

CH-CH-CH- CHANGES

Still don't know what I was waiting for/And my time was runnin' wildⁱ

Introduction

Change is the consistent pillar in life and thus also a career. Moving upward, finding new challenges, defending the status quo, all good reasons to embark on a career change effort. Covid-19 has challenged the world on numerous aspects, including job losses, changes of job scope leading to voluntary changes and new positions and thus job opportunities. Consequently there is more competition for the position you are going after, maybe the process is shorter and more people can be involved in the process.



With an open and positive attitude during the process you will quickly find that this will be an enriching and rewarding period! I compiled some lessons I've learned and deployed during my professional life. My ultimate advice: **Dare to dream, dream big and include a purpose and go for it!** No one else is going to do it for you.

Approach, a few recommended steps:

1. **Don't:** when losing a job, don't call your network immediately announcing you are looking for a job, don't call headhunters asking for leads, don't send your resumes randomly etc. First think about your situation, assess your base requirements and follow a methodology
2. **Reflection:** on yourself, where do you stand nowadays? What did you enjoy most in your previous assignments? What did you achieve and how did you surprise yourself and others? How do you see yourself; as a manager leading teams, or as an individual contributor? If any think also about some mistakes and what you learned from them, and what your motivation to change now is.
3. **Elimination:** try to nail down for yourself and based on your own familiarity (ignore gossip from others!), what you certainly don't want to consider for a next career step.
4. **Identify:** Target what you really want and don't get into the trap of targeting what others may expect you to do. In broad-strokes the kind of environment you'd like to work in: B2B or B2C or a hybrid; international-local; size of company: large multinational ... small; small teams / big teams; public company or private company (family business, small practice etc...).
5. **Change:** Try to be as specific as possible since change is certainly not the answer to all your current issues or headaches, think what kind of change you are really looking for.
6. **Resume or CV:** this should truly reflect you, your achievements and the potential you can bring to a recruiting company, should include a profile as well as a good presentation of your positions, companies and achievements, education, locations and timeline etc. Don't undersell, use supporting data and include softer factors such as language skills, former internships, sports, music, writing or even being a professional father-mother! This is your brand and likely be seen by many influencers & decision makers. Your resume should be adaptable to each opportunity and target person since there will be very different stakeholders, each with their own perspective e.g. a CMO, CFO and HR have their own perspective.
7. **Value Proposition:** think how your recruiter perceives you and how your profile will contribute to the new company. What are the relevant specifics you will bring to the table? Marketing Guru Philippe Kotler once said: If you aren't a brand you are a commodity!
8. **Networking:** Refresh your own network and increase your base! Alumni associations, Sports clubs, current and past colleagues, friends & family. There are no boundaries in increasing your network!

Headhunters count only for <5% of all recruitments. Many jobs will be made available through your own network. My own rule of thumb: every network session should lead to at least to 3 new contacts, simply by asking each person you talk to if they know someone I should talk to, this creates a multiplication effect.

9. **Preparation:** This requires serious efforts, discussions with insiders (close or far). Try to understand what your target companies' biggest challenges are, what is their strategy, what are the investment priorities, get a sense of the company's culture. It's certainly common that you are invited to work on a business case or prepare a presentation on how you will achieve the goals and run a department, country or division.... thus anticipate!
10. **Prospective Company:** try to understand if there is a recruitment process, who is involved, who are the influencers and final decision maker and the timeline? Sounds obvious but you will realize while you meet people and companies where the job is not (yet) created but the company might consider creating a new role that fits you. This happened to me twice!
11. **The in-person interview:** check the background of the people you will meet and their personality! Steer for a real dialog and not a Q+A, always favor short over long answers, stay focused and to the point and always answer with the new company's challenges in mind. Anticipated questions: What can you achieve for this company others can't or what was the biggest mistake you made professionally and how you solved this, what will be your strategy during the first 3 months in our company. When asked, make sure you can clearly articulate why you left your previous company and why you are looking for new professional challenges. Prepare carefully insightful questions about the company, the role and the team. Remember less is more. Demonstrate empathy and show energy, curiosity, authenticity, have a friendly attitude and avoid topics such as politics etc. Hint: humor doesn't travel that well, be sensitive!
12. **The video interview:** accelerated by Covid-19 many companies are now running the entire recruitment's process through audio and video sessions, all of the above in point 11 is applicable when the interview is via video. Be aware about a few important nuances....such as the camera background and "dress for success", look into the camera, no multi-tasking! A video conference requires more focus than a face-to-face chat, says INSEAD Associate Professor of Organizational Behavior Gianpiero Petriglieri. Video conference is more tiring because we need to work harder to process non-verbal cues like facial expressions, the tone and pitch of the voice, as well as the body language, especially for job interviews
13. **Register what you do:** a lot is happening in the process and easy to forget, therefor create a log and capture e.g. date, company, executive, name, role and scope, discussion topics etc
14. **Thank you!** Follow up with a "thank you" note including one or two pointers from the interview and why you are a good fit for the role with a short motivational line

