In an economic landscape where daily reports of corporate cuts and volatility have created sustained job instability in the marketplace, thousands of jobs across all industries have been lost, and careers are in transition. Chances are you may have experienced similar circumstances, finding yourself, for the first time, "on the market" — a confusing and often stressful world to navigate.

Like thousands of professionals today, you may find that the need to hunt for a new job has been thrust upon you from a downsizing or post-merger integration that has eliminated your role. Maybe you simply want to clean the slate and make a career change. Or perhaps you have simply fallen out of love with your current role or employer and are looking for a career change or new direction. Whether you are currently employed or looking for the next great opportunity, we know that many of you may, at some stage, want to or need to think about finding a new position.

With that as background, the following perspectives will hopefully be useful to you. They are built around a view that there are three phases to developing and implementing a job change strategy:

PHASE 1 — DEVELOP THE PLAN
PHASE 2 — TAKE ACTION
PHASE 3 — PREPARE FOR THE OFFER

Throughout this guide are examples of helpful resources you can use during each phase of your career transition. Additionally, at the conclusion we have included a list of supplementary resources to assist in your process.
PHASE 1 — DEVELOP THE PLAN

FIND YOUR STRENGTHS

A key driver of professional success is to find yourself in a role that plays to your strengths. We all have an intuitive sense of our strengths and weaknesses, but now is the moment to become very specific. To do so, we recommend a number of exercises and resources. First, build a skills and accomplishments inventory. Start with a blank sheet of paper and make a chronological list of all your jobs since you began your career. Then next to each job, note the things about that role that you did well and not so well. In addition, for each position, note what you believe was your most important accomplishment. Be thoughtful about this and try to get beyond the obvious.

One key to assessing your strengths is to see beyond the functional roles as defined in your workplace. View yourself not as a banker, marketer, manufacturer or magazine publisher with industry-specific skills, but as a unique person with specific skill-sets that can be broadly applied across a number of fields. For each accomplishment and role, list the key skills that were required: problem solving, product design, managing yourself, leading others, team participation, conceptual thinking, written communication, salesmanship, etc.

After filling up a few sheets of paper, you should notice themes emerging: the themes of the strengths and weaknesses throughout your career. If you are like most professionals, there will be surprising consistency over time.

Brutal honesty helps — even if it’s difficult. Are you short-tempered with people but patient with projects? Are you a good motivator but poor at delegation? Do you manage “up” well but “down” less well? Are you a good presenter to large groups of people or do you get stage fright? Are you an off-the-cuff communicator or do you require detailed preparation and support? Are you led by facts and analysis or do you lean toward generating ideas and concepts? Are you gifted at complex problem solving? Do you revel in the immediate gratification of checking items off your to-do list? Do you thrive in the thrill of the hunt or perform better servicing existing customers? Do you love the action of the markets or feel trapped being tethered to events out of your control?

Of the various resources we are familiar with, one of the best and longest-standing in self-assessment is a program run by the Johnson O’Connor Research Foundation. This not-for-profit institution, with offices in many major commercial centers, has been conducting research and measuring aptitudes and their effect on human performance, success and work satisfaction since 1922. The foundation runs individualized programs in its Human Engineering Laboratory, resulting in the development of an individualized inventory of your aptitudes.

After personalized testing, your pattern of strengths and weaknesses is compared to the hundreds of thousands of subjects who have been assessed over the decades, from which high-level career implications can be drawn. The people to whom we’ve recommended this program have come back with incredible enthusiasm for the rigor of the testing and the data-driven feedback of the results.

ASSESS WHERE YOUR INTERESTS LIE

If it looks like layoffs are coming and you will be one of the victims, or you want something more from your career that the last experience didn’t provide, that’s normal enough. But you need to define what it is that you will be passionate about. What subjects or industries raise your interest? Does high tech bore you? Do consumer products fascinate you? And how do you like to work? Do you like participating in team goals on a daily basis? Or do you prefer to sift through and analyze information on your own?

