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JOB HUNTING? DON'T READ THE WANT ADS!

By Janet White

If you're like most people, losing a job can be one of the most difficult experiences of your life. But the process of finding a new job can be almost as traumatic because the traditional job hunting methods of answering want ads, networking, contacting head-hunters, and applying to Human Resources are inherently self-defeating.

When you use the "Traditional System," you may feel helpless, defensive, vulnerable, and utterly dependent on the whims of others. And when you're looking for a new job, this is the worst state of mind to be in.

This article will outline the "Contrarian System" which puts you in total control of your destiny, and enables you to go through your job search with a strong sense of purpose, an ingrained belief in yourself and a positive outlook on life.

Out Of Work – Out Of Luck

It was a bad day for Bob. Rumors had been floating around for months that his company would soon merge with a competitor, but it wasn't until this morning the news was made official that Bob's division was to be let go.

Fortunately, the axe wouldn't fall just yet – the company gave the terminated employees several weeks notice and a severance package that included paid-for untaken vacation days, a stipend based on tenure, health insurance for three months, and outplacement consulting.

Despite the shock of losing his job, Bob was grateful for the advance notice, the financial cushion and the help in getting a new job; he figured he needed it. Bob had been a commercial property manager for 15 years, and was very good at his work, but the thought of being unemployed even for a little while filled him with dread.

Job hunting had always been a nightmare for Bob because he never could be certain how things would turn out. He had a family to support and bills to pay – what was he going to do?

A thorough professional, Bob spent his last weeks on the job tending to business. He made sure the transition to the new company went smoothly for his clients, many of whom he had worked with for years.

He thought his strong work ethic would make a good impression on them and perhaps one would offer him a job. But while all of Bob's clients expressed remorse he was leaving, none of them stepped up to the plate. Bob didn't really expect them to, but he had hoped.

Then it was over, and it suddenly occurred to Bob he was unemployed, and given his age, probably unemployable. The competition's tough, he thought.

It's not like the old days when he started out as an on-site leasing agent. Now, management companies want sharp young MBAs who work for less than what he's been getting and they'll never even set foot on a property! It just wasn't fair.

Besides, his company wasn't the only one laying off property managers, and there were a lot of experienced people out there looking for the same kind of job he was. It was a going to be a long and difficult time for everyone, he thought.

Now in his mid-40s and with a large family, Bob knew he didn't have a chance to get a decent job, but he'd do his best. Somehow they'd get by like they always had before, and Bob steered himself for the worst.

He immersed himself in executive-oriented job-hunting books and websites, and launched a broad-based job search. He spent hours writing a resume and cover letter the books and websites assured him would result in a flood of calls from employers.

Bob followed their advice precisely, and his resume was an in-depth catalog of his current and past responsibilities, achievements, and professional and personal activities.

Bob was afraid to leave out the smallest detail, so his resume ran two single-spaced pages and was crammed with information; he didn't know what would catch an employer's interest so they'd call.

The chronological format was the best, Bob thought, so he listed each job in reverse order, starting with his recent position and then going back to his college days.

Bob wanted to make a good impression on employers, so he began his resume with a summary of qualifications written to present him as a winner they couldn't resist:

"A dynamic, energetic and results-oriented industry veteran with a documented track record of dedication, performance and commitment. Outstanding achievement in streamlining operations and reducing costs to maximize value. A visionary professional with a unique ability to fuse diverse interests of owners, tenants and suppliers into achieving cohesive, driven and focused objectives."

Bob thought about using an objective, but some websites said executives and professionals should never use an objective at all. They said recruiters and HR screeners

would give his resume only ten seconds, so he spent many anxious hours worrying about what to write.

One of his concerns was that if he was too specific, employers would discard his resume if they had a different need, and he didn't want to risk losing any chance of getting hired. He finally decided to include an objective, but made it intentionally vague to keep his options open so he could be available to whatever came along:

"To secure a challenging, growth-related position with a progressive company, utilizing my extensive background in commercial property management."