The Channels:

1. **Your own network**, e.g. alumni organizations from universities or companies you have worked with these folks know you and can provide connections, insights, introductions and leads, also at times they might have a personal experience with the company you are targeting. IMHO **network is the single most important vehicle** in the job or board search process!
2. **Social media:** it's essential to include LinkedIn as part of your lead generation and contact strategy, moreover it's an excellent information source. Make sure your resume or bio is properly posted on LinkedIn. To boost this process, I advise you to get LinkedIn Premium. Other sites such as Glassdoor provide insights from people working at companies and provide salary indicators and therefore might influence candidates and their choices.

3. **Websites of target companies'** these are rich information sources, you will be surprised what is published on these sites, you get a sense of the culture, diversity, available jobs, requirements, timeline and a template for your application
4. **Human Resources** departments are evolving and one of their challenges is to embrace the disruptive forces surrounding them. Try to understand their role and stature in an organization and their process in the recruitment process. Is it only screening, do they have a real say in the process, can they even coach you during the process?
5. **Executive Search firms:** be on their "Radar screen" yet be aware they work on behalf of recruiting companies. These firms assess the position, develop a profile, identify candidates, create a short list, provide recommendations and ultimately negotiate compensation with selected candidates. Examples of executive search firms: Egon Zehnder, Heidrick & Struggles, Korn Ferry
6. **Advertisements:** web-adds, newspapers, or special magazines do have search section. There are numerous opportunities to select that one job
7. **Others:** job fairs and recruitment events (virtual or F2F) might certainly be worth attending

Key Insights:

Attention points from recruiters: Quality of university and education, quality of work experience and further education, achievements & results, career progression and mobility. Competencies such as charisma, honesty, integrity, personal values, references, emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivities, agility, cognitive intelligence, communication skills, analytical capabilities, organizational knowledge, digital savvy, empathy. Hiring companies are nowadays more focused to understand the potential you can achieve for them, versus your existing skills, competencies and experiences, thus curiosity and agility to address with confidence future challenges and assignments are essential.

Self-motivation!

Career transitions can take a long time, require many interactions and can become stressful and frustrating, therefore you might have difficulty sleeping, lack of focus and become restless. It's important to maintain a healthy balance between hard work on the career change process and your ability to stay fresh, positive and receptive. Therefore, I recommend adopting some rigor in the process is. Suggestions are:

- Milestones: try to quantify your own approach as best as possible since it helps you to stay on track and motivated e.g. every week I should add 5 new meaningful contacts to my network, and 3 times a week I will speak with a person from a targeted industry etc.
- Develop a daily routine: research, network, reflect. Watch your food intake, think about your wellbeing, get fresh air by spending time outdoors.
- Self-confidence is important therefore stay fit mentally and physical! This means thorough preparation combined with physical activities from e.g. running, biking, walking to meditation etc.
- Read a good book, write a blog, take pictures, prepare for a sportive challenge. This will be proven to be much more inspirational then watching the news or spending random website surfing.
- Assure to get enough sleep, make sure to stay productive..... the process may take some time, thus stay mentally and physically fit!
- Work diligently and stay smart. Never give up!

In the mid-nineties I received some guidance from a gentleman who was the personal coach of Miami Dolphins legend Don Shula, Hall of Famer, player and head coach. My advisor taught me the famous words "**Don't wait, initiate**" and that's what I really believe in!

References and additional sources:

Who moved my cheese, Dr Spencer Johnson

The craft of interviewing, John Brady

What color is my parachute? Richard Nelson Bolles

Rites of Passage, Lifetime Guide to Executive Job-changing and Faster Career Progress in the 21st Century, John Lucht

Bestemming Boardroom, Eelco van Eijck

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ⁱ David Bowie from the album Hunky Dory released in December 1971