



Chas Hartwig's Advice to Job Seekers

Fifth Edition



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By Charles D. Hartwig



Forward

I'm pleased to offer this guide in the service of your job search and your career.

What you are reading originated in 2 pages of outline notes that I summarized after the successful completion of my first-ever full-on job search. Prior to that, my job searches had been limited to recruitments as a college senior, graduating MBA student, and former colleagues reaching out to hire me when I wasn't actually looking for a new job. I learned so much in that first true search that I invested an hour and typed up a few notes as I prepared to start my new job.

Over the years many people networked with me as part of their own job searches, and I had a number of additional job searches myself – for both new positions within my own company as well as searching on the outside.

As I learned more and more, I gradually added to this material. Several people who networked with me graciously offered to review this material and suggest enhancements.

I hope you find this information useful to your own situation. As always, I welcome all suggested edits, corrections, and additions.

Enjoy!

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1. Your Mindset

Probably the most influential aspect of a successful job search – and life - is your mindset, so this is where we'll start.

The importance of your mindset, and this entire chapter, is the same regardless of the reason for your job search. Did you just graduate college? Finish graduate school? Take a restructuring package because your company was bought? Retired but don't want to stop working? Get fired? Having a powerful mindset will help you no matter why you're doing a job search.

Expect highs and lows. It can be an emotional and stressful time. Change is stressful, even positive change. When you're low, realize that it's normal and it is a cycle.

Foundational to managing the high-low emotional cycle is your underlying mindset.

Your mindset is like a computer program, running in the back of your mind. Your mindset influences how you speak, act, your proactivity, your interpretation of events, everything.

A. Your Mindset is Self-Chosen

The insight is to recognize that your mindset is self-chosen. There is no single "true" mindset - you can easily find evidence and examples to support both empowering and dis-empowering thoughts about your current situation.

Since your mindset is self-chosen, you get to choose! **Choose a mindset that empowers you and leaves you free to lead.**

If you aren't purposely choosing a mindset, your brain's software is going to use its default settings. I guarantee the default settings won't be as helpful as a consciously chosen positive, empowering mindset.



I want to share an insight I learned from a wonderful organization called Gap International. What generates your results? It's your actions, of course. The magic comes from realizing what generates your actions: it's your thinking!

To illustrate what I'm saying, imagine two equally qualified job seekers who differ only in their mindset (i.e., their thinking)

- Person 1's mindset: "This sucks and I'm screwed. There are three other people they should have let go instead of me. Just because I didn't pander to the boss, I'm the one who got whacked. I'm never going to get another job as good as the one I just lost."
- Person 2's mindset: "I didn't expect this to happen, and I didn't want it to happen, but now that it has happened, I'm going to look forward not back. I'm going to treat this as an opportunity, and I'm going to make sure that I come out in a better situation than I had in my old job."

Do you think Person 1's unconscious thinking could result in actions such as

- Statements that imply bitterness about his unfair treatment by his former employer?
- Conversations that project a lack of self-confidence, because he thinks his career has topped out and he fears he'll never get another job as good as the one he just lost?
- Hesitation to put himself forward for roles of increased responsibility because his mindset is that he'll never recover to the level he used to have?
- Projecting passivity or lack of initiative, because he "knows" that what really caused him to lose his job was the vagaries of company politics?

What job search results would be created by those actions?



Do you think that Person 2's consciously-chosen thinking could generate actions such as

- Conversations that project self-reliance and self-confidence?
- Creation of a clear focus for her next roles based on an honest re-appraisal of her strengths and weaknesses?
- Proactive follow-ups and plenty of initiative to get out and network?

Who is going to have the more successful job search?

B. Self-Assessment Helps You Choose an Empowering Mindset

I don't want to leave you with the impression that a self-chosen, empowering mindset means putting on rose-colored glasses and pretending everything is fine.

Even if you start off that way, it will be difficult to maintain such a mindset, because self-doubt will creep in and surreptitiously alter your mindset back to some of those unhelpful default settings.

The key to creating and operating from an empowering mindset is to create it with a **full understanding and acknowledgement of your fears and imperfections**. Acknowledging your fears and imperfections gives you power over them. Trying to avoid them gives them power over you. You want to pre-empt the little voice in the back of your head whispering disempowering thoughts.

Let's start by identifying your fears and concerns. We'll cover imperfections in the next chapter. Write down all of your fears and concerns, giving yourself free rein to express all of them, no matter how big or small they seem, and do not judge them now. Your objective is to write them all down until you can't think of any more. Include both personal and career-related fears and concerns

For example, if you're mid-career and doing a job search, you might write a list that includes fears and concerns such as

- I'll lose status among my friends at home
- We'll have to sell the house because I can't pay the mortgage

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- My brother-in-law will use this as another reason to put me down
- Me losing my job is causing stress for my son/daughter/parents/spouse
- I can't afford to send my kid to summer camp. She'll be so disappointed
- We'll have to cancel our overseas vacation
- This is the start of a downward career spiral – I never deserved the high position I used to have anyway
- This is a career blow – harming my reputation within my industry or function
- Etc.

If you're just graduating, your list might be different, but no less powerful, with items such as

- My friends are all getting jobs but not me. They'll think I'm a loser
- If I don't get a job, I'll have to move back home with Mom and Dad – or – if I do get a job I'll have to live independently and I'm not ready for that
- I won't earn enough money to live on
- I don't know what I want to do or even how to begin a job search
- I'll take a bad job and my career will be ruined before it's even started
- I won't earn enough to pay my share of rent and food
- I don't have any idea about the professional workplace, and I'll screw up
- My friends are all going to be earning much more than me
- I'll disappoint my parents/grandparents/brother/sister if I don't get a great job
- Etc.

Regardless of whether you are well into your career or just starting out, you will probably feel a mixture of freedom and panic when you're done generating this long list. Freedom because it is freeing to acknowledge fear. Panic because until you assess the items on the list, your mind tends to inflate the consequence beyond what is realistic. Without assessment, you can't really judge whether it's a valid fear or not, as well as how consequential it truly is. Now that you have a long list, it's time to assess and evaluate.

As you look through the list, no doubt you'll find some themes. Write them down – instead of addressing 101 fears and concerns, it's easier and more practical to address 5 or 6 themes. The themes may fall into categories such as

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- Loss of social status
- Causing concern to loved ones
- Impact on material things
- Reduced career prospects, future financial security
- Self-image, Imposter Syndrome
- Etc.

Now that you have identified the key themes, with your individual fears & concerns listed underneath each one, take an objective, dispassionate look at them. Ask yourself the question, “Is this really likely to happen?” and “If it does happen, how bad is it really going to be?” As you do this simple assessment for each of the categories, you will probably realize that

- A. Most aren’t going to happen** (e.g., “*I’ll never get a job*” – of course you will. “*I’ll lose social status*” – you recall that several of your friends have lost their jobs or done job searches in the last few years, and everyone was actually very supportive & helpful to them.)
- B. The consequences won’t be that bad** – certainly not anywhere near as bad as you originally thought. They may even be positive (e.g., “*My brother/sister/child/spouse is going to think less of me*” may actually be “*this can help me grow closer to my brother – I’m going to ask him to introduce me to people in his field*” or “*this will be a teachable moment for my daughter, to learn that losing a job is a normal part of life, and she will see how I deal constructively with a job search*”)

If you have some fears and concerns that remain on your list as “Yeah, it’s probably gonna happen” and “Yeah, it’ll probably be bad”, your job isn’t done. Now you must decide for yourself “What am I going to do about it?” Remember, you are not a passive recipient of events.

For example, if you realize you can’t carry your monthly expenses without a salary, make a budget and identify some temporary cost savings (Do you really need all those streaming subscriptions right now? Can your Starbucks habit be curtailed? Are you eligible for unemployment benefits?).

Or, if you’re worried that certain family members or neighbors will look down on you, create a short explanation of what’s going on that isn’t defensive, such as (“I



don't know if you've heard, but I was impacted by the recent layoffs at Slate Rock & Gravel Company. These things happen, unfortunately. I'm in the middle of a job search for bronto-crane operator or other similar heavy equipment roles. Fortunately I have a great track record from my time at Slate and know lots of people in the industry.")

You'll be in control of events, and your self-chosen, empowering mindset is built on a strong foundation from that assessment of your fears and concerns.

C. Choosing Your Mindset

Ok, it's time to choose.

Write it down. Nice and brief, concise and to the point.

This is your intention...what you intend to happen and how you intend to act.

As an example, remember Person 2's mindset earlier in the chapter

- Person 2's mindset: "I didn't expect this to happen, and I didn't want it to happen, but now that it has happened, I'm going to look forward not back. I'm going to treat this as an opportunity, and I'm going to make sure that I come out in a better situation than I had in my old job."

What is your self-chosen, empowering mindset?



2. Knowing Yourself

A. How Did I Get Here?

This is where you want to identify and accept how you contributed to being in this situation and use those insights in your job search. The point is not to beat yourself up, but to gain insight into the factors that led to your present situation.

