

HOW TO FIND WORK in the 21st Century

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1

HOW THE WORKPLACE HAS CHANGED

A ship in port is safe, but that's not what ships are built for.

— *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Looking for Work Instead of a Job

Is that all there is?

We have lived with the modern concept of a job for so long that we tend to think it has been around forever. In fact, it was introduced to the world about 150 to 200 years ago as nations began to industrialize. Before that, people earned a living by performing a variety of tasks, mostly in agriculture, in areas that were affected by the seasons, the weather, and the time of day. When the concept of a job was introduced to society back then, it caused just as much angst among our ancestors as it is causing now that it is in decline.

We also tend to assume, because it is the way the majority of people have earned their living for generations, that a job is the only way to earn a living. In fact, a significant percentage of the workforce doesn't earn their living from traditional jobs. Take the construction industry, for example. For people employed there, their job is tied directly to the project that they're currently building, and when it is

finished, so is their job and they have to look for another project. The same could be said for people employed in the arts. If, for example, you're an actor in a movie or a stage show, once the movie or show is over, so is your job and you move on to the next project. This is also true for musicians and other people employed in the arts.

So the idea of your job being tied to the project that you're currently working on is far from new. What's new is that more people who have always had a traditional job are finding that their livelihood is now going to be earned this way. What is disconcerting is that most of us come from a background where our parents and grandparents made their living from a traditional job, which, for the most part, meant that their careers were stable and they had some security. Most of us still long for that security, but it's getting harder to come by.

The rise of the temporary or contingent worker

The twentieth century was the century of mass production and large corporations, and the workplace was dominated by industrial giants like General Motors. At the end of the century, the biggest employer in the United States was Manpower, a company that specializes in temporary and contingent workers.

In the manufacturing sector, one of the improvements that companies have made to make their process more efficient and economic is to employ a just-in-time approach to the inventory of parts that they carry. Instead of having large quantities of these parts sitting in inventory for long periods before they get used up, they access those parts from their suppliers at the time that they are needed in the manufacturing process and have thus eliminated the need for costly inventories.

The same type of thing is happening in the workplace as companies increasingly view the work to be done in terms of projects and think of their staffing needs in terms of what they need for current and upcoming projects. The idea of a temp, or temporary worker, has been around for decades, but it tended to be restricted to clerical and office staff like receptionists and data entry clerks. Now companies are hiring temporary workers at all levels within the organization.

This is particularly true in the Information Technology or IT sector. That industry is very project oriented, and IT companies regularly hire people for projects with no expectation that their employment

will become long-term. Even in Japan, the last bastion of the idea of lifetime employment, many companies where employees have traditionally expected to spend their entire careers with that company are now moving towards hiring temporary workers.

A January 5, 2008 article in *The Economist* titled “Sayonara, salaryman” points out that almost 40 percent of the workforce in Japan are part-time, contingent, and contract workers and that this category is growing while those with permanent jobs is decreasing. It also points out that today’s young workers are not interested in accepting the corporate paternalism of their parents’ generation where work was the center of their lives and even led in some cases to “karoshi” or “death by overwork.”

Outsourcing

“The unearned advantages of having been born as Canadians or Americans may be about to evaporate.” This interesting perspective from management expert Tom Peters — writing in *Macleans* (December 1, 2003) on the issue of outsourcing — applies to all western countries, not only Canada and the United States. What he is suggesting may evaporate are jobs that we have taken for granted for decades, along with a lifestyle and standard of living that have been the envy of many people who live outside of western countries. Many thousands of these jobs, particularly in manufacturing and in the IT sector, have already evaporated and moved overseas.

Dan Pink, in his excellent book *A Whole New Mind*, says that “outsourcing is overhyped in the short term. But it’s underhyped in the long term.” That opinion is supported by experts’ predictions of the number of jobs that will move overseas from western countries to countries like India and China in the next few years and beyond. So far manufacturing and the IT sector have lost the most jobs, and those losses are expected to continue. But these job losses may be the canary in the coal mine. Most experts are predicting that the next wave of jobs moving overseas will be in the insurance, financial services, customer support, and engineering sectors.

It’s not just a question of jobs in western countries moving overseas. Foreign multinationals are aggressively going after markets in western countries, taking on the local multinationals on their own turf. A July 31, 2006, article in *BusinessWeek* cites the example of

China's Huawei Technologies Co., which won a huge contract with British Telecommunications PLC in a deal that "sent a chill through the rest of the telecom manufacturers."

