

SPRING



CLEAN

LOOKING TO GET AHEAD? SEARCHING FOR A NEW GIG? HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW TO IMPROVE YOUR CHANCES OF SUCCESS

Gone are the days when you'd graduate from college, get hired by a company that would develop and promote you until age 65, then send you off into retirement with a gold watch, pats on the back, and a lovely pension. That's so *Leave It to Beaver!*

Nowadays you're left to your own eager-beaver devices. Even before the recent recession decimated the job market, the career landscape had undergone a huge transformation. Lifelong jobs went out with the manual typewriter, as many employers and employees redefined loyalty to mean "what have you done for me lately?" While it used to be heretical to switch jobs within your industry after fewer than five years, the new generation of workers is predicted to entirely switch *careers* at least five times.

So as we usher in spring's restorative tradition of cleaning up our houses, take some time to consider your career aspirations. Recent initiatives by Congress and the White House have led several prominent economists to predict that between 2 million and 2.8 million new jobs will be created in 2011. Maybe one of them will be yours. Sort through your goals. Take stock of your current skills and talents, and consider some upgrades. Polish up your résumé. Refresh your network of business contacts, online and offline. Maybe this is the moment to dust off that lingering desire to search for a new job—or a whole new career.

LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE

"My first piece of advice is to take a step back and look at where you are today," says Allison Nawoj, a career advisor for CareerBuilder.com, the nation's largest online job site. "Take the pulse of your career. Are you happy and content with your job? Are you satisfied with what your company does?"

This self-analysis also includes examining your skill sets and knowledge, Nawoj adds. "Is there anything new going on with your job, any new functions you should learn?" If so, check to see if your company or organization offers training in those areas. Consider going back to school, especially if tuition reimbursement is available.

The logic behind this reflect-and-review strategy is to be sure you're prepared if and when you decide to make a change—or if an unexpected opportunity arises. "It can be difficult to reflect on your career, but you need to do it," Nawoj says. "You don't want to take that step forward without feeling comfortable about yourself."

Laura Collins, a human resources consultant

YOUR CAREER

BY BOB WOODS □ PHOTOGRAPHY JONATHAN ROBERT WILLIS

to companies and individuals, conducts workshops for middle- and upper-management professionals. Many of the participants are 40 and older, have held the same job for years, and have a tough time with this assessment process. They define themselves by job title rather than by their responsibilities and expertise. “I recommend having a business card that defines your skills, not just your title,” says Collins.

She also suggests developing an “elevator speech” that succinctly sums up who you are and what you do: I am a (fill in the blank) specialist, which means that I (provide your particular skills and expert knowledge). “Make the speech so your 12-year-old nephew or next-door neighbor can understand exactly what you do,” Collins says.

UPDATE YOUR RÉSUMÉ FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

Once you have the big picture of where you are in your career, it’s easier to ask whether you’re satisfied or want to make some changes. No matter what, the next step is to evaluate your résumé—another quaint convention that’s undergone an extreme makeover. More than a sheet of paper listing current and past jobs and education, tucked into a folder and updated every couple of years, today’s résumé is a finely tuned and highly adaptable document that serves as your professional profile. Although a paper version should always be on hand, managing your résumé online has become an occupational imperative.

That opens up the discussion of online job sites, not only mass aggregators such as CareerBuilder.com and Monster.com, but also the thousands maintained by individual companies, professional associations, and other organizations. Résumés are the fuel that powers those digital engines, so making sure yours remains in tip-top shape is essential if you decide to enter the online job marketplace.

Your résumé should be updated regularly, says Nawoj, with an eye to finding ways to make yourself stand out. “Look at what you’ve done in

your job over the last year—anything that’s contributed to the bottom line, such as sales numbers, projects completed, and quotas met,” she says. “Companies want to see quantifiable results.”

Another old-versus-new element of online job sites is that instead of human beings actually reading résumés, they’re scanned by computers to search for keywords particular to the job posting. “HR departments receive thousands of résumés, and their goal is to compile a manageable group,” Collins says. Rather than searching for good candidates, the first step is eliminating bad ones. “They look for low-hanging fruit, such as degrees or specific job experience.”

A résumé is no longer one-size-fits-all. Yours should be tailored for particular job postings or sectors. If an employer is looking for someone with a *master’s degree in accounting* and *seven years of experience in the apparel industry*, be sure those keywords are in your résumé.

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ENTER THE BRAVE NEW NETWORKING WORLD

An increasingly important part of managing your career is networking, another 20th-century concept gone wildly digital in the 21st. It’s still important to keep in analog touch with business associates past and present, and to make new ones, yet online social networking is vital, too. While Facebook has rapidly become the place to be for your personal life, LinkedIn is recommended for business networking.

