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## **How to find a job in today's market**

**This document is the opinion of the author only and is based on a thirty-year career managing the appointments of Executive level candidates into the professional marketplace and as a result is geared towards professionals.**

**It should provide advice and guidance to all levels of people, but some of it may be less relevant to those in other careers or who are yet to embark upon one. Take what bits of it work for you, but where possible, do as much of it, as hard as you can. Even in a good market, getting a job is a full-time job and this is not a good market.**

**I sincerely wish you well in your quest to find a job.**

**Natasha Cleeve**



**CEO, Cleeve Executive**

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## **Introduction**

If you are looking for work, you are in good company. There are an astonishing number of people who are in the same position as you, many of whom have no experience of either being out of work or unable to secure another role relatively easily.

It is worth remembering that nothing has changed. You haven't suddenly failed to be every bit as good as you always were - this is just symptomatic of the time, so try to avoid falling into this way of thinking. You are not old, over the hill, or unemployable. The market is tight and you are every bit as valuable as you always were and you will be again, I promise you. This isn't a platitude. I have worked through three recessions and we always bounce back. Right now, companies that have been cushioned by furlough, are now no longer. Far from making appointments, many of them are cutting their costs to the bone to stay afloat longer until they either make it or they don't and when they do make it, they will start hiring again and you need to be first in the queue and have the right mindset to be impressive.

Unfortunately, there are many more people about to join the pool that you are currently in, which makes it imperative that you move as fast as you can to secure the work that is still out there. There is still work out there....not as much, but there is and why shouldn't it be you that gets it?

To do that, you will have to work as hard at getting a job, as you do when you have a job. I have said for many years it is a full-time job to get a job, so apply yourself consistently and you will have the advantage over those who do it half-heartedly.

So, this is how you do it. Good luck!

There are three routes to market: -

- 1) Recruitment Agencies**
- 2) LinkedIn**
- 3) Your network (its bigger than you think)**

## **1. Recruitment Agencies**

The usual route to market and many think the only one, but they are wrong. Even in a good economy, recruitment agencies typically only manage about a third of the work that is actually out there.

There is always a cost applied to using a recruitment firm, so if someone can be hired through a recommendation, or any other means that circumnavigate having to pay a hefty fee that is often the preferred route for hiring entities.

However, people do and will continue to find work through agencies, so this is what you need to know in order to engage with them appropriately and get the best out of them for you.

There are 41,000 recruitment firms in the UK at the moment and they practise two types of recruitment:

One is Retained Search, which is geared towards the most senior executive roles. The client pays a proportion of the overall fee upfront to retain the exclusive services of the recruitment firm to find them the very best person for job, whether they are on the market or not. This is where the term ‘headhunting’ comes from and it is only ever used for permanent recruitment.

It is a high-end service and you should get a better and more professional approach, but even so, they will have very little interest in you as a speculative candidate. If they want you, they will come and find you and they don’t tend to meet too many people for no good reason. Those of you who have dealt with them in a client capacity are likely to have had a very different experience with them now you are a candidate, as they now often won’t take phone calls or respond to emails. My advice? Don’t distract yourself unduly and waste too much of your time and effort trying to get them to notice you. Incidentally, they account for only about 10% of all recruitment activity.

The other 90% of recruitment firms practice Contingent Recruitment, by which I mean there is no fee for them unless it is their candidate that gets the job. (‘Bums on seat’ is the charming colloquialism we use). Only then do they get paid for the work they do. They are highly sales driven and almost always work in competition with each other. They could be on a recruitment framework as a preferred supplier with a client, which at least guarantees they get a steady stream of work, but often they are on there because they have agreed to work at very low price - promised volume over margin. Typically, four or five firms at any one time might be on a preferred supplier list, so it is very competitive. If they are not on a framework, then it is a constant round of cold calling and KPI driven sales targets for them to win work, so when they finally get given a job you can imagine it turns into an even more competitive process. The word ‘bun fight’ springs to mind. Of the firms briefed, only one will get paid for their time....so it’s not too much of a stretch to imagine how such a poor process can drive such a poor candidate experience.