The same article states that over the next decade, the World Bank projects that developing nations' share of world gross domestic product is expected to grow from one-fifth to one-third.

Ron Hira is considered one of the leading experts in this area and has written a book titled *Outsourcing America: What's Behind Our National Crisis and How We Can Reclaim American Jobs*. In a July 3, 2005 interview published in *The New York Times*, he was asked in regard to outsourcing, "How can this trend be stopped?"

His answer was "There's nothing that can be done to stop it. The question is, how do we adapt to it and deal with the negative effects?"

That answer should be a wake-up call to governments and business leaders in western countries.

Michigan governor Jennifer Granholm's response to outsourcing is a plan to make her state the innovation capital of the United States. As the historical US hub of automobile manufacturing, Michigan has lost thousands of jobs to outsourcing in the past couple of decades. In July 2006 Google announced plans to open a Michigan operation that will generate 1,000 direct jobs and 1,200 indirect jobs over 5 years. Michigan is offering Google tax breaks over the next 20 years as an incentive for creating these jobs.

When General Motors can get their cars built in China for \$2 an hour versus \$34 an hour in the US, you don't need a degree in economics to understand why they are now the biggest foreign car manufacturer in China. This is also an example of why manufacturing jobs, which have been a key part of the economies in western countries for decades, will continue to move overseas.

Dan Pink points out that the conventional view thirty years ago was that an economy couldn't be based on services — manufacturing had to be the foundation. When asked how the US can survive outsourcing, he suggested, "We massively underestimate human ingenuity and resilience."

The future, he says, will bring "industries we can't imagine and jobs which we lack the vocabulary to describe."

Our future, in other words, lies in our imagination — to create products and services that the world doesn't know it is missing. Dan makes a valid point but unless we pay more attention to the impact outsourcing is having on our workforce and find ways to deal with its negative effects, as Ron Hira suggests, we're in danger of becoming nations of Wal-Mart and Starbucks employees.

A new relationship

An employee with a company in yesterday's workplace could safely assume that included with their job were a variety of benefits and services that the employer would supply. Benefits ranged from dental plans to pension plans, and you could often expect the employer to assume the responsibility for such things as mapping out a career plan for you.

Even your employability and expectation of being with the company on a long-term basis was a given once you had gone through the hiring process and had landed a full-time job. Today, having a full-time job is no guarantee that your future with the company is assured. Your security is tied to the value that the company perceives you to bring to their operation at any given time.

More companies are looking at employees as commodities, i.e., we will pay you for the set of skills that you bring to us but benefit packages, career planning, continuing education, upgrading of skills, and those types of issues are viewed as costly overhead, and the onus to provide for them has shifted from the company to the employee.

The consensus among the experts on the workplace is that today everybody is a temporary worker and the only security you can expect is in having a set of current, marketable skills that are in demand.

The shift to smaller companies

The workplace of the twentieth century, up until about the 1970s, was dominated by large companies. This changed in the 1980s and '90s to the point where, for years now, the vast majority of jobs and work opportunities are created by small businesses. Small today could mean a single operator who has expanded to the point where he or she needs an extra body on a full-time or part-time basis.

This shift has many repercussions for today's workers, especially those who have lost their jobs with a medium to large, well-established company. Whether the shift is positive or negative is all over the map depending on how informed the individual is about the workplace and how well they've positioned themselves to survive in it.

Many of today's small business owners were formerly full-time employees in large companies who decided that self-employment made more sense for them than looking for another full-time job. Also, more young people coming out of college or university are starting their own businesses than at any other time in the past. According to a May 2005 Ipsos-Reid poll, 40 percent of Canadian college and university students would like to be their own bosses by becoming entrepreneurs or consultants.

In the US, according to a *New York Times* article on May 1, 2008, over 2,000 colleges and universities are now offering courses in entrepreneurship, up from 253 institutions offering these courses in 1985. The article also pointed out that many colleges have turned to active or retired business owners rather than academics to teach these courses. It also pointed out that some people see a strong liberal arts education as a foundation for success in these courses and that entrepreneurship in business schools is often too narrowly focused.

A new set of expectations

While there are no hard and fast rules that define how small and large businesses operate, there are some things that you generally can count on to be different between them. If you lost a job with a large company, you've lived in a world where you could expect that your job included a decent benefit package, paid overtime, a nice office, and other perks that you probably took for granted. If you expect to find all or most of these things when you join a small company, you're probably going to be disappointed. You may also be disappointed if you expect to earn the same salary as you did in the past.