If you are hard-pressed to identify a potential career path that really intrigues you, here’s a simple but effective way to give yourself an informal "interests X-ray": Do an online search of recent news or get a pile of newspapers and magazines, both national and local, covering the last four to six weeks. Go through them and print or tear out everything that appeals to you. Don’t ask yourself why — just put the items in a folder. Then, separate all your selections into piles, one pile for each area of interest. What does the landscape tell you? What themes emerge? If you are like most, the tallest piles will be those things that genuinely trigger your enthusiasm.
Another step is to build from your strengths and weaknesses inventory from step one. In reviewing your list of roles and accomplishments, take out another sheet of paper. For each one, list the following: what you liked most and what you disliked most about achieving each accomplishment. Then rank them in terms of enjoyment you derived from them.

BUILD YOUR PERSONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Relationships are critical to your success since everything you do in professional life is dependent on others. Therefore, it is imperative to have a relationship mindset. This means recognizing that all business relationships are also personal relationships, that one relationship or interaction leads to another, and what goes around comes around. People genuinely appreciate hard work and thinking on their behalf, responsiveness and straightforward communications. When you’re at a critical turning point in your career, it’s wise not to go it alone. A proven strategy is to cultivate a small group of professional and personal relationships to serve as your sounding board, brain trust or personal “board of directors.”

"Beyond the concrete attributes of the specific next job, try to put your thinking into a prioritized list of personal goals."

If you have not yet done this, make a list of trusted, experienced individuals whom you’ve known for years. They make the best sounding boards. Contact them. Ask them to review your assessment of strengths and weaknesses and either gain agreement or alter your assessment. Implore them to be straightforward. You may hear things that surprise you, positive and negative. Ideally, you will gain valuable insights and ensure there will be no unfortunate surprises later on. In addition to corroborating your views, these individuals may also be your professional and character references down the road. You want to ensure there is no dissonance between the assessment of strengths and weaknesses you communicate to potential employers and references.

IDENTIFY WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO ACHIEVE FROM THE NEW POSITION

Clearly articulate what you must have and what the nice-to-haves are in your new position. Where do you want to live, and in what kind of a setting? What compensation package do you require?

With what level of responsibility are you comfortable? Thinking hard about what you want and where you can compromise will help you identify acceptable trade-offs early. Maybe you are willing to make a lateral move in terms of money and/or responsibility in order to obtain an opportunity to learn and grow in ways that will be very useful to your long-term plan. Perhaps you are open to other regions of the country. Beyond the concrete attributes of the specific next job, try to put your thinking into a prioritized list of personal goals. How important are the following to you: achievement, duty, expertise, friendship, self-improvement, independence, leadership, family balance, pleasure, power, prestige, recognition, security, service and wealth? Make a list and rank these goals.

GENERATE OPTIONS FROM FACT-BASED RESEARCH

It is all too easy to get caught up in career myopia. Recognize that your skills can potentially be applied in many industries. Sit down and stretch your brain. Focus on those fields you think might interest you, or that might have similar characteristics to your areas of expertise. Make a list of major industry sectors, dig down and identify specific companies, and develop a preliminary target list.

Review local and national publications. Identify trends, companies of interest and functional areas of growth as well as the current thinking and trends in your industry. Staying up-to-date is important to maintaining your enthusiasm, credibility and viability.

Also, review the piles of articles you saved from the Internet, magazines and newspapers. Certain companies will draw your attention. Then use Google Finance, Yahoo! Finance or Hoovers to identify the competitors of those companies, which will help you build your target list.
DEVELOP A WRITTEN PLAN THAT SUPPORTS YOUR JOB STRATEGY

Develop a target list of specific companies that interest you, search firms at which you have contacts, outplacement firms and associations as well as friends, colleagues and acquaintances who may have connections to such organizations. Make a methodical plan for contacting each one. Devise a realistic timetable. This will give you much-needed structure and tangible goals. Be prepared to make mid-course corrections and/or contingency plans as necessary.

