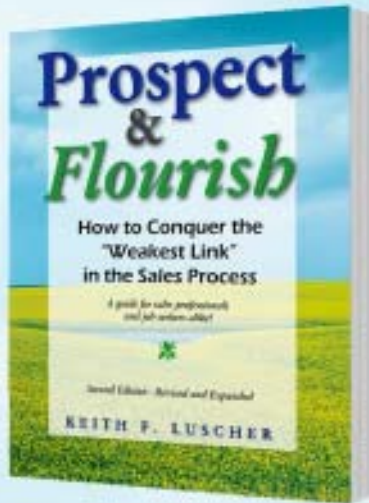


What Job Seekers Can Learn from Sales Professionals

by Keith F. Luscher
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Everybody prospects. Whether you are a professional in sales building long-term relationships or now in the process of seeking your next full-time position, you are still required to continuously explore for and qualify new people to meet and talk with concerning your business.

For job seekers who are not used to this activity, this can be a daunting challenge—hence the explosive growth of networking groups and events everywhere. This doesn't even compare to the proliferation of online social networking. Yet, there are quite a few lessons that the job seeker can take from the sales profession. However, I believe that one stands out as most important:

“Don't look for a job—search for a need.”

Sales professionals are expert observers and listeners. Their “job” is to ask questions and look for signs that point to business opportunities. In other words, they look for needs—needs which they can fill better than anyone else.

Job seekers must take the same approach. “This can be a challenge for job seekers, who often have immediate needs of their own,” comments Ken Lazar, managing director of Manpower Professional and founder of the Scioto Ridge Job Networking Group (in Columbus, Ohio). “When you are networking and meet a new contact, you must realize that it's not about what they can do for you...it's about what you can do for them.”

How does this advice help the job seeker? Look at it this way: Most of us agree that most jobs are acquired through personal relationships or, in many cases, being in the right place at the right time (The technical term for this is luck).

This begs the question: how can you possibly plan for those opportunities? You can't. But imagine how many job seekers go about their day, are in the right place at the right time, but don't ever realize it. You must be able to recognize the opportunity when it presents itself—and the opportunity typically exists in an unmet need or an unsolved problem of someone else.

As you network and meet other people, don't be too insistent on telling others about yourself, what you are seeking, or what your needs are. That chance will come—and it will fall on much more receptive ears if you invest yourself and become engaged, rather, in listening and inquiring about the needs of others.

Let's say you are attending a business gathering, and while pouring yourself some coffee, you start talking with Beth, who is in the retail merchandising industry and is seeking a new job. You converse with her and exchange information. Then a while later, you encounter Jim, a recruiter who has a client that seeks professionals with retail merchandising and marketing experience. Remembering your discussion with Beth, you track her down and introduce her to Jim.

Congratulations! You just filled a need, and made two new friends! The more you learn about and respond to others' needs, the more people you help! As your network grows, so does your capacity to connect people with others, and help them. When you help others, you strengthen bonds, build relationships, and help yourself.