



# EXECUTIVE SEARCH PARTNERS

## Twelve Steps for a Highly Effective Job Search



[www.execsearchpartners.com](http://www.execsearchpartners.com)

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# INTRODUCTION

Executive Search Partners is, according to Forbes, ***One of the Top Recruiting Companies in North America***. We have been in business for 17 years and have know what it takes to find a job and ace the interviews. This guide was first developed by Executive Search Partners founder, Gary Erickson, to help him in his job searches. Gary is a former CIO and used many of these steps to help find his last 2 CIO positions. Executive Search Partners has refined and updated this guide each year to reflect any new insights we may have gained as well as to address the changing job finding landscape.

In general, you will find your next job in one of three ways:

- **Networking** – still the best way to find your next job
- **Recruiters** - both Retained and Contingent
- **On-line job postings** – this area has grown significantly in the last several years with the growth of job listing companies like Linked, Glassdoor, Zip Recruiter and Indeed.

Each of these avenues has its unique challenges and this guide provides advice on how to navigate each.

The following guide of 12 steps in organized into 4 sections:

- **Preparation**
- **Marketing yourself**
- **Networking and Interviewing**
- **Closing the Deal**

In addition, there are sections on:

- **Resume Writing**
- **Difficult Interview Questions**



# STAGE ONE

## *Preparation*

Preparation is the key to this whole process – you will use this preparation in creating your résumé and in any networking or interviewing situation. Here is what you should do to prepare.

### 1. Success Stories

Write down 10 accomplishments for each of your last 10 years in the following format (PAR) in 2-4 sentences.

- **Problem** – describe the problem you tackled
- **Actions** – describe the actions you took.
- **Results** – list the measurable results achieved.

As an example:

*To improve the timeliness and accuracy of order processing, designed and implemented a new computer-based order to ship process that reduced order to ship time from 2 months to 2 days, while increasing order accuracy from 72% to 99.5%.*

### 2. Professional Summary

In 4-5 sentences describe your background and capabilities. As an example:

*Senior Information Technology executive (CIO, Vice President) with 22 years of increasing responsibility experience in several industries including automotive and manufacturing. Have been responsible for a global organization of 425 professionals and an annual budget of \$165 million. Recognized by Deloitte as one of the top CIOs in the country in 2014.*



### 3. Résumé (more details in the Appendix)

Write your résumé in the following format:

- **PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY** – usually 4-5 sentences
  
- **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE** – Reverse chronology format with:
  - Company name and description of company.
  - Your title, dates.
  - Responsibilities described in narrative form.
  - List 3 – 4 “Selected Accomplishments” from your “Success Stories”.
  - Your résumé can be 3-4 pages long. 2-page résumés for experienced people are frequently not long enough.
  - Use the third person. Do not use the words like “I” or “my” or “me.”
  
- **EDUCATION**
  
- **OTHER** – Recognitions/awards/other distinguishing activities and accomplishments

#### DO NOT INCLUDE:

- a. Objective
- b. “References available upon request” – this is assumed



### *Résumé – Special Cases*

1. **Students** – if you are just coming out of college, you probably need to put your education first. However, remember that companies are not hiring you for your degree. They are hiring you for what you can do for them. Research the company and the position before sending in your résumé, and do two things:

- Make sure your professional summary, education, and experience include references to the skills and experience they are seeking.
- Add a short email summary of why you are a good fit to the job.

2. **Not currently employed** – make sure your résumé indicated the actual end date of your last position. It is not much of a stigma to not be employed. It is, however, considered bad form to not be accurate on your résumé.