FURTHER EDUCATE YOURSELF

We suggest you review at least one career self-help guide. For recommended reading lists, you can start by visiting Amazon.com or selecting one or two books listed on the Spencer Stuart Web site. While some books may espouse different models from what we recommend here, there is no single plan for each person or situation. You may also find it useful to refer to the career development articles found on www.spencerstuart.com in the “Your Career” section.

PHASE 2 — TAKE ACTION

With the plan now developed, it is time to take action. Executing an effective job search requires discipline and work. Approach this search as a full-time job. Manage yourself as effectively as you have managed your own teammates or employees. Having said this, recognize that job searches take time, and while it’s important to keep moving forward, it’s also important to be patient. Focusing 100 percent of your waking attention on a job search will make you tiresome company. It is essential to stay refreshed by doing some activities outside of your search. Join a local community board. Spend quality time with the kids. Exercise regularly. Take a little time for yourself. Give back to your community, college or religious institution.

DEVELOP YOUR OUTREACH MATERIALS: AN EXCELLENT RESUME AND COVER LETTER

Resume Law #1: Omit needless words.

In their famous style guide, William Strunk and E.B. White codify the rules of polished writing. Rule #17 is simple: Omit needless words. Never is this rule more applicable than in resume writing.

You will need to remind yourself of these axioms regularly:

A career transition is:
> a major step
> a full-time job
> a problem to solve — and an opportunity to exploit
> a time to reflect and reprioritize
> the first page in a new life chapter

A successful career transition requires:
> planning
> practice
> humility
> hard work
> discipline
> creativity
> ability to deal with disappointment, anger and frustration
> willingness to see the best in yourself
> eagerness to market yourself
> many irons in the fire
> a positive attitude
A good resume conveys the heart and soul of someone at a glance. A tall order, yes. Always describe the company at which you worked. Unless it's a household-name company, people probably won't recognize it by name alone. Be clear by noting which geographical location you worked in. Be complete and specific with regard to the dates; don't leave time gaps that will only raise questions. Write in simple, direct language. Don't state your objective — that is what the cover letter or e-mail note is for. Indicate how the company should contact you — if the potential employer shouldn't call your office, state that in the cover letter.

It is not necessary to mention every project from the beginning of your career, but it is frequently useful to include not-for-profit, volunteer or extracurricular information, as it provides extra information about you and potentially a hook or link for the reader. However, never embellish. And obvious as it seems, never misrepresent your academic credentials in any way. They are easy to check and the effects of misrepresentation are devastating.

Both your resume and cover note should communicate how you can be a solution to a given company's need. No company wants to know why this would be a great opportunity for you; they want to know why you would be an asset for them. Put your time and skill toward identifying the problems you can solve for the potential employer — do your due diligence. Is the company attempting to grow or exploit a new market? Figure out the company's key challenges and present yourself as the solution. If you can come close to identifying your skills as a solution to that company's needs, it is more likely that your letter will be read and your phone call will be answered.

You may prefer to use a service to help develop your resume, some of which are accredited with the Professional Resume Writing and Research Association (PRWRA) and the National Resume Writers' Association (NRWA). You might also try the Professional Association of Resume Writers and Career Coaches as well as the online resources listed at the end of this guide.

Don’t forget to develop a crisp phone message for networking and follow-up calls. Try it out on a friend or two who will give you helpful, honest feedback.

ADAPT YOUR COVER LETTER AND RESUME FOR E-MAIL

Today, e-mail has become the preferred means to send a cover letter and resume. While this is not as formal as sending a resume by regular mail, most companies prefer e-mail for its convenience and because it can be easily forwarded and added to a searchable database. Attempting to avoid harmful viruses, many companies today also have guidelines regarding the opening of e-mail attachments.

While you will still need to have a traditional, handsomely formatted version of your resume to print for in-person interactions, for e-mail we advise pasting a simple text (.txt) version of your resume at the end of your e-mail, as well as attaching it as its own Word document (but not a zip file). Don’t forget to include a direct and descriptive subject line such as: "VP of finance seeks new opportunity" or, better yet, "John Kelly suggested I contact you." If you can find a reference that is known mutually by the hiring contact, the more likely it will be that your e-mail will be returned. Be sure to include your complete contact information in the message and the resume attachment.

