



Career Path: Your Next Campaign: You

Development professionals have already learned many of the skills necessary to find the perfect new job

Development professionals already know how to conduct a thorough job search--even if they don't know they know. This article explains how fund raising is similar to looking for a new job and provides tips on how to find the perfect new place of employment.

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A new president, a budget shortfall, or mismatched expectations—the reasons may vary, but the results are the same: You're in the market for a new job. In the development field, where the average job-life expectancy is two years or less, it happens more frequently than a lot of us would like to admit. Thank goodness you're a development officer.

I don't say this because experienced development officers are in demand, though luckily they are. I say it because, thanks to what you do for a living, you already know how to conduct a comprehensive job search—even if you don't know you know.

Inherent advantage

When I was on the hiring side of the desk, I used to judge people's approach to their search as an indicator of how they would perform their new development job. The parallels are substantial.

Here's how you can approach your job hunt like a search for the ultimate gift:

Make your case. What do you want for the next phase of your life? A well-thought-out and articulated case is the bedrock of any fund-raising program. A job search is no different. Reassess your career goals based on your personality and skills. Write down the type of job you want and the type of organizations for which you'd like to work.

A written statement gives you valuable information to share with others. You can also use parts of it for applications or letters or when you talk to networking contacts or a potential employer.

Focus on your targets. A good fund-raising program, like a good job search, has a well-vetted list of prospects who have the interest and capacity to fund your objective. Now that you've built the case, who are the prospects who could fund your project? In career-speak, who has the jobs? Make a list of organizations, not job openings. Find out who has hired people for the types of positions you defined in your case. It's like finding out who has made gifts similar to the ones you're seeking for your campaign.

The better prepared you are, the better the rest of the process will go. That means doing your prospect research. As a development officer, you already know a lot of the resources that will help you build your list, such as Guidestar or professional directories. You're also an expert in the most powerful research process: making visits or, as the career consultants say, networking.

Develop your secondaries list. If you apply moves management terms to your search, you are the "prime," the person who orchestrates the actions and makes the moves happen. But who are the "secondaries," the ones with the connections to support your good work? Make a list of absolutely everyone you know, inside and outside the profession. This list is as important as your prospect list, because these people can get you in the door.

Manage your process. You're probably familiar with prospect tracking systems such as Raiser's Edge and Benefactor. Build your own system for tracking your contacts, or get an off-the-shelf program such as ACT. Microsoft Outlook, which may already be on your computer, can be modified for this use.

Other than contact information, include who referred you to this person, when you made contact, what was said, and your next steps.

Work that list. Networking is what you're good at, and if not, use this process to get better at it. With your list of potential employers (prospects) in hand, start visiting your secondaries.

Philanthropy is an exchange relationship and so is a job search. Each name leads to another. By purposefully working your network of secondaries, asking each person you visit to review your target list, you can get closer to the key decision makers who might have the job you want.

At this point, you might be thinking, "But I've been around town for years. Why don't I just call the president of the hospital? She knows me." There's a good reason you shouldn't do that.

Remember that last big gift you brought in? You worked with your prospect's closest advisor, and that person gave you the endorsement you needed to gain access to the prospect (and that person may have even told the prospect to make the gift). The same dynamic is at play in the job hunt. A third-party endorsement can get you in the door and could lead to the offer.

Make the ask. In a job search there are two ways of "making the ask," both of which have parallels to your fund-raising work. The first and most familiar is answering a job posting. Just like writing a grant proposal, draft a letter and send back-up paperwork (cover letter, résumé, and references). Follow up as appropriate and hope that your paperwork was enough to get you a face-to-face meeting.

The second way is more like your work with an individual donor: Build a relationship and wait for the right time. Can you fill a need in the organization? (Can the gift meet a need of the donor?) Will the hiring manager see you as the solution to a problem? Describe how you can make your boss's job easier, the organization stronger, and, most importantly, bring in more revenue.

Stewardship. The parallels here are uncanny. We all talk about stewardship, but rarely is it done well. There is great pressure to keep getting gifts, or in a job search, to keep moving on to the next interview. There's no time, it seems, to keep up a relationship. Wrong. After your interview, whether you got the job or not, you need to stay connected with your contacts.

The most important thing is to remember Jerry Panas and say "thank you" at least seven times. If a person you interview with might become your next boss, won't she or he want to see that you know this?

Care and feeding

Even after you get a new job, focus on maintaining your network in a systematic way. Web-based solutions such as LinkedIn and Plaxo are increasingly popular. Make a few calls each week to maintain your network. Your new employer will come to value your connections. You will be the go-to person when the boss needs to recruit another fund raiser.

So that's it. It might not be as easy as you'd like it to be, but neither is fund raising. The difference is that instead of representing a terrific nonprofit, now you're representing you, your family, and your personal values.

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