

Insider Secrets

Of An IT Recruiter

What Every Information Technology Professional Needs To Know About Work
In The New Millennium

By

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About the author

Rick Bateman has worked as an IT industry professional for over twenty years. He opened and operated a western branch office for a national IT recruiting company, provided IT Recruitment consulting services to major corporations such as EDS and IBM and performed technical recruiting for small local companies. Rick brought candidates across international borders and placed individuals in both contract and permanent positions. He provided recruitment office training including the development of recruitment office policies, procedures and operations manuals.

Rick has also been an IT employee, employer, the owner of an IT proprietorship, a partner in an IT company and operated his own incorporated IT consulting company. He has worked extensively in both the private and public sectors having been a senior government IT system troubleshooter and business representative prior to starting his career as an IT Recruiter.

Why I wrote this book and why you need to read it.

She was about 25, a gorgeous strawberry blonde wearing what appeared to be silk pajamas, about a half a bottle of French perfume, and little else. We were in my office seated across the desk from one another. “Even if I don’t get the job”, she said looking steadily into my eyes, “call me, I’d like to get together with you some time”. I managed to stammer something polite about her coming in for the interview and saw her to the door of my office.

His resume was very impressive. 20 years worth of IBM mainframe experience as a senior programmer. Looking it over I could see he would be worth about \$500 month, after taxes, in my pocket for the next five years. I called him in for an interview. He walked into my office wearing cowboy boots, a stained bomber jacket, long, frizzy, unkempt hair and smelling like cheap wine served in a dirty ashtray.

She was tall with an athletic build. Wearing an expensive business suit, her long hair was neatly done up. She smiled, shook my hand firmly, commented on my office, and took her seat with poise. She had a B.Com, an MBA, and swore like a trooper throughout the whole interview.

Interview after interview it became clearer and clearer that most IT professionals looking for a new or different job have no idea what the business end of their career is about. Over the years, working with hundreds of individuals, I’ve realized most of them could be helped if they saw things from the other side of the desk.

Recruiting is a huge and booming industry. Media gurus tell us that the technical shortage in North America is estimated at about 400,000 jobs going begging right now. What they don’t tell you is that for every full time, permanent, jobs there are ten contracts. And social trends are clear; there is going to be even more high tech work over the coming decades. *It will be more and more short term and project based. Full time jobs will almost always be dependent on the employer’s contracts with his or her clients, and involve a customer service aspect.*

Increasingly, as companies suffer the costs of delays in project or development work, they will turn to recruiting companies more and more. Individuals who understand how recruiters work and make the most of them will find they are offered far more employment than those who take the traditional approaches will.

Recruiting companies, consulting firms, temp agencies- what's the difference?

A recruiting company usually has no full time employees other than those engaged in recruiting new candidates, those engaged in placing them, and the necessary administrative support staff. They do not keep contractors or consultants on staff when they are not on a contract with a customer. Recruiting companies operate more like temp agencies, where administrative/secretarial or construction workers are called in to work for a client as required and let go when the job is done. There is no commitment to offer employment beyond the immediate opportunity. Temp agencies however usually bring their workers on as temporary employees whereas recruiting companies will prefer the business model of sub-contracting with you as a proprietorship, partnership or limited company.

Consulting companies sub-contract as well but they also have full time, permanent staff who they put on client projects as required. If there is no immediate need for the staff persons skills, they will put them to work on whatever they can find that fits but eventually lay the person off if they spend too long 'on the bench'. Be sure to check this out with any hiring company that is hiring you for a specific client project.

Working for a consulting company vs. a recruiting company has its up and down sides shared by the firm and the worker. A consulting company has more overhead and takes a bigger financial risk by hiring. It also provides security and things like benefits plans, education, and the potential for promotion to its employees and in return pays them less and earns more for their work. A recruiting company makes less money per hour on its contractors, but takes less risk and has little overhead. For example, a recruiting company paying a contractor \$50/hr will charge the client \$60 to \$80/hr on average. Ten to thirty dollars mark-up is common. They want a 20 - 30% profit margin. A consulting company on the other hand will hire you for say \$50,000 a year and charge you out at \$100/hr and up. They want a 100% - 150%+ profit margin. The more they pay you, the higher the margin.

Recruiting companies are not consulting companies or even IT companies. They are sales organizations: hard driving, fast paced, extremely competitive, and brutal to those who do not contribute to the bottom line. The motto of this culture is, 'Whatever it takes.' They are based and measured on only one thing, and it is not innovation, quality or service. It is money.

These are sales people. That's why they occupy the same department in the public mind as Realtors and used car or franchise store suit salesmen. Recruiters have to be 'people persons', able to quickly judge the personality and style of the candidate they are approaching and adapt their own to put the person at ease and facilitate the process. Surveys have shown that the most successful recruiters come from the hospitality or retail industries. Individuals from these backgrounds are often hired by the recruiter firms and trained to be conversant in IT jargon. They likely have no knowledge or experience of IT at all and will often be reading from scripts or other guides during telephone conversations.

Depending on the size of the recruiting firm, placement and recruiting are either both done by the recruiters, or they split the process into two separate roles. The role of placement then falls to an 'account representative' who is able to communicate at a senior level and make presentations to the management of potential employers. They will be the ones who have a portfolio of clients, generally within a geographic territory, from the Fortune 500 list and local firms who they actively cultivate and constantly poll to see if they are seeking any new resources. They will have an on-going activity of calling their contacts on a regular basis, sending them flowers, chocolates or other gifts, and taking them out to lunch to pick their brains.

Account reps will often have a number of 'technical recruiters' working under them who only do recruiting. They never talk directly to employers. The account reps feed the tech recruiters the job orders

they gather from the clients. The recruiter spends all his or her time finding potential candidates to fill the positions, contacting them, and persuading them to sign up with the recruiting company either for a specific opportunity or towards future opportunities. Once the recruiter has the resume and general agreement of the candidate, the account representative will take over the process by interviewing, negotiating with, and further qualifying and coaching the candidate.

The activities of the recruiters and the account representatives are closely tracked by the recruitment firm's owners. Sales is a numbers game. Generally the more activity a person can generate, given that they have any sales skill at all, the more revenue they will generate. In addition to how much money they make, the account reps are measured by:

- how many phone calls they make each day
- how many job orders they glean
- how many placements they make
- how many meetings and lunches they have with existing or prospect clients
- how many conferences, user groups, seminars, etc., they attend.

The technical recruiters are measured by:

- how many calls they make per day
- how many resumes they collect
- how many candidates of theirs get placed.

Each recruitment firm will measure more or less of these types of activities.

Why do I need to use recruiters anyway?

I have seen the resumes of thousands of IT professionals and contract work is almost always a part their history and to be expected in the field. Having dealt with hundreds of employers I can tell you almost all of them use recruiting companies in some form for both their contracting and permanent employee needs. As the supply and demand gap is only going to grow over the coming years, this trend will increase.

There are a number of reasons you should be using recruiting companies. You may be good at what you do but are probably not good at marketing and selling yourself. You could be doing more interesting work, working with an employer offering more opportunities for education, training, career advancement and enjoying greater recognition and appreciation for your efforts. Recruiters will increase the number of jobs available to you, provide on-going intelligence regarding your industry and your professional value, generate job offers which will allow you to negotiate your present salary up, and they can provide you with qualified, no-nonsense feedback regarding your resume and your interview/communication skills. *All for free!* Lets look at these in more detail:

They will increase the number of jobs available to you:

1. They know of more jobs than you do. 90% of available jobs are never advertised! For every one job you see in the paper any recruiter will know of at least ten which an employer is dying to fill right off the top of his or her head that are not advertised. In any large urban center, a recruiting company will have dozens of jobs they are trying to fill at any given time which you may be eligible for and will likely never uncover on your own.
2. They have contacts that are not available to the public. Their position, as a business contact, allows them to speak directly to the head of any HR department or any branch manager. And that contact will generally be candid and straightforward, telling the recruiter in a nutshell what they are looking for.
3. They have insider knowledge of companies, which only comes with their job. Their job is to get as far inside the HR loop of their client companies as possible. The more they know about their clients, the more they are likely to be able to find a candidate the client will hire. To find out about the client the main tool they use is networking. Taking the client to lunch or for coffee is how they find out the insider information of the company. They will identify key people in the organization and systematically attempt to create a relationship with them, from the director to the managers to the senior technical staff. Because they are perceived as a business contact, this channel is available to them. You on the other hand will find it difficult if not impossible to splice into.

