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Career Change Requires Refocusing Your Target

Changing jobs is hard. Really hard. Even for the experts who coach and train the rest of us on how to do it. And even for those people who write books about the subject.

An e-mail I received recently illustrates the point. It was from [Lynne O'Connor](#), co-author of a career transition book, *It's Your Move*.

She told me that she had recently gone through a job change herself and had learned a great deal from the experience. In her words, "I had a renewed sense of empathy for the challenges facing job seekers today."

This was intriguing to me. Here was a professional who specialized in career transition and was experiencing the process first-hand. So I decided to meet with her to explore more fully what she had learned.

Today, [O'Connor](#) works as a senior consultant at Axmith, a national career transition firm, in Toronto.

"...career change is hard, even for people who know how to look for work, yet the change can be invigorating..."

Her first task was to update her resumé. And she knew very well how challenging it was to do a good one. It had been more than six years since she had worked on her resumé and, of course, she had done many new things during that time, including co-writing a book on career transition.

It took time to channel these achievements into a well-crafted script, and it wasn't easy. She knew how to counsel others on how to do this, but it was still a challenge doing it for herself.

"The really hard part about any resumé is connecting past experience with the needs of the organization to which you are applying. This is how to create a well-focused resumé," [O'Connor](#) said.

And she knew that employers really do look for this. "It is not just a matter of listing your accomplishments, it's more about making the information relevant to the prospective employer."

O'Connor is amazed at how many professionals miss this crucial requirement when doing their resumés. So her message to all of us is that resumé writing is hard for anyone. It takes time, a lot of time to get it right; and to be good, it has to be focused.

What did she learn about networking?

“Jobs like mine are rarely advertised, so networking and cold calls are the primary means of finding opportunities. In retrospect, I could have been more strategic about networking.”

“With every letter, phone call and meeting, it was important to analyze in advance what personal attributes and areas of expertise I needed to emphasize, as well as being alert to opportunities to customize my message. For instance, in one meeting I was asked, ‘So, what do you think this business is about?’ This required some quick thinking to refocus my key marketing points.”

O'Connor is absolutely right here. Strategizing is essential in networking; otherwise you can waste a lot of time.

Another aspect about networking is the more you do, the more you learn about yourself. You soon discover where you really want to work and where you don't. It's like looking through a foggy window that eventually clears.

In O'Connor's case, it became clear that maintaining ‘collegiality’ was very important to her. “The people I work with have to have similar values. Integrity and high level of service are important to me, too. I want to feel a part of a group that works well together.”

Ultimately, she found what she was looking for and made the move. But to her surprise, the change was more of an adjustment than she had imagined.

“I had not anticipated the effort it took to ‘unbrand’ myself from my former employer. While at the same time, I was aware of the importance of ‘unbranding’ as quickly as possible, in order to be accepted by a new team. It was a dilemma.”

“I spent the first 60 days of my new job just concentrating on doing a lot of listening. It was amazing to me how different things were at my new company. And yet both firms did great work. I felt so energized by this change.”

“In the next 30 days I concentrated on where I could add value to this new company without ever compromising my former employer. I feel I have a good fit now. I am invigorated and look forward to increased professional growth as a result of this career move.”

Her experience shows us that career change is hard, even for people who know how to look for work. Yet the change can be invigorating and provide professional growth.

O'Connor adds, “It is really an act of courage to put yourself on the line to be judged by others as you look for work.”

She is so right. This is true for everyone, and that's why finding work can be difficult. Fortunately, we can learn from others, especially those who are brave enough to share their own job finding experiences in such a public way.

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