

CHANGING JOBS IN THE PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

Robert S. Joslin, Ph.D.

Search Consultant

Joslin & Associates

3264 Sanders Road, Suite D

Northbrook, IL 60062

One of the most important decisions that we make in our lives is one that many of us are inadequately prepared to make - career and employment choices. Too often subjective and emotional factors lead to a less than optimal decision. We are unschooled in how to uncover and evaluate job opportunities and are often poorly advised by colleagues.

It would be presumptuous to suggest that this brief paper can provide a penetrating look at the many facets of employment selection. However, here are some insights into changing jobs from the perspectives of both the individual and the employer, and some "wheres" and "hows" to find the facts you need. I also hope to stimulate you to analyze your motivations and capabilities. Let's look at it from the candidate's side first.

When you decide to look for a job, start with two key questions: what you want to do and where you want to do it. Simple,

or so it would seem at first glance, but the better you know yourself and your goals, the better your chances of a successful relocation to a productive, enjoyable job. Relocation success, like invention, comes to the informed and observant and has the 95% perspiration element, too!

One useful approach in defining realistically what you want to do is to assess what you do well and what you enjoy doing. Several books offer suggestions and mechanisms to help in the evaluation of your skills and limitations (1-4). Use this information to decide the kinds of jobs you want to consider and for insights into deficiencies you may want to strengthen. It will also be helpful later in matching your qualifications and desires with job offers.

The elements in the "where" question are geography, company size and personality. Matching your personality with a company's comes primarily during and after the interview, but here, too, prior definition is helpful. The clearer and more specific you are on your needs and preferences, the better your job hunting direction and decisions will be.

Job opportunities emanate from many sources; expand your creativity in uncovering them. Advertisements are an obvious, but far from the only, source since it is estimated (2) they cover a mere 10% of the available jobs. Although more than 10% of the scientific and middle management jobs are advertised in our industry, many are not advertised, especially the higher level positions.

Friends, present and former business associates and former professors all become valuable sources of information in ferreting

out open positions. Don't discount "cold calls" to prospective employers that may uncover possibilities not yet formalized or publicized. But sending resumes to personnel departments is definitely not the way to find out what is available!

Personnel search or recruiting firms, i.e., headhunters, are another valuable source of information and assistance. These individuals make a business of knowing where the jobs are and welcome qualified candidates. The amount of help you will get from a recruiter depends largely on your marketability as a candidate as well as on the type of recruiting firm representing you.

Let's dig a little deeper into what the search firms do and how they operate.

Basically, there are two different types of firms that function in significantly different ways. A "retainer" search firm gets an exclusive contract from a company to seek out the best individuals for a position. A "contingency" search firm functions in much the same way without an "exclusive". Hence, commission fees are paid only upon placement of the contingency firm's proposed candidate. Generally, retainer searches are conducted for the higher level management positions, hard-to-find specialists or the rare superstars whose potential for advancement is a critical factor to the employer. Contingency searches are most frequently utilized for middle management and technical positions; they are the norm for most positions in the pharmaceutical industry.

A retainer search begins with a detailed analysis of the position and how it interrelates with others in the organization.

Next, the retainer firm would have its research department develop a list of individuals who have the required background or who could provide a lead on possible candidates. They may also generate information on competitive companies employing potential applicants. The search consultant contacts these sources and discusses the possibility of their candidacy or seeks suggestions of possible candidates. This continues until several suitable individuals are found and initially interviewed by the search consultant. Extensive dossiers reviewing all aspects of each proposed person's qualifications are then submitted to the client company for final interviews and selection.

In contrast, a contingency search consultant, working primarily by telephone, will obtain a description of an open position along with the personal and technical requirements preferred by the client company. He assesses the competition he will have from the hiring company's own efforts and from competitive search firms, and evaluates his ability to suggest good candidates. He may already be aware of potential candidates from previous contacts or may search for candidates; or he may elect not to actively compete for that specific position and continue to look for other positions where the competition doesn't have a head start or where he has a better potential of quickly providing good candidates. Many elements of his search may be closely akin to the functions of his retainer counterpart, although the depth and quality of the search varies widely and may be more superficial with some (but certainly not all) contingency firms.

Another common mode for the contingency recruiter is quite different, however. He may, on occasion, find a person who is anxious to relocate and appears to be quite marketable (i.e., the individual's experience, skills and bearing would be attractive to potential employers). He may then hunt a position for that person by calling his contacts in the companies he feels may have a suitable position. This is never done by retainer firms; they only search for people to fill positions they have been retained to fill.