Think of this the way an athlete does – when a baseball player analyzes why he or she has an unsatisfactory batting average, those insights will drive better performance in the future. The player may realize that his swing mechanics are off (loading, stride, swing, and follow-through) or that he needs to get better at pitch recognition (reading the pitcher's arm angle, release point, and spin on the ball). Then he can make changes going forward that will result in improved performance.

Think of yourself as a top-level athlete (take your pick - baseball, football, golf, sailing, fencing, whatever). Top athletes never rest on their laurels and are very willing to find holes in their game that they can improve.

This exercise is probably more useful to someone who has lost a job for one reason or another as opposed to someone entering or re-entering the workforce as a result of graduating college or grad school or returning to the workforce after raising children or caring for elderly parents.

Of course it pays to be very truthful with yourself. Most of us don't like acknowledging our imperfections or what we did wrong, but there is no insight or learning without a clear-eyed assessment. And I recognize that usually there are several factors that led to you losing your job. Regardless, being accountable for the outcomes you generate is a very powerful behavior.



Let me give you an example from my own career.

In one instance, a senior executive eliminated several positions, including mine. It would have been easy for me to say, *“Well, the exec wanted to put his own people in place and make some other moves, and so I’m out”*, but when I evaluated how I contributed to me being the person let go, I came to an important realization that has helped me from then on. Here is roughly how my own self-assessment went

Why did I lose my job? The exec wanted to put his own people in place and make some other moves.

Why was I one of the ones let go? I wasn’t driving results and I was out of step with what he wanted.

Why wasn’t I driving results? I wasn’t bought in to the strategy, including not really interested in the future roles.

Why wasn’t I bought in to the strategy & not interested in the future roles? I hadn’t taken the time to figure out how to connect my own aspirations and commitment to the company mission with what the strategy was going to require from me.

In my case, I had gradually become out of step with the strategy. The company was consolidating and centralizing internally, in response to a consolidation of our customer base. While intellectually I understood that the strategy was correct, and I agreed with the strategy, the new roles weren’t the ones I enjoyed, and I felt a sense of loss. Also, I believed that certain consolidation initiatives were misconceived, and the intended benefits could have been delivered much faster with a much lower investment if they took an alternative approach. Feeling out of step with the strategy led me, imperceptibly, to becoming passive and not driving results. Not personally committing to the objective. I supported it with my head, but not my head and my heart.

I realized that if I had spent some time self-assessing earlier, I could have come up with more empowering thinking for myself about the new roles, which would have let me maintain the drive to implement change that had been the foundation

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of my success. My takeaway was in future roles I needed to pay attention to my internal alignment with the strategy, and to self-correct my thinking. Or, if that wasn't possible, it would have led me to leave the company earlier or find a role in a different organization that was a better fit for me.

Start by asking yourself the most basic questions, "Why am I doing a job search?" and "How did I contribute to getting here?" Write down your answer, and then ask yourself "Why?" about what you wrote down.

In your case, what do you learn? Maybe you will have realized things like

- You rested on your laurels and didn't develop your skills or capabilities
- You weren't supportive of other department objectives and came to be seen as not collaborative
- You didn't speak up when you saw things that weren't working
- You didn't mentor or develop the people who worked for you
- Etc.

You can take these lessons and use them as input to your next action, which is figuring out what you want to do in your next job.

B. What Do You Love Doing, What Are You Best At?

Even though it may not seem that way if you have just been laid off, or if you have absolutely no idea about work & life outside of college, you actually are going to be able to get a job. It's even likely that you'll receive more than one job offer, giving you a choice and some negotiating leverage.

Since you are going to get a job, you might as well get a job that is a good fit for you: a job that you are good at that you enjoy doing.

Taking a job (or working in a job environment) that you don't enjoy, even if you can perform the job successfully, is a recipe, frankly, for an early grave. Yes, it will pay the bills, but at what cost? Life is too short, my friend. If you are going to find

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yourself a job, I suggest that you find one that you are naturally good at, that you enjoy doing.

Taking a job that you enjoy but aren't very good at is a recipe for getting fired and doing a job search all over again. As Marcus Buckingham says, "that is what is known as a hobby!" Don't try to earn your living that way.

"But Chas," you cry, "I don't really know what I like doing, and I don't really know what I'm good at. One job sort of followed another, year after year, and here I am suddenly looking for a job. I never planned my career, it just happened!"

Take heart, because that's the way it is for pretty much everyone. The good news is that you are about to become someone with more self-awareness than the average person, and you are about to use that self-awareness to identify and win a job that is a great match for you, you unique, lovable person, you.

I'm not suggesting that you need years of deep psychoanalysis for this, just some honest introspection.

An honest, practical self-assessment gives you the required focus in your job search, increases your self-confidence, and helps you avoid taking a job that's wrong for you.

Here is what I suggest:

First, go through your resume, and select the 3-5 jobs that you were best at and that you enjoyed the most. You can include volunteer jobs too, if that is helpful. Analyze why those jobs were such a perfect match for you. Was it the nature of the work? The work environment or company culture? How your boss managed you? The industry? The company mission? Write down what you learned.

Second, select 3-5 jobs that you were worst at and that you disliked the most. What made those jobs such a bad match for you? Again, was it the nature of the work? The work environment or company culture? How your boss managed you? The industry? Again, write down what you learned.



Be aware that your mind's software will try to distract you by focusing only on the external factors such as the company culture, the nature of your boss, and so forth: "It wasn't my fault!"

But your self-chosen mindset puts the power in your hands. Be honest with yourself, now is the time. It's OK to admit, for example, that you don't do well with detail-oriented tasks that require follow through, or that you really don't enjoy dealing with people and their conflicting priorities.

There is no shame, and in fact there is tremendous power, in clarifying these things to yourself. After all, the whole point is for you to get a new job that you enjoy and that you are great at.

Here are two examples:

1. Bobbie likes structure, quantitative measures of performance, deadlines and targets as an indicator of progress and status, a boss who is in the details and always driving the team's camaraderie and focus.
2. Jesse likes a creative, strategic environment, focus on the big picture, a high level of teamwork and interdependency, a boss who gives her and the team plenty of room to set direction and take initiative.

Jesse might not like the competition and micro-managing aspects of the environment that Bobbie thrives in.

Bobbie may feel demotivated and under-recognized in a group where outcomes are shared, the objectives are longer-term and less measurable, and the boss is less directly engaged.

The point is for you to identify the type of work & work environment that you perform best in.

Continuing that theme, what are you personally passionate about? Can you make this part of your job search focus? For example, maybe you are passionate about youth sports. You believe that children who play organized sports learn important values about teamwork and fair play, as well as gaining the physical and mental benefits of regular exercise. You volunteer for a youth sports organization.

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Or maybe you are passionate about cancer research or counseling at-risk youth. Hey, maybe USA Swimming, or a cancer research organization, or Big Brothers/Big Sisters needs a new Chief Information Officer, or a financial controller, or whatever it is that you are naturally good at and enjoy doing. Why not combine your passion with your profession?

If you want to go a bit deeper, the web site www.mindbodygreen.com published “13 Questions to Help You Find Your Purpose in Life.” Take a couple of hours of quiet time and work through their questions. Their questions are:

1. Why am I doing what I'm currently doing?
2. If I continue doing what I'm doing, what kind of person will I be in five years?
3. What do I wish I spent more time doing?
4. What do other people always thank me for?
5. What completely absorbs my interest and attention?
6. What do I need to do to truly enjoy my work and effectively lead others?
7. What weight am I carrying that prevents me from moving forward?
8. What dream do I need to start moving toward?
9. When did I feel like I was being completely authentic?
10. How do I know when I'm being completely authentic?
11. When do I constantly have to adapt and act like I'm someone else?
12. Where will I end up if I continue to show the world a facade and keep underutilizing my strengths?
13. When was the last time I lit myself up and turned my energy on?

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After you have answered those questions, they suggest you set a direction along the following lines:

- Who am I in the next phase of my life?
- How do I want to feel in the next phase of my life?
- What do I want to do in the next phase of my life?

What did you learn from this self-assessment (work, work environment, boss, culture, etc.)?

Now it's time to use these insights.



3. Focusing Your Search

Based on what you learned from the “Knowing Yourself” assessment, identify one or two roles you are looking for.

A. Roles

Note that I said “*Role*,” not a specific position or title, for a reason: There are many jobs with different titles that could be a match for you, depending on the industry, company, or geography. Don’t inadvertently close yourself off from opportunities by being too specific.

“Sales Executive” is an example of what I call a role. You could probably find 10 or more positions & titles that offer the type of work you are good at and love doing, e.g., District Sales Manager, Regional Sales VP, Account Executive, Inside Sales Director, Business Development Executive, Client Service Manager, etc.

You need to describe your desired role specifically enough so that people will say, “yeah, I understand what you’re looking for.”

But you also need to describe your desired role broadly enough so that people will say, “lots of companies have that need...I can think of several people I should introduce you to.”

“Sales Director National Accounts” is too specific – you might be cutting yourself off from jobs that aren’t Director level, for example, or jobs where your customers aren’t “National Accounts” *per se*.

