

# CV FOR LIFE

“Finding Work the South African Way”

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[www.cvforlife.co.za](http://www.cvforlife.co.za)

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## FOREWORD

### Finding direction

**M**ubashar Hussain, I remember him well – the first person I ever placed. I marketed Mubashar for a solid month before placing him in a forty-eight hour locum position in a well-known London Hospital.

Of course he managed me just as well as I managed him – calling me solidly every day for a month. Mubashar had the right attitude towards his career; this is something I just do not see enough of with South African candidates.

A year later Mubashar was one of the top surgeons in London, demanding a larger remuneration and selecting his consulting roles. It was then that I knew that I had found my calling in life – to be a recruiter.

It wasn't 'til I returned to South Africa that I found my true direction – head-hunting. My then mentor Don Gray ushered me into an industry that would forever shape my career.

The dedication and training that he provided, along with the support of my father, would ensure that I made empowering my staff and managers a business imperative. Now after fifteen years in the industry, seven as CEO of the Ridout Group, I know that not even reaching the top spot in the search industry will satisfy my need to give back to an industry that has provided me with so much.

Over the years it has become apparent how many South Africans wander round our streets aimlessly looking for a career that will ultimately secure their futures or satisfy their financial needs.

The mistakes that are made in pursuit of this career are so appalling I cringe. And as I get older I struggle to get through an interview without asking the

obvious question – why? Why did you move when you did? Why did you not finish all those courses? Why did you turn down that opportunity for the sake of the same salary? It still amazes me how many people enter my office unable to understand how life got them where they are and how their CVs turned into a story without direction.

Hence this book. If I can in any small way assist the man on the street find direction – provide him or her with the secrets that will ensure success in the job market – I would have succeeded as recruiter and as a South African. Understanding the plight of job seekers and the poor support that is given to them with finding simple direction, needs to be a priority in our emerging economy.

“CV for Life” is geared towards the South African job seeker and aims to provide job finders with key hints and secrets that will make this journey more manageable. I have tried to keep the text as simple and understandable as possible, with a strong emphasis on practicality and sharing of my own personal experience through lots of trade secrets that need not be secret.

Most business schools will teach you to create a business plan when starting a business. I am advocating this process in your search for a new career or career change. This will guide your business (read career) through the various pitfalls that are to be found in the marketplace. The business plan is broken up into various elements that will equip you to handle almost anything that is thrown your way.

I have always designed a business plan for my businesses and update mine every year. It’s a crucial part of finding direction in your life and career.

I still find it ironic that South Africans today spend thousands of Rands studying at university and yet the most important aspect of embarking on this journey – that of finding a job – is left to the last year as a non-compulsory course.

This business plan concept is therefore translated into this book and I hope it will serve as supplemental assistance to those people starting their careers or looking to change direction.

You must make sure you have a plan from the beginning in your hunt for work. This will encourage you to use a plan that will force you to focus on managing a process and ensure a proactive rather than reactive approach regarding finding work. This is the cornerstone for the concept and book “CV for Life”.

I have also included, in narrative blocks, information that I feel is crucial when looking for work in South Africa. So enjoy the journey and I hope that in some way you will learn from my experiences.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Telling a story with your CV

**M**ost people do not realise the importance of looking after their life story – their CV. And I am not speaking about that old formatted set of documents packed away at the back of your sock drawer that you fondly think of as your CV.

It is important to draw the line here immediately and stress that my interest is mainly the content of your “CV for Life”. Yes, the format is important but if the story is not right no amount of formatting will save you.

The simple fact remains that the CV you forward to prospective employers can open the door to an interview that could change your life.

I see many people on a daily basis that have neglected their CVs, in many cases at an early point in their careers.

Understanding what motivates a human resources (HR) manager to hire you or a recruiter to interview you, on behalf of a client, often comes down to the most basic of aspects and the CV is where it all starts.

But why place so much emphasis on a document rather than the person? The answer is simple: when on the receiving end of a response for a role such as an advertised position in the newspaper, any hiring manager will need to work through hundreds of possible CVs before deciding which to explore further.

Most candidates will think their CV is important because they have a degree or relevant experience. What they do not realise is that their CV is one of no less than two hundred CVs that get sent for the same role.

Frightening isn't it? But that is the reality of the South African workplace.

Often the reader – an HR manager or recruiter – will know exactly what he/she is looking for and scans the CVs for the exact experience that is required to fill the vacancy, neglecting important information that could prove convincing, particularly at a face-to-face interview.

Would you blame any reader of two hundred CVs for wanting to scan the documents as quickly as possible? Especially when taking into consideration that most HR managers or recruiters will never have less than twenty to fifty jobs that they work on at any given time.

Imagine scanning two hundred CVs for fifty positions and advertising this amount of positions twice a month!

This is the reality of the workload that is put upon stakeholders in this sector. Just as you have pressure to find a job so does the hiring manager have pressure to fill vacancies.

Most role definitions are also geared towards the reader having to understand if the potential candidate fulfils exact requirements rather than looking at transferable skills or potential talent.

It is these highly important external factors that most individuals forget about when preparing their details for entry into the marketplace.

Hiring managers gain much faith and security from a CV that reads as a story rather than a mix of unusual career happenings.

It is also normally the CV that presents the most concise information with relevant and informative text that catches the eye of the reader. This CV can open the door for you to meet with a company that can potentially ensure you many years of successful employment. And what better motivation could this be for any job seeker, to ensure his or her CV reads like a well planned life story?

But let's get real, how many individuals in today's workforce have CVs without poor moves or short company stays. Certainly not even mine.

Unfortunately for some of us factors such as retrenchment have become a

real fact of life. Years ago seeing a retrenchment on your CV would have raised serious questions regarding your ability to pre-judge a company's future. Today, retrenchments are a common occurrence in CVs and an accepted norm.

It is certainly not just the content of your CV that improves your chances of getting into the interview but also how your story in your CV reads from a big picture point of view, and how you have adjusted your career direction after these small challenges such as retrenchments.

Your CV should be a document that tells a story. It should contain a flow of information that starts with your education and ends with your latest successes. The career path you follow should have some form of direction even if this is the finest thread that holds all your different roles together.

Anybody that reads your CV should be able to understand your "CV for Life" without meeting you or reading a covering letter, because that's unfortunately what will happen most of the time – hiring managers will be perusing your CV long before meeting you. The decision to finally meet you will ultimately rest on this crucial document. Your interview process will also be enhanced by this story telling type of CV, rather than spending your entire CV trying to explain poor moves and bad career decisions.

You should always remember that your CV is simply a tool to get you through the door to meet with the company you wish to work for.

You will be held to account for every move in your CV, so you should feel comfortable with the information as it is presented and have practised your life story as it is presented in the written form.

The average South African HR manager remains extremely influenced by the depth of information that is contained in a CV, to a point where the CV should contain pages of information that quite frankly will never be checked in any way or form.

This often happens to quell fears that the HR manager has of recruiting the

wrong person and then having to face massive financial risk on behalf of the company at the CCMA. Something which I deem a very unfortunate side effect of our new open communication and fair labour market type approach.

The South African style of CV is not commonplace in the international market where a shorter CV (two pages) is often adequate.

Unfortunately you will need to comply with this very painful way of doing business when seeking work.

I always recommend keeping your CV summarised to a few pages, however some companies will stipulate longer CVs, which you should always comply with. You will also need to adjust your CV to various formats. I suggest always keeping one or two different formats on hand; One for resumé purposes and another for the longer detailed CV requests. We will touch on the presentation of your CV at a later stage.

The important thing to remember is that your “CV for Life” will arm you with a tool that will ensure you an endless pool of opportunity. Together with a good business plan you will benefit in the long run.

### HOW TO DO IT

I interviewed a candidate that we headhunted for a project management role in a bank. His CV was perfect except for the fact that he started out his career in hospitality and had a hospitality qualification, which the client did not want. In the interview he started out by emphasising the management experience in his hospitality qualification as the skill he gained and now uses in his project management career. This very clever way of using the transferable element within his qualification to take the emphasis off a weak point in his CV works well when you have unrelated moves or events in your CV. Once you have finished typing out your CV, practice in front of a mirror telling your story to yourself. You should be able to do this without stopping and be able to motivate all your moves in your career.

### HERE'S A CHALLENGE

Take the two most diverse careers you have worked in for more than two years and justify how this came to be.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Wake up to the new South Africa

If anything, being a recruiter has certainly made me a realist and I have no doubt it is the result of all the people I have interviewed over the past fifteen years. Every person has their own story and idea of career success and failure. Imagine interviewing an average of five people a day every year for fifteen years – eventually some trends will start to emerge.

The South African labour market is incredibly complex in my view. Most job seekers remain absolutely clueless to the market's many complexities. The labour market, especially the white collar market, has also changed over the past few years and so have its key stakeholders. Combine this with the large amount of unemployed people in the market and you have a complicated situation.

The biggest problem that exists in the current market remains the lack of communication between stakeholders. This ultimately puts the jobseeker in a situation where they do not have adequate information at their disposal and they are unable to gain a real understanding of the practical factors that will affect a successful job search.

Through this book I will provide you with some of the hard facts that will give you some insight into these complexities and hopefully shed light on some of the statistics that will assist you in making the right choices.

Let's cover right now some of the trends within the South African market that will influence you as you enter the job market:

## SOUTH AFRICA IS CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING A HUGE SHORTAGE OF SKILLS

Read your newspaper any day of the week and you will see that this is a fact. I have two major blue chip clients that have over one thousand vacancies each.

However, nobody in South Africa knows exactly how many vacancies exist within our borders in the blue or white collar markets. I am not referring here to how many people are employed every month but rather those roles that are not filled.

In certain industry sectors there are a huge amount of skills shortages, for example accountants and engineers. Within these specialities there are even more specialised roles which only a limited amount of people in the country actually fulfil, a good example here is actuaries. If you are in one of these sectors your skills will be in higher demand than you currently know.

Affirmative action has had a positive effect on the market for all colour groups. Markets have a tendency to assume a natural state of equilibrium, but the current shortage of skilled black talent has put pressure on institutions to train more professionals. White managers threatened by affirmative action have started companies and now enjoy success in a thriving economy.

## WE ARE ONLY NOW BECOMING GLOBAL PLAYERS

South African companies still remain very conservative when hiring talent from overseas so chances are you won't be losing a job opportunity to an ex-pat just yet. Government still tells us about this negative picture regarding the brain drain. I have a different opinion regarding this – we have become global players, a compliment to our highly skilled workers. The only problem is we don't allow for skills from other countries to flow into our economy without huge red tape obstacles – why?

The fact that we have become a global skills player is here to stay for the benefit of everybody. We simply need to embrace the benefits and start becoming more competitive.

### NO CENTRALISATION OF INFORMATION

The greatest problem in the job market is poor communication. How do the eleven million unemployed South Africans find all those jobs that are available in the market? As a company, if you decide to advertise in the media for talent you will be astounded at the response you get. Why is it that there are so many unemployed people in the marketplace?

This phenomenon remains an unresolved element in our economy, no stats are currently accumulated on the trends in our economy with regards to where vacancies exist and where the situation was ten years ago. How can our educational institutions then know what course to push to our students?

### RESPECT FOR SMMEs

When sending your details, remember even if the company seems small treat it with the same professional courtesy that you would a large blue chip. If you have no working experience, you may fall into a common mistake that I see graduates make in today's workplace.

Small companies are mainly run by individuals who have worked in large companies before and have carried over some form of professional experience into their companies. The problem crops up when you as a graduate arrive for an interview with this type of company assuming that because the furniture is second-hand you need not assume the same rules apply as you would expect in a blue chip – wrong.

Read your contract properly when entering into a relationship with a new company, ensure that you follow the rules such as dress code, working hours and so forth. Also, spend time with your immediate superior or even better the owner to ensure you understand his or her expectations.

Don't neglect this sector of our economy; the growth in the South African marketplace comes mainly from the SMME market.

## THE RECRUITMENT ARENA IS IMPROVING

For many years recruiters have been seen as poor service agents not able to provide candidates with the type of service they want.

Even though this still remains the case in the industry it is rapidly changing. E-recruitment is putting serious pressure on recruiters to improve their service to clients and by default their candidates.

Even with huge amounts of unemployed people in the market, specialist skills have become difficult to find and recruiters now need to become more creative when looking after their candidates. Companies are becoming more competitive in finding and keeping staff.

The increase on sign-on bonuses, restraints of trade and shares for staff is a sign that companies are starting to mobilise to keep and get staff in a more competitive fashion. Businesses are expecting HR managers to advise them on these strategies and, in many cases, salaries remain a huge part of this competitive strategy.

With the advent of global skills poaching, companies will soon need to guard against not only local companies stealing staff, but international giants offering all sorts of competitive incentives to our highly skilled professionals. These are only some of the factors that will affect your job search and working career.

### THE ALL IMPORTANT QUESTION – IS IT TIME TO MOVE?

As a headhunter I am often asked the question: “When should I move jobs?” Certainly many of us will look back at our careers and realise that we moved for the wrong reasons or moved too soon. I advise many of my candidates to use a strategy that I have gained through many years of candidate interviewing.