Because most of his jobs had been very similar, Bob tried to beef up his job descriptions by using a lot of action verbs, keywords and power phrases that his potential employers' computers would pick up.

Looking for work proved to be a full-time job, and Bob pored over the want ads in the paper and in trade journals and scoured the internet for job listings seven days a week, responding to anything remotely feasible.

Bob contacted several executive search firms specializing in commercial real estate, asked his old clients and associates if they knew anyone who was hiring, and joined a local support group for unemployed executives. But the months dragged by and Bob was still unemployed.

Both Bob and his wife were from Phoenix and hated Chicago's bitter cold winters. They had dreamed of moving back to the Sun Belt when they retired, but leaving Chicago now was out of the question; they couldn't possibly afford it.

Bob would have liked to line up a job in the Southwest, but he'd been in Chicago so long his network of contacts back home had long since dried up.

And asking people he knew to help him find a new job was too humiliating; besides, a lot of people in the industry were in the same boat he was. *"What else could you expect with the economy in the tank?"* he thought. Still, there were a lot of job leads, and Bob responded to every one of them with this email:

Bob's Cover Letter

To Whom It May Concern:

Pursuant to your job posting on www.chicagodirt.net for a property manager, herewith I enclose my resume.

My last employer was one of Chicago's largest property management companies, but it was sold and my responsibilities were made redundant. Thus, I am seeking a challenging, growth-related position in a stable, progressive company in the property management field.

In such a dynamic and positive environment, I believe I can realize my full potential and reach my long-term professional goals.

I have spent the past 15 years in commercial property management and have never had a major problem at any of the properties I have managed; indeed, I have “added value” whenever possible.

I attribute this stellar performance record to my ability to anticipate potentially difficult situations, as well as my strong people skills in working with tenants, contractors, suppliers and owners.

My experience and training in all facets of property management are detailed on the attached resume; references will be provided upon request.

Should my qualifications meet your requirements, my compensation package should include an annual salary of between \$55,000 and \$65,000, and complete family health and dental insurance.

I welcome an opportunity to discuss my background with you and can be reached at (312) 333-1234 or by email at propmgr@leogem.web.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

When all Bob got were rejection emails or letters when he got a response at all, he hired a fax/email broadcast service to send his resume to thousands of companies across the country. If no one in Chicago wanted him, there had to be someone, somewhere, who did.

Bob considered hiring an executive career management firm that said it had access to hidden jobs no one else knew about.

The friendly sales rep promised a total reworking of his resume and cover letter by a certified professional resume writer and a slew of services that would be just the thing to kick-start his stalled career.

Bob planned to get the one-on-one sessions with a counselor and the videotaped practice interview sessions; he hadn't looked for a job in years and needed coaching.

The career management company wanted a lot of money, but Bob reasoned it would be worth it if they could get him a good enough job.

Just as Bob was about to sign the contract, his wife urged him to wait a few months because money was getting tight and they needed to watch every penny. As Bob put the paper in a drawer with a sigh, he hoped they'd be able to get by on the savings they had left.

Bob knew he could do consulting, but he hated the idea. Freelancing was so uncertain because you never knew where your next paycheck was coming from, or even if there

would be a paycheck, and then you were constantly looking for the next assignment. No, consulting was out of the question.

Then Bob had an idea. A new Home Depot had just opened a few miles away that needed part time workers, and he had always been good at fixing things around the house.

He could work there until a “real” job came along – it would keep his mind off his unemployment and bring in some much needed cash.

After six months of looking for a job in commercial real estate, Bob had several promising interviews, even one halfway across the country, but nothing conclusive or remotely near what he wanted in terms of salary or responsibility.

None of the techniques he had used to find a “good” job were working, and Bob considered himself lucky to have a wife who understood.

“Honey, this is not your fault,” she said. “It’s just that no company wants to hire anyone your age with six children.”

She was such a blessing; what would he do without her?

Using the career firm was out of the question now. It had become prohibitively expensive considering their shaky situation (he hated borrowing money, but had no choice).