“Transformational Leader & Motivator of People” is too general. Every company wants every hire to be like that.



B. You as a Solution to Their Problem

Once you have identified one or two roles you are looking for, there is a very powerful way to talk about them.

When you are talking about your desired future roles, describe yourself as a solution to a problem. Make the conversation about them, not about you. Not what *you* want, instead talk about the problems you can solve for *them*:

- Example of the wrong way: *“I’m looking to become a divisional CIO where I can be the top IT person supporting a line of business undergoing strategic change with a shot at the top CIO job if I deliver the way I know I can.”*
- Example of the right way: *“I’m looking for a senior IT role with a company that needs someone to bring alignment between the IT organization and the rest of the business, making sure that IT is directly contributing to the success of the company; a company that needs someone who can build a highly engaged, talented IT organization with strong morale and sense of mission.”*

Put yourself in the shoes of a hiring manager. Do you notice the difference? Do you react differently when you read each example? When you read the second one, even if you have no understanding of IT, weren’t you thinking “I could use someone like that!” If you read the two examples aloud the difference is even more clear – try it.

What if you have trouble describing yourself this way?

Perhaps you can’t seem to master this. Every time you practice your elevator pitch, you slip into language such as “I want a role that...” or “I want to use my experience in...” or “I want to leverage my background in...” You find yourself talking about you and what you want, not the problems you can solve for them.

You might benefit from taking these actions

1. Script it. Actually write it down, record yourself reading it, analyze how it sounds. Revise, re-record, and re-analyze until you can describe yourself as a solution to their problem in a very natural and authentic way.

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2. Refer to yourself in the third person. There is some research indicating that referring to oneself in the third person helps people make more logical decisions. If your name is Cynthia, try starting with “Cynthia is looking for a situation where a company needs someone who can...” A few iterations, perhaps in combination with scripting-recording-analyzing, may get it.

C. Don't Limit Yourself

One more thing: don't limit how big your goals are. Particularly if you are leaving your former employer, it's totally possible to compete for, and win, a job that's much larger than you would have been considered for at your old company. I think inside most companies, people have an internal reputation that places an implicit limit on how far they are going to progress. On the outside there are no such limits. Think about “The Perfect Candidate” for the roles you want. Can you truthfully portray your experience that way? If you can, then you are a viable candidate for that role, even if it wasn't in the cards with your previous employer.

I experienced this myself, so I know it can happen. Here's my story. I had left a very large, well-known company as a result of a restructure, and was conducting an unplanned job search. I completed the same exercises I wrote about above, and decided to focus my job search on two different roles:

- Leader of a large IT-enabled business transformation program
- General Manager of an information-based business unit or service line

Now I can tell you for certain that at my old employer, no one would have considered making me the general manager of anything! But in the outside world when I networked with people, described the two roles where I thought I could contribute best to an organization, and provided a few sound bites about how my prior experience had prepared me for those roles, most people listened, nodded affirmatively, and said something along the lines of, “That makes sense. I think I should introduce you to...”

I have to confess, the first time I said the words “general manager of an information-based business unit or service line” in a real live networking meeting, in front of a living, breathing human being, the little voice in my head was screaming “You can't say that! There's no way you could do a job like that! What

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are you, some kind of fraud? General Managers are much bigger, more powerful people than you are! This person is about to laugh in your face!”

This is precisely why I spent time earlier emphasizing the importance of consciously choosing your mindset. I had consciously chosen an empowering mindset, along the lines of “I didn’t plan to be doing a job search right now, but I’m going to use this as an opportunity to accelerate my career and end up in a better place than I started.” So, when I heard that little voice in my head screeching disempowering thoughts, I recognized it as out of sync with who I wanted to be. In a split second I mentally stuffed a sock in his mouth, put him back in his box, and went on with my meeting.

You probably wonder how my little story ended. It’s really amazing how things can work out. I took a job with another large, very well-respected company as the leader of a major business transformation program within the IT organization, and within 6 months I was promoted to Vice President! So not only did I get one of the two types of roles I wanted, but I also ended up with a major increase in responsibility compared to anything that would have been possible at my former employer. It can happen!



4. You and “The Perfect Candidate”

Now that you’ve figured out the role(s) you are looking for, you need to be able to convey why you’ll be a great performer in those roles. You will use your resume, your cover note, and your networking meetings & job interviews to convey your message. We’ll cover all that later.

Before you start revising your resume and other materials, you should identify how you will position your background and experience for these roles.

A. Who is the Hiring Manager?

Most importantly, you must put yourself in the shoes of the hiring manager.

For example, if you want to be a senior IT leader for a business unit, the hiring manager could be the division President or the Corporate Chief Information Officer (CIO).

If you want to be a sales executive, the hiring manager could be the VP of Sales or the GM of the business unit.

If you want to be a department head in Corporate Finance, the hiring manager could be a divisional Controller or the VP of Financial Planning & Analysis.

These are the type of people you will want to network with as you conduct your job search.

Who is the hiring manager for the roles you are looking for? Who would be the boss of that hiring manager? Who would be the peers of that hiring manager? Later, when we discuss networking, you’ll want to focus your actions on meeting those types of people.

B. The Perfect Candidate

Now, thinking from the hiring manager’s perspective, you need to write down the profile of “The Perfect Candidate.”

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Do not think about your own qualifications during this exercise at all. Instead, play the part of the hiring manager, and pretend you are talking to your HR partner or the executive recruiter who is going to help you fill your vacancy with The Perfect Candidate.

Ask yourself the question, “If The Perfect Candidate walked through my door, what would that person be like?”

Think in terms of the main hiring criteria, such as experience, education, track record, industry background, organizational leadership, personal style, etc.

You can get additional insight by talking to colleagues and looking at position specifications for similar jobs that you find posted online.

You can also use Artificial Intelligence tools to get started or to cross-check your definition of The Perfect Candidate. Fire up your favorite generative AI application and ask it to summarize the perfect candidate for the role you want or for a particular job posting.

For example, I asked Microsoft Copilot “what is the profile of the perfect Chief Information Officer for a Life Science company?” and received the following response:

The perfect Chief Information Officer (CIO) for a Life Science company would possess a unique blend of technical expertise, industry knowledge, and leadership skills. Here are some key aspects of their profile:

1. **Technical Expertise**: A deep understanding of IT systems, data management, and cybersecurity is essential. The CIO should be well-versed in the latest technologies and trends, including cloud computing, AI, and big data analytics¹².

2. **Industry Knowledge**: Familiarity with the life sciences industry, including regulatory requirements, clinical trials, and research and development processes, is crucial. This knowledge helps in aligning IT strategies with the specific needs of the industry¹².

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3. ****Strategic Vision****: The ability to develop and implement a long-term IT strategy that supports the company's business goals. This includes aligning technology investments with business priorities and ensuring that IT initiatives drive innovation and efficiency²³.

4. ****Leadership Skills****: Strong leadership and management skills are necessary to lead IT teams effectively. This includes the ability to inspire and motivate teams, manage budgets, and oversee large-scale projects¹².

5. ****Communication Skills****: Excellent communication skills are essential for collaborating with other executives and stakeholders. The CIO must be able to explain complex technical concepts in a way that is understandable to non-technical audiences¹².

6. ****Problem-Solving Abilities****: The ability to identify and address IT-related challenges quickly and effectively. This includes being proactive in finding solutions and mitigating risks²³.

7. ****Adaptability****: The life sciences industry is constantly evolving, so the CIO must be adaptable and open to change. This includes staying updated with industry trends and being willing to implement new technologies and processes²³.

By combining these qualities, a CIO can effectively lead the IT department of a life sciences company, driving innovation and ensuring that technology supports the company's overall mission and goals.

Source: Conversation with Copilot, 9/11/2024

This approach can quickly get you started defining the profile of The Perfect Candidate.

I don't recommend relying solely on AI for anything, but it can improve the speed and quality of your work.

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C. Assessing Yourself vs. The Perfect Candidate

Your next step is to assess how closely you match up to that theoretical perfect candidate. Create a table, with the left column being the characteristics of The Perfect Candidate, and the right column being the evidence showing how well you match each characteristic.

Undoubtedly you will identify certain areas where you fully meet or even exceed The Perfect Candidate. Write your experience in the right-hand column. Include the role you were in and any relevant factual data.

When we discuss Marketing Material, you'll want to make sure these accomplishments are highlighted in your resume.

When we discuss networking and interviewing, you'll want to turn these accomplishments into short, compelling little stories. There is an entire chapter coming up on the Power of Story.

For example, one characteristic of The Perfect Candidate could be something like "demonstrated ability to execute large, complex IT projects on time, on budget, and on-value."

Your evidence could be something like, "At Acme Corp. I led a \$5MM ERP migration delivered on time, on budget, and on value. I'm PMI Certified, and I also consolidated two Salesforce instances when Acme acquired another company. I have many other examples of leading large complex IT projects throughout my career."

