

Career Opportunities

Got Canned? You're Now a Salesperson

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So what euphemism is your ex-company using these days? Outsourced, surplusd, early-retired, RIF'd? It doesn't matter. You got the handshake, you got the exit interview, and you got the check. Now you're on the street with the rest of us and it's time, maybe for the first time since grad school, to look for a job. To find that job you are going to have to stop thinking about yourself as a geoscientist. You're now a commission-based salesperson. Your product is you. Your commission will be your first paycheck.

If you're like most recently fired employees, you just attended, or are currently attending, outplacement classes. These are run by human resources (HR) people who, although well meaning, don't have a clue about how to sell a geoscientist. You'll get some good advice from them and you'll get some bad advice. Headhunters? They're buried in résumés. If you want a job, it's going to be up to you to get it. Fortunately, you know more than you think you do. You know your product better than anyone, and believe it or not, you know how to sell it. During your career you may have interviewed and evaluated more than 100 contractors and job applicants. You hired some and you didn't hire others. Why? What made you select contractor X and not contractor Y? How did contractor X convince you that he was the best person for the job? Before you ever send out a résumé, before you ever make a phone call, sit down for at least half a day and write down all the successful sales strategies that led you to hire specific people. That's the stuff that works—and that's going to be your sales strategy.

First Contact There are three stages to any sale: 1) first contact, 2) the presentation, and 3) the close. For many geoscientists, first contact means blindly sending out lots of résumés. Salespeople call this direct mail. You call it junk mail. In a job market like today's, it absolutely does not work. Instead, begin your search by identifying leads. Find out which companies may need your specific skill set. Then find out the name of the exploration manager or a senior scientist that has a voice in hiring decisions at that company. That's the person you will contact. He or she is your lead.

The best way to generate leads is to call your friends. I know that hitting your friends up for work may be awkward, but don't worry about it—in this business you'll probably get a chance to return the favor. Once you've identified a lead, the first step is to mail him or her a cover letter and a résumé. The cover letter is actually far more important than the résumé. If you don't interest them with the cover letter, they won't read the résumé. Make the letter very specific. For example, if the person you're writing is a South Texas exploration manager, talk about your success rate in South Texas. If he's V.P. offshore Gulf of Mexico, discuss your lease sale experience and expertise in delineating subtle

HCI's. If you're sending everyone the exact same cover letter, you're wasting paper. Keep the cover letter to one page. Use 12-to 13-point type—no smaller.

Send the letter and résumé by U.S. mail on good stationary. No faxes and no e-mail. Give the letter a few days to arrive, then call. If you get an answering machine, don't expect a return call. Everyone's busy these days and everyone's getting calls from job seekers. Instead, call again. You may want to call multiple times. How many times is hard to gauge as you want to be polite, but a certain amount of persistence may pay off. Most leads won't pan out, so plan on making lots of calls. The telephone is going to be your best friend. Always keep the calls short and always be polite. When you get in touch with the exploration manager, invite him or her to lunch—your treat.

Your Résumé is Too Short If you get nothing from this article, get this! Your résumé is too short. The outplacement mantra 14 years ago was "one-page résumé." Now it's "two-page résumé." They were wrong then and they're wrong now. The average geoscientist on the streets these days has about 20 years of experience. If you can only think of two pages worth of accomplishments in 20 years of work, ? don't read the rest of this article. Go sell shoes. The logic behind the two-page résumé is that no one will read a résumé longer than two pages. This concept is taken so seriously that I get some résumés, two pages long, which are printed in 8-point type! (Trivia question: Why do lawyers use fine print?)

The two-page rule is based on a fundamental misconception on how geoscientists read résumés. Most geoscientists don't read résumés cover to cover. They read the first paragraph; then they read the part they are interested in. A résumé is like a catalog. You read the front where it says "Low, Low Prices," and then you turn to the item you want to buy.

Let's say you spent the first 10 years of your career working China and the last ten years working the offshore Gulf of Mexico. You send your résumé to an offshore Gulf of Mexico exploration manager. She may not care about your China experience and pass over that part of the résumé. She will want to know the details about your GOM experience. She'll want to know which sales you've worked, what blocks you've worked, how much grease you've found, where you found it, and how you found it. If the details aren't there, you will not get the job.

Every résumé should begin with a one paragraph (around 150 words) executive summary. This is the most important part of the résumé, so spend some time on it. After all, someone probably spent hours selecting just the right font for the "Low, Low Prices." Every sentence counts in this paragraph. Emphasize how much oil and gas you've found or helped to find. A good opening sentence will read something like this:

John Doe is a hardworking, dedicated geophysicist who has found more than 500 BCF of gas and 20 million barrels of oil . . .