Ironically, your time in a company is often governed by your reasons for joining the company in the first place. More often than not, candidates move based on emotive reasons such as a poor performance appraisal, bad salary increases or an argument with a boss. Very little thought is given to what you wanted to originally achieve or what you have achieved in the company when considering a potential move.

Candidates forget to ask two critical questions when joining a company. Firstly, what would you like to actually achieve by moving to a new company? What soft skills would you like to gain or how much leadership experience would you like to gain? We will cover this in more detail later.

Secondly, is the role that you have applied for actually what you are about to do? I see a lot of candidates who have started with a company and are doing something totally different to what they applied for in the first place. Although most candidates are quick to point out that this is the fault of the hiring company, I do believe that it is also the candidate’s responsibility to ensure that the role is what it is supposed to be. This is easily solved by ensuring that you meet the outgoing incumbent to take a handover.

But let’s focus on the question at hand: when is the right time to move? You should always have a solid plan of what you would like to achieve when joining a company. This list can include basic skills acquisition, such as supervisory or PC skills or more dynamic skills, like influence or motivation. You should also put a time frame on your plan but always keep it open to a change in direction.

Let's look at a practical example here: you may be hired into a company as a supervisor in a call centre, spend several months doing this and then be presented with an opportunity to take on a quality assurance role. Even though quality assurance was not on your career plan as a skill to attain, at this company you might have realised that supervising staff is not for you and decide to rather look at the alternate role.

You should be continuously thinking about developing your toolset of skills as this is what will ultimately arm you for an overall good career and highly sought after CV. It is when the company you work for stops adding to your toolset that you should start to consider your situation with the company. I believe in a planned move rather than a quick fix move.

I maintain that a stay of at least two years with a company is acceptable but there are many exceptions to the rule. I do see candidates that have one long company stay in their CVs and then several shorter stays such as six months. This often happens with individuals who have enjoyed a long stay with one company, especially enjoying the company's corporate culture, and then move to another company with the hope of replicating this corporate culture without success.

Consider your personal happiness when looking at a company; very few people consider the softer issues such as corporate culture as a reason to stay. Conversely this could also be your biggest move motivator – often it is the corporate culture fit that makes us complacent and motivates us to look for a new challenging environment that will reinvent us. Just measure the possible sacrifice and ensure you are ready for the challenge – this is a totally personal choice and very much dependant on where you are in your career.

If you are considering a move when you have been in a company for under a year, make sure that you have clearly identified all the reasons for you not being able to stay.

Change in company management style or corporate culture are not common

reasons for moving and for a good reason. In companies with solid performance these elements are often the most stable. I still believe that a good corporate culture and strong leadership should ensure you a long stay with a company.

Common short-term move motivators include poor managers, bad working conditions, boring job descriptions and poor salaries. I still feel candidates that join a company and within a year declare that the company is too small for career growth should never have joined that company in the first place. The candidates should have researched the company organogram and ensured the company had significant growth potential or declared their career ambitions and goals up front at the initial interview. Smaller companies with slightly more conservative organograms often lose staff for the reason mentioned above. So if you are joining a smaller company make sure that you ask the right questions and be honest with the owner regarding your career ambitions.

If you have run out of training opportunities within a company you may then decide to study externally instead of considering a move. Even if you decide to study externally the environment may not allow you to test these newly honed skills.

This is especially important if you have highlighted this in your overall career plan when you started with the company and you have reached all those goals. I always ask candidates if they have spoken with their bosses regarding these frustrations, and more often than not they have not. Sometimes solving career hurdles is more simple than expected. If after all of these interventions you still feel that your career is hampered by a company that just cannot accommodate your training requirements then it is time to move.

Salary, for many of us today, dominates our reasons to move and often colours our judgment regarding when to move. I maintain that salary is not a good move motivator. Period.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Planning your CV for Life

**F**or me this is the most important chapter of the entire book as it deals with your MINI BUSINESS PLAN. Why is this important? Because most people don't have one. I am still amazed at how many people enter the job market with no plan. Why? Would you embark on a business venture with no business plan or a trip with no route plan? Your career is certainly not any less important than any of these scenarios.

I have put together a very simplistic plan that should assist you through your journey in the world of searching for a fulfilling career job.

You will notice that I often refer to you as a product and that my entire way of looking at you as candidate is in the context of a business plan.

In the plan you are the product that needs to be sold and your CV is your promotional tool. I am not attempting to be impersonal but the reality is your skills set is a product that is in demand by employers and you need to promote the benefits of your product. To achieve your business plan you will need a sales plan and a plan of execution. But first, let's talk about the contents of your mini business plan.

#### PREPARING YOUR PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL

Your CV layout and what you are trying to communicate with your CV is vital. The South African market demands very specific information in your CV format. Your promotional material will also include references and background checks.

## SETTING YOUR GOALS

Creating goals and timelines for yourself in a realistic manner will ensure greater focus and more dedication to your process of finding work. Understanding timelines in the South African marketplace is also important so that your expectations are not unrealistic.

## YOUR PROMOTIONS AND SALES PLAN

How you get your CV into the market is vital. Most people do not even think about this when looking for work. Whether you send your CV to a recruiter or a headhunter or use the internet or your personal network, your choice of promotional channels will affect how successfully your CV will be received in the marketplace. Most people will not take on a proactive approach when selling their CV to prospective employers. This part of your plan should ensure that you need not be a sales person to find a job.

## EXECUTING YOUR BUSINESS PLAN AND FOLLOWING THROUGH

Researching and preparing for your interviews with a recruiter or prospective employer is vital. This is where your plan ultimately comes together and even though you would not want your interview to look staged, being prepared is vital. Managing all your sales channels proactively will ensure you get maximum value for all the hard work put into your career or studies thus far.

### REFERENCES AND BACKGROUND CHECKS

Getting together your background checks and references is vital. When a potential opportunity arises it will need quick attention and nothing is worse than not being prepared. Understanding what a recruiter or HR manager wants from you before providing you with an offer is a must when entering the job market.

Your plan should ultimately become part of your daily lifestyle, not just something that you look at and do once, but something that you continuously change during the course of your job search adventures.

#### **HERE'S AN IDEA**

When getting a plan together I find most people just never get around keeping to the deadlines. Try to get your plan onto one page, keep it simple and make sure you make your deadlines easy to reach. Then take your plan and put it up where you will see it on a regular basis (not the office – maybe the fridge). Then get one of your family members to check your plan once a week and ask you what you have achieved in that month with your plan. Simple but effective .

#### **REMEMBER**

Celebrate each success in your plan and make sure your timelines are realistic. You only appreciate your successes if you create real challenges.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Let's first get your attitude sorted...

**A**ttitude for me remains a major contributor to people finding or failing to find an ideal job in the time they allocate themselves.

Let's cover a few overriding principles.

#### SET YOUR GOALS

Set down some goals you have for finding a job, as already discussed in the planning part of your "CV for Life". Once you have done this you can congratulate yourself because this is already a step in the right direction.

Make sure you focus all your efforts on achieving the goals that you have defined in the time you have allocated and not before. Often people looking for work give up just when they are armed with enough experience to find their ideal job.

Do not make any broad based assumptions when entering the marketplace; your degree provides you with no certain job opportunity and affirmative action does not mean that you should give up if you are the 'wrong' colour. It remains your responsibility to find a job or a new career – no recruiter or any other person has your job finding priority as their priority.

## BE PROACTIVE NOT REACTIVE

Use all channels available when marketing your CV. Remember, whilst you are selling yourself you are the product and your CV is your promotional tool. Now sell your product the best way possible.

No amount of interviews is enough, I know of nobody that was declined a job for going to too many interviews. I do however know of lots of candidates who have gone for interviews and given up because they simply get tired of being interviewed.

Always try to improve your interview style by finding out after the interview if your interview style was rotten. Try to ask your recruiter what you can do better at your next interview – even if you don't like your recruiter. Always be open to learning from your mistakes, especially when it comes to interviews. To successfully navigate the complex job market as a candidate you need to accept that, like a business, you are competing with many other product offerings (candidates). These candidates all have different backgrounds and are all after that ideal role. That's right – it's competitive.

Your positive and proactive attitude may provide you with the final push that gives you that edge required to find your ideal career opportunity. If anything, it will toughen you up for the work environment that you will find yourself in. So get out there and make it happen, because only you can.

## USE YOUR COMMON SENSE

Try to remember that you could have a very unique skills set or have a career at a very senior level. You will need to adapt your plan accordingly. When selecting your channel of promotion try to select the elements that will provide you with the best type of opportunity. The recruiter that supplies you with secretaries will

not necessarily provide you with good executive opportunities. The same is true for you if you are a secretary or have a more junior skills set. Do not waste your time pursuing a recruiter or e-recruitment site that does not focus on your industry sector exposure. It is simple really.

### NO DEGREE NO FUTURE?

I think we are a little bit past this point. I see a huge amount of people with degrees who have wasted their qualifications. For me the focus is more on skills and experience. Yes, getting the degree is important but it is certainly not a determinant to what you earn. To get practical experience is vital – a lot of people overlook factors such as soft skills and management skills.

Identifying what skills you can attain when joining a new company is crucial. You should never let the fact that you don't have a degree stunt your career. Today your skills are rated against a national qualification rating system called the NQF – here you can attain the same level as a degreed person by completing smaller courses rather than just a degree. A lot of roles have these NQF levels advertised and rightly so.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Get your product hot

**T**his is probably the most spoken about and written about topic. It should always be remembered, as I suggested at the beginning of this book, your actual paper-based CV still remains just that – a few sheets of paper.

I meet many candidates who spend a huge amount of time adjusting their CVs and then totally forget to do research on the company that will be interviewing them. For me, the content is way more important than the format. However – and this is a big however – the way you present your CV ultimately gets you into the interview – it's the door opener.

**Remember:** your paper-based CV only serves to get you into the actual face-to-face interview and not the actual job.

Let's cover some golden rules with respect to putting together a winning CV. Please note that this is my recommended way, there are many other experienced recruiters that will suggest different formats and these also have merits. You can download this directly from the website: [www.cvforlife.co.za](http://www.cvforlife.co.za).

- ♦ Never lie in your CV.
- ♦ Keep your CV professional; no overly personal details – nobody wants to know about your allergies.

- ✦ Ensure your contact details are correct and provide multiple contact details.
- ✦ Keep your CV down to about three to four pages.
- ✦ Make sure the format is in a font that is legible; the reader will need to read the text quickly and get an immediate idea of your background.
- ✦ Use bullets and create pauses in your CV for the reader's eye.
- ✦ Spell-check your CV and the e-mail content that you attach with it.
- ✦ Always mention accomplishments in point form, preferably per company.
- ✦ Put in a reason for leaving including your current place of work.
- ✦ Group companies or associated businesses that you have worked in across your work background otherwise people think you have job-hopped.
- ✦ Make sure the reader knows whether a role is contract or permanent.
- ✦ Include references and keep them updated.
- ✦ Include a copy of your latest credit check.
- ✦ Make sure that if you have been promoted, you point this out effectively in your CV.
- ✦ Keep the details of your most recent jobs and your responsibilities easy to read and factual.
- ✦ Keep old work experience and responsibilities down to a minimum description.
- ✦ Update your CV regularly, especially with new responsibilities and promotions.
- ✦ Include the web address of your previous companies in your CV as the reader can then get an understanding of the industry sectors you have previously worked in. Never assume an HR manager will automatically know the industry sector the company belongs to.

- ♦ Include your ID number as many companies will not see you if they suspect you are not South African by birth.
- ♦ Do not use humour in your CV.
- ♦ Put in your highest marks for all your courses.
- ♦ Include only recent references and not friends; if you skip a reference explain why.

Recruiters and HR practitioners are actually trained to spot the negative before the positive when reading your CV – what a shock!

Some people may view my previous statement as one that portrays the recruitment industry in a negative light. It is actually about a filtering mechanism that all recruiters have to use if they want to survive in the industry.

The reality is most people hide their poor work experiences very carefully and then lie in their interviews about their strengths and weaknesses.

In many respects the HR manager has been forced to become very careful when hiring, as dismissing someone is now harder than ever. It's also very hard to fire somebody when they have lied on their CV and no one wants to be stuck with a candidate that simply does not have the skills to do the job.

Let's look at some of the negatives that HR managers and companies in general look out for. I also suggest a few solutions for you if you are faced with these challenges.

### JOB-HOPPING

This is a very topical issue and very hotly debated, there is also a perception that job-hopping is a black candidate thing only – wrong.

South Africans still tend to be very conservative when it comes to moving around too much. Spending a lifetime at one company still seems to be the pre-

ferred option. I see many CVs where if you read the CV the candidate may seem to be job-hopping. However, this is often cleared up by portraying your various work experiences as clearly as possible.

For example, provide details if you have been retrenched, or the company has merged or even if you have moved between companies in a group. Depict the company on group level and make sure the reader knows that the companies are all part of the same group. Clarity is the operative word here, think about the reader first.

I do not like seeing in a CV aspects such as ‘unfavourable working conditions’ and ‘I moved due to poor management style’. There’s being honest and then there is being too blunt. Issues such as this should rather be left for the interview. If an HR Manager reads this they may make a uninformed decision with regards to you and your motivation for leaving organisations before you get an opportunity to explain. Simply portray your move in a softer format such as ‘limited promotional opportunities’ or ‘no career plan’.

