



How to Change Jobs in Uncertain Times

Introduction

Whether you choose to call the current economic times a recession or downturn, the truth is that the trickle-downs from this dynamic affect everyone – even accountants.

That's why it's more important than ever to understand your current employment situation. That means considering exactly what you want out of your career, as well as analyzing the financial health of your employer.

Is it time to change jobs or stay put?

At the end of this teleseminar – and after you have completed this workbook – you will have a clear perception of:

- Early warning signs of your company's fiscal instability.
- How to analyze those signs and translate those into what's best for your career and personal life.
- How to define and maximize your career goals.
- Initial steps to take when looking for a new job.
- What gains can be made by changing jobs in this economy.
- Strategic paths to carrying out your job search.

How to Analyze Your Current Employer's Stability

According to our recent survey, almost 20% of accountants polled said they had did not know the financial status of their current employer. This is clearly distressing from a standpoint of protecting yourself from layoffs or job elimination.

Here are several methods to detect early-warning signs of financial instability:

- Review your company's financial statements: 10K's, stock price, sales forecasts, press releases, and external analysts' reports.

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- Check with payables to see if your firm is starting to stretch out payment terms to conserve cash
- Other cash-crunch strategies include cutting temp or contract workers, delaying IT projects, requiring additional signoffs for minimal amounts, selling products at discounted costs.
- Are key executives leaving the company?
- Check for signs that:
 - ✓ Financings, IPOs, etc. have been put on hold.
 - ✓ There is talk of a merger.
 - ✓ There are wage and bonus freezes.
 - ✓ Travel and purchasing freezes have been implemented.
 - ✓ There are selective layoffs, hiring freezes or delayed promotions.
 - ✓ Your competitors are also having financial difficulties.

When is the Right Time to Make a Job Change?

The following reasons are the ones most often given from people considering a job change:

- They want to improve the work/life balance. They're working too many hours, too many weekends, and/or are traveling too much.
- They want to increase their compensation.
- Their current employer is not doing well financially -- they want a more secure position.
- They have conflicts with their managers that cannot be resolved.
- They have been instructed to do things they consider unethical, such as creating "documentation" for borderline accounting practices.
- They want more opportunity for career advancement.
- Personal issues such as the commute, the need for certain benefits, or the need to work a more flexible schedule.
- Their mentor leaves the company and "things are changing for the worse."

Almost all of these reasons are reactions to events, rather than being part of a career advancement plan. They are the things people want to move away from,



not the things they want to move toward. These are valid reasons for seeking a new job -- but they're only half of the equation.

Turnover Rates

The national turnover rate -- the percentage of people who change jobs annually -- is between 30% and 35%. This means the average American worker changes jobs every three years. A Salary and Job Satisfaction Survey we conducted at the end of 2007 revealed that 30% of CPA firm professionals planned to change jobs in 2008, and 40% of accounting in "industry" planned a change.

Consider the following factors when deciding if the time is right for a change in jobs:

- Your current job isn't advancing you along the path to your goal AND you have at least two years at your current company.
- Your company is experiencing severe financial problems.
- You feel you are being pressured to do things you consider unethical or illegal.
- You have an abusive relationship with a boss or co-worker that cannot be resolved.
- You have personal issues that necessitate a change.

Assuming you've decided it's the right time based on one or more of these factors, it's time to review the requirements for your career goals.

Review the Requirements for Your Career Goals

When you have a career plan that details how and what you need to achieve your career goals, you can begin a new job search with a clear vision of what you want to get from your next job.

The most important reasons for starting a new job search: You have accomplished all the tasks you have set for yourself at your current employer, and have few, if any, tasks to be completed there. Or, your company has become so financially unstable that the situation has become a danger to you.

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If you answered Yes to either of these statements, it's time to search for a new job.

Notice the difference between this approach and the top eight reasons people give for leaving? You are taking action to move your career forward, rather than reacting to what you want to move away from.

You always get what you focus on. So by staying focused on what you want, you'll make continuous progress toward it.



Preparing an Effective Search Plan

Approach finding a new job just like any accounting task. Methodically. Begin at the beginning to determine a positive outcome.

1. Begin building your networks *before* you need to utilize them. Contact your peers, former co-workers and bosses from previous jobs. About 80 % of jobs are filled through networking. (Remember, networking is a two-way street).
2. Contract industry recruiters who you are familiar with. Ask them their thoughts on the timing of your job change, and any thoughts they have on the subject.
3. Update your resume. Be meticulous in terms of focus, content and grammar. Expertly outline your skill sets and accomplishments. A recruiter or professional resume coach can assist you with this.
4. Position yourself to maintain a presence at your current job, while you survey your options. Speak to your supervisor and ask what tasks you can take on to help the company get through the down turn.
5. Begin developing a profile of attributes you think are important at a prospective employer.
6. Don't wait for the hammer to fall! Begin your search early – if your company improves you can always stay.

