



SPIKE HUMER



DARREN STEPHENS

GREAT WORK GREAT CAREER

How to Create Your Ultimate Job and Make an Extraordinary Contribution

STEPHEN R. COVEY and JENNIFER COLOSIMO

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MAIN IDEA

Now is the perfect time to be creating a great career for yourself – even if you’re currently unemployed.

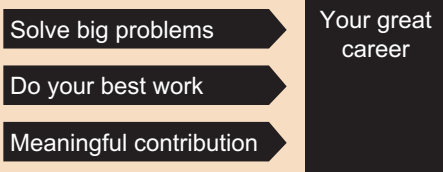
As the economy moves from the Industrial Era into the Knowledge Era, everything is in a state of flux. That means it’s no longer true the only way to succeed is by climbing the corporate ladder with a lifetime employer. Instead, there are no limits to what you can do and how you can shape and mold your own career. It’s now easier than ever before to use your initiative to put together a great career for yourself – something you look back on with pride because it involved doing great work.

To create a great career:

- Understand how to define and then build what you personally would term a “great career”.
- Know the answers to two questions: “What will be my contribution to the world?” and “How will I deliver or make that contribution?”
- Learn how to master the mechanics of the job search process so you maximize your opportunities.

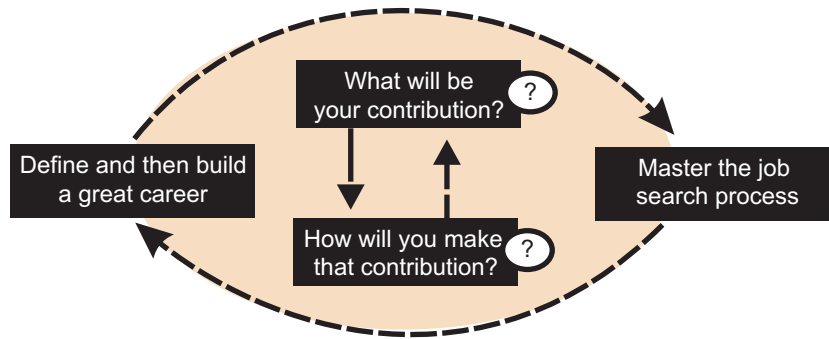
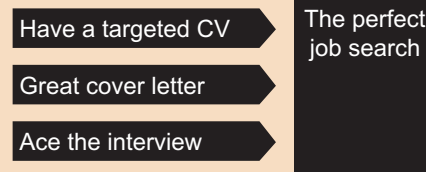
Define and then build a great career Page 2

There are loads of different ways you can define what is your “perfect career” but when you get right down to it, the perfect career for you will probably be one in which you get to do three key things:



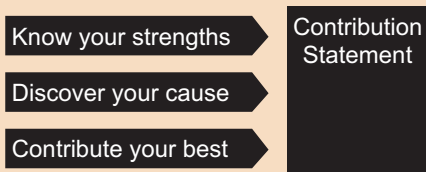
Master the job search process Pages 7 - 8

Too many people approach searching for a job with a “one-size-fits-all” approach. If you aspire to get the right job, you’ve got to be smarter than that. You need to get three elements right:



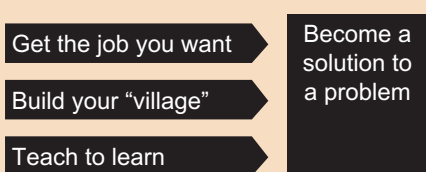
What will be your contribution? Pages 3- 4

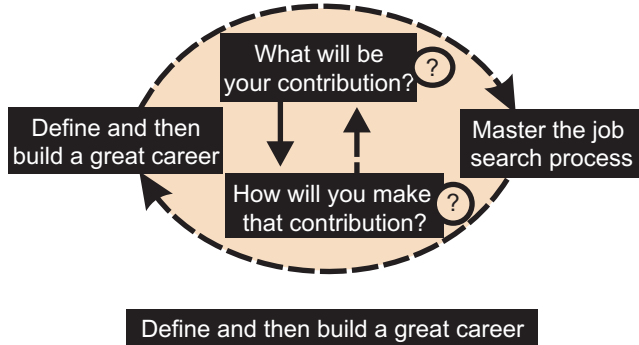
You have to sit down and develop a written Contribution Statement – a statement which sums up what you have to offer to the challenges which energize you the most. Developing a Contribution Statement will involve three elements:



How will you make that contribution? Pages 5 - 6

Once you’ve developed your Contribution Statement, your focus then moves to how you’ll position yourself in a job where you can actually make that contribution. This will be a matter of overcoming the barriers and then becoming a solution to a critical problem for your employer. Three elements are involved:





Meaningful contribution

A person who has a great career makes a distinctive contribution to his or her organization. You want to make a difference because you're very good at what you do. Because of what you generate each day, the world is a better place, your company is stronger and people or clients you care about get the benefits of the value you add.

