

Ruth Passo: Discovering the Role that Is the Right Fit

When Ruth Passo began researching her move from the for-profit to the nonprofit sector, her first thought was to focus on senior roles that centered on fundraising—executive director (ED) roles in particular. With her strong relationship building skills, the ED position seemed like a natural fit.

But as she began looking online for tips on how to revamp her resume for a nonprofit job search, she discovered several in-depth articles about a relatively new senior role that the nonprofit world was beginning to embrace: chief operating officer (COO). “For nonprofits, the people skills are still paramount in the COO position—and that was very important to me as those, personally, are my strongest asset,” Passo said. “When I also took into account my previous management, operational, and financial skills, then it all started clicking together for me.”

Once she realized the COO role was exactly the position she was looking for, Passo researched sample COO job descriptions and sample resume formats. She restructured her resume to highlight her skills in operational management and relationship building. In interviews she played up her abilities as a team leader. Her job search ended successfully when she was hired as the deputy director of Food Export USA—Northeast. She said the COO-equivalent position is a great match with her skills and personality.

Passo said she has long had a strong attraction to the nonprofit sector. She began her working life as a Spanish teacher, and then landed a job at a nonprofit organization managing programs for foreign students working in the United States. She then used her foreign language skills to land a for-profit job underwriting loans in Latin America. She worked in the banking industry for 25 years in a number of roles, most recently managing the foreign currency advisory sales desk at a financial services institution.

“It had been in the back of my mind for several years to return to the nonprofit sector once I was done with my banking career,” she said. “Being open to change for my personal growth has always suited my personality. I like the challenge of placing myself in new and rewarding situations. So, it was a process of thinking, planning, and working toward that end.”

Passo said an integral part of her nonprofit research entailed volunteering at a variety of nonprofit organizations, including the United Way, so she could learn first-hand about nonprofits and make contacts within the sector. Her advice to other nonprofit job seekers is to do their homework before they start applying for jobs and to be open to all the possibilities that the nonprofit sector has to offer. “I recommend research, research, research,” she said. “Do informational interviews, talk to a lot of people....I can honestly say I wouldn’t do anything differently in my job search.”

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