The president or owner or the principals of the company, who often risk everything they have to establish it, may not have many of the things that you may feel you're entitled to, like security, benefits packages, and so on, so it's unrealistic for you to expect to have them.

You'll probably wear more hats in your job than you have in the past, and you could be much more involved in the important decision-making processes affecting where the company is going. You may have an opportunity to pick up some stock options if the company is planning to go public. You may become a telecommuter and perform most of your work from home and be expected to supply or help to purchase the PC that you need to do this. You may be a contract worker with no benefits included in your compensation and no buy-out or golden handshake at the end of your employment even if you've worked with the company for years.

You may have opportunities to advance your career — a thing that may never have happened with a large company. Your contributions could have much more influence over the success or failure of the company. You may be expected to provide leadership in guiding the company in new directions, and that could be a new role for you.

No more entitlements

If you're over 40 or have been strongly influenced by your parents' experience in the workplace, you may need to make some significant and fundamental changes in your thinking about your career and what to expect in your working life. In yesterday's workplace, the relationship between the worker and the employer was much more paternalistic than it is today.

The reason why so many people are devastated by the loss of a full-time job often has more to do with other aspects than the financial one. What the individual also loses is a sense of belonging to a community, some dignity and self-respect, pride in what they do, and they often have a sense of betrayal if they feel that they gave the company all that they had to offer. These non-tangible things that come with a job in a large company may not necessarily come with a job in a small company.

How people react to the changes that arise from going from a large to a small company will vary according to how secure they are with themselves, how well they adapt to change, how informed they are about the workplace, and their ability to rise above the day-to-day challenges and view the transition that the workplace is going through from a broader, more philosophical point of view.

A need to take the broader view

As the workplace goes through its current transition, those who have lost their jobs are having a tough time dealing with the realities of the new workplace. In many cases their kids are also looking at them and wondering what they should do to position themselves to earn a decent living. The range of emotions goes from those who feel liberated by the changes going on in the workplace — “good riddance to the traditional job” — is their attitude to those at the other end of the scale, who may be devastated by the loss of their jobs. There’s no quick fix to any of this. We’ll just have to adjust to these changes, as our ancestors had to adjust to the changes that took place in their lifetimes.

There is work available, but if you’re looking for it to come in the shape of a traditional job with all of the benefits and security that we’ve become accustomed to, you’re probably going to be disappointed. Finding the work that’s available is also going to be a lot more challenging. For most of us it will require developing new skills, being much more informed about what is going on in society and in the workplace, and finally shedding some long-held attitudes about work, jobs, and expectations.

You’re going to have to become more adept at selling yourself and anticipating and understanding the needs of the employer that you want to work with. That’s a new role for most of us and it won’t come naturally. You’ll have to learn how to do it and how to do it in a way that is effective for you.

Facing reality

When the realities of the new workplace are laid out for us, most of us, at a rational level, can relate to them. It’s common sense. The big challenge is to psychologically accept that reality and adjust our lives and attitudes towards earning a living. That challenge will continue for the foreseeable future, because in that time frame most people around us will still have traditional jobs. One of the biggest problems facing people who have lost their jobs is looking around and seeing the majority of people they know still working in traditional jobs. This leaves them feeling victimized and lost.

Even though the majority of people are well aware that significant changes are going on in the workplace, they can’t really relate to

the challenges that people who have lost their jobs are facing. They only get it when it happens to them or someone in their family.

There's denial going on here, of course. Sure, we know about the turmoil going on in the workplace, but if we still have a job, we don't want to think too much about the challenges we would face if we lost that job. It's an attitude that many of us have towards major diseases as well, and it explains why so many people are shattered when they lose their jobs. It's the "it'll never happen to me" syndrome. Our first reaction is to replace the job we lost with another job, and if the prospects for that are bleak, we panic and look at our situation from the worst possible point of view.

At some point, however, we have to face the realities of the new workplace, and one of the fundamental changes that we have to make in our attitude is to recognize the fact that there is work out there just not necessarily jobs. We have to learn to cope with the new realities and adjust our approach to looking for work accordingly. That doesn't mean giving up looking for a job, if that's what is important to you. It means that you have to accept the fact that the route to finding that job will be different from what it has been in the past.