The idea of working towards having a great career may look like it's out-of-reach at first glance but don't be too quick to reach that conclusion. Why should having a great career be restricted to the rich and famous? Why should great careers only be available to those in specific professions – perhaps doctors or others who save lives? The simple truth is anyone and everyone can have a great career but very few ever take the time to figure out just what this term means for them.

"A person with a great career makes a distinctive contribution and generates a strong feeling of loyalty and trust in others. Anyone, regardless of title or position or profession, can do these things. Fame, fortune, unusual gifts – these are not the issue. A great career does not rise from the need for outside affirmation, but from within you, from your own curiosity, from your own unique mix of talents and passions."

– Stephen Covey and Jennifer Colosimo

Now is a great time to be working towards making your great career happen because we're in the middle of moving from the Industrial Age to the Knowledge Age. Workers in the Industrial Age were considered to be "small cogs in a large machine." The way to succeed back then was to get a job with a stable company and work your way to the top if you were lucky. You would stay with one company for your entire career and then retire with a pension. In today's turbulent job marketplace, that model doesn't hold true for most people. Corporations have downsized and shed workers with such regularity nobody but an optimist today believes they will stay with one company forever.

The dynamics of the marketplace means today, there are lots of problems coming to the surface. People who can solve these problems will do well. There is no need to be bound by an old set of assumptions about careers which no longer applies. You're free to design and then build a career which will unleash your highest and best talents and passions. The first step in starting down that path is to sit down and figure out what a great career means to you.

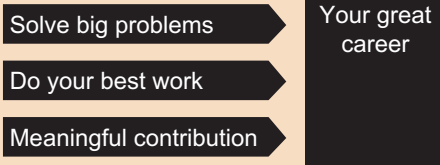
"In the Industrial Age, workers were treated like machines. They had 'user manuals' called job descriptions. You didn't expect or even want workers to contribute anything unique or unexpected, any more than you wanted a toaster to do something 'unique' to your bread. But a knowledge worker is the opposite of a machine. She chooses the problems she works on. She creates new solutions. She recognizes no limits to the contribution she can make."

– Stephen Covey and Jennifer Colosimo

"Mediocre employees are poor leaders, poor team players. They get passed up for pay rises and promotions. They're generally frustrated and bored. They find little or no satisfaction in their work. So why not commit to excellence? You'll contribute more. You'll make more money. You'll generate more credibility and have greater opportunities."

– Roger and Rebecca Merrill

There are loads of different ways you can define what is your "perfect career" but when you get right down to it, the perfect career for you will probably be one in which you get to do three key things:



To have a great career, you need to start with a clear mental picture of where you're trying to end up. When you first start out, you probably just want to get any kind of job so you can pay the bills and survive financially but eventually the day comes where you want to do more than eat – you want to achieve something you can be proud of. This is what defining a great career is all about.

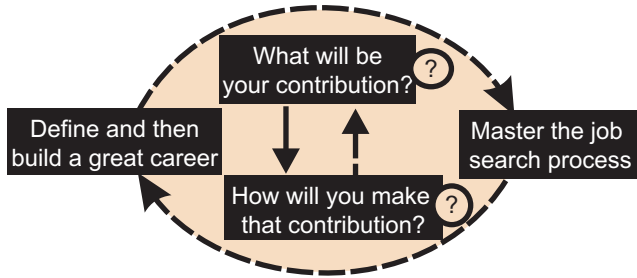
A great career is an individual thing. The images and aspirations that term conjures up for you will be different to what it suggests to someone else. It doesn't matter what line of work is involved or even how lucrative your career is. Your definition of what constitutes a great career will come from within. When you get right down to brass tacks, however, chances are good your personal definition of what is a great career will incorporate three elements:

Solve big problems

You want a career where you get to tackle some very important issues. These issues may not be of the "bring peace to the Middle East" variety, nor do they have to hold the potential of winning a Nobel Prize. You may be happy to focus your career on much more modest aims, but the whole point is great careers are built around the aim of solving big problems.

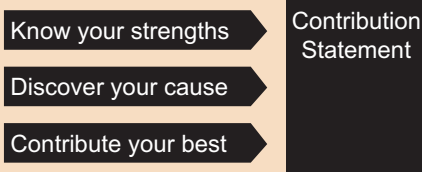
Do your best work

A great career will stimulate you to dig deep and do the best work you are capable of doing. It won't be a job where you show up and then watch the clock until you can go home and do something more interesting and appealing in your spare time. Just the opposite. When you have a great career, you will sit back each day and think: "I can't believe I'm getting paid to do this!" When you're doing something you're passionate about, you will be anxious to get to work each day. You'll do things you're proud of and happy to be judged by.



What will be your contribution?

