

# In Between:

*How to  
Search for and Find  
your Ideal Position*

Published by:



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## Being Unemployed

The trouble with being unemployed is that your job is to find a job. That means the minute you wake up in the morning, you're working.

Regardless of why you're in between jobs, here you are and in a tough, although not impossible, job market. And while it can be a pretty disheartening situation, searching for a new job can be a time of introspection, self discovery and goal clarification which can energize you and give you a new lease on life. You'll be starting fresh in a new job with new possibilities, opportunities and experiences. Just because there are fewer jobs available now does not mean that the ideal one for you doesn't exist-it may just be harder to find. This is a time to roll up your sleeves and do good work to ensure yourself the best chance for success in finding the right position.

You may be tempted to panic and post your resume on every known job site and mass e-mail your resume to top employers in your industry. But wait. Before you take the paint splatter approach to your job hunt, stop to think about this. If you jump into the wrong position, either you or your employer will be unhappy and you'll be unemployed again soon. Take some time now to think about and plan your next move. You may do more damage to your job search than good.

## Purpose of this Booklet

The purpose of this booklet is to assist you in planning for and finding your next job. The key word is plan. You would never undertake a major project without a plan in mind would you? So, our project plan will start with an assessment of your experience and skills. Then we'll look at your short- and long-term goals. Based upon this information, we'll offer guidance and tips for developing the tools of the trade-resumes and cover letters. Then you'll actually begin your multi-faceted, but focused search. Finally, we'll wrap up with some tips for keeping yourself primed for your next career move.

Keep in mind that this is a project and developing a good plan that is implemented with passion will have a higher probability of success.

## Assessment

Most people are uncomfortable with performing job searches for several reasons. First, most of us are not trained on how to prepare a resume or conduct a job search. Secondly, it is not something we do very often and in between searches, you can easily forget the lessons you learned. Finally, for many people, it may feel uncomfortable "marketing" yourself. You know why you are a skilled person worthy of performing your ideal job, but unless you can sell yourself, you'll have a very difficult time even getting a foot in the door for an interview.

If you haven't done so already, go get a pencil and some paper, or get in front of a computer with a word processor where you can do some writing. A computer is helpful because you can edit and format quickly and neatly. We're not starting on your resume yet, but rather doing something MORE important: taking an in-depth look at you.

Be honest when answering the following questions about you:

- What experience do I have?
- What special skills do I possess?
- Am I good at what I do?

- Do I enjoy doing what I do?
- What desirable working habits do I practice?
- What significant accomplishments have I contributed in former jobs?
- What was the value of these accomplishments?
- How can I contribute to future employers?
- Who would want to hire me?
- Why would someone want to hire me?

Please contribute ample time and energy to answering these questions thoughtfully and accurately. Think positive, but be honest in your assessment. This information is beneficial to internalize because not only will it assist you in crafting your resume, it will certainly prove helpful come interview time.

If you find it difficult to concentrate on these questions or the next set of questions, try a change of venue. Take your pencil and paper to a park or scenic location. Go somewhere where you won't be distracted. This is a time for inspired thinking.

## Goals

Start with the end in mind even if the short-term goal is just to eat.

Now, what are your career goals? Are they aligned with your personal goals? Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years? Sketch out your career path.

People do best at what they like most, and people like most what they do best

- What type of position would you most like and best be able to succeed in?
- What position do you need now to reach the one you want in five years?
- What type of working environment do you work best in?
- What type of company would you like to work for?
- Is there a new direction you would like to branch into, and why?

Assessing yourself and determining your goals is the most important piece of searching for your next job. If you don't know who you are or what you want, how will you know the ideal job when you find it? Or worse yet, how will you know to run when the WRONG job finds you!

Now, on to developing your tools for the job search.

## Tools of the Trade - Resumes and Cover Letters

### The Resume

The right resume is one that gets you an interview. Think of the process as writing a custom resume for each position you are applying for.

It is easy to fight the resume process. How can a few sheets of paper accurately reflect your experience skills and abilities? Regardless of the answer to this question, in a majority of

cases, the resume serves as your ticket to getting to the next step-the interview. And in an employer-favored market, your resume will be competing with many others. The overall goal is to create a very carefully crafted, clean and concise document.

