

BEST  
IMPRESSION

The **5 Keys** to Success in  
**EXECUTIVE JOB**  
**SEARCH**



[www.YourBestImpression.com](http://www.YourBestImpression.com)

---

# The 5 Keys to Success in Executive Job Search

■ ■ ■ Louise Kursmark ■ Best Impression Career Services, Inc.

■ ■ ■ <http://www.louisekursmark.com>

**T**here are 5 critical components of every executive job search. Fail at any one and you'll find that your search is more protracted, painful, and unproductive than it needs to be. Here are my top tips for succeeding in all 5 areas.

## ■ ■ ■ ONE: Strategic Planning and Focus

1. **Know where you want to go before you set off.** Without a clear direction, it's difficult to know what steps to take first. Begin your transition by creating a clear picture of your ideal next position—role, type of company, industry, location, challenges that inspire and energize you, and culture that enables you to do your best work.

Of course, you might shift focus during your search, and the end result might be different from your original vision. Nothing is set in stone at this point—but you must have a direction to guide you as you begin your search efforts.

2. **Understand the job search strategies that really work.** Most people find their jobs through network connections or referrals. That's been true for decades and remains true today, for pretty much every level of job seeker in every industry. For the most efficient and effective search process, spend most of your time cultivating referrals to people at your target companies.

When you've covered that base, you can consider any opportunities that come your way through executive search firms (headhunters) or posted openings as a bonus!

- 3. Create weekly activities and specific goals** so that your efforts are purposeful and your progress measurable. The job search process can feel overwhelming and disjointed. You can quickly fall into the trap of doing the easy but unproductive things (such as surfing for job postings, uploading resumes, emailing recruiters) rather than the more valuable but more difficult networking and personal outreach.

When you have specific plans and goals, you'll find yourself working to complete the tasks that will really make a difference in your search.

## ■ ■ ■ TWO: Marketing Communications (Resume and More)

- 1. Have a great executive resume**—one that clearly conveys your value, tells your story, and sets you apart from other candidates. In line with today's standards, your resume must be concise (ideally, 2 pages), easy to read, and include just the information that's most relevant to your readers. It should look great and be visually distinctive. And, of course, it must be well written and error free.

While you might be inspired by another person's resume, don't make the mistake of trying to fit your career into a template, no matter how well done it is. The structure, format, and design may not work for you; and the content certainly won't be unique to you. Still, you can glean valuable ideas for your own resume by looking at examples. [Check out sample Best Impression [resumes](#) here.]

- 2. Differentiate yourself on LinkedIn.** Your LinkedIn profile is not your resume—it's an additional source of information about you and should be

written in more of the storytelling, narrative form that works well on social media. Keep it readable (no long chunks of text)—and make it interesting!

Consider including links that provide additional proof of your qualifications and value. Examples include media stories where you're featured, presentations you've given, work you've created, video, your personal website, your blog ... items that enrich the content of your profile and provide new views into who you are and what you've done.

- 3. Use your executive bio wisely.** As you network, your goal is to engage in peer-to-peer business conversations—about industry trends, company prospects, career paths, business challenges, and other professional issues. Thus, often it's better not to send a “job seeker” document (such as a resume). Your executive bio is the perfect alternative!

Make sure that your bio focuses on the achievements and experiences that are most germane to your current career goals. It should not be simply a rehash of your career but rather a relevant highlights reel.

- 4. Understand today's cover letter: the e-note.** In most instances, you'll be sending your resume or otherwise reaching out via email. The traditional cover letter, with its business heading and leisurely tone, will strike the wrong note. Instead, write concise and powerful email messages that get to the point quickly, capture attention, and move the dialogue forward.

All of your email correspondence should close with a professional signature block that includes your name, contact information, and perhaps links to your LinkedIn profile or website. Make it easy for people to find out more about you and get in touch with you via multiple channels.

## ■ ■ ■ THREE: Outreach and Networking

- 1. Identify your target companies.** Of course, you might not land a job at a company on your list. But simply having the list is a great start to your networking efforts. Your list gives you parameters for finding connections, makes your search more concrete, and helps your contacts to give you precise assistance rather than general advice.

As your search progresses, your target list will change. You'll expand the scope to include competitors of your initial targets; you'll delete some companies that turn out not to be a good fit; you'll add others that come to your attention. Your list is a living document that provides a helpful framework.