You have to sit down and develop a written Contribution Statement – a statement which sums up what you have to offer to the challenges which energize you the most. Developing a Contribution Statement will involve three elements:



A great career will get created first in your mind before it is realized in the physical world. You have to start your journey with a clearly defined end in mind. Envision what you want your great career to look like rather than accepting what comes by default.

“Your great career starts when you stop asking questions like ‘How do I get promoted?’ and start asking ‘What is the difference I want to make? What is the legacy I want to leave?’”

– Peter Hawkins and Nick Smith

You write a Contribution Statement to answer those questions. Put differently, your Contribution Statement will become the rudder of your career. It will dictate which opportunities you pursue and which you avoid. It will specify the value you want to add, the people you want to serve and the kind of difference you want to make in the world. Developing a robust and personalized Contribution Statement will be your first step on the pathway to a great career.

“People who are only looking for a job have resumes. People who are looking to make a great career have Contribution Statements. I encourage you to write Contribution Statements for every position or project you take on, as well as for your overall career.”

– Stephen Covey

“You can’t be what you can’t see.”

– Maya Angelou

“Most people live in a very restricted circle of their potential being. We all have reservoirs of energy and genius to draw upon of which we do not dream.”

– William James, Philosopher

“Knowledge Age workers must learn to ask, ‘What should my contribution be?’ This is a new question in human history. Traditionally, the task was a given. Until very recently, it was taken for granted that most people were subordinates who did as

they were told. The advent of the knowledge worker is changing this, and fast.”

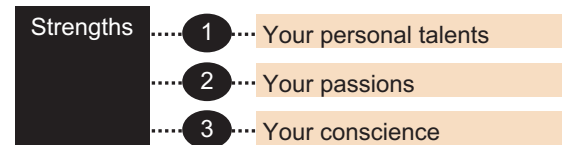
– Peter Drucker, management consultant

The prevailing paradigm of the Industrial Age was the job description. Workers attempted to mold themselves to what the employer specified needed to get done. That no longer works all that well in the Knowledge Age because things are changing too quickly. If you keep sticking to a traditional job description, you will end up becoming irrelevant and stranded on the sidelines. To move forward, you’ve got to identify what your unique portfolio of skills and competencies are and then figure out how you can best leverage your blend of strengths to make the greatest possible contribution. The best place to bring all of this material together is to put together a Contribution Statement.

To develop your own personalized Contribution Statement, you need to put down in writing three things:

Know your strengths

First, you need to list the portfolio of unique strengths you can leverage in your career. Broadly speaking, these strengths will be divided into three categories:



- **Talents** – are the unique knowledge, skills and competencies with which you can make a contribution. These are the tools you have available to get things done. Everyone has a unique set of talents. To figure out yours, answer these questions:
 - What do you do find easy to do that others struggle with?
 - What do other people ask you to do because you’re good?
 - What do my peers tell me I’m good at?
- **Passions** – the things you do which make you feel good deep down. Again, everyone has these but you may never have really taken note. Again, answer some probing questions:
 - What do you spend your free time doing?
 - What do you do that energizes you?
 - What do you read about and follow the most?
- **Examine your conscience** – because this is a moral compass which will whisper what your true responsibility is and what contribution you should be making. This may sound a little touchy-feely but the undeniable fact is you’ll only ever build a great career if you’re doing something you’re proud of because it aligns with your own personal belief system. To probe your conscience, answer these questions:
 - What is my real responsibility to my organization?
 - What do I owe my co-workers?
 - What do I owe my customers to deliver?

Identifying and articulating your strengths is an important step in transitioning from an Industrial Age worker with a job description to a Knowledge Age solution provider. You need to have clear a picture of the tools you have available.

“One notable distinction between wrong people and right people is that the former see themselves as having jobs while the latter see themselves as having responsibilities. Every person should be able to respond to the question ‘What do you do?’ Not with a job title, but with a statement of personal responsibility.”

– Jim Collins, management thinker

Discover your cause

Contribute your best

In today's economic climate, it's all too easy to have and apply a scarcity paradigm:

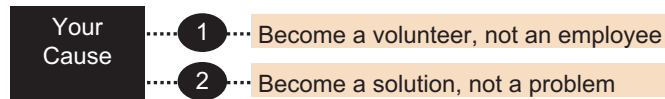
- Nobody's hiring. Companies are laying off thousands.
- The only jobs available are dead-end jobs that lead nowhere.
- I have no connections and therefore no chance.

A better way to operate is to adopt an abundance paradigm – the turbulence of the new economy is generating an amazing array of new ways to earn a living which have never before existed in the history of the world:

- Companies face big challenges, and need problem solvers.
- I can take charge of my own career and opportunities.
- I can create a job which leverages my talents and passions.

This is the difference between sitting around and lamenting the state of the current economic climate and seizing the initiative. Discovering your cause is all about finding something you want to do because you believe it's the right thing to do. In a way you rethink your job and make it evolve it into a cause.