They provide on-going intelligence regarding your industry and your professional value:

One of the most common areas of ignorance IT professionals have is the value of their time. They simply do not know what they are worth on a dollar per hour or salaried basis. They do not know the current supply and demand picture for their niche and they do not know how it plays out geographically. In terms of managing their career, they are not. From a business point of view they are operating without knowledge of their customer, market, or competitors. These days, when it is necessary to manage your career like an entrepreneur, this could be a recipe for disaster down the road. Certainly you will be leaving money on the table. The average employee could be earning up to 25% more either by; becoming a contractor (double your income but only 50% more ends up in your pocket); negotiating your present salary up; finding another job.

Recruiters on the other hand know exactly what any IT skill set is worth and where it is worth more or less. They know what areas particular skills are in demand. By the time they have looked at your resume for ten seconds they will be able to tell you exactly what salary you should be getting or what the going hourly rate is for someone with your particular mix of education and experience. They know what a Java software developer is worth as a junior, intermediate or senior; what he or she is worth in Dallas versus Vancouver vs. Rhiad, and which industry experience and education are worth to different employers in their territory.

Because of this knowledge, recruiters can make you aware of opportunities for more interesting work by knowing what you're interested in. They can tell you which employers provide educational or training opportunities and opportunities for advancement, something which is usually only known to company insiders. They can direct you to employers where your particular skills or education are highly valued, or where they know the corporate culture will reward and recognize your value to the organization. Knowing the life cycle of different skill sets, which are on the rise and those on the decline, they can prevent obsolescence by advising you regarding employment opportunities to seek out or education to enhance your current repertoire. Oracle with C++ is good, but Oracle with Java is better.

In order to use recruiting companies as an effective intelligence network you need to have a number of different firms in different geographic locations working for you. Here's how you do it:

Using the Internet, find several recruiting companies in each of the geographic areas you want information from. A good broad net would include a couple of Asian and European countries respectively, Vancouver, Calgary and Toronto in Canada, and half a dozen US cities. Prepare your resume and covering letter as detailed in the chapter 'Resumes for Recruiters' and submit to the recruiting companies as per instructions on the sites.

In order to get the most out of a recruiting company, you need to develop a relationship with one or more of the recruiters who work there. If you don't hear back from a company within two weeks, pick another company in the region and re-submit.

When a recruiter does call you:

- have a clear idea about what you do and do not want in terms of location, pay, type of work, business relationship, length of contract, etc. If you don't it is possible for a good recruiter to persuade you into something less than ideal for you because they are salespeople and selling you on an opportunity is part of the job.
- always tell them you are looking for a new job and are always interested in hearing about opportunities, even if you have no intention of leaving your present job and are only gathering intelligence towards a request for a raise from your current employer. If the latter is the case, get all the information and then tell them the offer is not really what you are looking for.
- always ask them first what the employer is offering. Usually the employer will only tell the recruiter what they want, not what they will pay etc. Sometimes however, the employer will tell the recruiter what the ballpark remuneration is or the recruiter will have a good idea what can be realistically expected.
- if it is a contract, ask them what rate they will be bidding you to the customer for. They will usually tell you and it may be a real eye opener for you. It may give you an opportunity to bump your rate up. If it is more than \$15/hr above what you are getting I suggest you ask for more. Ten to fifteen dollars is the average markup on a contract although there are cases where it is much higher. Don't be afraid to ask for more if you feel there is room. Their job is to 'maximize the margin' so they will try to keep you as low as possible but they are motivated to place you even if they only make five bucks and hour. They get measured on how many people they place and they would rather place you than not. Even at a five dollars and hour markup the recruiter will still earn an extra hundred dollars a month in their pocket for as long as you are on the contract.

- Don't be surprised if they know little about the job except that when it starts and what skills the employer is seeking. This is normal in their industry. Ask them to try to find out anything more you want to know and to get back to you. If they are unable to do so, and this is often truly the case, give them the nod and find out the details at the interview. After the interview you can always decline.
- Try to develop a relationship with them over the phone. Chat them up. Once the ice is broken, offer them a few tidbits of information about your employer or the local market. Then ask them about employers or other areas you want information about. Because you have given them information, they will feel obliged to reciprocate.

They can give you qualified, no-nonsense feedback regarding your resume and your interview/communication skills:

Some recruiting companies or recruiters will do this as a matter of course, some never do it, and some will with a little effort on your part. Some recruiting companies have very sophisticated procedures to prepare you to be one of their candidates such as an initial interview to explain what they will expect from you in return for their efforts. They will provide feedback regarding your resume, covering letter, appearance and communications skills, practice interviews with their staff, and audio and video training materials. As most IT people do not have any sales or marketing training in their background, this is very valuable information.

If the recruiter does not offer these services as a matter of course, you can often get them to do some of the above by just asking. If they are not forthcoming, ask to see a copy of your resume as they send it out to clients. This will reveal any 'improvements' they have made to your original.

If none of the recruiters you're working with are providing much feedback, approach more local recruiting companies until you find one that does.

You may be good at what you do but are probably not good at marketing and selling yourself:

The probability is that you are not great at the sales and marketing end of your career. I say this for several of reasons: I have seen thousands of resumes (marketing material), interviewed hundreds of candidates (sales presentations), and am familiar with the psychological types that go into an IT career. The statistically average IT professional believes that the 'facts speak for themselves'. This is one of the primary errors IT professionals make. Their assumption is, "If you look at my education or experience you will see that I can do the job."

In my experience, few IT professionals have the ability, knowledge or interest in doing a good job of the marketing side. That is why it makes sense to team up with a number of recruiters (sales types) who can look after that department. Many IT professionals have an accountant because they know they are not experts at accounting and financial management. Hire recruiters for the same reason.

And here is the biggest reason to use recruiting companies.

They do all this for free!

Why they do it: they get HOW MUCH!?

Recruitment firms make a ton of money. Consider a contract for \$50 per hour with a markup of \$15; the client is paying \$65 per hour. A contract for one year, which is very common, will be worth \$30,000 revenue to the recruiting company. That pays for the base salary of the recruiter. The next one pays for the rest of the office overhead to support that recruiter. The average recruiter will have 10 to 30 or more contracts going at any one time. In some firms the recruiter will be paid up to 20% commission for contract placements so each person they place will be worth \$500 pre-tax dollars per month in their pocket. A permanent placement, say for a salary of \$60,000, for which the client will pay anywhere from 15% to 50% of that for the recruiters services, will be worth \$9000 to \$30,000 to the recruiting firm. The account representative who makes this deal will see a pre-tax commission between \$1350 and \$15,000 that month. The technical recruiter may see no commission or something between five to ten percent.

Despite these figures, it is the recruiting company itself, which generally gets the gravy. Account reps and recruiters put in long hours. They are expected to work evenings and through the weekends on a regular basis. When you break their annual income down by the hours they put in, the earning potential promised by the employer who hired them is, as in many high volume sales jobs, dubious. And like any sales job, there are more bad months than good months. Most people who are not workaholics or driven by the sales 'bug' soon find other work. When they do of course the company inherits all the commissions from on-going contracts they currently have.

