



THE
KORN/FERRY INSTITUTE

CAREER PLAYBOOK

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR
PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS



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Introduction

Building a career has never been more complex. Even managers and executives, who spend more years in each job than most, change positions about every six years. That means if you're among this group, you'll face several potential forks in your career path—and likely will need a new roadmap each time.

Consider this one of your roadmaps.

Korn/Ferry International created this guide because we are committed to improving executive leadership and the state of human capital. In it, our experts provide unconventional strategies, as well as tried-and-true advice. They delve into tactics that leverage technology and social networking to get the attention of hiring managers while protecting your professional reputation. You'll find practical advice about identifying your strengths and objectives, marketing yourself, and negotiating a job offer.

We hope you find this a useful resource and that you will share it with others.

All best wishes for continued personal and professional success.

Defining what you want

It takes, on average, six to twelve months to find a senior-level executive position. That's a lot of time to waste if you set off in the wrong direction.

Knowing your strengths, as well as what matters most to you at this stage of your career, will bring focus and clarity to every part of your job search. In a competitive and turbulent job market, flexibility and creativity are essential to success. A sophisticated understanding of your professional skills and personal attributes allows you to be more imaginative about how and where they can be applied.

A good first step is a career audit. For every job in your past, make a list of what you liked and disliked most about your role, colleagues, and the work environment. What “non-negotiable” criteria are you looking for now?



Write them down. Creating a list of companies you respect also might help narrow the scope of your job search.

Next, take the time to understand the motivations behind your earlier choices and what inspires you now. For example, CareerView, one of the online assessment tools Korn/Ferry utilizes, divides professional decisions into four themes: experts, competitors, learners and entrepreneurs. Consider which of these seems most like you:

Experts generally stick with one field—and often one employer—and focus on deepening their knowledge and skills. Because they are motivated to become a sought-after specialist, they can be unlikely to apply their talents in new ways. If you fall into this group, consider other ways to use your expertise. For example, explore mentoring future leaders or becoming a thought leader by writing or speaking on your area of expertise. These activities might reveal a new path.

Being clear about your top five “must-have” career criteria—such as responsibilities, company culture, work-life balance—as well as staying up-to-date on the latest industry and hiring trends, will make it more likely that every new job will contribute to a positive career progression.

On the other end of the spectrum are **competitors**, who are driven to gain influence and responsibility. They may frequently switch companies, functions, or even careers purely for more pay or a more impressive title. While it is admirable to seek advancement, it takes time and a wide range of experiences to become a mature leader capable of handling complex roles. If you are motivated by upward mobility, be honest with prospective employers about your intentions and realistic about your abilities.

Learners and **entrepreneurs** are curious and attracted to trying new things. The difference is that learners select a field and then move every five to seven years into an area that uses their previously acquired knowledge and skills in a new way, while entrepreneurs typically move every two to four years into entirely new fields.

If you are a **learner**, you might find it hard to choose among your various interests. One way to manage such dilemmas is to make your personal values the foundation of everything you do, and to make sure they align with your

employer's brand values. Also, look for organizations where you will easily be able to change departments, participate in company-sponsored training or educational programs, travel frequently, or contribute to new projects every few years.

If you are a natural-born **entrepreneur**, but want to work for a corporation, you will do best in a start-up or at a company with a progressive and even unconventional culture. Alternatively, you may thrive in roles where your job is to build a department from scratch, or launch a major initiative.

Solicit feedback from as many people as possible to get objective views of your strengths that you then can market with confidence.

Finding your core strengths

What sets you apart as a candidate? What is your style of leadership and decision making? How do you build relationships, influence others, facilitate teams, and solve problems?

One easy way to find out is to use LinkedIn's "Recommendations" feature to see how your colleagues and peers describe you. This might help you put words to your intangible talents or even discover attributes you

Resources

The International Coach Federation (www.coachfederation.org) can help you find certified coaches in your area.

