



Key Success Factors (KSF) in the Christ Centered Career Search:

Author: Peter Bourke

Having spent a significant amount of time working with people in career transition and based on my previous experience in “human capital” management organizations, including recruiting and outplacement businesses, I have learned that there are a few “key success factors” associated with career transition for most of us. This is not “finding a job in 3 easy steps”! Rather, the items below are the insights learned that I believe are most critical for those in career transition. You may choose to use these 5 items as key discussion topics during your weekly CCCG meetings, perhaps choosing to focus on one priority each week that each of the group’s members can discuss.

1. What does God want from me and for me during this time of transition?

It’s often hard for God to get our attention in life. We all get preoccupied with work, with family obligations, with our personal hobbies and interests, and who knows what else. Unfortunately, most of us have little time or energy left over for God.

And yet, who gave us this gift called life? Who provides us with our blessings? Who is committed to love and care for us in spite of our sinful nature? God has. I’d challenge you to consider a few questions that may be helpful during your career transition to ensure that you’re listening to what God may want you to understand.

Is it possible that God is trying to get your attention right now? Is He smart enough to know that when we are fully employed, and very pre-occupied with day-to-day life, that it’s hard for Him to get our attention? Is it possible that He would like you to change something about your life? Your priorities? The way you spend your time? Your relationship with those you’re close to? The degree to which you contribute to the great commission – bringing others to know Christ? Career transition can be a real blessing if we allow it to be. There are few other times in our life when we have the time available to focus on these

types of questions and issues. Are you clear on God's purpose for your life? Are we here on earth to simply enjoy what life brings? Or is there something more?

- Action Items to consider:
 - For most of us, God uses the career transition stage of our life to get us to pause long enough to draw us close to Him. Consider what God may want you to know. Determine what God wants from you and for you and write it down. Pray about it – heck, ask Him what he wants! Be ready to listen for His answer. It may be a key component in enabling you to return to work.
 - Recognize that job loss is like other “crisis” stages of life including death, divorce, etc. You will experience a range of emotions and it is perfectly normal. Prayer and reflection may be one of the best ways to proactively deal with these emotions. Pray for discernment; pray for patience; and certainly pray for strength. Your spouse is also likely to experience a similar range of emotions so be sensitive to these as well.
 - Read the book “The Purpose Driven Life” by Rick Warren. It is a 40-day study that takes only 15 minutes per day for 40 days. It may be the most valuable book you have ever read because the author challenges the reader to put our life in perspective. Every activity, every relationship, every decision we make could and should be shaped by God's purpose for our lives.
 - Two additional books that have been recommended related to our “purpose” and God's unique ways to get our attention include: “The Dream Giver”, authored by Bruce Wilkinson (also wrote Prayer of Jabez) and “Waking the Dead”, authored by John Eldridge.

2. Is your spouse on your team?

If you're like me, when my relationship with my wife is stressed, it is nearly impossible for me to be effective in almost anything I attempt to do. It impacts my work, my interaction with my kids, and certainly my efforts to find a new career. God blessed us with our spouse to be one with us. They can help us celebrate success and can also help us get through difficult times, among many other things. And yet, when we become unemployed, the relationship that often suffers more than any other is our relationship with our husband or wife. Why is that? Is it because we're both scared? Or, is it something else?

There are likely a number of reasons for the fracture in the marriage relationship during career transition but there are few things more important than rectifying the situation. In fact, I'd argue that it is one of the most important priorities for someone in career transition. The spouse can be a tremendous encourager; he or she can be a great networker for the unemployed person; and the spouse can help relieve the pressure the entire family feels by helping to determine actions that

can be taken to lower the families costs, or take care of chores that allow the unemployed spouse to focus on the career search. They can also provide empathy, love, and accountability. I would challenge you to consider the following ideas:

Action Items to consider:

- Spend time together initially, and then for one hour weekly, to really discuss the career transition status and challenge. Solicit feedback from your spouse to get his or her perspective on the search and educate them on the process that you're going through. Be open to new ideas and be patient with the questions your spouse asks (I know, that's hard!). Remember, it's likely they are not well versed on career transition – the more they learn, the better they'll understand and perhaps they can even lend a hand.
- Discuss ways for you to reduce your spending level. This can reduce more pressure from this process than most anything. It will help stretch your savings and may allow you to consider more career options, some at lower levels of pay than you may have earned previously. The tendency will be for both of you to assume that a new job will be found shortly. It takes time and anything you can do to stretch the length of time your severance or savings can last will be beneficial and lower the stress in both your finances and your marriage.
- Take some time each week to simply enjoy each other's company. When we're working we get too few opportunities to have a picnic together, or see a matinee movie. You can't career search 15 hours a day! Take some time to grow your relationship with your spouse; it will pay great and long-term dividends!

3. What are my God-given strengths/talents and how can I best use them in my next career?

God has blessed each of us with a set of skills and passions that he would like us to utilize in our life journey. The challenge is to determine what these are. The good news is that if you love your work, you'll never feel as though you're actually "working". Your work becomes one of life's blessings, not a chore. Another way to look at this is to challenge yourself to find work that you love so much that you would do it for free; and then do it so well that people are more than willing to pay you to do it! I know, it's easier said than done.

But, it is not unreasonable to think that each of us can be better utilizing our strengths and talents than our previous career has allowed and you can and should be very specific about your career goals that leverage these talents. Consider the following:

Action Items to consider: Ask yourself the following (write down the answers):

- What have I been most successful at doing in the past (don't limit this to work – it could be hobbies, charitable work, classes)?
- When have I been the happiest in my past work or hobbies?
- What are my most unique strengths?
- What do I dream about doing?
- What makes me laugh? What makes me cry?
- What is the ideal working environment (size, culture, management style, etc.)?