When they win the work, that is when they engage with you and many of you will have been on the receiving end of that experience. They may have technology designed to do the initial sifting before you even get to speak to a real person (I shall cover that in the CV) and when you do get to speak to one, it is worth knowing that the average age of a recruitment consultant in the UK today is 23 years old. Particularly for executive level candidates, this is a significant challenge as many have neither the training or indeed the life experience to understand what it is you do.... Or even some of the brands you have worked for – they weren’t even born when you were there.



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What is critically important to know is that it is this group of people who hold the power of veto over you and get to decide whether you go forward for the job they have advertised or not. You may know yourself to be absolutely perfect for the job, but if you fail to communicate that to them effectively, they cannot understand. That makes it your job to help them understand, because if you do not, you have not understood it is they who are your audience, not the person that will ultimately hire you. They are the gatekeeper and next in line comes HR and only after that, does the person that might truly understand what it is you actually do.....get your CV.

Now you understand why a CV is so important.

### CV

It may well be that you have to tailor your CV for specific roles, but for a generic CV that can be understood by your audience....Who is your audience? Oh yes, it is both the gatekeeper, who are the people who have the least real knowledge about what it is you do.....as well as the highly knowledgeable client that is going to hire you. It therefore needs to work at both levels. Please avoid descending into jargon, acronyms, meaningless strings of words that fail to tell the people reading it, what it is you actually do! You only keep someone's attention for about the first half of your first page.... before their eyes glaze over and they lose attention if they don't understand what you have written. (Helpful to keep in mind here, that agencies are in a competitive rush to the finish line, so they can't waste precious seconds, trying to work out what it is you do and uncovering it finally somewhere down in page 3).

The first thing to keep in mind is that a CV is not a biography of your professional life. It is a marketing document that you must gear very specifically towards drawing out your key abilities and achievements and its purpose..... is to be interesting enough that someone calls you. That is mostly its purpose – to get someone to ring you up. Once they have called you, you can fill in any additional detail you need to but I advise resisting the urge to put everything you have ever done down in writing. Honestly and truthfully, they will not read it. The last ten years is where we look, and we look at the rest only to reassure ourselves of your career projection.

Your first half page therefore should have everything in it you want your audience to know about you. My recommendation is to do it thus:

No margins, no fancy boxes, no colours or even too many fonts or bolding. Keep it plain and simple and easy to read. It only gets reformatted anyway.

At the very top, your name and contact details. Nothing else. Do not tell them where you live (or anything personal at all come to that). It allows people to judge you – if you live in Birmingham and there is a job in Watford, it is for you to decide whether you are prepared to travel that far, not them on your behalf.

Next is 'Profile'. This is your summary of you. Your 'elevator pitch' about yourself. Most people hate writing this because they cannot think what to say, but it is very important. In it you need to tell them what you ARE. By that I mean, what job do you do... what is your job title? You are selling something...yourself...as a product. You therefore need to be crystal clear to your audience what it is. If you fail to do that, why do you expect them to come up with the right answer? Resist the urge to gloss over what you actually are. For example, I don't particularly like saying I am a Recruitment Consultant – 'Headhunter' sounds so much better, as does 'Global Talent Acquisition Specialist'; but wipe away all the guff and I am a Recruitment Consultant! My job in my elevator pitch is to tell them why I think I am the best one there is. And that it your job too. Don't call



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yourself ‘a seasoned professional’, or ‘an exceptional and inspiring leader’ or anything else that fails to convey what you do for a living. Remember, your audience (and your gatekeeper) is 23 years old. They don’t get it and you don’t get to pass Go.

