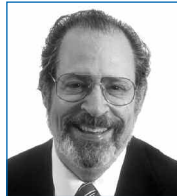


CareerSmart Advisor™

Strategies & Solutions for Your Career Success

A Note From Dave

We continually hear stories about the valuable connections that are made at ExecuNet's nearly 70 local networking meetings, which many times result in interviews, offers and jobs.



First timers often approach the meetings with trepidation, unsure of what to expect or if they should even expect anything at all [See: http://www.execunet.com/e_network_expect.cfm] They'll find a welcoming environment where they can learn something about the job market, share information with peers, and connect with generous individuals.

ExecuNet managing editor Allan Hoving recently flew up to Toronto to attend Martin Buckland's regional networking meeting and found an overflowing crowd of more than 120 attendees. Here's what Allan had to say about the event:

The first part of the evening consisted of networking introductions. Due to the size of the crowd, the time allotted for each person was just 30 seconds. Martin asked for "name, what you do, what you're looking for, and how you can help others." This was very hard for many folks to do well in under a minute, but a few definitely stood out, either by being very efficient or by adding personal or humorous touches.

Next, Martin led five of the top recruiters in Canada through a 15-question Q&A touching on everything from "Why don't you call?" to "How to establish a relationship" to "What do you look for on resumes, cover letters?" to interview advice. It was all great stuff and they really offered many pearls of wisdom.

To find the ExecuNet networking meeting in your area: http://www.execunet.com/e_network_results.cfm

Sincerely,

Dave Opton
Founder & CEO
ExecuNet

Leadership Speaks, Pt. II

By Robyn Greenspan

NEW YORK — This is the concluding portion of the summary of presentations at the *World Business Forum: Leadership Speaks* at Radio City Music Hall in New York City, September 13 and 14. Produced by executive management education firm HSM, the event featured some of the top voices in the executive ranks who spoke with great candor about their management styles.

The luminaries drew upon their own experiences with illustrated examples of how they effectively led, and they also took a critical look at the recent hurricane disasters and how leadership was displayed in an international arena.

The first part appeared in the October 3rd issue of *CareerSmart Advisor*, archived here:

http://members.execunet.com/e_resources_advisor.cfm

Richard Branson, founder, chairman, CEO, Virgin and Voyager Groups

The icon for unconventional management spoke about that very topic but first, a video of his Virgin Galactic space tourism venture was played, illustrating Branson's quest to become the "most diverse brand in the world."

With a portfolio of companies that includes a range from mobile phones to music and from air travel to space travel, Branson says, "If you can run one business, you can run any. Be the best and find the best people."

"Once you have created a business that is superb, you can have fun," said Branson of the culture he fosters across his brand. "Too many chairmen take work far too seriously. If the chairman is the first person willing to be thrown in the pool, everyone will follow. That's a great party."

Branson exemplified his unconventional leadership role when he was asked about Virgin's five-year business goals. "I'm sure we have them," remarked Branson. "But they don't tell me what they are." Branson went on to say that he is more comfortable around the people who are further down the chain from the directors.

The man who is as big as his brand humbly spoke about Virgin's biggest failure. "We were least successful in soft drinks. We grabbed 70 percent of the market everywhere we were on display in the UK," said

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FastTrack Programs —
October 2005
Hosted by Dave Opton,
founder and CEO, ExecuNet

- 10/18 — **Winning Interviews: Converse, Connect, Convince** — Judy Rosemarin
- 10/19 — **Market Yourself: You're a Big Ticket Item** — Steve Conner
- 10/20 — **Winning Networking: Great Contacts Become Offers** — Bill Belknap
- 10/26 — **Guerrilla Marketing for Job Hunters** — Jay Levinson & David Perry
- 10/27 — **Warm Up to Cold Calling** — Nick Papadopoulos
- 10/27 — **Seven Steps to a Great Executive Resume** — Louise Kursmark