Secrets of how recruiters get resumes and candidates

For the recruiter, their most valuable asset is a large bank of resumes. Collecting them is their most time consuming activity. It demands creativity, persistence, and when the resumes are to be solicited from a non-client company, a degree of nerve.

The main ways recruiters get resumes is in via advertising in newspapers, trade magazines, and on the Internet. Unsolicited resumes pour in response to the positions posted as available. Networking, meeting as many people as possible at any seminar, monthly user group meeting, or conference, generates additional submissions. Newsgroups, listserves, guestbooks, and other internet resources can searched. The people currently on file at the recruiting company will often recommend their associates submit their resumes. Universities, colleges or other training programs will keep a list of companies for their students to approach.

When you see a newspaper advertisement from a recruiting firm with a long list of positions they are trying to fill, keep in mind that probably 20% or more of the positions listed are not currently available. Those positions are added to the advertisement because the recruiter frequently has an on-going need for people with those skill sets and is trying to stock his or her shelves for future opportunities. You still want to respond to the ad, because you are interested in those future opportunities as well, just don't be surprised when you call and the recruiter stalls on the details. If you see this kind of ad in a magazine, keep in mind that few positions will stay open long enough for the lead, production, and distribution time required of magazine advertisements. 100% of the positions in those ads are likely 'fishing' for resumes towards future opportunities.

Networking at seminars, monthly user groups meetings, or conferences is another standard tool recruiters use to collect resumes (and find new clients). Usually, these kinds of resumes are from more senior professionals who are currently employed, who know the basics of marketing themselves, and are therefore worth more to the recruiter. One placement a month resulting from these activities is worth the time spent to the recruiter.

A large number of resumes come in via the standard resume submission pages of any recruiting companies' website. All recruiting companies have them and their results depend on the ability of the company to promote the website.

Raiding

When a recruiting company needs find specific kinds of candidates however, they take on a slightly different character. They must raid non-client companies to find out the names of their employees and contact them to see if they are willing to jump ship. Needless to say they run the risk of being very unpopular with that employer. The task itself is not easy and depending on how important the penetration is, the recruiting company will initiate a variety of methods. These methods increasingly mirror the activities of espionage, for that is what they are, industrial espionage to steal the information and assets of another company.

If the target organization where the candidates are is some kind of government organization, the task is relatively simple. Almost all of them publish telephone directories that include not only the staffs' names and work phone number, but their department and title as well. This allows the recruiter to call the staff at work directly or look up their name in the local phone book and call them at home in the evening to see if they can be lured away. Sure there may be more than one James Brown in the local phone book, but the recruiter will just phone them all till he gets the right one.

If the target firm is a private company the task can be more challenging but there are a number of easy routes usually left open. One of them is the companies web site. Often, the names of many of the staff will be listed by duty on the site. I have even seen photos and resume like documents posted for each of them on some sites. Another simple method is to call the receptionist or another worker in the company and ask him or her to fax or send the company directory. Sometimes it is necessary to use a ruse but not usually. Secretaries are usually very compliant, especially when approached with a tone of friendly authority.

If that does not work the recruiter will call and ask to speak to the help desk, technical support, the supervisor of the IS department, the DBA, or whatever is appropriate to get into the right department. A number of these calls spread out over time to avoid notice will often result in a coffee with one of their employees.

If unsuccessful, the recruiter may attend functions where a high percentage of the companies' employees are known to frequent. Networking at these functions will usually bring a contact. Once the contact is made that person will be cultivated over time and will almost always divulge information that can be used by the recruiter.

Beyond these tactics we enter into the very real realm of the many covert methods used by companies to gather competitive intelligence and it is beyond the scope of this book to explore them all. I can assure you however that the prize is worth their efforts and many recruiters will go beyond moral and ethical limits to get what they want.

Once the recruiter has met with the company employee they negotiate to see if the employee is willing to be bid on any contracts or perm jobs the recruiter is trying to fill or be registered towards future opportunities based on the employee's interests. If successful the recruiter will walk away with a new resume and some general terms of agreement with the employee like; contracts must be one year or more, here in the city, I only do financials, and a rate.

After the recruiter has taken the time to develop a relationship with the employee, he or she will begin to see if other company information can be gleaned from this source. The recruiter will ask if they know any other employees they could approach, if they could meet in the company cafeteria, or if they could get a copy of the company telephone directory.

Another source of leads is resumes. Remember those references on the bottom? Generally, each of those references on the bottom is the name, title and phone number of a senior staff member of a firm which employs IT people. They can be called and approached directly and if they are not interested they may, because of their position, know someone who is might be. Also each of the previous employers listed in your resume represents an excellent lead. From each employer listed, the recruiter can determine what kind of work they do in general, and at least one of the skill sets they require. They can take a pretty educated guess at what to say when the receptionist answers to get into that department.

The Job Order - how they get them, what they look like

When a recruiter calls an employer, he is looking for what they refer to as 'requirements'; that is, any need that company has for a person with specific skills. When the employer gives them permission to recruit on his or her behalf the requirement becomes a 'job order'. This process has several stages.

First of all, who does the recruiter call? A recruiter will either have a geographic territory to cover, or they will have an industry sector such as banking, medical, manufacturing, or they will simply be given a portfolio of assorted clients which is handed on and shuffled with other recruiters from time to time. The recruiter will attempt to contact as many of the key decision makers in each company or government office in their portfolio, industry, or territory as possible, and develop a relationship with them. Eventually someone in the company will give the recruiter a job order. This may happen on the first contact or may take up to a year or more.

What is a job order?

Normally, a job order doesn't include much more info than the job title, skills required, skill level (junior, intermediate, senior), and term or start date. Keep this in mind when discussing the opportunity with the recruiter. He or she will usually just not have more than this to go on. There are exceptions when they will have a full job description, project details, even technical environment details, but very seldom. Do not press the recruiter for this info, go to the interview and find out what you need to know.

It's a numbers game.

Like any sales job, recruiting is a numbers game. It's not about quality, it's about quantity. The recruiter does the same things, over and over, and the one who does the most usually makes the most sales. A typical daily worksheet for a recruiter will have daily/weekly targets along the following lines:

How many clients did you call today?
How many client lunches/coffees did you have this week?
How many client presentations?
How many associations, user groups, or other meetings did you attend?
How many job orders did you get this week?
How many did you bid on?
How many resumes did you get this week?
How many candidates did you call, interview, and bid?
How many placements did you make?

The recruiter will have a checklist he or she works from which breaks the day into sections for client calls, candidate calls, etc.

Your resume is the recruiters lead sheet.

As mentioned earlier, one of the many places recruiters get client leads is from your resume. It contains the company name, job description, skill set, and many other details of every job you ever had. And since they hired you at some point maybe they need another person with similar or related skills now. Also, your list

of references is an even better lead list because it also provides the name, title and phone number of key contacts in several companies.

P.S. If you are looking for work, other people's resumes are also your most valuable information asset. If you want to be a business analyst, look up the resumes of business analysts on the Internet. Find the successful ones and model yourself after them.

Contracting

Terms, rates, deductions, benefits, and OT - always negotiate, always confirm

Contracts exist for two reasons: to comply with investor, insurance, or other business requirements (copyright etc.), and to scare you away from competing in any way with the recruiting company. Since most people don't take the trouble to read them, a recruiting company will often load them entirely in their own favor. They are seldom enforceable or enforced. Most contractors are very naive however and take them at face value. Check them over to see if there is anything you strongly disagree with. Don't be shy about asking for changes to be made. Remember they are motivated to want this deal to happen too.

When will I get paid? It depends.