It's not all bad

We should also try to be as objective as possible about the changes going on in the workplace. Some people have actually benefited from losing their jobs in that it has forced them to go through some soul-searching about what is important to them in their careers and they have come out of the process happier for the experience. They find out that the job they were so attached to was a bad fit for them and that there are other, more attractive options and ways to make a living that make sense for them.

Some people who get involved as contractors, initially with skepticism and trepidation, find that as they gain confidence and realize that they can earn a living this way, they wouldn't go back to a traditional job if it was offered to them. People who have just lost their job may have difficulty believing that, but if they take the time to talk to people who have made the transition to contracting, and they should make a point of doing that, they will find that there is a world beyond that of the traditional job.

An example of the struggle people continue to have in accepting contract work was given in an October 24, 2006 article on Workopolis, Canada's biggest job site. A worker in the auto sector who had lost his job and was having no success in finding another job after months of searching was seeking advice. He had just been offered a four-month contract by a company he respected in the auto sector and his question was; should he accept it or continue to seek "real" employment?

It's just possible that once we work our way through the transition that is currently going on in the workplace, we will pass on to our children a workplace that is healthier and more fulfilling for them.

Most Employment Opportunities Are Hidden

Where are the opportunities?

Looking for employment opportunities in yesterday's workplace was a fairly straightforward procedure. You looked in the newspaper, called some friends and associates, maybe called a few employment agencies, and checked with your professional association or union. You still need to do these things, but they won't lead you to the majority of the employment opportunities that exist in today's workplace. You need to significantly expand your approach to include:

- Monitoring the websites of companies that you would like to work with and who you feel are likely to be adding to their staff. Most company websites these days have a section where they list their current employment opportunities. In the IT sector, this is the main way in which many companies advertise their jobs or contract opportunities. There's even an attitude on the part of some of these companies that if you can't find these opportunities on your own, they're not interested in you. In other words, they want people who are "with it" and who know how to find employment in their industry.
- Most professional associations have a job-search service which they provide to their members. Companies who want to hire members deal directly with the association, which in turn lists the information on its website. Some industry associations do this as well, and sometimes you can access this information even if you're not a member.

- While most of the major newspapers still include a career or employment section, you may find more opportunities listed online in their electronic employment service, which more and more companies are using instead of listing their requirements in print. Most of these services allow you to post your résumé on their site for free, and some of them will automatically notify you when an opportunity comes up that matches your job specifications. Some of these sites are also a very effective way to monitor what is going on in the workplace and to learn from the experience of others who are actively seeking employment.
- There are lots of online job sites available today, some that are generic and others that specialize in particular professions or geographical areas. One of the biggest online job sites is www.monster.com. Other sites are excellent resources for monitoring workplace activity, trends and news, www.rileyguide.com being one of the best of these.
- Marci Alboher's "Shifting Careers" column in *The New York Times* is also recommended: www.shiftingcareers.blogs.ny-times.com.

We've already learned that the vast majority of employment opportunities are generated by small businesses. These businesses may not have a website at this point and if they do, it may not have a section on employment. In order to flush out these opportunities, you need to access every possible tool.

Finding employment opportunities

Most of the opportunities that exist today never hit the mainstream media or get posted on a website. The ways to find them include:

- Becoming a news hound and staying on top of trends in the workplace and in society. If you find that you are constantly being surprised by events when they are reported in the mainstream media, you're not doing as good a job as you need to of monitoring what's going on.
- You need to create your own database of news sites and job sites and monitor them regularly. Indiscriminate web surfing is not the answer. You need to approach this area in a diligent, intelligent, and creative way to ensure that you know more

about what is going on in the workplace than the average person does. Many websites offer free newsletters filled with current news, and you can have them sent to you automatically on a regular basis. For example, if you want to keep abreast of events in the IT sector, www.wired.com is a good site to be connected to.