### **4. Cover Letter Replacement – the “in resume” cover letter.**

We do not recommend a cover letter as they usually do not get read. We do recommend that when you email your résumé to a hiring manager or a recruiter that you include a short message in your email that summarizes why you are a fit for that position. **On your resume include a summary right after your Professional Summary, as why you are a fit to the position. The format should be 4-5 dot points not more than 2 lines each.**

# STAGE TWO

## *Marketing Yourself*

### 5. Marketing Plan – develop a marketing plan

- The marketing plan is a list of target companies, individuals, and recruiters. These should be kept in a spreadsheet or database with notes.
- First, ask yourself if you will move. If not, confine your marketing plan to the area within acceptable driving distance.
- Add to this list as you network and use it for to follow-up with key contacts.
- Monitor the career websites of your target companies for opportunities that look interesting and follow-up on those. Review job openings on LinkedIn, Indeed.com, Google Jobs, Glassdoor, ZipRecruiter, the Ladders, Bluesteps and other job listing web sites.
- Read the news, and industry / business journals for companies that announce expansions or acquisitions – they may need new blood.
- Read the news, LinkedIn, and industry / business journals for promotions. Frequently the person being promoted will be looking for key additions to his or her staff.
- Follow target companies and key executives on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other social media platforms.
- Note that we do not **recommend** sending letters to target companies. Your best avenue for being considered for a position is to have someone else recommend you to the hiring manager (see #6.)
- The next best avenue for finding a job is a recruiter. Develop a list of recruiters and contact the same way you would a networking contact.
- The least effective way to find a job, but still a viable approach, is to apply on-line. The

best sites are Linked, Indeed, ZipRecruiter, Glassdoor and The Ladders. At a minimum set up daily alerts from each of these sites. If you find a position you are interested in, first try to network into the company and get someone to present your resume to the hiring manager. If this is not possible, apply online, **but make sure you customize your resume so that it shows you are a 95% fit for the position, and this shows on the FIRST page of your resume. Try including the “in-resume cover letter” described in step 4. Otherwise you will not be considered.**

#### 6. 30-second commercial

Using your professional summary as your guide, write and then practice giving a 30 second commercial about you. You should know this so well, that it comes off naturally. You will use this for both networking and interviewing. As an example:

*I am Senior Information Technology executive (CIO, Vice President) with 22 years of increasing responsibility experience in the several industries including automotive and manufacturing. I have been responsible for a global organization of 425 professionals and an annual budget of \$165 million. In 2014, I was recognized by Deloitte as one of the top CIOs in the country.*





## 7. Networking

Networking is THE KEY to any job search. You should identify as many people as possible with whom you can meet. Your purpose is to ask for their help in your job search. You want to walk out of the meeting with at least three names that you can call and use their name as the contact. Here is a typical networking approach:

- Hello Mr. Jones – my name is xxxx, Fred Smith suggested I give you a call. I am – then launch into your 30 second commercial.
- Fred thought you would be a good person for me to talk with about my job search. Would you have 30 minutes sometime in the next two weeks to discuss my background and suggest possible companies or individuals with whom I could meet.
- When you meet with Mr. Jones, treat it as if it were a job interview. There may be some opportunities within Mr. Jones' company, and if you do well in the meeting, they may ask if you would be interested in talking to someone in their company. See the next step for interviewing techniques.
- At the end of the meeting
  - a. Ask for names of people that with whom they would recommend you meet.
  - b. Here is where your marketing plan is important. If you have any specific target companies you would like to get into, ask them if they know of anyone at the target companies.
  - c. Ask their permission to use their name when contacting their referral.
- Maintain your network – every 3 weeks, send a brief email to the top 30 – 40 people in your network bringing them up to date on your job search.

## STAGE THREE

### *Interview or Network Meeting*

#### **8. Interview or Network Meeting**

Even if you are networking with your best friend, treat the meeting like an interview. Your best friend might not recommend you to one of his contacts if he thinks you are not a good fit. There are lots of books on how to interview and how to answer questions. Here are points that we consider critical:

**8.1 Know the company** – Before launching into a discussion with a prospective employer or new networking contact, do your homework. At a minimum familiarize yourself with the corporate website and social media content. Even better, do a literature search or speak to others who know more about the company than the public. Be prepared to discuss specifics about how your background and experience relate to the company's needs.

**8.2 Know the people with whom you are going to meet** – at a minimum find out their title, and to whom they report. LinkedIn and other social media are good sources of information. You should be able to surmise broad responsibilities and make an educated guess at what their key issues are. Be prepared with some of your PARs that demonstrate that you would be a good person to have around.

