



A Pre-Flight Check for a Smooth Landing

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With the correct attitude and a well-charted approach, you can make a smooth job landing even in turbulent times.

Landing your dream job is a challenge even in the best of times, but these are the most challenging times in generations.

Chemical industry job losses parallel those in the overall U.S. economy. With 15,000 jobs lost in 2008, chemical industry employment is down 1.7% from year-end 2007. This compares with a 1.9% decline in jobs for the overall economy in 2008. And so far, 2009 has delivered more of the same bad news.

Still, many engineers at all levels are landing on their feet. Positions are available, and companies continue to view talent attraction as a long-term strategic necessity.

In today's information-driven, dynamic, global workplace, keeping an open mind about the path you take to your next job is one of the best ways to ensure that you remain marketable, even during fluctuating economic cycles. By adopting a flexible approach, and through perseverance, one can walk away a winner in even the most turbulent of job markets.

Consider unconventional career strategies

1. *Be open to interim positions or consulting projects.* These can help you keep your skills fresh, provide an income, and give you an inside track when hiring returns to more-normal levels.

2. *Don't rule out jobs that are a pay grade or title below your current or most recent position* — particu-

larly at organizations with reputations for promoting from within. This may give you the opportunity to exceed expectations and turn the downgrade into a dream job.

3. *Be willing to relocate* — both domestically and internationally. Such perspective-changing and career-expanding opportunities can broaden your knowledge and experience, and set you apart from the rest of the field.

4. *Maintain contact with recruiters.* If you are a manager in transition and you do not already have a relationship with an executive recruiter, it is helpful to establish one. Although the vast majority of recruitment firms are engaged by the hiring organization rather than the candidate, recruiters always want to know superior professionals. If you have not done so in the past, begin returning recruiters' calls and expanding your network.

Do your homework

Job-seekers who are clear about their "must-have" career criteria and who keep up-to-date on industry hiring trends are more likely to have a positive outcome to their job search. Doing your homework will set the stage for long-term success.

Treat the job search as a job in itself. This requires investing in a period of self-examination and external research, but the payoffs are worth the effort. Dedicate adequate time to identify both your personal criteria for success and the companies that match your career objec-

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tives. Take stock of your achievements and identify additional skills worth developing.

Reflect on ways to maximize the power of your network. Make the most of your connections and colleagues at the professional organizations you belong to (such as AIChE), the universities you attended, and other social and professional networks to uncover opportunities.

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Results-oriented resumé get results

Even the most experienced business executives can feel uncomfortable about selling themselves, and this can be especially true for engineers and technical professionals. However, clearly communicating your value is essential in any job search. This communication starts with the resumé. While resúmes alone do not get anyone an offer, they are still one of the first impressions a potential employer will have about a candidate.

Your resumé indicates what you can do based on what you have done. For this reason, do not wait until you are looking for a job to build a resumé. Instead, review and update your resumé every year when you are not actively looking, and every few months when you are. Once your resumé exceeds two pages, you have included too much. Pare it down to only the most outstanding examples of your competencies and accomplishments.

The employer will be most interested in the specific results that came directly from your work. Include action verbs like *delivered* and *created* as well as key phrases that apply to your function or industry, but without too many statistics or too much jargon.

Employers screen candidates based on both functional skills and leadership skills. Functional skills may include your business acumen, understanding of customers and the market, depth of technical knowledge, strategic analysis capabilities, and communication or language skills. Equally important are your leadership capabilities and the behaviors you exhibit — as well as the behaviors you bring out in others. This may include your ability to take calculated risks, learn from experiences, drive entrepreneurial behaviors, or motivate others.

The core components of a solid resumé are:

- *contact information*. Include your full name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address.
- *executive summary*. Begin with approximately 50

words that provide a snapshot of your expertise, technical skills, competencies and ability to achieve results. Some people are inclined to include an objective statement in this section, but we advise against that, because it might be taken too literally and preclude you from roles for which you are well-suited.

- *experience*. List your employers in reverse chronological order, including positions held and primary responsibilities, highlighting promotions and, where appropriate, your reasons for leaving.