- 2. Make it easy for people to help you.** When contacting friends and colleagues for assistance, let them know *specifically* what you're looking for. When you issue a vague request ("I'm looking for a job, can you help?"), it's unlikely that anything will come to mind. But a precise request ("Who do you know who works at XYZ Company?") will often trigger an idea or a memory, so your inquiries will be more fruitful.

General requests for "help" will make your contacts feel bad because they can't help you. Requests that are presumptuous ("I want you to introduce me to your third-level contact, the president of Acme Company") are a turn-off. Ask specifically for things that are fairly easy for your contacts to give you—and you'll often get precisely what you need, and more!

- 3. Rethink networking.** Many people shy away from networking because they think it means begging for help. But think about how you feel when a trusted colleague or good friend asks for something. Aren't you delighted to help if you can? And if your contact makes it easy for you to do so, doesn't that increase the odds that you'll provide genuine assistance—and feel great about it?

Don't let a false perception of networking prevent you from using all of the tools, resources, and contacts at your disposal. Allow your friends and colleagues to help you. You know you will do the same when the situation is reversed.

## ■ ■ ■ **FOUR: Interviewing**

1. **Don't try to wing it.** Many executives, fluent in speaking off the cuff and accustomed to delivering executive presentations, think that once they get in the door, they'll do just fine in an interview. But an interview is an important and high-pressure event that can rattle even the most seasoned professional. And, often in an interview you're not in control—you're forced to follow the lead of your interviewer. So the tactics that work in normal business situations may not be effective.

Just as you'd prepare for any important business meeting, you should go into every interview with the strategy, plan, and confidence that come only from careful preparation.

2. **Understand the core challenges.** Beforehand, think about where the industry is going, where opportunities lie, and specific problems that the job will address. During the interview, listen carefully to learn even more. Look for every opportunity to share your ideas for solutions to those problems and challenges. You'll create the perception that you are a problem solver already at work for the company.
3. **Master your stories.** Stories (specific examples) provide evidence of what you've done in the past and presumably what you can do in the future. You must know how to tell those stories in a structure and format that helps your interviewer understand your core skills and key achievements.

If you haven't carefully practiced your stories, you might commit a faux pas that will sink your chances. It's all too easy to unconsciously ramble, lose the thread, boast, fail to give credit to team members, share irrelevant stories, or otherwise miss the opportunity to make a solid case for your candidacy.

- 4. Seek opportunities to show rather than tell.** A great way to distinguish yourself from other candidates is to demonstrate how you'll actually do the job. Give a white-board demonstration of your strategic planning process; sketch out a marketing strategy for a new product introduction; share a flow chart showing supply chain improvements.

The more specific you are in the interview process, the more memorable you'll be and the more distinct from other candidates.

## ■ ■ ■ FIVE: Negotiation

- 1. Create a cordial professional atmosphere.** When you receive a job offer, express your delight and appreciation. Then work together to resolve the details. It should not be an adversarial negotiation—first of all, the company wants to please you! And you will want to keep their impressions of you very positive and establish a beneficial relationship for working together once you're on the job.
- 2. Know what's important to you.** Before you begin to negotiate any offer, create a prioritized wish list of things that are most valuable to you. For some, salary tops the list; for others, time off is just as precious. When you run into a negotiating roadblock, you can ask for additional items from your list to construct an offer that's attractive to all parties.

Also, have a clear understanding of your non-negotiables and your walk-away terms. At some point you may find that the offer is not going to be

acceptable to you. There's no sense continuing to negotiate if the company can't meet your fundamental needs.

- 3. Don't be afraid to negotiate anything.** You can always ask! If your attitude is calm and professional—not demanding or entitled—you might be surprised at what the company will grant. Again, your goal is to structure a package that works for both parties.

### ■ ■ ■ Summing It All Up

Strategy, planning, and execution ... a career transition is just like any other critical initiative in your professional career, and it's one with enormous implications both immediate and long-term. You can improve your outcome by mastering each of the 5 key steps that will take you from thinking about your next career move to starting your great new job.

---

■ ■ ■ **Louise Kursmark** is an award-winning resume and LinkedIn profile writer, president of Best Impression Career Services, and one of the most widely published authors in the careers field. She works exclusively with executive job seekers, developing powerful career marketing documents that help executives tell their story with power, meaning, and relevance.

Contact Louise for a complimentary career/resume review:  
[louise@louisekursmark.com](mailto:louise@louisekursmark.com)