



Rebel With A Cause

It isn't always your great résumé that gets you in the door

By **David G. Jensen**
Contributing Editor

SOME PEOPLE ARE REBELS. THEY stretch the boundaries of any project they are passionate about. And when it comes to looking for a job, the old rules may not apply. They are impatient and intensely motivated. It is this inner drive that pushes them past other job seekers to the top of a pile of CVs.

After spending close to two decades in the headhunting business, I've often wondered how it is that some people, despite the prevailing winds of the job market, seem to manage their way through the process with less stress and more results than their equally competent colleagues. You see this all the time in a "down" market, such as the one we have today. Three hundred people are laid off in a pharmaceutical industry merger and they rapidly separate themselves into two camps: those who will take the advice of their outplacement counselors and proceed cautiously, and those who use their internal motivation, creativity, and a lot of hours to tear up the track.

Let's take a look at that latter group of job search rebels.

Traits and Techniques of the Rebel

The Single-Minded Pursuit: James Allen, a 19th century author of motivational books, wrote, "Above all be of single aim; have a legitimate and useful purpose, and devote yourself unreservedly to it." For the job search rebel, the search becomes a single-minded pursuit. It is the reason that the rebel gets up in the morning. These few have found that it is possible to get two or three hours a day invested into the effort, even when employed. (This compares with 15-30 minutes, the average daily outlay of time for a job search.)

Attitude About the "Perfect" Résumé or CV: Most job seekers will fuss and worry about their résumé or CV, to the point of wasting time that could have been used in more productive aspects of their search. To the job search rebel, "good" is better than "perfect" in that it gets him quickly into the job market where he can always adjust the document later to suit a particular situation. Rebels believe that CVs are a work-in-progress, to be modified as needed—sometimes "on the fly."

Contacts with Leaders: There are a small number of people in every scientific field who are at the top of their game. These few, whether they are professors on the ivory tower or directors in major companies, are typically those who get the first calls from headhunters and hiring managers when a position opens. Job search rebels have the guts to write these elite few,

hoping that their CVs will land in a file for later networking referrals from the luminaries.

Belief in the Size of the Job Market: Most people gauge the job market by the number of advertised jobs in magazines and on the Internet. It can be fairly depressing to see so very few advertisements and to know that each one of them will receive several hundred responses. However, the job market is not what you see in ads; these represent only about 15-20% of the positions that are filled in the pharmaceutical and biotechnology job market. The job search rebel has a deep-down belief that there is a job out there with her name on it, and she knows that it may not be "visible" until she uncovers it.

Responding to Ads: Despite the fact that there are hundreds of people applying to these same advertised jobs, rebels toe the line and send résumés to those ads that fit their background. They break the rules, because they don't stop there. Rebels call these companies to ask any source within the firm for the name of the hiring manager. They duplicate their résumé mailing to this person, with a customized cover letter written for his or her specific needs.

Follow-Up Calls: No one likes doing follow-up calls. Despite this, the rebel job seeker makes them on a regular basis. When directing a letter to a specific person, follow-up calls will often tell more about that position and even give a few minutes to talk about the job seeker's strengths. Sometimes a busy manager appreciates the applicant showing enough interest to make contact. Of course, others would prefer the process be directed through Human Resources. Rebels push past negative feelings by being polite and yet persistent, getting an H/R person's name and changing the follow-up strategy accordingly.

Tell-Me-About-Yourself Preparation: Many job seekers, when suddenly on the line with a real hiring manager and not an H/R associate, flounder when asked, "Tell me about yourself," or some variant thereof. Job search rebels know that it is often best to have things written down. While they don't want it to come off sounding like a "script," the fact that they have written down and practiced a response to this question makes

David G. Jensen is the founder and Managing Director of CareerTrax Inc., a biotechnology and pharmaceutical consulting firm located in Sedona, AZ. Jensen is a writer and speaker on career issues worldwide. He can be contacted regarding personal career counseling questions at Tel: (928) 282-5366, Fax: (928) 203-0077 or dave@careertrax.com.

them comfortable. With this comfort comes a professional demeanor that separates them from the competition.

The Rule of Three: The job search rebel understands that it takes three telephone interviews before one of them will produce a face-to-face meeting; she doesn't stop the search process to wait for the results of interviews. She also realizes that it takes three good face-to-face interviews before one of the firms starts discussion related to an offer. That is why the rebel is out securing more networking contacts and multi-company interviews while other job seekers await the "we'll be getting back to you" response from their first interview.

Business Card Networking: One pharmaceutical scientist weaved through the stands at the recent Experimental Biology 2003 exhibit hall, picking up items off of each counter, sometimes talking briefly but always moving on and continuing the process. Most people thought the fellow was a collector of free pens and mouse pads. In reality, this job search rebel had a fist full of business cards for networking. Whether it is a name from a business card or a list of meeting attendees, cold calls like these are tough to make. Rebels find they are often the key to their next job.

Interview Preparation: Job search rebels are fanatics about interview preparation. They do more than the usual homework via Google. They have read and understood the annual report for the large companies, and they've asked the Business Development department at the smaller companies to send them the firm's non-confidential Executive Summary. The rebel has found other contacts within the company who are open to discussing the culture of the firm before interview day. In addition, the rebel's scientific presentation has been fine-tuned to fit the specific needs and concerns of the company.

While I've listed a lot of practices and techniques that you ought to consider using in your search, it is mainly through an attitude change that you will become the job search rebel. There is absolutely no substitute for the mental clarity and creative spark that comes from this kind of commitment. Your job-seeking skills will improve dramatically just by deciding that this project deserves 150% effort.

(Just one word of advice . . . Don't show up at the interview dressed like James Dean in "Rebel Without A Cause," or Marlon Brando in "The Wild One." That would put you into the category of a job search weirdo, not rebel.) ■