If you have job-hopped so much that your CV looks like the Yellow Pages, now is the time to settle down and expect no sympathy at your interview. Be honest about the mistakes you have made in your career and explain in your interview how this has benefited your career – this shows maturity.

## GAPS

The first thing that any recruiter is taught is to look out for gaps in a CV. Any gap of three months or more begs investigation. Make sure that in your CV you indicate what you were doing in your gap periods, especially if pertaining to travel, study or looking for work. I have never met a candidate that told me at an interview they did nothing in a gap period.

### TOO MUCH AMBITION

I see a lot of CVs where candidates depart from companies citing reasons such as ‘lack of career growth’ and other developmental issues. I often find this peculiar because many of the companies that these candidates have left are major organisations with a variety of business opportunities.

I always ask: “Why not seek an opportunity within the group, maybe another division or with a different manager?” I seldom get the right answer from these types of over-ambitious candidates.

Be careful not to depict yourself as over-ambitious – the last thing you want to portray is somebody who wants to move too aggressively.

Rather make sure that the company you are moving to has the right type of credentials in terms of promoting talent and that the previous incumbents in the position that you are applying for have possibly been promoted.

Too many candidates today put the emphasis on the new company and HR manager to reveal all at their interview with regard to their potential career growth. This is ultimately your responsibility, so ask the right questions and do your homework, don’t expect to have the ladder to the top cleared upon your arrival.

### TOO MONEY-HUNGRY

This is a big issue with many candidates in South Africa and I deal with this topic in greater detail later in the book. I still feel many South African candidates just put too much emphasis on money as a move motivator.

You should always remember to look at the big picture, no hiring manager wants to hire an incumbent that will just stick around until the next outside opportunity for a bigger paycheque rolls around.

I get this more and more at my briefings – “the person must stick around for

at least two years". If you have a monetary expectation without doing adequate research do not put this in your CV. By adequate research I do not mean speak to a friend in another company doing what you are doing. Check out the reference section at the back of the book, it will help you.

If you have applied for a role in a certain salary range, don't bail at the last minute because the offer is not high enough. Rather not consider the role at all if the salary is not within your expectations. Remember, a lot of hard work goes into the recruitment process.

## NOT ENOUGH AMBITION

I have met many phenomenal candidates that have worked for one company for many years and never moved, not even once – why?

Most often than not, a candidate may have just worked for a company that simply has not developed their potential. Unfortunately this occurs in many entry level roles where the company has a loaded element of non-promotion, whether the candidate excels or not.

Many candidates will move companies and then be promoted aggressively in a more forward thinking corporate culture.

There are also many candidates that are non-ambitious due to personal reasons such as having to care for a young family. You must be clever and ensure your interviewer knows of these reasons.

Ambition can be portrayed in your CV as education or hunger for knowledge instead of promotion. Think about this when compiling your CV if you have not been promoted as many times as you feel you would have liked to. It prevents people perusing your CV from thinking you have just sat around and done nothing with your career.

### UNDERSTANDING BALANCE FROM A RECRUITER'S PERSPECTIVE

Good HR practitioners and recruiters should look at a CV and give the candidate the benefit of the doubt with regards to their background, but there should always be a balance when assessing your CV for both good and bad.

When compiling your CV you will need to identify the good and bad aspects within your CV honestly and realistically.

You will need to ensure that these are in some way balanced in your CV without lying. Remember, nobody is perfect and you are allowed to make mistakes – your mission with your CV is to get you into the interview. For me, it is more important to see that a candidate has learnt something from their mistakes and put these experiences into practise during the rest of their career.

### PREPARE YOUR CV FOR THE READER

The key to preparing your CV is to put yourself in the reader's position and then try to provide the right details accordingly. If a sales manager is reading your CV for a sales role you should try understanding that this type of reader will go through your CV quickly, with an emphasis on results. If your CV is being read by a financial manager, you will need to provide more detail as your reader will be more detail focused. This ability to adapt your CV to your reader is an advanced technique and you can even take this one step further by researching your potentially new company and boss, and trying to get an understanding of the corporate culture. This of course all depends on how much you would want to work in that company.

## LOADING YOUR CV NOT TELLING FIBS

Most recruiters and HR managers will interpret 'loading' of a CV as filling your CV with lots of lies so that the candidate can get the job and the recruiter can get commissions. I actually disagree with this view as this is not always the case. As a candidate you have the right to provide details to the reader, relevant to the role you will be applying for – let me provide a realistic example.

Let's say you are applying for a role that you have seen in a newspaper for a sales manager. One of the role descriptives is that you will be required to write sales reports. In your current CV you may not have included this, even if you have this experience. Effectively you have left this out of your CV to your detriment. The reader may read your CV and mistakingly assume that as a sales person you have not written reports and will therefore not invite you in for an interview.

Very few candidates provide every single aspect of their current or past roles in their CVs. Can you imagine if we all did, our CVs would be extremely long and boring. Unfortunately candidates do not realise that recruiters will scan CVs and look for these all important key words relevant to the responsibilities (competencies) of the role they are recruiting for.

The solution of course is to adapt or 'load' your CV with the details that are relevant to the role and not include detail that will cause the reader to become bogged down.

## HOW TO DO IT

I see a lot of CVs on a daily basis where the role title that is mentioned on the CV is unusual. Lots of companies today use all sorts of elaborate titles for their staff and managers. The problem with this is that often when a person screening the CV looks at the CV they do not recognise the title and therefore assume that the person has not been working in a similar role for that amount of time. Candidates try remedying this by including their summarised experience into their cover letter. Never works.

Try these two ideas, next to each title in brackets write a more generic title – Business Development Manager (Sales Manager). The second idea is to summarise your generic work experience in a brief table format but include this in the body of the text. Go to [www.cvforlife.co.za](http://www.cvforlife.co.za) and click on tools for an example of this.

## HERE'S A CHALLENGE

Ask any one of the recruiters that is representing you to send you a copy of your CV. You'll be surprised to see how badly your CV is represented.



## CHAPTER SIX

### Job hunt with purpose

**M**ost people stumble into the marketplace by chance, throwing their CV at the first opportunity that happens to cross their paths. With no plan and no goal to guide them the results are all too often predictable – wrong company and wrong job.

Let's look at the design of a simple set of goals for your "CV for Life" plan:

- ♦ Setting a timeframe to find work
- ♦ Identifying your target industry sector
- ♦ Profiling your ideal company
- ♦ Understanding what you want your new company to provide you with for your career

#### SETTING A TIMEFRAME TO FIND WORK

Get real here; keep your timeframe goals realistic, and keep in mind that you are the only one that can turn your goals into reality. The manner in which your sales plan is executed will largely be affected by the timeframe you set in your plan. If your timeframe is short, you will need more aggressive promotional channels in your sales plan.

I suggest that your timeframe for finding work should be no less than three months but could be as much as six months. It is important to realise that the

more senior and specialist you are in your current profession, the more time you will need. The absolute last situation you want to find yourself in is taking the first job you are offered, for the sake of finding work due to timeframe pressures.

## IDENTIFYING YOUR TARGET INDUSTRY SECTORS

Understanding which industry sector you wish to enter or stay in is very important and often totally overlooked when looking for work. South Africa's work landscape has certain industry sector trends like all other countries. Certain industry sectors are 'sexy' in terms of management approaches, general growth prospects and career opportunities.

Companies such as retailers, banking, property and communications companies are all showing good growth in skills demand. Your choice of industry sector is often determined by personal choice, especially if you have worked in the industry sector before. The automotive industry, for example, tends to keep staff for longer. I suggest that you do your research before applying for work in this industry sector.

It is also worth considering that certain industry sectors have built-in bottle necks in their structures that are not always apparent at the interview. Getting to understand the structure of the company that is typical to that industry sector will help you not to get stuck in a position that has a career bottleneck later down your career track.

## PROFILING YOUR IDEAL 'COMPANY FIT'

Most people do not even think about this when looking for work. I maintain that this is the most important element in a career change – corporate culture fit. Just visiting a company website can educate you very quickly in terms of

what the company you want to move to is all about. Aspects such as company vision, CSI programmes and staff participation can often be picked up on a company website.

### UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE

Why are you actually moving? Obviously this is only relevant for people who are currently working. Most people today rate money as a major move motivator. Before even considering moving make sure you have identified a reason, if not a few.

I simply do not believe anybody that does not provide me with a reason for leaving, except of course if they are headhunted. I also suggest that if you give reasons, such as poor remuneration or poor working conditions and even the famous 'bored at work' you must have discussed this with your current boss.

I ask this question a lot in my interviews for a very good reason. Once an offer is on the table, candidates suddenly get all their move motivator issues sorted out simply because they have resigned and forced their employer's hand who now has to take action to keep them.

This really puts you, the candidate, in a poor situation as the recruiter and potential employer assume you have already covered this ground. Your relationship with your current employer, recruiter and company that offered you a position is never the same.

It's important when setting your goals to understand ultimately what you want to achieve in the new company and what you failed to get from the company that you are leaving. I believe that the company you work for must provide some form of career goal plan. Most people will move to a company and hope for the best regarding their career plan. Ultimately, identifying why you are looking for work will lead you to the main thing that will motivate you to join your next company.

I suggest making a list of your prerequisites for work happiness and factoring them into your interview questions.

You should look carefully at your value system and work ethic. Do not, for example, go and work for a retailer that requires you to work Saturdays if you have a religious objection or family requirements.

Transport is another huge element – many people move because of travelling. Who wants to spend the whole day in traffic?

Often move motivators and attractive new company motivators are about very simple elements. Practical elements often make a working environment unbearable and you should make sure you cover all your bases before signing an offer.

‘Company fit’ is about the very controversial ‘personality fit’ type of issues. Does the company you are looking at employ and develop young people, does the environment suit mothers with children, is the environment vibey or more conservative? All this touchy feely type stuff that recruiters are not allowed to interview on is often the most important element in your decision-making process and, if not identified in your goals, won’t even come into consideration when you look at a new opportunity.

You now have very broad based goals and are ready to get on with the really hard work.

### HOW TO DO IT

If you have been to a company for a few interviews and you think that they are going to offer you a role, take a drive to the place that you will be working at in rush hour traffic and see how bad the traffic is. Most people completely underestimate the importance of working close to home or the amount of petrol they will use travelling the extra distance. You should also factor the extra petrol spend into your budget when calculating your expectation. A lot of people forget to do this and then realise afterwards that the intended move which should have been a 20% increase on gross salary is now only 10% after your extra petrol costs.

### HERE'S A CHALLENGE

Ask a close friend or relative to list five important values that he or she thinks are important to you and keep this close for question time in an interview. I will tell you how later.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Become an opportunist

**R**ight now you have your CV or ‘promotional material’ and you have set up some basic goals – so what next? Creating a sales plan to promote your CV out in the marketplace is of course the next logical step.

Just like you would identify the various channels through which you would sell a product into the market, so you need to identify the various channels that you will use to promote your CV to potential companies.

When speaking about career direction it should be remembered that even graduates that have studied in a specific direction will need to first work in their field of choice before ultimately deciding that the choice was right.

Nevertheless, finding a job rather than a career still remains a priority for many recently qualified graduates when entering the South African job market.

Entering the job market is a complex and very daunting exercise that will cause stress for even the most experienced executives.

For this reason I have always believed that a proactive approach is best when looking for a job. For me this is about selling yourself using your CV as a product and your plan as a guide.

In this part of your “CV for Life” plan you should start to consider your strategy around the channels that you will use to find work. I certainly cannot recommend enough that before you embark on this part of your plan you do your homework.

You have five different channels that you can use to put your CV into the market. You can choose all five or just a few – I suggest as many as possible.

The channels are as follows:

- ✦ Your personal network
- ✦ Recruiters including headhunters
- ✦ Selling to companies directly
- ✦ The Internet or e-recruiters
- ✦ The newspaper and media

Let's cover each one individually starting with the simplest first and then discuss how you can combine the five channels to suit your specific situation.

#### YOUR PERSONAL NETWORK (FRIENDS AND RELATIVES)

When putting their CV into the market most people completely overlook a very valuable form of networking and promoting their CV. Your own personal network. Why? I think because of embarrassment. Often people don't want others to know they are looking for work, especially friends and family. Get a reality check here, these are the people who know you best and are actually your best agents.

When looking for your ideal job prospect I firmly believe that you should have no shame in promoting your CV through this channel.

Many companies today have also started to offer incentives to their employees to find staff. If you recommend friends or family for jobs within the company you will receive some form of an incentive.

Companies will rather spend money on staff than on recruiters, and why not? If the staff member has been successful so too should their peers as they should share the same values.

Just spreading the word will often result in you networking a very lucrative opportunity that was right under your nose the whole time.

**Remember:** do not just send your CV and never follow up with that person. Call the person you sent your CV to and find out if they received the CV and then ask: “Oh by the way was anybody interested?”. I am sure you get the message.

I do recommend keeping your personal network informed once you have found work and also be sensitive. Do not hassle your friends and family, as they may feel you are trying to use the relationship to your advantage.

### THE RECRUITER AND HEADHUNTER – YOUR HIRED GUN

Most people seem to think that the recruiter’s role is one that is owed to society, somebody who has been selected to represent every available candidate. This is a misconception.