How does this affect you as an individual considering a career move? Unless you happen to contact the retainer consultant when he is conducting a search for a position that you could fill almost to perfection, he will not be of immediate help. In contacting him, though, information about you will be filed and you may be called later for candidate suggestions or for a potential position.

The likelihood of relatively fast action is higher if you contact a contingency firm, especially if the firm specializes in the health care industry and if you are not yet in the upper tiers of management. Technical and middle management positions are most frequently filled by contingency searches; most retainer firms do not specialize and work primarily on senior management positions. Because contingency firms have flexibility in seeking positions for candidates, as well as candidates for positions, they are in an excellent position to assist individuals and to make quality presentations of your attributes and capabilities to potential employers while preserving your anonymity.

You should know the reputation and general method of operation of the search consultant with whom you work. Don't hesitate to ask straightforward questions about his qualifications and how and with whom he works. You should be aware that some companies do not routinely work with search firms; likewise, many recruiters develop better rapport with a few companies and are more aware of opportunities within those companies than in others. Also, emphasize your need for confidentiality, which is of the utmost importance, especially in the close-knit pharmaceutical industry. Most search consultants are very sensitive to your need for total confidence, but be aware that a few contingency firms indiscriminately "shotgun" resumes for any position that could conceivably hit.

A deliberate decision on how you will conduct your search should be made early in your search. If you decide to use a contingency search firm, only one firm should be involved. The search consultant should be aware of any personal contacts you have made to prevent working at cross purposes. Keep him informed of all contacts and any other information that will assist him in helping you. Total candor with your search consultant is definitely in your best interest.

If you work with retainer firms, inform a significant number of them of your interest in relocation. Lists of retainer firms are available from several sources (6,7). Working with them would not conflict with working with a contingency firm.

If you choose to do your own job hunting, a letter tailored to each position is most effective for the initial contact unless

you know or can establish personal contact with the hiring authority. This letter should briefly outline four or five major accomplishments that are closely related to the problems your new firm would expect you to solve. A resume may be asked for later but, if not, don't send it. Take it to the interview and leave it with your future boss after the interview is over.

Writing resumes has been the subject of several books and many chapters on job hunting (1-4, 8-10), so I will deal only briefly with this important topic. Be concise and hard-hitting! The SOLE purpose of a resume is to get an interview that results in a job offer. The five pound resumes usually come from people who haven't accomplished much. Except for recreational preferences which are useful as conversational starters, include only the information necessary to demonstrate your record of increasing responsibility and your expertise and capability for the position you are seeking. Indicate that your professional affiliations, publications, patents and references are available on request. List university/academic achievements and employment history (begin with present position) along with a brief summary of responsibilities and accomplishments for each position. The virtue of concise, clear resumes to create a favorable first impression as a dynamic candidate cannot be over-emphasized.

There is one more key element in this tedious, often exciting pursuit: the interview. It is wise to go on all interviews that have any potential whatsoever. Do not prejudge critically until you have all of the facts from the personal interview itself. It

is common, especially for management positions, to have the job for which you are interviewing change dramatically, perhaps to an entirely different position or department. If a particular job turns out to be unsuitable for you, the experience and exposure of the interview is still worth the time.

What could be a good job is often lost before or during the interview by prematurely voicing expectations or demands with the mistaken concept that being totally "up front" is desirable. Openness is not a substitute for tact or good strategy. Wait until you have sold yourself to a company and they are convinced you are THE one for the position; at this point, you will find that they are more amenable to your needs. You will gain more by remaining flexible, reflective and diplomatic throughout the discussions. Your search consultant can be a big help in these negotiations.

Approach every interview with one goal - to get a job offer! Decision time is after you have the offer, not before. Before you go, learn everything you can about the company, the job and the people. It is wise to pre-plan questions to raise during the interview. Think through the things you need to know about the company and the job to make a good decision. Alert, intelligent questions show your interest in the position and are a good way to demonstrate your breadth and depth of knowledge and self-confidence; caution - don't come on too strong.

During the interview, rapport is developed. How well your style, your personality, your aspirations fit with the people you will be working with are issues for both you and the company to

explore candidly. In my opinion, this subjective factor is the most important part of the interview and the most difficult to assess but a must for an enjoyable, productive relationship.