He had also heard horror stories about such firms from his unemployment support group. Several members had used the one he was considering and said the career firm never guaranteed they would actually get a job, so it was money down the drain.

Bob felt lucky he had waited, but he also felt lousy, helpless and alone. He couldn’t understand it. Maybe he should get out of real estate altogether.

Now that was something: he could stay home and work with his wife in her part-time catering business as a kitchen helper and business manager when he wasn’t at Home Depot. No more stress, no more politics, no more office hassles.

But Bob’s wife had other ideas. Little Robby will need braces soon, the car is acting up, the bills keep coming in and there are eight mouths to feed. No, Bob had to get a solid, stable job with benefits, and soon.

So when one of Bob’s old clients told him an employee was retiring, he leapt at the chance. The money wasn’t what he felt he deserved, and the job didn’t have the prestige or perks of his previous position, but it was a job and it would have to do.

By using the Traditional System, Bob found himself in a job he didn’t especially care for, but was grateful to have because he was getting increasingly desperate.

Despite his “good fortune,” Bob was bitter toward his previous employer for letting him go, and felt betrayed by the job hunting system he relied on to get him a new job.

A Contrarian Approach

Meanwhile, Bob’s co-worker, Jim, took a different tack. When he heard the rumors about the merger, Jim booked the next several weeks with lunches and after-work drinks with colleagues and his company’s clients, vendors and competitors.

The rumors were no surprise because business had been slow for some time, and Jim wanted to be ready in case of a layoff. He knew it was far better to leave a job on his own terms, rather than wait for the axe to fall because he could negotiate from a position of strength so long as he was employed.

As a chemistry major in college, Jim had dreams of becoming a medical researcher, but ended up in commercial real estate instead. During his 15 years in the industry, Jim had gained broad experience in many areas, including appraising, developing, financing, leasing and tenant representation.

The industry had been good to Jim, but it wasn’t his passion and he didn’t want to do it for the rest of his life. Jim was well-known, liked and respected in his field, but he was bored and ready for a change.

Now in his mid-40s, Jim yearned to do something he could really enjoy, while still making a living doing what he knew. With the layoff looming, Jim decided now was the time to somehow combine his fascination for scientific research with his knowledge of commercial real estate.

After much consideration, Jim decided he wanted to be a real estate administrator of a university-sponsored biotechnology office/research park. He spent hours at the library and on the internet researching the latest medical research trends, the leading research companies and the latest breakthroughs in the field.

He contacted several commercial real estate trade magazines, and they emailed him articles covering developing, leasing, financing and managing such specialized properties. Through the trade magazines and his internet research, Jim was able to compile a list of two dozen university-sponsored biomedical research parks in the Southwest.

Jim and his wife were native Texans, and they longed for its short, mild winters. They had planned to move back home when the last of their six kids had grown, but why not make someday today?

Moving home to a warm climate would be wonderful, and the kids would love the wide open spaces – there they would have room to grow.

Jim took it for granted that a full relocation package would be one of the incentives offered to him by the universities, so he and his wife started looking at houses on the internet in the cities they were considering.

To their astonishment, they found they could build a large custom home with a pool for less than what they could get for their cramped, creaking 40-year old house in the crowded Chicago suburbs. This move was going to be great.

Jim knew that the kind of job he wanted was rarely, if ever, advertised and probably didn't exist now anyway. So he didn't bother reading the want ads or going to job posting websites. He preferred to spend his time off from work relaxing with his family and enjoying his hobbies, especially fixing things around the house.

Jim stuck to the editorial parts of the trade magazines, since he wanted to create his own job and needed to know what was going on in the industry. He also avoided executive recruiters because he knew their role was to find executives for employers, not the other way around.

As the rumors of the pending layoff spread, Jim received several calls from headhunters dangling attractive offers, but to their chagrin, he wasn't interested. He knew what he wanted and that no recruiter could get him what he could get for himself.

In contacting his targeted universities, Jim bypassed their Human Resources departments because he knew only the senior administrators would have the authority to hire him, and HR's role was to process the paperwork after he was hired.