Discovering your cause has two aspects:



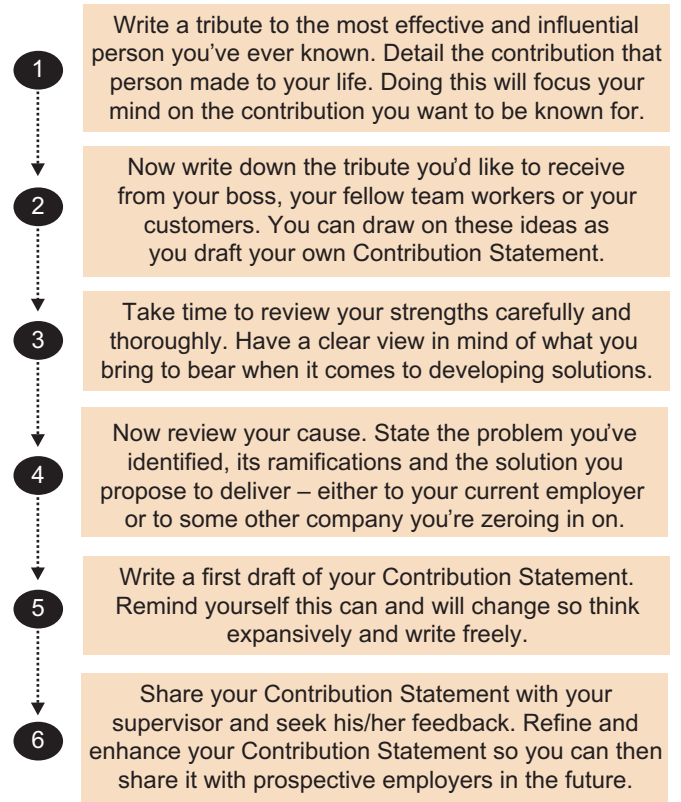
- *Become a volunteer, not an employee* – which is the difference between “working for a paycheck” and “volunteering to get something important done”. Instead of being externally motivated, you're motivated from within to pull off something great. Nobody ever fires a volunteer because they have so much energy and passion they become invaluable. Volunteers don't make decisions to keep a boss happy. They figure out what's the right thing needed to get the best result and get into action. A worthwhile cause doesn't have to be along the lines of “feed the world.” Instead, you can make your cause what customers are trying to do when they buy your company's product or service. The possibilities are unlimited.
- *Become a solution, not a problem* – meaning adopt a solution mindset. Every company is always on the lookout for the best solutions to their problems, even in tough times. If you have a viable solution to a problem that must be solved, they will hire you. To find out what those actual problems are, you'll need to start with an insatiable and deep curiosity. You have to research out and then answer the question “What is the job this company absolutely needs to get done which is not happening at present?” Once you come up with an idea, do a reality check by figuring out the answers to “What is the measurable impact of this problem?” and “How often does this crop up?” Armed with that information, you're then ready to start pitching your solution.

A good spin-off benefit of discovering your cause is when you understand the real challenges a business faces, rather than going along for a job interview you can approach it more as a “need-opportunity presentation”. You can go along and describe the need the company has and how you can help them meet it. If you're smart, you can suggest they engage you for a trial period at no expense until they are convinced your solution works and provides value. Rather than finding a job, you're creating an opening which you are the best qualified person to fill. That's a very savvy way to get great work and build a great career.

Once you've catalogued your strengths and discovered your cause, there's one more mental transition you need to make before writing your Contribution Statement. You need to transition from a job seeker mindset to a contributor mindset. This requires that you move from viewing yourself as a powerless person seeking a job to a powerful contributor.

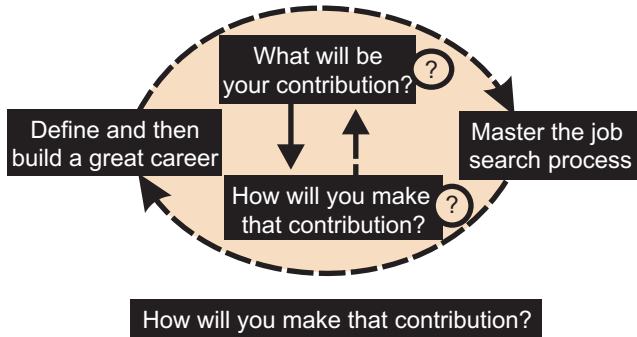
A good way to make this transition is to take note of an example from the world of naval engineering. A large container ship needs a huge rudder to change direction. To move the enormous rudder on ocean liners, a tiny second rudder called a trim tab is used. When the trim tab moves to one side, it creates a vacuum which then pulls the big rudder around. To make a difference for a large enterprise, you have to resolve to become a trim tab. You will make a small adjustment in what happens which will have significant flow-on effects. You do this by identifying an obvious need and positioning yourself to do something about it.