Korn/Ferry's FYI for Insight™ assessment and book will help you discover your top leadership characteristics, and teach you how to reach your full potential (insight.lominger.com/insight/).

weren't aware others valued in you. If the people in your network use the same words (e.g., "reliable," "creative," "no-nonsense") to describe you, use those as the foundation for your personal brand.

If, on the other hand, you find that your view of yourself conflicts with the results of these personality tests or feedback from colleagues, you may want to engage a certified executive coach. An expert coach can help you align your vision and values, create your personal brand, and think creatively about your options and true potential. Interview several coaches to

find one with whom you have good rapport and who offers the combination of face-to-face sessions, e-mail support, and other activities that can fit into your schedule. Be prepared to commit several weeks to coaching to see real progress.

This introspection lays a strong foundation for marketing yourself. Write out your "personal brand proposition" and a detailed description of your dream job. It is also essential to begin practicing a thirty-second to three-minute verbal "pitch" that encapsulates your personal brand.

Depending on your circumstance and priorities, you may want to consider taking on interim positions or freelance/consulting projects, exploring posts that are a pay grade or title below your ideal to learn a new skill or get experience in a new industry, volunteering to engage more deeply with your community, or relocating for opportunities that will keep you on the cutting edge of your field.

Marketing yourself

Even if you believe you have effectively promoted yourself throughout your career, never miss an opportunity to practice selling yourself. This is especially true for executives who have been in one function, geography, industry, or organization for a long time and who may be stuck in their ways no matter how "current" they think they are.

Therefore, whether you are actively looking for a job or not, use every encounter with new people to repeat your pitch aloud. This may lead you to discover new ways of positioning yourself to create a buzz. Doing so will help you clearly define and attract what you ultimately want and give you feedback on areas where your approach may not resonate.

In most cases, the first encounter with a potential employer is not in person. Therefore, cover letters and resumes are still key to grabbing the attention of the people who make hiring decisions. It will be easier to make your resume stand out if you review and update it every few months. Communicate your strengths and the tangible, significant results you have achieved by including action verbs and phrases that apply to your function or industry. Avoid being repetitive or using too many stats, facts, and jargon.

Write a short biography that summarizes your career in approximately 250 words and can be used at various online and networking forums.

Limit your resume to three pages, highlighting only the most outstanding examples of your capabilities and accomplishments. If you have been

working for more than twenty years, include information about jobs you held more than a decade ago in an “Early Career” section towards the end of the resume. Avoid including information about your hobbies and interests unless they clearly relate to a specific job opportunity, and save your objective statement for the cover letters you write for each new role you pursue.

Finally, never lie or pad your resume, even if you are uncomfortable about why you left a previous employer or have a long gap between jobs. Inflating responsibilities or falsifying degrees are two of the most common ways people exaggerate and, as resume fraud has become more prevalent, so has the degree to which recruiters vet and verify the information.

Cover letters: say what you want and why you deserve it. Every resume should be accompanied by a cover letter tailored to the specific position. While the letter will reinforce the contents of your resume, it should use



Promoting yourself with caution

Technological advances make it more important than ever to use discretion when looking for a new job while you are still employed. Here are some tips:

- > Print a set of personal business cards with your private contact information to give to people who can help with your job search.
- > Use only your cell or home phone to communicate with recruiters. And do it outside the office.
- > Avoid using your work e-mail and equipment to print, copy, or send your resumes or other sensitive documents.
- > Impress the sensitivity of your search on your family, friends, and new contacts so that they don't inadvertently reveal too much.
- > Always be aware of, and manage, the information that is available about you on the Internet. In addition to blocking access to your online profiles and other data, conduct searches for your name, use alert features to be notified when new information appears about you, and contact website administrators to remove untrue or unflattering content.

different language and compel the reader to follow up with you in some way, or state your intention to follow up with them.

The introduction should address the hiring authority or appropriate executive recruiter by name. If someone has suggested you reach out to this person, say so. Similarly, if you have met or spoken to the recipient already, remind them of that meeting, and thank them for their willingness to help you.