Be very sure your contract states the exact terms of payment. The type of business relationship you have with the recruiting company affects when you will get paid. If you are recruited as a 'temporary employee', you will likely get paid approximately every two weeks. If you are recruited as a contractor or consultant, that is as a proprietor or partner of a company or as the owner of a limited or incorporated company however, you may not get paid till after the recruiting company gets paid by the employer. In this case normal business practices come into play and you might wait 30, 60, or even 90 days before you see your first pay check, and every one after that. If the recruiting company offers you the latter deal and you don't have three months living expenses in the bank, again, don't be shy to negotiate. Tell them your terms (like "I need to get paid every month") and see if they will comply.

Overtime, off-hours, etc.

If you are hired as a temporary employee, term employee or under some similar term your rights will be in accordance the labor laws of your state or province regarding overtime, breaks, vacation time etc. If you are hired as a contractor or consultant however, you have none of these rights. You work for x\$/hr and that is the end of the deal. If you are hired as the former, be sure to clarify your expectations as often recruiting companies will expect every one of their recruits to forfeit their employee rights. If you do not clarify this up front you may end up having to fight for your rights.

The Term

Regardless of the term, the length of time, your recruiter states the contract is for, understand that your contract could be terminated in a matter of weeks. Almost all contracts will have a clause in them stating that your contract with the recruiting company terminates if the client terminates their contract with the recruiting company. The client contract, which you don't get to see, will almost always state that the client can terminate with five to ten working days notice for any or no reason.

Benefits

Benefits are almost never a part of a contract. Neither a temporary employee nor a sub-contractor gets benefits such as medical or dental or life insurance, etc. Most contractors I have spoken to about this concern do not carry any as the cost to cover yourself is so high they feel it is cheaper to pay these kind of expenses out of pocket as required.

Relocation and living expenses

Whether relocation and living expenses are paid and other services provided varies with every contract. Under special circumstances the recruiting company is willing to cover some of these, but the general rule is they will not. My advice to you is to do what the pros do; calculate the costs of moving to, and living in the remote location, and adjust your hourly rate to cover it over the term.

Rates - which candidates make the most money and why

Rates vary enormously (on average from fifteen to ninety dollars per hour) depending on your skill set, your years of experience, the supply/demand curve of the market for your skills, and geographic location. Notice I did not put education in that previous sentence. One of the hardest things I have to tell graduates who want to contract is that an employer looking for a contractor values only experience. The reason they are looking for a contractor is because they have a time sensitive problem and need someone to parachute in, hit the ground running, and be productive from the get-go. They need someone who has done what they need done several times before, who has worked in an environment as similar to theirs as possible, and needs little or no supervision to complete their task.

Tip: Even if you are still in school or just out, do all the things I recommend in this book. Build your relationships starting now, they will be ready to pay off in a year or two or sooner if you are looking for perm work. "Dig your well before you're thirsty" as networking guru Harvey Mackay says.

Employers don't value work done in school because they perceive there was little or no risk involved, either on your part or whoever you did the work for. So if you are a recent graduate, you are going to have to go permanent first unless you were doing some small contracts on the side in school. By the way, always get paid for any work you do, even if it is really volunteer work. Ask the organization for \$1, or \$100, or whatever you think they will bear. They will usually offer you more. The reason for this is that volunteer work doesn't really count on a resume. By being paid, you can put it in your resume.

Now lets break down the things that effect the rates. First of all, there are basically three kinds of contractors; seniors, intermediates, and juniors. Seniors have five or more years of experience, intermediates have two to five years, and juniors have less than two years. These three factors can affect the rate by five to twenty dollars per hour per category.

The next thing to vary your rate will be the geographic location of the contract. The country, city, state or province; all will effect the rate. Location is closely tied to demand for your particular area of expertise. There may be a high demand for one skill set in one area and little or no demand for it in another. If you want to be earning more money down the road, be prepared to make your decision based on the phase of your career.

So who does make the most money? They have the following characteristics: They do have education (as well as experience), and the more they have, the more they make. They go where the demand is high. As a result they are always adding valuable experience to their resume. They

maintain their personal and recruiter networks. They work hard and are very professional, respectful, and polite.

Bids and Offers

So, having made all the right moves to this point, you finally get a call from a recruiter who wants to submit your resume towards a job order. It may or may not meet the criteria (term, location, role) you gave the recruiter for a number of reasons:

- A. The recruiter calling may not be the one you spoke with and there may have been a communication breakdown.
- B. The recruiter thinks you are a great fit and may be persuaded to live in Toronto instead of staying in LA like you said in the interview.
- C. The recruiter ignores all the previous notes or discussions and calls anyone who has the keywords in their resume.

Regardless of the fit or lack thereof, remember at this point the recruiter is only thinking of the extra cash in his or her pocket for the duration of the contract. They are in a hurry and will try to make you decide while you are on the phone. They are sales people and they will try to persuade you. They likely have scripted responses on the desk in front of them to 'overcome your objections'.

Listen to their offer. If it does not meet your criteria, tell them so and ask them to make a note of it. If the recruiter keeps calling you with offers that don't meet your criteria, tell them to remove your information from their data base. There are lots of other recruiting companies.

If it is a bid for a permanent job.

If you think you are interested try to get as much information from the recruiter as possible. If you give your ok to submit your resume and be prepared to research the company as best you can. Research the company now because it is very likely that if they call back to tell you the employer wants to interview you the interview will be as soon as possible. Ask the recruiter when he or she will be getting back to you. They very likely will not call you back if you don't get an interview towards the job because that action no longer has any potential commission for them. Call them back in a week and follow up. If you do end up getting called for an interview, some recruiting companies will simply tell you when and where to show up, others will invite you in for coaching, tips, and general prep for the meeting which may include videos and a mock interview. It really depends on the recruiting company policies and the recruiters style.

If you go for an interview and they call you with an offer that does not meet the criteria you gave them, remind them again and proceed as suggested previously in this chapter.

If you go for an interview and the recruiter calls you back with an offer that does meet your criteria, be prepared to accept or decline. If you decline, be prepared to justify yourself because the recruiter will be pissed. If you don't have a good reason to decline the offer he or she will probably not call you again. If you accept, they will tell you to report for work based on terms you would have already discussed and you will probably not hear from the recruiter again. They will get on with invoicing their client.

Be aware that they may have a 30 to 90 day money back guarantee or other such agreement with the employer if you don't work out. If the employer decides not to keep you, everybody goes back to square one and you all start over again. Except for one thing. The recruiter may have to pay back the commission they earned on your placement. Keep this in mind in the event of this scenario because they will be feeling burnt and not keen to repeat the process.

Otherwise, if they employer decides to keep you on, you should not hear from that recruiting company again. They usually don't follow up and they have no further business with you. For them to call you in a year and offer you a job somewhere else is considered bad business because they often will get future placement opportunities with that employer. However, it may happen and is fair ball in today's market. If they or any other recruiter calls, tell them you are permanent now and will call them when you are ready for a change.

Once you get a permanent job, do not stop doing all the things recommended in this book. Maintain and grow your contact network and your recruiter intelligence network. These days the phrase 'permanent job' means one lasting two to five years. Within that period the technology will change, you will change, the economy will change, something will change, and you will be looking again. If you have kept up with all the activities I recommend here, you will be well prepared to make a move.

If it is a bid for a contract position.

If it is of interest to you, be prepared to discuss the following details...

- Business relationship

There are any number of business relationships you can have with a recruiting company and each has its pros and cons. Some recruiters will deal with you as a contractor only if you are a limited or incorporated company while others are open to dealing with you as a temporary employee, or as a proprietor or partner. Each of these has significant risks and benefits. They are too complicated for me to cover here, they deserve a book of their own. As the rules vary from one geographic location to another, you must consult with an accountant regarding the legal and tax implications and business obligations of each model for the location you will be working in.