With the popularization of the Internet, chances are part of your search will be electronic. This means you will either e-mail your resume or copy and paste it into a web-based form. Because of this, you will want to:

- Use very basic design and layout,
- Select standard fonts such as Times New Roman or Arial, and
- Avoid using special characters such as ampersands (&) or quotation marks ("").

Even if you mail a paper resume to a potential employer, it is likely your resume will be scanned and stored in a database. If the scanner can't interpret what is on your resume, it might keep a human from ever reading it.

For more information on what to include and not include on your resume, visit the JDA Professional Services, Inc. website Career Manager section. There you will find our article "*How to Write a Resume.*"

Now that you have the basic information about the mechanics of building a resume, you're ready to use your answers to the Assessment and Goals exercise you completed previously. Reread these and keep them in mind as you craft your resume.

Once you have a solid first draft document, ask a friend or family member to critique it for you. Your ideal proofreader will have superior grammatical skills and be able to understand the perspective of the hiring authority of the job you are applying for. If you are applying for a database manager position, and you have a friend who is an IT manager, he or she would be a good person to proofread your resume.

## The Cover Letter

In most cases, you will be submitting a cover letter with a resume, whether it is in e-mail or paper form. The cover letter is like a teaser that will entice the hiring authority to look at your resume more closely or to toss it into the tall "to be filed" stack.

Include in your cover letter:

- Which position you are applying for, use a job code if you know it,
- Why you want to work for the company,
- Why you are the best candidate for this position, and
- What you can do for the company.

Even more than the resume, carefully choose your words. A clean, concise and compelling cover letter will be the first impression you make on the hiring authority. Make it a good one!

## Personalization/Customization

Take it from a person who has read many resumes and cover letters, generic resumes get filed right away and are rarely retrieved. Make sure that when you send out your resume and cover letter, they are customized for the position. When you know the hiring authority's name, address the cover letter to that person instead of guessing at a title, i.e. "Human Resources Manager." Using a word processor makes quick customization of resumes and cover letters a snap.

And while it might appear very efficient to mass e-mail your resume to an arm's-length list of hiring authorities, a "spam" resume is likely to get deleted altogether. That sends a very clear message to a hiring authority that you have very little interest in getting a job with his or her company.

Remember the resume and cover letter represent you to the hiring manager who decides whether you will proceed to the interview phase for a job you want! Make sure it sends the right message.

## The Search

The goal is to find the right position with the right company-remember people hire people.

Remember the Goals questions you answered included what type of job you want and what type of company you would like to work for. Now is the time you'll be seeking out these opportunities and companies. Make a list of companies you know of who fit your goals. You can also research companies online. Hoovers.com is a good place to begin researching companies, as are business sections of online papers like the Houston Chronicle (<http://www.chron.com>), The Wall Street Journal (<http://www.wsj.com>) and the Houston Business Journal (<http://www.bizjournals.com/houston/>).

## Creating Your Own Opportunities

Some might consider this "cold calling", but when you are looking for a job, it is anything but. When you send a personalized and customized cover letter and a resume to a hiring manager not because you are responding to an open position advertisement, but because you want to work for his or her company, you send the message that:

- You are a self-starter
- You've done your homework
- You know what you want
- You have that oh-so desirable "fire in the belly"

Even if there is not a position available, who do you think the hiring manager will think of first when a position does become available?

So, take your Goals list, create your list of ideal companies and even make notes about why you'd want to work for them. Then start creating personalized and customized cover letters and resumes. To ensure accuracy, call the company and verify the correct spellings of the name and address of the hiring authority, but be prepared-you may just get to talk to the hiring authority personally! If you've internalized your Assessment and Goals, you'll be ready.

## Networking

By far, networking is your best resources. It's not what you know; it's who you know. And, it is part of our nature as human beings to help one another.

Networking doesn't come naturally for many of us, but it can be a useful tool in a job search. "Knowing someone" can help you get your foot in the door and help your resume get picked for the short stack of interview candidates.

Keep in mind friends, family, trade associations, chambers of commerce, and alumni associations. If you have a good relationship and performed well, former co-workers and employers are a good source for networking as well. And who better to vouch for you to a potential employer? Another reason to never burn bridges. How you end a relationship is as important as how you begin one. We have seen time and time again where previous employers when contacted by a former employee will hire back that employee either on a full-time or contract basis.