Begin the e-mail with a brief introduction that includes what you are looking for and whether you are willing to relocate. If you are trying to transition into a new function or industry, address why you are capable of such a transition. Ask for specific advice or direction. If you don't know the recipient, ask them to take a specific action on your behalf: Can you forward this on to the appropriate person? Can you instruct me as to how I can receive calls or e-mail from your firm? Can you direct my resume to any appropriate colleagues or clients? Can you spend 15 minutes with me for a courtesy interview?

This introduction should include a high-level, "at a glance" list of your most important qualifications followed by the embedded, text resume. But keep your e-mail cover letter brief — the individual reading it may have received hundreds of resumes and rarely has time to read lengthy communiqués. Avoid sending pictures, fancy html or other distractions in your e-mail. Here’s a good example of getting to the point: "I am a turnaround executive with strong financial skills and proven ability to manage large groups of people."
ACTIVATE YOUR PERSONAL NETWORK:
TELL AND SELL

Now that your presentation materials are ready, it is time
to share it with as many well-placed people as possible.
This is one of the most important things you can do. Talk
to former colleagues, associates, contacts and friends
from college and/or graduate school. Join and mingle in
associations, local networking groups and online networking
sites. Ask every contact for additional contacts. Take
advantage of professional and social networking sites that
afford opportunities to connect with potential employers
by leveraging your current contact network, including
LinkedIn, Nayzm and Facebook.

"Playing to your strengths will make you
more marketable, more successful and
happier in your next position."

You might be a superstar at your current company or
maybe you are one of the many undervalued overachievers. Either way, the next person you meet hasn’t been studying your professional and life history. You need to
tell and sell. Tell people the pertinent details of your last
job and sell it in the most positive light. This is especially
critical if you’re looking to reposition yourself in a different
industry. You must redefine yourself in terms of the
competencies that you possess. Highlight the traits most
hiring executives are seeking: intellect and skills; resourcefullness and problem-solving abilities; flexibility in applying
these talents to new areas; leadership and interpersonal
qualities; and specific industry, process or functional
knowledge relevant to their company.

In your positioning, you should also address two critical
issues: 1) What you can personally offer a company and
2) What you can do to help it advance its cause, build its
business and make it a more competitive and profitable
organization. View your skills and talents as leverage,
rather than as a means to develop your weak areas. Playing
to your strengths will make you more marketable,
more successful and happier in your next position.

DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH
EXECUTIVE SEARCH FIRMS

You have probably heard about or possibly even had some
direct experience with executive search firms in the past
couple of years, as most of the highest-profile professional
positions are filled this way — many of the jobs that you
will want to get move through search firms.

The sourcebook for executive recruiting is The Directory
of Executive Recruiters 2007-2008 (35th Ed.), edited by
Kennedy Information. Known to insiders since 1971 as the
"Red Book," it contains detailed information on more than
16,000 recruiters and over 5,000 search firms across
North America. Online, try the following web site:

While an executive search firm’s web site is a place to start
to identify whom to speak to, asking other individuals in
your industry or function — especially executives a level
higher — who they know and respect is an excellent start.
You can then reach out to a recruiter “upon the recommenda-

Ask former colleagues about search firms they have
worked with and if they can put you directly in touch with a
recruiter. Find out who has placed your friends, peers and
bosses — keep a list and use it. You should not overuse
your higher level or peer contacts in industry to open a
search door, but if there is a job that really looks ideal, and
your contact is a strong supporter, having him or her call
the search firm can be very effective.

There are a number of major executive search firms that
work internationally across different industry sectors.
Smaller “boutique” firms operate within particular
industries or functions. Most search firms are organized
by practice and function, with experts in particular indus-
tries and/or specific functions such as finance or
human resources.

