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Title:

Outwitting the Job Market Over the Long Term - Part 3

Word Count:

836

Summary:

If you've been in your job for at least a year, a promotion isn't the only path toward career advancement.

Keywords:

job,company,contacts,human resources,job search

Article Body:

LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES BOTH WITHIN YOUR COMPANY AND BEYOND

If you've been in your job for at least a year, a promotion isn't the only path toward career advancement. Applying for and landing an internal job of higher rank and responsibility is another way of getting ahead. Most companies will pick qualified internal candidates over qualified external ones. Beware, however, of applying for an internal position if you haven't spent at least twelve months in your present job. While companies are partial to internal candidates, they don't want someone who will leapfrog from one position to another.

Take a gander at the new openings at your company frequently. Better yet, look for a suitable internal job before it's publicized. Sometimes, you'll get a heads-up through word of mouth or office gossip. From there, it's a matter of speaking to the HR person responsible for filling that position.

While applying for an internal position is a perfectly legitimate means of career advancement, don't hide your intentions from your boss. He'll probably find out down the road, through a human resources person or another employee, so you might as well be up-front from the get-go. Also, while it's acceptable to apply for one or two positions, don't apply for every opening under the sun. For one thing, human resources won't take you seriously. And for another, your lack of specificity will signify that you don't have direction. It's much better to wait until the right opening comes.

While looking for opportunities internally is important, don't ignore the opportunities that exist outside of your company. If you successfully used a recruiter in the past, let him know if and when are about to begin another job search. It's also a good idea to keep your resume available on at least one employment site in case another company wants to contact you about an open position. Just don't make your resume too available. If you've plastered it all over Monster, HotJobs, and various other job sites, there's a chance your present employer will notice. Getting caught in the act of looking for an outside job is akin to unofficially declaring your decision to leave the company-something you might not be prepared to do.

NEVER STOP NETWORKING

Just because you are happily employed doesn't mean you should halt your networking efforts. In fact, the best time to network is probably when you are comfortably situated in a job. That way, you won't be saddled with the weight of a job search or unemployment. Also, you'll be able to talk freely with your contacts without having to ask them for favors. As mentioned in chapter 3, it's important to communicate with your contacts regularly, not just when you need their advice or assistance.

Keep track of your contacts and how often you communicate with them. It's easy to let months, and even years, pass in between phone calls and e-mails. And the more time that elapses, the harder it is to reestablish contact. Use a calendar, planner, or personal digital assistant to help you organize your correspondence. And don't forget your Rolodex or address book. Keep it updated with the correct phone numbers and e-mail and mailing addresses of each of your contacts.

If you have a long contact list but little time, try to prioritize. Be sure to make time to see in person those contacts who are most important to you. For acquaintances or casual contacts, the occasional e-mail or phone call is an acceptable alternative to a face-to-face meal or coffee break.

While keeping up-to-date with old contacts is crucial to networking, so too is meeting new people. Your new job will mean lots of fresh faces, so don't be shy about introducing yourself. Stop and chat with your new coworkers at company-sponsored parties. Go for drinks or dinner with your department. If your company sponsors an employee sports team or weekend activity that doesn't interfere with more important obligations, sign up.

If your company doesn't offer many opportunities for socializing, invent your own. Ask a few of your coworkers to your house for a dinner party. If time permits, organize a trip to the movies, bowling alley, local watering hole, or a concert. If you want to organize a larger event or to start a club or a sports team, speak to human resources before you forge ahead. You may need the department's consent and to follow a certain protocol. Nevertheless, human resources personnel are thrilled when employees think of new and innovative ways to bolster company morale. Most will be happy to oblige.

Finally, remember that networking will benefit you throughout your career. According to a recent poll conducted by the Society of Human Resources Management and the Wall Street Journal's Career Journal, the percentage of jobseekers who rate networking as an effective job search tactic was 78 percent. Referrals from employees also ranked high at 65 percent. Obviously, when it comes to finding jobs and advancing in your career, the more people you know, the better off you'll be.