

Case study 3: Contacts and developing a personal network

The Foundation for Jobseekers

Grant's role as a software development manager was made redundant in early 2010, when he was in his late 40s. He decided to take six months off to travel and pursue his interests in rowing and sailing, returning in September 2010. He then started to make internet based applications and used a number of IT focused recruitment agencies, expecting to find it hard, but not impossible to secure his next role

Grant was immediately dismayed by how few interviews he secured, and discussed the issue at one of The Foundation for Jobseekers executive job clubs, which he had started to attend after being referred by a friend. He considered the possibility of looking for a job at a lower level, but discounted this approach because it was important to his self-esteem and family circumstances to find work at the same level, or better, and he had adequate funds to allow him to look for work over the medium term.

The advice from the volunteer advisers at the job club was unanimous – if Grant wanted to find work quickly, he shouldn't discount looking for work at a lower level, although the approach carried no guarantee of success. However, to secure work at a similar level, the bulk of his efforts should be spent on networking and targeting companies where he believed his skills would be compelling.

He should start by minutely reviewing how he was spending his jobseeking time, an exercise which revealed that Grant was spending a mere 10 per cent of it on networking.

The hurdle Grant needed to overcome was his view that advertised roles were real and immediate and that networking did not guarantee results. However, what convinced Grant to try a different approach was the number of job club attendees and volunteers alike who could point to a wide range of individuals who had achieved their next role through networking. The statistics indicate that only 47 per cent of vacancies are either advertised or appear with recruitment agencies, leaving the remaining 53 per cent to be found by the networker.

The volunteer adviser reminded Grant that there was no suggestion that he should abandon using agencies and the internet, but that they should only account for half his activity.

The volunteer adviser gave Grant some practical networking advice - he should adopt a simple strategy which would involve developing his existing LinkedIn profile immediately, starting with broadening his connections base. He should then join LinkedIn groups focused on his areas of professional interest, take part in online discussions, and update the recommendations on his profile.

At one of the group presentations covering networking, Grant saw the value in joining other networking groups which had face-to-face elements, such as Ecademy (<http://www.ecademy.com/>); taking up the opportunity to attend Chamber of Commerce networking meetings on the basis of seeking advice and information from the range of business people attending; and going to trade fairs associated with his work.

It was also pointed out that family and friends should be part of anyone's jobsearch network.

Grant became more positive as a result of embarking on networking approaches in a consistent way. He was talking to people again rather than looking at a screen.

In discussions, Grant could see that building his network of contacts was not difficult. He was advised to contact previous customers, previous suppliers and previous competitors. He followed the volunteer adviser's suggestion that he should try to use the telephone as much as possible, contacting managers and reports from his two previous roles. The volunteer advisers and jobseekers all agreed that phone calls would be more likely to bring about a meeting than leaving all the communication to emails.

The volunteer adviser had seen some managerial jobseekers succeed through carefully researched and highly targeted direct approach letters, perhaps one a week. Grant was advised to send a letter rather than an email, because these are often opened and considered by the "target", whereas an email from an unknown individual may be ignored.

When Grant started to secure interviews, his volunteer adviser suggested that he should focus on explaining how all his transferable skills would work well for the new employer. "This is what I've done.....and this is how the experience applies to you..... because in your case I can....." Grant also needed to articulate why *he* was the best fit for the role.

The process took almost six months, but Grant achieved his goal – a role as chief architect, software engineering, via a networking contact he had approached who had managed him in the job before last. Grant is very pleased, although he would have given careful consideration to a role with less status, responsibility and pay, if that had been easier to achieve.

He felt that his volunteer adviser and the other jobseekers had played a key role in encouraging him not to give up and in helping him to maintain the positive frame of mind essential to any chance of success over a long period. He had also been careful to develop other interests to stay positive: learning a language and keeping fit.