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Job-hunting Myths That Could Hamper Your Search

If you're in the market for a new position in the legal field, you know there's no shortage of career information available, from job-related websites to advice from well-meaning friends and colleagues. You need to bear in mind, however, that although information is plentiful, it can sometimes be misleading. Check your knowledge of career-related trends by examining these common job-hunting myths:

Myth #1: Keep your resume to one page.

This familiar advice may be on its way out as a widely accepted guideline. A recent survey of senior executives by our company found a growing acceptance of longer resumes. While more than half (52 percent) of executives polled said a single page is the ideal length for a staff-level resume, 44 percent preferred two pages. That compares to 73 percent of respondents polled a decade earlier who cited a single page as the optimal length while 25 percent at that time preferred two pages. Respondents were especially receptive to longer resumes for executive roles, with nearly one-third (31 percent) citing three pages as the ideal length, compared to only 7 percent a decade ago.

As you update your resume, allow your experience to dictate length and depth, and be careful of appearing to "pad" the document for effect. If the position you're applying for and your experience level truly call for more than one page, don't let arbitrary length considerations hem you in. What's more important than length is that your resume is logically presented, error free and visually appealing.

Myth #2: The Internet is the best place to find your next job.

It's understandable why this myth exists: The Internet has created countless new opportunities for employers and job seekers alike. Job boards abound, and today even the smallest of companies have websites describing what they do and the advantages of working for them. However, while you can probably find what may appear to be promising leads online, answering blind ads and randomly submitting your resume on a company's website continues to have a low success rate as a strategy for landing a new position.

Sophisticated job seekers know that some of the best jobs are never advertised; rather, they're filled by referrals and word-of-mouth. Therefore, networking remains the best way to learn about possible job openings and to enlist others' help in getting your resume in the right hands. By working your network and meeting new people through professional associations and legal industry events, you'll increase the odds of uncovering the best opportunities and making the connections you need to gain an inside track on open positions.

Myth #3: Don't bother contacting a company if there isn't a position advertised.

Just because a company isn't currently advertising a position doesn't mean one won't come open tomorrow. In addition, a company may be just considering adding staff, but having an ideal candidate come along might provide the impetus to move ahead with hiring plans. Also, companies often show greater interest in candidates who have carefully sought them out as a prospective employer. This often signals that a job hunter identifies with the potential employer in some way (e.g., a personal value system that's a fit with the company's values) or has experience that would complement the firm.

Even if a company doesn't have immediate plans to add staff, hiring managers are often receptive to informational interviews, especially when a candidate's interest in a company is genuine. These meetings can provide you an opportunity to learn more about a firm's culture and goals and may help you remain top of mind if an opening occurs. Also, managers may be able to offer helpful advice on your job search, including possibly sharing information about other firms that are hiring.

Myth #4: Don't call them; they'll call you if they're interested.

Don't assume that because you haven't heard from a prospective employer that your resume wasn't of interest. Hiring managers often don't move at as fast a pace as job seekers would like, but that doesn't mean they're not interested in interviewing you. Always follow up on your application.

Some may feel they are being "pushy" by following up. The truth is most employers will view your outreach as a sign of initiative and enthusiasm. According to a survey conducted by our company, 82 percent of executives polled said job seekers should contact hiring managers within two weeks of sending a resume. Only 5 percent said professionals should refrain from communicating after applying for a position. The method you use for contacting a prospective employer seems to be less important than the fact that you're interested enough to make an inquiry. Asked how job seekers should check back with hiring managers, the top three responses given by our survey respondents were e-mail (38 percent), telephone (33 percent) and handwritten note (23 percent).

Myth #5: In today's market, there's no room to negotiate salary.

With the unemployment rate rising and recession fears growing, you may be tempted to accept whatever salary is offered. This would be a mistake. Most employers are willing to negotiate starting salaries with skilled job seekers, especially for hard-to-fill positions.

According to the *2007 Employment Dynamics and Growth Expectations (EDGE) Report* from Robert Half International and CareerBuilder.com, 40 percent of hiring managers surveyed said they are most willing to increase compensation for professional and technical staff positions, up from 36 percent the year before. Twenty percent said they would most likely raise salary levels for directors, managers and supervisors, up from 18 percent in 2006.

Myth #6: You should take the first offer you get.

Especially if your job search drags on for some time, you may feel pressured to jump at the first offer you get. Although it may not be easy to turn down an opportunity, even one that doesn't quite feel right, muster the courage to do so. If you feel pressured to accept a position, you'll likely find yourself wanting to make a premature move, and this could make it even harder to find your next job. Consider, too, that your offer may be a sign that you're getting better at interviewing, which bodes well for your continuing job search.

With job hunters having so much career-related information to sort through, it can be difficult to separate fact from fiction. And, often, a little of both is found in the kernels of advice you come across. As you execute your job search, be alert to the potential for misinformation. By recognizing frequently perpetuated myths early on, you can keep them from derailing your efforts to find a new position.