

The Ladders®

The Most \$100k+ Jobs

JOB SEARCH

Apply-Interview-Negotiate. Repeat.

Finding a new job is rarely a straight path. How do you handle a multi-tiered hunt?

By Kevin Fogarty

See COVER STORY Page 2

ILLUSTRATION: Chip Buchanan



Chutes and Ladders

By Matthew Rothenberg, Editor-in-Chief, TheLadders.com

PARENTHOOD MEANS TAKING GREAT PLEASURE in activities that would drive you crazy under other circumstances. In that category, I include a whole range of little-kid board games: Candyland; Hi! Ho! Cherry-O; and Chutes and Ladders.

If it weren't such fun for the little ones, would any self-respecting adult want to deal with the frustrations of climbing ladders of progress, only to be set back by an unlucky spin that sends you sliding further away from your goal?

Alas, that's a pretty good description of a typical job search – except you're trying to play multiple pieces at

once. Sometimes it seems like every forward move — from application to interview to offer — is met by a reversal. And just as you're moving forward with one prospect, you're sliding backwards on another.

How can you play the game without losing your marbles? In this package, business writer Kevin Fogarty talks to career experts about the ups and downs of a multi-tiered job search and offers some suggestions about how to keep your focus — and win the *right* job. ■

IN THIS PACKAGE:

- The Consulting Trap *Page 2*
- Designer Clears Security to Land Defense Job in D.C. *Page 4*
- What If It's Not Your Dream Job? *Page 5*

What did you think of this package? Got a story of your own to tell? Have ideas for future coverage? Please write Editor-in-Chief Matthew Rothenberg at matthewr@theladders.com.

▶ COVER STORY

FINDING A JOB SOUNDS and feels like a logical, linear progression: You search for a job; you find a job posting; you apply; you interview; you get an offer; you negotiate; you begin your new job.

If only it were so straightforward.

While each individual application may proceed step by step, every engagement progresses at its own pace, some never start, and some stop short. While Job Prospect A is already approaching the negotiation phase, Job Prospect B is in the late-interview phase, and Job Prospect C just called to say they got your resume and would like to set up an interview. Of course, you're still searching for leads and sending out resumes to additional prospects weekly, if not daily.

For the job seeker, the trick is to keep each of those engagements progressing despite the different pace and the varying degrees of effort and attention required at different stages.



Barro

"You have to think of yourself as a juggler, with many balls in the air, and you have to keep them all moving," Arlene Barro, founder of executive search and coaching firm **Barro Global Search Inc.** of Los Angeles, who holds a doctorate in education and is the author of

"Win Without Competing."

"A lot of people will keep waiting to hear from somebody; that's not effective. If you haven't heard within a week, pick up the phone and find out what's going on so you can close the gap with that employer. You need to continue your search; you can't sit and wait."

The life cycle of a search

Your job prospects typically follow a standard progression. Each stage requires a unique amount of attention and effort. However, there is room to add or subtract time and effort at each stage.

- **Search:** You hunt for available jobs using job listings and networking. This phase is ongoing, and time and effort vary based on the method used and each prospect. Much of the time and effort are outside your control.
- **Apply:** You choose the most promising and appealing jobs, and you apply. This usually means adjusting your resume for the specific position, writing a cover letter and submitting the application. This stage requires the least time and effort and remains almost entirely within your control.

The Consulting Trap

Side work can pay the bills during a job search. At what point does it become a distraction?

By Kevin Fogarty



Prabhu

JOB-SEARCH EXPERTS CALL IT THE consulting trap: while short-term work keeps money coming during your unemployment, it can distract you from your job search and keep you from your ultimate goal – a permanent position.

"What many people do is take a scattergun approach," said Arlene Barro, founder of executive-search and coaching firm **Barro Global Search Inc.** of Los Angeles. "If you're doing an array of con-

sulting work, but your long-term goal is a full-time position, you can become distracted by the consulting because that's what's bringing in the money. But you won't be satisfied in the long-term because you're not addressing your real goal."

People looking for jobs that pay more than \$100,000 tend to be fairly accomplished, organized, focused and able to get things done, Barro said. That's how they rose into six-figure salaries in the first place.

