

Managing Your Time During a Job Search

Organize your workspace, set deadlines and make lists

BY TAUNEE BESSON

Editor's Note: This month columnist Taunee Besson addresses a common job hunting problem. If you have a question or concern about your job search or career, send it to Ms. Besson at the National Business Employment Weekly, P.O. Box 300, Princeton, N.J. 08543-0300. All names are kept confidential. Although she can't answer all letters personally, she will address commonly mentioned concerns in her column.

The infamous "pink slip" arrived on your desk two weeks ago. On Friday, your last day, you packed up your mug and eight years' worth of mementos. Now it's Monday and you have nowhere to go, nothing to do. You know there's a new position somewhere; the question is how to find it.

Starting and maintaining job search momentum takes initiative and persistence. Whether you're searching full-time or trying to juggle a campaign between work and the kids' softball games, you'll have to get organized. Contemplating a job search can produce waves of anxiety, even dread. Once you plan it and get started, though, the process becomes more manageable—it can even be enlightening and fun.

For starters, your job search requires dedicated physical space. A home office will do nicely, especially if you can shut the door and declare it off-limits to pets, family and friends. A "Do Not Disturb" sign will usually buy some quiet time.

If there's no peace at home and you can afford it, a monthly lease to an executive suite will more than pay for itself. There you'll have an office to visit with a purpose every day, a phone answered by professionals, access to typing, copying, and fax services, mail pick-up and delivery and suite colleagues with whom to converse and network.

If you're lucky and you parted amicably, your former employer may offer you space and secretarial support. The company may allow you to use your old office for several months after termination or provide an outplacement firm, which may include these facilities as part of its package.

Wherever you locate your base of operations, make sure it contains the following resources:

Ms. Besson, an NBEW bimonthly columnist, is president of Career Dimensions, a Dallas-based firm specializing in career development and job search programs for professionals and corporations.

- attractive stationery, envelopes and stamps
- stapler
- notepads
- pens and pencils
- rolodex or business card file
- filing system consisting of notecards, folders, looseleaf notebook with index tabs, or computer and database management software
- desk with drawers or table-top organizers
- telephone with answering machine or answering service
- portable calendar for the office and on the road
- briefcase or small portfolio to carry resumes and notes for interviews
- typewriter or computer with letter quality printer, if you plan to prepare your own resumes and cover letters.

Once you've stocked your command post, begin thinking of your job search as a full-time position. Get up every morning, get dressed and report to work. If you're not a morning person, put yourself on a flex-time schedule starting at 10 a.m. instead of 8 a.m. or 9 a.m.—being your own boss has its privileges.

As with any major project, it's helpful to give your job search a deadline. Your deadline may

- Five networking appointments and interviews a week (a good goal) requires about 10 hours, including travel time.

- Library research on companies, industries, etc., takes about four hours per week.

Consider how much time you'll need to spend on your resume, interviews, research and networking to achieve your goal. Start from your realistic deadline date and move backwards, plotting the tasks on a month-by-month basis. Then jot down a daily and weekly schedule in your portable calendar.

You'll probably need to change your agenda occasionally to accommodate the people you'll be meeting. This requires balancing flexibility with determination. For instance, if you delete some phone time in favor of a resume deadline, adjust your schedule to increase calling time afterwards.

Making daily and ongoing lists can be helpful, too. A prioritized list is easy to follow, reminds you what needs to be done and offers the exquisite pleasure of crossing off tasks as they're finished. Today's unfinished items automatically appear on tomorrow's list. To illustrate how a job search plan might look before it's translated to a calendar, see the accompanying sample timetable.

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Sample Timetable

June - September 1990

Organize office space	June 1-8
List networking contacts	June 1-15
Assemble accomplishments history (10 years)	June 1-15
List interesting companies	June 1-15
Contact references	June 1-15
Formulate ideal job description	June 1-15
Call for networking appointments	June 15-Sept. 8
Go on five networking appointments a week	June 22-Sept. 15
Research companies, industries in library	June 15-Sept. 8
Write networking and employment interview thank-you notes	June 22-Sept. 30
Develop targeted resumes for specific jobs found through networking	June 30-Sept. 15
Read want ads and reply with targeted resumes	June 15-Sept. 15
Contact executive search firms	June 30
Follow-up on search firm contacts	July 30-Aug. 30
Schedule employment interviews	Aug. 30-Sept. 30
Start new position	Oct. 1

Time management

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The schedule shown is ambitious, especially by the old standard that says a job search takes one month for each \$10,000 in salary. If you're in the \$50,000 to \$150,000 range, don't be discouraged if you haven't found the right spot within three to four months. Employed job seekers also may require more time.

Part-Time Job Search Tips

If you're conducting a job search "in your spare time," keep the following in mind:

- Set a time frame for yourself or you may never make the move. Decide how many hours per week you can spend looking, block them into your calendar and follow your plan.
- You'll probably have to cut back on the time and energy you devote to your current job. Although you may feel guilty, this is a small price to pay for finding career satisfaction.
- Unless your schedule is flexible, you'll have to be creative to find time to meet people. One can have only so many doctor's appointments. On evenings and weekends, attend professional or-

Think of your job search as a full-time position; get dressed every morning and report to work

ganization meetings, conventions or workshops, and network within your club or civic group and among neighbors and friends.

- Determine how people should contact you. If you don't want calls at work, get an answering machine or service and check it frequently. Don't expect prospective contacts or employers to call you in the evening.
- Decide how to produce resumes, cover letters and thank-you notes. It may be risky to use equipment at work.

Finally, for both part- and full-time job seekers: Be sure to leave some room in your life for fun. Forty hours a week is plenty for a full-time search, 15 for a part-time one. Devoting more attention and energy than this produces a diminishing marginal utility, frays nerves and turns you into a one-dimensional, driven bore. If you find yourself becoming a 'searchaholic,' schedule some fun on your calendar. Balancing your life will put things in perspective and allow you to spend time with people who appreciate and support you. ●