D. Gaps vs. The Perfect Candidate

As I mentioned earlier, you will have gaps vs. The Perfect Candidate. All the other candidates will have gaps too, so don't worry about the fact that you aren't perfect.

The real question is, how do you address those gaps powerfully, so they do not become an obstacle to your candidacy?

For example, maybe you have never led a team as large as the one you would now be responsible for, or you have never had staff in other countries and time

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zones, or you never had responsibility for Contracting in addition to Sales. Your challenge here is to describe how you would mitigate the risk posed by that gap. Consider, for example, how you could mitigate the gap by relying on the experience of your direct reports, or your HR partner, or a mentor assigned by your new boss, etc.

In these instances, you'll want to marshal the evidence that demonstrates that at least you partially meet the criteria, as well as write down how you can mitigate the deficit so it won't be a barrier to your success in the role.

When I was interviewing for what became my first Chief Information Officer position, I (obviously) had no prior experience as a CIO. I was pretty sure that "The Perfect Candidate" already had CIO experience, so I was prepared for that question. And, as expected, I got the question. I handled it by saying something along the lines of

"When I look at the role of the CIO, it is responsible for infrastructure operations, application support, project delivery, IT architecture, attracting, developing & retaining a strong motivated team, and aligning the IT investments so they enable the main business priorities. I have done all of these things before in my prior jobs."

I then gave examples of each of those responsibilities in my background and the results I had been able to deliver. I was able to explain that I had done every role that they needed their CIO to do, which eliminated "has no prior CIO experience" as an objection. Being able to mitigate that concern, coupled with having strong qualifications in the other areas, resulted in me getting the job.

Imagine if I hadn't done that work ahead of the interview and hadn't anticipated the question. I have no doubt that my response would not have been as crisp & clear. I also might have come across as defensive. Putting myself in the mind of the hiring manager and thinking in advance about The Perfect Candidate made all the difference.



E. Changing Industries

Here's another common situation that many job searchers face. Your career may have been spent primarily in one industry, but you don't want to limit your current job search to that industry.

What I have found helpful is to understand the roles in those other industries and be able to 'connect the dots' for the interviewer by describing the areas of commonality between your background and the new industry.

For example,

- If you are a Sales Executive looking to change industries, your deep experience selling to large buyers such as Walmart, Costco and Target will likely translate well to roles in other industries selling to large buyers
- If you are in Process Engineering looking to change industries, be able to describe your experience with the types of manufacturing technology or factory systems used in the other industries, or how the regulatory & safety requirements were similar in your former industry, or your expertise in foundational skills such as Lean, Six Sigma or Design Control apply regardless of industry, etc.
- You might also give evidence of your flexibility and adaptability. Even though your experience may only be in a single industry, maybe you have worked for companies competing in different segments that industry that really do have different competitive dynamics. Or, you may have worked for companies in very different positions in the industry (e.g., some were market leaders, some were innovators or startups, some that were undergoing strategic restructuring, etc.) Even though your experience is all in the same industry, you have evidence that you can get up to speed and be productive in a variety of competitive situations. Even though it's a new industry, the hiring manager will be able to say, "Yes, she's worked for an innovative disruptor just like we are. That experience will be hugely valuable for us."

At this point, you have figured out

- The type of role(s) you are looking for and why

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- A clear understanding of the profile of The Perfect Candidate for the role(s)
- How to describe yourself as a solution to a problem, i.e., how you can help them
- Who the typical decision makers are that you want to meet in your job search
- The evidence that demonstrates why you are close to The Perfect Candidate for those roles

Let's move on and consider how you will market yourself for these roles, based on the insights you just developed.



5. Marketing Material

Now that you have clarity about the roles you want, how do you market yourself?

Do you realize you are a multi-million-dollar product? You may not have thought of it this way, but someone hiring you really is making a multi-million-dollar investment, when you add up several years of salary, bonus & long-term incentive, benefits, recruiter fees, etc.

Someone considering an investment of several million dollars in a piece of equipment for their factory would expect the marketing material (web site, product brochures, white papers & productivity studies, etc.) to be top notch. The marketing material certainly must convey a brand image and provide data to support such a large purchase decision.

Your own marketing material must be of that caliber. *You must be obsessive about eliminating typos, poor formatting, poor grammar, poor color choices, unclear wording, acronyms, lack of facts & data, jargon, hidden metadata, etc. from your own marketing material.*

Let's look at the most important marketing material.

A. LinkedIn: Your Product Web Site

While also a channel, LinkedIn is the most important aspect of your marketing collateral.

It is analogous to a company or product web site. Someone who has heard of you, or is about to meet with you, or who is searching for someone like you, will review your LinkedIn profile.

Your LinkedIn profile should shape how prospective employers think about you. It must reflect your “brand”, whether that is “Transformational Expert | Program Leader”, “Life Science Marketing Executive focusing on Commercial Innovation”, or “Software Developer.”

Your work earlier to identify the role(s) that you are looking for (describing yourself as a solution to their problem), and the profile of The Perfect Candidate should be

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incorporated into your profile Headline, About, and perhaps Skills sections of your LinkedIn profile.

You may want to use a generative AI tool to help you craft LinkedIn profile language that is brief, clear, punchy, and (most importantly) truthful.

This is also the time to invest in a professional photo. When I say a professional photo, I don't necessarily mean you in a suit & tie. I mean a photo with the right lighting and camera perspective that lets your personality show. More precisely, a photo that lets the personality that you want to show, show. The personality that reflects your authentic brand.

There are very useful articles on the web about how best to use LinkedIn and there are many people more knowledgeable than I am in this area. *Find some good articles and read them before you start tinkering with your LinkedIn profile.*

Important: if you have the wrong privacy settings, your entire network will be notified every time you make a change to your LinkedIn profile. So, eleven different drafts of how you describe your last job will be broadcast to your entire network!

B. Resume: Your Sales Brochure

Think of your resume as the product brochure that represents you when you're not there in person. There are many useful articles and books available on the web about how to write a resume. *Read several of them.*

I cannot over-emphasize the importance of a resume with a clean layout, simple fonts, perfect grammar and perfect formatting. Make it "perfect" then give it to a very detail-oriented person to proofread. I guarantee, every time you go through it, you will find more errors. Make it perfect.

In my opinion, you should organize your resume in reverse chronological order.

Resumes organized by functional theme or in some other way leave the reader wondering what you are trying to hide. They then waste time trying to piece together the timelines in various sections of your functional resume to find the problem they think you're hiding, instead of focusing on you as a solution to their problem.

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Most other people's resumes highlight the most important accomplishments & responsibilities in each prior job.

But not you - you are more insightful because you have spent time thinking about the needs of your hiring manager, and you as a solution to a problem.

Instead of doing what other people do, you will think first about the profile of The Perfect Candidate **for your next job**. What are the critical characteristics that your "product brochure" needs to convey? Make sure that the experiences and the results you highlight in your resume match The Perfect Candidate. You may find that an accomplishment or skill that was a secondary aspect of a prior job turns out to be a critical qualifier for your next job.

Likewise, you are likely to realize that some things that were very important in your old jobs are no longer important qualifiers for your next job. So, recraft your bullet points to highlight the evidence that demonstrates that you are almost The Perfect Candidate *for your next job*.

Someone reading your resume should be able to mentally tick through their profile of The Perfect Candidate and see all key characteristics represented.

Quantify! Figure out how to describe your scope and results objectively and factually. Citing facts and data makes it much more powerful and believable. For example, which of these accomplishments sounds more compelling?

- *Led Worldwide IT Infrastructure Optimization program. Consolidated servers, network procurement contracts, desktop support to deliver cost savings*
- *Led Worldwide IT Infrastructure Optimization program. Delivered first-year direct savings of \$9.7MM vs. plan of \$1.3MM. Handed off program in Year 3 with benefits case increased to \$77MM and actual ahead of plan (\$50MM vs. \$45MM)*

A useful memory-jogger is to go back through your old performance appraisals and goals & objective documents. You may have forgotten some of your accomplishments, and you may also find some useful details that can go in your resume or be used as sound bites during conversations.

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C. Resume Consultants, Resume Writers, and Generative AI

You may be considering hiring a resume consultant or resume writer, or you may have access to one as part of your outplacement package or your school's career development office.

Generally speaking, I recommend seeking advice from anyone willing to support your job search!

As with any advice though, remember whose career it is, and who is being represented by the resume: It's you! Seek the advice, but don't feel obligated to accept it simply because the person is "an expert."

When I think back on my experience with resume consultants and writers, I would summarize this way. Of course, your experience may be different.

Pro	Con
• Outside perspective, fresh eyes • Use powerful language • Graphic design expertise • Understand search engines	• Lack industry and functional knowledge • Less experienced with senior-level resumes

The resume writer brings a fresh look both to the format of your resume and how you represent yourself. It's very easy to become too inwardly focused when you write a resume and not think about how it will be received by a potential hiring manager. They can help you create a visually appealing resume where your key points stand out.