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- 10/18 — **Grand Rapids** — Ken Soper
- 10/18 — **Seattle** — Susan Stringer
- 10/18 — **Houston** — Cecilia Rose
- 10/18 — **Wilmington, DE** — Russ Dunn & Rick Hays
- 10/18 — **Cleveland** — Rick Taylor
- 10/18 — **Hartford** — Howard S. Bader
- 10/18 — **Tarrytown, NY** — Linsey Levine & Nancy Hutter
- 10/19 — **Philadelphia** — Ed Kelleher
- 10/19 — **Philadelphia Sr. Roundtable** — Ed Kelleher
- 10/20 — **Washington, DC** — Peter McCarthy
- 10/20 — **Oklahoma City** — Dr. Joy Reed Belt
- 10/20 — **Minneapolis** — John Wetzell & Barbara Adams
- 10/25 — **Chicago** — Melody Camp
- 10/25 — **Washington, DC Career Development Workshop** — Peter McCarthy
- 10/26 — **Denver** — Karen Armon
- 10/26 — **Toronto** — Martin Buckland
- 10/27 — **Atlanta** — J. Patrick Haly
- 10/27 — **Columbus, OH** — Janine Moon
- 10/27 — **Dallas** — Bob Hueglin
- 10/28 — **St. Louis** — Jim Clarkson
- 10/28 — **Detroit Sr. Roundtable** — Marge Larsen

Registration information can be found at members.execunet.com/e_network_results.cfm

Your Career Advisor

Negotiating to Get What You're Worth

by Sue Arth

You are excited.... there is every indication an offer will be forthcoming. Now what? Candidates are often afraid of negotiation and unsure how to proceed. Questions arise: If I attempt to ask for more, will the offer be taken back? Will they think I am greedy? Overconfident? Arrogant? Research indicates the outcome of this uncertainty is money left on the table, sometimes as much as 22 to 34 percent.

So, how can you get what you deserve?

Here are some things to consider before accepting or negotiating an offer, which could result in more money in your pocket.

Have a clear understanding of the position requirements, expectations, resources and current challenges.

Is this the right position for you? Sometimes candidates are thrilled with the offer and they forget to evaluate the company. Just as the company is deciding whether you are right for them, you should be determining if they are a good fit for you.

During the interview process you have an opportunity and obligation to learn how the company operates internally, both in structure and environmentally. Learn about the people you will work with and for, find out what the priorities and challenges of the position are, and develop a framework of goals and steps to reach them.

If this information leads to a good match, there is a greater likelihood of mutual satisfaction and success. A personality mismatch, skill deficiency or unreasonable expectations can doom an employee from the start and lead to an unsatisfactory result very quickly.

Understand your value to the company. Yes, you are a wonderful individual, but what are they hiring you for?

You come equipped with expertise and

experience, interpersonal communication skills and the ability to lead and motivate. You can create strategic plans with vision, manage projects and organize to increase productivity and increase profits.

Once you understand your value to the company, you will be able to gauge what is an acceptable and reasonable salary expectation.

Know the market value of your services.

Career service websites can give you a realistic view of your marketability. Consider location, level, length of experience and expectations in determining your worth.

Understand how companies determine salary. Most companies have a range in mind for a position based on a bell-shaped curve. If marginally qualified, a 10 to 25 percent of the range may be offered. Adequately qualified may earn up to 40 percent of the range. Typically, the company will only go to 50 percent of that range for the most qualified applicant in order to save room for growth and to keep salaries in line with other employees. To reach a higher percentage, there must be quantifiable evidence that you are worth the extra money.

Be prepared to "state your case" if necessary.

Demonstrate your "added-value" by your past successes. If you have a clear understanding of the position, you will understand how your unique set of skills became their first choice. For example, it could be your experience in productivity processes or sales management that made you the perfect candidate.

Use **Problem-Action-Result** statements to demonstrate past successes. Tell a story of past success that correlates to the position at hand, the actions you took and add quantifiable results. This way you help the company "see" your

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Your Career Advisor
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value, as your past behavior is a predictor of future behavior. If you performed at a certain level in the past, and are able to consistently accomplish what you claim, the new company already has an indication of the value you bring to the organization.

Approach discussions with a win-win attitude and be prepared to counter their offer with options, not demands.

Base salary is not the only compensation a company can offer. Consider your current and future needs while compiling a list of alternatives to cash. Perhaps extra vacation time, increased family benefits or life insurance, a home office, car allowance and mileage, tuition reimbursement or educational contributions, relocation costs, etc. can be added to base salary.

“
Base salary is not the only compensation a company can offer. Consider your current and future needs while compiling a list of alternatives to cash.”