Armed with a sense of how and what you will contribute, you're then ready to write your Contribution Statement. This may appear daunting but it's not if you approach it this way:

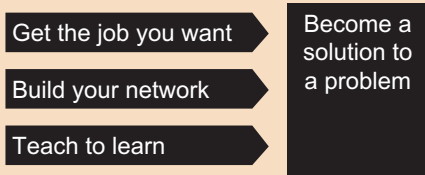


Sample Contribution Statements:

- Most software projects fail because of constantly evolving expectations so I'm going to borrow from my background as a little league softball coach to help my team maintain their commitment to a goal while continually adjusting their approach to match changing conditions.
- As a teacher, I notice many high-risk students drop out of high school so I will call on my background as an actor to make my classes so entertaining and educational that I will capture and hold their interest until they graduate.



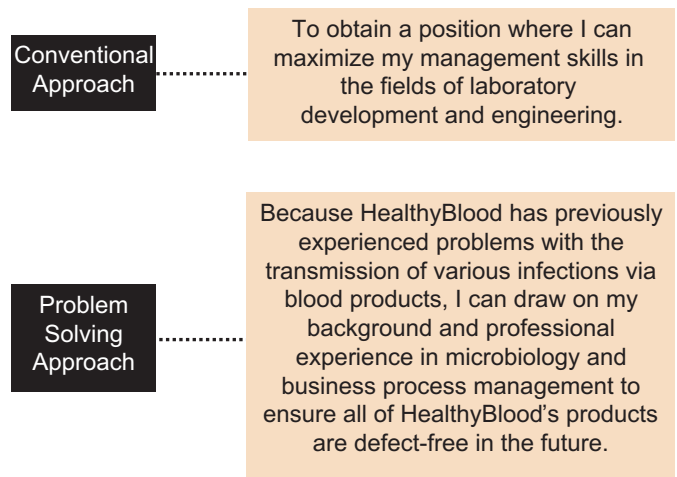
Once you've developed your Contribution Statement, your focus then moves to how you'll position yourself in a job where you can actually make that contribution. This will be a matter of overcoming the barriers and then becoming a solution to a critical problem for your employer. Three elements are involved:



The good thing about going to the effort of developing your own Contribution Statement is you now have a tool which can be used to expand the role you play with your current employer or with someone else. Don't hesitate to share it with your current team members.

"Don't be afraid of being thought presumptuous. Whenever anyone goes to his or her associates and says, 'This is what I am good at. This is how I work. These are my values. This is the contribution I plan to concentrate on and the results I should be expected to deliver,' the response is always, 'This is most helpful. Why didn't you tell me earlier?'"
 – Peter Drucker, management consultant

Where a Contribution Statement really comes into its own is when you're preparing for an employment interview. Contrast the difference between the traditional resume item and a problem-solving Contribution Statement with a fictional company called HealthyBlood Ltd. which is looking to hire a quality assurance manager:



Get the job you want

Creating your Contribution Statement is one activity. Actually making it happen is the next challenge, particularly if you don't currently work for the company which needs the solution you have to offer. So where do you start?

"Finding the job you want is 90 percent research! No company wants to hire just for the sake of hiring, but they all want to solve their problems."

– Stephen Covey and Jennifer Colosimo

You have to get to work figuring out what new challenges this turbulent business environment is throwing up for the company you want to work for and then start researching what solutions you can offer in those very areas. This will require that you show initiative and hang in there – even in the tough moments when everyone else is consigned to the fact it's a very tough job market. You have to keep beaver away until you break down all the barriers which crop up.

The job you want may not even be with another organization. If you can see the writing on the wall for what you currently do, don't sit around and wait until you get laid off. Be much more proactive and get to work expanding your own Circle of Influence – the people, know-how, tools and capital you have to work with.

Here's an example of how this approach might play out:

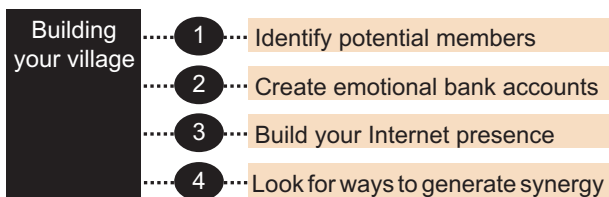
- A man working as a technical writer for a credit-card processing company noted times were tough and his position was likely to be made redundant soon. He researched why the company's revenues were down and realized there was a serious cash-flow problem as more customers were failing to pay their bills on time.
- He went to management and volunteered to work in the collections department – the coal face of the problem. He researched how other companies dealt with this problem and made suggestions to apply those same ideas – which improved performance in generating cash flow.
- He was curious about why this problem arose in the first place and found high-risk customers had been given credit cards. He did more research in his own time into how the company could have avoided the problem in the first place rather than dealing with the consequences later on.
- He talked with other people who worked for companies facing similar challenges and went to a couple of seminars on the topic. He also became familiar with all the new technology and the latest tools which were available in this area. He developed a budget for what would be required to address this problem in a comprehensive way.
- He then developed a business case for why the company should make that investment.
- He took that business case to his employer and volunteered to drive the implementation project.
- His offer was accepted and the company leaped at the chance to stop this problem. The fact his proposal was well researched and carried a clear-cut return on investment was vital to this acceptance.
- As he was obviously the most well-informed person in the company to lead the project, he moved to heading up the new initiative. He was eventually able to add thousands to the company's bottom-line profits running a project which was custom designed for his own skill set.