- There are always seminars, meetings, conventions, trade shows, and courses going on in your community. You need to be monitoring these to make sure that you don't miss out on an event that could be important to you in your search for work opportunities. They also help to keep you informed about what is going on.
- You need to network effectively. There's a whole section devoted to this later in the book, but let's recognize at this point that you must be constantly networking in a creative and effective way. Word of mouth is a pretty low-tech way to advertise in today's world, and many employment opportunities are filled this way.
- Use your imagination and be creative. Maybe the employment opportunity that you're looking for hasn't hatched yet in the mind of the employer who could benefit from using your set of skills. Look for unmet needs, and the better you're connected to what is going on in the workplace and the world, the more likely you are to identify these. Maybe you need to create your own work opportunity by going directly to an employer with an idea whose time has come. Smart contractors and job seekers are doing this all the time.
- Get involved with professional and business organizations, and that means volunteering and being active on the executive level, not casually showing up for an occasional monthly meeting. Also monitoring the websites of professional and business organizations both within and outside of your community is a good way to keep up with what's going on. Most of the chambers of commerce have a website today, and you may pick up some useful news items by monitoring them. Some of them also list their members and the companies the members are with. You could pick up some useful contact names. As long as

you approach these people professionally and you are polite, they will probably be willing to give you some information.

- Notwithstanding all of the preceding references to the Internet, do not discount the print media, particularly trade magazines and professional publications. You will find useful information in these that you won't find on the Internet. Most cities have one or two primary publications that focus on business and industry, and if you don't subscribe to these, you should at least monitor them regularly. To get an overview of all of the main business and industry publications, including international publications, look at www.ceoexpress.com on a regular basis.
- Your local library is still a very useful resource for keeping in touch with what is going on, and accessing their services can save you a lot of time. Many libraries offer courses on doing basic research and how to use the Internet as a research tool.

Obviously, looking for work today is radically different from what it used to be. Key differences between people who are regularly employed and those who are struggling is how well they are informed about what is going on and how systematically they monitor workplace issues and trends.

Why Contracting Makes Sense

Myths about contracting

As noted earlier, one of the most ironic perceptions about working as a contractor is that if you choose to go in this direction, you are cutting yourself off from the possibility of finding a permanent job. Nothing could be further from the truth. By being active as a contractor, you're adding to your experience and expanding your network of contacts. You'll feel better about yourself since you're actively employed as opposed to sitting on the sidelines waiting for a permanent job to come up, and if one does come up, you can take it.

The basis for this attitude is psychological. If you have earned your living for years by being employed in one or more permanent jobs and that's how your parents and grandparents earned their living, it's a challenge to accept the fact that you can earn a living as

a contractor, given the unpredictability of such work versus a permanent job. If you've lived with the security of a paycheck being deposited to your bank account every two weeks throughout your career it's not easy to make the adjustment to contracting, where your earnings are far less predictable. Some people are so addicted to this stable way of living they have difficulty accepting the fact that you can earn a living any other way.

There tends to be a generation gap on this issue too. Younger people who are entering the workforce are more likely to adapt to contracting than their parents are. Since they haven't had the experience of years of getting a steady paycheck, they will adapt more readily to contracting. They're also less likely to be carrying around the emotional baggage that their parents are as they try to adjust to the significant changes that are taking place in the workplace.

It would be wrong to assume, however, that young people are not challenged by the prospect of earning their living as contractors. They are influenced by their parents' attitudes and society's addiction to a job as the only way to earn a living. Our education system doesn't prepare them well for the entrepreneurial option. They may also want the material benefits that come from having a permanent job: a house, a nice car, and a comfortable lifestyle.

Because the concept of earning a living from having a permanent job is still very much a part of the fabric of the society that we live in, contracting tends to be seen as an inferior way to make a living. The fact is that some contractors are much better off than their counterparts who still have permanent jobs. They're earning more and keeping more of what they earn because of the tax advantages that go with contracting. They control when they go on vacation and how often they do it. They have much more freedom in how they work. They're not locked into a nine-to-five, Monday-to-Friday work schedule, and they're more likely to work from home and spend less time commuting, which can be a major stress factor for people who live in cities. While it's true that some contractors, especially those who are new to it, are struggling, many others love what they do and would never go back to the lifestyle imposed by a permanent job.

Working as a contractor is rightfully seen as a form of owning your own business, and that's what scares and makes some people

uncomfortable with it. Not everyone sees themselves as an entrepreneur, even though most of our ancestors were self-employed before the modern concept of a job came along. But contracting is a more flexible form of earning a living that can give you the option of switching to a permanent job if one comes up, or staying with contracting if that is your preference. And it's not a life sentence. Even if you currently choose contracting because you love it, you can always change your mind in the future and opt for a permanent job if one is offered to you.

