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The Six Missing Pieces of Most Job Searches

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“One organization with a long record of success in helping people find jobs is The Five O’Clock Club.”
FORTUNE

In the fall of 2009, a member of the Club told me that he would like to change coaches. He said that he had been attending his small group for eight months, but his job search was stalled. Although he didn’t have any complaints about his coach, he thought it was time to get a second opinion. Eight months? Our members usually get jobs in an average of 12 weeks—even in the tough job market we’ve seen for the last couple of years!

While he didn’t want to say anything negative about the coach, he did voice his irritation that The Five O’Clock Club methodology “wasn’t working” for him. So we quickly got him assigned to another coach. But I felt compelled, in my email to him, to give him some advice about getting up to speed with his new coach. I suspected that he might not have been working as hard at it—and as smartly—as he could. So I told him: be sure to show the new coach the results of your Seven Stories Exercise and Forty-Year Vision; be sure to show him your targeting map of 200 positions—and be prepared to explain to him the difficulties you might be encountering in trying to reach the hiring managers who represent those 200 positions.

I also pointed out that he should be sure to listen to the 16 lectures on the Five O’Clock Club methodology (on eight CDs); and be sure to read and study the books. The Five O’Clock Club is like a graduate course in job search: to get the maximum benefit, it’s important to attend “class” regularly, read the books, listen to the lectures, follow the syllabus and do the homework that the small group and coach give you every week.

His job search was a jumble of missing pieces. About a month later I was chatting with the new coach, and I asked him how the eight-month client was coming along. “By the way,” I asked, “had he done all those things I reminded him about?” The coach said—with more than a little weariness in his voice—
“No.”

In other words, here was a job search that was a jumble of missing pieces. Over the years, we have found that job hunters commonly want to bypass this or that step in the methodology. But we warn them that doing so can mean prolonging their searches— and making costly blunders. In fact, there can be many missing pieces, depending on who is doing the skip- ping. In the sections that follow, however, I’m going to talk about six of the most common missing pieces.

Taking Inventory: The Past and the Future

If I were to take a person-on-the- street survey, asking 100 people at random, “What would be the first thing you would do if you had to look for a job?” I can guarantee—guarantee—that nobody would say “assessment.” I would hear “revise my résumé,” “look at the ads,” “post my résumé on the Internet,” or “register with agencies.” Yet, if I were also to ask, “What are the interview questions that you fear the most?,” people would say that “Tell me about yourself” and “Where do you see yourself in five years?” cause the most panic—along with “What are your strong points and weak points?” They might scan the career books at the bookstore, hunting for the easy answers to these questions.

One cardinal rule of sales is to know the product, namely yourself.

But there are no easy answers—and they certainly can’t be found in a job search handbook that offers “100 sure- fire answers to tough interview questions.” Doing well on interviews requires far more serious preparation— and the foundation for that is thorough assessment.

Hence, we tell people who arrive at the Club that it is very important to devote at least a couple of days to the assessment exercises. This will be time well spent. In fact, assessment will probably shorten most job searches because it gives you an advantage in outclassing the competition.

During the last decade I have inter- viewed hundreds of successful job hunters, and one of the most- consistent themes I have heard is the importance of The Seven Stories Exercise. Most people have never taken the time to identify, write down and analyze the seven most important accomplishments of their lives—that is, those that they enjoyed doing and also did well. If most (or all) of a person’s Seven Stories turn out not to be work-related, that usually prompts them to consider a career change. But when the work-related, enjoyable accomplishments stand out with clarity, three things commonly follow; the job hunter:

1. Writes a better résumé, with brilliant highlighted accomplishments.
2. Becomes a much more interesting interviewee—how could you not? — you’ve just been thinking about your greatest life accomplishments.
3. Is much more convincing during salary negotiations, since “what I bring to the table” is front-of- mind.



One of the cardinal rules of sales is to know the product, and assessment enables you to master the product you're pitching to the market, namely yourself. People who have neglected assessment just aren't as convincing about what they have to offer and the kinds of problems they can solve.

One of the most important tools to develop for doing well in the job market is the Two-Minute Pitch, and ideally that flows out of the insights gained from the Seven Stories. Again, one of the most consistent themes I've heard from job hunters over the years is the key role that the ***Two-Minute Pitch*** plays.

Once you have it mastered, "So tell me about yourself," simply loses any power to intimidate. And you can turn on the pitch at the drop of a hat. One job hunter reported that the important call he'd been waiting for—trying to get into a company on his A list—came during the dinner hour with his kids running around the living room. He was able to tune out the racket around him and tune in on delivering his well-mastered pitch.