Next, in one or two sentences, clearly state what you are looking for and why this organization or position matches your vision. Following this objective statement, write one or two paragraphs (or a paragraph followed by a bulleted list of three major accomplishments) that summarize your background and skills as they directly relate to the organization or role.

Resume basics

The core components of any resume are:

- > **Contact information:** full name, address, phone, e-mail, and website, if applicable.
- > **Executive summary:** this section should be approximately 50 words that provide a snapshot of your special industry and technical skills, as well as hard-to-find competencies and niche expertise (e.g., “Able to deal with ambiguity,” or “Expert in innovation management”).
- > **Experience:** list your employers, positions held, primary responsibilities, and promotions in reverse chronological order. Where necessary, explain your reasons for leaving.
- > **Key accomplishments:** This is the “heart” of a resume and focuses on very specific, even quantifiable, results you have achieved. Organize your accomplishments in categories relating to your job function, such as “Business Development,” “Project and Team Management,” or “Media Relations.”
- > **Education:** List the highest degree you have attained first, with the area of study, institution, year of graduation, and any honors you received or special academic programs you pursued.
- > **Professional associations, awards, and publications:** Include these details only if they reflect your standing in your field.
- > **Languages:** Proficiency in multiple languages can give you an advantage. Do not overstate your abilities, however. Specify your skill level in writing and speaking and indicate whether you are comfortable in either a social or business context, or both.

Determining how much emphasis to place on these elements should be based on your work history. If you’ve worked at the same company or held one position for a long time, you might need to structure your resume differently from someone who has progressed steadily up the ladder. There are plenty of resources about building great resumes, online and in print, that you can refer to for more guidance.

Alternatively, this section can be used to present an idea you have for the organization that you are especially well suited to deliver. Close the cover letter by asking the reader for what you want to happen next, be it an interview, information, advice, or more contacts.

Working with recruiters to raise your profile.

Working with recruiters can be a valuable part of your marketing campaign, but understanding how they work is essential to establishing relationships that ultimately lead to a new position. Keep in mind that recruiters at the leading retained search firms work for their clients (the hiring organizations) and not candidates *per se*. Specifically, search firms do not do outplacement. In fact, the majority of the executives on recruiters’ radar screens are those who are gainfully employed. Similarly, recruiters are not career counselors. It will be easier for them to help you if you already have a clear vision of what you want, which is why the preparation work suggested earlier is so essential. It is also important to recognize that the majority of the work done by premier search firms is at the C-suite, managing director or board level. If you are not yet at that level, work with firms that cater to mid-level professionals.

Since recruiters receive dozens of unsolicited e-mails every month, one of the most effective ways to get noticed is to be introduced by someone they trust, such as a client or well-known industry contact. Aim to strategically target one recruiter who specializes in placing people in your industry, function, or geography rather than contacting multiple recruiters at the same firm. To maintain appropriate levels of contact, and become a reliable resource, demonstrate that you know what is happening behind the scenes in your industry by referring other executives to them too. Never waste a recruiter’s time by feigning interest in a job that you do not intend to follow through on; it will not position you as a serious candidate for other roles.

Using reputable employment services

Sometimes terms like “employment agency” or “personal placement service” are used in the same breath as “executive search firm,” even though they are very different entities. Be suspicious of any person or company that promises to get you a job and asks to be paid to do so. In the U.S., the Better Business Bureau is a good place to check a company’s standing. For more information on how to target, and work with, the most appropriate recruiters from reputable firms, consult the Association of Executive Search Consultants (www.aesc.org).

Getting the job

Interviewing. The personal qualities that make you influential inside an organization, such as social skills, energy, intelligence, and the ability to think on your feet, are the same ones that will make you a skilled interviewee. And, while these soft skills become more important the more senior you are, sometimes it is the most experienced professionals who underperform during interviews since they have long been on the other side of the hiring table without having to be interviewed themselves.

No matter your level, proving that you have what it takes to handle a job, or develop it into an even bigger one, is a primary goal of your interview. In addition, getting your questions answered, such as how senior leadership (including the board) sees the role and what worked, and didn't, with the predecessor is equally important.



