



More is not always better

Twelve things managers in transition should pay attention to

by Philipp Fleischmann

In times of crisis, managers often have to change jobs involuntarily. For many of them, several years will have passed since their last change of position. Going through a „classic“ application process may have been even longer ago, because since then they have been promoted within their company or were approached about new options via their own network. It's a completely different story if you have to actively find a new position yourself because you've been laid off or have agreed to a separation. Apart from administrative tasks like developing an up-to-date resume, an active search presents many executives with a challenge and some unknowns. It is especially important to keep the following twelve aspects in mind:

1. Priorities:

From the moment you are certain that you will leave your current employer - for whatever reason and with whatever transition period - you have one clear priority: finding a new position. If you've been terminated but are not on garden leave, finish your job properly without leaving scorched earth. But you don't need to give 150 percent anymore, because you won't be thanked for it. Instead, focus immediately on finding a new position - even though you may initially face a longer leave of absence: six or even twelve months pass quickly, based on the rule of thumb that an active search often lasts up to a year before a new role is available. That is why you shouldn't wait to start your activities, because the following applies: If you start later, you usually won't find a new position until later; time lost at the beginning of the search can be difficult to make up for later on.

2. Transparency:

Be as open and transparent as possible about your situation. Even if you are still working for your previous employer or are on leave of absence, you don't do yourself any favours by keeping quiet about the upcoming transition. Recruiters especially will ask directly about your current relationship with your employer. Being subject to a change is not uncommon these days - unlike perhaps twenty years ago.



More and more resumes show breaking points or unexpected shifts. A „jobseeker,“ to use the language of recruiters, is not fundamentally less suitable or less interesting than a candidate who is not under notice - it always depends on the respective search profile and the individual's competencies. Furthermore, jobseekers have the advantage of being available more quickly than candidates with long notice periods.

3. Publicity:

If you want to be found, you have to be visible - true to Say's law, „supply creates its own demand.“ Often, managers have neglected self-promotion and networking during years of high on-the-job demands. While you are still working for your employer, you can easily and inexpensively attend industry events and expand your network, give a talk yourself, or publish a professional article. This is easy to do today, especially on social media platforms like LinkedIn. Become visible - wherever possible - in order to get noticed by potential employers, referrers or even recruiters. At events, approach people who may be relevant to you. Before you leave the company, send an email to the important people in your network with your new contact details. In this context, one more tip: when negotiating a termination agreement, try to persuade your employer that you can take over your business mobile number and continue to use it. Many companies are reluctant to permit this because they use certain number ranges and do not want a number to be „broken out“. You, on the other hand, need to ensure that you can still be reached. Therefore, make it a condition that you take over the mobile number if your negotiating position allows it. This way you can ensure that your existing business partners can reach you in the future.

4. Message:

Before you put yourself out there, you must be clear about your own track record. Who are you? What do you stand for? What have been your greatest successes? Where did you suffer defeats? How can these be explained? Practice presenting your career with a stopwatch - people enjoy talking about themselves and often lose track of time, especially in job interviews. Your presentation should not take more than a quarter of an hour - without interruptions. Explicitly practice talking about your successes in an unbiased way and without boasting - this is not easy for candidates, especially in the German cultural area. For example, when talking about your own achievement stories, use „I“ instead of „we“, have concrete figures and data at hand, and prepare good examples to answer questions such as „What would have gone less well without you?“.

5. References:

Third parties' opinions on a candidate and his or her successes are very important for evaluation purposes in application processes. Testimonials are no longer very informative for this purpose, which is why both recruiters and future employers often ask for references. Therefore, it makes sense to create a list of potential reference providers early on, ideally in a 360° structure: that is, former bosses, colleagues, direct reports and other business partners who can judge you based on direct experience - and who are likely to agree to provide a reference. A list of impressive references can have an additional positive effect for you in an application process. However, you need to handle your top reference providers carefully, especially if you are in multiple processes at the same time. A CEO or supervisory board chairman will not necessarily be happy if they are called for references multiple times. However, you can intelligently anticipate a reference process by asking former superiors for a brief, written assessment of you as a person and attaching the collected statements to your documents.



6. Strategy:

While the „where from“ matters, a candidate must be even more clear about the „where to“ at the beginning of the process. Basically, career changes are possible along two dimensions: industry and function. Aiming to change in both dimensions at the same time is not advised. As an example, a CFO from the pharmaceutical industry can become a CFO in another manufacturing industry. However, it would probably not be easy to change to the role of HR manager at the same time. This change of function, on the other hand, would be perfectly conceivable within the same industry. Instead, it makes sense to prioritize target industries and functions and then, after doing your own research, draw up a target company list with the relevant decision-makers and stakeholders. Supervisory and advisory board chairmen, committee members, auditors, tax advisors and lawyers can be helpful intermediaries to key people. Prepare well for such contacts and research everything you can about the person you speak to. Find conversation topics that help you generate relevance with that person, in order not to be perceived merely as an „applicant“. Sometimes, a good and meaningful interaction will make your contact want to win you over for his or her company.

