

Eight Tips for Job Hunting During the Recession

By Margot Carmichael Lester, Monster Contributing Writer

The global credit crisis and flat-lining domestic economy could make this one of the most challenging times to be looking for a job in recent history. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of unemployed increased by 3.6 million between December 2007 and December 2008, and the December 2008 unemployment rate hit 7.2 percent. For February 2009, the unemployment rate rose to 8.1 percent.

To be a successful job seeker in this climate, you have to be calm, patient and proactive -- and try any (or all) of these tips.

Pick and Choose Your Targets

When Jack Hinson was laid off in mid-2008 from his job at a large Internet content company in Austin, he prioritized his search. "It's important to put your time and energy into opportunities that you're the most interested in and that have the best chance of coming to fruition," he says. "Pick a few companies you're interested in and pursue them, whether they have current openings or not."

Concentrate on Growth Industries

Brent Berger, a Las Vegas-based scenario planning and strategy consultant, suggests focusing on growth industries and areas. "Look at energy," he says. "With oil costs where they are, the need for cheap fuel and cheap heat is ever-mounting. And any job that alleviates pain is recession-proof. Similarly, the National Guard, Border Patrol, homeland security and the defense industry in general will continue to thrive as the next stage in the war on terror continues."

Work Your Network

Hinson's new gig came from an old connection. "I'd spoken to the company's founders about a year ago and stayed in touch," he says. "Then I ran into one of them at a networking function." So flip through your Rolodex or business social media contacts and let them know you're looking.

Sell Yourself

San Francisco PR account executive Samantha Rubenstein launched a job search just as the economy began to flag. After three months, she got a great offer from Atomic PR. She attributes her success to doing more than learning about the company. "Preparation [includes] learning how to talk about yourself in a meaningful and powerful way," she says. "I created a list of potential interview questions and typed up bulleted answers to create speaking points."

Consider Freelancing

Russ Carr, a designer and writer in St. Louis, has twice had a line on a job only to see it slip away when the employer lost a key account or decided to distribute the duties among current employees. To keep some money coming in, Carr started

freelancing. "I haven't stopped trying to shop myself for a full-time gig again, but freelancing certainly has kept food on the table," he says. "If you're in a field that supports it, don't think twice -- just do it."

Take a Temporary Position

If freelancing isn't practical, try temping. "Consider interim staffing to fill a temporary slot for work that needs to be done despite the economy," advises Ronald Torch, president and CEO of the Torch Group, a marketing staffing firm in Cleveland. Or temp with a company that interests you. "Many of these options pay well and can carry the burden of bill-paying until a permanent position comes along," he says.

Sweat the Small Stuff

"Don't forget the personal touches," counsels Felicia Miller, assistant director of career services at the Art Institute of Las Vegas. "Don't use a template cover letter -- make sure each letter addresses specific skills or qualities the company is looking for. And always send a thank-you note or email after the interview. Use this correspondence as an opportunity to revisit weak areas of your interview."

Stay Positive

The most important thing when searching for a job in tough economic times is to retain a positive attitude, says Carol Vecchio, founder and executive director of Centerpoint Institute for Life and Career Renewal in Seattle. "Even in a job market with 10 percent unemployment, there's 90 percent employment," she says. "There is an average of over 3 million jobs available in the US per month -- and each job seeker is looking for one. Those are pretty good odds."

Struggling to find a great job in a bad economy can be a drag, but undertaking even a few of these tips will improve your chances of landing a gig. "Remember it doesn't matter how many jobs are or aren't out there," Vecchio says. "You're just looking for one -- the right one for you."