The recruiter is a business person who needs to pay the bills just like you, and as such you are one of their products – you remain a means to an end. Never forget this as it will ensure you less sleepless nights if you experience poor service delivery from your recruiter. Utilising the recruiter is of vital importance when achieving your goals as set out in your plan. Many people underestimate the importance of the recruiter and the importance of managing the recruiter in the right way. The recruiter is there to earn money, you are their ticket to that pay-cheque, so working with the recruiter ensures benefits for both. An experienced recruiter will make certain that you never think that you are being placed for money only, although few recruiters do their job just for the love of it. Recruiters can earn anything from twenty to one hundred thousand Rand to place you in a job. It’s difficult but very rewarding from a financial perspective.

To understand the recruiter you must understand South Africa's complex job market. The main problem here is the size of the unemployed candidate pool in South Africa – it's huge. Any form of response that a recruiter is handling for a role is normally overwhelming.

The recruitment industry remains disorganised, unlegislated and unsupported. These are your hurdles. Do not let a recruiter that does not call you every other week after you have responded to an advertisement, affect your overall attitude – keep focused.

What would you say if that recruiter suddenly calls you out of the blue with an opportunity that you were looking for one year down the line? Would you say no you were not prepared to look at it simply because your recruiter had not called you on your birthday. Keep your options open, don't make bad decisions based on principle. Your challenge, ultimately speaking, is to use the recruiter to find work, it's that simple.

Most people entering the job market make the simple mistake of spending so much time whining about the poor service the recruiter offers, that they miss the point of the recruiter in the first place. Understanding the recruiter's mentality is important, so let's put things in perspective.

London recruiters make an art of selling their candidates proactively, American recruiters are called headhunters and require you to sell your CVs to them.

In South Africa the recruiter manages a large amount of candidates that apply for positions and the recruiter very seldom partners with the candidate through a life time of career changes. Your CV is shoved to the bottom of the pile or top of the pile depending on your credentials, only to wait for the right opportunity to present itself.

The headhunter on the other hand represents their company's exclusivity with a determined focus that ensures your placement – if you can get onto their shortlist.

Complicating this industry is the fact that most recruiters and headhunters run 'boutique agencies', which are small one or two man businesses, normally with paper-based databases and normally with a client base that is loyal but does not cover the entire marketplace from an industry sector point of view.

There are currently about four thousand recruiters in Gauteng alone, so finding a few decent ones should not be a problem. Most candidates also do not fully understand the differences between a headhunter and recruiter.

Each will need a separate section in your plan to ensure success and depending on your experience level, will require more or less research and relationship management. You should promote your CV to at least five to eight recruiters or headhunters at the same time.

Generally, the more senior your role in your current company, the more headhunters or specialist agencies you require on your list.

Headhunters will demand a higher fee for your placement and therefore you can demand more from them in return. The recruiter offers you no favours with such a large number of unemployed people in the market.

You will however, if you are lucky, find a 'career recruiter', somebody that you can nurture a relationship with, a recruiter that will stay with you through several job changes and that understands his/her client's corporate culture and your ideal fit in that culture.

Your attitude should be simple and straightforward; your recruiter is not a service provider, they are a broker between yourself and an opportunity that may exist in the market.

It remains your responsibility to provide your recruiter with as much ammunition as possible to link you with that career opportunity. How can you possibly do that if your attitude prohibits you from calling them regularly?

So stop whining about how many times your recruiter does not call you and start managing your relationship with your recruiters.

## WHERE TO START WITH YOUR RECRUITER

The place to start is definitely with your area of speciality or the industry sector into which you would want to move. Remember that in South Africa, unlike our international counterparts, moving industry sectors is seen as a more difficult move and only very experienced recruiters will be able to sell your transferable skills accordingly. Finding a specialist recruiter can be a challenge. Reading the newspaper is a good start, as most recruiters worth their salt will advertise in the Sunday Times and will normally brand their speciality.

The other option will be to contact the top companies in your industry sector and ask the HR managers who they use for recruitment. Most blue chips now have vendor lists and should provide this information to you fairly easily. The internet will also provide you with guidance and specialist magazines such as financial publications normally carry all the top recruiters' advertising.

I always suggest that if you are seeing a recruitment company with less than five consultants, check before making the appointment who they deal with from a client perspective. Otherwise, with the larger recruiters there are normally consultants that deal with specialist sectors and you are safer not to waste time at an interview being spoken to about opportunities that fall outside of your industry focus in your plan.

Managing your "CV for Life" business plan should remain your number one priority – keep focused on your goals, don't become bogged down when your attempts to find work reach a point of stalling. Keep on plugging away at your plan as this will pay dividends.

**Remember:** keep an open mind and take calculated risks.

### SELLING YOUR SKILLS TO COMPANIES DIRECTLY

You may be lucky and have an opportunity to sell your CV to a company directly – either to an HR manager or a line manager, the latter being a preferred and more direct way of attaining immediate results. When deciding on how you are going to promote your CV directly to a company, understanding the size of the business will impact your success. You should have already identified, in your planning section of your “CV for Life”, the type of corporate culture you wish to work in.

I believe that most people who move to a new opportunity do so without knowing what type of business personality suits theirs. However, you may not have worked before and still need to find this out, but you can still make a list of your values and aspire to work in an environment that will suit you best.

Let’s identify the typical recruitment practices of both small and large companies. This should assist you when putting together the execution of your sales plan.

### SELLING YOUR CV TO SMALL BUSINESSES

These companies typically have the following recruitment practices:

- ♦ Little or no use of recruiters
- ♦ Quicker recruitment processes
- ♦ Large degree of word-of-mouth referrals
- ♦ Large degree of smaller, cheaper media advertising

Most small business (SMME) owners will not have the money to spend on recruitment fees let alone national advertising. So most of these business owners will revert to their local newspapers or provincial newspapers and the Internet or word-of-mouth to advertise their vacancies.

Your sales and promotion strategy should therefore accommodate this target market accordingly. Here are some pointers to consider when promoting your CV directly to these companies.

The quickest way to see if a company is advertising directly is to look at the e-mail of the person taking the response of the media or Internet advertisement. If the e-mail address contains the company's name in the URL the chances are your CV will be screened by the actual company, not a recruiter.

This is also a good way to see what the name of the company is that you are applying to, thereby assisting you to research the company properly.

Always do research on the company you are applying to on the Internet before sending your CV. If the prospect looks good, try adjusting your CV to highlight experience that you may have that is in line with what the company is doing. (To read more about loading your CV, look at Chapter Five on page 34.)

Using Internet sites, screening local newspapers and speaking with friends about your availability would therefore be a priority when looking for work in these types of companies.

I also recommend downsizing your CV slightly. If an owner is taking responses from an advertisement he or she will have less time to read through a CV, therefore keep it short.

If you are a very bold candidate you can also, as mentioned before, study e-mail addresses in the advertisement. Track the respondent company and make a direct approach to that party who has advertised. Sometimes you can make a very good impression especially for a sales type role. But you didn't get that advice from me.

I always recommend to graduates that you need to keep an open mind regarding what size of business you want to work for. I believe most graduates think only large companies look for their entry level type skills. As a graduate you will gain excellent generalist skills in a smaller environment.

In comparison the larger company is often viewed as a fortress of impregnability. Most people looking for work assume that large companies will never take their candidacy into consideration if they make a direct approach – wrong.

Most companies loath spending money on recruitment and try every trick in the book to avoid the pain of this cost.

The problem of course is, with so many unemployed people in the marketplace, large companies are often overwhelmed, especially when recruitment processes and affirmative action come into play. Once again do your research properly and never assume anything.

Let's examine some of the traits of larger companies when selling your CV.

### SELLING YOUR CV TO LARGE CORPORATES

These companies typically have the following recruitment practices:

- ♦ Set recruitment processes and very process driven
- ♦ Recruitment is often automated using Internet advertising
- ♦ The use of mass advertising in newspapers
- ♦ A high degree of HR manager contact
- ♦ Slower process with poor feedback after interviews
- ♦ More competency than 'potential talent' orientated

Most larger companies or businesses with an HR manager will have invested money in this skill for a reason. The most obvious is the overwhelming or over complicated hiring process that has become established in that company, necessitating somebody to manage the actual process. So you can assume exactly that – lots of processes and policy – just what HR managers are good at.

To assist you in understanding the HR mentality I have divided HR practitioners

into two general categories. Please note there are lots of exceptions to my two categories and I have simply provided this simplistic view to help you understand the differences in interview style. For you to be more successful at applying for jobs in larger companies it is important to understand the typical HR manager profile.

## HR MANAGER TYPES

I believe that most HR managers fall into two categories, the administrator and the business type. Most HR practitioners unfortunately fall into the former category. This type of HR personality will normally be more concerned about following procedure than actually finding talent. Often these types of HR practitioners have been hired to do a job much larger than what they can handle and in so doing get forced into doing more recruitment than what they intended.

Most HR practitioners try to get away from dealing with too much recruitment because they simply do not like working with recruiters. When dealing with this type of person you should always remember the MD of the company is a call away if you really want into the company – just pick up the phone and call. The worst that can happen is that you get a closed door. I feel that's worth taking the risk if you really are being stonewalled.

This type of HR person will also look for lots of detail in your CV and you should be prepared for a gruelling interview process. Many blue chips still hire these types of HR managers to the detriment of their own companies, as true talent is often not spotted by them.

In defence of these types of HR managers it must be said that more often than not the workload for them is just completely overwhelming and you can see this in the market at the moment where there is a huge amount of movement in the HR arena.

The second type of HR person is the business type of HR person and is nor-

mally a person that has years of experience and has seen all the tricks and knows how to identify talent without reams of tests and paperwork.

This person should be treated with the utmost respect and humility as this is a dying breed in my opinion and more often than not this is the HR manager that will take on a calculated risk to get really top talent.

Normally by just speaking with this person on the phone you can identify the personality, one that is more concerned about ensuring profitability in the company rather than following process. This type of HR person normally requires less information in your CV and wants to know about your 'company fit' rather than just what you have done.

Either way you will need to deal with an HR manager in a larger company. This person is normally in a position to allow your application to be considered or not and you should treat this person with respect.

You can however show 'enthusiasm' and should expect service delivery, especially as the HR person is a 'practitioner'. So here you have some forms of influence that you do not have with a recruiter. Use it or don't – your choice.

Some other important attributes to take note of: With larger companies the job specs are well documented and the company's corporate culture well identified, this makes your research that much easier.

Larger companies tend to use more specific recruitment techniques, often using competency-based type interviews, where your actual practical skills are tested against various real life work situations, thereby trying to assess your practical experience.

For me your performance at the interview with the larger company is very important, as this is where your interview skills will be tested more so than maybe in a smaller company.

## THE INTERNET OR E-RECRUITMENT CHANNEL

By far the largest impact felt on the war for talent in South Africa, besides the introduction of affirmative action, has been the advent of e-recruitment.

How many of us today have our details floating around on the World Wide Web, promoting our availability to companies and recruiters. E-recruitment technology has started to shape our lives.

With the introduction of improved communications infrastructure in South Africa, candidate details have become more accessible to the recruiter.

To understand the emergence of these hi-tech tools and how they will affect your job search, I have sub-divided the technology into two main areas: the e-recruitment website used by recruiters and the outsourced internal database tool for both recruiter and company.

The greatest and most prominent technology tool in use at the moment is by far the e-recruitment website. (I have provide some details in the reference section at the back of the book.)

These online recruitment products focus on attracting large amounts of general candidates to a central point where numerous roles are advertised on behalf of recruiters. The immediate benefit to a candidate is the large amount of roles advertised and the centrality of the actual opportunities.

The negative is that you are literally just a number and name on a database. Positions displayed are also focused on lower level generalist roles, thereby not providing specific opportunities for more senior executives and specialists.

The positive side of e-recruitment tools is that candidates are starting to make use of these websites with a greater proficiency when applying for jobs, and therefore becoming better at managing their details, recruiters and applications.

The outsourced internal database tool for both recruiter and company is the second type of hi-tech tool in use and is a new entity in South Africa. Over the

past year or so several businesses within our borders have started emerging as strong players in this market. They offer a service designing internal recruitment websites for their clients and then assisting to manage these entities.

The definition of this type of e-recruitment would be: an offering to larger companies that require an outsourced database and workflow tool to manage internal recruitment processes and candidate applications, with the aim of saving money for the business as a result of the overwhelming recruitment needs that are required to be met by their internal recruiters.

As the communications infrastructure in South Africa improves so does the success of all of these e-recruitment channels. In other words, your e-recruitment channel will only improve as a tool to network your CV. These solutions normally have built-in automated functionalities that aid the recruiter and job seeker alike, ultimately saving time and energy.

Unfortunately for you as a candidate using e-recruitment, the overall goal of the company using the tool is often to attract many candidates to roles within the company and co-ordinate their candidacy in a way that is cost effective for the organisation. The personal touch is therefore slightly lost.

Not enough South African products have yet been developed by recruiters to ensure that the South African market keeps up with the international technology mainstream. The only way that the candidate will ultimately benefit from this technology will be if these parties work together to understand the successes and failures of using these hi-tech tools in the practical workplace.