In your profile you also need to summarise why you’re good and the qualities you possess that makes hiring you a simple choice. Don’t fluff it out with your industry sector knowledge – that comes later – make it a right between the eyes, high impact, positive statement about you. If you’re a strong directional leader, say so. If you lead through engaging people, say that too. It helps for us to know your character and style, as culture fit is one of the most important criteria we apply to hiring. There’s a place for everyone, so don’t try and be something you are not.

Academics go next if you have them. They go there because they deserve to be there, and it immediately lends context to what you have just said in your Profile. If you don’t have impressive academics, no matter. Instead you put three bullet points of your highest impact achievements. We are trying to build a picture of you in this first half page of how impressive you are. These will both do fine.

At this stage it is worth reminding you that every job has a spec attached to it and it will ask for essential skills and desirable skills before going into detail about the role itself. That is the spec the recruiter will be looking at and the ‘essential’ skills will be the words they use in their search criteria. I suspect this is where ATS tracking If they get too many names doing that, they will filter it by using the ‘desirable’ skills list. Therefore, you need to make sure when they search for you, you are in the list, and when they try and filter the list, you remain in it. (Remember, contingent recruitment firms are in a race to find the best person first - it is in their interests to make the list as small as possible, so they get to that person more quickly).

So, to overcome that challenge, I suggest this for the last part of your half page. This will also assist to some extent with the ATS systems used by some firms, designed to sift you out as well.

Put three columns running from left to right, and head them ‘Role’, ‘Skills’ and ‘Industry’.

**Role** – the job titles people *should* be calling you about. Job titles change meaning from company to company, so here is your space to tell your audience what jobs you could do.... whether you have held the actual title or not. Make sure these are job titles you are likely to see in a job advertisement. A Project Manager in a company like BP for example, might be more than capable of doing a Programme Management role, but have just never held the title. So, put it in.

**Skills** – these should be your core skills – e.g. supply chain, commercial contract management, project management, organisational design etc. – whatever suits your expertise. Don’t fluff it out with things like ‘stakeholder engagement’ – make it the core skills you are likely to see in the job spec described above.

**Industry** - you will be filtered out of a job if you don’t have relevant industry sector experience...and often. So again, lose no opportunity to inform your audience. If, for example, you have been working in Network Rail, that means Rail, Infrastructure, Public Sector - three industry sectors. If you have been working in a logistics firm it would be Logistics, Transport, Distribution. If it’s a Charity to do with health for instance, then it is Not for Profit, Healthcare, Fundraising...etc etc. Think hard about it and put them all in.

(No one list should be substantially longer than the others though – you need to remember that your CV needs to present really well too).

So, after your half page, what next? This...

### **Career History –**

The dates, your job title and the name of your previous company go first.

Underneath that, you should then write one or two lines about who the company are, and what they do. Give your audience some context. If you work for a large company, a small one, a high brand one or no brand one...remember your audience may not know who they are, so allow them to understand who this business is. Just a line or two.

Next, another line or two explaining your remit. What were you brought in to do? If you don't say that then whatever you have written underneath it, has no context that anyone can apply, and it is meaningless. This happens all the time – do not launch into a list of stuff you've done without explaining who and why. Context is EVERYTHING!

Once you have those little bits of narrative, underneath, you bullet point the things that you then did. It reads easier. Very lastly, and underneath the bullets, have a couple of lines of narrative about your 'Achievements' but make these the highest impact achievements you have. If there are/were many more, save them for the interview. For the CV, the biggest and most impressive will do just fine. That will be enough to get the attention of your audience and then they just might ring you up – which after all, is the purpose of your CV, remember?

Follow that model for all your jobs. Don't make your CV longer than four pages, but remember, two is a summary, not a CV. Very hard to pack a long career into two pages and still make it intelligible enough to an 'ignorant' audience so that they...ring you up!

## **2. LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is an extremely powerful professional network, that has changed beyond recognition since it first came into being and, as such, is much misunderstood as a source of jobs, opportunities, business, professional relationships, amongst a multitude of other things. Do not underestimate its power, reach and influence in finding yourself a job. Work it well, and it is likely to be the most influential of all three routes to market I describe here.

