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CREATING OPPORTUNITY...And Turning Them into INTERVIEWS

If you are not absolutely clear about what you want as that NEXT STEP in your career, envision an ideal position that will value you for the main characteristics and experiences you want to be hired for. Since you need to be concise and clear when developing your Personal Marketing collateral materials (resume, BIO, verbal communication, and your LinkedIn profile), it's important to figure out what you best offer in your next position, so you know exactly what skills and experiences to highlight. **Make FIT happen!**

RESEARCH: Analyze Your Target Industry

Once you know what you want to do, your next step is identifying where you want to be—think industry, city, and companies. Then, research your industry and key trends affecting it now: Read relevant industry news articles, research companies, and analyze job descriptions you're interested in.

SELF-Assessment: Find Your Fit and Focus on CAREER Objectives

With your knowledge of your target industry, it's time to figure out how you fit in (or want to). Identify, describe, and refine your key selling points with your end goal in mind. Then, craft them into 4-6 bullets, shooting for statements that are vivid and that clearly illustrate what you bring to the table over anyone else.

Ask Yourself

- What is the intersection of your 'value proposition' and what your target industry, or specific Company, needs?
- What are your most impactful areas of experience, knowledge, or skill?
- What critical problems are you well suited to solve?

Pay Attention to the Nitty Gritty

As you begin to think about the type of career transition you want to make, what IS the next appropriate employment for you... start out by documenting what you already know to be true about your professional self.

1. Give specific attention to what you spend the most time doing, those functional details of your work that have the greatest impact on your employer's success, and, especially, what are you uniquely providing that gives value to your role?
2. Take notes about when you're feeling particularly unmotivated or unenthusiased about your job. Write down the tasks that bring you down as well as those that get you excited.
3. It may seem like a tedious exercise, but if you stick with it, patterns will start to emerge. And it's in teasing out these patterns that'll help you build a picture of the role that's right for you.

Schedule Informational "Interviews" With Key Contacts

In addition to being introspective, it's also important to get out there and start becoming your own best CAREER Coach, learning about satisfying next steps, the career moves you're interested in. And what better resource than the very people already in, or connected with, those you seek?

As an active job seeker, especially in the first few months of a job search, networking your way to one informational interview per week is essential to your campaign's success. This may sound like a lot, but initially quantity is more important than quality as you want to get a sense of a wide variety of roles in different industries based on the results of your introspection.

The more people you speak with, the more you'll be exposed to fields you might wish to pursue. With that said, you don't want the person on the receiving end to feel that way—so always make sure to come prepared and send a thank you.

The GREAT Informational Interview

Let's say you managed the tricky process of asking for an informational interview and have succeeded in arranging a meeting with an amazing contact. What now? How do you make the most of this conversation—while still keeping things casual and comfortable?

As always, it's just a matter of being prepared. Here's a three-part process for your next meeting that'll make sure you get the advice you need... and make a great impression on those who may direct you to your next steps.

1. The Warm Up

People love to talk about themselves, so when you first sit down, give them a perfect opportunity! Get the conversation going by asking your contact something about his or her experiences thus far—something he or she knows all about. Some good places to begin:

- How did you get your start in this field?
- What's it like working at your company?
- What projects are you working on right now?
- What's your opinion on [exciting development in the industry]?

You should also be prepared to chat about yourself, your past experiences, and your career goals. Remember, this meeting isn't just a time to ask for advice and learn from your contact's experiences—it's also a chance to make an impression.

2. Your Pitch

After you've made some general conversation, it's time to move on to what you came for: the advice you can't get anywhere else. Before the meeting, think through the insider information you want to learn from this person.

- What information are you seeking?
- Is there something you can learn from this person that would be difficult for you to learn on your own?

Depending on where you are in the job search process, adjust your questions accordingly. For example, if you're still in exploration mode, trying to find out if, say, working for an technology startup is for you, then ask questions like:

- How did you choose this company or position over others in your field?
- What is the most rewarding thing about working in this industry? The most challenging?
- My background is in _____... how do you think I can best leverage my previous experience for this field?

If you're further along in your job search and could use some job hunting and interviewing tips for specific companies, don't be afraid to ask questions like:

- What experiences, skills, or personality traits does your company look for in new hires?
- What do you wish you had done differently when you first started at your company?
- What job search advice would you give to someone in my situation?

Of course, you'll want go with the flow of the conversation—you're trying to build a relationship, not fire off as many questions as you can.

Also remember that what these questions have in common is that they are all seeking advice. Keep it that way. It's no mystery that you are clearly looking for a new position or career change, and the fastest way to alienate your contact is to ask for a job (or anything along those lines).

REPEAT: The fastest way to alienate your contact is to ask for a job (or anything along those lines). If your contact offers to forward your resume based on your conversation, then by all means, take advantage of it. But that process is for him or her to initiate, not you.

3. Tap Into Their Network... a "Lost Owl" Strategy

When wrapping up the meeting, you should ask for recommendations for two or three more people who would be good to talk to as you continue networking.

“WHO else or WHERE else might I go for more advice and information? The likelihood someone will take time to chat with you goes up significantly if your initial request comes through a mutual contact, so it’s a fast, easy way to broaden the reach of your networking effort.