If you use this service be aware of the fact that as a candidate you are still very much part of a growing and learning e-recruitment platform in South Africa. The good news is it will only get better.

## THE NEWSPAPER AND MEDIA

Advertising vacancies in South Africa has in the past few years taken a less important role in recruitment strategies.

This is primarily due to the fact that e-recruitment has increased in its reach and also candidates who apply via advertisements have been disappointed with the response they get from those applications.

I cannot stress enough that you should use all forms of media advertising to sell your CV. Never assume that a certain form of media advertising will bring you a poor result. Responding to advertisements is an easy way of networking and selling your details to large and small companies. It's very much about how you manage the amount of admin that comes along with using this channel when promoting your CV. To help you respond appropriately to advertisements in the media, I will discuss the avenues that companies and recruiters use so you can ensure proper coverage.

- ♦ *The Sunday Times* (national)
- ♦ The main provincial newspapers
- ♦ Local community newspapers
- ♦ Magazines and periodicals

Obviously this is not all the forms of print media but rather the main ones. South Africa is unique in the world when it comes to having a single newspaper that can cover all provinces with one edition. *The Sunday Times'* Career Section has for many years provided countless job seekers with good opportunities.

Today *The Sunday Times* is not just reserved for jobs aimed at executives and potential government employees. The newspaper now covers a variety of smaller businesses seeking talent.

Most companies that advertise in *The Sunday Times* will pay significant amounts of money to run their advertisements. Therefore the type of companies that especially use larger advertisements in the media tend to have money to spend on looking for staff.

I speak in much more detail in the next chapter about using the media when looking for work, as using the media is very much about processes and bulk rather than personalised service such as a recruiter.

A final word about using this channel: consider the fact that companies that are smaller and more localised will use niche media platforms to recruit their staff. So if you have decided to work for a smaller company you should consider regional and local newspapers and magazines.

### HOW TO COMBINE YOUR CHANNELS

I would suggest the following with regards to choosing your channels. Generally the less experience you have working and the more desperate you are, the more channels you should employ. I also suggest the more specialist your background the more channels you should use.

For all types of people looking for work the use of the personal network is a must. This is an easy to use and very quick way to promote your CV into the market. It is also a channel that can be used by graduates and executives effectively. Using the media and e-recruitment is a must and often these are pooled together. This type of channel can be used with little effort if you have your information prepared and your admin skills honed. It can be a very useful option.

If you are really pressed for time or have planned for a less aggressive approach in finding work, using recruiters and approaching companies directly are options. I strongly recommend using all the above channels in some way to promote your CV if you are serious about finding an opportunity.

## **CAN YOU BELIEVE THIS**

There are currently five thousand recruitment companies listed with APSO (The Association of Personnel Service Organisations) in South Africa and these are just registered ones. To get a list go to [www.apso.co.za](http://www.apso.co.za) and you can search for a recruitment company.

## **HINT**

Many recruiters call their company names after their speciality, so when looking for a recruiter that works in your industry sector just look at the name. Most newspapers now use the Internet to advertise their roles, this is easier for you to use as you can get the website to notify you regarding new roles automatically. This means no weekly newspaper buying.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Executing your business plan

**N**ow that you've set your goals and fine-tuned them with respect to the channels that you will use, all you need to do is execute your plan.

This is where most candidates fall short – YOU NEED TO MANAGE AND DRIVE THE PROCESS FOR IT TO BE SUCCESSFUL. Your eventual placement into a new company may come from any one of the many channels that you have chosen and managed with your plan. You will need to use all the experience (even if it is limited) that you have on the soft skills side to ensure that you manage your sales plan effectively. You will need to keep track of all the places that have your CV and then manage these receivers of your CV carefully.

I have included only the most relevant channels in this section and while a lot of what I have to share here may seem obvious it is worth covering.

**Remember:** you want as many balls in the air as possible. At the end of the day you want to be in the driving seat when choosing a career and you need actual job offers to do that, so get moving.

#### MANAGING YOUR RESPONSES TO ADVERTISEMENTS

One generalisation that I can make is that most advertisers now mark their ads with a note that if you do not hear from the advertiser regarding your application

you have not been successful. The reason for this is simple: most companies do this to protect themselves from having to send correspondence to all the candidates that have been unsuccessful.

Also remember that a drawback with the larger media types, especially national press, is that advertisers receive a large response to each advertisement. There is a lesson for the applicant in this: you should be more innovative when compiling your CV.

Let's cover each of the type of advertisers that uses *The Sunday Times*, as an example, and look at some approaches to gain the maximum value. Typically there are three types of people advertising in the newspaper, the recruiter, the client or an ad response company.

Always keep a track of which advertisements you respond to on a spreadsheet so that you can follow up with advertisers where necessary.

Few recruiters have the money to advertise roles on behalf of companies, so often these recruiters are paid to place the advertisements.

This is important to bear in mind when responding to an advertisement that a recruiter is handling. The recruiter wants to fill the role and, therefore, will act very aggressively to get candidates in for interviews. You can use this to your advantage by prioritising these advertisements.

Generally, if the recruiter is handling the response the advertisement may read: "our client has retained us"; "our client, a leader in the following industry" or "all respondents please do not contact the client directly".

These are all hints that a recruiter has been retained to assist the client in taking responses. When responding to this type of advertisement you can cheat by calling the recruiter directly (find them by using the domain name in their email and the APSO website). Most recruiters do not like being called directly but it is a good way to sell your skills. It shows a proactive approach that clever recruiters will capitalise on when presenting you to their client.

When the client advertises, an immediate give-away is in the advertisement text, especially at the bottom of the advertisement. The ad may read “no agencies” or the title of the person that is taking the response will read “Human Resources Manager”. Another key indicator is the response e-mail domain address which will match the advertising company’s name. In a larger press advertising campaign I do not advise trying to call an HR manager after the running of the advertisement like I have advised for the recruiter. Either way expect a much slower feedback response if any when sending your CV.

Advertised response is a service that very few people understand or even know about. Most people will consider this to be the same as a recruiter – not so. Advertised recruiters charge their client for managing the response of the advertisement and then short-listing CVs in a set format to their clients.

When sending your details in response to an advertisement that you think is an advertised response handling company, keep your CV simple and concise as these advertisements are normally designed to effect maximum response.

Most advertisements will be clearly marked with the fact that the company has been retained to handle an advertised response. The advertised response company does no interviewing but you may expect a telephonic screening, so be prepared at all times for this. When looking for work you should always read *The Sunday Times* – never miss this newspaper.

The main provincial or community newspapers cover the major component of the vacancies that exist within a specific geographical area.

Now, a lot of what I have mentioned before regarding national newspapers is relevant to these types of newspapers as well. The provincial newspapers divide their publications into two sections, the block advertisements and the strip advertisements at the back of the paper, which normally take up most of the space in the newspaper. The strip section is divided into specialities as well, but do not just read the strip that is relevant to your speciality – a lot of times roles are ad-

vertised in the incorrect speciality column. Make a habit of reading the entire strip section. It's very simple: companies that want to promote their brands and have the money to do this, or have large amounts of opportunities, will use block advertisements. This is a good place to search for newer companies with exciting opportunities or companies with good growth potential.

You will also notice the larger recruiters advertising their specialist roles, which is great for you the candidate because you can profile the recruiter and identify if the recruitment company will have opportunities that may interest you.

Strip advertisements are very popular with small businesses and often contain some hidden opportunities – never just ignore this section. Also, nothing stops you from asking the advertiser for more information simply because the space they use in the strip is often not enough to provide you with everything. This is also a good place to prospect for business owners looking for talent and you can use the approach previously mentioned – call the advertiser directly and make an approach. Why not?

When in the job market, you must include your major local newspaper career section in your sales strategy. But, do not be lazy – never assume that a role will only have one specific description, be thorough and ensure you check all possibilities. In Johannesburg you will most probably manage several newspapers in your portfolio. Most people will forget about their community newspapers, but screening these newspapers is vitally important for candidates who wish to remain bound to a specific geographic area.

Most home-based businesses, brokerages or SMMEs will source their staff using this inexpensive form of advertised recruitment. This is by far the cheapest of the print media advertising and is often used for retail roles such as shop assistants or home-based businesses. Again, make sure you include at least two or three types of community newspapers.

Magazines are a great place to source specialist roles. If you're looking for fi-

nancial roles you can source positions in the financial magazines such as *Finweek*. The recruiters that are included in these magazines are often specialists that recruit regularly and have specialist knowledge of the industry.

If you read these industry-specific magazines regularly you will get to know who these recruiters are. Many industry sectors also have periodicals that contain industry specific roles; often these periodicals can be downloaded off or subscribed to through the Internet. Recruiters who are active in this environment are often worth contacting as a general candidate. They may unexpectedly present you with some interesting opportunities.

### KEY TIPS WHEN RESPONDING TO ADVERTISEMENTS

When responding to an advertisement in the print media, there are a few simple hints that you can follow to ensure your CV is looked at in a more effective way:

- ♦ Keep your CV concise and simple – less is more
- ♦ E-mail rather than fax
- ♦ Skip the introductory letter and keep your introduction to the e-mail text
- ♦ Forward all security documentation that is needed
- ♦ Provide a clear credit check or indicate this in the CV
- ♦ Provide references and make sure that they are available

Keep in mind that advertising is mainly orientated to companies wanting to get a mass response for a role from a mass market.

You are one of many candidates that will be forwarding your details; never forget that the information you forward should, therefore, be concise but attract attention in a professional manner. When executing your sales plan through this channel your CV format is vital.

## USING INTERNET RECRUITMENT TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

When I first arrived in Johannesburg we handled a search for a major corporate company, which took us almost three weeks to complete.

On presenting our very extensive research we were informed that a recruitment company had hand-sourced a single candidate from one of the major career websites and made the placement.

From then on, much to my disappointment, we were forced to use this same service to compete. The South African web-based e-recruitment industry is still in its infancy, but will provide you with a wealth of opportunity if used in the correct manner.

Your point of departure must certainly be to classify yourself into either specialist skill or more generalist skill. This will determine the degree to which you will use your e-recruitment channel. I feel that if you are an executive or co-owner, registering your details is risky. Be careful here as you are most likely bound to a shareholders agreement with a restraint, and you will need to consider your fiduciary responsibilities before going ahead.

Most people will not be in this situation and therefore can use any of the e-recruitment sites they wish. There are several types of recruitment websites and before venturing into this sphere you should be careful to ensure that you understand all of them. I am still amazed how people load their information onto multiple sites and forget where they have loaded their information.

Keep careful track of the site you load your information onto. Most people think they are being smart by registering on every site available – imagine what a potential client will say if they know that your details lie with every site on the Internet. I also still believe that employees put themselves at risk when loading their details onto a site, as many companies now use this site to search for staff and I think that this puts your intellectual property at risk. Think about this carefully.

**Remember:** once you load your information onto the net this information is no longer confidential – if people can hack a bank site they can hack a career site.

You should only spread your career details across the web when absolutely desperate. Consider it carefully, particularly if you are in a senior management or executive role.

Let's first cover the easiest of the e-recruitment sites: the company career site. Nowadays many larger clients run their own web-based recruitment sites. Unfortunately very few of these are supported but are rather a fully interactive solution. Therefore they tend to slow the recruitment process rather than aid it and this can be detrimental to the candidate.

Some company websites will provide a system to load your details and search specific roles. Many candidates remain too lazy to even identify this opportunity on company websites. You can save yourself time and money by loading your details onto the career site of a company. It is really an easy thing to do and is a very good way to get the ball rolling on your recruitment strategy whilst managing some of your other recruitment channels.

Whatever the process, you should always keep a careful note of when you loaded your details and then diarise to visit the site to see if the opportunities have changed on the site.

The second type of e-recruitment site is that of the recruiter – an independent recruitment site that provides the job seeker with links to companies or recruiters. In South Africa the market is dominated by two or three e-recruiters although the numbers are starting to increase dramatically.

The reason for the small size of competitor base is simple: why should recruit-

ers use their own sites if they can use a central place to advertise all their requirements that is already branded? In essence most of these e-recruiters charge recruitment companies for access to the database that you upload your details to.

It is worth loading your details onto larger and smaller recruitment sites. Make sure when loading your details that you provide as much technical detail as possible, as this is the quickest way for most recruiters to screen your CV.

### MANAGING THE RECRUITER AND HEADHUNTER

Once you have made contact with a recruiter or headhunter and been for an interview, call your recruiter at least once a week for the first month.

If you feel that the recruiter will have fewer opportunities call every two weeks. I suggest doing this for at least two months. Thereafter, e-mailing your recruiter and phoning once a month should suffice. You may already be on a recruiter's database – in this case I suggest keeping in contact once a month via e-mail or SMS, especially if you have been with the recruiter for some time without success. I know of no recruiter or recruitment company that knows of all the opportunities in South Africa, so you must network with many recruiters to get a larger scope of opportunities. Recruiters are fiercely client-centric – never forget this.

### ASSESSING YOUR RECRUITER OR HEADHUNTER

When scanning the press for opportunities also remember to link up jobs with the recruitment companies you have seen. Most people do not know that recruiters seldom share jobs in the same company. You may see a job that is advertised that you are interested in and your recruiter does not even know that their company is offering this position.

