

Information Overload

Issue 74, February 2009

Welcome:

Welcome to this month's edition of IEA's e-zine "Information Overload". This month we will be looking at what to think about when you find yourself looking for work. Are you are in need of a change but are not sure if you are ready to step outside of your comfort zone, or you are returning to the work force after a period of absence. Or as we have seen, with the economic downturn and companies downsizing is there a more pressing need to find alternative employment?

We hope you enjoy reading. Have a great week.

Lorraine Bradshaw
Marketing Coordinator and Projects Manager

In this issue we will look at:

- How to stay motivated when you are feeling "down"
- Social networks and E-Lists
- Contract work
- Voluntary work
- Dodgy hiring practices
- What are you worth?
- A Thought to ponder.

How to stay motivated when you are feeling "down"

It's not easy being out of work, especially if you are a naturally "busy" person. So the question is, how do you stay motivated when you are looking for work? Well, some of the following suggestions come under the category of the blindingly obvious, so you will have to excuse their inclusion, but they all need to be stated in order to present a more complete picture. Of course you will also have your own tips and techniques that you use, so if you would like to share them with your fellow readers, I will endeavour to pass them along.

Finding a job is your job when you are not working:

Sometimes it is easy to slump into the habit of "I'll do it tomorrow" especially when you have been out of work for a considerable length of time (of course considerable differs from person to person). The question is - what happens if you read the paper tomorrow and find your ideal job, the one that you have always wanted, had a closing date of today at 4pm. How do you think you would feel? Right – not good. Chances are that with such a tight

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deadline few people would have applied and the job would have gone to the person who had been motivated to read the paper – and apply for the position.

What happens if the closing date for your dream job is today at 4pm? Is your CV up to date? Do you have enough paper for the printer? Do you have time to run into the offices and apply in person? Or will you just scrape enough time to apply by email?

Keeping your skills up to date:

There are two aspects to this.

The first relates to the job you are currently doing, or were doing. Are you doing / did you do the same things in the same way for the entire time you were (or are) with the organisation? Most people make the mistake that length of time = experience.

It can be easy to let your skills base slide. And you don't have to be out of work for that to happen. Note the comment above – if you have done the same job in the same way and have received no on the job training or attended any kind of skills upgrading course, then your skills are going to be dated. Consequently you will struggle to meet the selection criteria of a potential employer. With money tight, the employers are going to be looking for the kind of candidate that does not need re-training or sending on numerous training courses to get up to speed. And how fast this has turned around. Last year it was the opposite here in Australia. We had more jobs than people and organisations needed to get someone who showed potential.

One way of finding out if you need to do some “brushing up” is to have a look in the paper. Choose a job you think you would like to do, and obtain the application package. Quite often these are available for download from the organisations web site, so don't feel embarrassed about asking for something you may not apply for.

Now have a look at the selection criteria. What are they asking you to be able to do? If you cannot answer every “Essential” selection criteria, then you have a gap that needs to be addressed, and if you had applied for the position it would be very unlikely that you would have been asked to attend an interview. (Most positions these days require a person to be able to answer all essential criteria as well as most if not all of the desirable criteria as well). However, with some managerial positions, “equivalents” are acceptable, so you may be able to think laterally and use the skills and abilities you do have and may not need to update your skills at all.

You may also like to practice answering the questions. A simple statement that says you have good written and verbal communication skills is not good enough. You have to prove by way of examples, what differences you have made to an organisation, this is achieved by stating a situation you faced or a task that you were given, state the actions that you took, and the results that were achieved. This gives your answer balance. And before I forget, one thing to remember – your entire application is an obvious example of whether you do or do not have “good written” skills. It can also high-light whether or not you do have a good eye for detail (how many spelling errors does your application contain?)

Of course if you are able to answer all the selection criteria and you still have time, why not send in an application. Who knows you might just be the person they are looking for.

Social Networks and E-Lists

I have been talking to a colleague about the importance of social sites like the micro-blogging site – Twitter and other sites like it (<http://twitter.com>).

I've mentioned Twitter in these newsletters before, but perhaps for those people who don't know of it and don't use, are unlikely to know how important sites like these have become. It has moved on from being a simple site whereby you answer a simple question. That question is "What are you doing now?" Whilst there are a lot of people who answer the question literally – "eating dinner" "watching so and so on the tv" there are a whole group of people who have taken to using Twitter to form alliances and networks, posting useful articles and links and posing questions to the community.

The problem with using Twitter is that it takes time to get a following. You have to be "on-topic" which comes down to deciding on the angle you are promoting with regards to yourself and your business. What the Twitterati will not tolerate and neither do any of the e-lists to which we are members – is direct SPAM – go here and buy my latest blah blah – nope the Twitterati will blacklist you faster than you can say "SALE".