- *key accomplishments*. The heart of the document, this can be organized according to functional categories, such as technology development or project and team management.

- *education*. List your highest degree first and include the area of study, institution, year of graduation, and any honors you received.

- *professional associations, board affiliations, awards and publications*. Do not let these overshadow your key accomplishments. For instance, if you are a member of numerous associations and boards, mention only those in which you hold leadership roles. One exception is if you are in academia, where a listing of publications, for example, will reflect your credentials and position you as an expert in a field.

- *languages*. In today's international job market, proficiency in multiple languages can differentiate you from the crowd. Distinguish between your ability in spoken versus written form; conversational in French is different from fluent in French or native French speaker.

In most cases, information about your hobbies and

WHAT HIRING MANAGERS ARE LOOKING FOR

Here are some of the characteristics that will help keep you competitive

1. Experience working at good companies
2. Experience with more than one company
3. Communication skills: written, verbal, visual and listening
4. Understanding of customers
5. Cross-functional experience
6. International experience or multi-language capabilities
7. In-depth understanding of technology and its use to advance corporate strategy
8. Broad view of business
9. Leadership skills
10. Creativity
11. Ability to get the job done
12. Team focus

interests is not necessary. Do not be surprised if employers outside the U.S. expect your marital status, age and even a photograph to be included on your resumé.

Approach the interview as a chance to get answers to your questions. You are evaluated not just on the answers you provide, but on the questions you ask.

Compelling cover letters are a call to action

Every time you send your resumé, accompany it with a cover letter. The letter should reinforce the contents of your resumé, but it should use different language.

Your cover letter should include:

- *introduction.* Target the hiring authority and address that person by name; avoid “To Whom it May Concern.” If someone suggested that you contact the recipient, say so. Similarly, if you have met or spoken to the recipient already, refresh his or her memory of that meeting.

- *objective statement.* In one or two sentences, state what you are looking for and why this organization or position matches your objectives.

- *qualifications.* In one or two paragraphs (or a paragraph followed by a bulleted list of up to three accomplishments), summarize your background and competencies as they relate directly to the organization or specific role.

- *call to action.* Politely close the cover letter by asking the recipient for a next step, be it an interview, information, advice, or contacts.

Put your best self forward during the interview

A successful interview is critical to getting hired. If it has been a while since your last interview, visualize and prepare for the three main phases of any interview:

1. Build rapport.

2. Discuss the hiring organization’s needs and connection to your background. Competency-based interviews are

typically used at the executive level and may require you to give multiple examples to illustrate how you think and act when faced with obstacles. As part of this, learn all you can about the expectations, reporting lines, and team structure of the organization.

3. Close the conversation by conveying your interest and appreciation for consideration, and ask about the follow-up process.

Approach the interview as a chance to get answers to your questions. By asking for insights, you can glean more information about what the hiring organization is looking for and whether the position is a good match for you. You are evaluated not just on the answers you provide but on the questions you ask as well.

Allow ample time. Although the interview schedule is typically pre-arranged, occasionally the hiring manager will unexpectedly invite you to meet others on the spot. Give yourself the flexibility to spend more time than was originally agreed upon.

When the interview is over, capture your impressions and solicit feedback. Send personalized thank-you letters (rather than a form letter) to everyone you met. Touch base with the person who referred you. Be open to constructive criticism.

Now is the time to remain patient, active, focused, and open. Your commitment will help you succeed.

After the landing

A career is not a discrete event, but a continuous process — so treat it as one. The half-life of any relationship shortens if it is not managed. So, keep in touch with the network you have built and don’t be afraid to share that network — doing so will strengthen your relationships and position you as a catalyst for career connections.

If you did not have relationships with executive recruiters prior to this process, then you definitely should now. Let them (and others you encountered along the way) know where you have landed.

Take the time to thank the people who provided direction and leads, and share your excitement about your new role.

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IN FUTURE ISSUES:

This is the first in a series of Career Catalyst articles by Lisa L. Walker. The next article in the series, to appear in October 2009, will cover how to work effectively with a recruiter. Future articles will address such topics as how to distinguish yourself in job interviews, negotiations with employers, considering overseas assignments, and how to launch a second or retirement career.

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