“When spring cleaning your career, review your relationships to be sure you’re expanding them,” says Debra Forman, a certified executive career coach and founder of Pinstripe Coaching, who advocates utilizing LinkedIn. “I tell my clients to use LinkedIn as a way to not just connect with people you know, but to expand



JONATHAN ROBERT WILLIS



New Leaves

You say your career is in fine shape? That's great. You might want to harness the energy of the season to spring clean other areas of your life.

YOUR HOME

Ready to undertake a major cleanup? These preliminary steps are adapted from the website housekeepingchannel.com:

- Walk through each room in your house and list what needs to be done.
- Call a local charity and schedule a pickup time for items you want to give away.
- Ask everyone in the family to declutter for 10 minutes each night. Be ruthless with things like gift boxes, grocery sacks, old magazines, catalogs, and broken toys.

YOUR TIME

Feeling overwhelmed about everything you need to accomplish? The folks at the Mayo Clinic have developed tips for time management—and stress reduction. Here are three to help get you started:

- Plan each day. Planning can help you feel more in control of your life. Write a to-do list, putting the most important tasks at the top.
- Prioritize your tasks. Relatively unimportant tasks can consume a lot of your day. Prioritizing will ensure that you spend your time and energy on those that are truly important.
- Say no to the nonessential. Consider your goals and schedule before agreeing to take on additional work.

YOUR MONEY

Want to focus on your financial picture in 2011? Check in with the Northwestern Mutual financial representative who sent you this magazine. You'll find contact information on the back cover.

—Catherine O'Neill Grace

your network.” Forman advises going beyond familiar connections within your company or profession by joining one or more of LinkedIn's groups that connect members by common professional skills, interests, and goals—from readers of *The Economist* to marketing professionals. “The objective is to lead people back to your LinkedIn profile, which summarizes your professional expertise and accomplishments.”

Just as Facebook reconnects long-lost friends, relatives, classmates, and other people from your personal life, LinkedIn has established itself by highlighting some of those same links, plus ones from your professional life, with an emphasis on obtaining work. Social networking takes that to exponential levels by allowing your connections' connections to connect to you.

Forman warns against simply accumulating as many connections as you can, suggesting instead a network of 200 or fewer. “If I have people who haven't responded to me in a while, I 'de-link' them,” she says. “It's not a popularity contest, so be strategic about your network.”

A growing number of colleges and universities are adding a direct social networking component to traditional “old-boy” alumni associations. Some schools' websites go even deeper into helping alumni manage their careers by hosting blogs, online seminars, webinars, expert videos, job banks, and individual career coaching. Check out your school's alumni site to see what it offers.

TARGET YOUR JOB SEARCH

Your career assessment may lead you to begin searching for a new job. If so, employ the full suite of online resources. Stick with the old-fashioned offline ones, too, including in-person meetings, professional conferences and trade shows, and conversations with professional recruiters and staffing consultants.

Most important, though, target your search to match not only your overall skills, but also your long-term aspirations, including where you want to live and the social-responsibility

policies of companies. “Take an analytical approach,” says Collins.

“Make the decision that you're not going to work just anywhere or do anything. Do your homework. What are the companies that can use your skills and knowledge?”

Don't feel that you have to stay within your current industry or profession. “Consider transferring your skills to industries that are showing growth in today's job market,” says Nawoj. For example, a manager of a manufacturing plant in the automotive industry can apply his or her skills to healthcare. “The two require the same basics, such as your ability to communicate, manage people and projects, and delegate responsibilities,” she says.

CONSIDER HIRING A CAREER COACH

In an age of college-application and life coaches, professional career coaches and counselors are gaining prominence. If you're thinking of hiring one, do your homework first. It's a burgeoning field, so be sure the person you select is certified by a professional organization such as the National Career Development Association or the International Coach Federation. The Global Career Development Facilitator has been formed to provide standards and credentialing for coaches. Seek out recommendations from friends and colleagues. Interview several coaches and always ask for references.

Beyond that, you may want a coach who specializes in a certain industry or profession. In general, find someone who can assess your skills and aspirations and help you explore your options, understands the job marketplace, and, ultimately, can assist you in advancing your career—up to and including a targeted job search. “There has to be a bond between you and the coach,” Forman says, “whether you're on the phone, online, or face to face.”

No matter how you spring clean your career, remember that you're in control. You decide what works best for you. After all, you *are* the boss of you. ☘

Bob Woods, a freelance writer based in Madison, Connecticut, is his own boss.