According to a 2005 report from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, Ireland is one of the leading countries in Europe in terms of entrepreneurship. Almost 70 percent of the population considers entrepreneurship to be a good career choice. A January 17, 2008 article in *The New York Times* notes that Ireland ranks third in the European Union in early-stage entrepreneurial activity.

Europe's labour market is considered overly rigid, and the countries with the most rigid "job protection" rules also have the highest levels of unemployment. This is the opinion of Ann Mettler, executive director of the Lisbon Council, which is committed to raising European competitiveness.

France is losing many of its young entrepreneurs because of the cultural attitude towards capitalism. A March 11, 2008 article in *The New York Times* points out that an estimated half a million French entrepreneurs, most of them under 35, have left France and moved to the south of England to start up their own business.

What employers are looking for

Looked at from the perspective of employers, and remembering that typically means small businesses today, contracting gives them the flexibility that is often a key factor in their decision to add another body or not.

It's a sad fact that some people are cutting themselves off from finding work by being so inflexible in how they approach employers. They may have a set of skills that the employer can use, but if the only option they are giving the employer is to hire them on a permanent basis, they may be shooting themselves in the foot.

If, on the other hand, they approach the employer on the basis of “Here is the set of skills that I can offer you. Let’s see how I could apply them to the projects that you’re currently working on and are about to start,” they’ve just given that employer a whole different set of options for hiring them. Just as the idea of accepting anything other than a permanent job scares some people, the opposite is true for the employer. They’re scared of committing to adding to the overhead costs of their operation by hiring a permanent employee when the only business they can count on, are current and upcoming projects. That may only be a guarantee of six months’ or a year’s work and under those circumstances, which are common in today’s workplace, it makes no sense to them to add a permanent employee to their staff.

Employers must also consider the attitude of the person who is looking for work. If that person can’t accept anything other than a permanent job, the message they’re sending out, often without being aware of it, is hire me and look after me, and that’s the last thing that a small business owner wants. They need self-starters who understand the uncertainty in today’s workplace and who are willing to share in the risk associated with operating in that environment.

Make It Easy to Get Hired

The number one criteria that today’s employer will use in deciding whether or not to hire an additional employee is, will this person add value to my operation and make my life easier? If you understand that and approach the employer in a way that is centered on it, you’ve significantly increased your chances of being hired versus someone whose approach is still attuned to yesterday’s workplace.

The way you communicate; your cover letter, résumé, brochure, and all the other print and electronic marketing tools you are using have all got to be focused on this issue, and that will be a major factor in determining how successful you are in finding work. If you get the employer’s attention and determine that indeed they could use your set of skills and let’s say that potentially there’s an opportunity for a six-month contract, make their decision even easier by suggesting that you ease your way into the contract, say one month at a time, rather than locking them into committing to the whole six months at the outset.

If the opportunity is for a long-term contract and you're excited about working with the company and you have no doubt that you can help them, you may even consider offering to work for them for a week for free to show them what you can do. Smart contractors have landed lucrative contracts by using this approach.

Guess who gets offered the job?

We've identified the fact that in today's workplace most of the work opportunities are hidden. One reason for this is that when companies decide that they want to make a permanent addition to their staff, the first place they will look to is their pool of contract workers, if that makes up part of their workforce. This makes sense since they know those people and what they can do and they in turn know the company.

If people who are looking for work and who are only comfortable with a permanent job understood this, they would be much more inclined to consider contract work as a viable route to finding more permanent work.

Employee referral programs

Employee Referral Programs (ERPs), whereby current employees refer suitable candidates for in-house job opportunities, are becoming increasingly popular with employers, some of whom are meeting up to 60 percent of their hiring needs this way. In some cases such programs account for almost all of the hiring done.

It is common for employers to offer their employees a cash bonus for people they hire from their referrals. But the cash isn't the only reason employees take part. They feel good about seeing people they know being hired, and they're smart enough to know that it's in their interest to only refer people they know are good and who they feel will fit within the culture of the company.

Hiring on the basis of employee referrals is a smart investment for the employer too, since it reduces the time involved in hiring new people and can substantially reduce the cost of recruiting. For people looking for work, being referred by an existing employee significantly increases the probability of their being hired compared to them approaching the employer on their own.

The growth of ERPs helps to explain why many employment opportunities are never advertised and proves yet again why it is so important to be connected to what is going on in the workplace and to be an effective networker. Some companies are sending college and university graduates they've hired, and who have worked out, back to their alma maters as recruiters. Encouraging employees to be active in alumni associations and networks is also seen as a good way to find new hires.

