

AFTER THE HATCHET FALLS—FINDING A NEW JOB IN WEED SCIENCE. David H. Johnson, Senior Research Associate and Associate Professor, Penn State University, Manheim, PA 17545.

With the continued trends of mergers and downsizing in the ag products industry and a similar trend for downsizing in the public sector, including academia, many people, ranging from newly graduating students to mid- to late-career professionals, are finding job opportunities scarcer and more competition for jobs. Chances are good that we will all be faced with having to find new employment at least once in our careers. In late 2002 I was “downsized”, and I hope to convey to others some of my experiences over the four-month period of my job search.

The job search is a process that involves selling—you are selling yourself and your skills and showing how you will benefit the employer. Some items and strategies to consider (they worked for me):

1. Establish and maintain an active network of associates throughout your career. These contacts are both professional and personal and will help you in the job search. Let them know you are looking and what your interests are. Keep it alive, and help someone else when they need it. The vast majority of jobs are found through your network.
2. Utilize career management companies as much as possible. Take full advantage of any services your former employer offers. These companies won't find you a job, but will help you develop a search strategy, define your interests and skills, create a strong resume, and provide information on industries and companies. Many universities also have job and career services available to students.
3. Develop a resume with impact and keep it updated. Use “active” words and show the impact of what you have done. Be brief and to the point, and quantify where possible. Most resumes get less than 1 minute of attention, so you must sell yourself quickly and show how you stand out from other candidates. Include key words that match job descriptions, since many resumes are initially pre-screened by computer before being seen by a hiring manager.
4. Develop informational interview opportunities. These are not job interviews, but an opportunity for you to learn about an industry or company, discuss your job search strategy, and develop potential contacts. The other person also gets the opportunity to learn about you, and may be able to pass on information to another who might have an opening. Develop your 1-minute “advertisement”.
5. Prepare thoroughly for your interviews. An interview is your chance to sell yourself. You must convince them that you are the best candidate for the organization. Research an employer as much as possible, including talking to acquaintances who currently or formerly worked there. If possible, find out the names and job titles of the people you will interview with. Go to an interview with questions (you are learning about them as much as they are learning about you), and be prepared to answer questions about yourself. Follow up an interview with thank you letters and reinforce your interest (if that is still the case) in the position. Use this opportunity to sell yourself again.
6. While waiting to hear decisions from a potential employer, pretend that opportunity doesn't exist and keep up the active search and implementing your strategy.
7. After landing the position, maintain and expand your network, keep your resume up to date, and help others in their search as they have helped you in yours.
8. Be patient, persistent, and network, network, network.