



Are You Prepared for Changing Employers?

People frequently change jobs, or move from one employer to another. Some have their job search thrust upon them by suddenly losing their job through redundancy, a personality clash, or not meeting performance indicators. Those seeking alternative employment are concerned with identifying the right job and its career opportunities, and how to present themselves effectively as the most suitable person to perform it.

Most job seekers need assistance in their job search: how to find jobs suited to particular skills and aspirations; the best manner in which to communicate with prospective employers, employment agencies; how to catch the attention of an employer reviewing many job applications; the way in which interview questions are best handled; and what an applicant needs to find out in order to make a satisfying job and career choice.

Employers are increasingly using training systems designed to develop the interviewing skills of their recruitment personnel. However, the job applicant rarely has the same type of help in the job search process.

Even if you are not actually looking for a job, perhaps you are not quite as happy in your current job as you would like to be. Perhaps you cannot use all your talents to the full, or there are no long-term prospects. You may find that staying in an unsatisfying job causes you to become frustrated with many aspects of your life. This can cause your job performance to deteriorate.

If you do make the decision to change employers, other problems then arise. You will need to cope with a new set of procedures and attitudes in the search for another job. You have to decide which direction will bring you more happiness and satisfaction in the future.

It can easily take three months—or more—to find a worthwhile position and an environment, which is compatible with your objectives. During that time you will experience the pleasures and difficulties of re-evaluating your life and choice of occupation. You will become reacquainted with yourself, with your strengths and limitations. It is definitely a personal growth process—providing you prepare properly for it.

Many people fail to obtain jobs that are well within their performance capabilities. They fail because they make mistakes in their job-searching activities, or are unaware of the more effective ways to obtain and handle selection interviews. Their job applications tend to be poorly organised, weak in content, dull to read; they frequently include irrelevancies. Often hurriedly put together, such applications reduce the chances of obtaining interviews and employment offers. Frustration and depression can result when rejections are received or job interviews fail. These applicants are repeating the same mistakes, not knowing what is wrong with their approach.

The following recommendations are designed to help you sell your qualifications to prospective employers—not to help you obtain a job beyond the level of your experience, knowledge and capabilities. In that direction lays only the potential for

unhappiness and failure.

These recommendations are about creating your personal brand. In your career transition branding helps define who you are, how good you are at what you do, and why you should be sought out and hired. Branding is about showcasing what sets you apart from others, and describing the added value you can bring to a job situation. Take time to read more about personal branding for the job search at this web site; your investment in this time may be well rewarded http://www.quintcareers.com/career_branding.html

Job search preparation

You would not start out on a long car journey or bush walk without first planning and checking your equipment. The job search process is really no different. Care and time should be given to each item you will need. There are even some things you should prepare which you hope you will not need before your efforts are over. Credit facilities are an example of this.

It pays to research thoroughly and talk to an expert before you set out, so that the chances of failure are reduced. Vocational counsellors, career coaches, HR staff and experienced recruiters know how to detect the faulty parts of your job search procedure.

You will need several items. The most important is a summary of what you want and what you are offering. The best way to do this is to prepare a résumé in which you provide, among other information, proof of your skills by listing what you have achieved for past employers.

You will need several types of job application letter for transmission by e-mail or by post. Preparing a set of letters for different uses before you start job searching is time well spent. Then, when you spot an employment opportunity, you can quickly amend one of your letters to suit the particular situation. You will need a spell check facility on your computer or a dictionary and/or thesaurus to check the spelling of words and aid the search for an interest-arousing vocabulary.

You need someone with whom to rehearse selection interviews. Practice answers to questions you are likely to be asked. Clothes in which you look and feel good should be prepared.

Arrange a programme of physical activity so that the less welcome effects of the stress of job searching can be controlled and reduced. Organise some of your friends to be your support group—people with whom you can talk frankly about your feelings and job-searching experiences.

Job searching can be an exhausting and demoralising experience. It can also be an exciting journey of exploration to a new interest and energy in your work life. Careful preparation is a critical factor in increasing the chances of a satisfactory and early conclusion to your job search campaign.



Find out about yourself

Many people put the cart before the horse when they try to find a new job. They start with the jobs that are advertised, and not with themselves, their skills, interests, values and abilities. This is the wrong approach.

Your first step in finding a satisfying job in your chosen field should be to analyse your past experience and assess all your abilities. This is not an easy task, whether you are reviewing one year or 25 years of employment experiences.

You need to find out what different types of work environments encourage you to be successful. Your analysis should include:

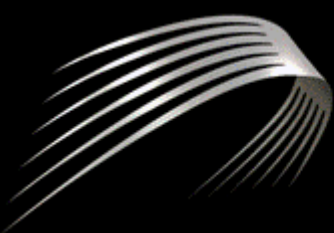
- what have I done successfully? (and enjoyed?)
- what have I done that others have commended me for doing well?
- what areas of my chosen field of work am I *really* qualified to administer?
- what training have I received and benefited from since leaving school?

You need to develop a comprehensive list of the competencies that you have to offer an employer; you are not 'just' an accountant, a systems designer or a sales representative. Many underestimate their working potential.

To convince an employer that you have much to offer, it is essential to know the full range of your skills and capabilities. Many people go through their work lives using only a few skills, unaware of the full extent of their talents and capabilities.

An astute job seeker takes steps to have this assessment carried out by competent counsellors. This process is likely to identify worthwhile points of which the job seeker was previously unaware. It does not matter whether you are looking for your first job or are an experienced member of the labour market. Using a career coach's service is no admission of weakness. It is a sensible and practical step that may shorten the period of your job search.