Resume writers generally have good language skills and practice at describing accomplishments powerfully, which means using action verbs describing the business problem you encountered, the actions you took, and the outcome you achieved. This can be very helpful if you're struggling with that.

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Finally, they understand how search engines and resume screening software will parse your resume and can advise you how to make sure that key search terms show up in your resume.

On the other hand, at least for me personally, I have found that very often the resume consultant doesn't understand your industry - the common terms and the particular priorities of an industry. They may also lack functional knowledge of the roles you have held. This can result in language that can read as a bit of word salad, causing the reader to react along the lines of, "I don't think this person wrote that."

These challenges are even more acute if you are a senior-level executive (let's say Executive Director and higher).

On balance I would say access a resume writer or resume consultant if you can, don't spend an awful lot of money on it, and most importantly, don't think it will result in a magical resume that will get you a job on its own.

Generative AI and Your Resume

Generative AI tools are evolving at an extremely rapid rate, so please recognize that these suggestions may become out of date in the very near future.

It may seem quite attractive to fire up your favorite AI engine and ask it to "write the perfect resume for a <insert your desired role>" or to "revise my resume for a <insert your desired role>". I do not recommend starting this way.

I do think there is a role for generative AI, but I suggest using it after you have crafted a strong draft of your resume based on your understanding of The Perfect Candidate for the role(s) you are pursuing.

You may wish to have AI suggest refinements to your language, e.g., "revise this language to be more professional" or "briefer" or "authoritative" or "confident". In my experience I can never simply replace the original text with the AI-generated text, but the AI-generated text definitely provides useful suggestions that I can refine and finalize myself.

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You may also want to use AI to cross-check your resume against the profile of The Perfect Candidate, e.g., “please evaluate <this resume> against <the profile of The Perfect Candidate> highlighting strengths, weaknesses, and areas requiring further investigation.” You will probably get some interesting, and perhaps insightful comments back.



6. Elevator Speech

Think of this as if you had a booth at a trade show, where potential customers walk by and want to know what your product does.

In about thirty seconds you need to describe yourself and the problems you can solve for your employer. You probably also want to have a two-minute version.

Reread the chapter on Focusing Your Search and review your notes about the roles you are looking for, described as a solution to someone's problem.

You do not need to be ashamed if you lost your job. Remember the very first chapter – Your Mindset. These days we are all just one memo away from a job search. People realize it doesn't necessarily indicate a performance issue.

You should be up front, truthful, and constructive about why you are looking. Here is an example of how you might describe your situation

“After 5 years at Acme learning all facets of Marketing and contributing to the growth of our Dynamite Pogo Stick, the Pogo division was sold to a Private Equity firm who initiated a restructuring that impacted me and the rest of my department. I left Acme with great memories, proud of what I contributed, and am ready for my next role. I’m looking for a senior Marketing role for a business that needs someone who can....”

A few points about the above summary

- It doesn't bad-mouth the former employer. NEVER do this – it makes you seem bitter, disempowered, and makes people wonder what you would say about them after you leave
- It talks about your accomplishments & your skill area
- It shifts the conversation to the future, demonstrating your proactivity, constructive approach to dealing with being laid off, and is a great lead-in to a networking conversation

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The reason you need a brief elevator speech is that when you are meeting people you may not have much time. It's unbelievable, and I've seen this myself, where I asked a simple opening question like, "So, what kind of roles are you looking for?" and the other person spouts off a long, meandering speech for 10 minutes. They consumed 33% of a half-hour meeting and haven't yet engaged me in how I can help them.

You should script these speeches word for word, like the script for a television advertisement or a movie. When I say scripted, I do literally mean you should write it down like a movie script.

Scripted does not mean robotic or inauthentic. Make sure you use language that is natural to you.

Draft your elevator speech in a conversational style, making sure that it hits your key points, which often include why you're looking for a new role, what roles you are looking for, what problems you can solve for someone, and so on.

Then, record yourself delivering the script (it's fine to read the script while you are recording.) Go back and listen to it, checking for high energy, brevity (I really do mean 30 seconds!), clarity, etc.

Be prepared, because it can be quite humbling to listen to the recording of yourself. You may think you sound like Winston Churchill rallying the nation during the Battle of Britain, but when you go back and listen to the recording you sound low-energy, rambling, monotonal, boring, etc. That's ok, in fact it's the whole point.

Keep tweaking the script and re-recording yourself, each time focusing the message and making the language more and more natural to your personal style. Keep rehearsing until you have memorized your lines, and can deliver them with authentic enthusiasm, within 30 seconds.

Then try it out on a trusted colleague and get feedback, revise the script, rehearse some more, etc.

The script for your elevator pitch also serves as the starting point for your introductory emails for networking, by the way.

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7. The Power of Stories

Particularly during interviews, but also during networking meetings, you want people to understand your accomplishments and you want their experience of you to be memorable.

Simply reciting your accomplishments is dry and boring and doesn't fully convey what you've done.

Telling a story gets your point across and can keep them literally on the edge of their chair listening to you. This is powerful.

Organize your stories using the SAR approach: Situation, Action, Result.

Consider these two ways of describing your accomplishments

- “I initiated a project to calculate customer and territory profitability. The business used this information to revise sales rep incentives and the sales planning process. Profitability improved by x percentage points.”
- “I was CIO of the business that was suffering from low profitability. We had gotten sales growth on track, but margins were just not acceptable. I did a little digging and learned that we didn't even have a way to calculate profitability on individual deals, nor by sales territory or by Sales Rep. Without that information we were never going to be able to improve our profitability because we couldn't measure it at the point where deals were being approved. I structured an IT project that developed profitability measures for each contract. The business was then able to add a profitability component to sales incentives, to set targets for profitability and to manage the pricing exception process using the profitability data. It was straightforward technically but made such an important contribution to the business results - profitability improved by x percentage points.”

Which is going to be more memorable? Which lets your leadership show?

Better yet make it a mystery story: “I was responsible for rolling out 90,000 desktops and laptops around the world. It was a super-high visibility program, and we were in trouble: We were behind schedule and this project was burning a lot of

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money every month. We noticed some sites in various countries were on schedule or even ahead of schedule, while most of the other sites were struggling to keep up. What was going on? What was their secret? Well, we got people from those countries on the phone, figured out what they were doing, and gained some tremendous insights. All we needed to do was about four or five things a little bit differently, things that we could easily replicate around the world. We ended up hitting the target on time and under budget - it was one of the most satisfying experiences of my whole career."

Go through the main qualifications you have based on The Perfect Candidate and convert them into stories. Situation, Action, Result. You'll end up with a little library of these stories, and can use them in interviews, networking meetings, and even emails.



8. Multiple Channels

You are a multi-million-dollar product, and you need multiple sales channels. A few comments:

A. Networking

The single most valuable channel for your search. Spend most of your time scheduling networking meetings, conducting them, and following up after them.

Think of your networking as your “sales funnel” – generating lots of leads. Some leads turn into prospects, some prospects turn into qualified buyers, some qualified buyers actually buy. You’ve got to work the process, just like a sales rep does.

Another word about your self-chosen empowering mindset that we covered in Chapter 1: Don’t fall into the trap of feeling that you are imposing on the other person when you request a networking meeting. That mindset makes you tentative, apologetic, and timid.

Choose an empowering mindset for yourself. People want to help, and you are giving them the opportunity to feel good about themselves by helping you.

If you don’t believe me, think about it with the roles reversed – if you were introduced by a colleague to someone doing a job search who wanted to get your advice, wouldn’t you be willing to help? Of course you would!

I find networking extremely validating & energizing and is great learning / skill building opportunity.

It’s energizing because you will find that you get a lot of positive reinforcement about your accomplishments.

It’s a great learning and skill building opportunity because you will learn new things that are going on in your industry or function, making your subsequent networking discussions even more useful to the other person, and your insights that much more valuable.

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The benefits of networking build over time. The things you learn and the people you meet position you as someone at the crossroads of the marketplace, with valuable insights and connections.

Without breaking confidences, you can share things like, *“yes, I heard when Acme centralized marketing across business units they had the same challenges you are describing. I heard they ended up integrating their sales planning across divisions to try and address that.”*

Notice how you are more insightful and compelling as a candidate? Notice how sharing that information has made the networking meeting more valuable for the other person?

Although rare, it's possible that the person you want to network with may think that your expectation is that he or she will be aware of specific vacancies that are a fit for you. They might hesitate to take the meeting because they are concerned they won't be able to help you. Pre-empt their concern by clarifying that all you are asking for is some “AIR”: Advice, Information, and potentially Referrals as you go about your search. In your introductory email to the person, you should set the expectation that you only want some AIR in the networking meeting.

From time to time, however, you will learn of a specific recruitment for one of your target roles. If your connection is willing to refer you to the hiring manager or some other influential insider, very often you can bypass the initial screening process conducted by HR. Likewise, you may learn of jobs not being advertised, or “opportunistic hires” where if someone sees the talent they want to hire it.

Look the person up on LinkedIn before you meet/speak with them. What jobs and employers has this person had? What do you have in common? Do they have connections that could be useful to you?