Finish the rest of it with basins you've worked and positions you've held at various companies. Then let the résumé grow to its natural length without padding. For most experienced geoscientists, this will be three to six pages.

But wait! You're not done yet! You have to add another page! Don't mind the sound in

the background. That's the sound an HR person always makes when he has a cow! Whenever you write an extended report, you probably include a title page. It gives the report a more professional look. It gives it a touch of class. In school, the title page probably helped get you a higher grade. So why don't you have a title page on your résumé? The title page should have four things on it:

The word "Résumé"

Your name

Your address, phone number, fax number, and e-mail address

The "teaser."

Remember "Low, Low, Prices?" That's a teaser. It's what made you open the catalog. You need one for your résumé. This teaser should be in the form of three or fewer bulleted phrases, placed immediately below your name. A sample name and teaser might read as follows:

John Doe

- Experienced Gulf of Mexico Geophysicist
- Found 500 BCF of Gas and 20 Million Barrels of Oil

Never forget that when you are writing your resume, you are writing a print ad. Make the title page and the résumé visually appealing.

Still don't believe me about the résumé? Try something: Write a two-page résumé, and then write a four- to five-page résumé with a title page. Give them both to friends. Ask them whom they would hire.

The Presentation Okay, you've made 100 phone calls and you've finally landed an interview. You don't want to screw this up. So why are you walking into the interview without preparing for it? Go back to your write-up on successful sales strategies. The interviewer is probably going to ask the same kinds of questions that you asked when you interviewed job seekers. What answers did you like? Think about the questions you are going to get asked and prepare for them. Remember the question "What do you feel are your major weaknesses?" Do you really want to wing it on that one?

When you write down your list of successful sales strategies, you probably will write down things like solid track record, enthusiasm, knowledge of the area, and so on. However, you may skip one of the most important attributes of a good salesperson, because you may not be aware of one of the most important sales techniques—listening! Contrary to the popular stereotype, a good salesperson is a great listener. There are week-long sales seminars on listening. Most texts describe sales as problem solving. Someone wants to talk to you about a job because he has a problem (e.g., they're drilling too many dry holes). Your objective is to convince him you can solve the problem. To do that you have to find out what the problem is and how he wants it solved.

For example, Company A drills 50 low-risk wells a year. The exploration manager is looking for someone who can generate a prospect every month. Company B drills two high-risk, high payoff wells every year. They're looking for someone who can do very detailed science. You can do either. However, if you pitch yourself as a Company A kind of person to Company B before you understand Company B's exploration philosophy, you won't get the job. A better strategy is to get the exploration manager to describe exactly the problem he has. Then you can explain how you can help to solve it. continued on page 26 ?

Your potential employer is not just looking for a good scientist. He's also looking for a friend. He's going to have to work with you on a long-term basis and he's going to want to have a good working relationship. So be friendly! If he has a picture of his daughter dressed in a soccer uniform, ask him about his daughter's soccer team. If he has a picture of himself racing a sailboat, ask him about his boat. Talking about the interviewer's personal interests is a great way to break the ice and get the interview off to a good start. Don't talk about your own interests unless they're the same as his. Macrame may be your passion, but he just might find a long-winded discussion about it somewhat boring. Offer to buy him lunch. Always remember that no matter how good you are, if you come in with a chip on your shoulder, you'll leave with one.

The Close There are hundreds of books written on closing sales and hundreds of closing techniques. If you've bought a car you've heard some of them (e.g., "What would it take to put you in a new car today?"). Most of them are totally unsuited to selling a long-term working relationship. There's really only one you need to know. Ask for the job. The most common mistake most rookie salespeople make is not to ask for the sale. When the interview ends, tell her you're really excited about working with XYZ Oil Company and you're ready to start tomorrow. Ask if you can start tomorrow. Follow the interview up with a letter thanking her for her time. Ask for the job in the letter. Follow that up with a call thanking her for her time. Ask for the job when you call.

I'm not a professional salesman. I'm a geophysicist. I got canned myself some years ago and decided I wanted to run a geologic and geophysical interpretation services company. To be successful, I had to learn how to sell myself and my staff. The ideas presented here are ideas that have worked for me. I hope they work for you. After all, I would rather hit you up for business than get your résumé in the mail. In the end, sales is a little like dating. Remember dating? You got told no a lot and when they said they'd call, they didn't. When someone finally did call back and said yes—Oh, yeah! It was a great feeling.