Before you agree to any one business relationship be sure to ask:

- When will I get paid? As anything but a temporary employee, you may not get paid for up to 90 days!
- How often do I get paid?
- What deductions will you be making?
- What is the understanding regarding overtime? Some companies will not expect you to take OT rates even if you are a temporary employee and legally entitled to them!
- Does the agreement include any benefits?
- What is the termination clause? I have seen more than one person give up a career with a major corporation or government to flip into contracting only to have the new employer execute his ten day exit clause because things have changed and they no longer need the contractor. The contractor is on the street with no right to employment insurance, social benefits, or other support. Payment may still be months away. I highly recommend you do not become a contractor if you can not have three months living expenses in the bank (not credit) as a reserve from the get go. Keep it there.
- Ask for a copy of the contract so that you can review it prior to giving the green light. Recruiter contracts go from one extreme to the other and some will try to own you and everything you ever did or will do from the cradle to the grave while taking responsibility for nothing should there be any

problems. Most recruiting companies are totally honest and ethical but many are not. Cover your butt, always assume you are dealing with the latter.

Always negotiate everything! In my experience most contractors and employees get less than they could simply because they do not ask for more. Ask for more money, ask for things to be changed in the contract, ask about expenses.

The prima-donna, the guru, and the geek - who gets hired, who doesn't, and why

In the IT business, as in any business, there are a few stereotypes that come to mind.

The Geek thinks it's all about technology, about what you know about Java, or Linux, or Perl. They think personal factors like appearance, communications skills, or service, are beside the point. They don't care about their relationship with you because they don't care about you. They serve the computer, not the customer. In their view, the customer is simply a support droid for the computer system, and usually the one that causes the most problems. The geek's career is self-limiting because as we turn the corner on the millennium all employees must be able to work with the customer. You may be a wiz at the bench in the back room but if you can't cut it when called to the front counter you will only be going so far.

The Prima Donna thinks its all technology too but they do care about their relationship with you. They need you to recognize what intellectual towers they are. If you do, they will only take it as a matter of course. If you don't, they will attempt to intimidate, threaten, and abuse you into doing so. The prima donna's days are pretty well over now really. They can still occasionally be found firmly attached to the bowels of some mainframe operating system or application where they have been for a decade or so. But as the mainframes go, so do the prima donna's. They may upgrade their technical skills from DB2 to Oracle, remember they still think that's what it's all about, but they are mystified when they don't ever get past the interview.

The Guru has come out of the shadowy realm of computers along with the computers themselves over the past decade. The Guru is now the Pro; at the expert level in the systems he or she supports, with a professional image and communications style. Simply put, they have the right package; they always get the contract.

But what about the rest of the contractors out there who are none of the above? There are all kinds; from those with little or no education or experience who just want someone to give them a foot in the IT door, to the older person with outdated skills who has decided they could use some extra money, and the average type in the middle; a junior with a university or college degree or a certificate from a private institution.

I can tell you one thing about them getting a contract, a job, or getting ahead in their career: personal qualities are number one! Listening skills, making eye contact, smiling, good grooming, speaking clearly, being busy and organized, being calm and comfortable in your surroundings, these are the types of things employers find attractive. This bit of advice is often very hard to hear for people who think they are being hired for their technical skills. They often just don't believe it because they don't want to; they aren't comfortable with the human side of things, that's why their techies. The fact is the more uncomfortable they are about it, the more they need to attend to it. To get ahead, emulate the pros and the ones who make the most money.

Income tax, insurance, setting up a company.

I am not going to address these issues. They vary too much from one location to another and they cover far too much ground to cover in this book. I recommend you contact someone you know who is already an independent contractor and lives in your area and discuss it with them. If you don't know any yet, look around your school or place of employment, they are there somewhere.

The Permanent Job

Using recruiters to find a permanent job is a much simpler process than contracting because once the employer they find hires you the recruiter is out of the picture. You should have no further contact from the recruiter until you are again looking for work. The recruiter will normally not contact you again because they want to place more perms with your employer and raiding customers employees is not on the list of 'best practices' in the recruiting business. Of course there are exceptions to every rule and there are recruiters, usually independents, who will place you with one employer only to call you after the guarantee period is over and offer you another job.

Though the recruiter is reluctant to call you, be sure you call them. Maintain your network. There are four reasons for this. One; you may not like your new job. Two; your new job may not like you. Three; you need to maintain your intelligence regarding salary levels and technical trends so you can ask for a raise or get training. Four; in two to five years, you will almost definitely be looking for another "permanent" job.

Job fairs and on-campus

Job fairs are good places to go because you can get your resume to a lot of recruiting companies and employers at one time. They are fast paced assembly lines however so go prepared to see as many agencies and companies as possible in the given time. Job fairs are usually held in hotels or conference centers with the companies in booths or hotel suites. The recruiters are lined up behind tables with very brief interview question lists in front of them. They have one or more staff out 'greeting' passers-by to drag them in to be interviewed. The interview usually lasts less than five minutes. The objective of the recruiting companies is to get as many resumes as possible during the fair. Your objective is to get your resume to every company at the fair. Get as many interviews as possible because, surprisingly, the recruiters do remember many of the people they interview.

On-campus recruiting is no different. Though all companies like to give the impression that it is somehow special that they are at your school, it is still just a way to harvest a large number of resumes. The proceedings are the same as job fairs.

The art of the interview - knowing the recruiters checklist

When a recruiter calls in response to your submitting your resume they will be making one of three types of call. They will be calling with an offer to submit your resume towards a job order, to interview you over the phone, or to make an appointment for an in person interview. The latter two types of interview are conducted by some agencies to qualify you for future opportunities.

Either on the phone or in person the recruiter will want to confirm at least the following:

- When are you available for work - how much notice do you require?
- What geographic area are you available for?

- What kind of work are you looking for?
- Are you looking for permanent or contract work or both?
- If you are looking for a permanent job, what salary do you want?
- Are you are interested in contracting and if so:
 - how do you wish to conduct business - as an individual, a proprietorship, or a limited/incorporated company?
 - what hourly rate are you seeking?
 - what minimum term will you consider - three months, six, a year?
 - are you willing to travel?

They may also ask:

- Are you registered with any other recruitment agencies?
- Are contacting employers directly, if so which ones?
- Are you bidding yourself directly on any contracts?

It is in your best interests to provide answers to these and any other questions they may have with as much detail as possible. It will save you both from wasting a lot of time when an offer arrives. The recruiter wants to know what other employment seeking activities you are doing in order to prevent your resume going to an employer from more than one source. Generally if you have applied yourself or been bid by another recruiting company, they won't bid you as well. The recruiter has time now to chat now, they won't when they are calling about an opportunity.

During this interview the recruiter is also checking your interpersonal and communications skills and, if in person, your grooming. They will be determining your awareness (marketability) of current corporate values such as customer service, teamwork, initiative, and the ability to promote yourself or your ideas. These are the personal characteristics and qualities most commonly given as job order requirements by employers.

In general IT recruiters are not qualified to conduct technical interviews however some recruiters will ask specific technical questions at this time regarding the kind of work you are seeking. Because they do not have technical backgrounds, they usually do so by flipping to a page in a book with questions for each type of work or skill set listed. For example if you are interested in Oracle development work, they flip to the "...databases/Oracle/developer" section of the book and read off the questions.

Here are a few tips regarding interviews. You don't have to like them, or even agree with them, but they have stood the test of time.

- Everything trim, clean, and tidy including hair, nails, clothes, shoes, and breath. Do not wear cologne or perfume, many people have allergies or asthma reactions to these substances.
- Dress like the President or the First Lady or someone close to them closer to your own age.
- Make eye contact, smile, and give a firm handshake. Smile even if it is a telephone interview.
- Keep smiling. Find one thing you really like about the interviewer and keep that in mind.
- Say nothing negative about anyone or anything.
- No swearing.
- Use the persons name. Be as respectful as possible.
- Have copy of your resume and list of references with you.
- When answering a question, always answer in the affirmative if possible, give a quantified example from previous employment, and then stop talking.