**8.3 Be enthusiastic and positive** – to encourage good interpersonal chemistry.

**8.4 Introductions** – at some point early in the meeting you will be asked why you are there, or you will be asked to describe yourself. Use your 30 second commercial.

**8.5 Golden Rule for answering questions** – the golden rule of interviewing is: “the more the interviewer talks, the better you look.” So, you must keep your answers short (2-3

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sentences) and on point. This is where the preparation you did in Stage 1 becomes extremely valuable. Use the PAR (Success Story) format. It works for most questions you will get.

**8.6 Typical questions** – there are many common interview questions. There are a list of tough interview questions at the end of this guide. Amazon.com has a variety of books listing the toughest interview questions and effective answers. You may want to buy one of these books and review it. Frequently a PAR answer will work for many of these questions. Here are some examples of tough questions where you can use a PAR as part of your answer:

- 8.6.1** Describe your best and worst boss.
- 8.6.2** What are your strengths and weaknesses.
- 8.6.3** Give an example of a difficult problem and how you handled it.
- 8.6.4** Give an example of a difficult employee and how you handled him.
- 8.6.5** Describe your best and worst projects.

**8.7 Buying signals** – at some point in the interview, if it is going well, you will get some “buying signals.” The interviewer will be convinced you are a capable person and they will now start to probe for how well you would fit within their organization. A typical “buying signal” question is “Here at xyz company, we have the following problem.” — they will describe the problem, and then ask how you would solve it. The interview has reached a critical stage and your answer here can make or break the interview. The problem is, you should not and cannot answer this question. You don’t know enough, and you cannot get enough information from the interviewer in 1-2 minutes to answer it. So here is what you do: Say, *“that sounds a lot like the problem I tackled at abc company, where I ....”* Then you launch into one of one of your PARs.

**8.8 Compensation questions** – if you get asked how much you want to make, the best answer is to tell them about the compensation in your current or last job and tell them you hope for a reasonable increase.



## 9. Trial Close

There is a sales technique that says you should always try and close an order in each meeting. You cannot really ask the employer to “buy” you. However, you can try a sales technique called a trial close. The technique to try and get them to “try” your product (You!) before they commit, with the idea that they will like the product (you) so much, that they will not want to buy (hire) anyone else. This is what you do:

a. Ask the interviewer how he felt your qualifications matched up against the position requirements.

- This gives you a chance to address the areas in which he feels you are not a good match.
- Utilized PARs to give examples of where you have strong accomplishments in the areas he thinks you are weak.

b. Ask the interviewer what the top 2-3 projects, problems, or issues, the person hired would have to deal with in the next year.

- Take each one, and play back a PAR that shows you have solved this kind of problem before.
- This gives them a sense of how you attack their issues and shows them that you know how to solve them.

## STAGE FOUR

### *Closing the Deal*

#### 10. Follow-up

This is critical that you follow-up with all your networking and interview contacts and that you do it non-obtrusively. This frequent contact keeps you in their mind. They may run across an opportunity for you 3-4 weeks later. You must:

- a. Write a note thanking them for their time and indicating your action plans because of the meeting or interview. This can be an email.
- b. About every 2 weeks, send an email or call to tell them what you are doing and especially how you are doing with the contacts they recommended. Some people prefer email and some prefer direct contact. If you get their voice mail, leave a brief message that describes what you have been doing.
- c. One of your follow-ups could be indirect. Ask one of your contacts who knows the hiring manager to send an email recommending you to the hiring manager.
- d. If one of the people you interviewed with said they were having difficulty getting information or finding people to fill other positions, do what you can to help them. Find and provide them this information, or recommend candidates to them.



## 11. Persistence

Finding a job is a full-time job.

- a. You should meet with 5-8 individuals perweek
- b. Follow-up with 40 to 50 people per month.
- c. Constantly refine you marketing plan.
- d. Continue to do research on companies and individuals and add them to yourlist.
- e. Refine your list by dropping companies and contacts that do not prove to be fruitful.
- f. Review job openings on LinkedIn, Indeed.com, Glassdoor.com and other web sites. Look in the news, and industry / business journals for opportunities that look interestingand follow-up on those.
- g. Critique each interview and networking meeting and ask if there were any questions you could have answered better – and if so, develop a better answer.
- h. Review what kind of job and what compensation you are seeking. Ask yourself if you are being too limiting in yourcriteria.