Deferred compensation in the way of stock options and equity in the company are other alternatives to cash-in-hand, while also demonstrating your stability and commitment to your new employer.

Early probation and salary review in 3 to 6 months instead of annual performance review may be an enticement to the company. They will gladly raise the stakes when they are sure of your performance.

Incentives in the way of sign-on bonuses and performance milestones can be appropriate when the negotiation gap is narrowing.

It's time for the dance to begin...

You are sitting with the HR Director and the CEO...the moment is building

Sue Arth has more than 10 years experience in career counseling, executive coaching, training design and program management. She is also a mediator with more than 15 years experience. She is CEO of Sea of Change, a California consulting company offering individual coaching and counseling, organizational development and conflict resolution services. She can be reached at suearth@yahoo.com.

and you hear the words you've been waiting for: "We are very happy to offer you the position and are prepared to offer this compensation." What are the rules of engagement at this point?

The use of nonverbal behavior as effective negotiating tools. "Silence is golden" takes on a new meaning in negotiations. A 30-second pause can mean extra dollars. Envision this scenario and practice it yourself:

You have received the written offer, and are sitting across from the CEO and HR representative. You are reviewing... smiling...reading...smiling, and then look down, stop smiling and count to 30. It seems an eternity — to you and to them. They sense something is wrong...They want to make it right, because you are the one they want. The power has now shifted from the employer to you. When you look up, say "Although this is an excellent opportunity, and I am excited at the prospect of joining your company, I am a little concerned about the salary."

React from a position of value and good will. Don't use manipulation or other tricks to get what you want. If you have actually been talking and negotiating with other companies, it may be time to bring it up, but don't start a bidding war with only one bidder.

Don't rely on salary information as a base of your negotiations. Just because the marketplace says you should be making X amount, doesn't mean the company has to comply. Demonstrate your value with skills and accomplishments. Use salary information as backup information. For example, if the company states, "our offer is more than your previous salary," you might reply with "yes, that is true, but the recent information I gathered on salaries indicates X amount is more in line with the kind of responsibilities and expectations we talked about. Is there a way we

can close that gap?"

Brainstorm alternatives. Be open to hearing what the company can do and make suggestions with your list of alternatives. Don't pull out the laundry list and state you want A through Z. Be prepared to accept some and give some. If the company states X amount is the highest they can go, you can say, "I can appreciate that, but would you consider this as a way we can both benefit?" Be flexible and search for win-win alternatives that make the company understand your motives are to contribute to the organization and be fairly compensated.

Use time for reflection and careful consideration. It is wise to take an offer and review it for a day or longer before making a firm commitment. Ask — don't demand — that you need time to think it over, talk with your family, etc. and schedule a time to meet again. Be prepared to go back and forth several times. Often, if it is the HR Representative making the offers, they may not have full authority to change the terms of an original offer. They will need to meet with senior executives to gain acceptance of your terms. They will tell you when they have reached a final offer, and then the decision is up to you.

I have never heard of an offer being taken back once given, but you can start a new job off on the wrong foot if you demand too much or you feel cheated by accepting a salary you are not comfortable with.

The moral of the story here is to not be afraid of negotiations, ask for what you believe is appropriate, and be prepared. As long as the goal is the same for you and your new employer, there will be a meeting of the minds that will be mutually satisfactory.

These tips have been useful to many clients, and will work for you too. ■

Leadership

Continued from page 1

Branson, but when the competitive Coke marketing machine went into overdrive, the Virgin beverages didn't have a chance. "In the end, we couldn't make a real difference in the market."

When asked how he can effectively supervise a global workforce of roughly 25,000, Branson said, "We give people a lot of freedom and allow them to make mistakes. People flourish with praise and shrivel with criticism. Some American companies too easily hire and fire, and they rule by fear."

Branson says that the diversity of his business units makes it easy to retain top talent, and he is always looking for people who know the new sectors they infiltrate. "We spot trends by living and experimenting life. Not sitting behind a desk."

The Virgin philosophy of having fun starts at the top, but risk-taker Branson plays it safe with the mantra, "Never do anything to damage the brand" with a goal to become the "most respected company in the world."

