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How to Manage Your Job Search

Introduction

Managing and organizing your job search is one of the most important activities you need to master in order for your overall job search to be successful. There are so many activities and steps involved there's no way to remember it all. If you aren't organized, you'll find yourself drowning in details which will overwhelm you and will negatively affect your job search success.

We no longer live in an environment where you can look at the classified ads in your newspaper, apply for a few jobs by mailing your resume in, and have one of them result in a job offer. If you haven't looked for a job recently, it's gotten much more complicated, even in the last few years! There are hundreds of applicants for each advertised job, so getting noticed takes a concentrated effort, well thought-out strategy and massive action. That effort, strategy and action can only be effective if you are organized. A haphazard approach will provide a haphazard result and that's not your goal!

The average job search typically takes several months depending on what you're looking for, so having a plan, strategy, structure and a format to keep you organized over these months is imperative. Once you have your job search tool in place, it will only take about 10 minutes per day to stay organized if you keep up with it, but the time it will save you in the long run is immeasurable.

There are very savvy job seekers out there and it's not that they are any more qualified, experienced or able than you are. The only difference between them and you is a well managed approach to what they are doing. You CAN compete with them, it's just a matter of focus and execution, which this article will prepare you to do.

No matter where you are in your job search, it's not too late to start organizing yourself. If you've already started your job search process, you can begin the organization process today and recreate what you've already done by logging your activity into your organization tool. If you haven't already started or are just starting your job search, great - this article will help you get your organization tool ready to go today so you won't get behind!

So what do I really mean by 'managing your job search'? It's about being organized, but organizing 'what'? First I'm going to address *HOW* to organize and then I'll address *WHAT* to organize.

Organizational Tools

Employers and recruiters are utilizing technology like never before to keep up with the growing number of applicants and to keep their recruitment costs down. As a result, you as an applicant need to use the most up to date tools available to you. Follow-up is a major component of a successful job search strategy and it's impossible to follow-up properly without being organized.

So how do you organize all of the data that's needed to be tracked? There are several different tools you can use.

- The first one is the most low-tech – a notebook and a pencil. If you are unfamiliar with word processing or utilizing a spreadsheet program or other software, this may be the best way for you to organize yourself, at least in the beginning. I've also heard of people having a job search wall in their home office or you could use the back of a door with post-it notes. You could also use the recipe file box method where you use index cards to keep track of information and tabs to categorize the information. There's nothing wrong with these lower tech approaches if they work for you, but given the complexity of the task, you might want to consider using something that has a little longer term value and utility.
- The next most popular tool is probably a spreadsheet program, like Microsoft's Excel® program. This program will allow you to sort and organize data in many different ways and easily allows for retrieval, additions and removal of data. You could also use a word processing program like Microsoft Word®, which you would format similar to using a notebook and pencil.
- There are also job search management tools at most of the major job boards, like Monster and CareerBuilder, where you can build and store different resume and cover letter versions and store and view jobs and your application history. My favorite online tool, however, is the website www.JibberJobber.com. They have a free tool or one you can pay for, but start with the free one first.

The bottom line is, it doesn't matter what organization tool you use, as long as you use it! Pick a tool and start using it today!

Just as a side note here - if you are collecting unemployment insurance, your unemployment office or workforce center probably has forms you can use to keep track of your job contacts made each week. You do need to make sure you're complying with those requirements in addition to the organizational tool you use, but proper use of the organization tool I'm describing here will help you fulfill your unemployment requirement.

What to Manage

Now let's address what needs to be tracked and managed on this journey called 'your job search'!

I like to break these categories into 2 different groups: external and internal. External actions can be defined as things you do that other people will see, such as applying for a job, posting your resume, making a phone call, attending a networking event or sending a thank-you note. Internal action steps are activities that you do that support your external actions, such as research, reading, writing a cover letter or resume version, practicing interviewing etc. So you can categorize your activities as to whether they are external or internal.

External Activities

So let's address the external activities first. Obviously these efforts are important since these are where you make contact with the outside world. You can do all of the internal actions you want, but if others aren't seeing your output, you can't and won't get job offers!

So what needs to be managed in the contacts arena, the externals? I like to break this section down into companies and people.

- First are the companies you've applied to. List the following:
 - Company name
 - Company address
 - Company web site

- Company phone numbers
- Research information about the company. Have standard info you fill in to refresh yourself about who they are and what they do so you can answer the question - 'what do you know about us?' Have a section where you keep track of acceptance and rejection letters – both from the company and you.
- Under the company name you want to list all of the following information about positions you've applied to within the company and the complete chronology of your application and interview process:
 - Position you applied for, including title, job description, and requisition # if available
 - Where you found it
 - When you applied
 - Which cover letter version you submitted
 - Which resume version you submitted
 - Who did you submit your application to, i.e. hiring manager name and contact info
 - Who called or emailed you – their name, title and contact info
 - When did they call or email you back?
 - When did you call or email them
 - Interview dates and times
 - Who did you meet at the interview
 - Log all contact information for everyone you met at the interview
 - Notes and impressions about the interview
 - Thank you notes: to who and submission dates
 - Follow-up dates
 - Salary information for this particular position. When you get to the salary negotiation, you must know what you've already told them and what they've told you!
 - Log any internal contacts you have at the company. Even though they may not be the hiring manager or interviewer, you want to keep track of who you know 'on the inside' and what your conversations have been with them.