How to manage your relationship

Keep in touch with your recruiters. Call them every three months to remind them of your interests, even if you are not currently available. Make sure they have a current copy of your resume. Drop by their office if you're in the area. Send them a card once in a while. When you do contact them, be sure to remind them of your skill set, they may not remember the details. Take a lesson from the advertising industry and 'position' yourself in your recruiter's mind. That way when a matching opportunity comes up, they will think of you first.

Resumes for recruiters

Just as each resume you send to each employer is different, the resume you make for recruiters will be different again. To best understand the how and why of formatting a resume for a recruiting company, you need to understand the process it will be subjected to. The recruiter destined resume is going to go into a database. It needs to be structured in such a way that it will most likely be found by the database search engine. These are either engines which search every word of text in every resume in the database or they search fields which have been filled in when the resume was entered. Recruiters searching resume databases search first for specific skill sets based on the job order they are working from. An example of a search for someone who can do Windows programming for a building environmental controls company might look like this: "MCSE and MFC and Visual C++ and assembler and HVAC". If this fails to turn up any resumes they will then try every imaginable combination and anything possibly related. They will look for people with experience in embedded systems, machine control experience, or other hardware related programming experience. The more creative they can be at this point the more likely they are to find a candidate.

When they execute their search the computer will display a list of resumes that contain the words they are searching for. Where a resume comes up between the top and bottom of the search results list is often based on how many times the key words are found in the resume.

Often they will eliminate some at this level depending on what other details are included in the list. These other items shown will depend on what database they are using and how it has been configured. It will be different for every recruiting company. The search results list may display additional fields like willingness to relocate, a preference for contract or permanent work, whether they are currently working or not, etc. From this list the recruiter will select which resumes he or she wants to see.

Once a resume comes up on their screen they scan it very quickly. Recruiters are in a hurry. They know they are not the only one with the job order from the employer and they know it is most likely that whoever responds first will win the commission. It has come up in response to their key word search so they are looking now looking to see where the key words they entered show up. If what they see indicates a possible match with their job order requirements, they will read any notes which may be filed along with the resume. The notes will be made by the recruiter or his or her coworkers-workers every time they contact the candidate. If the notes contain no bad news, they will then phone the candidate.

Formatting your resume

Based on the above process, here is the way to format your resume for recruiters.

Make your 'objective' into something that says what kinds of work you are willing to do and where you are willing to do it. That's all the recruiter cares about as far as your objectives go.

In the next section put a short functional summary of bulleted accomplishments. Use a half a dozen examples at most. They should be specific, quantifiable, and show you improved the efficiency, economy, or effectiveness of your employers in some way.

If you have little experience and your strong suite is your education, make that the next section. If experience is your strength, make it the next section after the objective and put education after it.

In the education section simply put the full names of your degrees, diplomas, certificates, etc. and the dates awarded and the institutions. Transcripts etc. are for after an employer contacts you.

In the experience section list each job by:

- dates worked
- company name
- your title
- your responsibilities, duties, and accomplishments
- the platforms, environments, tools and applications you worked with

In this section the recruiter and the recruiters client will want the details. If you say you were a UNIX administrator, which UNIX? What version? How many users?

Do not listen to people who tell you your resume should be two pages at most. That's fine for some industries but in the IT field people want all the details. If you have had a long career use as many pages as you need to provide them.

Use key terms several times.

Be sure to use the words you want noticed as often as possible. This will cause you to come up higher on the list. For example, if MCSE is your foot in the door, use the term several times in the resume.

Use variations of your key terms.

Be sure to use as many versions of each of your key terms as possible. If Visual Basic is one of your key words, also use the term 'VB' in your resume. Also be sure to describe skills sets generically. For example if you use the term 'Java' or 'C++', also use the term 'object oriented'.

Include a skills summary page.

Be sure to include a skills summary either as part of the body of your resume or as a separate page. The skills summary is a very useful way to satisfy the recruiters need to qualify your resume when he or she has been given a requirement like, 'must have two years or more of Adobe PhotoShop experience' by an employer. The skills summary should list every operating system, application, tool, methodology or responsibility you have had by:

- version number
- education only or years of experience
- when last used
- level of ability

Including a skills summary maximizes your probability of being found by a data base search because of the high number of key words it represents yet is appreciated by the recruiters because it helps them do their job.

Finally, list any professional organizations or groups you are a member of.

Do not include any information which is not directly related to your work in your resume. Do not list hobbies or interests or memberships other than work related memberships.

Regarding those references

Always put 'Available upon request' in the references section of your resume. Do not list the names and contact information in the resume. This is something you need to keep control of as the information will change over time. References will retire or move to other jobs or phone numbers. Also, you may want to use different ones for different jobs. Have a half dozen or so ready to go at any one time. Make sure their information is still correct. Be sure to call each of them and inform them that you are using them as references. This is of vital importance because they may not be the right person for a number of reasons. One is that they may say bad things about you! I have had the references someone listed call the candidate in question a thief and a liar. That was after they closed their office door so they could yell.

Recruiters will not always call the name listed. If you listed someone's name they will obviously be giving you a good reference. So the recruiter might call someone else in the company or department.

If you have a past position you don't want the recruiter to call about, don't list it. If anybody asks what you were doing during that time, say you were nursing a grandparent, having a baby, or traveling.

How to submit your resume.

If you plan on submitting your resume from a recruiters web site also submit it via the postal service or hand deliver. Electronic versions of resumes submitted via website forms often come out formatted so badly that the front line recruiters won't bother to try and read them.

If you submit your resume via email there is at least a fifty percent chance or greater that they will not be able to read it because of compatibility problems. Send a hard copy in the mail or hand deliver. I know from experience that the majority of resumes sent via email come out as thirty pages of little boxes and other gibberish. The recruiter wont send you a note saying please re-submit. He or she will just hit the delete key. No time. Next.

Always mail a hard copy or hand deliver if at all possible. I have seen a resume take fourteen days arrive when mailed from within the same city. The job was long gone. Always follow up to see what your file copy looks like once in the data base.

Post your resume on the web.

The technical recruitment scene is moving quickly onto the Internet. Because the community performs most of its work on computers and is geographically mobile, electronic communication is the favored medium. Every IT professional should have his or her resume posted to the web and promoted to the search engines and resume sites. In addition to the intelligence gathering benefits mentioned in the chapter, 'Why you need to use recruiters', posting your resume will provide you with further intelligence regarding your field of expertise. It can also be a simple method of providing potential employers with references, transcripts, or samples of your work.

There are a few rules to learn before you post your resume.

Use the words 'resume', 'CV', and 'curriculum vitae' on the document. Internet searchers will often use them as search terms.

Do not include any non-employment information on your resume web site. All too often you will see resumes posted with links to personal information. Put on the site only the information you would take to an interview. Would you take a picture of your cat? Information about creative anachronism? Your Star Wars FAQ?

Also do not post information which may cause you to be eliminated from further consideration. Do not include a picture of yourself (or anything for that matter). It tells the employer your sex, your age, and your race. Do not give them any information which could indicate your marital status, your sexual orientation, or your religious or other social affiliations. I have seen all these things and more on resumes on the web.

Do provide a copy of your resume and samples if appropriate. Do tell them any employment preferences you have i.e. your geographic location and willingness to travel, your role preference, or the kind of work you are interested in. Provide an email address and a phone number (recruiters are in a hurry).