Recruiters do have preferences for certain clients, and most recruiters will

work with no more than ten clients with at least two or three being their favourite. I have never had a candidate ask me who I work with as I think most people believe recruiters know the entire world.

Ask your recruiter at the interview who they work with and if the recruiter cannot tell you in five minutes or less why they work with that client, you are most probably wasting your time. Ask the recruiter what sectors his or her colleagues work in and who their major clients are. If the recruiter refuses to let you know call for a manager and ask again.

Most recruiters guard their clients jealously and they are afraid you will share this information with their competitors.

Ask your recruiter about his or her background; this will tell you about the professionalism of the recruiter. Ask the recruiter to tell you about his or her successes; you will quickly determine if the recruiter has a passion for their industry and clients.

Recruiters that are passionate about their clients often make the best career placements because their client relationships are usually forged over many years.

**Remember:** the recruiter you deal with will represent you to their clients and will add value to your career business plan.

Once you've met with all your recruiters make a list of the best and worst with ratings according to experience, client base, general attitude and sales ability.

Use this list to call your recruiters and manage the relationships. If a recruiter fobs you off replace them with another, but always keep your number of recruiters on your list constant.

**Remember:** your recruiter may call you out of the blue with an unbelievable opportunity that not even he or she expected, so never assume a recruiter is useless – even the really bad recruiters stumble onto good roles by chance.

We will cover the recruiter’s interview in more detail later as your brief or interview to the recruiter will ensure that the right opportunity finds you quicker.

#### WHAT YOUR RECRUITER DIDN'T TELL YOU

The recruiter, friend or foe? When promoting your CV in the marketplace few people understand that your recruiter can provide you with valuable advice and assistance in finding work. Ultimately, you should build several good relationships with recruiters on your journey through the many pitfalls of finding work and direction in your career.

Most people find work through a recruiter to never contact that recruiter again. This is an ideal network and relationship building opportunity that you must not miss out on.

Your recruiter often has a pessimistic, but rather realistic, view of the job market that may benefit you. Filtering the good recruiters from the bad recruiters is however a challenge and you should make sure that you choose your recruiters with care.

**Remember:** this recruiter will be representing your brand, that is your CV, to potential clients.

As an experienced headhunter I will in the next few pages share some idiosyncrasies of the recruitment industry that hopefully will assist you to understand your recruiter better, and help you in building stronger relationships with this agent of opportunity.

Recruiters have certain limitations as to what information they can share with you as a candidate. Yet, this information is often vital to you as a job seeker in order to improve your sales technique when selling yourself to prospective companies.

Let's look at one common example: the feedback you receive after attending an interview with a client. Most recruiters will only provide you with a 'technical' reason for you not receiving an invitation for a further interview, such as your level of experience or the famous line: "the other candidate had more experience".

Recruiters are taught not to reveal non-technical reasons such as your interview style really stank or that you arrived late for the interview and irritated the interviewer. A lot of candidates fail interviews based on very basic aspects that they will repeat at other interviews if not warned.

I never forget placing a candidate who had a very bad twitch; the candidate had the perfect credentials and what difference did it make that he had a twitch? Yet, the client debated this at executive level for two weeks before opting to take the candidate. Three years later the candidate still produces excellent results – twitch and all.

You may ask why this reluctance to share information that will eventually benefit both the candidate and the client? It has a lot to do with the way recruiters interpret legislation in South Africa. Recruiters have the view that legislation determines that post interview feedback, which is not objective, is problematic. In order to avoid potential problems many recruiters simply avoid this all together.

Developing a strong relationship with your recruiter over a period of time can ensure that this shortfall in communication is avoided. Also asking your

recruiter after the meeting if there were any pointers regarding your interview style, emphasising that the recruiter can be as frank as needed, will ensure you get the full picture.

Another major area of poor candidate-recruiter communication is that of your recruiter avoiding comments at the initial interview on your CV or career history or even your salary expectation. Candidates tell me every day that they feel they are underpaid according to market standards, yet where do they get their so-called 'market standards' from – normally word of mouth. More often than not the recruiters will place you on a shortlist rather than challenge you at the interview on issues such as salary expectation, as the assumption is that you will not move your salary expectation if the client fails to meet it.

Often it's more what the recruiter 'accidentally' leaves out at your interview regarding their client that is vital. Recruiters often leave out all sorts of juicy details regarding their clients, such as their recruiting history for that client and their understanding of the client's corporate culture.

How often have you been asked at an interview what type of corporate culture you prefer? More often than not the recruiter already knows the history of their client's hiring decisions and you will need to get this information before proceeding a potential employer, as a lot of relationships that sour between new employee and employer are due to the soft issues such as poor corporate culture fit.

What about your reference checks? More often than not candidates will provide references from people that actually provide them with poor references.

I am not sure why but this does happen. A recruiter will never tell you that one of your references was rubbish for fear of landing in trouble. Always ensure that your references check out; change your references in your CV with every move and check that your references remain loyal to your cause. When leaving a company ensure that you have references from the right people, and ensure that your recruiter has your permission before calling your references.

If a recruiter sends your details to a client and another recruiter sends your information to the same client the recruiter that sent your information first will have the right to claim a fee from your intellectual property. Now I bet you didn't know that!

Most candidates think they are being smart when sending their CVs to as many recruiters as possible – wrong.

There have been several cases of recruiters suing for fees due to this problem. There can be nothing worse than two recruiters sending your details to the same client and then getting into a fight about who gets the fee. However, it happens with frightening regularity.

I believe that this problem is caused by either the recruiter failing to tell the candidate who he or she is recruiting for, or the candidate who is simply trying to play the field. Either way, clients frown on this practice. Keep your relationship with your recruiter frank and open at all times. If your recruiter lies to you, end the relationship and ask that your details be taken off their database.

Recruiters are obligated to keep your details on their database by law for a period of one year, most recruiters do not keep databases that manage this and therefore you should keep careful track of who you send your information to.

Recruiters also have a nasty habit of sending your details to a client without your consent; this should be frowned upon at all times. Send updates to your recruiter regularly on new accomplishments or additional responsibilities – keep your CV as current as possible. As a candidate you do have an opportunity to voice your disapproval, if you feel you have really been short changed you can lay a complaint against your recruiter (contact APSO).

At the end of the day building a partnership with your recruiter can ensure that you land yourself roles that are life changing. It is only through the creation of an open relationship with your recruiter that you will learn about your mistakes and become better in interviews.

## HOW TO DO IT

I find the best form of reference regarding good recruiters is word-of-mouth. Send an e-mail to your friends asking them who placed them in the company they currently work at (only if they are happy there) and then get the contact details for those recruiters. It is very hard for a recruiter to refuse to see you if they get referred by somebody that was placed successfully. Another good idea is to use your Facebook profile to advertise your availability, some recruiters are starting to get smart now and network and search using Facebook. I personally believe that this is the future of personal networking recruitments worldwide.

## CHAPTER NINE

### Meeting the decision-makers

**T**he interview with the recruiter is possibly the most important element of your recruitment experience. It's crucial to get as much experience at interviews as possible before going to see the client and you can never have too much interview experience with recruiters or clients.

For every client meeting you should generally have five recruiter meetings behind you. Let's discuss some tips that will help you with your interview technique.

Always confirm your meeting with your recruiter first, check what documentation you will need to take along to the meeting. (I speak at length about background checks in chapter eleven.)

Recruiters are notoriously poor time-keepers. When arriving at the recruitment company's offices ask the receptionist for a marketing brochure providing details of the recruiter's background and the company background. The more you know about your recruiter the less time you waste in an interview. You could of course do this online as well.

Just sitting in the waiting room of the recruiter will tell you a huge amount about the business; look around for hints of how successful or busy the recruitment company is, it should be very obvious. Most candidates when starting a meeting with a recruitment consultant fail to understand that this is not a formal interview. Rather consider this to be a two-way information gathering exercise.

Your goal at the interview is simple: establish if the company and opportunity interests you and decide if you want to work with this recruiter in the future.

Most candidates behave as if the recruiter is making the hiring decision, actually you are in the position of power provided you have the rights skills – if not, the recruiter has the power to decline.

**Remember:** being humble at a recruiter’ meeting is always appropriate.

Some recruiters will just not have the kind of information you will need and therefore you will walk away empty-handed. You should avoid putting these types of recruiters on your list of recruitment partners.

Recruiters will protect their clients by not revealing the identity of the company and sometimes not even providing a full job specification. So expect most of your information at the actual interview.

This is common practice as recruiters do not want their opposition to find out who they are working with – never mind that the candidate needs to know if he or she will be interested in that company.

I generally recommend letting the recruiter make his or her way through the interview as you first want to gauge what the recruiter has to offer before starting your information gathering exercise.

Very few candidates come to an interview with the attitude of gathering information regarding the job and making a decision on whether or not they want to partner with that recruiter.

**Remember:** you need to harvest information at every opportunity.

Every recruiter will ask if you have any questions at the end of the interview, if not, you can ask them anyway. Going to an interview with a recruiter unprepared is a cardinal sin; if the recruiter has given you the client's name you should have done your research upfront and have all your questions ready. Always go to your interview with a set of standard questions that you can ask.

When probing the potential job opportunity, probe not only the company background but also factors such as previous recruitment and corporate culture of the company. I generally teach my consultants that it will take up to year to understand the corporate culture of a client and that placing several people with the company will teach you the ultimate 'fit' for the company.

So, as a candidate you are probing to see if the consultant understands the fit and then understands if you are the right fit.

You should walk away from the meeting trusting that the consultant will recommend you if you are a good fit.

Unfortunately, most recruiters will not know this and you should be cautious when letting the recruiter send your information to that client for an opportunity when this good fit has not been established.

You can also find out quickly how experienced your recruiter is by asking a few questions such as how long they have been in the industry and more specifically with this recruitment company. I wouldn't even see a recruiter that hasn't been in the industry for more than six months.

You can also place an ultimatum on the recruiter by asking that he or she let you know by a certain date or you will consider an opportunity elsewhere. Just remember this can be a risky strategy. If you thought the recruiter was worthwhile, don't ruin a potential good future relationship with a recruiter just because your recruiter didn't call you to say sorry you were not short-listed.

Make sure that you let the recruiter know that he or she should only send your information if you have given consent. Currently, in the UK it has been legislated

that recruiters will need to be given written consent to forward details and have that candidate on their databases. No such thing seems to be on the horizon in South Africa.

**Remember:** a potential employer will frown on a candidate who sells their details to too many recruiters.

When the interview is over ask your recruiter to introduce you to some of the other recruiters that may have opportunities. Some recruiters will want to network your details with other colleagues and since you are at the meeting, why not ask to be introduced? Many recruiters will decline but at least you have asked. It's also a good idea to ask the recruiter for a contact person in the office that handles the admin such as an office assistant. Often such a person will provide you with crucial information when the recruiter is too busy.

## THE INTERVIEW WITH THE COMPANY

The moment of truth! You finally get to your ultimate meeting. The meeting with the company is actually not that different to your meeting with the recruiter. You still remain in a situation where you need as much information as possible from the interviewer, with regards to the opportunity, before making a decision.

Let's break down the interview into basic components:

## RESEARCH THE OPPORTUNITY

Nothing impresses a client more than an informed candidate and I mean informed not arrogant. After meeting your recruiter you should have a specification and the name of the HR manager you are meeting.

Great, now you can get down to business: start by identifying the company on the web and getting a real understanding of the company's profile and business ethics. I like looking for aspects such as CSI programmes, product information, management structure and any form of information pertaining to future and potential growth.

Next, do a Google search on the name of the company or its CEO. I cannot tell you the amount of candidates that tell me they started work for a company and the company was busy being acquired or liquidated.

I also think it's a good idea to check [www.caselaw.com](http://www.caselaw.com) for past cases at the CCMA, it's always good to know how your potential new employer has been behaving itself. Doing a general search will reveal any complaints, problems or hidden deals that may be in the works such as a deal with the competitions tribunal. Then, if you can, Google the person that is interviewing you – I think understanding the background of your interviewer is a good thing. I especially recommend this for a final interview with the MD or CEO.

Most successful business people love having their egos stroked and the fact that you have shown interest is a good sign and even better for you as you know more about your new boss.

Now look at the specification and make a list of questions that you need to have answered. Understanding the spec is important as you will be fulfilling that role. You are now ready for the interview.

## THE ACTUAL INTERVIEW

Call your recruiter the next day and confirm the appointment. Then check the directions, and make sure you know how to get there – we get many calls from candidates who get lost going to an interview.

Do not be late for the interview – there are no excuses. If you are nervous about finding the location of the interview drive to the location the day before to make sure you feel comfortable with the traffic.

Why? It's bad manners and unprofessional and most HR managers will line up several interviews for that day to save time and you will simply be overlooked – does not matter how good your CV looks.

When arriving at the interview switch your cellphone off and wait patiently for your interviewer. Often HR managers will be very busy and you should respect their poor time management skills.

Do not be nervous, most hiring managers will have a set format when interviewing and you should let the HR manager go through this format at their own leisure. The HR manager is there to screen you, ninety per cent of declines happen at this initial interview stage. Good HR managers will be able to assess your possible company 'fit' and get an understanding of what your skills are without making you feel uncomfortable.

