

# Setting Yourself Apart from the Crowd

By Natalie G. Rooney

The job market is ultra-competitive these days, no doubt about it. Not only are young professionals facing competition from their peers but also they're having to job seek in the shadow of some pretty formidable foes—experienced professionals with a wealth of experience to offer.

## Good News and Bad News

Let's get the bad news out of the way first: there's no magic solution to finding a job, especially in a down market, says CSCPA member **Jenny Pitkin Emerson**, owner of Emerson Search LLC. But the good news is that those individuals who are willing to develop a system, work hard, and have patience and persistence will greatly increase their chances of success in the job market.

Emerson says that a changed job market will require job seekers to change their strategies and expectations as well. Those who are likely to succeed most quickly in a down market will:

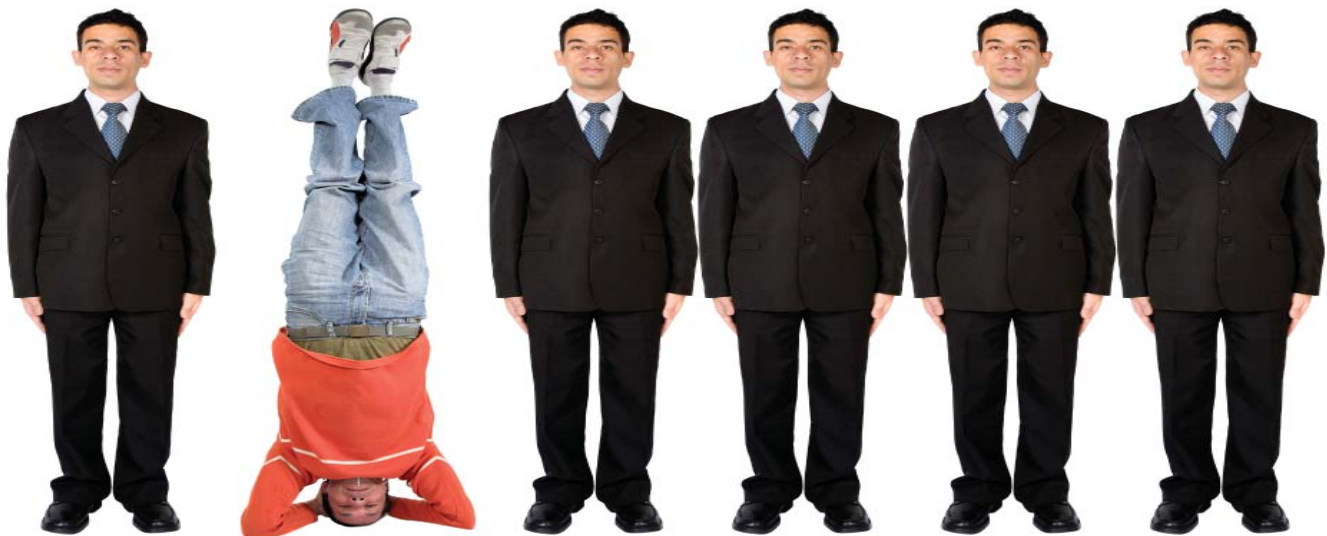
- **Be flexible.** Adjust your expectations for today's market. Have flexibility in the types of job titles, job descriptions, a job's physical location, salary, or other benefits you'll consider, Emerson advises. "The more open you are to looking at other opportunities, the more likely you are to find something."
- **Be proactive.** Expand your network, talk to people you know, work with recruiters who know your market.
- **Be sharp.** If you get an interview, take it seriously even if it's not exactly what you want, says Emerson. Do your research, and do it well. This could be the opportunity. Don't rule something out because it might not be everything you ever wanted.
- **Be open to change.** Consider different industries or even contract work. Do what you need to do to pay the bills.

- **Be patient.** Finding a job in this market isn't going to happen overnight. Young professionals need to keep a longer timeframe in mind, perhaps as long as six months.

## Professional Pointers

It turns out that all of those interviewing and job hunting skills you first learned about in school were on the money. Emerson says it pays to go back and master the basics to really stand out, especially when there's no room for error.

- **Have an updated resume that's concise.** A one page resume is an appropriate length for someone with fewer than 10 years of experience. Check that there are no spelling errors.
- **Make a good first impression with your handshake.** A good handshake has a firm grip—not too tight. Make two short but firm pumps from the elbow, up and down, not side to side. Gently release without dropping the other person's hand. Avoid a limp grip.
- **Wear a suit.** Yes, Colorado is known for its more casual lifestyle, but if you're not sure what to wear or the company didn't indicate you should dress casually, assume you should wear a suit to an interview.
- **Do your homework including going to the company Web site and Googling the company.** Know as much about the company as you possibly can so you're prepared and confident when you walk into the interview.
- **Review your resume and know your job changes.** If you've had a recent change to your employment status, make an open, honest disclosure in a positive light, even if you're not "over" it, Emerson says. You have to be able to portray that you can get over a change and move on.



- **Know your strengths and why you would add value to the company.** You're there to sell your skill set so make sure you can match your skills to what the company is looking for in the position. Find out what's important to the company and why you're there to solve that problem.
- **Have goals.** What do you want to do? What do you need to live? These are two different things. Have an idea of your ideal job but also think about other positions that will work. Develop a timeline of how long you can wait to find that ideal position versus going to your second tier options. Emerson emphasizes, "Understanding your goals, what's realistic for the market, and a timeline of when you might have to adjust your expectations all are important."

## Take Your Networking to the Next Level

Networking is something you should be doing in a good economy as well as a bad one, Emerson advises. "Unfortunately, people don't always think about networking until

it's too late or they're in a situation where they need to use their network," she says. "People should be thinking about networking as an opportunity, not just for now, but for their whole career."

Emerson suggests dividing your network into two groups: your "warm" network, which includes friends and family—people with whom you already have a relationship—and your "cold" network—people you don't know but are connected to your friends or family or people you meet through an event, group, or committee. "Both networks are important," she stresses.

Managing both networks can be hard, Emerson acknowledges, but this is where networking Web sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn can help, especially in a tough job market. LinkedIn offers options such as searching all contacts in a certain industry or by important key words. "If you want to get to know someone through a cold call, try to find something in common with that person before you reach out," she advises. "Find a way to differentiate yourself when you call. You can reach out and say, 'I'm an alumnae, and I found you on LinkedIn. I'd like to ask

for your help and advice.' It's better than the usual, 'I'm looking for a job,'" she says.

## Professional Help

"Is it self-serving to tell people to work with a good recruiter?" Emerson laughs. "You'd be surprised at what they can help you accomplish. They're typically good listeners, can help you with your resume, and can give you perspective about companies in your market. If you decide to post your resume on a job board like Monster or Careerbuilder, you might be inundated with opportunities that don't match your background. If you see a job posted somewhere, try to find out more about it before sending your resume," she suggests.

The bottom line is that in this market, it's just going to take more hard work by getting out there and talking to people, Emerson says. People will have to adjust their expectations in this market, but it's important to get out there and try. "Don't give up. It's just going to take longer for awhile." ▲

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