

The Straits Times: Tuesday, September 18, 2001



Back to Life

Did you hold a senior management position but were retrenched recently? Are you at a loss as to how to get back into the corporate world? Be prepared to get hired again.

If you are in your forties, are used to drawing a few hundred thousand dollars a year, and being courted by several headhunters with multiple job offers at any one time, it is easy to feel bewildered if you lose your job. But you still have much experience and knowledge, and there is a strategy of working yourself back into the job market. Here's how:

1. Shrink financial burdens

Stop being negative and cynical. Leave the past behind you and look forward. If you are heavily geared financially, approach your bankers for re-financing. If necessary, down grade your standard of living to ease the financial pressure.

2. Appeal to networks

Statistics have revealed that more than half of the recruitment at senior management level is done through personal contacts. When a senior manager leaves, other than promoting from within, those in management usually use personal networks and employee referrals to seek suitable candidates.

Ask around your personal network of contacts to see if they know of suitable vacancies in their organizations and ask their help to refer you to the recruiting manager. Get ideas from them. Don't be shy to follow up.

3. Organize your search

Keep a list of the opportunities you follow up on – the companies and the recruiting managers. Regularly reflect on them. This is to help you be prepared should they call you. As search consultants, we regularly receive calls from candidates asking us to return their calls. But when we do, we are asked where we are calling from. This does not create a good first impression.

4. Choose carefully

If you're not familiar with the recruitment industry, take time to find out which players operate in your area of expertise.

Employment agencies operate at the support staff level. Search and selection firms advertise and they are strong in the middle management level. Headhunting companies do not advertise and they operate at the senior management level.

Forget about sending your CV to any search consultant in the hope that he will "float" it around the industry. The business does not quite work that way. Bear in mind the implications of your CV being seen every where in the market – you might look like a desperate job seeker.

Besides, when your CV lands on an employer's table through a search firm, you are more expensive to hire, compared to someone who approached the employer directly as the latter does not attract an agency fee.

5. Circulate your name

The last thing you should do is to stay at home, withdraw from society and feel sorry for yourself. Distinguish yourself from others by showing your ability to rise above adversity.

Offer to do voluntary work, keep your mind agile and give yourself chances to mingle with others. Taking part in seminars gives opportunities to network.

6. Think positive

In spite of the economic downturn, those in senior management are still saying, “Good people are hard to find”. Opportunities are still available. Maintain a professional stand. The economic upswing will return in time. But the same jobs may not be there. So, be flexible, do some soul-searching, take stock of your skills set and consider doing something different.

7. Polish your CV

Maintain the discipline of updating your CV regularly, so that you can send one out at short notice. It helps your search consultant too. Despite the numerous articles published on how to craft an effective CV, the standard CV search consultants get is still appalling. Don't underestimate the importance of a well-written CV.

8. Gather your references

It is in your interest to be aware that in a typical retrenchment exercise, the first batch of employees let go are usually the non-performers.

Even if you were retrenched for other reasons, note that your prospective employer will ask why you left. Be prepared to answer him truthfully.

The best way of blowing your trumpet is to let someone else do it for you. So, ask the help of your latest bosses and peers to vouch for your performance.

Obtain reference letters and prepare a list of your referees' names and contact numbers. References play a critical role in the recruitment process in separating A-list candidates from B-list ones.

Article contributed by Doris Cheng, Partner of Doris Cheng & Associates, an executive search firm specializing in the search of senior level executives in the technology industry.

Doris Cheng, Managing Director
391A Orchard Road
#13-08 Ngee Ann City Tower A
Singapore 238873
Email: d.cheng@pacific.net.sg
Direct Line +65 68872232

