energy and health-care related companies remain strong and are actively recruiting, said Gary Fraser, assistant dean of the Office of Career Development for New York University's Stern School of Business. Looking for a job in financial services or consulting? The going could be a lot tougher.

But if you've lost your job, don't lose hope. "It's not a total bleak barren landscape—just a challenging one, and people have to be willing to take on that challenge," Zales added.

## **NEGOTIATING A PAY RAISE IN A SLOW ECONOMIC RECOVERY**

Many hardworking Americans coming due for a salary review believe they deserve more money today because they endured salary freezes and bonus cuts during the recession. But with pay raises clinging to an average of 3 percent, in an economy experiencing a slow and unpredictable recovery, that's easier said than done.

So how do you best negotiate a pay raise, especially a better-than-average one, in the current economic environment? The key, according to numerous benefits consultants, is to try to figure out what the boss cares about most and then demonstrate how you're helping to achieve those goals.

"You have to prove that you're someone the company should invest in," suggested Paul Platten, a managing consultant with benefits consultant Wyatt Worldwide, in a recent article in The Wall Street Journal.

Employees seeking a raise (of any size) also need to articulate their specific value to the business, said Denise Aird, president of Executive Realities, a Chicago executive coaching firm, in the same article. She advised people to list any revenue they have brought in over the past year, describe new skills they have gained, and present "several sources of objective" data showing their worth in their industry. Other experts suggest that employees map all of this in a chart, highlighting data in a "de-personalized" fashion.

Some employers have begun to heed such pay-pressure tactics, according to the article. Matt Weller, president of recruiting and consulting firm Brokerage Consultants Inc., granted a 15-percent raise to one of his 12 employees several months ago. Her salary increase was the firm's first this year because business had been flat and salaries were frozen.

Why the 15-percent increase? The rewarded manager proved she had assumed additional tasks and quantified her contribution to the bottom line, Eller said. With business starting to pick-up again, Weller realized it was much more costly to lose a valued employee. He added that he would grant other staffers raises if they also demonstrated their specific worth in similar fashion.

Nevertheless, many employers still don't plan to be very generous this year, the article pointed out.

If efforts to win raises fail, don't give up. Executive coach Ryan recommends that employees should ask their manager what steps they can take to receive more money

at a later date, and then offer the manager a written reminder of his or her proposed steps when that date arrives. "It's a nice little tool for later," she added.

Here are some other tips for negotiating a pay raise, according to *The Wall Street Journal* careers columnist Kemba J. Dunham:

- Carefully assess whether there are concrete signs that your company is truly in a recovery mode.
- Talk to others-preferably outside of your company-who have successfully received a pay raise recently for ideas on how to strategize.
- Visit Web sites that cater to your industry or focus on salary issues to ascertain your earnings potential.
- Approach your manager in person about discussing a pay raise.
- Don't focus exclusively on what a great performer you are when approaching your manager for a raise. Stress instead that you're a teamplayer who is contributing to the greater good of the company or division.