After the interview, go back to the same folks that gave you leads initially to help round out your perception of the company. Check with present and former employees or interviewees, former professors, annual and 10K reports, publications, your friendly headhunter and anyone else who can be of help in determining the company's personality, style, policies and people.

Other than being well-prepared, well-rested, well-groomed and open and direct, any more advice on the interview will be left to the books on the subject (3,11). If you have done your homework on all of the previous items, especially in defining your objectives and knowing yourself and the company, the big decision, when the offer comes, should be an easy one and a good one.

Now for a glance from the other side of the desk - the employer's perspective. An open position obviously results from the departure or promotion of an employee or expanded requirements. In any case, carefully defining specific objectives and then establishing realistic job specifications and candidate qualifications to meet these objectives requires thoughtful analysis. Although this information is usually required for justification and authorization of the position, take the time to look at all the options and to candidly assess what is really needed. It is not uncommon to find that the requirements for a position change several times in the course of the search because of faulty assumptions or over-

sights. A frequently encountered example is finding that a particular skill is needed after interviewing several seemingly well-qualified candidates lacking that skill. A few hours of planning and reviewing can save many hours interviewing the wrong people.

How the search is to be conducted is frequently not tailored to specific circumstances. There should be discussions between the hiring manager and the personnel department on the role each is to play, whether advertisements or a search firm is to be used, and to what extent the contacts of your employees are to be used. It is your position and you should have a big part in determining how you are going to find candidates. Don't abdicate your authority to the personnel department or expect them to know where to find specific technical expertise; you and your employees may best know that.

The interview is as critical an event for company representatives as it is for the candidate. The candidate's qualifications and credibility, as well as personality and style, are established and evaluated for fit into the organization. Although there is not much written on these important factors, personal rapport is a major aspect of the interview and should be considered as carefully as the candidate's technical qualifications.

Most managers prefer to interview a number of candidates to assure themselves that they are getting the best possible. This is prudent to a point. One common concern in research groups, however, is the lack of urgency and a protracted selection process which is demoralizing to all involved. Look at several candidates,

but keep everyone involved informed. Be sure you are informed, too, of what's going on with your best candidates to avoid unpleasant surprises. Remember that you are in the middle of a war to get the best candidates; your strategy, tactics and timing must be tailored accordingly.

Your headhunter's job is only half done when the final candidate is selected. He can help both parties define their feelings and concerns, facilitate a clear understanding and agreement on the job description and expectations, and mediate compensation and relocation issues. Don't slight these details. They will help insure acceptance of your offer and can bring about a smooth, rapid transition that results in a more effective employee who will be productive at an early date. Equally important, pitfalls and bad fits can be averted.

When a concerted effort is made to develop a realistic hiring program, the rewards will be highly qualified, motivated personnel who are in tune with your organization. The groundwork is laid for a mutually enjoyable and beneficial relationship.

Happy hunting to all!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The suggestions of Phillip Radlick, Ph.D., Irvine, CA, Ruth Pierpont, Indianapolis, IN and Nancy Korbar, Schaumburg, IL are appreciated.

REFERENCES

1. R.N.Bolles, "What Color Is Your Parachute?", Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, CA, 1980.
2. R.J.Jameson, "The Professional Job Changing System", Performance Dynamics, Verona, NJ, 1976.
3. W.A.Cohen, "The Executive's Guide To Finding A Superior Job", AMACOM, New York, NY, 1979.
4. R.N.Bolles, "The Quick Job-Hunting Map", Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, CA, 1979.
5. A.J.Cox, "Confessions of a Corporate Headhunter", Trident Press, New York, NY, 1973.
6. Membership List, Association of Executive Recruiting Consultants, Inc., New York, NY, 1978.
7. J.H.Kennedy, Ed., "Directory of Executive Recruiters", Consultants News, Fitzwilliam, NH, 1978.
8. R.K.Irish, "If Things Don't Improve Soon, I May Ask You To Fire Me", Anchor Press/Doubleday, New York, NY, 1975.
9. C.R.Boll, "Executive Jobs Unlimited", The Macmillan Company, New York, NY, 1971.
10. R.Lathrop, "Who's Hiring Who", Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, CA.
11. A.Medley, "Sweaty Palms; The Neglected Art of Being Interviewed", Lifetime Learning Publications, Belmont, CA, 1978.