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Senior Real Estate Matters

Quarterly Newsletter – July, 2009

Sweet Tweets and Other Job-finding Strategies

By Elyse Umlauf-Garneau

After 22 years with the City of Santa Barbara Parks & Recreation in California, fifty-something Billy Goodnick got a pink slip. His last day was in June.

Rather than viewing the job loss as the end of his life, Goodnick immediately started assessing his experience and talent and using them to repackage and market himself.

Employment coaches and recruiters say it's exactly what every aged 50-plus job-seeker should do.

Here are eight strategies that can help you land your next job.

1. Repackage yourself—Assess skills that are transferable to other industries. A few years ago, Goodnick started a landscape consulting business on the side and blogged about the work. He's parlayed that gardening passion into a new career niche. This fall, for instance, he'll be teaching a gardening class at a community college. And a recent National Public Radio story http://thestory.org/archive/the_story_795_Same_Skills_New_Industry.mp3/view told of a laid-off auto industry worker who transferred her skills to a new job in medical manufacturing. "Another strategy is to look at other applications for the same customers you've worked with," suggests K. David Umlauf, principal of Executive Search Consultants, a Chicago-based financial services recruiting firm. He says that too often resumes are so geared to a specific industry that it's difficult for readers to see that a person isn't married to that one niche. Just one simple example Umlauf offers is someone who sells text books to school districts. The skills and industry knowledge transfer directly to other product

lines—paste, computers, office supplies, and so forth—that schools purchase.

2. Talk to recruiters—Established, successful recruiters have inside knowledge of companies' open positions. And they're able to provide insight on hiring practices, a firm's cultural landscape and insight into industry trends and hiring practices.

3. Develop technology skills—Community colleges, distance learning programs and online venues are all places to go to sharpen the technology skills that are pertinent to your industry. If you're unsure of what's required in your field, scour job ads to see what expertise employers are seeking, suggest Lisa Pasbjerg, president and CEO of Focused Coaching, in Ann Arbor, Michigan. And then acquire those skills. Pasbjerg specializes in coaching and training executives and managers, and has a specialty working with job-seekers in transition.

4. Seek online help—Several jobs sites geared to the over-50 crowd have emerged, such as <http://www.workforce50.com>, <http://www.seniorjobbank.com/>, <http://www.retirementjobs.com>, <http://www.retiredbrains.com>.

And AARP offers resources at <http://www.aarp.org/money/work/?cnn=yes> that address everything from difficult interview questions to anticipate to the best companies for 50-plus workers.

5. Eliminate dated terms—Gal, those kids, hon and back in the day all are words and phrases that immediately place you in the old fogey crowd. Pasbjerg also suggests avoiding dated business terms, such as "think outside the box." And keep the cute grandkid stories to yourself.

6. Network—"Do the one thing that everyone hates," says Umlauf. "Call someone." Your neighbors, former colleagues and recruiters can be potent sources of information and jobs. Pasbjerg finds that many clients are too passive in their job hunts, often roaming around in their jammies until early afternoon and responding to five or six job ads with generic resumes. Then they wait. But job-finding needs to be an active process. She recommends creating lists of everyone you and your spouse know and getting in touch to let them know you're looking for a job. Always ask whether they can recommend someone else to call for information on a lead, insight into a company or someone looking to hire. "Try to come away with at least one or two new names each time," she says.

7. Accept part-time work— Pasbjerg says people frequently refuse to accept jobs they perceive to be beneath their skill, status or salary level. Then desperation sets in and they end up accepting a full-time job for \$20,000 less than they were hoping for. But then they're exhausted by the new, less-than-desirable full-time job and have limited time to search for something better. She suggests taking a part-time job—anything from a position in a vet's office, a wine shop or at a community college—while you're seeking a new job. "It brings in some money, gets people out of the house and it's another opportunity to network. It also reduces that sense of panic," she observes. "Yet you still have plenty of time to look for full-time work and go on interviews."

8. Broaden your social networking—Maintain an active presence on social networking sites, such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. It may seem like a timewaster, but don't underestimate its power. Goodnick posted a Tweet that was spotted by a *Fine Gardening* editor. She got in touch and Goodnick now is writing his own blog on sustainable landscaping (<http://www.finegardening.com/blog/sustainable-landscaping>) for the magazine. Of course, it was likely helpful that Goodnick has distinctive writing style that he describes as "opinionated, cheeky, humorous and authoritative on the topic of sustainable landscape design."

Once you land an interview, here are some crucial points to keep in mind:

- "Identify your value pitch," suggests Stephen R. Balzac, president of 7 Steps Ahead, a Stow, Mass., organizational development firm that helps businesses increase revenue. He points to how salespeople quickly outline why a product is beneficial to a prospective buyer and says, "You are your own product. How will the company benefit from your presence?"

- Don't view interviewers as opponents to be defeated, but as partners who can enable you to demonstrate your value. Balzac, who is also an adjunct professor of industrial and organizational psychology at Boston's Wentworth Institute of Technology, suggests getting interviewers to talk by asking about their concerns and goals. Then respond with relevant, brief vignettes about your accomplishments in previous jobs "The hiring manager needs a certain set of skills to accomplish something," Umlauf comments. "Find out what that something is and then illustrate why you can do it better than the other job seekers."

- Adhere to basic etiquette—Arrive on time, turn off your cell phone and send a thank-you note. Pasbjerg sees considerable resistance to writing thank-you notes. "It's an opportunity to reiterate your main selling points," she says. One client balked, telling Pasbjerg, "No one does *that*."

And *that's* the best reason to do it.

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