## 12. Responding to a job offer

Somewhere along the lines you should get a job offer. Here is our advice:

### a. Evaluate the offer along several dimensions.

- Location – do you have to move; is the drive reasonable
- Compensation – is the offer reasonable and sufficient. If a bonus is included, what has been the company's track record of paying bonuses over the last 5 years
- Position – is this a good next career move for you. Imagine that two years from now you are looking for another job. Does this job enhance or distract from your résumé?
- Company – is the company a growing company or are they in a financially difficult position.

**b. Negotiating** changes to the offer – you usually cannot change any of the dimensions of the offer except for the compensation, and you cannot change this by much. Our advice is to tell them how much you want and commit that you WILL take the offer if they provide that level of compensation. You will be taking a risk here. They may withdraw the offer because they may think you are being unrealistic. If you have a competing offer tell them that and ask them if they can match or beat it.

**c. How long can you wait** to respond to an offer – most companies will want an answer in 2-3 days. You can sometimes string this out for a week, but the longer you wait, the more they will wonder why.

# RÉSUMÉ WRITING

## *Summarizing your career in four pages or less*

The purpose of a résumé is to introduce yourself to a potential employer, summarize your career, and create enough interest to get an interview. The résumé in most cases creates the initial impression of you, and will shape the rest of your interaction with the prospective company. Frequently, the interviewers will use the résumé to guide questions during your interview. The content of the résumé gives you the opportunity to sell yourself, and to guide the interview process.

There are many books written on how to write résumés, and even more opinions on what is correct and not. There are not absolute right or wrong ways of writing a résumé. Some people recommend using first person, most recommend using third person. (We recommend 3rd person) Some people like to use bullet points, some don't (We do). Some people say keep it short, others beg for detail. (Our view is 3-4 pages for an experienced Executive)

The following is an example of a résumé that is formatted exactly like we would submit to one of Executive Search Partners' clients. As a reminder, this is the format we recommend.



### RECOMMENDED RÉSUMÉ FORMAT

#### Professional summary

#### Reverse chronology format with:

1. Company name and description of company
2. Your title, dates and responsibilities
3. List 3 “Selected Accomplishments” from the PAR’s
4. Your résumé can be 3-4 pages long. 2 page résumés for experienced people are frequently not long enough.

#### Education

**Recognitions/awards/other** distinguishing activities and accomplishments

### Some quick tips:

Use good English, and proper choices of words. It is OK to use incomplete sentences to keep the résumé concise.

Spell check, grammar check, have someone else read it over, and spell check it again before sending. Grammar and spelling errors are killers.

Be sure your contact information is accurate

# The 25 most difficult questions you'll be asked on a job interview

*Being prepared is half the battle.*

*If you are one of those executive types unhappy at your present post and embarking on a New Year's resolution to find a new one, here's a helping hand. The job interview is the most critical aspect of every expedition that brings you face-to-face with the future boss. One must prepare for it with the same tenacity and quickness as one does for a fencing tournament or a chess match.*

## 1. Tell me about yourself.

Use your 30-second commercial.

## 2. What do you know about our organization?

You should be able to discuss products or services, revenues, reputation, image, goals, problems, management style, people, history and philosophy. But don't act as if you know everything about the place. Let your answer show that you have taken the time to do some research, but don't overwhelm the interviewer, and make it clear that you wish to learn more.

You might start your answer in this manner: "In my job search, I've investigated several companies. Yours is one of the few that interests me, for these reasons..."

Give your answer a positive tone. Don't say, "Well, everyone tells me that you're in all sorts of trouble, and that's why I'm here", even if that is why you're there.

### 3. Why do you want to work for us?

The deadliest answer you can give is “Because I like people.” What else would you like — animals?