Build your "village"

In the Industrial Era, job seekers were encouraged to network vigorously – to establish working associations with as many people as possible as a way of getting your foot in the door at various companies. This concept of seeing people as tools you may need to use at some stage has been largely superseded now. In the Knowledge Era, it's important that you build a village of people you value.

A village works differently to a network. In a network, people know how to contact each other. In a village, people know each other well and take action to help one another. There is much more effort injected into building and maintaining long-term relationships. Village connections are more genuine as opposed to the superficial associations of networks.

What's involved in building a village? Four suggestions:

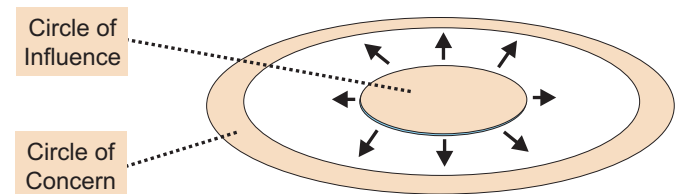


- *Identify potential members of your village* – from those you already serve or support or those who help you in various ways. There will probably be ten or so rather obvious choices you can think of right away. Start with them and expand outwards from there.
- *Create an emotional bank account with each person* – figurative bank accounts into which you make deposits when you help them and vice versa. Work hard to build up credit with each person in your village by doing things to help them before seeking their help for yourself. Build relationships and make deposits by doing things which are consistent and aligned with your Contribution Statement.
- *Build your Internet presence* – by starting your own career blog. Put your Contribution Statement on your blog and showcase your resume. Regularly post new ideas, personal discoveries and accomplishments to your blog. Try and take a few minutes every day to post new stuff and to keep your resume up-to-date. Invite people within your village to share their ideas and comments. This blog can be a great resource when you're looking for a job because prospective employers can get to know you quickly and concisely. You can also write and then publish an e-book which encapsulates what you know about a specialist topic. That will also impress any prospective employer.
- *Look for ways to generate synergy* – perhaps everyone in your village can work together to generate new advances in your field. If you start a global conversation going around a subject you're passionate about, all kinds of things can happen. For example, a scientist with a passion for wedding photography started a blog with tips for taking and editing pictures, reviews of new cameras, galleries of photos and more. His blog is so well done hundreds of thousands of people read it. The fact he has now started his own wedding photography business seems almost incidental. When you start building your own village, all kinds of new and creative possibilities emerge.

Teach to learn

While it may sound counterintuitive, the best way to learn how to create a great career for yourself is to teach someone else how to do that. Anyone with experience knows that in these kinds of situations, the teacher learns far more than the student ever does. If you can find a co-worker, a friend or a family member who wants to head down the career development path and get to work teaching them all you know, you will find your own level of understanding will deepen as well.

As you teach, encourage the other person to ask lots of questions. Not only will answering those questions help crystallize and focus your own thinking, they will also bring to the surface some new ideas you may find worth following through on in the future. It's surprising what the impact of looking at an old problem with fresh eyes can sometimes be.



There's also another great flow-on benefit of teaching. You have what can be termed a "Circle of Influence". Inside this Circle of Influence are all the people you've drafted into your village, the know-how, tools and capital you've acquired and all the various assets you have available to work with. As you work towards creating a great career, you are in effect expanding your own Circle of Influence outwards.

Your Circle of Influence is surrounded by a much larger "Circle of Concern". The Circle of Concern will incorporate all of the barriers to your personal career success. A Circle of Concern will include worries about the state of the economy, concerns your skills are becoming outdated because of technology advances, questions about the financial viability of your current employer – and so on and so forth.

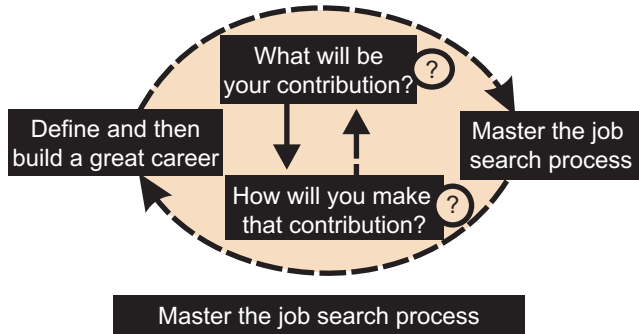
Most people fall into the trap of being overwhelmed by their Circle of Concern. A much better idea is to focus on growing your Circle of Influence and to put your best energies into this. As your Circle of Influence becomes bigger and stronger, the Circle of Concern will take care of itself. Teaching others is a great way to do this. As you help other people find ways to expand their own Circles of Influence, you will also find your personal Circle of Influence is growing as well.