As a general note here, keeping yourself organized with different versions of cover letters and resumes is vital. Don't just name a file on your computer 'Resume'. Name it "Resume – XYZ Company". Same with cover letters. Also, when you're applying on-line you typically need different file types of your resume, so keep that organized by easily being able to tell which versions are MS Word® documents vs. plain text documents.

With all the detail in that category you can see why it's imperative you're organized!

Other Places You Apply To

Along with the above discussion of companies you've applied to, you need to repeat all of the same information for the following:

- Recruiters – make sure to keep track of who they are contacting on your behalf and the interviews that come through them.
- Employment agencies
- Trade association websites
- Career centers such as local city/county or state workforce centers
- School campus job or career centers
- Job fairs – track where and when did you go, who you talked to and what did you give them. Make notes about all of your conversations. It all becomes a blur after awhile, so stay organized!
- Also, if you are looking at newspaper classifieds or help-wanted ads, keep track of all of the activity and details as outlined above. Many times when you apply for these, you don't know who you're sending to whether it's a company or an agency, so keep track of it separately until you do know.

Job Boards, Social Media and References

Next, you want to be organized about where and what you're posting on-line, such as on monster.com or careerbuilder.com. Track your login credentials – your username and passwords, log when you posted your resume, which resume version you posted and keep track of how many calls you are getting as a result of each post.

Have a section for tracking your on-line social networking and social media activity such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. Keep track of what sites you're on and your login credentials. Also, know what your profile says and keep it up to date. Use your friends and connections to get the word out – but be careful, especially if you're still employed. Always be professional on these public sites – avoid inappropriate photos, comments or jokes. Potential employers will Google you and find you and this information!

Next have a references section where you keep track of the references you'll use to give to potential employers. You must keep in touch with them and have their permission so keep up to date with their name, phone numbers and email addresses. Also, keep them informed of your progress and situation.

Networking

The next major section is about keeping track of your networking contacts. Now, you've already tracked contacts you've made at various companies, organizations, recruiters, employment agencies, career centers and job fairs. But here, we're talking about efforts you make for the sole purpose of networking and connecting with others, before there's a job to be applied for.

In your Networking section, list the person's name, all of their contact information, where you met them, when you met them, who introduced you, who they work for and what they do. Remember, networking isn't only about what they can do for you, it's also about what you can do for them. So keep track of ways you can support them and what you've done for them.

In this section, also keep track of networking events you go to. Where, when and who you met there.

Remember, most people find jobs through people they already know and who already know them. So you also want to network with people you already know. Put out the word that you are looking and be specific about what you are looking for. Keep track of emails you send to your network, and phone calls made. Make sure to cover family, friends, neighbors, previous co-workers, community contacts, church members etc. List all of the groups of people you can contact to network with, start contacting them and keeping track! You should consider writing a networking letter in which you clearly explain your situation, what you're looking for and specifically request them to keep an eye and ear out for any lead they may have. In the Career3D resources section there is a template for creating networking emails and letters.

Finally, have a section for Strategic Volunteering you do – list what, when, where, who you meet and any leads they give you.

Internal Actions

So we've covered the external contacts you'll make and how to organize and track them. Now let's talk briefly about internal efforts you'll want to keep organized. These are efforts you make in preparation for applying and meeting and interviewing.

- Keep track of aggregator sites you use like indeed.com or simplyhired.com. These are sites that send job leads and postings to your email inbox based on job titles and keywords you give them. Keep track of keywords you use and how many good job leads you get from each. You want to keep track of the effectiveness of this effort, so you know whether it's worth your time to stay there or whether you need to tweak something.

- Keep track of what you're reading to stay in-touch with the industry and profession. This prepares you to answer the question: "What industry publications are you reading and how are you keeping up with current industry trends?"
- Even though this is an external contact you're making, it's for internal purposes, so keep notes on your Coaching calls you have with your coach. What do you talk about, what specific action steps come out of the calls and what actions are you taking?
- Know your worth. Do your salary research in advance and keep notes on what you find so you're not scrambling when the salary negotiation conversation comes up. You can use salary.com, payscale.com or salaryexpert.com
- Keep track of job search related expenses for tax purposes: supplies like paper, envelopes and postage, mileage, parking fees, coaching sessions, assessments, resume writing, business cards, books and other resources and support you purchase, such as your Career3D membership. These expenses are all mostly tax deductible as a part of your job search, so keep good records and check with your accountant or tax expert to find out exactly what you should be keeping and tracking in this area.
- Make and stick to a budget during this time, especially if you're not currently working. You don't want to be forced into taking a job because you are on the brink of financial desperation.
- Another item to consider is setting specific goals for each week and then tracking your percentage complete. For example, you could set a goal of making 10 job contacts per week and when you have completed 4 of them, have a visual representation that you're 40% complete on that goal for the week!