The key with networking is that it is not a one-time event when you need something. It has to be a lifelong process maintaining relationships over the years. Start today and don't stop.

Let everyone you come in contact with know what you are looking for and how he or she can help. Be clear and concise-it helps potential network contacts focus their thinking. Networking works in multiples. You talk to ten people who each talk to five people who each talk to two people. 181 people are now engaged in your search.

## The Internet

Remember your ideal company list? Don't forget to check out their individual websites. Most companies now post their internal job vacancies on their websites. You may want to bookmark your ideal companies' sites and check back frequently for your dream job.

Job posting sites would have you believe your dream career is just a click away. If it sounds too good to be true-it probably is. However, the reality is that many companies have turned to the Internet for recruiting. Just be aware that many of the postings on job site boards are by third party companies who will not be hiring you, but representing you to a potential employer.

The challenge with job sites is that they get so many resumes that yours becomes one of thousands. Unless your resume reads like the job description, the clerical human resources person, who likely knows nothing about the job, will file your resume as "no interest."

What job sites ARE good for however is giving you insight into a company letting you know where to start your networking efforts. An online job posting can help you find the right contact person or at least someone who can make an introduction for you.

## Posting your Resume

A heated debate rages over the value of posting your resume on a job site.

The advantage is that many people can find you assuming you use the right "key words" on your resume. Since companies receive so many responses to their ads, many have opted to mine the job sites for resumes versus posting ads.

The downside is that you never know who has your resume and what they are doing with it. Plus, once it is distributed, you have no way of getting it back.

A note about posting resumes online - remember that in some cases your resume will be publicly viewable. This may or may not be a good thing. If you are unemployed, you have no worry about your present employer seeing your resume online. On the other hand, if you are currently employed, be very careful where you post your resume!

Also, clients of staffing companies have said they will not accept a candidate who has posted their resume online because a resume online cannot be recalled and thus, the job search is never-ending. The chance of that candidate leaving the employer is higher than a candidate who hasn't posted their resume online.

Below are examples of generic, industry-specific or locally focused job posting sites.

### Generic Sites

Monster.com  
CareerBuilder.com  
JobSearch.com

### Industry Specific

Dice.com  
HAL-PC.org  
BrassRing.com

### Local

HoustonJobs.com  
HAL-PC.org  
Houston Employment.com

## Recruiters/Agencies/Contract Services

While recruiters can be an excellent way to get you in to the top-notch companies, not all recruiters are created equal. And some will only work with you if you have a couple of years of experience or the right experience for their market. Ask around amongst your peers and find out which companies have experience in your industry and better yet, integrity. Most

recruiters will have a website which lists their professional associations. Make sure you pick one that is registered with the National Association of Personnel Services (NAPS) or the National Association of Computer Consulting Businesses (NACCB). You can search the NAPS/NACCB online Membership Directory for staffing professionals on their website at <http://www.napsweb.org> and <http://www.naccb.org>. Membership within these organizations means a business operates under a code of ethics established by the trade association.

When you contact a recruiter, ask if they can help you, and if not, whom you should be talking to. Ask how they work-will they contact you prior to submitting your resume or presenting you to a client. It is critical for you to be in control of your search to avoid duplicate submission that could disqualify you from a great position.

The big advantage recruiters have is that they usually have access to the hiring authority and can help navigate the hiring process. They have a broad contact base and can get you into the companies that may be closed to outsiders.

The downside is that to collect a reasonable fee, they have to find candidates who are an exact "fit" for the job and someone the client cannot find on their own. Great people who have been unemployed for a while are very difficult to collect a fee for.

Contract opportunities are a great alternative in these cases and sometimes lead to full-time positions. It is not unusual for as many as 40% of a staffing company's consultants to be hired full-time by clients.

Out of sight, out of mind. Recruiters stay very busy and receive calls and resumes all day long. After you have registered with a firm, find out what you can expect from them and how often to check back. Usually contacting your assigned recruiter by e-mail or by phone will be your best bet. But don't sit back and expect the recruiter to do all the legwork. Remember that the most recruiters are paid by the client and as such, represent the client. However, how you can work with a recruiter by continuing your search and running opportunities by them. For example, "XYZ Company is looking for a network administrator. Do you know anyone there and can you present me to them?"