If you secure a meeting with an executive recruiter, be
well prepared to discuss your history, strengths, chal-
enges and the types of organizations to which you feel
best suited. Always have an open dialogue with an execu-
tive recruiter, sharing other projects you are considering and a transparent perspective on your salary requirements, goals and what type of culture will be your best fit. Take these interactions seriously as recruiters have an unparalleled window into the job market and can provide valuable inside information on companies that can influence your search, even if you are not being considered for a current assignment.

Do not make the mistake of approaching a relationship with a recruiter as strictly assignment-based. Provide ideas for the searches the recruiter is working on, even if he or she doesn’t currently have a job that fits you. Sometimes recruiters may not want to tell a prospect all of the assignments they are working on because these details are confidential. However, saying to a recruiter “I do have a pretty good network of people and would be happy to help you source,” can be a valuable relationship-builder.

While the search firm is acting for its client, recruiters also are interested in developing relationships with candidates. Even if a current opportunity does not lead to subsequent conversations or a formal interview with the recruiter, he or she may want to call upon you for advice or information in relation to other searches. Use these conversations to develop relationships with recruiters who can be useful when you are looking to make a future career move.

**AGREE ON HOW BEST TO STAY IN TOUCH**

Do not badger a search person about why you really do fit a job after he or she has said you are not right for the role. This frequently annoys the recruiter and often there are issues the recruiter cannot publicly share. If the firm lists positions on its web site, check weekly and follow up via e-mail if there is something appealing. Calling every week is also counter-productive. If you can determine from the web site which recruiter is handling which assignments, you can further refine your approach.

Recruiters have a different sense of time than candidates. If you are out looking for work, a week can feel like a very long period. But to a recruiter, it might be a much different timetable. When you do check in, add value.

Networking within your industry helps to ensure that you are known to search professionals. Do not underestimate the value of having a good reputation in your field, being respected by your peers and bosses in your current and former companies, and being known to executives in other organizations.

**CONNECT WITH OUTPLACEMENT FIRMS AND CAREER COUNSELORS**

While we can’t recommend any one firm, some of the largest and most well-known include Drake Beam Morin; Allen & Associates; Challenger, Gray & Christmas; Lee Hecht Harrison; Right Management Consultants; and Spherion.

You can also post your resume on recruiting and general career web sites geared toward executives, including TheLadders, BlueSteps (the official resource of the Association of Executive Search Consultants), 6Figurejobs and ExecuNet, a career advancement membership organization. While some sites may charge fees for the use of their services, many others offer free online candidate registration.

**INTERVIEWING: THOROUGHLY PREPARE**

USA Today asked Richard Bolles, author of What Color Is Your Parachute, “What is the worst thing a job hunter can do?” His answer: “Going in and knowing absolutely nothing about the place. The basic rule here is that organizations love to be loved, and when a job hunter walks in the door and doesn’t know a thing about them, the first thing they say to themselves is, ‘This guy doesn’t love this place.’”

Before any interview, thoroughly research the industry, company, job and culture. If possible, find out how employees dress for work so you can dress accordingly, yet professionally, for your interview. Develop questions and identify anyone you know who works there. Hone in on cultural issues to which you should be sensitive.

There are typically four parts of a job interview for which candidates should prepare: 1) The opening, which is
intended to set the stage and, ideally, help you, the interviewee, feel comfortable by establishing some common
ground; 2) Chronological review, where the intention is to
learn who you really are as a person, how you think, and
what the major influences and key turning points were in
your life. Here, make sure to emphasize your work ethic,
values, personality and impact; 3) Assessment of your
background and track record against the core skills, expe-
riences, and competencies required for success in the role,
which will hopefully have been defined up front; and
4) Your questions, which are just important as your an-
wers, so prepare in advance to show what you know and
the insight you have gleaned about the company and its
competitors.

Be prepared to ask intelligent questions about the com-
pany. Spend time researching and learning about company
performance, leadership, goals and the profile of the per-
son interviewing you, which will greatly enhance rapport
and aid in building chemistry, not to be underestimated as
an important factor in decision-making between can-
didates. Focus on what skills you will bring to the role and
organization. Be able to quantify your past achievements
and offer metrics related to your accomplishments, keep-
ing in mind the business issues you anticipated, reacted to
and solved.

