

Job Hunting Advice

Tips on building allegiances with co-workers, landing a transfer and responding to help-wanted ads

BY TAUNEE S. BESSON

Editor's Note: This month columnist Taunee Besson answers questions about common career and job hunting problems. If you have questions about your career or job search, send them to our monthly Job Search Queries column, National Business Employment Weekly, Box 300, Princeton, N.J. 08540.

Q: I have recently been recruited for a mid-managerial position with a large property management firm in the Southwest. Given that I'm an outsider, I'm concerned about how to build good rapport with the supervisors reporting to me, some of whom undoubtedly think they should have been offered my job. How do I go about winning their respect and allegiance?

A: Begin by recognizing two important facts:

1. Your supervisors know a great deal about their individual areas. You need their expertise to do your job effectively.
2. From top management's point of view, you must have better big picture skills than any of your subordinates, otherwise the firm would have promoted one of them instead of hiring you.

By exhibiting a keen awareness that you and the supervisors need each other, you'll achieve an important first step toward gaining their loyalty and respect. Of course, some of them will resent you for taking the position they wanted. But they're likely to support your efforts if you ask for their input on important decisions.

Unless it's critical to business survival, don't spearhead any major changes for three to six months. Instead, get together with each of your supervisors to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of his or her area and options for improvement.

Develop a master plan for your division, using both top management's and your supervisors' input. Then refine the plan with your key people, before introducing it to everyone. Getting your staff's advice on how to proceed is not only politically astute, it's also a smart management technique for building a winning team.

Q: I'm an officer in the commercial loan department of a large bank. I've been with this bank for almost five years and I'm getting restless. While I've advanced rapidly in the loan department, it's time for me to learn more about other areas of banking. Last week I heard about a new position in the

commercial trust division that sounds really interesting. How do I apply for that job when I have no experience in trust and my manager is notorious for "hanging on" to his good people?

A: You haven't mentioned how you heard about the opening in trust. If it was through a job posting system, where anyone may respond, you can talk to a personnel representative who should take your application to the trust manager for review.

If you heard about it via the grapevine, expressing your interest in person may be touchy, especially if your boss and the trust manager know each other. On the other hand, while direct contact can be politically delicate, you may have a better chance of getting an interview if you pursue it yourself, rather than relying on someone in personnel.

In either situation you need to prepare a case for why the trust department should regard you as a potential asset, even though you lack trust experience. Your transferable skills plus your knowledge of the bank's milieu are the keys to selling yourself. Get a job description of the position you want, if one's available. Then examine your experience and pinpoint areas that most closely correlate to trust management. Skills such as planning and initiating projects, motivating staff, using numbers as reasoning tools and developing rapport with customers should all be valuable in both loan and trust activities.

Be sure to tell your manager that you are looking into the new position. He needs to hear this from you, not personnel or the grapevine. Emphasize that to pursue a career in banking, you need a greater breadth of experience to build on the excellent foundation he's given you. Also, be prepared to tell him why your move will benefit him and the company and how you plan to make your transfer as painless as possible for his department.

Finally, learn an important lesson from this experience. Don't confine all of your attention to the department where you are currently working. If you want to move within the bank's hierarchy, you must make contacts throughout the organization who will help you get what you want. It's much easier for someone to pull you into his area than for you to try to push your way out of a stale situation.

Q: I understand that the self-initiated job search is the most effective means of finding employment. However, how much time and effort should be devoted to responding to classified advertising? What's the best way to respond to ads? Is it better to omit a resume even though it's requested? What's the best way to discuss salary history?

A: You're correct in assuming that a self-initiated job search (finding a job through contacts) is the best way to look for a new position. In fact, its overall success rate usually is very high. Want ads, on the other hand, yield jobs for a much smaller percentage of the people using them. Keep that in mind when trying to decide how much time to give them.

Consider, too, that want ads represent 10% to 15% of all available jobs and tend to cluster in areas such as sales, secretarial, accounting, engineering, nursing and programming, where applicant supply is less than demand. If you are looking for something a little different or want to change careers, you probably won't find what you're looking for in an ad. But don't avoid them entirely. They obviously work for some people.

Respond to an ad by supplying what it requests. If you're asked to send a resume with salary history, do it or risk being round-filed. Other approaches such as cleverly written broadcast letters probably won't get you far. If you choose to play the want-ad game, you must follow the rules set by employers.

Be sure to put together a resume and cover letter tailored as much as possible to the listed job. If the ad mentions specific qualifications and duties, try to show how your background and experience pertain to them. Sending the same resume to everyone is unlikely to get you many replies. People who receive a stack of resumes choose only the most pertinent. They aren't interested in reading between the lines to spot potential talent.

You can try omitting salary history by stating that compensation is negotiable, if you are willing to risk it. However, you may be eliminated for not giving the information requested.

Q: I work for a large distribution company troubleshooting lost or delayed shipments. When I started here 16 months ago, I was told that I would have a performance review and a raise after one year. To date my boss hasn't approached me about either. Frankly, I'm beginning to resent the delay, as I think I'm doing a good job and deserve the overdue increase. What should I do?

A: First, recognize that your career is more important to you than to anyone else at your company, including your boss. He or she may not give your performance appraisal the same priority you do. Consider the possible reasons for the delay:

1. Your boss doesn't remember how long you've been on board. While this probably isn't true,

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- you may wish to give him or her the benefit of the doubt.
2. Your boss is uncomfortable rating your performance and is postponing your review, even if it's a good one. This is very common.
 3. High level management says, "Hold the line. Put off raises as long as you can." If you aren't *asking* for an appraisal in this situation, you may not get one for months.
 4. Your supervisor has something unpleasant to discuss with you and is avoiding possible conflict by postponing your review. When you finally get it, it will probably contain a nasty surprise.

While all of the above are typical excuses for postponing your discussion, they're not good enough to force you to wait four months beyond the scheduled review date. You need to ask for your performance appraisal and the raise you deserve, before your resentment begins to affect your work.

Schedule a specific day and time with your supervisor. Then think about both your outstanding accomplishments and stupid mistakes since you joined the concern. Put yourself in your manager's shoes and consider how he or she will evaluate your work. Be prepared both to respond to negative feedback and point out how your efforts have benefited the department.

Develop a list of alternative proposals on how you would like to be compensated for your above average performance. Be specific in your request. Have a dollar figure in mind. If more perquisites appeal to you as a part of your increase, don't limit your suggestions strictly to a pay hike. Consider extra vacation time, training opportunities, a new office computer, etc., as negotiable items. ●