So that about covers what needs to be included in your organizational tool. Remember, this is YOUR tool. Make it work so that it makes sense to YOU. If what I've outlined here feels too structured, scale it down. Start tracking only items that make sense to you right now. You can always add items later as you find you need them. Don't be put off of using any kind of tool because you feel overwhelmed. Start small, but start today!

Other Job Search Items and Actions to Organize

There are other job search items and issues that need managing. These items may not need tracking in your job search organization tool, but they are items that you need to do that will greatly enhance managing your job search. If you're not already doing one of these, then go ahead and add it to your tool for tracking until it is complete.

Structure and schedule your time – set your alarm, have set hours and a set weekly schedule. Set goals – break them down into daily tasks, have a daily to-do list. Have a set routine for looking for and applying to jobs and for networking. Yes, you can also schedule in some free-time, but without a plan for each day and week, you'll tend to lose focus.

Along with managing your time, keep a good calendar system, either written or electronic. Don't tightly schedule activities, especially around interviews. Always be reachable and don't leave town where you're not reachable by phone or email. Have a cell phone or home line that you check regularly, have an email account you can always get to and be able to check it remotely.

Keep track of where you are in the process with other employers so you can contact them to let them know you are no longer available. Also, once you get hired and are no longer looking, make sure to remove your resume posts from job boards and let your network know.

Your motivation will also need managing, so get a job search accountability buddy and a Coach to help you manage the speed bumps you'll encounter.

While it's not always possible, try not to be in the process of other major life changes, i.e. moving, having a baby, getting married or breaking up. It's disrupting and stressful enough to be managing your job search without other out of the ordinary distractions.

Summary

Having a successful job search is dependent on you being organized and managing your time and activities well, and being prepared. As you now see, there are many, many items that you need to manage in this process called 'job search'. Thanks to technology, it's not as simple as it used to be, but also, thanks to technology, you now have more sophisticated tools to manage your job search process.

The beauty of managing this process is that it can provide you with invaluable measurement tools. You can quickly see how many resumes you've sent out, out of those resumes, how many interviews you got, out of those interviews how many second interviews you got. If you're applying but not getting interviews, there's likely something that needs to be fixed on your cover letter or resume. If you're getting first interviews but not second ones or no job offers, there's obviously something going on in the interviews. This is all critical information you can use during your coaching to help make adjustments where they are needed. "What can be measured, immediately improves" is a Quality Management approach that definitely applies here.

I also want to note that this is not just a process you use to manage a job search, it can also be used to manage your career your entire working life. Everyone should have a career management plan and the process, plan, structure and format outlined in this article is an excellent way to stay on top of your career management plan to ensure you are always prepared for all opportunities as they come your way and as you create them!

Even if you are a passive job seeker, there may be an internal job opening you're interested in or that is recommended for you and you must be ready to interview at a moment's notice. If a recruiter calls with the perfect job would you be ready? If an exciting new opportunity presents itself through your network, would you be prepared to go for it?

Now you can see why having a career management plan is so important and why this isn't just a one-time job search management tool! You could also use it as a career journal, where you log and write about your career goals, establish career related objectives and use it to capture all of your work life related thoughts, notes and plans. When you have a career management plan, you are proactive in directing and controlling your career rather than being reactive to whatever comes along. We all know that taking control of your career and knowing you're in control will increase career satisfaction as well as life satisfaction.

So as a career management tool you can use it to:

- Keep a detailed and current list of accomplishments
- Keep work samples
- List training and education attended
- Keep copies of all awards, certificates, honors and testimonials about your performance
- List new skills and experiences to add to your resume
- List non-work related experience such as volunteer activities
- List next career steps

This article may make it seem as if you're going to spend all of your time in front of a computer screen. Nothing could be further from the truth! The purpose of having this tool in place is to actually reduce the amount of time you spend managing your job search. The goal is to get you away from your computer and get you out there talking, meeting and interviewing!

Like most things in life, having a solid plan and strategy will result in a solid result. Being organized and having a well managed job search approach is the best investment you can make. If you have any questions or need further support in Managing Your Job Search, remember that the resources and support at Career3D are here to help you.

To Your Success,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brenda". The script is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial 'B'.

Brenda Cody