Dennis Nally, chairman, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP USA
"We have come to devote so much of our resources dealing with the past that we can't focus on the present and the future," Nally said during his presentation on corporate vision, which was largely devoted to a discourse on rules-based accounting versus principle-based accounting. Citing some of the recent accounting scandals, Nally said, "The business environment of the US has made all of us too rules-bound;" and while Enron ferreted out ways to make their accounting procedures technically right, their judgment was grievously wrong.

"Leaders lead by example and do the right thing no matter who is present — lawyers, regulators, reporters," said Nally.

Ethics figured strongly into the qualities of leadership, Nally noted, along with orientation toward success, supreme self-confidence and drive.

Categorizing Employees, GE-style

1. Those who share values and make the numbers
2. Those who don't share values and don't make the numbers
3. Those who share values and don't make the numbers
4. Those who don't share values and make the numbers.

Jack Welch, former chairman and CEO, General Electric

Eschewing a prepared presentation, Welch sat for a Q&A with CNBC's Maria Bartiromo, stopping frequently to take questions from the audience. Focusing on Hurricane Katrina, Welch outlined the five stages of crisis management:

1. **Denial** — It can't happen here
2. **Containment** — Keep it quiet
3. **Shame/Blame**
4. **Bloodletting/Scapegoat**
5. **Rebuilding** — Helps to gain immunity against next related crisis

They had no systems in place when Katrina's warnings came, observed Welch. "They had been in denial for several years as a city and a state. There was denial before, during and after the event."

"Ideally, George W. Bush would have come in on a barge the first day with a megaphone," Welch suggested as part of the credibility building process.

Welch recalled his own crisis at GE when fraudulent bookkeeping was detected. "We were in shock and spent the whole weekend working over it. We were dying over disappointing employees and stockholders, but Wall Street was worried about bonuses. We had lots of bad press, which said we were lousy managers. We realized that there were other cultures we couldn't control," said Welch.

The GE CEO recognized that he had gotten too far removed from the day-to-day responsibilities of the company. "I had too much hubris," Welch admitted. "I made all these acquisitions and thought I was 6'4" with hair. I got too

big for my britches and I screwed up."

Of his early lessons, Welch says that he learned to surround himself with people who were smarter than him. "New managers don't realize managing is not about them, but about the team. You need to have people who have better answers."

"If you have someone with negative energy on your team, I would suggest they find another group with negative energy. You don't want a polluter on your team." Welch stressed that the employees who share the culture but don't make the numbers are more deserving than the high-producers with uncommon values. "There is always the horse's ass who makes the numbers. The boss of that person is eroding the company."

"I had to publicly acknowledge that there were four senior executives who did not share GE's values," recalled Welch. "Until I did that, all the speeches I gave meant little."

Personal integrity is important for the former CEO to display, and equally important for him to identify among his employees and colleagues. "In 1972, I played golf with a direct report, and I saw him drop the ball out of his pants. Four months later he was gone."

Welch said that GE's core competency was not engineering. "It was about people development. People who didn't develop leaders were not promoted." When Welch encountered leaders who mistakenly thought they were effective, the manager and the team were encouraged to have off-site 'work out sessions.'

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Jack Welch's 5 Steps to Picking a Job

1. Love the people who interview you
2. Learn something from the company
3. If you don't go to an entrepreneurial company, go to a brand
4. Make a deal when you accept the offer and own the deal
5. Find a job that turns your crank. Don't take something for the money thinking you will leave soon. You won't be a good employee.

Leadership

Continued from page 4

“You get candor when people work it all out. With a facilitator — not a boss. The facilitator gathers together all the team recommendations, and then the boss is brought back in. There would be an agenda of 15 items, and the manager had to make decisions on the spot about 75 percent of them and then have 30 days for the remaining 25 percent.”

Welch affirmed the importance of the role of human resources to any organization by recommending that the HR executive have an equal seat at the table with the CEO. “Would a ball team want to hang out with the team accountant or the guy who picks the players?” Welch analogized.

Jack Welch’s 4 Steps to Business Success

1. Build a great team by finding smart people
2. Have the passion and energy to get people to buy into your vision
3. Have the courage to make decisions and the guts to execute
4. Make business fun — it’s a game.

Like Tom Peters, the management guru who spoke on the first day of the HSM event, Welch acknowledged gaps in undergraduate education. “Kids need to learn how to evaluate the top 20 percent, the middle 70 percent, and the 10 percent who are not delivering. They should be taught less about disruptive technology and more about people.”