If a search firm is handling the interview process, you
should ask for a list of everyone you will meet at the com-
pany prior to a meeting. Do your own research on the web,
which will often yield good bios. Also, ask the recruiter for
a briefing session before going to interviews to review the
players and reaffirm the company’s key issues and strate-
gies. If time has passed, these could have changed.

"Spend time researching and learning
about company performance, leadership,
goals and the profile of the person
interviewing you, which will greatly enhance
rapport and aid in building chemistry."

The search firm will provide you with a position specifi-
cation, which explains the role requirements in detail. Review
this carefully prior to interviews, paying attention to the
language and emphasis. Assuming it is well-written, it can
give you a roadmap to the company’s concerns. Do not
write a point-by-point analysis of how you match this spec,
but weave the most important points into your answers
when speaking with the hiring manager.

**REHEARSE YOUR STORY**

Interviewing well is an art. High-performing artists re-
hearse exhaustively, so should you. Become comfortable
selling yourself, serving as your own agent. Practice and
test your style and presentation out on people who will
give you feedback. If the interview is by phone or video-
conference, determine what you need to do differently
from an in-person interview.

Phone interviews are becoming increasingly common.
Take them seriously. Make sure you have yourself set up
to do it from a land line, not a cell phone; make sure the
kids or the pets will not create unprofessional background
noise or interruptions. And remember the goal of the
phone interview is not to get the job, it is only to “move
the ball one rotation forward” — to get invited for an in-
person interview.

**BE PATIENT WITH THE PROCESS**

Depending upon the level of the position and firm culture,
the interview cycle may take a substantial amount of time
to complete. At senior levels, you will likely meet a variety
of people in different roles, from top leadership to team
members to direct reports. Scheduling time on multiple,
hectic calendars can lengthen the process. At executive
levels, you can commonly expect several weeks or even
months of return visits and follow-ups. Practice patience.

There are no set rules for interview timing. Some firms
may schedule several consecutive interviews in a day while
others may take additional time depending upon a variety
of factors: how many decision-makers are involved, other
priorities, the number of candidates, etc. Keep in mind
that once you complete a round of interviews, an internal
evaluation process may also keep you waiting for next
steps. If a company has a thoughtful approach to candi-
date selection and onboarding, many individuals will have a vested interest in your success. This lengthened period is a valuable opportunity for you to absorb much about company culture.

**PLAN FOR THE TOUGH QUESTIONS**

Be prepared for challenging questions, particularly about your exit from your last role or any gaps in your career history, neither of which are deal-breakers but which should be handled, always, with honesty. For difficult questions, you will benefit significantly by rehearsing until you feel comfortable with your responses. Think of the answers as your personal “elevator pitch” that you must have down perfectly before any interview.

Practice explaining your exit from your last job until you have taken the emotion out of your response. While you may not agree with the circumstances, you must never let any lingering bitterness influence your responses. Keep the discussion analytical and fact-based rather than personal. If possible, obtain references from your former superior with an explanation.

Job loss happens to most people in their careers — now more than ever. Simply state what happened: a reduction in force, not a culture fit, etc. Interviewers will usually wonder why you were involved in the reduction and not others. Don’t be defensive. Simply state the reason, which could include: the de-emphasis of a certain function, longevity location, costs or the loss of a mentor. All of these explanations are valid.

Culture fit is one area that you can turn into a positive. “I am a change agent and they said that was what they wanted, but in truth it was too difficult and they weren’t ready. Or, “The environment was not collaborative, and the politics finally caught up with me. I tend to focus on the results not the politics, and that isn’t always the way to survive.”

Remember that your resume tells your story. If you have gaps or short tenures in your career history, you might be perceived as a “job hopper” which will require additional explanation. While there may be valid reasons for frequent career moves, multiple jobs tend to bother employers who may perceive short-term stints as an inability to acclimate to company culture, an indicator of interpersonal issues or a professional form of ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder).

