



by **Walter E. Palmer, CFI, CPP, CFE**

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## Mastering the Fundamentals Tactical Job Search

**O**ne topic that is almost guaranteed to interest an audience is how to get ahead in the workplace—how to get a job, get a raise, get a promotion, or get a title. Millions of dollars are spent each year on books that promise to give you the secrets to achieve success. Yet, our thirst for “new” tips or secrets never wanes.

However, no matter how many books or articles you read, there are certain fundamentals that are timeless, but not glamorous. This article addresses some of the basics that are most important to a job search.

### Skill Set

There is no “tactic” that will substitute for having the appropriate skill set for a particular job. That means your next job search begins *today* with the efforts you are making to develop and expand your skill set. If you suddenly find yourself out of work and looking for a job, you will be stuck with the skill set you have at that time, unless you can afford to take some time off to develop new skills.

Honestly answer the following questions:

- Are you taking full advantage of the training programs your organization offers internally?
- If you go to a conference, are you maximizing the potential learning you can bring back from it?
- Are you reading publications and books that expand your expertise?
- Have you considered professional certifications to further your skills?
- Have you considered taking a class on-line or at the local university to further your education?
- Are you developing your skills with appropriate computer programs (not Half-Life 2 or Madden 2005)?
- Have you worked on your speaking skills by joining an organization like Toastmasters International?

There are no short-cuts. No matter what other things you do well in a job search, the limiting factor usually begins here.

### Networking

We all know what this means, don't we? I'm not sure that's the case. I probably get, on average, two or three calls a week from individuals who are looking for a job. What bothers me, though, is that seems to be the only time I hear from them.

Networking is not calling someone only when you need a favor. Networking should be about establishing and maintaining professional relationships that support one another.

I have a fairly extensive network of people that I value. But, it takes an effort to maintain those relationships when I get busy or when I'm traveling or when I don't see them for a period of time. However, the effort I put into maintaining those relationships is rewarded time after time by the value those people offer to me.

I'd suggest setting aside one to two hours a week on your calendar strictly for the purpose of networking...within your organization, within your department, and within the industry.

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Additionally, if you get the chance to go to a workshop or conference, use that opportunity to take the initiative to meet other professionals, not just your buddies, but new people who will expand your network. Then, if you need a favor, you will have others who want to help you.

### Recruiters

Executive recruiters are an important element in the job search process. However, many job seekers misunderstand their role. Recruiters are not looking to place you in a job. They are looking to fill jobs with qualified candidates. That is a very significant difference that is often misunderstood. They are not acting as your agent, so don't expect them to do all of the work on your job search.

Additionally, recruiters usually only hear from people when they are looking for a job. Include executive recruiters in your

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networking efforts as they have important insights and interest in our industry, as well. Develop a relationship with them before you need it. Then, if they have an opportunity for which you are qualified, you will be "top of mind."

### Resumes

It always amazes me when I receive a resume that has misspelled words, bad grammar, or looks like it was produced on a 1970s typewriter. I'm not suggesting you make your resume a work of art or place your faith in the resume being the deciding factor on whether you get a job. But, it is usually the first opportunity for you to sell yourself to prospective employers.

When I see a misspelling on a resume, it indicates to me a lack of effort and sloppy preparation on the part of the candidate. Is that unfair or extreme? Let me ask you this, if someone has misspellings and bad grammar on their resumes, what do you think the quality of their reports, memos, and presentations will be? There is simply no excuse that I find valid on this issue.

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### Thank-You Notes

I'm not sure I've ever seen an article or presentation on job search that doesn't address the importance of writing thank-you notes to your prospective employer after interviewing with them. Yet, when I was working in the corporate environment and hiring regional loss prevention managers, I received thank-you notes from only 20 to 30 percent of the candidates.

What should have simply been an accepted protocol, actually became a factor that differentiated and helped those candidates stand apart from the others. If you interview...on the phone, in person, or with an executive recruiter...get a hand-written note in the mail to them that day thanking them for their time and expressing your interest in the position. And, no, an email does not count. Show the person that you care enough about the opportunity that you are actually willing to spend ten minutes to write a note, address it, and put a stamp on it.

If you're not willing to do that, you don't deserve the job. ■

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