"It's a natural principle that you cannot achieve anything truly worthwhile alone – at least not in the world of work. The energy you invest in regularly and frequently building your village will pay dividends not only in advancing your career but also in personal satisfaction. You will get into the habit of service, which is the foundation of a great career. With a synergy mindset, you will learn from the best people in your life. And when you need them, they'll be there for you because you have been there for them."

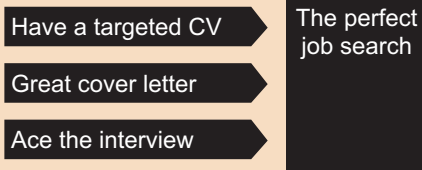
– Stephen Covey and Jennifer Colosimo

"It is impossible to have a great life unless it is a meaningful life. And it is very difficult to have a meaningful life without meaningful work."

– Jim Collins, management thinker



Too many people approach searching for a job with a “one-size-fits-all” approach. If you aspire to get the right job, you’ve got to be smarter than that. You need to get three elements right:



Have a targeted CV

Back in the “good old days”, a generic resume or curriculum vitae(CV) worked just fine. These were self-centered documents which listed your skills, education and experience. They were in effect a product brochure for you as a potential employee and they needed to be generic so you could apply for many openings.

Today, to get a job in the Knowledge Era, you need a targeted resume rather than something which is trying to be one-size-fits-all. The key features of a targeted resume are:

- A targeted resume is aimed squarely at one prospective employer.
- Your resume is the product of some extensive research into the organization you want to work for.
- A targeted resume reflects the mission and values of the organization doing the hiring.
- Targeted resumes are specific. Instead of stating “Increased sales leads and cut marketing costs,” you include more detail: “Boosted leads to 238 from less than 30 per week while cutting marketing costs 9%.”
- Since a targeted resume is created with just one specific position in mind, it is rewritten and tailored to emphasize experience and abilities in areas which have been highlighted in the job vacant listing.
- A brief profile is given along with a list of your skills. Anyone should be able to grasp what you do in 10 seconds or less.
- You should include a selection of your most important career accomplishments.
- Targeted resumes do not include anything about references, hobbies or personal information. Those things can be covered later in an interview if required. A targeted resume contains only that information which is relevant.
- Your targeted resume should be brief – one page. You can add another page which describes your achievements in more detail after that if you want.

Targeted resumes are much more effective than their generic counterparts when you’re going for a specific position. If you know someone inside the organization, you might be in a position to bypass the normal job application process. In this case, you can take your targeted resume a step further and submit what can be termed a “highly targeted resume”.

A highly targeted resume will contain:

- A summary statement of the problem you know the organization is trying to solve by hiring someone new.
- A proposed Contribution Statement – the solution to the problem. This is what you suggest could be done about the problem if you were hired.
- A brief statement of your background qualifications and experience which give confidence you know how to deliver the solution you have proposed.
- Details about your track record solving comparable problems for other organizations.

Obviously highly targeted resumes are focused on one opening and one decision maker. They are the result of some reasonably comprehensive research and analysis. Highly targeted resumes are for all practical purposes a Need-Opportunity presentation in written form.

To increase your chances of success with the highly targeted resume approach:

- ✓ Always start with the bottom line results you aim to deliver.
- ✓ Be very specific about the problem and the benefit or solution you have to offer.
- ✓ Make everything quantifiable – use the company’s real numbers but don’t include any confidential information.
- ✓ Go into an appropriate level of detail about the solution you are proposing.
- ✓ Put everything you have into demonstrating how much value you can and will deliver.
- ✓ Focus on when the benefits will be delivered and how they will be measured.

Remember, you can really only use the highly targeted resume approach if you’ve done your research and have a strong relationship with a company insider. You have to meet these prerequisites to even get into the game. Winning the position you want is another challenge altogether.

“You can use this approach to create a job, even when they’re not hiring. If you can provide a compelling solution to a problem that matters to them, they’ll find the resources to bring you on board.”

– Stephen Covey and Jennifer Colosimo

“The old Industrial Age paradigm tells you that you’re at the mercy of the economy, the industry, the boss, the job description, the standard operating procedure and everything else that makes you a victim. One the other hand, if you adopt the Knowledge Age paradigm, you free yourself. You don’t look for a job; you look for a significant problem to solve or an exciting opportunity to leverage. You are not a ‘job description with legs,’ but a thinking, creative human being with unique and irreplaceable talents. You can make a contribution no one else can.”