Keep in mind that in a tight market, successful recruiters will need to spend most of their time looking for positions. To maintain a good working relationship, respect their time.

## The Newspaper/Job Fairs

Even in the heyday of the Internet, traditional job search methods can still be useful. The newspaper has even gotten a boost in usefulness with online searchable job postings. The Chronicle is a good place to start <http://www.chron.com>.

Not only does the Houston Chronicle site have job postings; it will also list upcoming job fairs. If there is a job fair for your industry or a company you are interested in, meeting the human resources personnel or potential hiring managers face-to-face can only help. If you have internalized your Assessment and your Goals, then you can use those to quickly gain the notice of potential hiring managers. Remember, you may have only a few seconds to present yourself and your resume if the job fair is well-attended or your ideal company's booth is swamped. Be prepared as you would be for an interview. In the best case scenario, a job-fair visit might turn into an on-the-spot interview.

When you read the "help wanted ads", read the whole section. If a company is hiring in one area, there exists the possibility they may be hiring in your area as well but not advertising availability. This is potential company for creating your own opportunity.

## Interviewing

So, you've experienced some success in your search and have some interviews lined up. Congratulations!

As much as you'd like to relax now, the interview process is as important as the work you've done so far. Don't give up on giving your full effort now!

Because the interview is so important, we will not cover it in this booklet, but rather refer you to another great source of information. Please see our *Interviewing Techniques* article in the Career Manager section of the JDA Professional Services, Inc. website at <http://www.jdap-si.com>.

## Managing and Keeping Track of your Search

Remember that your job search is being conducted like a project plan and that you are on the "job search" 24-hours a day, seven days a week. Every day, do something that will help you get closer to your desired result. Include in your plan a daily goal targeted to get you one step closer to the ideal position. As part of this plan, keep track of:

- Who you talked to and what happened
- Who your resume was sent to and what were the results
- Send follow-up communication to the people you have exchanges with.

And remember this very important point:

- Communication is not a one-time event, but rather a process.

## Staying Prepared

Say your job search turns in to the ideal job where you spend the next 20 years climbing the company ladder and attaining a top executive role. As rare as that is in today's world, if you take your time and look for the right job, it is possible.

Or, if you make a hasty choice, you may find yourself in the job market in another year.

Either way, here's how to stay prepared when you are searching for your next job:

- Save your Assessment and Goals in a safe place where you can find them next time you need them. Keep them updated every six months or year. That way, they'll be in good shape when you need them next.
- Do the same with your resume and cover letters. It is easier to edit these documents than it is to start from scratch.
- On the job, keep any written correspondences recording successes you achieve in the workplace, or write down verbal compliments. Make a portfolio of accomplishments to jog your memory next time you rewrite your cover letter and resume.
- Maintain your network-keep in contact with people and look for ways to return the favors for people who have helped you. Do unto others...

**JDA Professional Services, Inc.**, a Houston-based business since 1981, has helped thousands of IT professionals advance their career by providing timely and useful marketing and career management information including:

- Houston IT market salary surveys
- Resume writing articles
- Interview techniques
- Negotiating compensation tips
- How to resign effectively

To access these resources, visit the JDA Website at:

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#### **Our Mission Statement**

*We provide the highest quality information technology staffing services to a select client base, with a focus on full-time and contract technical and managerial placement services. We aspire to be a premier, full-service IT staffing firm, regarded by clients as a firm offering the highest level of service, while being committed to the highest level of standards, investing in the development of our employees, involving ourselves in the betterment of the community and maintaining our financial soundness and stability.*

#### **Our Core Values**

**Integrity / Honesty:**

*We are honest and sincere when we communicate with our clients and candidates as well as with one another. We honor our commitments and do what is morally and ethically right.*

**Quality / Excellence:**

*We strive for excellence in all that we do. We are dedicated to doing the best job that we can do and continuously endeavor to improve. We are consistent in the level of quality of our work efforts.*

**Customer Service:**

*The needs of our clients and candidates as well as our own staff are equally important. We treat everyone with respect and dignity - as we would like to be treated ourselves.*