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Landing a Job in a Changing Economy

It may be a difficult time to be looking for a new position, but it's not mission impossible. In the current environment, legal administrators who are creative and resourceful will fare better in uncovering their next opportunity.

If you're embarking on a job search – either because you've recently lost a position as a result of the troubled economy or you're just ready for a new challenge – these suggestions can help you focus and energize your efforts.

Move on mentally. Especially if you've recently lost a job through no fault of your own, it's natural to feel some shock and sadness over what's happened. A job loss is always a traumatic event, and you may not have anticipated re-entering the employment market. But to be successful in your search, you have to put the past behind you and adopt a positive attitude. Although your qualifications for a position are always a key consideration, your ability to come across as an enthusiastic, confident person – someone others will want to work alongside – may very well be the deciding factor in whether you receive a job offer.

Do some soul searching. Any time you're facing a career transition, it's wise to briefly step back and re-examine your professional aspirations and direction. Is this an opportune time to return to school and pick up some additional courses? Or, maybe you've been waiting for the right time to earn an accreditation, such as the certified legal manager (CLM) designation? By pursuing additional learning, you can turn a potentially negative situation into an opportunity to enhance your marketability. Alternatively, through some professional introspection, you may decide that you're interested in a more significant career change, such as working in a different field. If so, begin researching opportunities in other industries and reaching out to your network to identify people who can help you learn more about making a career transition.

Use multiple search strategies. In today's job market, you have to use multiple approaches and tools to uncover the best opportunities. You can't simply rely on monitoring employment ads in the newspaper, searching a single online site or networking through a professional association. Instead, focus the bulk of your efforts on prospecting for opportunities in the "invisible" job market. Through effective networking, you can reach key decision makers who have the power to hire you into jobs that have not been advertised. These include internal openings that firms fill through staff recommendations, new positions that a company might create specifically for you, modifications to existing positions to fit your skills and emerging opportunities at expanding companies.

Work with a recruiter. A specialized recruiter who has a keen grasp on who's hiring and what they're looking for can help you stand out in an increasingly competitive job market. A recruiter brings a recognizable name and a host of relationships to your job search, allowing you to be represented by a firm that has long-established ties with some of the most desirable employers. Another important advantage of working with recruiters is that they will tell you the truth about your potential as a candidate and help you improve any weaknesses.

Consider interim work. While you're looking for a new job, consider working as an interim legal professional. Temporary work offers several benefits: It gives you the flexibility to accept or decline projects based on your current schedule and priorities, the pay is competitive and many companies bring in interim professionals to evaluate them for full-time roles, so these assignments can lead to a permanent position. At the least, they can help you better determine the type of position and firm you're looking for while allowing you to continue to expand your skills and experience.

Overcome age bias. It's unfortunate, but true, that experienced job seekers sometimes encounter age bias. But there are ways to offset any potential barriers of this nature. First, make sure your job search materials are age neutral. For instance, you can downplay your age by simply listing academic degrees, but not the year in which they were received. You may also want to use a functional, rather than chronological, resume format, which allows you to highlight your most recent skills, experience and accomplishments.

In addition, don't play into possible biases by noting, for example, that you're looking for a less stressful job that will allow you to ease into retirement. And be on guard against suggestions that you're "over-qualified" for a position. Counter comments of this nature with a confident response, such as, "I believe I'm *well-qualified*, and I'd welcome the opportunity to address your specific concerns about my ability to excel in this role." Another stereotype older job seekers often encounter is that they're not adept with technology. Tackle this problem head-on if necessary by mentioning your commitment to staying abreast of new technologies. You may also need to reassure your interviewer that you're a quick study who's always eager to learn new things.

A job search can be challenging in the best of times, but in a difficult economy, it has the potential to be especially demoralizing. For just this reason, your ability to adopt a positive and flexible attitude about the types of positions and salary range you're willing to consider can give you a distinct advantage over other candidates in landing an interview and, ultimately, an offer – even in a tough environment.