

FIVE MUST DO'S FOR TODAY'S JOB MARKET

By Alan Ludmer

Whether the economy is up or down, the job market can be very challenging for job seekers. A select group of career management experts has identified five critical must do's to make the most of today's job market.

1. Take responsibility for your own career

"There is nothing more important than a good, well thought out career plan", says Carl Brown, Vice President - Voyager Career Solutions in St. Louis. When times are bad, a career plan is often forgotten. All good career plans have long-term goals as well as short-term strategies. For example, if your long-term goal is senior management, then your short-term goals may include graduate classes in management, and increased internal responsibilities.

Your career is your responsibility. "The key to a successful career is to have a plan that will help you attain the highest level in chosen field," If you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there. Without a good plan, you stand a greater chance of losing your way and never realizing your true potential.

2. Look for opportunities, not just dollars

"It is easy to say, the money is the only thing that counts," says Shelby Heman, Sr., a career management consultant in Omaha. It is tougher to stick to a plan. Salaries in today's market have flattened or decreased. Certain industries, such as information management, have seen major decreases in compensation.

Money should never be the total issue. Jack Stovall, a job-search specialist recently advised one of his clients to decline a new job offer that included a significant salary increase. Why? The position would have taken him out of management where he excels, and lead him into a more technical path. The technical path was not his primary interest. The point is that while compensation is important, it shouldn't be driving your career. Smart professionals are far better off in the long run by making decisions based on criteria other than just compensation.

3. Properly assess your skill level

Steven Francek, a career consultant in Charlotte, NC states "Career planning begins with self assessment." I use a number of standardized professional tests. However, in addition, we spend considerable time determining what individuals like to do most. What have they been successful doing? What are their hobbies, interests, and pleasures? The plan is to build upon success.

Good career planning is based upon appropriate self-assessment. It helps direct individuals towards positions they would enjoy and most likely be successful. For example, good technicians may not be good managers. The necessary skill sets are contrary to their personal interests and skills.

4. Choose the right career track

Carl Brown, a St. Louis career consultant states, "It is critical for your long term career success to build a solid foundation of technical experience even if you later decide to move to management, sales, teaching, consulting, or other areas." Moving

beyond the technical track requires not only the necessary skills (read appropriate self assessment), but also willingness to master additional skills.

Where do you learn these skills? It may mean more schooling. You should be able to find opportunities in your current job. If you want to move into management, ask for a project leadership position. If your goal is teaching, ask to put together a training class. Spend a day with a sales person to learn what skills are needed to be successful.”

5. Acquire the necessary skills before you change tracks

Warren Bowling, Sr., a career coach in Memphis states, “Certain professional markets make for considerable career movement. Promotions, changes and relocations are the norm. Before you make a change, ask yourself, “Do I have the necessary skills to be successful in this new position? Will I have the support I need? Will this position provide the training I need?”

Summary

Doing things right takes careful career planning. Don’t put planning on the back burner as your career choices lessen in a tough market. Begin with self assessment, then base your choices on your skills and what you enjoy doing. Don’t just pick the hot job of the week. Choose the position where you’ll be happiest and most likely to be successful.

About the author

Alan Ludmer is the president of Voyager Career Solutions Offices. Voyager Career Solutions Associates is a nationally recognized regional firm specializing in individual career transition, corporate outplacement, and executive coaching. Voyager is a proud member of the International Association of Career Consulting Firms. For more information, call 314 991-5444 or visit the Voyager Career Solutions web site at VOYAGERCAREERS.COM.