

THE SUCCESSFUL EXECUTIVE'S TOOL KIT

Three things you need when jobs appear unexpectedly

By Robert Meier

Unexpected job opportunities can catch most professionals off-guard, but a little forethought can protect your career. We can't take for granted that sufficient warning will be offered when a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity comes knocking. Good career management requires that you put together a career kit. The best time to find a great job is when you don't need one, so if you prepare now for unexpected career situations, your payoff is a more rewarding career path.

A Good Career-Kit Includes 3 Tools

Tool #1: A Great Resume

Most people don't like to think that it all begins with how you look on paper, but don't kid yourself, even a well-respected executive with a sterling reputation and strong network must present his or her qualifications to a hiring chain. Even if someone is lucky enough to have a friend on the "inside," that champion represents only a single link in a multi-link chain. Since most people hate to write their own resume, they put it off until the last moment and then put down bland functional data that doesn't support a positive hiring decision. The key to writing a powerful resume is proving your value. Proving value means that you explain the challenges, strategies and results of the projects or assignments you've lead or supported. The cornerstone of an effective resume is using numbers, percentages and quantities, i.e. dollars saved or raised for your organization. If you can prove that you're worth much more than your salary, getting hired becomes a no-brainer for the staffing manager.

Tool #2: A Great Cover Letter

The relationship of a cover letter to the resume is like a tie or brooch to a business suit. The cover letter *complements* the resume. A perfect cover letter is concise, focused and direct. It illuminates key areas that the reader should focus on by presenting three paragraphs that address: (1) Who you are as professional, (2) Compelling career facts that are supported in detail in the resume, and finally, (3) Justification why a further interview is needed to discuss your abilities. The typical mistake people make with their cover letter is they are too terse, perfunctory and not illuminating. Also, they often reiterate each position they've held and the cover letter becomes too long. Always keep in mind the old saying, "*What have you done for me lately?*" The cover letter should summarize how your most recent role is a progressive step in an ever more challenging career path.

Tool #3: A Great Network

For years, successful executives have maintained the bromide, "*What you know isn't always as important as who you know.*" If true, why do we invest so much in education and training, and so little on building a professional network? The three easiest ways to develop a network are:

- ✓ Join a professional group, business club or association.
- ✓ Become active in your church, school, community or other local organization as a volunteer.
- ✓ Subscribe to trade publications that serve your industry; and attend events, seminars and/or conferences.

Once you have prepared your 3-piece career tool kit, you can respond to any job opportunity on a moment's notice. Opportunities are ephemeral; if they are not pursued quickly, they'll be gone. The tool kit will help to ensure that you don't miss that great career opportunity!