Research shows that interviewers form an impression of a candidate within the first eight seconds of meeting him or her. The remainder of the interview is spent confirming or turning their opinion around. When managed properly, interviews should include three distinct parts:

- > Establishing rapport and trust with the interviewer,
- > Selling yourself while the interviewer sells the role and company culture, and
- > Wrapping up, soliciting real-time feedback, and identifying next steps.

Before an interview, it is advisable to learn as much as possible about the hiring organization's business, corporate DNA, and key issues. Pre-interview discussions with an executive recruiter should be taken very seriously and can provide an early reality check about the hiring organization. You may also do your own Internet research or query your network. Based on what you find out, think about what the company is looking for outside the published job specification, how your skills fit. Anticipate questions you might be asked. Then, review your reasons for interviewing: What do you want to convey? What do you want to learn? Finally, practice talking about various experiences—both positive and negative—in less than three minutes. Review your own work history for specific situations that might apply to the new role, the action you took, and the results you delivered.

This is useful because candidates for top leadership and managerial roles are evaluated using competency-based interviews, which require you to illustrate how you think and act when faced with obstacles. Most executives are uncomfortable talking about job-related setbacks, but get yourself into a mindset where you can comfortably tell the truth and articulate how what you learned would prevent a recurrence. The interview will also probe your strategic and operating skills, personal and interpersonal skills, and what is known as your “learning agility”—the ability to apply your vast experiences in new ways.

Korn/Ferry also uses proprietary assessment tools to learn more about candidates, so do not be surprised if a recruiter asks you to complete an assessment, usually online. Assessments enable recruiters to understand more about how candidates are motivated, make decisions, interact with

Interview Do's and Don'ts

Do

Allot ample time. While a schedule comprising multiple meetings is typical, occasionally the hiring manager or managers will unexpectedly invite you to meet other members of the team on the spot.

Establish and maintain an emotional connection with the interviewer by smiling, listening, endorsing, and contributing throughout the conversation.

Pay close attention to your word choice: in some cultures, executives will frame their answers in the “we,” an approach that should be used only when talking about team initiatives.

Be mindful of where you are in the overall selection process.

Show a genuine interest in the organization and opportunity.

Ask if there are any areas of concern and address them while you are still face-to-face with the interviewer.

Don't

Schedule an interview for a day when you have other pressing demands on your time, or at a time of day when you might struggle to remain energetic and present.

Talk only about your knowledge and technical skills without also describing your personal work and leadership style.

Give canned responses that keep the conversation at the surface level or that make unsubstantiated claims.

Emphasize issues like compensation and advancement too soon, such as in the first round of interviews.

Talk about other companies you are considering or offers that are on the table.

Be desperate, sarcastic, defensive, or critical of past employers.

close advisors, and lead groups—with the goal of matching a candidate’s style to the hiring organization’s need. Recruiters will then look for gaps between the results and what’s on your resume, as well as the profiles of other candidates. By approaching this whole line of questioning with honesty and sincerity, it becomes an opportunity to demonstrate self-awareness, a valuable trait.

Once the interview is over, send personalized thank you letters rather than a form letter to everyone you met: include any information you promised to deliver and a call to action, perhaps clarifying when a decision might be made. Even if you have been told you did not get the job, use a thank you letter to handle it gracefully in case another, and even better, post in the organization comes along for which you would be ideal.

Reference selection. Choosing and preparing the most appropriate people to speak about you, as a person and as a professional, can effectively protect your reputation at this critical stage of your job hunt. Carefully consider who among your former colleagues, business, and social contacts can provide information that is the most relevant to the particular job. When creating your list, remember that each reference will be asked to whom else the recruiter should speak, and that the recruiter will ask the reference for hard, factual information. Your list of references should comprise a mix of people who can tell stories about you, including those with whom you have worked closely, as well as those who have been exposed to your business acumen outside of your immediate responsibility (e.g., corporate or charitable boards).