- **Interview:** You meet, often multiple times, with representatives of the prospective company. This stage can involve travel, extended preparation and focus and will vary wildly from job to job. It is the most consuming stage of the job search in terms of time and effort.
- **References:** A prospective employer will check your references and perform a background check. This requires little effort on your part other than coordinating contact with your references. The time and effort required is largely outside your control.
- **Offer-Negotiate-Accept:** The search doesn't end with an offer of employment. The offer must be reviewed. It may require research and several rounds of negotiation. You may also wish to delay accepting while you keep other job prospects progressing.

Juggling leads

A successful job search requires you to keep as many prospects as possible live at all times, including a range of prospects in various stages of development – from initial contact to final negotiation. That means jobs at different stages of the search are competing for disparate levels of time and effort.

The process resembles the workflow of a salesperson, said **Lynn Berger**, a career coach, licensed therapist and author of **The Savvy Part-time Professional**, which examines issues of work-life balance. In a single day, a salesman might cold call a new contact, do follow ups on prospects with whom he has talked to several times but are not ready to buy, and negotiate a price with a customer who has finally sealed the deal, Berger said.

That doesn't sound like a terrible challenge to a lot of people, especially those who have worked in sales and are accus-

tomed to keeping up with many customers, according to Barro.

However, it's all too easy to get distracted by a single job prospect, to lose your motivation to pursue new prospects when an existing one looks like it might succeed, or to focus on things like consulting work that helps pay the bills while you search for jobs. In Barro's

It's easy to get detoured by a likely looking job that ultimately won't come through and put off generating new prospects.

juggling metaphor, it's easy to focus on one ball that needs attention and drop the other balls.

Where juggling jobs can hurt you

Since long delays are common between the initial interview and a job offer, it's easy to forget who you're supposed to be talking to, or even confuse the details of one job and another, Berger said.

It's also easy to get detoured by a likely looking job that ultimately won't come through and put off generating new prospects, Barro said. That's a serious tactical error; you'll end up having to choose – or be chosen – from a much smaller pool of job prospects than you would if you were more consistent in generating new prospects.

Even if you're staying up to speed on your networking, job applications and interviews, it's easy to get off track do-

It's natural both economically and emotionally to spend more time and effort on the things that bring the most positive reinforcement, according to Jo Prabhu, founder and CEO of placement firm **1800Jobquest.com** of Long Beach, Calif.

Because it both helps pay the bills and feels like a "regular" job, side work can be a much more comfortable way to spend your time than a job search that involves being told "no" by recruiters or hiring managers with far less seniority or experience than you, Prabhu said.

"In this economy, it's the higher-paying jobs that go away first, so those people take on consulting jobs

to make a living," she said. "And it can be very embarrassing searching for a job, asking for help from people who might be far down the scale from where you were or applying for something that's a big step down.

"So it's much easier to focus on the consulting, but if you do that for too long, then interviewers start to ask why you want a full-time position when you've been consulting for so long.

"That's perceived as being involved in other companies in the industry, maybe competitors, not just a paying venture." ■

See COVER STORY Page 5

Designer Clears Security to Land Defense Job in D.C.

Carolyn Stinnette took advice from an old friend. He said to always keep multiple irons in the fire, because you never know. This proved to be key in her search when an offer was rescinded.

By Patty Orsini



“When you think you have found the job of your dreams, when it all looks positive, and you have this great energy, rather than going home and celebrating, you should go home and hit the search harder than you had before.”

—Carolyn Stinnette

CAROLYN STINNETTE KNEW her job as a senior instructional designer for a major corporation in the Washington, D.C., area was winding down. The challenges that had attracted her to the position a few years ago did not exist anymore; the clients she had been working with — many of them connected to the federal government and defense industry — were becoming scarcer; and she knew it was time to move on.

But emotionally, she said, it was hard to make the break. She started with baby steps, looking first within her company a little more than a year ago. That process picked up speed in June 2008, when it became clear that a layoff was imminent.