Experience has made me aware that many IT professionals do not have a web site or know how to make one or put one up. It is dead simple. If you do not know how I highly recommend you learn. I spent several years immersed in the web and multimedia-media business and met a lot of web designers. Every one of them learned the same way; they found web sites they liked and reverse-engineered them. All you need is a web browser, a basic HTML book and a freeware HTML text editor and you're away. I have seen people pay hundreds or even thousands of dollars to learn web page design from some shrewd marketing company when it should cost no more than fifty bucks, the most you should pay for a 'web basics' book.

Once you have the web page made there are many places to post your resume for free on the web. There are several kinds of places to post. First you should post to sites like Geocities, which is just a place where you can put up a site for free. Post to as many of these as you can find. Next, post your resume to all the top job boards like Monster Board, DICE, etc.. Then there are resume sites for specific markets like Oracle professionals or COBOL gurus, or JAVA heads. Seek out and post to the appropriate ones. There are news-groups where you can post according to specific markets and geographic scope. Finally, join any associations or user groups, either local or virtual, that have anything to do with your line of work. Their web sites often have employment related web pages you can post your information to and becoming a member allows you to do so. Recruiters search all these places. .

If you don't want to learn to create and post your resume to the web yourself, I guarantee you have a friend or associate who will be glad to do it for you. Don't forget to offer to give something in return. Maybe the local private sector school has students who will do it for free as a sort of co-op thing. If you have to pay someone to do it, it should cost less than \$100 to have it done and posted.

There is one more step. Once you have a web page posted you need to register it with the search engines and web directories. gain this is a simple matter. Every one of them has a submit button with instructions to follow. Also there are a number of web sites which will submit your site to the top ten search engines and directories or so for you for free or to hundreds of them for a fee. This is plain grunt work so you either do it yourself (if so read up on HTML meta-data tags) or pay someone to do it. It should cost from \$100 to \$300 depending on what they do for you. I suggest you use one of your small, local Internet Service Providers for this service or search for the best deal you can find on line.

What job finding strategies to spend your time on

The HR industry estimates that only about 10% of all permanent jobs ever get advertised. In North America right now with a significant shortage of supply, there are about 500,000 high tech jobs unfilled. The ratio of contract jobs to permanent jobs is at least ten to one. So in reality there are roughly five million high tech employment opportunities in North America and 4,500,000 of them will never make the careers section of any newspaper. How much of your job finding or career development time should you be spending on newspaper ads? 10%. And what do you do for the other 90%? Network. That's how the other 90% of all job placements occur.

Scanning for and responding to newspaper ads is fairly straightforward but not everyone understands the correct process to maximize the opportunity any advertisement represents. Certainly you want to send your resume, custom crafted and with a custom covering letter, to every job you want to apply for, but it should neither start nor end there.

Before we get into tactics of how to proceed, you need to understand the hiring process which is not a matter of fact, but a matter of psychology. When companies ask me to find them a new employee, before they ever give me the technical specifications, they give me their corporate values and they make it clear, each and every one of them, that they are not interested in anyone, no matter how much of a wizard, guru, or wonderkind they are, if they do not have the following:

- Good grooming, dress, and appearance
- Good communications skills: oral and written
- Customer service orientation
- A positive, can-do attitude
- Willing to take the initiative and go the extra mile
- Team player

The maturity to acknowledge and accept that the values listed above are required, and the ability to adapt and present yourself accordingly, is the mark of the professional and sets them apart from the competition.

Technical people, by nature of their psychological type, often make the mistake of assuming their skills speak for themselves; that they are being hired to work with things, not people, and therefore appearances and personalities have no bearing on the task. That is the mindset of the industrial age, when tasks were increasingly broken down into separate units, when task proficiency was king, and 'that's not my job' mentality was born. It is the mindset which has dominated the last two generations of North Americans but it is obsolete in the current project oriented, virtual world of work. Employers cannot afford, in a real financial sense, the luxury of single task workers, and must have people who can adapt to the fast paced, competitive markets of the information age.

So from the get-go, you need to be demonstrating these values to any prospective employer you approach. As soon as you see an advertisement for a job you are interested in, or decide to proactively approach a company, you want to find out all you can about the it. Usually their home page will tell you all you need to know. Receptionists and secretaries can still have a great deal of power and influence over their managers decisions and are often consulted regarding their opinion of a candidate. Make every effort to get yourself down to meet her. Be pleasant and courteous on the phone, be sure to mention your name. Drop by and ask if there is any company literature. Be sure to mention your name and why you are there. Observe the style of their space, their cloths; identify their cultural values. Try to find out the name of the person hiring. After you have reviewed all the material, call and ask to speak to the person who will be doing the hiring and try to set up an interview where you can ask details about the position. You won't often get away with this step but make the attempt anyway, it demonstrates initiative and discernment.

After you have gathered as much information as you can, submit your custom resume and cover letter. If the application is in response to an advertisement, submit your CV as per the instructions. Creativity at this point can often be seen in a negative light. Save it for after you get the job. If at all possible I recommend you hand deliver your package. Mail can often arrive after the competition is closed. No matter what medium you use to submit; mail, email, or fax, always phone and confirm your submission arrived in a readable fashion.

If you don't hear back when you expect to, call and inquire as to the status of the opportunity. If you get an interview, always send a thank you card within 24 hours. If you are informed you did not get the job, ask why you didn't. Call back in two weeks to a month and see if they are looking for any more people. This is a critical step which almost everyone overlooks. It is also a way to find out if the candidate they hired did not work out and they are looking to replace them. This happens quite often. You may have been number two on the list.

Networking - the #1 way people find a job

The most likely way you will find the job you want or your next contract is through personal networking. By personal networking I mean attending appropriate events, functions and activities where it is likely you will meet people who can help you, calling people and asking them to meet with you to find out more about their company or their industry and developing relationships with them over time.

This approach requires a shift in mindset prior to beginning. To network successfully you must not think of yourself as looking for a job! Let me explain.

When you approach someone to network, to meet with them, if you give them the impression you are needy, wanting something from them, they will put up their defenses and deny you access. The best example I can give is this: think of how you feel if you meet someone who is clearly, perhaps desperately, looking for a new boyfriend or girlfriend. This almost always puts the other off because we feel there must be something wrong here, there is danger. Most healthy adults can discern this agenda from a variety of non-verbal clues; the posture, tone of voice, or mannerisms of a person. Most women can tell a man on the make a block away. Most employers can tell by the tone of your voice when you call them if you are needy or not. Our inner agenda is always communicated in non-verbal ways and it is impossible to prevent it. The solution is not to try to prevent it, as many people do, but to change it. And it is really not that difficult.

Rather than think negatively in terms of, "I am not looking for a job", it is more effective to think positively, "I am not available for employment just now because...". Fill in the blanks with rationales like, "I am on a contract till March", "I am still in school", "I have a personal project to complete", whatever works for you. The key is to find some valid reason you are not available and take it to heart. This does two things; one, it changes your mindset from being needy and two, it actually makes you more attractive to an employer! How can it do that? Consider again the boyfriend/girlfriend situation. Have you ever noticed that when you have a boyfriend or girlfriend there are lots of options available but when you become single they seem to evaporate? The reason is that a person who is not available has several things going for them: They are perceived as having value to be taken, rather than requiring value be given. They feel more secure and therefore unconsciously exude more self confidence. Their behavior towards others is more open and honest, they act themselves. All these things make a person more attractive to the opposite sex.

These same psychological factors come into play when you approach an employer. If you approach them as someone who is busy, self confident, who has value that is not available, you will find them much more open to meeting with you. So, once you have the critical step of the mindset dealt with, you are ready to begin the tactics of networking. There are basically five steps:

Decide which companies and related institutions represent your market. By related institutions I mean schools, associations, government offices, etc. that have anything to do with your field. Map out a strategy of which ones you are going to approach.