If you are gainfully employed, as many top candidates typically are, your references should be people to whom the recruiter can speak in confidence without jeopardizing your current circumstance. These might include: board members who are familiar with your history and operating style;

Managing interview scenarios with aplomb

Phone calls: Sharpen your listening skills, paying close attention to what is being inferred and asking for clarification when necessary.

Video conferences: Conduct a brief test run ahead of time to clear up any technological issues and to review how you will be seen and heard by the other participants.

Panel interviews: Ask up front how much time you will have. Ensure that you have interacted with each person on the panel at least once before bringing the interview to a close.

Off-site venues: Work with the recruiter to choose a place where a reasonable level of confidentiality can be maintained and remember to stay focused on the matter at hand.

Negative references

Recruiters will examine any negative comments made about you, carefully looking at how objective the information was, how many people mentioned it, how certain they were about the information, and whether there is any way to confirm the information. Anticipating and discussing any negative perceptions that might exist about you beforehand, and demonstrating lessons learned, will help them keep unfavorable comments in context.

former supervisors from previous employers or who have left your current company; people who have reported to you; former peers who can comment on your teamwork and collaboration; customers or clients, if appropriate; and third-party service providers or suppliers.

Take the time to brief each person about the role and why you are pursuing it—do not let a reference be cold-called for this serious conversation. The individual should be willing to spend up to 45 minutes with the recruiter to thoroughly work through a set of questions relating to the specific scope of the job and how you lead, interact with others, and face adversity. Recruiters will probe to learn more about your strengths and any areas for development that the

prospective employer can help you address.

In instances where you have been let go from a previous position, the person involved in terminating your relationship with the organization may be contacted to verify the circumstances surrounding your dismissal and ensure that there is no disconnect with your version of events. However, a reputable recruiter will never contact a current employer without your permission.

Once the conversations with your references have been completed, a summary of their observations will be presented to the hiring company. The 1988 Data Protection Act in the U.S. and European Data Protection Directive 95/46/EC stipulate that the contents of these reports can be shared with you should the situation warrant it. If you are not selected for a role due specifically to what was uncovered during the reference check, you generally will be informed of this.

Negotiations. With little margin for error, organizations are taking more time to find the most appropriate people to fill significant C-suite and managerial roles. Enticing people to consider a career move requires

Negotiations begin well before an official proposal is extended. From the moment you meet a recruiter or prospective employer, your mindset and presentation send a subliminal message about your worth.

a thorough understanding of their motivations, no matter what the circumstances. It is the recruiter's job to uncover this information; the client pays close attention to what the recruiter reports about a candidate before any meeting. Clients want to streamline the process and eliminate executives whose requirements are beyond what they can realistically provide.

For you, the candidate, evaluating a job prospect in terms of how it ties to your long-term objectives should be done carefully and mindfully.

Wish lists

To prevent awkward negotiations, create a complete list of your needs and timing requirements. On top of attractive compensation and benefits, the areas to focus on during the negotiation process are:

Visibility: Ask where your new role will fit in any hierarchy, and if relevant, access to top executives or the board.

Geography: Be comfortable with the location of a role.

Long-term incentive plans: Understand the exact composition of the incentive programs offered as a component of the overall compensation package.

Real estate: In cases where relocation is necessary, companies may offer additional compensation to help you equalize losses incurred from having to sell your home.

Termination clauses: Carefully consider the downside of making a change and request clauses to protect yourself should circumstances change or your contract be terminated prematurely.

Transition period: Be prepared to have less of a break between roles than might have been typical in the past. To ensure a smooth transition out of your current position, prioritize leaving on good terms above taking extra time off.

In addition to salary requirements, a recruiter will talk to you about the intangible and tangible factors that will push you out of your current position and pull you into the new one, examining areas where you might be unhappy. Once the recruiter is convinced that the factors are significant enough to compel you to make a change, he or she will furnish an outline offer from the hiring company to get your initial feedback and identify gaps, so that they can inform their client that you are generally comfortable and interested, but have some additional requirements or questions.