Some skills emerge early in our lives. Most develop more slowly and can be difficult to recognise. Our skills grow in number and quality as we learn from experiences, both at work and in other activities. It is a common misconception that if a skill was not learned in employment then it is of no interest to employers. People working as career development coaches know this is not true. In fact, we all learn many work-related skills through everyday living. A housewife certainly knows about stock control and budget management; a school-leaver who has helped organise a school dance or play knows about planning; and a club committee member knows about conflict resolution and handling complaints. A skill learned in activities like these can be applied usefully in employment and be used to improve the content of your job applications.



Achieving job search goals

Investigate the services of career development coaches in private practice. This investment of your money could be an important move towards learning more about who you really are and help considerably to attain a satisfactory work life.

Alternatively, check with your local public library staff and consult relevant books containing career planning guides, self-assessment aids and skill inventory questionnaires. If your library does not have useful literature to help your diagnosis of who you are and what you can offer, an Internet search will produce an extraordinary range of sources.

There are several self-learning workbooks available to help you to conduct personal analysis and skills exploration. Such books provide exercises and questionnaires which help you examine your personal values, career preferences, life satisfactions, work-related strengths and underdeveloped capabilities.

You have arrived at the point where you have identified the skills you enjoy using, your values, your work style preferences and the type of work which will meet most of your needs,

A common pitfall at this stage is to regard the process as being complete—you feel the only thing that now has to be done is to apply immediately for the 'right' job. But this feeling of self-awareness and self-confidence is often deceptive. You probably don't have sufficient information to find the right job or employer, nor would you have accumulated all the necessary evidence to persuade employers to hire you.



Reality testing

Reality testing means obtaining information to verify whether the type and level of job you have identified is the most appropriate for you. At the same time, you are gathering information which will be a valuable addition to your job application. The more convincing the evidence of capabilities, the more likely the chances of securing interview invitations when you begin your job search.

What inhibits many people from carrying through the reality-testing phase of job searching? Perhaps the belief that the true nature of an occupation or job cannot be studied without actually performing the tasks involved, or that the true nature of an industry needs to be experienced to be understood. Neither belief is, in fact, an obstacle to reality testing. Consider the wealth of information you can obtain from the following:

- *People* - You can make contact with people already in your targeted field, customers of and suppliers to the relevant industry, and ask for information from the professional or trade association.
- *Publications* - Most industries publish information about their activities. Annual reports, newsletters and house journals are further examples of information that you can easily obtain.

In fact, there is very little which is kept secret about the nature of jobs or activities of most employers. You simply need to ask them or use the web for this research.

The process of analysis of the industry or job that seems right for you is not complete until you can honestly answer 'yes' to the following questions:

- Do you actually know as much about your target industry as is likely to be expected of someone of your job level?
- Do you have a thorough knowledge of its present trends and future outlook?
- Have you learnt enough about the target job role and industry to be able to lead a conversation with intelligent questions and demonstrate the thoroughness of your research?

The breadth and depth of the information you can obtain depends very much on the care you exercise in asking for what you want. These considerations may sound obvious, but your future work life satisfaction can depend on them. Do not take a casual or accelerated path through the reality-testing phase. There is too much at stake to treat it carelessly.

Maintaining your morale

There are some basic rules that you can follow to keep your spirits up and improve your chances of success while job hunting:

- retain a positive attitude and think of yourself as one of the 95% per cent who secure a job, not one of the 5 per cent who miss out.
- do not expect any job to guarantee you security.
- try to have a flexible attitude towards employment during your working lifetime, as you are likely to have a number of different jobs.
- have confidence and belief in your abilities before trying to promote yourself to someone else.
- finally, and most importantly, fight despondency. Do not give up when you are not immediately successful—keep trying.

When the process of self-analysis and skills identification is complete, your application strategy worked out, prospective employment analysed and reality tested, your morale reviewed and maintained, you are ready to begin the search. If you have skipped a phase of this process, then you are very likely to have to go through it all again at some point in the future.

About the Author Paul Stevens

*Paul Stevens, B.Bus., founded The Centre for Worklife Counselling in Sydney in 1979 following a 21 year career in Human Resources Management and The Worklife Network – a national and international affiliation of adult career specialists – in 1986. He wrote his first published contribution to adult career development in 1981, *Win That Job!*, closely followed by *Stop Postponing the Rest of Your Life*. Over 35 further titles, booklets and career assessment instruments have been published since, the latest being *A Passion for Work: Our Lifelong Affair* and *My Third Age: Work & Life Choices*.*

Paul's dedication to assisting adults in transition has been recognised in many ways – he is Fellow of the Australian Association of Career Counsellors (AACC) and in April 2000 was awarded their highest honour, Life Membership; former Research Fellow in Adult Career Development, University of Wollongong; former Member, Board of Governors, Institute of Career Certification International (ICC International); Member, Asian Accreditation Panel for Career Management Certification (AAPCMC); Fellow Practitioner and World Council Australian Representative, Association of Career Professionals International; Honorary Member, Professional Résumé Writing & Research Association; Board Member, The Career Development Leadership Alliance; Honorary Member, Elite Performers Lifeskill Advisers Association; Honorary Member, Asian Association of Career Management Professionals (AACMP); Director of Studies for the eLearning global facility, The College for Career Practitioners, recipient of the Career Counselling Excellence Award from the AACC in conjunction with its sponsor, New Hobsons Press; and Author and Designer of Worklife's CareerMastery® Virtual Career Centre.