But assessment also means taking an inventory of your hopes and goals for the future. You're not ready for the job market until you have your Fifteen- or Forty-Year Vision pretty well firmed up—which means having it written down. It takes only an hour to do. Of course, it will come to your aid when an interviewer asks, "Where do you see yourself in five years?"

To be sure, your answer will have to be tailored to the situation, but at least you've been thinking about it a lot. More importantly, however: How can you take a job if it doesn't position you well to get to your long-term goals? We all know that there are stopgap jobs, but your career can be in jeopardy if you don't allow yourself to be guided or driven by a long-term vision. If assessment is one of the missing pieces of your job search, the consequences can be devastating.

The Marketing Plan: A Map of 200 Positions

Just as I can guarantee you that not a single person out of a hundred will think of doing assessment, it's almost as certain that people don't realize how important it is to have a written marketing plan for a job search. Of course, people come to the Club with a résumé in hand, and usually a rudimentary cover letter as well. But when we say, "Let's see your marketing plan" —that document is usually missing. In fact, it doesn't occur to most job hunters that they need one.

The written marketing plan is actually a map of 200 positions that any job hunter should identify—existing positions—that he/she is qualified to fill. The most common reaction to this idea is disbelief: "You want me to do what?" But any Five O'Clock Club coach will pose a simple question: "Are there 200 people who do what you do for a living—in the geographic area(s) you're aiming for?" It turns out to be not so unrealistic.

Having a written marketing plan



for a job search is an important key for success.

Here's an example: Sylvia, a divisional controller for a large corporation in the mid-West, told her coach that she wanted to be the controller for an investment boutique. She was ready to hit the ground running, since she had a large Rolodex. She knew what she wanted—so why not just pick up the phone? The coach said, “Don't call any- one yet. Take a couple of weeks to do in-depth research: make the list of 200 positions that would be right for you”—which, in this case, meant making a list of 200 investment boutiques. Sylvia was skeptical: “There aren't that many”—but she followed the coach's advice. It turns out that there were that many. She knew the first and second tier names—all those names were in her Rolodex—but her research uncovered many more. Within two weeks she had compiled an Excel spreadsheet listing 200 positions in her geographic area. “It is so empowering,” she said, “to know that my next job is some- where on this chart.”

Your job search will suffer if you fail to employ direct contact.

Her daily routine in her job search then became a matter of researching and contacting the hiring managers— in a variety of ways. But “working the map” in a disciplined way is a key to a having an effective search, because—in the long- and short-run—your efforts will pay off if you chase companies and hiring managers rather than openings. Of course this is counter-intuitive. The most common reaction from job hunters is, “But don't you mean I should be looking for 200 openings?”

The fact is, if you've already seen a posted opening—in the want ads, on the Internet, through an agency—the odds are stacked against you, because you'll probably have hundreds of competitors. The best strategy is to get to know as many hiring managers as possible who are responsible for keeping those 200 positions filled.

Your job search will have a solid foundation if you build your map of 200 positions—or at least put in a lot of effort to push the number as high as possible. And it can be a wake-up call for a coach to look at your targeting map and give you honest feedback: if you have only 15 positions on your map, the coach might say, “It looks like you have an eight-year job search here—if you're waiting for one of these 15 jobs to become available.” Are there indeed 200 people—or even 100—in your targeted geographic areas who do the job that you do? If so, get going on building your target map.

Direct Contact: Reaching Out to Those You Don't Know



Notice that the coach, in the above example, told Sylvia, “Don’t call anyone yet”—because of the groundwork to be done. But the day will come when you do have to call, reaching out, in fact, to people in a variety of ways. Most people schooled in the Five O’Clock Club methodology know that answering ads and registering with agencies will usually bring meager results. Of course, you do both, but devote as little time as possible to them because we know that the overwhelming majority of jobs are not filled this way.

It is usually assumed, therefore, that networking is the way to go—or so holds the conventional wisdom. By “networking” people commonly mean getting out there to mix and mingle, for example at association meetings. But in terms of trying to contact the specific hiring managers who control the 200 positions on your targeting map, networking is more precisely defined as follows: Using someone else’s name to get a meeting.

However, if you look at the 25 positions listed in your Target One (on your map), you realistically know that it would take a long time to network (using someone else’s name) into meetings with all those hiring managers.

Hence, we recommend using the Direct Contact approach, which many job hunters ignore or shy away from: it’s a missing piece, and your job search will suffer if you fail to employ direct contact.