“Fire in the belly beats degrees any day in the world,” Welch concluded about the highly-educated employees he encountered.

“Be able to differentiate, excite and celebrate every victory with your people,”

Upcoming HSM Events

- **World Negotiation Forum**
Madeline Albright, William Ury, Herb Cohen, Richard Shell, Robert Cialdini
November 8-9, 2005, New York City Center, New York
- **World High Performance Forum**
Stephen Covey, John P. Kotter, Mike Ditka, Ram Charan, Patrick Lencioni, Frank Maguire
November 15-16, 2005, Navy Pier, Chicago

Women CEOs of Fortune 500 Companies

Rank	CEO	Company
114	Brenda C. Barnes	Sara Lee
128	Mary F. Sammons	Rite Aid
132	Anne Mulcahy	Xerox
247	Patricia F. Russo	Lucent Technologies
278	Andrea Jung	Avon Products
321	Susan M. Ivey	Reynolds American
424	S. Marce Fuller	Mirant
435	Marion O. Sandler	Golden West Financial
467	Eileen Scott	Pathmark Stores

suggested Welch. “Reward them in the soul and the wallet — not a plaque or out to dinner with you. If you don’t take care of your best, you’re going nowhere.”

Colin Powell, former Secretary of State

Greeted by a standing ovation, Powell discussed the role of leadership in global security with advice that transcends politics into the corporate space. Powell’s ingredients for success were, simply:

1. **Start with a clear mission:** “You know you’re a good leader when people will follow you, if only out of curiosity. Trust is the essence of successful leadership.”
2. **Hire good people:** “Good leaders don’t contaminate the organization with poor employees. A good organization is constantly hiring and looking for good people.”
3. **Take care of your staff:** “People want to be rewarded for good performance and disciplined for poor performance.”

Like the other speakers, Powell recognized the leadership void that accompanied Hurricane Katrina, saying, “Leaders are supposed to sense a problem and respond before it becomes a crisis. There were too many people in the first few days of Katrina standing there and not doing anything.”

However, Powell implored the audience to think about the more important issue: “Why is it that in America we have all the money we spend and we can’t break these pockets of poverty?”

Powell talked about the great diplomacy that leaders need, particularly when “managing up” and voicing opinions that are contrary to upper management’s. “I supported the President on everything we did, but I advised him to take the Iraq problem to the United Nations. I knew that as the president, he might not want to wait any longer, since he did not feel that Saddam Hussein was ‘answering the mail’ [responding to UN resolutions].”

Powell said he was not harboring any presidential aspirations of his own, preferring to enjoy retirement with his family and grandchildren.

Andrea Jung, CEO, Avon Products

“The day we don’t have to talk about women and leadership will be a great day,” Jung began her address to the audience. There are currently only nine Fortune 500 companies and 19 Fortune 1000 companies run by women, with Jung at number 278.

Jung outlined the barriers that women face in leadership roles:

1. **Work/life balance:** Choosing family over career obligations
2. **Stereotypes:** Often perpetuated by women
3. **Mobility:** Difficult in global business environment
4. **Lack of access:** Not enough network support
5. **Higher standards on women’s performance:** Carly Fiorina, Martha Stewart ■

Learnings from Landings

Job Seeker Morphs into Executive Search Consultant

When Scott Hahn reentered the job market in August 2004 after leaving his position as the CIO of a Fortune 250 company, he didn't imagine he would become senior managing partner of a boutique search firm in February 2005. The 43-year-old executive became the founder of the financial services technology and business operations practice for Jackman Financial Group after a self-discovery process that led him to the executive search business.

Hahn's foray into executive search was fueled by his strong networking ability; a DISC assessment that identified his "people" strengths; a coach that helped guide his journey; and relationships with recruiters. After two of his recruiter friends asked whether he'd considered joining the search industry, Hahn realized that "finding more of what he left was not necessarily a good thing."

In this unique Learnings from Landings story, Hahn shares his experience from two perspectives — as a job hunter and as an executive recruiter.

What techniques or strategies worked for you?

While it's not terribly original, it was extremely effective: Network, network, network. I called everyone in my contacts database and sent reminder e-mails every other week to keep my name on people's minds. To complement my efforts, I read several books on the search process and how to take advantage of your contact network. This really helped me get things into perspective and point out some not so obvious things about effective networking.