Here, and throughout the interview, a good answer comes from having done your homework so that you can speak in terms of the company’s needs. You might say that your research has shown that the company is doing things you would like to be involved with, and that it’s doing them in ways that greatly interest you. For example, if the organization is known for strong management, your answer should mention that fact and show that you would like to be a part of that team. If the company places a great deal of emphasis on research and development, emphasize the fact that you want to create new things and that you know this is a place in which such activity is encouraged. If the organization stresses financial controls, your answer should mention a reverence for numbers.

If you feel that you must concoct an answer to this question — if, for example, the company stresses research, and you feel that you should mention it even though it really doesn’t interest you — then you probably should not be taking that interview, because you probably shouldn’t be considering a job with that organization.

Your homework should include learning enough about the company to avoid approaching places where you wouldn’t be able — or wouldn’t want — to function. Since most of us are poor liars, it’s difficult to con anyone in an interview. But even if you should succeed at it, your prize is a job you don’t really want.

#### 4. What can you do for us that someone else can't?

Here you have every right, and perhaps an obligation, to toot your own horn and be a bit egotistical. Talk about your record of getting things done, and mention specifics from your résumé or list of career accomplishments. Say that your skills and interests, combined with this history of getting results, make you valuable. Mention your ability to set priorities, identify problems, and use your experience and energy to solve them.

#### 5. What do you find most attractive about this position? What seems least attractive about it?

List three or four attractive factors of the job, and mention a single, minor, unattractive item.

#### 6. Why should we hire you?

Create your answer by thinking in terms of your ability, your experience, and your energy. (See question 4.)

#### 7. What do you look for in a job?

Keep your answer oriented to opportunities at this organization. Talk about your desire to perform and be recognized for your contributions. Make your answer oriented toward opportunity rather than personal security.

### 8. Please give me your definition of the position for which you are being interviewed.

Keep your answer brief and task oriented. Think in terms of responsibilities and accountability. Make sure that you really do understand what the position involves before you attempt an answer. If you are not certain, ask the interviewer — he or she may answer the question for you.

### 9. How long would it take you to make a meaningful contribution to our firm?

Be realistic. Say that, while you would expect to meet pressing demands and pull your own weight from the first day, it might take six months to a year before you could expect to know the organization and its needs well enough to make a major contribution.

### 10. How long would you stay with us?

Say that you are interested in a career with the organization, but admit that you would have to continue to feel challenged to remain with any organization. Think in terms of, “As long as we both feel achievement-oriented.”

## 11. Your résumé suggests that you may be over-qualified or too experienced for this position. What's your opinion?

Emphasize your interest in establishing a long-term association with the organization, and say that you assume that if you perform well in his job, new opportunities will open for you. Mention that a strong company needs a strong staff. Observe that experienced executives are always at a premium. Suggest that since you are so well qualified, the employer will get a fast return on his investment. Say that a growing, energetic company can never have too much talent.

## 12. What is your management style?

You should know enough about the company's style to know that your management style will complement it. Possible styles include: task oriented ("I'll enjoy problem-solving identifying what's wrong, choosing a solution and implementing it"), results-oriented ("Every management decision I make is determined by how it will affect the bottom line"), or even paternalistic ("I'm committed to taking care of my subordinates and pointing them in the right direction".)

A participative style is currently quite popular: an open-door method of managing in which you get things done by motivating people and delegating responsibility. As you consider this question, think about whether your style will let you work happily and effectively within the organization.

### 13. Are you a good manager? Can you give me some examples? Do you feel that you have top managerial potential?

Keep your answer achievement and task-oriented. Rely on examples from your career to buttress your argument. Stress your experience and your energy.

### 14. What do you look for when you hire people?

Think in terms of skills, initiative and the adaptability to be able to work comfortably and effectively with others. Mention that you like to hire people who appear capable of moving up in the organization.

### 15. Have you ever had to fire people? What were the reasons, and how did you handle the situation?

Admit that the situation was not easy, but say that it worked out well, both for the company and, you think, for the individual. Show that, like anyone else, you don't enjoy unpleasant tasks but that you can resolve them efficiently and — in the case of firing someone — humanely.

## 16. What do you think is the most difficult thing about being a manager or an executive?

Mention planning, execution, and cost control. The most difficult task is to motivate and manage employees to get something planned and completed on time and within the budget.