I generally didn't use a resume in my networking meetings. I did have a standard email that described my 30-second pitch. Sometimes I had a one-page “summary profile” that I sent in addition. I felt that a full resume was too dense and would detract from the conversation. My assumption was that they had already looked over my background on LinkedIn. In your case, you may decide to forward your resume, and of course that's no problem.

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Focus on the conversation and ensuring that you are making a connection with the other person. After the meeting is over, even weeks later, what remains with the other person is the overall impression you created, much more so than any specific accomplishment.

The personal connection is much more important. Don't believe me? Try a little thought experiment:

- Impression about Networker #1: *"Mary seemed like a great leader and would really contribute to an organization. I forget exactly what she did in Finance, but I know she had pretty broad experience with some good companies and would definitely improve the talent in that organization."*
- Impression about Networker #2: *"Elizabeth had some phenomenal accomplishments in the Finance area, providing support to M&A, Sales & Marketing, and even Supply Chain. But I didn't really get a sense of her as a person."*

Who is more likely to be referred for follow-up discussions within the Finance organization?

Your objective is to make it easy for the other person to help you.

The general flow of a networking meeting (a "meeting" could be a phone call or Zoom meeting, of course) often goes something like this

- Thank the person for taking the time to speak with you and confirm how much time he or she has for the meeting (sometimes the other person's schedule changes, and what was scheduled as a 45-minute meeting turns into 30.) You need to know this in advance so you can manage the time.
- Clarify the purpose of the meeting: Tell the person that you would like to get some Advice, Information, and potentially Referrals as you go about your job search
- Typically, the other person will then say something along the lines of "So, what kind of roles are you looking for?" or "How can I help?" In response, I'd give my 30-second pitch

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- At that point, I'd ask for their reactions – “As you listen to my background, how does it sound to you? Does it sound like a good match for the roles I'm looking for?” “Does it sound like a good match for other roles that maybe I haven't thought of?”
- Frequently this will trigger the person to give you some useful insight. It could be related to how you are describing your desired role (“I think you'd be a strong candidate for roles like that”, or “Can you explain a little more about exactly what you're looking for?”)
- The insight could also be related to potential companies or roles that might be a fit (“I hear that Roadrunner Corp. has just started a big project and might need someone with your background”, or “I know a guy in that field who would be a great person for you to talk to”, or “Have you considered working for a consumer products company? I think your background could be really useful to one of those companies”)
- Keep this conversation going, focusing on advice, information, and referrals
- Pay attention to the time, and make sure you get everything accomplished before your time is up!
- Common questions I ask as we get to the end of the discussion include “Do you have any other advice for me as I go about my search?” and “Are there other people that I should speak with as I go about my search?”
- At the conclusion, thank the person, review the follow-ups, and ask the person if there is anything you can do to return the favor. True story – I asked that question one time, and the person I was speaking with said “Well, I'm looking to acquire consulting companies operating in the product development space, so if you know of any, I'd be very interested.” Believe it or not, I did know of one or two companies who might be interested in being acquired, so I had something to offer him in return for his time spent with me.

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B. LinkedIn: Also Your CRM

Again, think of your LinkedIn profile as a company or product web site, where you are the product, but also as a channel where you can find prospects and prospects can find you.

Make sure you have implemented “search engine optimization” by including key terms in your profile and experience sections. Recruiters pay for special features on LinkedIn that give them robust search capability and the ability to view your profile. Those articles you read about using LinkedIn should explain how to make sure your LinkedIn profile shows up in their automated searches.

You should also go through your connections and figure out who you want to contact for networking meetings, for example

- Industry connections
- Potential hiring managers for your new role
- People you trust to give you good advice
- People who are well connected

C. Job postings

I do not think a heavy focus on searching job postings and applying online will be a successful strategy for your job search.

Job postings can be a valuable source of opportunities, especially when you combine LinkedIn and networking with a job posting, but first let’s clarify why job postings should not be your primary focus.

Too Many Applicants

Online job postings are simply overwhelmed by the number of applicants. It’s very easy to search and apply from the comfort of your couch, so every posting reaches millions of potential applicants.

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One company posted a position and within days had 2,000 applicants! How is a mid-sized company ever going to screen that many people, much less winnow it down to a slate? Remember, this is just one of dozens of job postings their talent acquisition group has active.

Job searchers use AI tools to create resumes tailored to the posting, appearing to be viable candidates. I spoke to a recruiter who said that when these candidates have a screening interview, it becomes immediately clear that the candidate hasn't done any of the things their resume cited!

So the recruiters themselves now use AI tools to weed out the deluge of postings. It has become an AI-driven arms race:

- Companies use AI to help draft a position description and a posting
- Candidates use AI to create (potentially false) resumes and applications to the posting
- Companies use AI to screen the candidates

Remember the point made earlier that you are a multi-million dollar product. If you were selling a multi-million dollar piece of factory equipment, would you purposefully choose a sales channel that is full of many equivalent equipment providers, some of whom offer shoddy products, all trying to reach the same decision maker or gate keeper the same way?

Many Job Postings Are Not Real

Do you need additional evidence that investing your scarce time searching job postings and applying online is likely to be a waste? The *Wall Street Journal* published “Fake Job Postings Are Becoming a Real Problem” in the January 12, 2025 newspaper.

They found that potentially one in five job postings are for “ghost jobs – the roles that companies advertise but have no intention of filling”.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, “Companies have a number of nefarious and normal reasons for posting not-quite-real jobs. They may want to suggest they're

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growing even when they aren't, or may keep postings up in case they get a candidate who's too good to pass up."

Also be aware of postings on recruiter web sites where the position or employer isn't clear. A recruiter's web site may post positions to harvest resumes for future positions that they expect (or hope) to be asked to fill in the future. You could end up wasting a lot of time if you aren't careful

Even if you have been extremely judicious with your time, and only applied for five positions, likely one of them was not real!

Effective Use of Job Postings

All that being said, an SVP of Human Resources confirmed to me that pretty much every position a company is trying to fill is posted on their website, company LinkedIn page, and/or on a recruiting site such as Indeed.com. If the job posting is by a specific company on their own company web site or on their company LinkedIn page, you can be very confident it is real.

On recruiting sites such as Indeed, you should read the posting carefully to confirm that the posting is for a real position and not a recruiter simply mentioning the company's name to harvest resumes.

Once you are reasonably confident that the posting is real and is a role you are seeking, go for it. Fill out the on-line application and attach your resume. Make sure your answers are truthful and match the requirements. If the posting requires 5 years of experience, you need to be able to say yes. Otherwise, those remorseless online bots will do their work and your application will never get past the first screen.

However, don't stop there. Remember two things: your network is the most powerful force you have, and extra initiative will help you stand out.

Power of your network: If you know someone at the company, or if you can be introduced to someone in the company, they may be willing to email your resume and a recommendation to the hiring manager or the internal HR person handling the recruitment. I've sent references like this myself on behalf of candidates and have seen it done many times. Hiring managers want the best talent possible, and

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a candidate coming with a reference reduces their hiring risk. The recommendation email may be nothing more than “Hello, Bob – I hear that you’re recruiting an engineering manager for Acme’s Anvil Catapult program, and I just spoke with someone who could be a great match for you. I worked with her at my last company and think her background fits your needs and she would be a great fit with the Acme culture...” A note like that can let you bypass the screening process and jump directly to a conversation with someone involved with the recruitment. Your odds just got a whole lot better.

Extra initiative: Employers want someone who wants the job. Consider these three situations (all of them are real)

- Someone applies online and sits and waits for a response. And sits. And waits. And gets no response. Ever.
- Someone applies online, searches out the name of the hiring manager or person in HR involved with the recruitment and sends them a cold email along the lines of “Hi – you don’t know me, but I just applied to your Firecracker Roller Skate engineering manager position. Here’s why I want to work for Acme and why I think I can be a major contributor to the program...”
- Someone applies online, can’t identify the hiring manager or HR person, so emails a senior person at the company whose name they found on the company web site. A client told me about a person applying for a second shift plant maintenance supervisor position who took the initiative to cold email the head of HR (or head of Manufacturing, I forget which) expressing their interest and qualifications. The senior person forwarded the email to the people involved in the recruitment (several levels down the chain of command) and the person actually ended up getting the job! The maintenance person showed initiative and drive, which got them into the process.

Why Might You Find It Hard to Deprioritize Online Postings?

I have found that some people have a hard time breaking out of the online posting hamster wheel and shifting their job search focus to networking, even though they

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find it extremely demotivating to go through dozens or hundreds of cycles of “research-apply-get no response.”

It may be that they haven’t done a lot of networking in the past, and they find it very uncomfortable to start. Perhaps they have disempowering thoughts such as

- No one will meet with me
- I will come across as begging or weak because I lost my job / am looking for a new job
- I don’t think I have any useful connections to meet with
- I’m very introverted or not used to meeting new people
- I’m going to screw up the networking meeting
- The networking meeting might be another source of rejection
- etc.

You may be one of those individuals who has found it hard to deprioritize online postings.

