

## EMPLOYMENT

# PITCHING YOUR SKILLS TO WIN WORK

BY  
SHERYL  
SILVER

Do you wish you could find someone who can call prospective employers to "pre-sell" you

before you initiate contact?

Job hunters commonly lament the anxiety they feel calling prospective employers.

Having observed that even executives feel awkward about this aspect of the search process, former outplacement executive Susan Howington recently launched Power Connections Inc. in San Clemente to provide search assistance for executive job hunters.

"Even the most highly educated and talented executives have trepidation about calling people to ask for help or inquire about new [job] opportunities," said Howington.

"Besides, it's easier for most people to have someone else tell prospective employers how wonderful they are," he added. "Many people feel uncomfortable lauding their own accomplishments, even though it's appropriate and, in fact, essential to do when job-hunting."

What exactly does Howington do for her clients? "First, I work with them to identify the job or career they're truly passionate about. Then [I] help them design a résumé, bio and/or business cards to market themselves into that context," she said.

"We then design a marketing plan by identifying target industries and companies as well as appropriate recruiters for them to contact. Then, I implement the marketing strategy, calling

members of my network to identify appropriate opportunities and make referrals."

How does Howington's role differ from that of a search consultant or recruiter? "I represent — and am retained by — individual job hunters. As such, my efforts are focused on finding opportunities for those job seekers," she said. "Search consultants are paid

---

### DEVELOP A 30- TO

### 60-SECOND

### 'ELEVATOR SPEECH'

### THAT SUMMARIZES

### YOUR EXPERIENCE.

---

by employers to fill specific vacancies."

Obviously, not all job hunters can afford to retain their own professional networking experts so Howington offers the following tips.

"If you see a job that interests you in the paper or online, use your network to find out if you know someone who works at or does business with the company so you can learn more about the organization, the available opportunity, possibly even the hiring manager," said Howington.

When it comes to networking, she said, "You probably know more people that can help than you realize. Think about the various parts of your life — your church or synagogue, your current or previous jobs, the gym, perhaps a parents group at your child's school. Don't forget your doctor, accountant or real estate broker, either. You never know who knows or can refer you to someone famil-

iar with the company you're interested in until you ask.

"Remember, too, there's no reason to feel embarrassed about asking people for help with your job search. People really enjoy helping other people if they can."

When presenting your strengths and experience to prospective employers or people who can refer you to hiring managers, it's appropriate to blow your own horn, said Howington.

"If you don't do it, who will? And if you don't do it, people won't know what you're capable of doing," she said. "It is, after all, your ability to produce results that's key in motivating people to hire or refer you."

Howington suggests developing a 30- to 60-second "elevator speech" that summarizes your experience, strengths and professional objective before starting your phone campaign. "Practicing what you're going to say a few times is also helpful," she added. "A little rehearsal can help in honing an effective summary and becoming confident and comfortable delivering it."

Finally, said Howington, try not to take rejection personally. "Job hunting is a lot like sales. It's a numbers game. You may have to call 10 or more employers before one decides to interview or hire you," she said.

And if a colleague seems abrupt or dismissive when you call for information or advice, you may have called at a bad time, said Howington. "It's smart near the start of a call to ask if it's a good time to talk," she said.