7. Network:

The next step in the search process is the activation or targeted expansion of your own network. Options for a new position that come up via direct contacts have two invaluable advantages: Firstly, you can make a good first impression when approaching with a recommendation and, secondly, there are often no competing candidates - unlike when acting via recruitment consultants. So, you should not be reluctant to approach business associates and friends, and ask them to keep their eyes open. Or, if it makes sense for both sides, to establish contact with a specific person who might offer a potential job. After all, most people are eager to help - even those with whom you don't have much of a connection; helping others is something deeply human and gives a good feeling. Also, the helpers will usually consider that one day it might pay off to have helped others - after all, it's a small world. But the following always applies: You can only expect adequate help if you have worked out your strengths and the value you add, and can clearly communicate them to your network contacts.

8. Recruitment consultants - exclusivity:

In addition to your network, you can approach recruitment consultants in order to make them aware of you. You need to consider that consultants do not work on behalf of candidates, but on behalf of their clients. Nevertheless, recruiters will always talk to interesting jobseekers in order to gain a personal impression - especially if they already know they may be commissioned with a search for which the jobseeker's profile could fit. Generally, recruiters work exclusively for their clients in individual searches. This means that different consultancies are not commissioned in parallel for the same search. Among other things, this serves to avoid duplicate approaches. For you this means that you need to contact as many consultancies as possible, as long as their consultants handle searches in your target industry or function - because you can never be sure which consultancy will land exactly the search that fits your profile. If you want to work exclusively with one consultancy, you're not doing yourself any favours, because you are limiting your chances of being in the „relevant set“ of the consultant commissioned for the search that suits you.



9. Recruitment consultants - contact:

If you want to contact a recruitment consultant to introduce yourself and send them your CV, try to find the consultant on the website who looks after the sectors or functions you are interested in. However, it is important to remember that recruiters usually have limited time and busy schedules. In some cases, the consultant will thank you for your email with your resume, in others they may not. If you announce a phone call in your message, you should follow up - otherwise you will appear unreliable right from the start. Sometimes the consultant will call you on his or her own initiative, but it is rather rare for a personal conversation to take place without a specific search going on that your profile might fit. You can expect, however, that the consultant will have your CV stored in their company's database - and then you have to wait. Very rarely will the consultant have a suitable vacancy to fill at the exact moment you contact them. You need to be patient and you should not repeatedly contact consultants you have sent your CV to in order to ask for updates: Any good consultant will contact you immediately if there is a suitable option, because they have an interest in filling the position quickly and with a great candidate. If they don't get back to you, there are simply no options. And one more tip: Prepare answers to the four important questions asked by the recruiter: How long is your notice period? Are you mobile geographically? Are you bound to a non-competition clause? And what was your last compensation package (fixed, variable, and benefits) or what are your salary expectations for a future role? If you're worried about your compensation being above the market rate and depriving yourself of exciting opportunities that pay a little less, state your previous fixed salary or minimum expectation „plus bonus, which has varied in the past.“ It's better not to go too high - there are important thresholds that determine whether you will be „approached“ or discounted as being “already too expensive“.

10. Recruitment consultants - No-Go:

In this context it's important to mention a No-Go: Do not send your resume to several consultants of the same company. The rule here is: less is more. Today, most consultancies work with databases that all consultants and researchers have access to. If you speak to one consultant and he or she stores the information in the database, then basically all consultants and researchers of the consultancy are informed. If you have doubts about how a contact handles this, or whether you should still talk to a colleague, just ask. Multiple, uncoordinated contacts, on the other hand, get the word out among the consultants at that firm and are unlikely to increase enthusiasm for your profile. And another practical hint: If possible, don't start a conversation with a recruiter by asking, „How did you hear about me?“ or „Where did you get my coordinates?“ A serious consultant cannot and will not disclose this. Your question may therefore show that you have little experience with such processes and, in case of doubt, are not at senior executive level.

11. Outplacement consultants:

Consultants who act on behalf of the candidate are often called outplacement consultants. Their fee is paid by the previous employer, often as part of a termination or severance agreement. Working with such a consultancy is particularly valuable for candidates who have not participated in an application process for a long time: outplacement consultants help with the preparation of the CV, practice job interviews or work with the candidate on a personal communication strategy. Recruitment consultancies rarely offer this candidate support for a fee, since conflicts of interest can arise in the relationship with the client if the consultant is paid for their work by both the client and candidate. On the other hand, outplacement consultants often have a good network among recruiters and distribute profiles skillfully. However, the basic rule for most outplacement consultancies is: Above all, the candidate must become active themselves in order to identify suitable options and apply for them.



12. Achievements and failures:

Apart from the many established tips and tricks for job interviews, there is one important hint that you should not neglect under any circumstances: Trained interviewers in particular will not ask you about strengths or weaknesses, but rather have you explain which concrete strategies, concepts and actions helped you to achieve a particular success or deal with a failure. They will focus on examples that demonstrate your competences, such as results orientation, leadership or teamwork. Based on these, they will try to deduce how you will act in the future. So there is nothing more annoying than not having good examples of your own achievements - and also failures - ready during the interview, and selling yourself short. Therefore, sit down immediately after an interview, write down all the questions from memory, and think about which answers or examples are the most meaningful. Of course, nothing should be invented or exaggerated. You should read the note with these questions and answers before each subsequent interview - and you will be able to report on your successes and failures much more confidently and convincingly in future interviews. Also, if your interview has been arranged by a recruitment consultant, there is nothing to stop you asking them for tips beforehand: the chances are good that he or she already knows the participants and their approaches, and can give you helpful advice. Afterwards, you should also make it clear that you are interested in open feedback - recruiters are, after all, professionals in the hiring process and can tell you how to present yourself even better next time.



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