Somewhere in the answers to these questions lies clarity on the nature of the work that each of us can do that is most consistent with our God-given talents.

- Share your answers to these questions with your spouse or a close friend who knows you and will be honest with you. This will allow you to validate your conclusions and may also help you identify strengths you may not even realize that you have.
- Based on the above exercises, document your career goals. You should be able to identify the nature of the work, the ideal environment (small business versus large business versus your own business as an example). You should also identify the steps you need to take to achieve your goals.
- You may find that this exercise also encourages you to look for “non-traditional” career options – perhaps working as an independent contractor, or starting your own business. Be open to the vast possibilities for your career because the nature of employment continues to evolve and those that explore all reasonable options will be rewarded.
- Finally, engage others in helping you to attain your goals. Talk to others who have achieved the goal you aspire to – and learn from them. Consider partnering with them in your journey. Get advice from your mentors. There are many people who can help – but you've got to ask!

4. Identify Target Companies

“Sales and Marketing 101” always suggests that the best way to ensure you hit your target is to have a clear definition of your target – otherwise you'll hit something, it just won't be what you intended. The same holds true for career search.

The most successful career searchers are those that have clearly identified the ideal target companies (based at least in part by the criteria identified in #3 above), have developed proactive strategies to better understand these target companies, and then execute these strategies aggressively.

Action Items to consider:

- Identify 10-15 target companies that are “best fit” for your skills and interest. The list may change as you learn more about each target – that's ok.

- Research each of these companies to understand their business issues and challenges, their key executives, their competitors, and anything else that may help you define the value that you can add to the organization and the key people you need to reach in this process.
- Be proactive and explicit with those that you meet about who your top 2 or 3 target companies are (you'll want to adjust which companies you mention based on who you're talking to – specifically, those companies they are most likely to be able to help with) and don't be bashful in mentioning them. What you're looking for is help to get connected with a few of the key players in each target organization and if you aren't explicit about your interest, people you meet will not know how to help you.

5. Become a great networker.

Most experienced career transition experts will tell you that networking is the most common way that people find their next job. The challenge lies in knowing how to do this well. Following are a few suggestions to consider based on feedback from some of the best network navigators that I've met.

Actions items to consider:

- Informational Interviews – If you're asking for time to meet with someone because you're looking for job opportunities that they may know of – most people shy away from the invitation. If, on the other hand, you approach people to spend 45 to 60 minutes to gain their insight or their “advice and counsel” based on their background and knowledge, most people are actually flattered by this approach. They don't need to feel they must hire you, or find you a job. You'd just like their perspective. Ultimately, as you gain credibility, they will want to help you by extending their network of contacts to you as appropriate.
- It's a bit overwhelming to try to connect to 75 or 100 people at a networking event. Don't even try. Rather, use networking meetings to find 2 to 3 people that you identify as being credible and a good, symbiotic contact for you. Get to know them and create a relationship that will ultimately be good for both of you.
- Don't be embarrassed – every environment you're in is a networking opportunity – neighborhood pool, church, and the grocery store check out line! – You never know whom God will place in your path that could be the channel to your next position. Be open and honest, share your career interest and tell people that you would be appreciative of any insights they may have that could help you to meet someone they know who could be helpful in your transition. What's the worst thing they might say – “no”?
- Ensure that you keep that “bounce” in your step. When your energy is low, or you're feeling dejected, that is easily sensed by others, including those with whom you interview. Ask people that are close to you to

monitor how you are being perceived to ensure that you are viewed as positive, hopeful, and excited about what the future holds in store for you, in spite of challenging circumstances. Attitude is everything in career transition.

- Pay it forward – this is not about receiving – it’s about giving first, and it will be returned to you in kind, and then some. The most effective networkers are finding ways to help others before even asking for help from others – providing their time or insights, offering to solve a problem, introducing another friend - whatever they can do that someone else would value. You’ll be surprised at how willing people are to help those that have helped them. Accordingly, consider the following:
 - Get involved in charitable activities – Habitat for Humanity, Hands On Atlanta, Big Brothers/Big Sisters – this is where you are likely to find many employed people who could help you, once they see you have a good nature and a heart to help
 - Go out of your way to help a friend – employed or unemployed
 - Make as many investments as possible in others – particularly if you can lend your specialty skills to a project or someone in need (perhaps your technology skills, or handy man skills for example)

6. Control your costs

This may be the most practical, and easiest adjustment for anyone going through career transition. The problem – it can be the hardest to actually implement and requires real discipline.

Actions to consider:

Start immediately to drive every possible cost out of your monthly expenses. The sooner you start, the sooner you will reap the following benefits:

- Allows you to reduce the amount you dip into savings (some of which, i.e. 401K, is subject to tax penalties)
- Gives you more flexibility on the career options you’re able to consider
- Lowers your long-term costs that allows you to save for the future – so long as you can retain the discipline you learn.

Reduce your debt – it’s biblical and it’s sensible! Doing so will not only reduce your interest costs but will also help you to learn to live within your means. Once you’re able to pay off debts, continue to put the same amount of money into savings that you were using in paying off debt – this will best position you for the long term.

Tithe – I know it sounds counterintuitive! God wants us to have the right perspective on money and he both commends us and commands us to give first. In some cases, he may be using this career transition phase of our lives to allow us

to demonstrate our faithfulness and to help us learn to rely on something other than our money. He may want us to learn to rely on God, not on our ability to accumulate wealth or worldly goods. The best way to break money's hold on many of us is to learn to give it away. God will reward our faithfulness.