Trying before buying

Another reason why contract work makes sense for both the employer and those who are looking for work is that it gives both parties a chance to get to know one another before making a more permanent commitment. Our working relationships are the only relationships in our lives that we approach with an attitude of making it a permanent commitment before the parties involved know one another.

You can interview, test, and reference check all you want in considering a potential employee, but experience shows us that it's only after working together for a period of time that either party knows if they are compatible with the other party or not. This is another argument in favor of both sides entering into a contract work arrangement before committing to a more permanent one.

Computer-based job simulation technology is becoming an increasingly popular way for companies to attract and assess potential employees. L'Oreal, for example, uses job simulation scenarios as part of the screening process. According to a 2005 study by Rocket-Hire of New Orleans, close to 20 percent of companies are using this tool, and that percentage is expected to grow.

Such technology also allows potential employees to try on a job to see if it is a right fit for them. Although it is an effective tool to use at the beginning of the hiring/screening process, applicants must still expect to do well in interviews, where companies will assess their personalities and communication skills.

Vocation Vacations is a five-year-old company in Portland, Oregon, that gives people the opportunity to "test drive" their dream jobs. They do this by pairing up the individual with a mentor for a couple of days, during which they get hands-on experience in the field

they believe they'd like to work in. Participants pay anywhere from a few hundred dollars to a few thousand to experience life as a race car driver, dog trainer, fashion designer, Broadway producer, or whatever. Vocation Vacations has placed hundreds of people in the US and Britain into these dream job simulations.

The Need for Self-Promotion

Why you have to self-promote

One of the main factors that distinguish people who are succeeding in today's workplace from those who are struggling in it is how well they understand the need for self-promotion and how effective they are at doing it. Some people, especially professionals who are over forty and who have lost their jobs, are really challenged by this. Some of them don't see why they should have to do it; after all, they are professionals, accountants, engineers, etc., and they achieved success in their careers before they lost their job. Surely, they reason, their qualifications and experience speak for themselves.

Another reason for being uncomfortable with self-promotion could be your upbringing or your cultural background. You may see the whole subject as unseemly. Blowing your own horn is something you were taught was undignified, and this attitude may have been reinforced by blowhards that you've come across in your life.

The first thing you need to do is to understand what self-promotion is, in the context of doing it to find work. If you have an aversion to loud, self-aggrandizing people, that's good, because that's the last thing you want to become. Employers are not bullied, schmoozed, or coerced into hiring people; they will be just as turned off by this behavior as you are. On the other hand, they're not mind readers, so you can hardly expect them to determine for themselves what your strengths are and how they may be of value to them.

You need to be aware of another one of those shifts that have occurred in the workplace. In yesterday's world, often your experience and qualifications did speak for themselves, so you could still succeed in looking for work with a fairly passive approach. Also you were probably responding to a newspaper ad where the requirements for getting hired were clearly spelled out. Finally, you were probably applying to a large company that had a personnel or human resources

department that had time to assess applications that were not as well prepared as they could be.

That's all changed. Remember, most of the work opportunities today are generated by small companies who don't have personnel or human resources departments. Often this task is handled by someone whose expertise is in another area, and hiring is only one of several hats that they wear.

You will often be applying to companies on speculation that they may need your skills rather than responding to a specific ad that you saw in a newspaper or on the Internet. Under these circumstances, the applications that will get attention are those that are very focused, where the applicant has done some research on the company and their résumé is effectively designed to highlight their strengths and how those can benefit the company.

Communication skills are far more important than they used to be, especially in the area of looking for work. The workplace is a more fast-paced and busy environment than it used to be, and it is more difficult to get an employer's attention. The focus of the communication must be clearly on what you can do for them and not the other way around, and it must be specific and geared to their needs and not be a general description of your past career.

If you are soliciting companies for contract work, maybe you should replace your résumé with a simple brochure, or one of the electronic marketing tools described in Chapter 3 of this book that, again, have as the main focus your strengths and how those can benefit the company.

Managing your own career

Here is another requirement for succeeding in today's workplace that people don't pay enough attention to. You need to be far more cognizant about who you are, what you're good at, and what type of people and companies you want to work with. If you're currently working on a contract, you should have a plan of action for finding your next contract. It's always a juggling act for today's contract worker.

