

Monster® Take on Talent by Charles Purdy

Sticking to Your 2012 Career and Job-Search Resolutions

The start of a new year is typically a time when people commit (or recommit) to finding a new job, getting a promotion, or otherwise advancing themselves professionally. And in 2012 this likely holds especially true, in part because the U.S. jobs situation is showing many signs of recovery after a couple of difficult, stagnant years. For instance, in late January, the Federal Reserve predicted that the unemployment rate would continue an overall downward trend, to 8.2 percent, this year. And the Monster Employment Index (MEI) -- a monthly review of millions of job opportunities posted on online job boards and corporate career sites -- showed an annual increase of 8 percent in December 2011, consistent with slow, steady growth in online recruitment activity.

But New Year's resolutions are well known to slip as January turns into February. If improving your career or job situation is one of your 2012 goals, how can you stay on track?

A problem with the way many people make job-related resolutions is a lack of actionable tasks. "Find a new job" or "Get a promotion" is a typical resolution that's extremely hard to follow through on, because it doesn't have tasks you can complete. Without those actionable steps, it's easy to lose forward momentum.

Instead, consider these tips:

Get Specific

Instead of the aforementioned vague resolutions, set yourself a realistic, specific target that you want to achieve this year. Think about and clarify the role you want, the salary you want, the company or companies you want to work for, and so on. Notice how "Advance my marketing/public-relations career with a management role at a high-tech company" does two things better than "Get a new job": it lets you start to make a plan, and it helps you describe your goal to people you meet through your networking efforts (who might be able to help you).

Make a Plan and a Schedule

Inside every major project are numerous tasks. Be your own project manager -- identify the actionable steps that will help you toward your goal, and then give yourself deadlines for achieving them. (Also, reward yourself when you complete them!)

For example, whether you're working toward a new job or simply looking to stay on top of your current role, adding job-related skills and knowledge should always be on your list of tasks. You could take a class (which is also a great way to network) or simply set some goals for self-directed learning (for instance, read an industry-related book and then write a report on it for a professional blog, or recommend it to your contacts). Incorporate skill-development tasks into your resolution.

Redefine "Find a Job"

You may think that "Find a job" means scouring job boards for open positions and diligently applying for them -- and that's part of the process, but it's by no means the end of it.

First, many company career sites and other job boards (including Monster.com) allow you to create very specific email job alerts, so you don't have to do the manual labor of combing through job ads. You may not have to spend as much time searching online as you believe.

Second, a modern job search must include tasks related to building your online profile, networking, and otherwise accessing the "hidden" job market. If these sorts of tasks are not on your to-do list, you're not effectively looking for a job.

And although online networking is important, don't stop there. Seek out conferences and volunteer opportunities in your area, consider informational interviews or working with a mentor, and remember that successful networking starts with staying connected and finding ways to help other people -- make sure that one of your monthly or weekly tasks is checking in with contacts to see what they're working on.

Try New Things

It's tough out there, and it's easy to be discouraged -- especially when you're doing the same things over and over but not seeing results. So when you feel as though you've gotten into a job-search rut, make an effort to find new ideas -- for instance by looking for career advice online or talking to people you admire -- and make "Try new job-search tactics" another of your actionable tasks.

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