But if someone else endorses you and your products – believe me that's different. "Hey have you read the new book by Fantastic read, worth the \$\$\$"

You can also ask questions – Does anyone know the best place for

But it takes time and most people who want to see an instant return on these ventures will be disappointed. It's just an important part of the social marketing mix we need to be aware of in our business world today.

So how do you leverage these sites?

- Be on topic
- Be relevant
- Be useful
- Be honest

There is a bio section where you can say in 160 characters or less who you are So – set yourself up a free blogging service (eg Wordpress) which will give you a personal URL, then start to populate it with interesting information about yourself and your needs, brilliance and ways to help other people – links to useful sites etc etc. Then create a Twitter account – link the two and you can be up and running in no time.

Your bio line can be exact – Out of work Librarian seeks books to catalogue....

The more interesting you are, the faster you will get followers – but to get conversations going, you need to be following people too – and yes you can do a search of the twitterers and away you go. But be on topic, be relevant and be useful. You've determined your angle and now you need to talk about it, what you do and why.

Networking is all about being relevant to other people. And that is where a lot of people fall down, and that includes the industry events we go to.

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Are you prepared when you go to industry events? Do you have business cards ready? Hint, don't run around the round chucking business cards at anyone and everyone. Side by side to your business cards should be your "elevator pitch". You know – the 15 second span you have to engage someone's interest when they ask you what you do for a living.

Again – the more engaging you are, the more likely you are to retain interest and in a climate whereby there are going to be quite a few people looking for new work opportunities you need to be able to offer your fellow industry event attendees a new angle – on the – I need a job, have you got anything going - front.

One final thing about industry events is – listening. If you are too busy telling people about what you need you may miss out on the opportunity to hear what someone has to offer. And it may not be with the person you are having a conversation with.

Remember also, your reputation will always precede you. If you are known to be a whiner and complainer about why you are not currently working, "it's not fair" and "they didn't renew my contract even though so and so was kept on" are common phrases to watch out for. Always be polite when you are at a social or networking event, don't "bag" your previous employer, even if they did do something you don't agree with.

One final word on networking. If someone says "why don't you call me in a day or so and we'll have a chat" – do it. If someone says, "a friend of a friend is looking for someone, why don't you send me a copy of your CV in the morning" – do it, and if you have promised to do something – then do it, whatever it was. You've opened the door, don't let it slam shut in your face, because you "forgot".

Contract work:

Contract work may be able to fill the gap between permanent positions. As Organisations consider all their options when it comes to staffing requirements, organisations will need people to do the work they have. What we have noticed is that organisations are taking on contract personnel rather than permanent. Go in, do the job, leave. The agencies handle all the tax, superannuation and insurance requirements.

Whilst Information Enterprises Australia is the only employment agency that specialises in Library and Records Management positions in Western Australia, it does not mean to say that other employment agencies cannot help you. Some large organisations have a "preferred supplier list" and that includes the use of employment agencies to supply them with contract staff, so find your "ideal" organisation and call them. Ask to speak to a person in HR, be prepared to give a 15 second presentation as to why you want the information and ask if they are currently looking for staff, if they say no – ask if they would accept a CV "just in case" and then ask if the organisation uses contract staff to fill positions or slots whilst people are on holiday or sick – if the answer is yes, then ask politely which agency they use, you may be surprised at the answers you get. Of course once you have the information, send in a copy of your CV with a covering letter to the person you spoke to, but also telephone the employment agency and make an appointment to see a recruitment consultant. This also means that you will be on their "books" for other opportunities as they arise. Are we giving work away by telling you that? Not at all, some things just are – whilst we would prefer it people came to us, we know that sometimes they can't.

Voluntary work:

Still not working? Have you considered giving your time and skills to an organisation free of charge? I have mixed feelings about voluntary work. There will always be organisations who will take advantage of people desperate for experience, so make sure the organisation is not the only one to benefit from your time with them.

Dodgy Hiring Practices:

Employment agencies and recruitment firms are not allowed to head hunt. We may advertise a position, but we have to wait for you to contact us before we can put you forward for the position. What you do need to be aware of – as the downturn continues is that organisations may be tempted to cull their workforce and replace with contract / casual personnel. What an organisation cannot do is fire its personnel on one day and re-hire as casuals under the same rate and conditions as the permanent staff were under. So make sure you do your homework before accepting a position. Of course, organisations may decide to go ahead anyway, and if you don't want the job then someone else will. But do you really want to work for an organisation like that anyway?

