

New Year, New Career? Positioning Yourself for the Next Step

If you're the kind of person who likes to start the new year with some good old-fashioned goal setting, both personal and professional, now's the time to reflect on your next career steps and put together a game plan to position yourself for success

We use the word "position" deliberately here because managing your career—and this includes the job search—is an exercise in positioning your skills, experiences, and personal qualities toward those in demand at organizations where you'd like to serve.

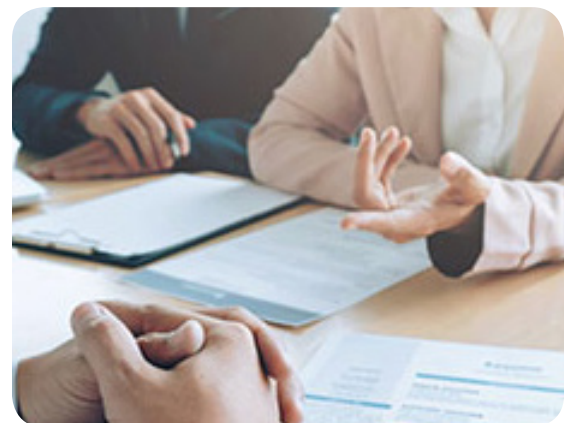
As this article was being written, there were tens of thousands of open positions and many more people "on the prowl" for them. How many candidates will subject themselves to the discipline and tap into the creativity needed to position themselves for success in this marketplace? Will you?

To get you in a strategic frame of mind, we asked several executive search experts to share their top insights and tips.

Take a step back

Before you begin revising your resume, step back and ask yourself what you want and need from your professional life. According to Kathleen Yazbak, president of [Viewcrest Advisors](#), you'll save time in the long run during your search by answering a few key questions upfront. "Ask yourself, what's working in your current role? What's not working? Why are you feeling the need for a change in the first place?" she explains.

One useful exercise Yazbak urges her prospective clients to undertake is to imagine their ideal roles and then align their experiences and skills to those roles. "This way, you can see where you stand in your journey," Yazbak says. For instance, a particular role you're interested in might require more experience leading large teams. Where might you find this opportunity? "Maybe staying [in your current job] is the



right thing to do,” she adds, “or maybe you need to take an intermediate step at another organization to prepare for your ideal role.”

Putting some focused time into honest self-assessment will not only align your interests with the opportunities but also impress prospective employers. Says Janet Albert, an executive search partner at [Bridge Partners](#), “Hiring managers, recruiters and networking sources will respond more positively, and can be more helpful, to job seekers who have demonstrated a high level of thoughtfulness in their job search and who are clear on what they are looking for in their next move.”

Do your homework

Once you’ve decided to make a career move, develop a sizeable list of organizations about which you’d like to learn more. These organizations can be in an issue area you care about or in a growth stage where you feel you can add value. Information sources such as [GuideStar](#) can help you learn about the firms and the people you want to meet.

At the same time, begin perusing the qualifications section of job descriptions that catch your eye. Yazbak recommends disciplining yourself to make the pitch about your skills and experience to the hiring manager. “List out your accomplishments, then look back at your resume. Do the examples align, or are you learning that your resume is focused on how you spend your time as opposed to the results you’ve achieved?” If the latter, revise your resume and LinkedIn profile to highlight your accomplishments.

Network to find the right opportunities

You’ve done your self-assessment and homework. Now you’re ready to share what you’ve learned with others who can help you. Anthony Tansimore, managing director at [Blueridge Advisors](#), views networking as “part of the job” and advises clients to identify organizations they want to know more about and then consult their LinkedIn network for contacts in that organization. “Ask for 10 minutes of your referral’s time, and you’ll probably get 20 or 30,” says Tansimore.

During the appointment, engage your contact with questions about the organization, the field, and their own careers. “I have found so many people will make time for others who engage with them in a genuine manner,” Tansimore adds.

Albert says casting the net wide within focused parameters is also important. “Reach out to family, friends, current and former colleagues, and board members to see whom they know,” she says. And don’t forget recruiters. “Most will happily receive your resume even if they don’t have an appropriate opportunity to propose at your ideal time.”

Use your networking meetings to hone your positioning message. “Are you thinking about traveling down a new path and changing sectors, aspiring to move into a more senior role at your organization?” asks Albert. The more clarity you can provide regarding the type of position and organization you want, the smarter you look and the more helpful your contact can be.

Stay positive

“I can’t emphasize enough how important it is to remain positive—regardless of how long you’ve been ‘on the hunt,’” Albert says. Hiring managers and recruiters are not only interested in technical skills and career accomplishments but also cultural fit and interpersonal skills such as resiliency, authenticity, optimism, and listening. “The ability to confidently articulate your values and your passion for the mission of an organization, both verbally and in your resume and cover letter, is essential,” she says.

Armed with rock-solid positioning and a winning disposition, you’re well on your way to landing that job you’ve dreamed about. And when you finally do land it, keep in touch with your network. Dropping notes of thanks to members of your network or grabbing quick coffees with some of them will show you were successful in landing a job. And, who knows, you might be able to return the favor. “Be helpful to others with whom you’ve networked,” counsels Yazbak. “That kind of karma can be valuable down the road.”

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