Most HR managers know that their recommendation to their boss will influence their bonuses and therefore they will need to make the right decision regarding hiring you. Even HR managers have performance appraisals!

Competency-based interviews will generally move through a series of questions that aim for you to prove you have done what you have said you have in your CV. Do not oversell yourself at your interview if you do not have that experience, simply keep to the truth. Try to highlight your accomplishments and promotions in your current company as much as possible – these are your achievements.

Now comes the important part: make sure that you interview almost like you are telling a story – your life story.

Don't harp on about your bad experiences with previous companies, make sure you stay focused on the job and opportunity at hand, not on your previous bosses and their bad management style.

Do not get flustered when the HR manager probes something in the interview. I have had candidates say their interview went very badly and they get the job – always keep a positive frame of mind.

Try to gather information during the interview and remember that it does not matter how badly the interview goes, most HR managers will provide you an opportunity to ask questions. This is an opportunity to ask one or two good questions that could turn the interview around in your favour.

You should not leave the interview without indicating that you have done your research, so when asking questions ask something that is relevant regarding the company's future. Always ask about the recruitment process and who you would be potentially meeting next and when they would want to appoint a person to this position.

This is valuable ammunition for your next meeting and often your recruiter does not know any of this information. If you do not get asked about money at your first interview do not discuss this as it can be interpreted as desperation. If they should ask you about your salary expectations or your resignation period, be cautious.

If you are keen on the role, take a position that keeps your opportunities open. If your recruiter has given you a range, I feel quoting up to a 25% increase on your annual growth is important. Make sure you have information with you regarding your current salary breakdown as well as all your benefits and incentives.

**Remember:** mention incentives as part of your package – some companies offer very good incentives with very average salary packages.

You should be provided an opportunity to negotiate a salary when the offer is made, most HR managers will ask the recruiter to ask you regarding your expectations and then you can discuss this with your recruiter. Always take into consideration, before quoting a salary range, the opportunity with the company, potential career progression and incentives and then keep it realistic.

After the interview call your recruiter and provide the recruiter with feedback, especially telling the recruiter if you are keen on the opportunity and why. Ask the recruiter to call you when they have feedback. Don't just leave it up to the recruiter to call you, call the recruiter back after a few days to get an answer.

**Remember:** feedback is your right.

## CHAPTER TEN

### Let's talk about the cash

**E**very good business plan has a strong element of finance in the form of a budget. As the candidate this finance section is your 'value'.

I have focused in this chapter mainly on the element of self-worth relating to your salary. Whether as a candidate you are entering the market or simply moving roles this remains for me a major guessing game for most people.

Most candidates simply have no idea of their own self-worth in the marketplace and do not understand how their own salaries have been increasing year on year. You should always be aware of your salary level and appropriate market related salary as you never know when you could be approached by a head-hunter or see an advertisement that may tempt you into moving.

Many candidates meet with me in a face-to-face interview and start discussing their salary expectation without even revealing their current salary. They then start to explain how they got to their salary expectation, often mentioning 'market value' as the magical factor.

But let's get to the point, how do you peg your value? It's simple – research. There are several websites that are dedicated to providing salary surveys to participants in the marketplace. These websites normally divide their salary surveys into specialities such as secretaries, accountants and managers. These are then divided into low end and top end salary brackets to provide readers a range of salary ranges. The best websites to use are: Kelly Group and PAG.

Another way to understand your value is to contact various recruiters that you know recruit in your industry.

Recruiters can be incredibly informative, especially when recruiting repetitive talent, so do not hesitate to call your recruiter to get this information.

If you really want to be proactive you can also call some of your competitors and speak to some of your counterparts regarding their salary structures. Always remember to be professional and keep the discussion confidential. And to do this you cannot just call a few. This should also be a guide, rather than the rule.

I remain optimistically conservative when speaking to candidates regarding money, most candidates will disagree as they just want the most money when moving. I simply feel that ultimate wealth will come from working in the right environment, as this will advance your career and thereby advance your salary.

My rule is simple: look at the company and opportunity before shooting your mouth off about salary expectations that may be unreasonable, especially if you have not researched your value properly.

Never go to an interview and tell the interviewer that you want a salary increase because you heard that a certain person that has joined the company received a great salary increase. You put your source in jeopardy and also irritate the interviewer no end.

A lot of candidates that I see decline offers because of money and then call back in six months to see if the company would still be interested.

I find clients are put off when the candidate starts punting large salary expectations too early in the interview process. This is because the client feels that the candidate may be short-sighted in approach and is only moving for money. With the current job-hopping phenomenon in South Africa, clients fear candidates moving for money will just be poached again for more money.

The other element, besides monthly salary, is to look at your long-term wealth creation opportunities such as share incentives. Companies today like to see prospective employees look at the opportunity from a mature point of view and many companies, especially blue chips, have impressive wealth creation programmes.

I believe there is one golden rule when approaching an opportunity and considering a remuneration level – first go to the interview before starting to set large salary expectations; do not go to the meeting and start setting huge salary demands without hearing about the opportunity.

Many companies are arrogant about their position in the market and will not negotiate because they feel that candidates want to work for them due to this position of strength. As a result they feel luring candidates with money is not necessary. Often this has a hidden advantage for the candidate as these companies have strong success with staff. You should therefore think carefully about declining a poor offer made by this type of company.

Many companies also have hidden benefits and structures that may not be immediately obvious or mentioned, but have huge ramifications on your salary at a later stage.

As a final note, it may be good to understand how the remuneration research companies in South Africa work. When researching salary trends, these companies contact various companies and request that they participate with other companies in sharing information (if only recruiters will work like this).

This information is then pooled and provided back to the subscriber companies to use this information to establish company remuneration strategies. So often your offer is right but just not what you want to get that bigger car.

## HERE'S HOW TO DO IT

Understanding your salary expectation for me is one of the most important elements of moving into a new role, especially in South Africa. The top guys normally go into salary discussion with their own personal bookkeepers as most guys earning top salaries have no idea how to manage all that money. Dig deep into your pool of connections and get help from a friend who is a bookkeeper or accountant to work out what you should be looking at regards a realistic expectation. Then get this onto a spreadsheet and take it along to your final interview. Setting a benchmark is always important and most companies will be impressed if you do this with an educated approach. Good luck.

## HERE'S A CHALLENGE

Make a list of every benefit that you get. Include company lunches, training and any form of benefit that you can translate into monetary terms. Then add this to your expectation in a value format – make sure that when you get your offer you do the same from their side too.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Convincing the decision-maker you are for real

I have included this in my book for a very good reason. As a recruitment company we lose, on a yearly basis, at least one or two placements where candidates have simply not provided us with the correct security checks.

We still get candidates that provide us with references that, once called, cannot remember who the candidate is or provide a shocking reference. And as already indicated, the recruiter most times won't tell you this.

The problem is compounded by the fact that most offers are actually reference-dependant and companies will not put an offer on the table if the references aren't good. Most companies and recruiters are improving their forms of security checking year on year, mainly due to the amount of fraud being committed by candidates desperate to find work.

There are two main types of background checks that all candidates need to prepare themselves for before entering the job market. The emphasis will be on you to ensure that you have these in order.

The first are references and these remain a major form of background checking for most companies or recruiters. Most insist on the candidate providing at least two references with their CVs when applying for a job.

I must emphasise that overseas companies are now performing more reference checks on candidates and I see this becoming the trend in South Africa.

Experienced recruiters will also notice when you have skipped a reference check in your CV history and see it as a warning sign of poor work relations. So be prepared for probing questions on this.

You can provide two types of references on your CV; firstly, a character reference, which is normally a lecturer or colleague that will speak about character; secondly is the more commonly used type of reference, which is normally a previous superior in a past company that you had a good working relationship with. When providing references, there are a few golden rules – and I mean ‘GOLDEN’:

- ♦ Call your references and check that they will provide you with a favourable telephonic reference and I mean favourable.
- ♦ Make sure your references are contactable.
- ♦ Don't provide references that are older than three to five years.
- ♦ Don't provide your current boss as a reference unless you have requested permission.
- ♦ Make sure you have at least an additional two back-up references handy.

If you are lucky enough to be considered for an offer, often the greatest delay is in getting hold of the references. This is extremely frustrating for the recruiter as the client will not make an offer if the reference checks have not been conducted.

The second type of background check includes all previous proof of qualifications, proof of nationality, matriculation certificate, proof of residence, schooling, in-house courses, credit and criminal checks. You should have copies made and stamped by a commissioner of oaths. Have these available at short notice.

One final word on your checks – many people do not know that ITC Credit Bureau has a record of your qualifications and previous work history – if you lie regarding previous work experience an experienced recruiter or HR manager will pick this up.

**Remember:** lying on your CV is fraud.

Also, be aware that some companies are now checking online with respect to your previous CCMA history, this is now available on an online database and you should be cautious when considering taking your previous employer to the CCMA, unless you have a good case.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

### Credit defaulted – now what?

I see more and more candidates that have a poor credit history with the credit bureau. There is also no single policy currently in place that regulates how companies manage candidates that apply for roles who are credit blacklisted.

Most candidates think they are somehow labelled when they have a poor credit history and that this will have an influence upon future job opportunities. Not so.

One major problem that candidates faced before was they simply didn't know they were blacklisted. Luckily, with the new credit act the rules have changed. It has become difficult for companies to simply blacklist you without you knowing. I still however recommend that you get yourself checked regularly. There is nothing worse than going to an interview, getting an offer and then having to find out from a recruiter that you are blacklisted.

I interview a lot of candidates who know they are blacklisted but just avoid telling the recruiter or HR manager. This is simply the wrong strategy from the outset as most companies will run checks on your credit history as a standard procedure and do not require your permission. You should check your credit standing regularly – at least three times a year. It is no excuse if you arrive at a meeting and you didn't know about your credit record.

But how do companies generally take your credit-worthiness into consideration if you are blacklisted?

As a rule of thumb most companies will look at the amount of money outstanding and see if the monthly payments needed to pay it off exceeds the

monthly salary offer. The reason for this is simple, the company does not wish to employ a person who will become stressed and perform unproductively due to money problems.

If your default is below R5000 I believe it is not essential that you tell your recruiter upfront as this is a small amount. However, I believe your recruiter should know as, unfortunately, there are companies that they may represent that simply will not recruit credit defaulted candidates. This is something that you can do nothing about.

If your debt is larger make sure you have all the necessary information pertaining to your defaults, especially proof of payment with the institution, as most hiring companies today want proof that you are dealing with your debt in a mature fashion.

I do not believe it is important to attach this proof with your application, but rather deal with this in a face-to-face discussion as you at least have the opportunity to explain your situation. Most bad debt is due to very simple reasons and can be explained very easily. I feel that candidates should be given the opportunity to explain.

## SOLVING A CREDIT DEFAULT PROBLEM

With the new credit act in place, getting rid of a credit default problem has never been easier. With almost two thirds of South Africans credit defaulted, companies have had to start looking at how to solve this growing problem. By calling the National Credit Regulator you can get free advice on how to clear your name. Nowadays, if your amount is below a certain threshold you can pay this off and get rid of the default immediately from all records. In the past you could settle this amount but you would still be registered as a credit defaulter, not so anymore. Be careful if you are threatened by a collection company that the settlement arrangement they are proposing is in line with the current credit regulations. If you are unsure call the NCR yourself and check. For more information please log onto my website [www.cvforlife.co.za](http://www.cvforlife.co.za) for advice.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### Affirmative action

**F**or every ten white candidates I interview eight have some concern about affirmative action. I think for most white candidates, affirmative action remains a huge concern and often a reason not to put themselves into the market. In practical terms I must also mention that white women are not being considered for affirmative action roles. Although this is a generalisation in the marketplace this is normally the case.

For me to really understand the true impact that affirmative action has on the South African workplace one first needs to understand the overall impact of the skills shortage problem.

Why? Because no matter what policies are put in place by government or companies the gap between the actual amount and quality of trained black skills that enter the marketplace and the demand for these skills remains an issue.

Let me provide a simple example. Most retailers have planning or merchandising roles that are normally filled by graduates from universities of technology. Planners however, are only supplied to the market by a handful of these institutions and therefore most retailers will need to attract talent with transferable skills rather than fully trained planners. This is something they struggle to do. The nett result is a huge need for planners at entry level and more experienced levels. Colour does not even figure into the equation.

The real problem is a complete lack of availability and an inability of educational institutions to produce qualified candidates at the rate they are needed. This is just one example. I could give you many more.

Being the extreme optimist that I am, I see an opportunity where most people see a hurdle. I feel that the pressures that affirmative action has put on the average white manager and the threat of no long-term career security has led many to open their own businesses.

This is good news, even if the large majority of small businesses fail in South Africa – at least these businesses are being started. I feel that this has had a very positive impact on our marketplace.

I hear a lot of white candidates also comment regarding the type and size of business they want to work in, especially when pursuing roles in blue chips – the assumption is that these doors are closed.

The reality is that the skills shortage has now even begun to force the larger blue chips to start relaxing their affirmative action policies as skills are just not present in some sectors.

It is common place for recruiters to get jobs where the role has been open for six months or more as the role was deemed an affirmative action position.

