

Looking for a Job When You Already Have One

by Rose Jonas, Ph.D.

The old view, that you have to have a job in order to find a job, is no longer true. The economy has just been too scary, with layoffs and company closings, downsizings and outsourcings. Employers are not surprised when applicants are between jobs.

In fact, those folks standing slack-jawed at the unemployment office have an advantage over the cubicle wretches sitting slack-jawed at their PC, wishing the day would end, that this miserable job would end. The unemployed at least have the time to look for a job, and that's a key point for the employed job seeker to remember.

Here's what's true about job search duration. To find a job, it takes slightly less than a month for every \$10,000 you make. In a down economy, add a month or two. If you're employed, add four to six months on top of that. Why? During the day you just don't have the time. At night you don't have the energy. And that's assuming you know what you want to do next AND that your job didn't go to Bombay.

If you are employed, and you are sure you want to move on, here are some points to ponder:

1. *Be realistic.* Assess how long this will take you. Nine to twelve months is generally right.
2. *Talk to yourself.* Can you hang on that long, or should you just take a deep breath and leap?
3. *Talk to your spouse.* What does a job change mean to the family? Will you get the same money? Will your spouse need to get another job? Can we stay in the same city? Are you sure your spouse would move to another city if you got a job offer out of town?
4. *Plan your strategy, which often means you hire a career coach.* The job world has changed so much: we aren't often sure how to move, where to look, or how to talk about what we've done. You'll save yourself time if an expert is helping you.
5. *Look at your days/weeks and determine what you can carve out for the job search.* You have to do research, networking, resume writing, and interviews. Can you get up an hour earlier a couple of days a week? Can you get to the library at lunch to research companies? Can you go to a conference room with your laptop and surf the job net? Can you have early morning coffees throughout the week with friends or people who can help you develop leads?
6. *Get an accountability buddy.* A client in the Northeast wanted to return to his Midwestern roots, spent a year fretting over the above points/issues, and got nowhere. His most trusted helper was his sister, so they decided to formalize the arrangement, following the procedures typical of job clubs. The deal was he had to call her on Sunday evenings to report his progress and detail goals for the upcoming week. She was to be supportive as well as challenging. She kept him on the mark. He found a new job in about three months.

7. *Don't be afraid of networking.* People hate to do it; it's still the primary way to find a job except in a few rarefied fields — major executives or hot commodities or technically oriented professions — where a recruiter or the Internet is a major search source. For over two-thirds of us, the next job is gotten through networking, saying what you're looking for, asking for leads. Ya gotta be out there.

8. *Keep the search confidential.* Don't tell your boss till you have the next job. You'll have a problem in certain professions, which are small, tight, and highly networked. Gossip fairly zings along those network lines. If the boss will find out in about 5 seconds, 'fess up. Otherwise, play your cards close to your chest. Have NOTHING come to the office, tell potential employers not to contact your present one, take vacation or sick days to do interviews. People at work will find out if you're careless. Trust no one.