



Desperate Times Call for Hopeful Measures

A recent *Time* magazine article featured a new phenomenon in today's job market. Apparently, at least some job seekers are now offering a financial reward to anyone who can hook them up with an appropriate employment opportunity. While desperate times may call for desperate measures, however, this do-it-yourself referral program is a hopeless investment. The money would be better spent on a do-it-yourself self-improvement program.

According to the article, people are offering as much as \$10,000 to anyone who can connect them with a job opening for which they are ultimately hired. There are even a couple of Websites trying to turn this just emerging trend into a business. They enable those who want a job to connect with those who profess to know where such jobs are and take a commission on the money paid to facilitate the exchange of that information.

At a superficial level, this strategy would seem to be failsafe. The job seeker pays nothing unless they are hired for the opening identified by the informer. They get access to jobs they wouldn't otherwise know about, and they're not out of pocket a dime until they actually land a position. There's just one little problem. That transfer of information does nothing to increase your odds of being selected for a job. It simply puts you in the queue for consideration. And unfortunately, given the length of many employers' queues these days, the odds of your actually getting hired are no better than if you had stumbled across the job yourself.

Sure, it's helpful to get a peek into the "hidden job market," but what's more helpful is to get a leg up on the competition, whether the job you apply for is hidden or not. In other words, the key to success is not what jobs you can see. It's what job you can land. And for that, it's better to invest in yourself than in some outside agent.

A Do-It-Yourself Self Improvement Program

Employers today have raised the bar for hiring. Most have decided that they need employees who are more than qualified for their positions. That doesn't mean that they're overqualified. It means that they are "ultra qualified." They both meet the requirements specified for a job and demonstrate that they can and will make an important contribution with their work and from day one.

How can you prove that you're "ultra qualified?" You must take two steps that combine to differentiate you into what employers call "A" level talent.

- First, you should upgrade your capabilities. It doesn't matter, whether you have a Ph.D.

or a Bachelors degree, whether you have twenty five years of experience or five, whether you're in transition or hoping to hang onto the job you have, you need to continue your education and training right now and for the rest of your career.

For example, that job seeker who was willing to pay someone else \$10,000 to find him a job, should take the money, instead, and invest in his own skill development. Employers want individuals who are at the state-of-the-art in their field and able to use key ancillary skills (e.g., they speak a second language, they know how to use an esoteric software program) that will enable them to apply that core expertise in a range of situations and circumstances.

- Second, you should promote the fact that you're engaged in self-improvement. As an old mentor of mine once said, "It ain't braggin' if ya' done it." In other words, it's not only important but appropriate that your supervisors and peers know that you're engaged in continuous self-improvement. It ensures that they don't mistakenly put the wrong person in a key new assignment or job because they aren't aware that you have the qualifications to do it and do it well.

How do you signal your commitment to self-improvement? For those in transition, it's simply a matter of noting it on your resume. In the Education section, enter the name of the course or program you're attending, the name of the institution that's delivering it and the word "On-going." And if you're employed, use your annual performance review and other regularly scheduled meetings to let your boss know what you're learning. And for maximum impact, also tell them how you intend to use that new knowledge to make a greater contribution on-the-job.

Desperate times may call for desperate measures, but, it's hopeful measures that deliver the most benefit. And the most hopeful measure of all is a do-it-yourself self improvement program. Thanks for reading,

Peter
Visit me at Weddles.com

Peter Weddle is the author of over two dozen employment-related books, including the recently released blockbuster *The Career Activist Republic* and *Work Strong, Your Personal Career Fitness System*, one of the most innovative career success books in print. Both are available at Amazon.com.

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