Here’s an example of how it can be used. One Club member, Sean, wanted to move from Boston back to Atlanta where he had been raised. He asked his brother to send him the want ads from Atlanta newspapers, he registered with as many of the local agencies as he could, and scoured the Internet for openings that looked good. He hadn’t lived in Atlanta for many years, so his network there was very rusty.

His coach said to him, “Pick out 50 companies in the Atlanta area—pick the kinds of companies you’d like to work for—and send a cover letter and résumé to the people who would be one or two levels above you.”

“But I don’t know if they have any openings,” was Sean’s first reaction. “That doesn’t matter,” said his coach, “chase companies and hiring managers, not openings. Let the right people know about your valuable experience.” Sean was highly motivated to get back to Atlanta, so he gave up watching TV at night and chilling out on the weekends. He identified 50 companies in the Atlanta area, did research on each one and wrote cover letters that reflected his knowledge of each company. This direct contact campaign (Sean didn’t use any- one’s name to get a meeting) resulted in eight inquiries, and four interviews— and, eventually, one offer.

Don’t rely on networking leads:

They take too long.



There are many ways, however, to pursue direct contact. You may see the name of an important player at one of your targets mentioned in an industry magazine—maybe the person even wrote an article. Contact the person directly. Or you may see a dozen people listed in your college alumni directory who would be in a position to help advance your job search—or even just your research. Again, contact these people directly, rather than waiting to come up with a networking lead. Over the years, almost 40 percent of The Five O’Clock Club members who earn over \$100,000 have landed interviews using direct contact. **And this is why we keep stressing that networking and direct contact are not the same thing.**

To be sure, direct contact is more arduous. You have to write brilliant cover letters or emails based on sound research; you have to make the follow-up phone calls, which many of us find so stressful. It’s hard work, but the pay-off is **getting interviews in half the time that it takes to network into seeing the right people.** Many job hunters forego the direct contact approach because they just aren’t interested in putting in the required effort. They would prefer to wait for things to happen: a call from an agency, a response to a résumé submitted online, or something serendipitous. But that’s a good way to end up with a job search that lasts two or three times longer than it should. The failure to engage fully in a direct contact campaign can mean your next paycheck is months away instead of weeks.

Job Search Honesty: The Importance of Smart Work, Not Just Hard Work

It’s very important to keep track of all of your job search activity, and most people can probably tell you how many résumés they’ve sent out, how many networking events or job fairs they’ve been to, how many informational or job interviews they’ve had.

But very commonly, there are other things going on that people neglect to mention. We like to ask, “Just how many hours do you devote every week to your job search—honestly?”—because we know people usually don’t force themselves to bring the full measure of devotion to searching. Of course, when you were employed there were probably many mornings when you didn’t feel like getting up and going to work—but you did it anyway.

However, when you don’t have to obey the alarm clock every morning, it is oh-so-tempting to give in to “I don’t feel like job searching today.” And it’s also very easy to give in to temptation: the garage needs to be cleared out or the bathroom should be painted. And yet—and yet—if you’ve gone to the job fairs, posted your résumé endlessly on the Internet and registered with several agencies, you can tell people how hard you’ve been working on your job search. People will sympathize, because we all know how rotten the job market has been.

The first step in “honesty is the best policy” is to not kid yourself about how many hours you’re working on your job search every week. Many people can’t imagine how they can devote 35 hours a week to the effort—because they don’t work from the targeting map of 200 positions. If you have identified 50 positions in your Target One, spread out over 30 companies, there is an enormous amount of research



to be done—followed by writing cover letters. Sean’s direct contact campaign in the Atlanta area required almost all of his waking hours.

Strategic Interview Follow-up

Who doesn’t know that sending thank-you notes after an interview is a good idea? HR officers have told us, however, that a surprising number of people don’t even bother. But The Five O’Clock Club—it may surprise you to learn—knows that thank-you notes are actually a waste of time. If you really want the job, your follow-up should go far beyond a thank-you note. Hence, we speak of writing an influencing letter, at the very least, and perhaps even a proposal. But **most people don’t give much thought to post-interview activism**. This is usually one of the most glaring of the missing pieces in job search.

But it’s very common for Club members to come to their weekly group meetings after important interviews to get advice for smart follow-up—they get input from 5 or 6 peers and the coach on what to do to influence decision makers.

Anthony’s story is fairly typical. He was one of three finalists for the position of office/business manager for a major law firm. He followed the Club’s advice and wrote influencing letters to five of the partners he’d met—a different letter to each one. He also wrote letters to several of the people who would be his direct reports. “But is there something else I can do?” he asked his small group at the Club. In describing his meeting with the senior partner, he mentioned that the partner had been unaware of a book on law-firm management. The consensus of the group was that Anthony should overnight a copy of the book to the partner, which he promptly did. A few days later he got the offer.