Unless you're one of the lucky ones who still have a stable job and work for a company that provides some help to map out a career strategy for you, you'll have to take ownership of this issue yourself.

Even if you're in a stable job, you should have some kind of plan in place in case you lose it.

You are responsible for managing your own career, and the only security you have is tied directly to how marketable your skills are, how creative you are in finding work, how well you communicate, and how good you are at recognizing opportunities where you can apply your skills.

The first step in managing your own career is to be very clear on what skills you have to sell to potential employers. Most people are weak in this area. Chapter 2 will eliminate that weakness by getting you to go through a series of exercises to determine exactly what it is you have to sell to potential employers. This will set the stage for Chapter 3, which focuses on how to market yourself. You can't sell yourself effectively unless you're crystal clear on what you have to sell. The better the job you do in Chapter 2, the more comfortable you will be with marketing yourself.

Summary

The objective of this chapter was to make you aware of the changes that have occurred in the workplace. You won't be successful in finding work unless you understand these changes and their impact on you. Most people don't understand them and the consequences of that are: If they lose their job, they feel lost, or if they decide to become a contract worker, they don't know how to go about it.

To be successful, you need to understand the workplace and the changes going on in it at a level far beyond that of the average person. If you don't understand it you'll make the same mistakes that most people make, i.e., using an obsolete approach and set of tools to find work, and you'll also be caught off guard when the changes occur. Here's a recap of what has been covered:

- You need to understand the difference between looking for work and applying for a job. There's a lot of work available today; it's just not packaged in the form of a job — as most people understand the term.
- You need to understand that some of the tangible and non-tangible features that were always part of a traditional job are often not included in contract work.

- You must understand that most of the work opportunities that exist today are found in small companies, and if you've spent your career in a large company, you'll have to change your perception as to your role in the small company and what is expected of you.
- Since most of the work opportunities that exist today are hidden, you need to know how to find them.
- You need to know how employers make their hiring decisions and what they are looking for in contract workers.
- You must understand that your success in today's workplace is tied directly to how effective you are at self-promotion and what self-promotion means in the context of looking for work.

A Note About the Quizzes

There are three quizzes in the book. The point of the quizzes is for you to test, on your own, your knowledge of the material you've read in the section preceding the quiz. To determine what you've learned, you must answer the questions in a comprehensive way rather than with short answers. If the question asks for a true or false answer, for example, the question is not merely whether you think the statement is true or false. Ask yourself why you feel it is true or false, and list all of the reasons you can think of to support your answer.

In the Appendix and on the CD included with this book, are answers to the questions so you can compare your responses. Do not be tempted to look at the answers before you have answered the questions as completely as you can. You'll only be short-changing yourself if you do. If you're not sure about the answer, take a stab at it anyway. You're trying to determine what you know and don't know.

If all of your answers are wrong, as unlikely as that may be, that's not a bad thing. You will find out what you don't know and the areas you have to brush up on. That will make your search for work far more effective and increase your chances of making a good impression in an interview.

QUIZ 1: THE WORKPLACE

1. Name some medium-to-large organizations that potentially could use your skill set and explain why you chose them.
2. Name some small (less than ten employees) organizations that you would like to work with and explain why you chose them.
3. Name some projects that are either underway or will soon be started that might provide employment opportunities for you.
4. Your chances of finding work will be directly related to the number of want ads you respond to, the number of recruiting agencies you register with, and the number of résumés or CVs you send out. True or false?
5. Name the three most active sectors in the economies of the cities or regions in which you want to work.
6. What are the key trends in the sectors in which you want to work?
7. Name some influential people in the sectors in which you want to work.
8. Where do the “players” in the sector you want to work in hang out? What associations do they belong to? What networking events are they likely to attend? Identify the trade shows and conferences coming up in the next six months that they are likely to attend.
9. What are the best media sources for keeping you abreast of new developments in the workplace and in particular the areas you’re interested in?
10. Name some websites that will keep you informed about the areas in which you want to work.
11. What are the best electronic and/or print newsletters that will keep you informed about the areas in which you want to work?
12. Can you think of an unmet need in the areas in which you want to work that could be an employment opportunity for you?
13. Outsourcing will destroy the workforces of countries in the western world. True or false?
14. You’ve just joined the association that you know the “players” in your sector belong to. The executive has asked you to fill the vacant “program chair” position and you’ve accepted. In putting together the program for the coming year, identify three topics that you know will be of interest to the members.

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