

Creating Career Insurance

HR people plan, listen and advise as part of their everyday job. So why, when it's time to move on, do they drop their professional tools and make cold calls?

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Whenever I speak to professional associations, I ask for a show of hands: How did you find your last job? Often, over two-thirds of the crowd will say "somebody heard about me." People are surprised to see so many hands in the air.

Still, more and more people seeking career advice today get a "click" when I say that their conversations are more important for career advancement than their resume. We want to lay down paths to new options and opportunities, and opportunities can only play out through people -it's that simple.

HR people plan, listen and advise as part of their everyday job. Yet, when they want to make a move, they tend to drop their professional tools and make a priority of replying to ads. They seem to think it's less risky to send resumes to strangers rather than call peers and talk shop. The straight reality is that when HR leaders need to locate the right person for a job, many of them start with their networks. Just the other day, a vice-president in marketing at a major company told me "I can't remember the last time I hired through HR." This is because advertising means risk, time and expense for companies. Since this is the case, why not try to be part of the buzz in your company, profession and industry? I can start you off by telling you how, but it will be up to you to follow through.

My challenge to you: spend the next couple of years turning 50 existing and new professional and business contacts into supporters who know what is special about your work and what your career goals are.

Career Action Plan

Now that you're ready to weave career management into your day-to-day working life in your organization and profession, how exactly do you go about it?

In Your Organization

1. The arrival of a new boss is an event in your career. Take the initiative to meet with them and share what you do well and enjoy, some recent achievements and your future goals-and ask for their ongoing support of your career growth. Take time to find out what their objectives are and how they'd like you to support them.
2. To engineer a change in your position or internal move to another business unit, follow these five steps: research the business and players; set an objective aligned with what you do well and where it is needed; create a proposal emphasizing your loyalty and the positive impacts for the company; set up a one-on-one meeting with the right senior person to discuss it and persistently shepherd your idea through until you get approval.
3. Walk the career talk. Be a manager who will listen to your staff's career-related questions. Research tells us employees are hungry for career information and coaching. Champion career discussions in the organization and look for resources to make it work for your culture. Companies that offer career management for employees say that, rather than prompting departures, this binds employees to them.

Outside Your Organization

1. Craft a large network for sharing learning and advice, professional courtesies, and as a place to start when you want to generate new opportunities. Prime the pump with former colleagues. It's not likely to be *your* close contacts, but the names they supply that will produce results for you. With these people, there will be less common ground, so it will be more natural to focus on the present and what you can do for each other. Make a habit of contacting at least one new person a month in another company, and having coffee. That adds at least 12 new channels a year to your career network.
2. To get to know people better, volunteer on a committee or take on a leadership role. Sharing a joint role may work better for your busy schedule.
3. Publish articles about situations you've handled. Industry and professional magazines, as well as business media are open to *your* inquiries. Conference producers are always looking for consultants and clients to talk about their initiatives. Recruiters watch trade publications and conferences for people who are active in the field.
4. Go for learning and networking where other HR people do not necessarily go such as business associations. You might be the only HR person that group knows.

Try these proven tips, and then break the rules to make it work *your* own way. The best networking starts with a plan and ends up casual, so everyone involved forgets this was ever networking at all!

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