

## Show me the (Hidden) market

If you are unemployed and searching for work, undoubtedly at some point in your search somebody, with good intentions, has told you what you already know. “80 percent of jobs are not advertised” or “You’ve got to access the hidden job market”. Good observations and advice but pretty generic and un-actionable information. What you really need is useful information that you can take action on.

When I have interviews with unemployed people and ask them to give me a brief history of their work experience, very often it includes something like “I have never had to look for work, the jobs just seem to find me” or “I was never unemployed before this, I was always recruited from one job to another”. Those anecdotal bits of information are the proof that the hidden job market exists. It is those jobs that never make it to a newspaper because they are filled because the Sales Managers son’s wife’s brother is looking for work and gets an interview before anyone even knows about the job. So the trick becomes how to find out about the jobs before they become advertised. I’ll even go one step further for those that want to be really proactive and entrepreneurial and say the trick is becoming aware of a job before the company knows they have one.

It is not an easy answer or task as you undoubtedly know, but before I give you some pointers I will give you a warning: It is hard work. You have to be willing to take the blinders off and open your mind to the possibilities that exist and be willing to spend time looking, researching and talking to people. As corny as this might sound, you have to believe whole heartedly that opportunities exist when you can see nothing but closed doors. There is no room for doubt. You will have to work harder now than when you have a job to the point where you say “I can’t wait to get back to work so I can take it easy again”. One of the things people occasionally say to me is “I am doing *everything* I can in my job search, it is just a matter of time”. To borrow a phrase, poppycock. There is *always* something more an individual can do.

Here are a few pointers and ideas to get you going.

- **Somebody else’s problem is your opportunity.** Think back to your last position and some of the challenges you faced and some of the problems you solved. Come up with a list and then ask yourself, is it likely that there are other companies out there, like my last one, who may be experiencing the same kind of problems? The answer 99 out of 100 times is yes.
- **Define the market.** Now, ask yourself, how can I define those companies with information that I can take action on? For example Are they companies of particular size (by people, sales, market share etc.)? Are they companies that deal with a certain set of definable customers (i.e. government agencies)? Are they companies that have to meet strict regulatory guidelines at the municipal, provincial, or federal levels? Find some way of defining the market with information.

- **Once you have your market defined, start researching.** It might be a cliché but it is true; Knowledge is power. The more you know about a market, a problem a specific company, they better equipped you are to approach them with a solution to a problem. Search the internet for information, read trade journals and newspapers, ask your networking contacts for the specific information you are looking for, contact your Boards of Trade and Chambers of Commerce, attend trade shows and industry functions. The goal is to get as much information as possible so that when you are talking to people you are an expert on the problem, on the industry and on the specific company.
- **Don't just read the classified section of the newspaper.** Advertised jobs (the aforementioned 20%) are printed in the classified section of the newspaper. Information leading to the other 80% is printed in the other sections. Look for articles about companies expanding, relocating, or opening up branches. Look for articles on changing government legislation and ask yourself how that will effect your industry. Look for companies who's stock is on the up and up; they probably are doing something that will cause their business to grow. Remember, read for opportunities and problems. Open your mind and believe that opportunities are there, you just have to see them.
- **Go to trade shows and industry events.** You might say "I am unemployed and have no company to represent", and you would be wrong. Another cliché I'll give you. You are not unemployed, you are self employed. As trite as that might sound it is true. You are currently in charge of your own company and face a very serious problem; You have no sales. It is now your sole job to make sales and the only way to do that is understands the need in the marketplace and how you might be able to fulfill those needs. Go to trade shows without a resume. You are not there looking for a job, you are there to find problems and help fix them. The job will follow.
- **Network like mad.** But be careful. Always be mindful of how you present yourself. Have you ever noticed how people behaviour towards you change when you are unemployed. Some people walk on eggshells, others avoid you all together. You will get two different reactions from people (read companies) if you pass them a resume and ask for a job versus passing them a business card and tell them you are researching particular problems in their industry.

These are just the beginning. The most important piece in this article is not where to start looking for the hidden job market but to believe that it exists, that you can find it and that there is an opportunity out there for you. When you truly believe that, you may be amazed at the number of opportunities that exist and how many you may have missed.

Watch this site for the next part in this series.

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