What are the "must haves" for your next position?

- Compensation: _____

- Benefits: _____

- Commute time: _____

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- Job content: _____

- Work environment: _____

- Growth potential: _____

List ten companies you believe fit your requirements and "must have":

Next, prepare a baseline of your current situation. In effect, know your complete financial situation with your current employer. List out the following information:

Current salary and projected date and amount of next raise:

List all bonuses and benefits, with amounts and costs to you:

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Compute total cash compensation for the last 12 months (TTM) and project your expected cash compensation for the next 12 months for your current employer:

Determine if and how much money you will “leave on the table” if you change jobs before any bonus vesting dates, 401-k matching amounts, etc.:

Review stock option, stock purchase, or other equity-type plans to determine vesting periods and your exercise options upon termination of employment.

Adjust your timeline if you will leave too much money on the table.



Prepare a Resume

Update your resume with the skills and experiences you acquired in your current job. Then:

- Review it as though it was someone else's.
- Think about the questions you would ask if you were the interviewer.
- How would you rate your performance level compared to your peers?
- Does your resume show what you offer a new employer?

When you know what you want in your next job, understand why you want to make a change, know what you offer a new employer and have profiled the type of company you want to work for, you are ready to begin your job search.

If you need any help getting to this point, please call us. We'll be glad to review your resume, offer assistance in researching companies/industries, and help you further define your career path.

Prepare to Start Your Job Search

At this point you are prepared to start your job search. Here are some ideas that will make the search process easier.

Time Commitment

It takes a lot of your time to do a job search. Tasks include, preparing at least two versions of your resume, composing strategic cover letters, writing thank you cards, interviewing, researching, giving and receiving feedback, and staying in touch with potential references and networking contacts.

Thick Skin

Prospective employers will all ask you the same or similar questions about your work history. They will probe why you made certain choices in your career, test your technical knowledge, and challenge you to show why you are right for them.



Human resources will ask you to fill out application forms, perhaps take some tests, agree to a background check and want to call your references. Plus, just when you think you're done, they may ask you to come in for "just one more" interview. The interview process can be stressful. Keep in mind that you are still doing your current job and attending to personal matters. Lots of patience and a "thick skin" are the keys.

Be Prepared

You need to have a personal presentation ready to go. Prepare a 30-second "elevator pitch" about your background and work history. Find a peer or family member and practice your presentation until it's second nature to you. Why? Because more than half of all hiring decisions are based on the interviewer's first impression of a candidate.

You also need to be prepared to make concise, but complete, answers to questions about your skill sets, work ethic, management style, and accomplishments. You need to bone up on the company you are interviewing with to demonstrate how your background fits with their needs.

You also need to be prepared to answer the "what's your weakness" question. In other words, tell the prospective employer about an area of your background that you want to improve, and you think you can do that by working with your company. Don't say, "I work too hard" or "I don't toot my own horn enough."

Network

Contact your business contacts and let them know what you're doing. Ask them for advice and referrals to opportunities they know about that meet your search criteria. The majority of people get their next job from networking with former managers, colleagues, mentors, lawyers, or CPAs they know, or from friends and family members that know someone.



Outsource Some Work

Work with a couple of recruiters who specialize in your field. Recruiters have access to opportunities that are not advertised, have knowledge about most companies, hiring managers, work environments and current compensation and job market information. A good recruiter will help you find opportunities that fit your criteria and will help you with every step in the job change process - for free!

Stay True to Yourself

You decided to make a job change in order to further your career. You have determined where you want to be in three years and have developed a plan to get there. Stick to your plan when evaluating a job offer. It's hard work making a job change, so only accept the offer that meets your criteria and moves you closer to your goal.

Prepare Your Elevator Pitch

Your elevator pitch is a 30-second compelling summary of your background and work history. Write it here:

Practice your elevator pitch with a peer or family member until it's second nature to you. Why? Because more than half of all hiring decisions are based on the interviewer's first impression of a candidate.



Some Tips of the Trade

- Have realistic expectations. Though an upward career path is optimal, the name of the game is job security in this marketplace. Progress is good, even slow progress is better than none at all.
- Narrow your search to financially strong companies. Do the research prior to attempting to secure a position.
- Utilize your current benefit plan – go to the dentist, doctor, and anything else that will take time later on but won't be paid for.
- Focus your search locally. Relocation outside the Bay Area should be a last resort – once you leave the game it's hard to get back in.
- Put off any educational goals – such as pursuing an MBA – for the time being. The downturn is not an excuse to go back to school.
- Keep an eye on your CFO. CFOs tend to try and set a good example by laying off a key member of their own staff, prior to a company-wide layoff.
- Most importantly, remember there is still a shortage of professional accountants. There are jobs, and you do not need to see your career stalled because your current employer is experiencing a down turn.