

AOL Jobs submission (6/30/14)

A Game Plan for the “Job-Hopper”

By Dan Campbell, CEO of Hire Dynamics

It used to be that someone who worked at a company for just a year or two before moving on would have signaled red flags as the non-committal type, or even a risky hire. But today, it's more common for professionals to change jobs, or even careers, more frequently. This decline of tenure isn't something new. In fact, it has been heading this direction since the 1940s when a gold watch marked a 30-year employee's send-off into retirement.

The latest numbers from the Bureau of Labor Statistics in its bi-annual study on employee tenure show that the average tenure is 4.6 years (Jan. 2012). Not surprisingly, older workers tend to have more years under their belt than their younger colleagues. The median tenure for employees age 65+ was 10.3 years, more than three times the tenure for workers age 25 to 34 (3.2 years). More than half of all workers age 55+ were employed for at least 10 years with their current employer in January 2012, compared with 13 percent of workers age 30 to 34.

While more people are changing jobs at a faster rate, there's a lingering stigma tied to those with lengthy resumes that hasn't quite caught up with the times. Just ask the Millennials who are told that frequent job changes is a character flaw, professionally speaking. So how do you overcome general presumption and use your moves as an advantage? By thinking of your skillsets in broader terms and promoting the personal attributes that enhance your ability to do the job.

Strategy 1. Promote your character

The workforce is at a point where the growing skills gap is resulting in unfilled jobs and high unemployment, which impacts the way organizations find talent. To widen the talent pool a bit, many companies are expanding candidate resume criteria beyond the traditional job description to those who have strong core attributes; they then work to train these new hires on the job for the specific role. As a result, personal character and the capacity to learn quickly are becoming hiring attributes.

Forbes contributor Mike Myatt thinks this is a good approach for companies anyway. He wrote in a [recent article](#) that a “values-based approach to hiring increases performance, enhances collaboration, reduces turnover, improves morale, and creates a stable culture.” He says that if managers can't trust someone to do the right thing, it doesn't matter how likable, passionate or talented they are. “You can teach many things, but altering the hardwiring of an adult's character is best left to a therapist or the clergy – not an employer.”

There is no shortage of conversation and media stories around leveraging [soft skills](#) these days, but when put into practice, it's not as common as one may think. Think about your skillset – both soft and technical – in the context of the business at large. Instead of sharing that you have experience doing X, Y and Z (like ticking off a check list), tell the interviewer how, by using X, Y and Z experience, you were able to solve a specific business problem. Then bring that back to the lessons you learned and how you can apply that learning to the role for which you are interviewing. The goal for a hiring manager is to sign on a great employee, rather than just a great job applicant on paper.

Strategy 2. Try different “career trails”

Referring to a [recent CareerBuilder survey](#) on job-hopping statistics, Rosemary Haefner, CareerBuilder's vice president of HR says: "More workers are pursuing opportunities with various companies to expose themselves to a wider range of experiences, build their skill sets, or take a step up the ladder in pay or title." The latter two she references – skill sets and pay/title – are pretty straightforward in terms of how those are assessed in an interview. The first one, though, is wide open as a personal selling opportunity – and companies are buying into it.

To capitalize on this when searching out a new job opportunity, reflect on your work experience to determine other industries where that experience may apply. For example, the trade industries are hiring across the board, and these jobs are sophisticated and specialized. They offer excellent pay, professional growth and job security. Like any company, they have sales, marketing, logistics, finance and other business functions that align with verticals in these areas.

If you just can't land a permanent job, think about signing on with a staffing company for contract-to-hire or short- or long-term contract assignments. This sets up "career trails" that will help you assess your desired career path while gaining experience and avoiding a resume gap – a win/win/win. Another benefit of working through a staffing company on multiple assignments is the ability to tryout various jobs and companies to decide on the best fit without appearing to job-hop.

With some companies now more willing to hire someone with less years of experience under the condition they can illustrate specific qualities in various work scenarios, the playing field has been leveled a bit – offering non-industry veterans a chance to compete. It's still not ideal to jump from company to company for no apparent reason. But if you can come to the interview prepared to engage in a dialogue about the reasons for the moves and how your varied experiences have positively influenced your broad business competencies, it will be an asset to your portfolio of work.

Dan Campbell is founder/CEO of Hire Dynamics and 2014 Chairman of the American Staffing Association. Hire Dynamics is an industry leading staffing provider that has been recognized as a "Best Places to Work," "Best Staffing Firm to Work For," and on the Inc. Magazine 500|5000 list, among others. More information may be found at hiredynamics.com, on [LinkedIn](#) and [@HireDynamics](#).