## 17. What important trends do you see in our industry?

Be prepared with two or three trends that illustrate how well you understand your industry. You might consider technological challenges or opportunities, economic conditions, or even regulatory demands as you collect your thoughts about the direction in which your business is heading.

## 18. Why are you leaving (did you leave) your present (last) job?

Be brief, to the point, and as honest as you can without hurting yourself. Refer to the planning phase of your job search, where you considered this topic as you set your reference statements. If you were laid off in an across-the-board cutback, say so; otherwise, indicate that the move was your decision, the result of your action. Do not mention personal or personality conflicts.

The interviewer may spend some time probing you on this issue, particularly if it is clear that you were terminated. The “we agreed to disagree” approach may be useful. Remember that your references are likely to be checked, so don’t concoct a story for an interview.



### 19. How do you feel about leaving all your benefits to find a new job?

Mention that you are concerned, naturally, but not panicked. You are willing to accept some risk to find the right job for yourself. Don't suggest that security might interest you more than getting the job done successfully.

### 20. In your current (last) position, what features do (did) you like the most? The least?

Be careful and be positive. Describe more features that you liked than disliked. Don't cite personality problems. If you make your last job sound terrible, an interviewer may wonder why you remained there until now.

### 21. What do you think of your boss?

Be as positive as you can. A potential boss is likely to wonder if you might talk about him in similar terms at some point in the future.

### 22. Why aren't you earning more at your age?

Say that this is one reason that you are conducting this job search. Don't be defensive.

## 23. What do you feel this position should pay?

Salary is a delicate topic. We suggest that you defer tying yourself to a precise figure for as long as you can do so politely. You might say, "I understand that the range for this job is between \$\_\_\_\_\_ and \$\_\_\_\_\_. That seems appropriate for the job as I understand it." You might answer the question with a question: "Perhaps you can help me on this one. Can you tell me if there is a range for similar jobs in the organization?"

If you are asked the question during an initial screening interview, you might say that you feel you need to know more about the position's responsibilities before you could give a meaningful answer to that question. Here, too, either by asking the interviewer or search executive (if one is involved), or in research done as part of your homework, you can try to find out whether there is a salary grade attached to the job. If there is, and if you can live with it, say that the range seems right to you.

If the interviewer continues to probe, you might say, "You know that I'm making \$\_\_\_\_\_ now. Like everyone else, I'd like to improve on that figure, but my major interest is with the job itself." Remember that the act of taking a new job does not, in and of itself, make you worth more money.

If a search firm is involved, your contact there may be able to help with the salary question. He or she may even be able to run interference for you. If, for instance, he tells you what the position pays, and you tell him that you are earning that amount now and would like to do a bit better, he might go back to the employer and propose that you be offered an additional 10%.

If no price range is attached to the job, and the interviewer continues to press the subject, then you will have to respond with a number. You cannot leave the impression that it does not really matter, that you'll accept whatever is offered. If you've been making \$80,000 a year, you can't say that a \$35,000 figure would be fine without sounding as if you've given up on yourself. (If you are making a radical career change, however, this kind of disparity may be more reasonable and understandable.)

Don't sell yourself short, but continue to stress the fact that the job itself is the most important thing in your mind. The interviewer may be trying to determine just how much you want the job. Don't leave the impression that money is the only thing that is important to you. Link questions of salary to the work itself.

But whenever possible, say as little as you can about salary until you reach the "final" stage of the interview process. At that point, you know that the company is genuinely interested in you and that it is likely to be flexible in salary negotiations.

## 24. What are your long-range goals?

Refer to the planning phase of your job search. Don't answer, "I want the job you've advertised." Relate your goals to the company you are interviewing: "in a firm like yours, I would like to..."

## 25. How successful do you feel you've been so far?

Say that, all-in-all, you're happy with the way your career has progressed so far. Given the normal ups and downs of life, you feel that you've done quite well and have no complaints.

Present a positive and confident picture of yourself, but don't overstate your case. An answer like, "Everything's wonderful! I can't think of a time when things were going better! I'm overjoyed!" is likely to make an interviewer wonder whether you're trying to fool him, or yourself. The most convincing confidence is usually quiet confidence.