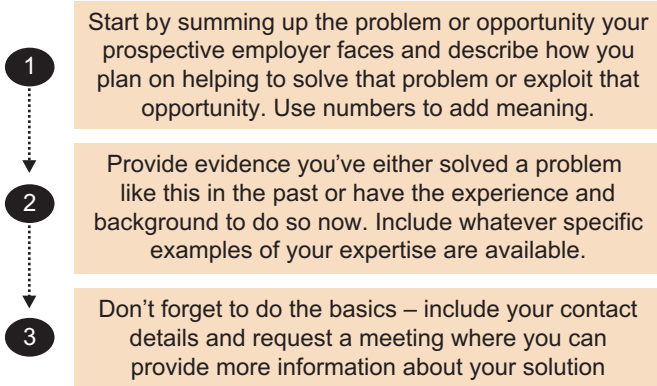
– Stephen Covey and Jennifer Colosimo

Great cover letter

The cover letter is your opportunity to introduce yourself, provide your resume, tell why you're applying for a job and ask for an interview. An effective cover letter should start the conversation off on a good note.

As for resumes, generic one-size-fits-all cover letters have done their dash. Employers today are looking for cover letters which have some pizzazz. Think of your cover letter as a one-page proposal highlighting what you have to offer.

Ideally your cover letter should follow a similar approach to that used in your resume:



Since nobody has much time these days, you have to do all this in a one-page letter. This means you'll have to get all your thoughts organized beforehand so you can cut to the chase rather than throwing in all and sundry in the hope something sticks. Be focused and concise and expressive about what you want to happen next.

Keep in mind your ultimate aim is to come across as a problem solver. Your letter is a one-page description of your proposed solution so structure it that way. You want to send the signal you're a living, breathing problem solver capable of doing your own thinking. You want the people doing the hiring to read your letter and decide they want to meet you in person. Your cover letter should be focused on securing that in-person interview, nothing more.

Ideally, you want your letter to be hand-delivered to the decision maker. In other words, you want someone on the inside who will vouch for your credibility. Hand-delivered proposals are always more appealing and stand a better chance of getting you on to the interview list. Do the best you can to make that happen.

"If you've done all this and you're still out of a job, what now? Then it's time to create your own job. Begin a blog. Make a podcast. Publish your own newsletter. With the experience and information you've gathered in researching and presenting yourself, you've become something of an expert in your field. So make a name for yourself. As people come to know about you, you will become a resource to them – a resource that ultimately someone will pay for. This is also the time to fill your skills gap, which can in turn jump-start your job search. Take the initiative. If you can't get an interview, you just haven't made the right case to the right people yet. Keep working at it."

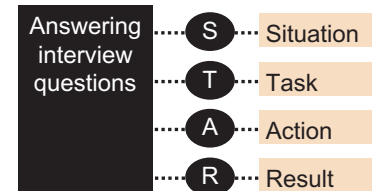
– Stephen Covey and Jennifer Colosimo

Ace the interview

When you get invited to an interview, approach the meeting with the mindset you are a problem solver, not a job seeker. Ask in advance if it would be alright for you to present a few ideas during your interview. Then get to work creating a great Need-Opportunity presentation where you demonstrate your knowledge of their issues and how you suggest dealing with them. An interview is also a great opportunity to do more research and to validate what you've figured out thus far.

Some things to keep in mind about job interviews:

- If you're still researching out the problem you plan on solving, use the first interview to gather facts. Then ask if you can return and give a brief presentation based on what you learn.
- Try and think beforehand about specific situations where you have used your skills to benefit your previous employers. Be prepared to tell a quick story about each instance.
- Always try and figure out why the interviewer is asking you about something. If they say, "Tell me about a time you used this skill," answer them briefly and then ask: "It sounds like this issue is important to your company. Could you tell me more about that?" Get more data all the time.
- A good approach to answering interview questions uses the STAR approach:



Say an interviewer asks: Tell us about a time there was conflict at work and what you did to respond to it." A STAR response might be:

Situation: One of my key strengths is I am good at making smart decisions. At one time, I was leading a sales group as the company was trying to figure out whether we should have geographical territories or organize by key accounts. This was a political issue with everyone in one camp or the other.

Task: I was assigned to research the question and decide.

Action: My analysis showed dividing the sales team by key accounts would be more productive because it allowed the right sales teams to focus on the most appropriate key clients. I was able to win over the naysayers by showing them doing this would bump up our bottom line by enough to move everyone to a higher bonus level.

Result: We increased sales by a third the following year.

- When you're answering questions, be careful not to ramble on. Be concise and then stop talking and listen. Remember, this is a data gathering opportunity.
- Periodically during the interview, pause and ask the interviewer: "Is this information helpful? Am I providing you with what you're after here?" By doing that, you show you care about the interviewer's point of view and that you're not blinded by your own agenda.