



Marty Nemko, PhD

## TO FIND A JOB, BREAK THE RULES

In this tough job market, you can't play by the old "rules." As a career coach who has helped thousands of clients, I've found that contrarian job-search advice often is more effective. *Here's what to keep in mind...*

**Old advice:** Foster long-term relationships.

**New advice:** Develop instant deep ones.

Conventional wisdom says that you need long-term relationships to get significant career help. Alas, by the time you've developed a long-term relationship, you may have given up on finding a job.

**Good news:** It's possible to create a deep enough connection with someone that you've just met to land a job lead.

**The key:** In the first few minutes, unearth a person's core hot button, something that he/she cares deeply about. Usually it's related to money, success, family, looks or health.

Let's say that you meet someone at a professional event and have the following conversation...

**You:** *(In line for snacks or drinks)* Sure is a big crowd.

**She:** Sure is.

**You:** I'm Joe Jobseeker. I'm an accountant. Well, I was until last week. They laid us all off and sent the jobs to India. *(It's important to be quickly revealing without appearing desperate. That sets the stage for developing a quick connection.)* You?

**She:** Sally Smith. I'm a marketing manager. *(This is said in a flat tone.)*

**You:** *(Using a light tone.)* You sound thrilled with it.

**She:** No, it's OK. It's just that with three kids, my plate's pretty full. *(Aha! Her children could be her hot button—you'll know this if she becomes more animated while talking about her kids.)*

**You:** I can understand. How old are your kids? *(She talks, you listen, sharing parallel experiences and showing empathy. When you sense that she's feeling somewhat connected to you, make what I call "The Ask.")*

**You:** As I mentioned, I'm looking for my next accounting job. Might you know someone I could speak with?

If she knows someone, she may tell you...even though you just met.

**Old advice:** Rely on LinkedIn.com.

**New advice:** Use Twitter also.

Twitter, used wisely, can be a surprisingly helpful job-search tool. "Follow" a dozen employers you would like to work for. Occasionally, retweet their tweets and make a smart or kind comment when possible. After a while, send a message to one or more of them—"I have an idea I'd love to share with you. May I e-mail it to you?" With little effort, you've upped your chances of landing a job.

**Old advice:** Don't e-mail a cover letter.

**New advice:** Cover letters do matter.

Sure, large employers screen applications by computer, but eventually someone decides whom to interview. The cover letter increases

your chances of being selected. Start the letter with something such as, "I was pleased to see this job opening because I'm a good fit." Then list the first major requirement just as it is written in the ad. Below that, explain how you meet that requirement. Repeat that for each major requirement. Then say something along the lines of, "Of course, there's more to me than that. People say I'm *(insert one of your desirable qualities)*, so I'm hoping that you'll interview me."

**Old advice:** In résumés, it's numbers that count.

**New advice:** Tell stories.

The standard advice is, "Quantify your accomplishments." But desperate job seekers have so jumped on that bandwagon that if you totaled up all the dollars job candidates claimed to have earned for companies, it would exceed the gross domestic product. Most employers now are wise to this, so it's important to enhance those numbers with two or three "PAR" stories—a thorny *Problem* you faced... the smart way you *Approached* it... and its positive *Resolution*.

**Example:** "Our pizza shop was struggling, so I asked local bakeries if they wanted to rent our ovens after midnight so that they would have more fresh-baked goods for the morning. One said yes, which yielded us \$8,000 a year without our lifting a finger or investing a dime."

**Old advice:** Send a thank-you note.

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**New advice:** Send an influencing packet.

A thank-you note alone won't help you rise above your competitors. Instead, along with the note, send one or more of these...

*A short paper, even a one-pager, that you've written that would impress that employer.* For example, if you're

applying for a software marketing position, "Four Things Every Software Marketer Must Know in 2013."

*A humbly offered proposal for what you or the company might do.* For example, a step-by-step proposal for a pilot test on replacing outsourcing with in-sourcing to improve quality and save money.

*New information that would entice the employer.* For example, a client who was interviewed for a job selling toxic-waste services sent the interviewer a list of 10 federal decision makers he would contact if hired. He added, "I have 40 more. Hire me, and I'll use them." He was hired. ■ ■