What mistakes would you tell people to avoid?

Don't underestimate the power of your contacts. Sometimes the most beneficial leads can come from the most seemingly benign contacts. Additionally, I think that I was too shy at first to openly discuss my situation with others. This only delayed the process. Every day in the search process counts, so get started right away.

Did anything during the process come as surprise?

Yes, there is no longer the social stigma associated with being "in the market." Whatever your reasons, these kinds of circumstances are now a fact of life for our current culture and economy. There are all kinds of reasons why people leave jobs. Bad things happen to good people

all the time. The terms "right sizing" or "RIF" (reduction in workforce or layoffs), etc. are now commonplace terminology and events. People are far more understanding of your situation than you might think and generally would like to help you in your efforts.

Was the marketplace what you expected it to be?

Yes, tight. But things are always in flux. There are always opportunities out there for someone that really persists. You simply can't take "no" for an answer.

What did you think about your experiences in interacting with the recruiting community? Any advice you would pass along based on your experience?

Interesting question, given my current role. I worked with several recruiters and had different experiences with each. I had some good experiences and some bad ones. I think recruiters have generally been given a bad rap. That being said, some live up to your worst expectations.

In general, I found that if you work with a recruiter who sincerely has your best interests at heart (rather than theirs) I think you will be in good shape. I would offer the following pieces of advice — all of which I now practice:

- Make sure that the recruiter you are

working with has verifiable contacts within the industry. After all, you are investing your time to work with this recruiter. Make sure that it is time well spent. You don't simply want to be another résumé in their "database" while they wait for opportunities to arise. A good recruiter can make things happen for you.

- Make sure that you are notified of any "presentations" being made on your behalf. The recruiter should get your permission prior to any résumé submission being made. There are several reasons for this. You may have some insight into the company that the recruiter is working with and/or you may want to customize your cover letter to better fit the opportunity. Sometimes this can make or break your chances. Don't let your résumé get "shotgunned" all over the marketplace. It can make you appear overly needy and accordingly less attractive.
- Stay in close contact with your recruiter. You need to stay on the forefront of their thoughts. Don't let yourself become another number to them.
- Don't stop any of your own efforts once you begin working with a recruiter. Your recruiter is only another tool in your bag. Be sure to keep he or she apprised of your own activities. There's no sense in working on the same lead or opportunity.
- Try to form a good relationship with whomever you work with on your recruiting efforts. A solid working relationship can further your search efforts very quickly.

What about companies? Any particular differences?

To me, the key difference these days seems to be the dehumanization of the résumé submission process. Hiring managers are usually dependant on HR

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Learnings from Landings Continued from page 6

Departments, and HR Departments have become dependant on the company's job-related websites. Depending on the company and position you are applying for, the "blind submission" process is, I feel, a very difficult approach to take.

With the widespread dependency of Internet-related job sites in general, I just feel that you're playing a numbers game, and the deck is stacked against you. After all, your résumé is rarely a substitute for a good introduction. The résumé submission process tends to be a very empty and frustrating experience. It may take a hundred submissions just to get any kind of response. This is where a good recruiter can sometimes give you an edge.

Did you feel as prepared as you expected to be?

Yes, I did. Since I hadn't interviewed in years, I knew that my interview skills had gotten rusty. I think one of the smarter things I did was to hire a coach. Not only did my coach get me ready to interview, she also helped me get my head straight, which ultimately prepared me to better interview.

In addition to helping me hone my interview skills, she helped me through the shellshock of being "between jobs." Once you get that behind you, you are mentally more equipped to deal with the task at hand. My coach had me take a personality test, which not only taught me more about my own personality, but helped better prepare me to alter my approach during the interview. In doing so, I could be more appealing to different

Scott Hahn welcomes the opportunity to personally connect with ExecuNet members. He can be reached at (972) 395-2124 or scott.hahn@jackmanfinancial.com

personality styles and ultimately have more favorable results.

Did things go as quickly as you expected or not? If not, why not?

Yes, once I got over the hardest part, which was simply getting started, I started getting some traction and things seemed to snowball quickly. I forced myself to spend a certain amount each day on different tasks: phone calls, e-mails and generally "pressing the flesh." Every bit adds up to progress and keeps you moving forward.

