

March 18, 2009

How to Find a Job in Any Economy

Why I'm offering this information:

My agenda is to help people find their next job, especially those who have been recently laid off. I'm not a recruiter or a job coach. I run an SAP and JD Edwards training practice, but this has nothing to do with that. This has to do with my obligation to the broader community.

20 years ago, I read a small book on job-hunting which explained the method I outline here. I can't remember the title or the author, so if anyone recognizes the book from this write-up, please let me know. I'd like to give credit where credit is due.

Why a different approach is needed:

The typical job hunt goes like this: You find openings on the Internet, and you send your resume in and/or fill out an application form. You wait a few weeks, and after not hearing from the company's HR department, you call them and ask the status of your application. The HR department says "you'll be notified by email", or they say "we don't have the resources to respond to every applicant, so if we are interested, we'll contact you." You continue to hear nothing, and you continue to respond to dozens or even hundreds of job ads. Six months later, you find a stop-gap job that you have to take. Your career is on hold.

Did you know that small companies—those with less than 10 employees—create a lot of unadvertised jobs? According to the New York Times, in 2008, 3.8 million companies had fewer than 10 workers, and they employed 12.4 million people, or roughly 11 percent of the private sector work force.

Regardless of company size, many jobs are not advertised. Someone knows someone else and they get hired—friends of employees, for example. Think about the hundreds (if not thousands) of applicants responding to advertised jobs. Your chances of standing out from the crowd with a resume and getting the job are quite low.

Instead of this process, consider a six-week campaign to identify and contact 100-200 hiring authorities (people that can actually hire you) in your area. That's what I did 20 years ago, and I am sharing these techniques in hopes that this method saves you pain and wasted time.

In 1989 I needed a new position in the IT industry and I conducted a successful job hunt using these methods. I contacted 100 software companies in the Denver area, and 10 of them interviewed me. Three companies called me back for 2nd and 3rd interviews, and I accepted a job offer from one of those. Total elapsed time: 6 weeks. The company that hired me was JD Edwards, and I worked for them for 10 years, before starting my own company that provides JD Edwards training and consulting services.

Here's how I did it and it's as relevant today as it was 20 years ago.

Step 1: Know what you want to do.

When I conducted my last job hunt, I knew that I wanted to work for a software company in customer support. Based on previous experience, I eliminated related software jobs such as sales and programming.

My last job hunt was in 1989, so if I were doing this today, I would pick a particular niche in the software industry where my background would be a good fit. For example, I might focus exclusively on CRM software, or the Energy and Chemical industry market—areas where I have specialized skills.

If you don't know what you want to do, it will be pretty obvious to potential employers. If you need help getting focused on a specific type of job, then I recommend that you hit the library or the bookstores. Check out the job-hunting section, for books like *What Color is Your Parachute*.

Step 2: Do your research.

Research companies and individuals that you want to call. When I did this 20 years ago, the Internet did not exist, so I went to the local library. I found a directory of Denver-based software companies that included information about company size and products, and most importantly, some contact names of top managers.

I also used the Yellow Pages to find the names of other software companies. By the time I stopped gathering company names, I had basic info on 100 software companies. I had contacts for about 35 of those companies.

If I had a company name but no specific hiring authority to contact, I would call the company and try to find out the name and number of the person I needed to talk with. Today, I think many of these hiring authority names could be found on the Internet.

A great source of contacts is www.Linkedin.com. Build your network now, before you need it. Read this blog for more on LinkedIn: <http://blog.guykawasaki.com/2009/02/10-ways-to-use.html>

Sometimes it isn't easy to get past the "gatekeeper" to get to the right person, or to find out who that right person is. Try asking for a salesperson. When you get to them, apologize for taking their time, and then ask for the name of the person you need to speak with.

Step 3: Prepare a 15 second introduction.

When you call the hiring authority, you'll have about 20 seconds to make a good impression. I was fortunate that my background included 3 years at IBM, so my introduction went something like this:

"Hello (insert name here), my name is Andy Klee, and I have 5 years of IT experience including 3 years at IBM. I'd like to come in and discuss working for your company."

If I were looking for a job today, I'd be more specific about my current skills, assuming that I was looking for a JD Edwards related job at a JDE client. So my pitch might be:

"Hello (insert name here), my name is Andy Klee, and I have 20 years of JD Edwards experience, specializing in Distribution with an emphasis on Advanced Pricing and Sales Order Management. I'd like to come in and discuss working for your company."

It's even better if you can quickly point out how your work has helped previous clients or employers:

"Hello (insert name here), my name is Andy Klee, and my 20 years of JD Edwards experience includes helping many clients maximize their revenue potential through best practice pricing methods. I'd like to come in and discuss working for your company."

Notice that I didn't ask if they were hiring or if there were any job openings. That just gives people the opportunity to say "no, we aren't hiring". What you are really saying is: "I'm available, I can help you succeed—let's meet and talk."

Also, **notice that you aren't calling anyone in HR.** Their job is to tell you there are no jobs. Instead, you are calling the person who can make the hiring decision—the manager with the authority to hire.

Practice your pitch with friends or professional associates until it sounds right to you. Be authentic. Don't oversell yourself.

If you are looking outside your driving distance, you'll need to adjust your closing sentence to indicate that you would like to "schedule a time to talk about working for your company".

Step 4: Make those phone calls

Visualize success! Make the calls when you are coming from a positive place. If you feel bad about yourself or your situation, it will come through when you make the calls.

The first day I made these calls, I almost fell off my chair when the fifth or sixth person I called said, "Sure, come on in. Let's talk." So be prepared for some success right away.

Once you are in the door, be ready for either a "get to know you, in case we have an opening soon" type of interview, or an interview for a specific job opening. Brush up on your interview skills. Be ready for the typical questions about your strengths and weaknesses.

Why does this work?

This is speculation on my part, but I think there are several possible reasons why this method works so well:

First, you are talking with the right person—not the HR department.

Second, some companies would like to replace a weak employee, if they have a great replacement lined up.

Third, companies are often looking to hire "the best athlete available", similar to how NFL teams will sometimes draft a great athlete regardless of the position they play. You might get hired because you exhibit great potential to solve a problem they weren't even thinking about prior to meeting you.

Fourth, companies want to hire people who can add value to their business quickly. That means someone who can solve problems, increase revenue, or bring down costs. That's you! Right?

There, you have it. It's not rocket science, but doesn't it make sense? Instead of competing with masses of people for a very small number of posted jobs, you are out there competing with almost no one for a larger number of current and future openings.

So, give it a try, and please send me your feedback, sample pitches, and experiences about what works and doesn't work for you. Email me at Andy.Klee@ERPTips.com.

Want to join the conversation about job hunting tips? Get yourself on www.Linkedin.com (create a profile if you don't already have one), and join this group:
<http://www.linkedin.com/e/vgh/1853434/>

There are many good job-related websites. One that I like is: <http://jobmarket.nytimes.com/pages/jobs/>. Scroll down the left side and there are some good articles to read.