“I really loved my company, and I wanted to stay with them,” Stinnette said. “But what I found was the jobs within the company required that I would have had to move, travel 75 percent of the time or go overseas to high-risk areas, and none of that sounded desirable.” But neither did leaving her company. The company now had her on overhead — that is, not attached to a paying project — so she let her job search lag while she continued with internal projects. She did use this time to network, looking for short-term projects with managers with whom she thought might have upcoming permanent projects, or a wider view of the company for her networking.

But Carolyn was devoting 60 percent to 80 percent of her time on the internal projects, and she knew the timeframe for being on overhead is generally a short one — much shorter than the time she’d already expended.

Looking outside

By late August, Carolyn found it difficult not to spend time worrying about the situation.

She talked to her manager. He agreed that her situation was precarious and asked her to shelve the internal projects and concentrate on the job hunt, explaining that while on overhead the clock was ticking to find a new position, and she could use the office during her job search.

“It just struck me walking down the hall one day: ‘It’s time to look outside the company, and that’s OK with me,’ ” she said. Once Carolyn made that decision, she went into high gear. She signed up on every job board she could find that related to her field. “I hadn’t heard of TheLadders.com before, but it definitely seemed to be a focused search opportunity in the right direction,” she said.

Once she’d signed up with TechnologyLadder, Carolyn had to refine her tracking methods. She developed a spreadsheet for all her contacts that would prove invaluable for her job search. “I was kind of shocked. Even in the economic downturn, there were lots of great opportunities outside my company; just a different pool, I guess. I could barely keep up with responding to recruiters’ inquiries, and I responded to everyone!”

She proceeded to land interviews — and offers. And one offer, which came in late November, seemed like the right fit. “I had three offers, and the position I accepted paid \$15,000 less than the other two. But I really liked the manager, there was opportunity to advance, and it was still more than I was making at my last job. I went with this one because I thought it would work out the best.”

Throughout her job search, Carolyn recalled some advice she once received from an older friend. “This person told me that when you think you have found the job of your dreams,

See DESIGNER Page6

▶ COVER STORY

ing too much research in an interesting area that has few job prospects, neglecting new prospects while waiting for a really promising offer that might not ever arrive, or even doing work around the house that makes you feel good but doesn't help you get a job, Berger said.

"If you have a tendency to respond to issues at hand, if you're really good in a crisis, there's a really good chance you're not paying enough attention to the shorter term," Berger said. "You have to put some structure in place to make sure you're attending to the things you need to — something outside yourself that can help you make sure you're attending to other things."

Right at the beginning of your job search, write out a blueprint of what

you want to do, how you want your search to progress, and list the things you need to do to keep it on track, Barro recommends.

"Put down all these things you want to do and weight them according to what's most important to you," she said. "If you give consulting a 30-percent weighting, that's almost a third of your time. What are you going to do with the rest of your time? Spend it on the job search? Spend part on follow up? What allocation do you give each activity?"

After that, keeping on track is strictly day-to-day time management. "I tell people to revisit the blueprint about once a month to make sure your priorities are always current," she said. ■



What If It's *Not* Your Dream Job?

In this economy, it can be hard to resist any job offer. How long can you hold out if you're hoping for something better?

By Kevin Fogarty

One consequence of the tough economy: People are reluctant to relinquish any job offer, even for a position they don't want.

"One (client) was a VP of business development, and now he only sees offers as a director or manager," said Jo Prabhu, founder and CEO of placement firm **1800Jobquest.com** of Long Beach, Calif. "It's hard to say 'no,' but that could be \$30,000 less in salary. Working your way back to a vice presidency is a long and arduous climb."

There are ways to delay your response. You can consider the offer for a week, for example, or accept

in principle but plead obligations to consulting clients that will delay you from making a formal agreement for a set period of time.

That may work for a couple of weeks. Nevertheless, in this market, no one is going to keep a job open for someone who seems ambivalent about taking it, Prabhu said.

"That's why companies are worried about consulting; they want to know they have your full commitment," she said.