Research each company as described in the previous section of this chapter. Find out who the manager is of the department you are interested in.

Once you have done your research, here is a five step process to follow:

Step 1. Calling the prospective employer.

Call the company on the phone and ask to speak to the person you are attempting to contact. When the receptionist answers use this format: "Hi (her name if you have found it out) this is (your name), may I speak with (the managers name)." Use a tone of friendly, familiar authority with her. Once you are put through, introduce yourself again, and explain why you are calling: you are planning on making a change/move later in the year, you are not available right now, you would like 15 minutes of the persons time to discuss trends, skills, changes in his or her industry. There are two key psychological events you must cause to happen at this point: you must bring down their defenses, and you must flatter them. You do this by making it clear you are not available right now, and by telling them you have identified them as someone who is in the position to know important information. If they are receptive, book a time, say thanks and hang up. Do not chat at this time! It can dilute your chance of getting in to meet them face to face and this is crucial as will be explained.

Step 2. The Interview

When you meet with them, show up on time and stay for only the 15 minutes. This shows them you respect their time and that you are both busy people. This apparent business and organizational skill is again seen as attractive by prospective employers.

When you are with them, be sure to have a pen and paper and write everything they say down! This is a critical step in showing them respect, attention to detail, and flattering them.

During the meeting, first, thank them again for their time. Begin by asking them about themselves. How did they get into the business and what did they do right to get where they are? What would they do if they were starting over in the business today? Where would they be starting and what would they be aiming towards?

Move the interview next to the trends in their industry. What important changes are happening within and what changes on the broader scale are going on which may influence the industry? What trends will influence employment? What skills are currently required? What education is valued? What experience? What personal characteristics? How will the trend changes influence those requirements?

Finally, move the interview towards questions about the company itself? What are the companies objectives, strategies and values? What do they see as their unique niche in the market place? What is their competitive advantage? What kinds of people do they hire in terms of education, experience, and character? What values are they looking for in perspective employees?

This line of questions will easily eat up your fifteen minutes. Lastly, be sure to ask them if there is anyone else they know that you could speak to. Get the contact information from them. Try to get one or more

names. Do not miss this step! This is the true key to networking because the people they recommend are the best leads you'll get. When you call the leads you can say, Mr. or Mrs. So-and-so suggested you call. This is the best way to get in to see anybody. Remember, referrals are the number one way people get hired.

Finally, ask if there is anything different you could be doing in your research and interview process? Any feedback they give you could save you from continuing to do some major mistake in your process. Take their advice with a grain of salt however as it may simply reflect a personal preference on their part. Make the change only if you agree with it and feel comfortable with it.

During the interview, notice:

How the person is sitting, try to mirror them if you can. This is a non-verbal way people tell each other they like one another, by mirroring their body movements.

What choice of words they use in relation to visual, tactile, or audio senses. Do they say they 'have a gut feeling', 'grasp an idea', and want 'people with heart'? Do they 'see what your saying', have a 'vision for the company', and 'read people pretty well'? Do they have 'an ear to the ground', value 'good listening skills', and can 'sound out' candidates pretty well? Whatever of these three communication styles is reflected in their speech, use similar terms to create your responses.

What length of sentences are they using? Short sentences indicate a concrete thinking style, someone who takes the world as a matter of fact and does not look for deeper or intuitive meanings behind things. Longer sentences indicate a thinker, shorter ones indicate a person who prefers action. Craft your responses accordingly. If the person does use longer sentences don't let them ramble. You only have 15 minutes. Keep moving on to your next question as soon as you can.

Office and personal style. Find clues to their values to use during the interview or in follow up communications. If you can, ask direct questions about something in the office that has bearing on your line of questions.

When your time is up, thank them again for their time and leave with a firm handshake, a smile, and good eye contact.

Step 3. The Thank You Card

Within 24 hours, send them a thank you card. Try to find a card that reflects some point from the interview or information from your visit. If that's not convenient, try to use the information to write the thank you note. Hand deliver if possible.

Step 4. The Callback

After two to four weeks, call them back with a valid question you have as a result of interviews with other people. You can ask them all the same question on the call back however it must be one which you really do want their opinion on. It must be sincere. Again, they will detect insincerity over the phone if you try to fake this.

The purpose of this call is simply to reinforce yourself in their minds. One of the reasons there are five steps to this process is to position yourself in the employers mind. In the advertising industry, positioning refers to who or what a person thinks of in regard to specific cues. Who is the largest producer of computer software in the world? Who sells the most hamburgers in the world? Which company makes the most oats?

The answers to these questions represent the position the companies have achieved in you mind. They do it through repetition and association. What you want is to be the first person the employer thinks of when opportunities for employment arise, whether it is on the golf course or at the office.

Advertising companies know that they can create a need through this process and it can work for you as well. New positions are often created in order for an employer to bring on someone they want.

Step 5. The Letter.

After about three months of your initial contact with an employer, send them a letter indicating your availability, your research results, and why you want to work for them.

Use the information you gathered from the interview; values, goals, characteristics, etc.

Inform them you will be calling within a week to ask if you can get together with them to discuss joining their team. Hand deliver if possible.

Once you have completed these five steps, if you don't get a job offer right away, you continue on building a relationship with your contact. Contact them about every three months from now on. Try to get together for coffee or lunch (plan on paying). Try to have something to give them. This is a two way street. For example, pass any leads you get on to them that might represent possible business for them. Do this without ever disclosing what would be considered competitive intelligence you have been given by another prospective employer as part of your job search. If you tell Joe things about Mary's company, Joe assumes you will tell Mary things about his.

This strategy takes about three months to show results. By the time you have been doing this for three months, you are a very busy person. The process often yields results indirectly. You may not be a good fit for a particular employer you are cultivating, but when a good fit does come to their attention through their network, he or she will think of you because of your position in their mind. If you have done a good job of things, they will recommend you.

Once you get a job or contract, never stop this process. You will need another contract and the best time to be networking is when you are working. These days, a 'permanent job' means you will be working for the same employer for two to five years. Somewhere in there either you will leave, or the job will. Have a goal of meeting with someone regarding your career on at least a weekly basis.

Amazingly, almost no one does this. Ask any employer you know how many candidates send them thank you cards or keep in touch. So if you do, you will stand out from the competition by a mile. The strategy, the five step approach, is not apparent to the employer - if any of it is, they will be very savvy individuals and appreciate your professionalism.

For the employer

If you are an employer, I highly recommend using recruiting companies. They can save you a lot of time, trouble, and money and generally don't cost anything if they don't deliver. Though there are recruiting companies that require you to pay a percentage of the fee up front, most do not charge this way. Consider the time and you spend on recruiting new employees and the possible costs of not having the tasks that person on the job. It easily adds up to thousands of dollars and you cannot have the reach of a national recruiting company without spending tens of thousands on advertising.

Like the candidate seeking employment, I recommend you read the sections of this book directed at them, and use some of their strategies and tactics. Generate a network of recruiting companies and use them as an intelligence network regarding salaries and technical trends. This also allows you to initiate a more competitive process with them. If they try to insist on exclusivity, tell them to take a hike.

Be sure to deal with recruiters on your own terms. When they tell you what their rates, guarantees, and procedures are, negotiate everything, especially rates. Rates can vary from as low as a few thousand dollars to up to 30-50% of the employee's first year annual salary. If you are a small employer, there are many recruiting companies that will work for you at a reasonable cost. A \$50k/yr employee is worth the \$5k-\$10k per placement you will pay the recruiting agency. If you're working in a large company you already know this game and that a \$25k fee for a rare, senior candidate will be justified with your next sale.

The Beginning

Start again at the beginning of this book with a pen and paper and draft out a project plan, including dates, to do everything I recommend here. You will soon see that you are going to be a very busy professional. And so will everyone else.