All recruitment agencies use LinkedIn as their database to find people, as do internal talent functions, as do professional individuals, such as HR Directors, Managing Directors, Private Equity houses etc. So, if you do not have a profile, or the right number of connections, you might as well be invisible to your potential audience...of 690 million people. That is the number of people registered worldwide on LinkedIn today, with 27 million of those in the UK – Europe's biggest market.

The optimum number of connections is 1500. If you have less than 500, how ever good your profile is it won't matter, as practically no one can find you when they are searching for candidates with your skills. The more connections you have, the more likely it is that anyone who might have an interest in hiring you, will find you. Your first and second stage connections are critical as the 1<sup>st</sup> stage connections of your 1<sup>st</sup> stage connections,



automatically become your 2<sup>nd</sup> stage connections and are then allowed to contact you directly, without having to pay for advanced LinkedIn capability to do so. Hence the more the better.

Incidentally, etiquette no longer requires you to make a lengthy introduction when you ask to connect to someone, so just connect and they either will or won't connect with you. Don't be put off. Keep going.

### **LinkedIn Profile page**

This is *everyone's* first impression of you. Based on this, they will decide to contact you or not. Therefore, the more you are prepared to share about yourself to allow your audience to form an opinion, the better. Remember this is a professional networking site and treat it as such – if you choose to show your humorous side, you'd better be sure your audience will appreciate it!

### **First part (or box 1, hereinafter referred to as B1,2,3 etc)**

The blue banner – you can keep it or change it if you wish. It's perfectly easy to Google 'LinkedIn Banners' and you can add something that is professionally appropriate to your page.

Your photo – make it professional. A headshot where we can see you. Or no photo at all. Definitely no action shots, family snaps, or anything that allows anyone to judge you.

There is a new feature on LinkedIn that allows you to tell your audience you are 'Open to work' - a green circle around your photo. Not for everyone, but on balance, it does allow people to identify the 'actively available' market. Only use it however if you are out of work, not if you are looking to move.

Contact Info – put it on! Telephone number, email address.... If you cannot be easily contacted, recruiters will move on to the next candidate, so enable them to make instant contact with you.

Strapline – you can either say what you are, or what you do. For example, a CEO, *or* a CEO that drives business performance across the transport sector. A Project Manager, *or* a Project Manager with expertise in delivering engineering projects using Six Sigma etc. See? As a first impression, it has more impact as a very brief 'elevator pitch'.

### **B2**

**About.** This is an opportunity to tell people who you are, as well as what you do. Try and avoid using it as an extension to your CV, as your CV will be replicated in your 'Experience' box further down.

There is no limitation on what you can say about yourself here, but tell them what you are, what you do, what work you like to take on, how you like to deliver that work. What you value, what is important to you.

It won't be looked at unless someone is already interested enough in you to do so. But it adds a layer to your interested audience (recruitment agency, HR Director, your new potential boss), that allows them to make a judgement on you, good or bad. So be mindful of what you say here, but a little bit of vulnerability (ie, your motivations, your background, what inspires you), just might be useful. (Look at mine – it went against the grain terribly to share such personal information, but it shows people who you truly are).

### **B3**

**Featured.** Do you have it? If you don't, it won't even show as an option, but it is there (again, check out mine), if not, consider it. Particularly for senior professionals – it can have anything you want in it and allows for

three or four articles. These could be things you have written yourself, something you have had written about yourself, professional interviews, references, your CV, things you find interesting or resonate with you on LinkedIn that you want to share permanently for a while on your profile. Worth looking into – again it adds another layer to what your audience can surmise about you... make it good!

#### **B4**

Experience Page. Do make sure this has enough detail for your audience to actually understand what it is you do. Your job title and a one liner are not very helpful if people are trying to work out whether you might be good for a role they are recruiting or wish to hire.