If you were to advise a fellow member to do only one or two things really well in this process, what would that be?

Get your résumé and cover letter looked at by a professional. If your résumé is the only way to get that much needed edge, your résumé had better be top notch. Start digging out every contact and business card you have ever come across. Put together a plan and start making contact with people.

If you had it to do over again, is there anything you would change?

I think I would have spent less time saying, "I'll get started tomorrow." Pick yourself up, brush off the dust and get started! There's no time like the present. A half day spent networking today is far better than none at all.

What two or three things did you feel were the most effective for you?

Without a doubt, hiring the coach was the key for me. The process that I went through with her was invaluable. I aced several difficult interview "gauntlets," which ultimately led to offers. I can only attribute this to what I learned about myself and how to modify my behavior to better fit different situations. Another key thing was to have my résumé and cover letter reviewed and modified by a professional. That's now your calling card, so it had better represent you the best way possible. Last and ultimately the most important thing for me was to follow up on every lead.

Did you use the Internet as a tool? If so, what resources or sites did you find the most helpful or which would you recommend to others and why?

I used the internet extensively for research and networking. In addition to ExecuNet, there are some great sites that are dedicated to expanding your network of contacts.

Any other comments you would like to make?

Looking back, I learned a lot about myself while going through this process. These lessons will ultimately help me become more successful in my future. ■

Ask the Expert

MBA = More Barriers Abound?

Q ■ I have risen through the corporate ranks over the years and developed a great track record in strategic and creative marketing, project management and team-building. As I look for new opportunities, I am finding that my lack of an MBA is

eliminating me from positions I am otherwise qualified for; and hiring managers are telling me I am not even being considered without the MBA. I know the obvious solution is to enroll in a business program, but I can't undertake that commitment right

now — or maybe ever. How do I position myself in the market without the MBA? Are there any industries or roles that are more open to individuals with undergraduate degrees and a history of success?

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Ask the Expert

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A. The short answer to your question is “yes.” There are companies who consider the skills and wisdom gained through experience to be equal to the knowledge gained through the educational track. And you’re right, it’s your positioning that matters here.

First, it’s important to review your target positions. If you are primarily using jobs posted as your main job search tactic, through either big boards or recruiters, you will experience some resistance when an MBA is preferred or required. The job market is in good shape this fall, but it’s still a buyer’s market — so recruiters and other gatekeepers will likely hold fast to the job description as written — if an MBA is required, that may not be the position for you.

Having said that, however, I must share that I just finished a telephone call with a hiring manager, a Senior VP of a financial services company, who shared his goal to continue hiring only people with the right skills (technical and behavioral), along with a commitment to continuous learning. He has a VP position open, and he is considering a candidate who has not finished her Bachelor’s even though the job description prefers an MBA. Why? Because the candidate was referred to him by someone he knows and trusts, and she was able to interview with the Senior VP without going through the gatekeepers. She is committed to finishing her undergraduate degree and MBA — and this organization will pay 100% tuition

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reimbursement. He said if he hadn’t met her, he would not have considered her without an MBA. So what does that tell you about the value of networking!

Expand your job search to include research on culture as it relates to education — if you find that the companies you’d like to work with are strict MBA-only companies, you can work toward your MBA and present yourself as an MBA candidate, or move on to another target company. Work with a recruiter or two who understands your considerable talent and skills, and see if you can be considered their “wild card” for openings, even if the job description says, “MBA preferred.” And network to meet hiring managers, even if there are no current openings, to become known in your industry as an expert — regardless of graduate degree.

Finally, create a branding strategy for yourself that lets everyone know who you are and what you can do (focusing on accomplishments), so you can market yourself as an expert. Branding yourself means getting your name out there and associated with something specific related to what you offer — not merely name recognition. The minute people think of you, they think of what you offer, making your networking efforts that much more effective. Just as with corporate brands, your personal brand is based on your promise of value. It separates you from your peers, your colleagues and your competitors. Personal branding strategy development is not about building a special image for the outside world; it is about understanding your unique combination of strengths, skills, wisdom, talents, values and passions — and using these attributes to differentiate yourself and guide your career.

Think strategically through every stage of your job search: the brand, the plan, the network, the targets and the interviews. Instead of focusing solely on recruiters to get a job, network to build your brand and get interviews. The offers will follow. ■

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