

Career Planning

By Hugh Owen

Before our panelists discuss the tactics that they use to be successful in their careers, it is desirable to spend a few minutes discussing the general strategies that can help make almost any career successful.

In a depressed economic situation like ours, the real national unemployment rate may be at least 15%. This includes the official unemployment rate along with those who have given up on finding work and those forced into working fewer hours than they would like. But despite this record rate, in February there were still 2.7 million job openings! Most of these openings represent a career opportunity for someone. Such openings are created by the growth of organizations—especially small ones—that are prospering in spite of, or even because of the recession. And even without growth, openings are created by:

- promotions
- retirements
- workers quitting their jobs
- sickness or injury
- death
- firings and layoffs

How do you find and sort through such opportunities to find a series of challenging and satisfying occupational situations that you can call a career? To do this, it is good to engage in some career planning. Career planning involves researching yourself and the world around you.

- You need to research the kind of work that you want to do. This involves researching yourself by inventorying your skills, knowledge, values, and the manner or style in which you use your skills—the latter have been called adaptive traits.
- Career planning also involves defining the kinds of problems that you are best equipped to solve, your preferred working conditions, and preferred level of responsibility and salary. In short, you need to decide what kinds of problems you really care about solving in the world of work. This kind of introspective research allows you to distinguish yourself from other job candidates when you are promoting yourself during your career.
- You need to identify where you want to work. Through your research you need to identify up to about 50 Potential Organizational Targets whose missions coincide with yours by specifying the geographic location, organizational size, and industries you like best. Research these organizations and their unique requirements.
- This list of Potential Organizational Targets is more important than your resume, since it makes you focus your networking efforts—you can qualify for a job without a resume, but it is difficult to have a job without an employer.

Concentrate on this list instead of randomly looking for advertised job openings. If you wait long enough, every organization will have openings, or if you approach in the right way, they may create an opening just for you!

Defining the kind of work that you want to do and where you want to do it allows you to formulate and articulate your marketing message to those around you—including those making hiring decisions. This message is the theme of your resume. It is the message you want to send out “on the grapevine” during your job searches. It is the foundation of successful interviewing.

Before this talk comes to a close, I would like to mention social networking, since it is the most effective way of identifying and competing for career opportunities, with a 50% success rate, yet it is often underutilized. This is especially true of less outgoing job seekers who favor responding to job postings on the internet, a method that has at most only a 4 to 10% success rate. An excellent book on networking is reviewed in the handout supplied for this talk.

So, in both good times and in bad times, do not think that your present job is your last, or that you are indispensable at work. Far too many technical writers have discovered that in the eyes of management that they are not. Keep revising your career plan, looking around for Potential Organizational Targets and continuing to network.

If you have any questions about what has been presented here you are welcome to send me an e-mail at technical.writer@verizon.net with your message and telephone number. Depending on the complexity of the issue involved, I will mail or telephone you back.