Knowing what you are worth. Top tier talent—whether unemployed or gainfully employed—is always in high demand, even in a tough environment. A finalist who is attractive to one company may elicit the same or even more interest from another company, and recruiters help hiring organizations to manage this. When handled skillfully, vetting several offers can demonstrate your worth and improve your leverage. However, be careful not to be seen as playing companies against one another, and never use an offer from another organization merely to see what you are worth to your current employer.

While it is true that organizations are fighting harder to keep their existing leadership talent, and that the number and strength of counter offers is significant, it is also true that accepting those counter offers is not necessarily the smartest move. In fact, once you express an intention to leave, you immediately break trust and rapport with your employer, regardless of what is said or done to try to keep you. Avoid talking about the details of a new offer or allowing room for a counter offer. Rather, if you are certain that you are committed to taking a new job at another company, simply communicate a firm decision and focus on mapping out your exit strategy.

Similarly, you would do well to think carefully about the longer term and honestly evaluate how committed you are to your current company before you entertain joining a new one. If you have doubts about making a move, say so. That is fair and shows you are self-aware and secure. It is easier to deal with your thoughts and emotions up front than towards the end of a negotiation and it will save a lot of time and energy for all parties.

Sealing the deal. Typically, by the time the hiring organization and the candidate are convinced the fit is a good one, they both are emotionally

Evaluating promotions

High-potential senior managers are sometimes offered a stretch role—a position that is a step-and-a-half up the ladder instead of the obvious next step in their career. If this happens to you, ask yourself, “Am I really ready for this?” and look at whether the prospective employer is prepared to help you succeed. Then, negotiate to get whatever support you need to make this a viable move.

committed to making things work. It is only at this point that the formal negotiations begin.

The most common misstep made by both companies and candidates at this point is to move too slowly. When either side goes quiet, even unintentionally, it sends the wrong signal. Silence from an employer does not give a favorable impression about how effectively it operates, while not hearing back from a candidate will make the hiring manager question his or her interest. This can be avoided by outlining the decision-making process and timeframes up front. The recruiter will be an independent third party who helps to broker the deal up to the point where the finer details are better taken forward directly by you and the hiring organization.

When a bond has formed during an honest and open negotiations process, finalizing the details is generally easy. After carefully reviewing the offer letter, take a personal approach to accepting: call the recruiter, HR head, and/or the hiring manager and thank them for the opportunity. Clarify next steps and inform them of when and how you will return a signed copy of the offer and confirm a start date. Ideally, during the bargaining phase, both you and your future employer have kept as much of a focus on your new relationship as on the details of the contract itself, allowing for a smooth transition and a positive, long-standing partnership.

Resigning with respect

The delicate step of resigning should not be done until a formal, written offer has been accepted and signed by all parties. It is advisable to resign face-to-face with your upper management team, allowing for an opportunity to discuss a termination date and transition plan. Presenting solutions for a smooth handover—rather than positioning your departure as a problem—is essential for leaving on good terms.

Conclusion

A job search can be stressful, to be sure. Economic turmoil and rapid industry shifts can leave even highly talented executives wondering what their next career move should be.

But the first step is always the same: Take control of your job search. Use this time as an opportunity to explore not only new companies or industries, but your own interests and attributes. Hone your own personal brand, outline your work-related desires, and seek out the position that is right for you.

At Korn/Ferry, we believe that everyone benefits when the right match is made.

About the Korn/Ferry Institute

The Korn/Ferry Institute generates forward-thinking research and viewpoints that illuminate how talent advances business strategy. Since its founding in 2008, the institute has published scores of articles, studies, and books that explore global best practices in organizational leadership and human capital development.

About Korn/Ferry International

Korn/Ferry International is a premier global provider of talent management solutions, with a presence throughout the Americas, Asia Pacific, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. The firm delivers services and solutions that help clients cultivate greatness through the attraction, engagement, development, and retention of their talent.

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