When you read the list above, written down in black and white, you might react along the lines of “well that’s not really the case – those things are either false or simply not going to happen.”

However, unless you examine the unrecognized thinking that is holding you back, that unhelpful thinking will continue to limit your freedom of action. The list above is intended as an example of unrecognized thinking. What is your list? Move your unhelpful thinking from “unrecognized” to “recognized”. Now you can do something about it and change it.

Recall that Chapter 1 is entitled Your Mindset. Recall the empowering mindset you chose. If you didn’t go through that exercise before, or if you now realize that what you wrote down earlier isn’t serving you well at this time, go back. Reread the chapter. Call a friend. Schedule some networking meetings.

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D. Company Research

You can analyze online job postings and your LinkedIn feed to help your search. Analyzing job postings from a company you are investigating may give you some valuable insights about what's going on inside the company. Even if those particular postings are not a match for you, you can apply that knowledge to focus your networking for the roles you are interested in.

For example, imagine you see lots of postings for Lean/Six Sigma practitioners located at the company's various manufacturing plants, or several postings for people with digital marketing experience in one of their divisions.

If you are a digital marketing executive, you might wonder if they also have need for a digital Director or VP, even though they aren't publicly posting a position like that.

If you are looking for senior-level operations transformation roles, you might wonder if all those Lean/Six Sigma postings are a sign of a major internal initiative that needs someone like you to help lead it.

You can then network your way to someone in that company for a discussion about your background and roles you are looking for...you never know where it could lead.

This has happened to me in real life. During a job search, I saw lots of postings at a large telecommunications company for analysts and managers to support acquisition integration. Those jobs were more junior than I was focused on, but I could see that there was a lot of activity in the area of acquisition integration. Maybe they have a need for more senior roles that would be a match for me. I found a way to connect with that company, describing my background as a solution to their problem (in this case, to develop a repeatable, efficient acquisition integration process and integration management office) and actually had an exploratory interview with the head of M&A for the business.

Investor calls and company presentations can also provide useful insight. Find them, usually on the investor relations section of the company web site. Read them, or listen to the archived calls, and see what you learn. Just like with the job postings, you will get some insight about the company's needs, and if those needs

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match the roles you are looking for, you can network your way into the company with a purpose.

For example, what you might learn from the investor presentations or earnings calls could be

- Progress against cost savings commitments made as part of a recent acquisition
- Progress of their geographic expansion strategy
- Targets and strategy for entering new market segments
- Etc.

Based on the roles you are looking for and thinking of yourself as a solution to a problem, you could focus a portion of your networking efforts to identify and connect with someone at the company.

One last benefit – the insights you gain from researching job postings, your LinkedIn feed and investor calls may be very valuable in your networking meetings. Wouldn't it be useful to share insights such as *“Did you know Acme is gearing up their hiring of digital marketing and distribution management in their Rocket Roller Skate business, mostly in Santa Fe? I bet that relates to them saying they want to globalize.”* Because it is all taken from public information, you are free to share your insights.

E. Executive Recruiters

Learn which recruiters handle the area you deal in – network to them. Many of them won't spend the time to talk to you, it's not personal – they work for the hiring company. Offer to serve as source for searches that aren't a match for them. Ping them every 6 weeks or so to let them know you're still in the market. Realize that they are huge users of LinkedIn, and they will check you out through back channels. I have had several occasions where I was speaking to a recruiter and they said, “by the way, what do you think of person x?” Although they asked the question nonchalantly, I later learned they were considering the fit of person x for a specific opportunity.

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9. Interviewing

You're being asked to interview for a position! It's a good thing you are prepared:

- You know what role(s) you want, and why, and can describe yourself as a solution to their problem
- You know the profile of The Perfect Candidate and how well you match
- You have a brief, energizing opening about yourself
- You can explain your qualifications and answer interviewer questions with compelling stories that also include the facts and data that make them believable

Now let's talk about how to manage the interview process successfully

Prepare by creating table of job spec vs. your qualifications (like you did for The Perfect Candidate). You do have a copy of the job description you are about to interview for, don't you? Tell me you do.

Use your profile of The Perfect Candidate to create a list of potential interview questions and prepare your answers. Stories work much better than recitation of facts & figures. Tell stories that make your main point. Use SAR – Situation, Action, Result. Nice and concise. Answer the question, and then stop, don't blaviate.

A. Do your Homework

Research the interviewers on LinkedIn in advance – learn about them. What jobs have they held? What companies have they worked for? Who do you know in common? Etc.

Research the company strategy on the web. Most companies hold “investor days” annually where they describe their strategy for Wall Street analysts. You can find these presentations on the company web site, and they are very useful. Also, find analyst reports, WSJ searches, etc.

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B. Preparing for Their Questions

The key thing here is to think from the perspective of the hiring manager and the interviewer (i.e., if you were interviewing, what topics would you be assessing and what questions would you ask?)

At one point in my career I was interviewing to be the head of IT for pharmaceutical supply chain for a well-known company and was scheduled for a half-dozen interviews. I thought I had a pretty good handle on the profile of The Perfect Candidate and knew the key questions I was likely to be asked.

That was perhaps all I needed to do (other than doing my homework about the interviewers), but I went beyond. I prepared for those interviews by creating a long list of every question that might come my way and framing out how I would answer each question. They ranged from the very general (e.g., “so, tell me about yourself”) to the very specific.

Just to give you a sense of it, here are some of the questions I came prepared to answer: What Supply Chain work did you do at former company 1? What Supply Chain work did you do at former company 2? What Supply Chain work did you do at former company 3? What were some of the most important projects you delivered at former company 2? What were some of the most important projects you delivered at former company 1? What systems did you consolidate at former company 1? Why are you interested in this job? What is your biggest weakness? Where do you feel you are least qualified for this role? Do you know what Pharma products are about to launch? What are the revenue & growth rates for Pharma over the last few years? What are our biggest pharma products? What are the upcoming patent expirations? Which products are now 12 months off-patent? Isn't it a gap that you don't have much background with any of the key pharma business leaders & management board members? I see you integrated 3 acquisitions in a former job. How did it go? What are the key things we should be paying attention to regarding our recent acquisition? If we want to improve the speed & cycle time of supplying new products, what should Supply Chain do differently with R&D? With Commercial? Tell me about the redesign of company 3's New Product Development process. What is your experience working with sites in India and China? What do we need to do there? Will you be able to improve the reliability of the infrastructure? Reduce the costs? What was your biggest mistake? What did

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you learn from it? Tell me about your approach to talent development. It seems like you don't have much SAP experience. How will you be successful in the role? What is your current budget & HC? Whew!

I didn't have time to prepare a detailed response for every one of these, but I did for most of them. The big advantage of this level of preparation is that you can provide a crisp answer if asked, and even more importantly you won't become flustered if you get a tough question. I purposely drafted and prepared for hostile questions – not that I expected hostile interviews, but I wanted to be ready for their toughest questions.

In addition, I had a “two-minute drill” monologue, my elevator speech, that reviewed my entire career very briefly, highlighting the key characteristics that qualify me for this job. I rehearsed this out loud, and timed it, so I knew I could deliver it quickly, concisely, and enthusiastically.

Because you have prepared, you will be able to handle a tough question much more smoothly, even if your answer can only be along the lines of (for example), “you're right, I don't have that direct experience. But I do have some very related experience [say what it is] and I expect that I'll be able to bolster that by drawing on the expertise of my direct reports. And I have demonstrated the ability to get up to speed on new areas, for example [give an example].” That's better than fumbling, getting tongue-tied, and blathering something inane in the heat of the moment. Remember, there is no perfect candidate! Your objective is to show that, taken as a whole, you are the best person for the job.

C. Smooth Logistics

This is a small thing that can turn into a big thing if it doesn't go right.

I made sure that I knew where each interview would be held (these were face to face interviews), how much travel time to allot, which office number to go to, and the name of the admin I should ask for. I made sure I had extra copies of my resume and bio. I had my materials & notepad in an outside pocket of my bag, so I wasn't fumbling around when I met my interviewer. I used the restroom before the interview. I had my cellphone muted.



All this logistical preparation helped – I arrived early for each interview, so I had some time to mentally rehearse. Believe it or not, the most important interviewer never received a copy of my resume (how that happens I'll never know), so it was a good thing I had extra copies with me.

Imagine if one or more of those things had gone wrong and you weren't prepared – would you be in your best mental state to shine in the interview? That's why logistics are important.

For virtual interviews,

- Test the technology in advance – Does the app load? Do your camera and mic work with the app?
- Set up the space – do you have a professional background? Is your face illuminated?
- Are you in a quiet place where outside noise won't distract the interviewer?
- Have you closed every unnecessary app?
- Etc.

D. Influencing the Interview to Your Advantage.

The whole objective of interviewing is so your qualifications for the position can be thoroughly and comprehensively assessed. Even though the interviewer is the primary person responsible for achieving this, you also have an obligation (and a self-interest!) to make sure that every relevant aspect of your candidacy is assessed. You have to pay attention to subtle interpersonal cues, and you need to influence the interviews.