The key here is to make your request as specific as possible. This might be counterintuitive, but it actually makes it easier for your contact to think of someone when you say, “Could you recommend a couple more people for me to speak with to learn more about harnessing of available wind energy?” ...than to come up with an answer to, “Is there anyone else you would recommend that I speak with?”

To recap: Get the conversation going, know what you want to get out of the meeting, and don’t leave without knowing who you’re contacting next. And don’t forget to follow up with a thank-you note!

Better yet, follow up again with an update on your meetings with the people he or she recommended and the results of your job search. After all, your informational interviewees aren’t just useful for their one-time advice—they can become a long-term part of your network.

Turning Opportunities In To Interviews...

This topic represents what most people call ‘active job search, but, as you can learn, the HOW –TO is what creates your success in networking. It professes strategies and tactics that will generate more effective networking. In your ‘first wave’ of networking you had the opportunity to reconnect with people you already know or have cause to know... a nice by product of your efforts is the identification of attractive opportunities, and targeted organizations!

You’ll be the first to know when you’re ready for ‘wave 2’ of networking... which, simply put, is networking your way in to attractive opportunities. You will focus your activity and time management to the business of creating INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION with employees, customers, and vendors—the “stakeholders”—within and surrounding any targeted organization.

THE BASICS

So what are those basics that will allow you to effectively network to identify appropriate opportunities, and then secure the requisite INTERVIEWS in order to “close the deal?”

1. Practice your two minute drill every chance you get.... it’s the fundamental building material of your communication strategy--your verbal collaterals!

2. Practice your exit and qualification statements... most all potential employers and networking contacts will want to know your current situation and why you are available.

3. Practice answering both common and tough questions... including pre-offer negotiation tactics. The most asked question during career transition is, "Tell me about yourself." Appropriate use of your two-minute drill and related verbal strategies, your "verbal collaterals," is a key ingredient to personal salesmanship.

Let's not forget a couple of additional 'collaterals' that will help you round out your ability to 'get the word out' and serve as evidence of your qualifications.

4. Brag bytes... Wordcraft various collections of words, phrases and sentences to capture memorable moments or accomplishments--the best you have to offer. "...saved 80% cost-perhire..." Used in MSWord, 'Quick Parts' can be quite efficient when building high impact correspondence as well.

5. Personal Portfolio... Your collection of certificates, examples of work, reference letters, etc that can bring life and interest (not to mention PROOF) to your story.

RESEARCHING TARGET Organizations and Attractive Positions

Step six in our 12-step Process, first level research, will help you to identify attractive trends and targeted companies. But, in THIS context, I suggest digging a bit deeper in order to help secure an interview... Learn as much as possible about the company, the potential opportunity, and the hiring authority--This is usually your next boss, but could be even higher in the chain of command.

Your research goals ought to include developing information about the company's products, people, organizational structure, successes (and failures), profits (and losses), capital spending, strategic plans, philosophy and labor climate.

- As part of your 'second wave of networking,' ask a friendly recruiter, business acquaintance or stockbroker what they know about the company... and by extension, call people with whom you have networked and ask what they know about the company
- Check with the local Chamber of Commerce or Better Business Bureau.
- Call the company directly; request a sales brochure, annual report or other company information. Companies have to market themselves, too, you know!

Telephone and Networking Skills

On a scale of passive to assertive => to aggressive, let's take a look at how we could communicate direct to contacts in and surrounding a targeted organization...

Email...safe, but too easy to be deleted before a relationship is established.

Requires follow-up.

LETTER of introduction... also safe, but read more often. Paves the way for a first call to a referral... creates dialog. Requires phone follow-up.

Phone call...direct... often a cold call... requires risk. Establishes contact, interaction and, worst case, VISIBILITY.

There's only two reasons to be on the phone during active job search...

1. Reconnecting with valid contacts, seeking their advice and information, sharing your communication strategy, and seeking referral activity...
2. Securing actual interviews

Cover NOTE and resume... Rather than mindlessly applying to countless jobs, playing the numbers game; develop your networking style to motivate a person to request your resume. When requested, resume gets read more often. Establishes relationship. Requires follow-through. Face2face office visit!



ABOUT DFWCareerpilot... A FREE, WEEKLY WORKSHOP event with a regular rotation of topical material covering a 12-Step Process **M.A.P. (MAHER Associates Process)** that will accelerate your job search success. Bob's presentation style is highly engaging and interactive, so never be shy with questions and/or supportive anecdotes.

BE PREPARED for Bob's two philosophies: Learn to Embrace The OTHER Job Market... and, fully optimize your efforts with a high tech/high touch approach!

1. His public Group on LinkedIn: **DFWCareerpilot**
2. **GO TO: www.dfwcareerpilot.com** and **FOLLOW** (register for) it to receive regular updates
3. Follow **DFWCareerpilot** on Twitter!



Bob Maher created his online presence, www.careerpilot.com, in 1994. He has over thirty years of successful experience in Corporate Recruitment, performance management and Career Management Services. He is an entrepreneur and innovator in the use of information technology in the recruitment and employment process.

On the Founder's Council of the Association of Career Professionals - International and quite active in their Professional Development, Technology and Chapter Growth initiatives--a frequent speaker at industry conferences and seminars. The Institute of Career Certification-International has him reviewing the portfolios of incoming applicants. Bob was presented with the prestigious LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT award by The Association in 2006.