Resume gaps should be addressed, but not overly emphasized. Again, simply state the facts: “I was transitioning to a new industry” or “My family had some immediate needs I needed to address.” With friends, practice with explaining these gaps, and make them really push you. But don’t get into a trap of explaining too much. A simple declarative statement will suffice, and then move on.

While much of the interview discussion may center on accomplishments, you will inevitably be asked to discuss any weaknesses. Familiar answers — you are too detail-oriented, you have issues delegating — may inadvertently appear pat or even worse, evasive. We have all developmental needs and areas to improve, but during an interview it is not enough to simply recognize them. Rather, discuss your plan for working on them, how you have made progress and the strategies you have used. You might also discuss the type of environment or culture where you may not perform well, as well as one where you will best deliver results.

If you have a tendency to “fill the space in the room” by offering more information than is necessary to answer questions, or being too conversational, you risk being misperceived as nervous or insecure. While it is good to answer thoroughly, limit any extraneous details. You shouldn’t push your answers, but make sure you selectively emphasize the most important experiences and skills — avoid laundry lists. Never bring out presentation material or samples unless asked. This can turn potential employers off and make you appear too needy.

During an interview, it is important to clarify the employer’s expectations for the role during the first 30 and 90 days and one year, as well as what you will need to do to demonstrate your success. The better you understand the targets and the more measurable they are, the greater your likelihood of success.
PAY ATTENTION TO FOLLOW UP

Remember that the recruiter cannot control the interview cycle and is at the mercy of the client’s schedule. Always call the recruiter after interviews, and if you do not connect leave a brief report.

Finally, don’t overlook the thank-you note. It is simply common courtesy to send a thank-you e-mail or letter to anyone who took the time to meet with you. While this is rarely what gets you the job, a potential employer will notice if you skip this step. If you met multiple people on a visit, take the time to differentiate your messages and tailor them to your individual discussions. A brief, well-written note reinforces your image of professionalism.

TAKE STOCK OF THE SITUATION

Allow yourself a realistic timetable, but at a certain point, if things aren’t working well, you need to figure out why. How does one discern the difference between discouragement and a real need for a mid-course correction? If you are significantly into your search and not getting at least some response, you should look at each item on your list and figure out where you need to make corrections. If you’re well over six months into your search and still gaining no traction, perhaps you should explore other alternatives.

Is your net cast wide enough? If your research into a particular industry isn’t yielding options, maybe you should expand your geographical limits. Perhaps you want to meet with a career counselor or an outplacement counseling firm. Other options to consider: an entrepreneurial venture, consulting, school or not-for-profit.

PHASE 3 — PREPARE FOR THE OFFER

BE PREPARED TO RECEIVE AN OFFER

Yes, it should happen and you need to be ready for it. When you receive an offer, the very first thing to do is to thank the potential employer with a call or in a personally written note or even an e-mail. Then, you should establish a timetable for decision-making with those who have offered you the job.

Develop your follow-up questions. This is your last opportunity to do your own due diligence on your potential employer. If you are relocating to a new community, you might plan to make a special trip to the company’s location with your spouse, family or significant other.

> When will I receive the offer in writing?
> How much time do I have to assess the offer?
> May I please have a summary of the benefits program?
> Now that I have the offer, may I meet with other members of the organization?
> Do you offer relocation benefits?

AFTER THE OFFER IS ON THE TABLE, REACH A DECISION

Accepting — or turning down — a job offer is a critical decision with many factors to consider and you would be wise to consult with trusted counsel, be it a spouse, a colleague, a mentor or your search consultant. It’s important to know when to seek advice about:

> negotiating
> legal matters
> financial concerns or compensation
> cultural/international matters
It's not always, categorically, a good idea to negotiate. Be realistic. Ask yourself — or your consultant — based on your skills, experience, the job market and the terms of the offer, if this is the best offer you're likely to get. Expect candor from your search consultant and rely on him or her to advise you. Typically, he or she has perspective on whether the company has put together its best offer, take it or leave it, or whether the company expects to negotiate. In rare circumstances, you may need to seek legal advice on compensation and other contract terms.