Here are a few things I try to do:

Make a personal connection at the start. Look the person in the eye, smile, and shake their hand (if you're in person.) Thank them for taking the time to interview you. Probably your homework has identified a personal connection, and this is a good time to use it: "[our mutual former boss] says hello!" "I can't believe the

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Pittsburgh Penguins lost again!” “I hear from [so and so] that you’re an avid stamp collector – me too!” Etc.

Confirm how long the interview will last and what topics the interviewer wants to cover. Don’t get caught assuming that you have a 1-hour interview when you only have 30 or 45 minutes – schedules change, and emergencies do happen! The beginning of the interview is a good time to ask your most important question: “When you are thinking about The Perfect Candidate for this job, what are the main characteristics that you are looking for?” Alternatively, you can ask the same question as “When I spoke to the hiring manager about the job, she indicated that the profile of The Perfect Candidate would be along these lines [list them]. Is this pretty much the way you see it too?”

Answer the interviewer’s question and shut up. Try to give concise answers, then stop talking. I can’t tell you how many candidates give me a good answer, then just keep going instead of shutting up! They can take up 10 minutes out of a 30-minute interview on one question! My thoughts turn to “this person really has low emotional intelligence – don’t they realize that we have a lot to get through?”

Give your concise answer, then simply say, “Did that cover it, or would you like some more detail?” Asking this question also gives you the opportunity to redirect your answer if you weren’t on the mark the first time. As you answer the interviewer’s questions, keep that profile of The Perfect Candidate in the back of your mind. You want to answer in a way that fits into the criteria they are assessing against.

Body language and attentiveness. Look them in the eye! Smile! Pay attention to the clock! Sound enthusiastic!

Have questions to ask them. As part of my preparation, I created a page for each interviewer that I would be meeting, with some key bullet points about their responsibilities as well as several relevant questions I wanted to ask them. Remember, you want the interviewers to know that you want the job. Many times, when I am the interviewer, I close with “so, what questions do you have for me?” and get a look of shock and panic from the candidate that says, “Oh S***t! I have no idea what I want to ask!” Do you think that comes across as an organized, prepared, capable person?



Some “evergreen” questions: Who would be my main collaborators? If I get the job and we’re sitting here a year from now, what would you expect me to have accomplished?

One more interviewer secret – I write down the questions the candidates ask me, and when we are debriefing on the candidates that definitely factors into our decision.

Close powerfully. When we’re getting to the end of the interview, I try to ask the question, “So, at the beginning of the interview when I asked you about the profile you are looking for, you said [list the profile of The Perfect Candidate]. How would you say I measure up against the profile?”

You need to ask the question carefully because you don’t want to give the impression that you’re fishing to see how you stack up compared to the other candidates. Nor do you want them to think that you are trying to find out if you “have their vote.” Be clear that you want their perspective on you vs. The Perfect Candidate.

This is an extraordinarily useful technique, and here is why. First, if you are a great match to the “perfect candidate” just by the interviewer saying how well you match up will psychologically make them more convinced that you are the best candidate.

Second, you may find that the interviewer misunderstood some of your answers and thinks that you are not well qualified in some areas when in fact you are. This gives you the opportunity to correct their misunderstanding (politely, of course, e.g., “Oh, I’m glad you said that. I must not have been clear in my answer. As a matter of fact, I have been managing globally dispersed organizations [list some examples]”).

Third, you may find that you are a great match against most of the criteria, with a gap in one or two. This gives you the opportunity to discuss how you’d mitigate that gap, and help the interviewer realize it’s not a fundamental problem with your candidacy.

At the very end of the interview, look the person in the eye! Shake their hand! Thank them for taking the time to interview you! Tell them to please reach out if



they have any additional questions for you or any concerns about your ability to be successful in the role.

Some additional comments. Don't relax and think you have the job and don't go on autopilot – i.e., with pre-thought answers. Stay alert!

Let me tell you how I learned the importance of staying alert.

I was interviewing to be the head of e-business for a life science company. I was asked to come to their headquarters for a half-day of interviews – about 4 if I recall.

The first interviewer was the hiring manager, who I'd already met as part of networking, followed by several interviews with peers and HR, concluding with the hiring manager's boss, who would have the final say, and then an end-of-day catch-up with the hiring manager.

I thought the interviews went great – good connection with everyone, it seemed as though my background was a good fit. I was pumped and brimming with confidence going into the key interview with the hiring manager's boss. That interview covered more general topics, one of which was along the lines of "so how do you see your career progressing here?" I was on autopilot, and answered something like, "well, if I deliver the results you want in this role, I'd like to move towards general management."

I stepped on a land mine. His response was "our general manager track is very different, and you wouldn't be a fit for that. We don't want to bring you into this e-business role if it's not going to get you where you want to go in your career – it's not fair to you and not good for us." And that was that. I didn't get the job.

The lesson I learned? Stay alert, pay attention to body language (he was probably giving off some signals during the interview that I missed) and, most importantly I learned that

- You don't know how a company works on the inside
- Describe goals as specific, but general. If I had only followed my own advice from the Focusing Your Search chapter. Especially since most of us don't really plan out how our careers will unfold. It would have been better to say

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“I don’t have a specific end-game role in mind, but I know my strengths and where I can make my best contribution, and it’s in roles that need someone with good depth in technology, but a commercially-oriented mindset and general management perspective who can work effectively across key functions such as IT, Sales, Marketing, Distribution and Finance.”

- Know your strengths: What are you best at that you enjoy doing?



10. Treat your job search like a job

A. Professional Phone Greeting and Email

If you've read this far, I probably don't need to say this, but make sure you have a professional phone greeting and email!

- You do not want a prospective employer to get a voicemail greeting like, "Duuude – I'm probably wasted or watching TV. Leave a message and I'll call you when I sober up"!
- Likewise, do prospective hiring managers really want to get an email from nastygurl420@gmail.com?

B. Contact List

During the course of your search, you will have discussions with many, many people. You need a way to keep everyone straight. E.g., you could get a phone call saying "Hi, Chas, this is Howard from Ms. Jones' office". You need to figure out who the heck Ms. Jones is before Howard catches on that you forgot! Email is much easier for this, but you still need a list.

Which dovetails with your...

C. Action Item Tracker

It is up to you to keep the ball rolling. People want to help, but often they won't do what they promised because they get busy. You need a system that prompts you to reach out and remind them

You will have many actions and follow-ups and you need a way to keep track. You really don't want to forget that you promised to send your resume to a CEO tomorrow, do you? Don't laugh, it's easy to forget something when you have lots going on, even something big like that



D. “Sales Pipeline” / Goals & Metrics for Your Search

I found metrics very useful as a motivator. I created a “sales funnel” working backwards (with examples, assuming a 6-month search):

- # Offers I want to receive: 2
- # Final round interviews I need to go on: 4
- # Second round interviews I need to go on: 12
- # First round interviews I need to have: 24
- # Screening interviews I need to have: 40
- # Networking meetings/calls: 300; divide this by 26 weeks = 11/week = 2/day



11. Watch Out For

During my own job searches, I have recognized that I exhibit a few personal behaviors that really aren't helpful.

Perhaps by sharing them here, you can avoid them.

A. Bird in the Hand

You may end up getting a real, bona fide offer for a job that really, truthfully, isn't a great match for you. Every fiber of your being is telling you to accept the job and get the damn job search over. Should you take the bird in the hand, or wait to see how those other job opportunities in the bush pan out?

This is why it's so important to evaluate what you're good at and what you love doing. Accepting the wrong job just means you'll be doing another job search sooner rather than later.

I dodged that bullet myself, but more through dumb luck than anything else. This was during a dot com boom, and I was interviewing with a startup tech company that had filed for their IPO and was looking for a head of consulting. They made me a verbal offer. Fortunately, they reneged on the offer, because otherwise I probably would have accepted it, chasing the IPO pot of gold. At the end of the day the company never went public and ultimately went out of business.

B. Getting Close so Slow Down

This is another weakness of mine. When it looks like one of my opportunities is likely to turn into a job offer, I tend to relax in my search and slow down the pursuit of my other opportunities.

That's exactly the wrong thing to do. Now is the time to accelerate your other opportunities.

You can use the fact that one opportunity is getting close to accelerate others: *"Hi, Mr. Jones, I think one of my other opportunities is close to making a decision. Is there any progress on my candidacy at Roadrunner? I felt a great connection with you and the Roadrunner team and know that I can contribute to the...."*

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Having more than one job option gives you negotiating leverage.

C. Surfing the Web

I'm sure you would never do this, but I have heard of people who can spend an entire afternoon reading business press, looking at job posting sites, engaging in lateral thinking based on what comes up in their social media feed, and thinking they are conducting a job search.

Don't do this! Set up a networking meeting instead! Go through your action item list! Follow-up!



12. Closing Thoughts

It is my sincere wish that you have found value in this small book.

I do appreciate comments and suggestions that improve the usefulness of this material, which you are invited to send to me at chas.hartwig@hartwigadvisory.com

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