Instead, Jim sent a highly targeted letter and resume directly to the top administrators at each of the biotech office/research parks on his list. He didn't have inside information about the workings of the research parks or personal knowledge of the individuals he was contacting.

But Jim was able to make fairly accurate guesstimates about their real estate issues, and offer himself as a potential solution to their needs.

Jim's letter never discussed his desire for a job; in fact, it barely mentioned him at all. It simply introduced him as a highly-trained real estate professional with a scientific bent, and suggested it might be in the administrators' best interest to get to know him:

Jim's Cover Letter

Dear Dr. Jones:

A mutual acquaintance of ours, Dr. Michael Ross, Director of Biochemistry at Southern Methodist University, told me you are planning to expand BioMedical Research Park in Dallas, and he thought it would be a good idea if I contacted you.

I understand BioMedical Research Park is home to a number of specialists in blood and circulatory diseases and disorders. As you know, the AIDS epidemic has lead to an overwhelming demand for increased research into the human body's immune system, and I appreciate your desire to broaden your scope in this area.

However, there are many complex operational and financial issues unrelated to medical research that may impede your progress. These may include:

- Attracting, recruiting and securing new biomedical research and development companies locally, regionally and nationally;*
- Planning, building and securing financing for new facilities to meet your tenants' specifications;*
- Managing and perhaps modernizing your existing buildings to gain the most efficient use from them while reducing your on-going costs; and*
- Working with your current tenants in making their stay at BioMedical Research Park a long, happy and satisfying one.*

As you can see from the enclosed material, I have specialized in commercial property management for the past 15 years, with an emphasis on tenant relations, building modernization and construction and project financing.

I also have a lifelong love of medical research, and a special affinity for scientists who have dedicated themselves to unlocking the secrets of the human body.

Dr. Jones, please take a few minutes to look over the attached material, and I will call you next week to discuss your facility's specific needs. Thank you for your time, and I'm looking forward to speaking with you.

Rather than being an itemized listing of his work history and professional qualifications, Jim's resume was a finely crafted sales tool written from the perspective of the administrators he wanted to work for.

His one-page resume began with a short, specific objective, "*Biomedical Property Management*" and included several stories about some projects Jim worked on that would interest the research park administrators.

In one case, he helped transform an abandoned military base into a thriving industrial park, taking its occupancy rate from 0% to 60% in two years. Another example was the cost-effective turnaround of a deteriorated office building that became the focal point of revitalization for the entire community.

These stories were intentionally written to get the research park directors interested in learning how Jim got those results. This Jim planned to tell them – in their meetings.

Like other industry professionals, Jim had done many things unrelated to real estate, especially right out of college. But since these jobs had nothing to do with his current career or future plans, he left them off his resume.

Jim knew dates are unimportant, so he put them at the tail end of each group of stories for each employer. This put the focus on what he did, not when he did it.

This approach bypassed any questions he might have gotten about a six month-long hiatus he took to stay home with his young daughter. Jim knew his personal life was his business, and he didn't have to explain or defend it to anyone.

As Jim expected, the administrators he contacted were educators or scientists, and had little or no experience in property or facility management. His letter intrigued them because it addressed issues they knew they needed to deal with, but didn't know how or didn't know anyone who knew how.

They were extremely interested in Jim's ideas about recruiting new tenants, improving relations between current tenants, the university and the local community and revitalizing their facilities.

To Jim, this is what he did for a living; to the research park administrators, this was a revelation.

By the time Jim was let go from his job in Chicago, he had three solid offers for senior-level positions at substantially higher salaries than what he had been making from university-sponsored biomedical research parks in Dallas, Austin and Houston.

They each included a generous incentive package, including relocating his family, buying his house in Chicago despite the soft housing market there, along with a hefty signing bonus.

Jim chose Dallas, but kept his lines of communication open with all the other facilities; after all, they would probably be doing business together in the not-too-distant future.

An added plus was the deeply discounted tuition for Jim, his wife, Sue, and their six children. The two oldest were in high school, and weren't the only ones in the family thrilled to learn that their college education was spoken for.

