

## Definition of a Career

The Oxford American Dictionary defines a JOB as: "a paid position of employment . . . got a job at the factory," and "something one has to do, a responsibility, it's your job to lock the gates." We define a job as someone else's idea of what you should do all day. They list each of the duties you will perform and the corresponding requirements:

- Education
- Years of Specific Industry Experience
- How Much You Have Earned (They Equate Ability with Dollars and Vice Versa) and although it may not be in writing, Age . . . Sex and Often Times Race.

Is it any wonder individuals have difficulty trying to find a "job?" It's like trying on a size two glass slipper; even if you squeeze your foot in there's no room for growth.

A CAREER, the dictionary continues, is defined as: "an occupation, a way of making a living, especially with opportunities for advancement or promotion," and "progress through life." We might add a career means waking up excited, and ending the day with a feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction. The rewards are greater also, not merely in terms of money, but in the quality of our personal lives. If we are miserable during the work day (the majority of our waking hours), it's impossible to be happy afterwards. We also tend to generously share our feelings and frustrations with those around us, depriving them of the quality time they deserve.

It is mystifying that the dictionary's authors understood the profound difference between JOB and CAREER, while the vast majority of professionals do not. The dictionary might have added that "jobs" happen, but "careers" are planned. The development and implementation of a sound and detailed plan distinguishes the successful enterprise from the failure; the individual we admire from the one who has never achieved. When wearing their "business hat," executives and professionals recognize and stress the importance of planning; but these same individuals treat their career search with careless indifference.

Until the new paradigm of career or job search impacted their lives, most people have never considered the difference between "having a job" and "building a career." Many had been lulled to sleep by the golden handcuffs their companies placed on them: good earnings, good benefits, lots of vacation and an economy that seemed it would never end. It didn't matter if they no longer woke up anxious to get going . . . they were comfortable. They had a job.

Today, hundreds of thousands of these individuals recognize they have a job, never had a career. They have suddenly had to face the reality of life: their futures are their problem. Companies are concerned with profits; their officers answer to stockholders, not employees. The uncertainty of the economy has caused many to recognize their security is not guaranteed; they must find the more stable environment. The problem common to all job hunters, employed or unemployed, is "where to next."

The professionals and executives that I meet on a daily basis have been quite successful in their business lives. They are entrepreneurs, educators, corporate officers, vice presidents of marketing, finance or operations, or leaders from the public sector. They describe their problems as not enough contacts, or the inability to penetrate the marketplace. Their search methods are those which were successful for them in the

1980s and 1990s. Unfortunately, this is the new millennium with its new paradigms. They look through job fairs, ads, agencies and networks. They invest time and energy and risk their future hoping on a match with a classified ad, an agency's "blue sky" requisition or telephoning friends and relatives who really don't know what to tell them, and can only feel sorry for them.

If companies buy and sell us (what else happens in an acquisition, divestiture or merger), a marketing plan is an essential ingredient to maximize potential! An effective plan starts first with product research. What unique blend of experiences, skills and abilities are we able to take to market. What separates us from the others? Which of our prior successes, or failures, will be valuable to an employer in the future? Which of our skills will lead to the development of new options, options which are critical to future growth and security?

Once the skill sets have been identified a label can be assign (one that connotes value and that a decision-maker will readily identify with), potential markets can be researched and a marketing strategy . . . a plan designed. Considerations must include potential industries to which you will be attractive, the organizational structure (size, age, etc.) for which you are best suited, type of written credentials (Marketing Collateral) which will best portray your strengths, methods of dealing with perceived liabilities (age, education, earnings, experience) in a professional and effective manner, personal communication strategies (what to say, what not to say, how to say it), methods for accessing and understanding the total marketplace. Today's job hunter, working without a plan or knowledge of the process, rarely has access to even as much as 20 percent of the opportunities.

Unable to objectively analyze their prior experience, placing value on skills and abilities, individuals tend to repeat that experience over and over again; sometimes in new companies or with new titles, but the same duties day in and day out. Limited in knowledge to the industries in which they've had experience, their future hinges upon the economic vitality of that one industry, as those in defense and now telecommunications will attest to. Their efforts are undisciplined and without direction. This week there are ten ads to answer, last week it was two and next week may be five. And each ad will receive hundreds of responses from others who are flailing . . . others without a plan. Half measures no longer work. The vast number of job seekers from all over the world have transformed the hiring process into a totally negative activity. The greatest efforts are directed toward "eliminating" candidates; how else can you deal with hundreds, and at times thousands, of applicants? With a five-foot stack of paper to wade through, the intent is to reduce the size of the pile. Without a professional approach you cannot expect to survive the process; without a plan you will not escape the "de selectors," and attract the attention of that elusive decision-maker who can create the position you've always wanted.

If any of this sounds familiar then the moral is simple, plan as well for your life and career as you do for the supermarket and birthday parties. Remember, your career is your family's greatest asset.

Please contact us to setup a no cost appointment to learn more about the services provided by Career Management Associates. CMA was founded to bring empowerment, planning, and an edge to the career search process and has guided the career minded executives and professionals in the Iowa market over the years.