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Widen your network

With Christmas approaching and the year coming to a close, are you feeling stressed and down because you have still not found the job you want? Maybe it is time to ask yourself: are you adopting the right job search strategy? Have you taken the right steps?

The job market may be soft but hiring is still taking place. Employers are filling strategic positions made vacant.

Companies are not all equally hit by the downturn, so some are hiring, though cautiously.

Looking for a job is similar to selling a product or service. Working out a strategy to effectively market yourself is the Key. Knowing which companies are hiring and who the hiring decision-makers within the company are is equally important.

The human resource department does not always do the hiring. They are facilitators. Not all job vacancies within an organization are advertised. Studies have shown that the most people (70 percent) find new jobs through networking than through other means.

Whether in good or bad times, when a position needs to be filled, employers will usually try to find the right candidates through networking, failing which they'll resort to a search or recruitment firm to assist them.

Sadly, a large number of people do not realize this. Hence, all they do is send their resumes to search or recruitment companies, expecting these companies to help them find a job.

An observation of the market here is that most people do not network enough, compared to, say, people in Hong Kong. When they are hit with retrenchment, they do not know what to do or how to begin networking. Many rely on search firms to find them a job, not realizing the search firms do not find jobs for candidates.

Search and recruitment companies find candidates for their fee-paying clients. They are not search and-rescue outfits for people who are out of jobs.

If you are reluctant to network, it's because you may feel embarrassed. It is all right as most people are actually glad to help, provided you approach them correctly.

Some may not be able to help you directly, but they may be able to refer you to their contacts who may be able to help you. That is how you widen your network.

In networking, your objective is to increase your number of contacts, obtain referrals and get as many relevant people involved in your job search as much as possible.

Increasing your network gives you access to information on the industry you are studying. It also helps you to target companies. You want your network to remember to talk to you should they hear of a job opening.

One important you must never do when approaching a contact, however, is to ask for a job. This will put him in awkward position and he may feel embarrassed that he has to "Reject" you, so to speak. Put him at ease by asking for his advice and guidance on your job search strategy as he is knowledgeable about the job market and has a network.

If you network effectively, you will soon find that people will call you should they know of a job opening.

Send Targeted Letters.

Another approach to securing your dream job is to send targeted application letters.

Once you have identified the target companies that might be of interest to you, you should research them. The internet is a rich resource for this. Prepare an effective cover letter summarizing the key points and ask for an interview.

Keep track of where you mail your letters as you may receive a call from a recipient a few days or a few weeks later. You do not want to appear as if you did a mass mailing and cannot recall who you sent your resumes to. Imagine how disorganized you would sound to a prospective boss.

Mail such letters in batches and follow up with a telephone call to ask for an interview then mail the next batch. This approach may uncover hidden opportunities.

The biggest advantage for the company that is interested is that you are less expensive to hire as there are no agency fees involved. Besides, you have demonstrated your initiative by sending out a letter and making it your job to impress them.

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