This has also started to force companies to become more competitive regarding salary. But then you say only for black candidates. Not so – remember most companies have salary grading systems in place.

For me, whether the specialist trained skills are in the market or not, some new emerging economy is poaching these skills. South Africa's labour market is more competitive and will become even more competitive for the benefit of all.

You should assume nothing when applying for work. Take all opportunities by the scruff of the neck and go for the interview even if you think that you will not get the job. You should however adjust your plan, especially if you are very negative about being white in South Africa. You can obviously not focus too much attention in your plan on applying to companies that will be trying to boost their black staffing numbers.

Rather focus on applying to smaller companies and companies that fall be-

low the five million rand range as these companies now get automatic accreditation with Empowerdex.

The current South African legislation is becoming more favourable even to smaller companies; ironically it is often the larger businesses that fall foul of the black economic empowerment targets. If you are concerned about affirmative action go straight to the source – do some research online regarding how companies get evaluated. I think you will find that the targets are reasonable – I should know, we just completed ours successfully.

### AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IF YOU ARE BLACK

In many respects I sometimes wonder if affirmative action has not been more difficult for black candidates rather than white. This is a result of the huge pressure that exists within our labour market for black trained skills and the backlog that exists regarding the training of these skills. The largest complaint, in the form of a move motivator, that I get from black candidates is that no career progression exists in the company. This is obviously a major topic of debate as I see that a lot of black talent simply does not stick around in a company long enough to get the right training or that they moved to the wrong company in the first place.

Let's discuss both. With regards to moving to the right company I see two major hurdles when moving; either the company that you are moving to simply does not have managers that can train and develop black staff, or any other colour for that matter, or the company has a corporate structure that is too flat or simply not open to advance black talent.

Regarding the above hurdles, you should continuously assess your own career requirements – are you joining the company for career progression or simply to learn the basics.

Always be aware of the need for companies to fulfil their affirmative action tar-

gets. I see a lot of black candidates who have quite clearly been placed in a role to ensure that companies comply with an affirmative action plan, without thought of what happens when this black talent excels and requires a new career challenge.

A lot of these warning signs can be sorted out in an interview. For me, a standard question that any black person should be asking a hiring manager is: “please provide me with an example of what my next role would be if I excel in this role and has this happened before with any previous incumbents that fulfilled this role?” An open minded hiring manager will easily cruise through this question. When applying for a role in SMMEs the hurdles for black candidates change. The greatest in this case is lack of management structure and often training.

You should also keep an open mind when assessing an opportunity within an SMME, often embedded into this company’s value system is something that no large corporate company can manufacture.

SMMEs enjoy freedom to change their structures in a more fluid fashion, this provides you with more scope to learn and grow the content of your CV. However, if you are an individual that requires more of a structured environment rather seek your career in a larger company with training and mentorship structures.

This is the time to be honest with yourself about your ability to work independently in a new work place. I must just add here that you should never assume that an SMME has a non-existent training structure, a lot of emerging companies have very dynamic internal career progression structures that have been tried and tested.

I think a company’s corporate social investment (CSI) programme says a lot about the company’s overall attitude towards transformation and black talent advancement. It’s also important to examine whether this CSI program has a true value to the greater community.

Regarding the second aspect, black talent hopping. South African companies still remain very sensitive about this. I actually think that across all race groups

South Africans hop at some stage in their career. It is vital, before you make a move, that you examine all the options available to yourself in both opportunities.

I get many candidates coming to see me without having spoken with anybody in their companies regarding their unhappiness. Often these candidates speak about aspects that can be changed such as money or role content. Companies will grow too quickly or not put career plans in place for staff and without knowing it simply lose their most valuable staff.

Often within a company a more stimulating environment will exist in a new department and a company rather than lose your skills will move you into a new area and retrain. Trying to negotiate on these elements after you have considered a new opportunity is often too late as the company may simply have an attitude of non-tolerance towards candidates that have offers on the table.

As a final word, I believe that your approach when searching for work should be that of no assumptions.

The competition for entry level graduate roles into blue chips is high. Never assume the role is yours due to the fact that you are an affirmative action candidate. Keep positive and remain focused on your plan.

## IN MY OPINION

Having run a successful business now for seven years I simply believe that black economic empowerment is embedded into a company's value system by the leaders of that business. I still feel that very few companies actually feel they need to try to change their business to accommodate a BEE strategy at all even if the intervention is slight. You should think about this carefully when looking for a new home for yourself if you are a candidate of colour. The Internet will provide you with a list of companies that are BEE-accredited – you can use this to navigate yourself into a company that is accredited. I believe that companies that are serious about transformation and look after their previously disadvantaged individuals will have some form of BEE accreditation. Think about it...

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### Too old to find a job?

I feel very strongly about this topic as I do believe that South Africans tend to be over-sensitive regarding the age factor when looking for work and considering candidates for roles. I came across some very interesting statistics on the Department of Labour site in the USA that were summarised as follows when speaking about employment over the age of 55: “In other words, while the number of persons aged 25 to 64 is expected to increase by about 12.8 million over the next 10 years, almost 90% of this increase is projected to occur among persons aged 55 to 64”.

Unfortunately in South Africa we do not have the statistics to understand how this phenomenon occurs within our borders. I also notice that the statistics that were presented on the Department of Labour and Stats SA websites tend to be very much unemployment focused, which is understandable.

I have, over the past few years, noticed a very positive trend in the marketplace. Many companies have started to recruit older staff to fill positions that require very specialist experience and skills – notice I use the word experience here.

One such example is a retailer chain that requires staff who understand how to use electrical home improvement goods such as electric drills, something a lot of young people just don't know about these days. This retailer went on a massive drive to recruit older candidates with this type of handyman experience. And it worked.

I recently also completed work for a company looking for candidates with loads of experience in the loss assessment field – again needing lots of business experi-

ence and being able to understand how companies from a variety of industry sectors function financially, perfect for a slightly older candidate.

But despite some of these examples I still feel that as an older candidate you will need to think carefully before looking for work in South Africa as the mindset is not as advanced as our counterparts in Europe. There are a few companies that specialise in the placement of retired people – you can find these recruiters on the Internet or through APSO.

Another option is to look at contractual and consulting roles – this is becoming more prevalent in South Africa, especially with the current trend towards more CCMA cases. Set yourself up with a mini business plan and as a company with product offering and get yourself an invoice and tax number and start trading as a contractor. The best place to sell yourself here would be in local newspapers where you can advertise your services.

When preparing your CV I can advise that you follow a few simple guidelines. Keep the size of your CV down to a minimum – even though there is a temptation to put everything into your CV it may become overwhelming to the reader. I suggest only including brief duties per role for the last two or three roles and then using a brief title, date and company only format for the rest of the CV.

I see a lot of older candidates also leave out the initial part of their CVs to try and hide their age – this can be a risky strategy but sometimes can pay dividends.

I also think the skills summary upfront in the CV is a very good idea for companies to understand your total skills experience in specific areas.

I would also suggest that you consider highlighting in the CV your flexibility regarding permanency or contract. I feel smaller businesses especially often need a more mature approach when dealing with some strategic business issues and by selling yourself as more of a consultant or temp type talent you may put yourself into a role where the experience you have gained provides high value to the business owner.

I do think that the mindset is changing for the positive and that many companies are starting to see the benefit of using more experienced staff to fill roles. I do foresee that just as in the USA you will see an increase in the number of workers in higher age groups.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### Retrenched – what a surprise!

**B**eing retrenched has almost become as frequent for most people as getting a payslip at the end of the month. Without getting into too much rhetoric with regards to being retrenched, let me say from the outset that being retrenched today is totally acceptable to most companies that are hiring.

Most candidates I meet that have been retrenched seem to walk around with this major complex about being retrenched. Why?

You may still get a few tired old HR managers that maintain that if you have been retrenched that somehow the company that you worked for just did not want you in their company and kept their finest staff while retrenching the staff they least wanted. Actually the law has become very specific regarding retrenchment in a way that makes very difficult for most companies to just retrench. Companies now have to follow very specific processes and keep within these processes.

I often wonder why we experience as many retrenchments as we do and I think it's most probably within international trends but also with our economy growing so quickly – businesses tend to either misinterpret potential to grow too quickly or even too slowly and just do not get their manpower plans correct. And if I can digress even more, I think companies just grow too quickly and do not get the right HR help to plan for these growth spurts.

Anyway, whatever the reason you find yourself at the end of a retrenchment broom, for me there is one simple rule that I feel applies in every situation – keep positive.

As a guideline I would suggest that you make sure that your CV details exactly

why you have been retrenched. Don't write an essay on the topic but rather keep to the facts and don't just say "retrenched" either.

You can say: "retrenched due to the company experiencing poor cash flow" or "retrenched due to closing of the division".

I think it's also important to have some additional references for that company. If you have been retrenched, most companies will be sympathetic and provide additional referees, the more you can convince the reader that you were a valued resource the better.

The other advice that I can give you is check the deal that the company provides you with is above board before signing anything. You can even call the CCMA or Department of Labour and speak to them regarding what the company has offered. You should make sure that you are provided with as much funds to get you into new employment – do not assume that the company has followed the right process.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### Sexy industries in South Africa

Candidates often ask me which are the sexy industry sectors to work in, and I think I can give some insight on the subject. I must just once again emphasise that if you are a specialist with a high salary and have been in your specialist industry for many years, moving industry sectors may be difficult. Please also remember that I am no economist and that my advice is from hiring in these sectors. Let's however cover some key sectors.

#### RETAIL

My favourite and still, I believe, a good sector to move into. I have always liked this sector because of the fact that in South Africa we have still not really gotten a hold of the so called 'mass market'. I think that there is a lot more potential in this sector regarding growth, and for the candidate seeking work, lots of specialist jobs worth pursuing as a career. Training institutions also cater for this industry, especially our universities of technology. The skills you gain as a 'merchant' will also provide you with a good set of transferable skills that can be used anywhere in the world. At the moment, you see many retail buyers and merchandisers that trained in the UK, returning to South Africa to work for local clothing retailers.

#### BANKING

Coming from a banking family myself I still believe we rank as the foremost coun-

try when it comes to the advanced nature of our banking. Banking has for many years been the cornerstone of South Africa's most forward-thinking sector when it comes to transformation, skills development and training. Nowadays they are even more competitive and there are more banks to work for. I think this trend will continue as long as the services industry continues to show growth. Again a skill that will provide your CV with global appeal.

## ENGINEERING AND MINING

Now this is a field that I have only had limited experience in, but I must say that they always say you can judge and normally see how well an economy is doing by how busy its construction and building companies are.

There is a huge need for engineers worldwide, you just cannot go wrong going into this field, I also think we are seeing an emergence of the need for commercial skills here as well, which is creating more opportunities for engineers in the workplace. These companies are needing engineers to fill commercial roles thus creating an even greater need.

## SERVICES

The services industry has shown good growth year on year and considering how many new small businesses are growing and moving into the medium corporate territory, the requirement for services for these companies will continue to grow.

In this space brand is particularly important as well as company credentials regarding empowerment, so make sure you join a company that has good long-term potential for growth.

### FAST MOVING CONSUMER GOODS

FMCG, for me, is also a good place to find work. I really think that you can get good marketing and branding experience working in an FMCG type environment. This is a highly competitive environment with many multinationals and encourages strong customer and brand management skills. In this industry sector make sure that you consider the pros and cons of joining a company with a headoffice overseas.

### INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Although a sector that has gone through its turmoil over the years it makes for some of the most interesting career choices. Again, with the growth in the overall SMME sector and availability of technology platforms, many technology companies are starting to show very good future prospects. When entering this sector make sure that you do your research regarding the need for the technology in the marketplace and the brand presence as well as competitors in the sector.

One of the most exciting factors in the South African economy in my opinion is the availability of entry level businesses without real competitors. Where else in the world can you work in a country where there are one or two companies in one product space competing? Look for real opportunities when entering into the job market – there are many products and brands that will hold good potential going forward and that's good for your career.

## HERE'S AN IDEA

AltX Group JSE-listed companies are some of the most exciting to join, you can download a list from the JSE website and make an effort to sell you CV to some of these companies. Many of these brands and business owners have fantastic success stories and the fact that they have listed their companies is testament to the fact that they have good corporate intelligence and strong internal structures of benefit to new staff. The Top Companies to Work For Survey which is released every year also has some fantastic companies to work for – the book has good descriptions of their leadership style and company benefits.

## FINISHED but not done

**A** lot of my old mentors used to say I speak too much, so writing this book was a great way of getting all of what I wanted to say onto paper.

Will I speak less – no way, I still have lots to say. I am currently working on another book project related to this and looking forward to bringing you the reader even more relevant information that will assist in your career quest.

I think I have achieved my goal with this book and for me if one person e-mails me or calls me to say my advice worked I would have made a contribution to our fantastic country.

I am truly very optimistic about our new place in the global talent pool, I feel that we are starting to compete on a global platform. which will only mean positive things for you the candidate.

Even though there was a lot more to be said and advised in this book, I wanted to ensure that you the reader absorb everything in the book rather than read one or two chapters. I feel that if you apply all the principles and follow the plan, you cannot fail in your quest to find the career you really want. The title for me really says it all –your CV for Life is exactly that, so make sure you look after it well.