You can avoid getting into that situation by applying only for jobs you know you'd be willing to take, which

has the double effect of making your search far more efficient and keeping you from having to hem and haw, according to Arlene Barro, founder of executive search and coaching firm **Barro Global Search Inc.** of Los Angeles.

"If the candidate, or more often the employer, does not have a clear picture of what would be the right fit, they're comparing and contrasting what they see, not thinking about what they want," she said. "That's like picking one apple from a barrel that's all rotten apples. It might be the least rotten, but it's still rotten." ■

► DESIGNER

when it all looks positive, and you have this great energy, rather than going home and celebrating, you should go home and hit the search harder than you had before,” she said.

“He told me it’s wise to keep other ‘irons in the fire’ by continuing to put out more resumes and contact more recruiters, just in case the job doesn’t come through. You won’t waste time getting depressed if it doesn’t work out because you are already on to the next opportunity,” she said. That proved a smart move.

Maintaining momentum

The week before Christmas, just as Stinnette was getting set to leave her previous job to start her new position, the offer was rescinded. There was an issue with the company’s ability to transfer her clearance from her current job to the new one within the timeframe that the new position required. She found herself out of a job before she even started.

However, she had never stopped contacting potential employers. And, she had two things going for her: her detailed spreadsheet of job contacts, and her employment, even though on overhead.

“I was very close to the final layoff date — like several others in my department, I had been on overhead for some time and now, I had finally gotten the actual notice. So, I followed up with everyone who had contacted me,” she said. “I told them I was still interested. When they asked me if I was still with my company, I was glad I could honestly say yes, since I hadn’t left them for the other job. It definitely looks better if you are still working when you are looking for another job — and, I prayed.”

Of one of those interviewing companies, “I thought I’d found the best,” she said. “Even though my clearance would have gone by the wayside, they had good people, an interesting project, and I liked the management, and the salary offering was back in the higher range. I supposed that I was ready to accept a formal offer,” she said.

Carolyn came home from that job interview and went through her notes in her spreadsheet. “As I went through e-mails and voicemails, checking everything on my spreadsheet, I found one last company that had contacted me,” she said. “I had received a voicemail from them over a week before that had fallen through the cracks. I didn’t actually think it was a good possibility, but I decided to return the call simply out of politeness. We spoke on the phone on a Thursday night, and then set up an interview for the very next day, again, for interview practice and because I’ve learned that you never know what you’ll find out in the actual interview,” she explained.

In fact, it turned out the interview was very exciting and the job was exactly what she was looking for. It offered an opportunity to grow personally and professionally as well as a decent commute; it required her clearance, and it provided a 30 percent increase in salary.

Carolyn’s new position, with a federal contractor predominately in the defense industry, is much the same type of job that she previously held, “but it takes everything I’ve enjoyed and in which I’ve done well over the last decade and combines it into one job, with a lot of people contact, which is a primary requirement for me,” she said.

The role your instincts play

Looking back over this past year, Carolyn said she believes that all the stops and starts in her job search were an important part of the process. “I had so many false starts, opportunities that didn’t work out, and opportunities that sounded good but about which I didn’t have a good gut feeling,” she said. She explained that it is important to listen to your intuition in times of stress; you don’t want to take just any job even when you are concerned about losing the one you have.

“If you have any red flags, then you should trust your instincts and know it’s probably not a good fit,” she said. “You might be worse off taking that opportunity. When I think back about the fact that I turned down three jobs right before the holidays, and then the job I accepted didn’t pan out, I thought to myself, ‘There’s a reason you turned down those three jobs.’ You don’t want to go on for years searching for a job, but you do need to give it time.”

By the time she found her job, Carolyn had come to the end of her overhead. She was able to use her company’s office facilities and had used her remaining vacation time for pay, but she had no more actual income. She went more than two months without a paycheck between the former job and her first week’s pay on the job she started in early February.

But it was all worth it for her. “If you get the right fit, you’ll excel and progress,” she said. “If you go with a bad fit, you’ll likely have to explain it at your next interview.” ■

Career Advice from TheLadders

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- Your Layoff, Your Brain: How to Get Out of Your Own Way
- Controller Perks Up for Second Job Offer
- Emotional Stages of a Job Loss