Sue was offered a part-time job on campus but she declined because she was home-schooling the younger children. However, a part-time clerical job wasn't what she had in mind. Sue's children would soon be in school, and so would she.

Thanks to the discounted tuition, she could start on that master's degree in social work she had put off to raise her family. And with the built-in social life that came with being part of the campus family, Sue could hardly wait.

As a result of his job search, Jim had built a network of contacts around the country in a new field and was on his way to a more satisfying and rewarding career in an industry he loved.

Your Attitude Sets Your Approach

Both Bob and Jim knew they were going to lose their jobs, yet each chose a distinctively separate path to find a new one.

The difference was their attitude: Bob felt helpless and at the mercy of forces outside his control, while Jim believed he could benefit his potential employers by meeting their needs, even if they didn't know it yet.

Bob ignored the situation until it was too late. He hoped the company would change its mind or something would come along at the last minute so he wouldn't have to leave or humiliate himself by asking someone to hire him.

When wishful thinking didn't work, Bob had to scramble for any kind of work that resembled his former job. Managing office buildings was the only thing he could get hired for; after all, he was too old to start all over doing something else.

It never occurred to Bob he could call the shots, and he left finding a new job entirely up to chance. He felt he had no choice but to wait passively and helplessly as time slipped by.

Bob worked very hard at a system of job hunting that was inherently flawed. And the Traditional System, combined with his negative beliefs and self-induced insecurities about himself and his possibilities, kept him unemployed.

Bob had never decided what he wanted to do, but was willing to adapt himself to whatever came along. Without meaning to, he became a victim of his own limited thinking. On the other hand, Jim viewed his pending job loss as a blessing. When the layoff became official, Jim said to his wife, "*You know, this opens up all kinds of opportunities.*"

Jim's proactive, targeted program began when he decided precisely what he wanted to do, and with a clear goal in mind and a plan to follow, he went after it.

When Jim defined his objective, "*Biomedical Property/ Facilities Management,*" his options broadened, and working in any one of these settings would have made him happy:

- A university-sponsored biotechnology research park
- A large hospital or medical center
- A major pharmaceutical manufacturer

As part of his job search, Jim programmed his mind to believe he already had the job he wanted. Each night before he fell asleep, he saw himself as the real estate director of a university-sponsored biomedical research park in the Southwest.

Jim visualized working with research tenants, negotiating with corporate sponsors for additional funding, overseeing the construction of new buildings, meeting with the administrators and walking the grounds.

By playing this scene over and over in his mind, Jim gave his subconscious a specific set of positive thoughts and images: he was capable, thoroughly qualified, really excited about getting into biomedical research, and genuinely believed his new career would happen just the way he pictured it.

As Jim pursued a new job, most of the people he came in contact with subconsciously received these messages and instinctively responded to them. Just to be sure, Jim visualized himself in his new position right up until his first day on the job.

But Bob had given himself only negative thoughts; the best he could muster was a vision of managing office buildings inside Chicago's Loop. He told himself it really didn't matter what he did for a living, as long as he could pay the bills.

The longer Bob stayed unemployed, the more he considered himself to be a failure, and the more he resented Jim, who always seemed to have all the luck.

Bob didn't know it, but his subconscious was obediently broadcasting his self-defeating messages to everyone he came in contact with. Bob fully expected potential employers to turn him down, and nearly everyone did.

Break With Tradition!

In The Traditional System, you allow other people to determine your future, and you are forced to wait for circumstances outside your control to eventually work in your favor.

But with the Contrarian System, you determine what you want to do, for whom you want to do it and on what terms you'll be compensated for doing it. You never sell yourself, sell out your dignity or sell yourself short.

The Contrarian System puts you in control, builds your self-image, and enhances your professional credibility. And the best part about the Contrarian System is that all you have to do to make it work for you is to change the way you think.

For when you change the way you think, everything changes: what you say, what you do, how you act and most importantly, you change the way other people respond to you.

And that is the secret to getting anything you want in life.