Put in some content. A one liner explaining who the company are and what they do. Another one liner explaining your remit. Thereafter, it will make sense and have enough context for someone to make an informed judgement on your suitability for their role.

#### **B5**

Academics – If you have a degree, your ‘O’ and ‘A’ Levels, GCSEs etc, are of no relevance and should be left off. If you don’t, whatever you have is relevant and good to see.

#### **B6**

Recommendations. Get some! Don’t be shy, ask for professional recommendations, preferably from your bosses, not your juniors.

### **3. Network**

This is simple. Draw three columns on a page and fill each one with 50 names. Chances are you will struggle but let me explain. In the first column you will put the names that come easily to you – your close network – the people you could and probably have already called up and asked for a chat or advice or indeed, a job.

The second column is much harder – you have to think of names of people you worked with and got on fine with, but over the years have lost contact. Luckily, you are by now hopefully connected with them (as you race towards your 1500 optimum connections!) so you can track them down.

The last 50 is really tough, but make these anyone that you could possibly remember, that would remember you too, given the context of your meeting. Whether it was a supplier, or a consultancy with whom you did business, or a business deal or anything...as long as they will remember you.

Of course, it doesn’t have to be 50, but that is a stretching number and will require you to think really hard, so I suggest keeping it in and just getting as many names as you possibly can.

The first 50 are probably the least likely group you will find work from, yet it is most people’s only focus. What it actually is, is your comfort zone and it means you don’t have to actually go out there and sell yourself or tout for a job. True, you will get lots of tea and sympathy, but unlikely a job. Why not you ask? Lots of reasons – these people are your close network. They know you well enough to almost certainly have a fixed mindset about what it is you do. They see you in the context they met you and often aren’t able to see beyond that. If there is a job that’s a good fit, sure, they’ll put in a good word, but they are unlikely to be able to see beyond that and recommend you for a broader role. Or it could be that you are too close – a friend perhaps



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and they don't want to ruin the friendship by bringing you in. You could be a threat – there are lots of reasons, but if they know you well, they almost certainly have an opinion on what you can or cannot do. Fixed mindset.

The second and third columns are those who don't know you well so they don't have the same biases about you, but reminded of you, will remember you, (one hopes positively). What you then do is this:

You write to them and you say:

*Dear Peter/Jane*

*You may remember me from when we met at.....*

*I am on the market and looking for my next role/ assignment. This is what I do: (clearly make it personal to you)*

- *Bid management, tender writing, commercial contracts*
- *Expert in public sector frameworks* (No more than three bullet points)
- *Leading large teams in delivering xyz*

*If you are interested in knowing any more it would be great to hear from you, my contact details are xxxx.*

*Best regards*

The reason you structure it like this, is because you are not asking them for anything - you don't require their time, a phone call, a coffee, and they avoid any potential embarrassment of having to talk to you, to turn you away or even respond. You are simply informing them of your availability and skills and what you are doing is dropping into their consciousness and reminding them of a few things about you. The first being that they know you i.e. you are not a risk – they have some context around you and have seen you in a professional setting. You are then telling them succinctly and clearly what you do, whilst avoiding falling into the trap of writing a great long missive about everything you have ever done – hoping, that amongst it, they see the one thing you have done that might match their needs, (which would be promptly ignored as they would be very unlikely to bother reading it)!

Lastly, you are inviting them to get in touch only if they are interested and not demanding a response regardless. It couldn't be a less demanding email to receive. At the worst they ignore it, but it is likely that will politely acknowledge it. But at best, what could happen is that they do remember you, you remind them what you're capable of and you trigger a thought in their head about something coming down the track that they maybe haven't thought about sourcing yet. A role they need to hire, a project they need to get delivered, a bit of work that they haven't got round to – and here you are, not only perfect for it, but a known entity. Even better, no agency fee.... A safe and known pair of hands. Perfect, give that man/woman a ring.....

That's how to network!



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