Another Club member, Patricia, an HR professional, had interviewed with a growing company that needed to start an HR function. She was very enthusiastic about this position, so to follow up she submitted a proposal to the company president: a full description of the HR set-up project, and what she would accomplish during her first 90 days on the job. How could the president not offer her the job? He called her to begin discussing implementation—“and, oh yes, we want you to do it.”

You need to measure the impact of your efforts.

The Five O’Clock Club also recommends that you become very familiar with our job search assessment tool called Stages 1, 2 & 3, described fully in our book *Targeting the Job You Want* [pp. 181-187]. This will help you to measure the impact of your efforts. You should always be asking yourself, “Have I achieved Stage 1 yet? How many things do I have going in Stage 2? What do I need to do to get my search into Stage 3?” This makes much more sense than just having a tally of résumés sent out—which really tells you nothing about the impact of your efforts.



This is what we mean, for example, by having achieved Stage 2 in your search: You're talking, on an on-going basis, to 6 to 10 people in the right companies and the right levels—and you're hearing the affirmation: they'd love to be able to hire you if they had an opening. How good is that! They've said they would like to hire you.

When you can count the number of people who have responded to you this way, you can assess your search realistically. Clearly, there's a lot of hard work involved in sending out 100 résumés—unless you're just mindlessly hitting the send button. But working smartly means that your résumés are targeted to specific opportunities, are being sent to the right people, and that you are following up on a regular basis.

Be sure to assess the quality of your efforts. This kind of honesty usually means you'll arrive at your goal—multiple job offers—sooner rather than later.

Yet this kind of strategic follow-up doesn't occur to most people. **They fail to recognize that the interview is usually the beginning of an extensive process**, and that they must take the initiative to keep it moving forward. Thank-you notes are so very feeble when compared with what can be done to influence decision makers.

But what if you don't want the job? You may leave an interview feeling that it just wouldn't be the right fit for you—for any number of reasons. It's still a good idea to write a follow-up note, in the interest of goodwill: you might cross paths with the people you have met in years to come. An even better idea is to still write the best possible influencing letter, because, while you might not want the job, there's nothing, to be lost—and everything to be gained—by getting the offer. Getting multiple offers boosts morale and momentum. Remember that we recommend getting three offers to choose from.

Being able to turn interviews into offers is vital for job search, and if strategic follow-up is one of the missing pieces of your search, you might be the person outclassed by the competition.

Getting Professional Help

Many months ago, in one of those TV news stories detailing the plight of the unemployed, several folks were profiled who had “done everything they could” to find a new job. One of them said that his latest idea to get interviews was to include a Dunkin' Donuts gift card with every résumé he sent out. Clearly, desperation can lead people to such self-defeating behavior, but it was also clear to me that this fellow had not bothered to get—or listen to—professional advice.

Without expert guidance, people end up making costly blunders, or spending too much time doing the wrong things—when they could have much more effective (and shorter) job searches. Of course, if you're reading this article, you know that help is available, and you can eliminate that missing piece:



· The Club offers weekly strategy groups for job hunters—to provide expert guidance. Most of these are done by telephone on weekday evenings, so are accessible no matter where you live. Each small group of five or six people is facilitated by a certified Five O’Clock Club Coach. For those who earn less than \$100K, the cost is \$360 for 10 sessions (\$440 for people over \$100K). We have not raised these prices in 10 years. The goal is weekly brainstorming of each person’s search. Our research has shown that people who attend the groups—and do their assignments—get satisfying jobs faster and at higher rates of pay than those who try to go it alone or only work privately with their coaches.

If you cannot sign up for a group by all means get the four main books that outline our methodology—and study them as if you were in graduate school (see p. 14). They are available through our website or Amazon.com. They’re also in most libraries.

· There is a free mini-course on our website— “Are You Conducting a Good Search?” This can help you to put your job hunt on solid footing.

· Private career coaching is also available through the Club, with the per hour cost ranging from \$150 to \$200 for those who become members of the Club (\$49). You never have to commit to more than one session at a time.

We all know that the job market has been tough for a long time now. But why compound the difficulties you face by job searching poorly? Have you had an “Aha!” moment when you’ve read about any of the six missing pieces I’ve just described? If so, do the work that you may have overlooked, make the course corrections and attack the job market with fresh determination and improved tools.

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