

HOW TO GET YOURSELF HEADHUNTED

Want to improve your chances of getting on a headhunter's shortlist? Linda Clark suggests how to get yourself in good business shape.

"I need a new job" – sound familiar? Does the thought fill you with fear, dread or enthusiasm? If you approach your career as though you were developing a product, it can pay off with less pain and more gain. Just get the product right and then take it into the marketplace.

Core skills audit: It's essential that you know what you're good at and in which areas before you put yourself into the marketplace. Conduct a "core skills audit" by using your last three roles as a starting point and writing down what skills you used, highlighting those you particularly liked using. Try to be specific – instead of "good team leader", try "successfully motivated a team of four to come up with a new creative solution to a long standing problem". This will help you to identify whether you prefer to work with people, things, information or ideas.

Next, consider whether you are (or might be) good at organising people to think about new concepts or work with new information, or whether you can manage different types of people other than those in your immediate team, eg external consultants, trustees, etc.

Often, it's easier to do this with a trusted friend, coach or colleague who will be honest while prompting you to consider other options.

Your CV: Update your CV so that it reflects your core skills – this is still the main tool of the recruiter. Your CV is your personal sales document – make sure that you're happy with the way it represents you. It should be no more than three pages and make sure there are no gaps – a couple of months of job hunting is acceptable, for example, but more than 12 months raises questions.

In addition, a short profile at the beginning of the first page gives recruiters a flavour of a candidate. It can help get you onto the "yes" pile more quickly, if your details are relevant. Highlight your

key strengths, areas of experience (sectors and functions) and the type of role you're looking for (tailored for each position).

In the body of the CV, your most recent job should be listed first – with key responsibilities and key achievements. Recruiters want to know what you've done, so quantify achievements as much as possible: "increased sales by 25 per cent over an 18 month period" is much more impressive than just "increased sales". Remember that a CV will get you into an interview, but once there,



you need to focus on how you can bring your skills to bear on the challenges facing your prospective new employer.

Personal contacts: Your contacts (personal and professional) may lead to opportunities for employment. Make a point of telling people that you're looking for a new role and make it simple for them to "sell" you to others. Summarise your own skills and experience in an easy-to-digest manner, so they know who and what you are, and what role you want and can introduce you to relevant people. Don't assume that your friends know exactly what you do – tell them. And don't worry about "using" your friends – most people like to be asked their opinion and are happy to help.

Networking: This is not about asking people for work or new jobs, but about extending your group of contacts. Everyone should be doing it all the time – even if you're happy in your current role. The results from networking take time; investing effort into it now will reap rewards in the future.

Business and professional groups such as Aurora (a woman-only group: www.auroravoice.com) and, for owner-managed businesses, Business Link (www.businesslink.gov.uk) organise a number of events to help people get in touch. Check out www.ecademy.com for online networking, to correspond with like-minded people.

Quality is more important than quantity so try to limit how many groups you join. Successful networkers attend regularly and are active, so suggest speakers for future events, volunteer a venue or offer a contact to someone who asks. What you invest today you will receive back in due course. And always carry business cards – many people forget this essential networking tool.

Become an authority: Write an article about your area of expertise. Offer to speak at a conference or local business group. Chambers of Commerce meetings and your local ToastMasters clubs are good opportunities to improve your speaking skills (www.toastmastersd71.org).

Use headhunters and recruitment agencies: Identify which headhunters and/or agencies work in your sector and get in touch. Most will be open to an approach and will hold your details on file for a future opportunity if they have nothing appropriate at the time.

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