And on that note:

Do you know what you are worth in the market place?

What are you worth?

The following piece was written by the Director of Information Enterprises Australia, Shirley R Cowcher and published a few years ago. Given the economic climate we deemed it well worth repeating.

As a profession, and as individuals, I think we have spent considerable time and energy considering our worth. Worth can be measured in many ways and we are encouraged to justify our worth and existence by the keeping of statistics and performance measures. My concern in this discussion is not, however, at the corporate level of justifying the worth of our profession, but at an individual level and particularly at the level of the freelance librarian.

I think we all acknowledge that our work environment is changing. I have read articles from Phil Teece, through his *Work watch* page, about the changes to librarians' working conditions and the continuing use of contract and casual employees that has eroded the entitlements of people working within the profession. There are many library personnel today who work on a contract basis either through an agency or freelance and there are probably many more of us that have considered becoming freelancers. So if you are a freelance librarian/consultant have you truly considered your worth?

ALIA has a list of salary scales. These can be accessed through the web, and has outlined the formula for librarians to use when considering their financial worth as a casual employee. If you are freelancing as a registered sole trader or company with an ABN is this formula sufficient to fully cover the costs associated with you and your business? Does the formula provide you with enough information to ensure you are earning an adequate income? The answer is no. But it is a very good starting point.

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Let's use ALIA's formula for casual employees requiring 20% loading on the annual salary to calculate an hourly rate for a librarian wanting to earn \$58,000 per annum. Remember the 20% is to cover sick leave and annual leave entitlements, which you will not accumulate as a casual, and you certainly won't accumulate them as a freelancer. (Note: Please check the actual percentage as it is more like 25% in today's marketplace). So using the formula given you should be charging a minimum of \$35 per hour.

For genuine casual work, the formula for calculating hourly rates is as follows:

[annual salary] x 1.2

52.2 x [hours in a standard week]

For example:

Librarian [extensive experience]

$$\frac{\text{Annual salary } \$58\,000 \times 1.2}{52.2 \text{ weeks}} = \frac{\$69\,600}{52.2 \text{ weeks}} = \frac{\$1333.33}{38 \text{ hours per week}}$$

<http://www.alia.org.au/employment/salary.scales/casual.html> (accessed on 3/3/09)

Which equates to around \$35 per hour.

Great, that covers your leave entitlements but what about the 9% superannuation contribution that employers make. If you add that to your hourly rate you should now be charging \$38.15 per hour. Is that your worth as a freelancer?

How many unpaid hours do you put in to your business? Have you considered those when determining your worth? How much time do you spend on the administration of the work you do for your client/s? - Timesheets, invoicing, chasing up payments, bookkeeping and accounts. In my experience a freelancer generally can expect to add about 10 – 20% to their paid working time. In other words if I work (and I am paid for) a 30 hour week I can expect to actually work a 33 to 36 hour week i.e. 3 to 6 hours of unpaid work to keep my accounts up-to-date. This may even be increased a little if you've got GST to worry about. If you are working for more than one client have you taken into consideration the telephone conversations you may have with your clients that are not part of your paid working hours? Do you charge them for this time or give it them as good will? Again, if working for more than one client what kind of record keeping do you have in place to ensure that you are up-to-date with the client's requirements? Have you costed the time taken to maintain the records into your worth or do you perform these tasks as unpaid hours?

Now let's think about other requirements of freelancing. Do you have professional indemnity and public liability insurance? How much per year does it cost? Let's assume it costs \$1,500 per annum – and that's conservative – it therefore costs \$28.74 per week. How many hours per week are you working? If you are working a 38-hour week, you need to add another 75 cents onto your hourly rate to cover your insurance cost. You are not covered by your client's workers compensation, so do you have income protection or workers compensation insurance? How much does it cost? Do the same calculation as you

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did for public liability for your workers compensation and/or income protection and add it to your hourly rate. How much have you have invested in equipment that you use to support your business: - PC, modem, printers, mobile telephone, and car? How much do you spend on consumables: - paper, toner, electricity, telephone calls, postage, fuel?

With many thoughts

Lorraine

A Thought to Ponder:

“Never fear the want of business. A man who qualifies himself well for his calling, never fails for employment”

Thomas Jefferson (1743 – 1826)

Your comments and suggestions on the subject of this newsletter are most welcome. Or if you would like to see other issues covered in future editions, please email me at training@iea.com.au. Please feel free to pass on this newsletter to your colleagues' friends and associates. To subscribe they should send an e-mail to training@iea.com.au with “subscribe newsletter” in the subject line.

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