BE PREPARED FOR A COUNTEROFFER

If you are leaving a job to take a new one, it is not uncommon to receive a counteroffer from your current employer in a last-ditch effort to retain your talents. Don't let this confuse you — if you are ready to leave, stay true to the goals that compelled you to look for a new opportunity in the first place. In our experience, even if an employee accepts a counteroffer, unless the situation that made the job unsatisfactory changes radically, he or she will move on to a new position within a year to 18 months.

ACCEPT GRACIOUSLY TO THE APPROPRIATE PERSON, BOTH VERBALLY AND IN WRITING

Relationship-building is important at this time — seize this chance to convey your excitement about the new position and build rapport with your soon-to-be colleague(s). If you choose to decline the offer, you should offer an explanation and close the communication gracefully and in such a way that future contact will be welcomed.

REIGN FROM YOUR CURRENT JOB

If you are employed, two weeks is the minimum notice you should provide, although you may choose to provide more advance notice than the bare minimum. In any event, set a firm date that you are leaving and stick to it.

CLOSE THE LOOP WITH YOUR PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

This is a particularly crucial step that will enable you to maintain a strong professional network and strong relationships with your contacts. Thank the people who have helped you and let your contacts know about your new position. Most importantly, let them know how they can contact you in the future. Completing the communications only strengthens your professional network and ensures that you will hear from and be free to contact colleagues in the future.

SUMMARY

Following the three phases of this guide will help you develop a plan and take actions that will ultimately lead to an offer from your next employer. And while you may be facing the uncertainty of a career transition, following these guidelines will ensure that your job search — a process of discovery and new directions — leads to the right opportunity for you. While there are always challenges associated with making a career change, the transition methodology illustrated here will lead to the fit that best matches your career path and future goals.

GOOD LUCK!
This document originates from Spencer Stuart’s desire to help executives in transition. Originally developed by Claudia Kelly, the advice in this guide has been continually refined over the years as Spencer Stuart has used it with clients and candidates. At various stages, content was integrated into The 5 Patterns of Extraordinary Careers, co-authored by Jim Citrin (Crown Business, 2005), and also augmented by Cathy Anterasing. Recent contributors also include Amanda Fox and Tom Scanlan.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Career planning
Career Explorer (www.careerexplorer.net)
Career Planner (www.careerplanner.com)
Johnson O’Connor Research Foundation (www.jocrf.org)

Business intelligence
Corporate Information (www.corporateinformation.com)
Datamonitor (www.datamonitor.com)
Forbes (www.forbes.com)
Fortune (www.fortune.com)
Google Finance (www.finance.google.com)
Hoovers (www.hoovers.com)
One Source (www.onesource.com)
Wright Investor’s Service (www.wisi.com/ramainnew.htm)
Yahoo! Finance (www.finance.yahoo.com)

Resume development
Career Resumes (www.career-resumes.com)
CRS Resume Service (www.crsservice.com)
National Resume Writing Association (www.nrwaweb.com)
Professional Association of Resume Writers and Career Coaches (www.parw.com)
Professional Resume Writing and Research Association (www.prwra.com)

Job postings
6Figurejobs (www.6figurejobs.com)
BlueSteps (www.bluesteps.com)
CareerBuilder (www.careerbuilder.com)
ExecuNet (www.execunet.com)
LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com)
Monster (www.monster.com)
NETSHARE (www.netshare.com)
Spencer Stuart (www.spencerstuart.com)
TheLadders (www.theladders.com)

Search firms
The Directory of Executive Recruiters
(www.kennedyinfo.com/directory/executiverecruiters)
FindaRecuriter.com
(www.recruiteronline.com/match/search.phtml)

Outplacement firms
Allen and Associates (www.allenandassociates.com)
Challenger, Gray & Christmas (www.challengergray.com)
Lee Hecht Harrison (www.lhh.com)
Right Management Consultants (www.right.com)
Spherion (www.spherion.com)
The Recruiters Lounge (www.therecuriterslounge.com)

Further education
Amazon.com (www.amazon.com)
Spencer Stuart (www.spencerstuart.com/research/books)

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