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JOB SEARCH

Self-Employed to Employee: Making the Switch

Entrepreneurs have plenty to offer the senior ranks of corporations. If you're looking to change gears, be ready to explain your motives and your unique value.

By Patty Orsini

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ILLUSTRATION: Chip Buchanan



Make It Work

By Matthew Rothenberg, Editor-in-Chief, TheLadders.com

MY LOVELY WIFE has been self-employed ever since we met 20 years ago. As a matter of fact, one of the first things that impressed me about her was the moxie Nancy demonstrated by moving to San Francisco from Grand Rapids, Mich., to pursue her entrepreneurial ambitions. And I've always admired the drive that has led her to success in design, illustration and now in fine art.

I'm also very familiar with the stresses and strains that self-employment entails. You're first string on every project, and

"delegation" generally means asking your spouse to help move your work from your office desk to the dining-room table.

Running your own business of any size takes skill, guts and brains — but how does all that great experience translate if you decide to take your game back to the corporate hierarchy?

In this package, reporter Patty Orsini fields questions from entrepreneurs weighing employment opportunities and answers from recruiters and

human-resources managers who've helped senior talent make the switch from entrepreneur to employee.

"Typically, the person who has pursued an entrepreneurial career is someone who is passionate about what they do and is driven to create results," Linda Hall, president and senior partner of Wakefield Way Consulting in Rochester, N.Y., told Orsini. "Even if they have decided ... they need to pursue a corporate job, they need to keep in mind this is one more business decision." ■

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THERE ARE PLENTY OF BENEFITS to working for yourself. The flexibility, the autonomy, the ability to build something: All are great lures for those who like the challenge of an entrepreneurial business.

However, the same factors that attract people to self-employment can also become a burden. Autonomy can mean having no one to bounce ideas off. Flexibility means you can take time off during the week, but you may also find yourself working through the weekend. And when you need to spend as much time marketing your business as you do working with existing clients, you might wonder if the grass is greener on the other side of the cubicle.

In addition, the economic downturn has stalled business growth, prompting business owners to trade autonomy for a steady paycheck.

Those who make the transition from entrepreneur to employee join the pool of wage-earners already on the job search, but they face different challenges, said recruiters, human-resources managers and those who have made the transition.

Many of these job seekers question what line of work to choose after years wearing multiple hats; most struggle to

match the standards of a corporate hierarchy against which they've never been measured; and all must come to terms with handing control to someone else, starting with the job interview. They must also battle the perception that they are abandoning a failed business or could prove unmanageable within a corporate structure.

The employer is concerned about the entrepreneur's experience as well as his intentions, said Caroline Ceniza-Levine, a partner at Six-FigureStart, a career-coaching firm based in New York.

"HR might be thinking, 'OK, this person has been on their own; are they going to just come here and hang out until things get better?' He will need to come up with compelling reasons why he wants to go back to the corporate lifestyle," she said. "The prospective employer wants to feel they are selected, rather than think the candidate is running from something else."



Ceniza-Levine

"Why do you want to work for someone else again?"

For whatever reason a person decides an office job beckons, making the transition poses some real challenges for job seekers, who will be scrutinized by hiring managers trying to determine whether they can truly function in a corporate hi-

The Business Owner's Resume Riddle

Owned your own business? Writing a resume presents special puzzles, like what to call yourself or how to describe all your roles and responsibilities.

By Patty Orsini

THE RESUME of an entrepreneur isn't fundamentally different from the resume of any of the employees in a large organization. But the nature of the entrepreneur's role in a company and the tasks he performs creates unique hurdles when crafting a resume for the business owner.

For the most part, it all comes down to words, said Steve Burdan, a certified professional resume writer based in

Chicago who works with TheLadders. A hiring manager will not necessarily read between the lines to understand what you did in your own employment and why you want to work for their company.

Roles and responsibilities

The trouble starts with the entrepreneur's title, Burdan said. Does "consultant" fit the bill? Does "president" fully explain the work you've

been doing? "It's not necessary to have your resume mirror the title you are applying for," Burdan said. "Think about what you did for your company. If you are looking for a vice president or president role, you don't necessarily have to give yourself that title. Sometimes, general manager stands apart from VP or president and gives the sense of overarching responsibility."

erarchy. Indeed, someone who has managed a business but not necessarily a staff is a bit of an unknown when it comes to her place in that hierarchy. And the job seeker needs to be prepared to answer one inevitable question: “Why do you want to come back to an office?”

Instead of waiting for a hiring manager to raise them, a job seeker needs to ask herself these questions at the beginning of the hunt.

It’s an exercise Linda Hall, president and senior partner of Wakefield Way Consulting in Rochester, N.Y., advises her C-level executive clients to conduct before they send a single resume. It’s up to the job seeker to present the image that he isn’t running away from a bad experience but offering something valuable to the corporate world.

“Typically, the person who has pursued an entrepreneurial career is someone who is passionate about what they do and is driven to create results,” Hall said. “Even if they have decided, because of economic conditions, they need to pursue a corporate job, they need to keep in mind this is one more business decision. In essence, what they are doing now is

creating a contract within an organization to provide services.”

Going rogue?

If you’re going to convince an employer that you can provide value to his company, you’ll need to draw on all the skills you’ve used to make your own business succeed. One of the biggest challenges is convincing an employer that you want to work within a company after you’ve been working solo for many years.

Wayde Gilchrist, a freelance IT consultant in the Dallas area, is considering a move into the corporate world as the economic downturn has forced him to reduce his fees.

Gilchrist, who has worked as an independent consultant for 12 years, admitted that his first choice is to work from home. But he said he is realistic about the way the business has changed; he’s convinced that to continue doing the work he likes, he will need to go to work for a company.

He would like to be hired for a management position or even a chief technology officer position, he said, but he is concerned about how his management skills will be perceived.



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— Linda Hall

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There’s also the matter of overstating your rank. Too often, business owners include inflated titles, such as “president and CEO,” Burdan said. He advises against those titles, even if that’s what the individual’s business card said.

The rationale boils down to perception: There’s a big difference between being the president of a one-person company and being the president of General Electric, and, in most cases, it’s wise to “dial it back” to avoid being seen as exaggerating your role, he said. “If you were a one-person operation, then use ‘principal.’ A franchise owner would be an ‘owner-operator.’”

It can be difficult for a business owner to capture the breadth and scope of her roles and responsibilities in a title, especially when the sole proprietor wears many hats, Burdan said.

Here he recommended the job seeker make use of the resume profile section to spell out not what she did in her old job but how she can leverage her experience to deliver for an employer. “Think of it as a branding statement, with yourself as the brand,” he said. “It should highlight your skill set and give the hiring manager a clear idea of what you can do.”

The consultant’s many jobs

For independent contractors, it is important to list the clients you performed work for as a way to highlight your professional credibility among peers. On the other hand, listing the many jobs and relationships of a consultant’s career presents its own problems, Burdan said.

A contractor may have dozens of clients, concurrent engagements and overlapping projects that can appear confusing if listed chronologically as separate “jobs” on a resume. It creates an unnecessarily long document and can confuse the hiring manager, Burdan said. Instead, he recom-

Back in Someone Else's Boat

Scot French, a marketing consultant, enjoyed the flexibility and money of working for himself but wanted to contribute to a team as part of a larger company.

By Patty Orsini

Scot French liked the perks of working as a freelance marketing consultant. He worked with nearly half-a-dozen startup technology companies in two years and enjoyed the flexibility and variety of working for multiple clients.

"I was able to have a lot of different experiences," he said. "Focusing on one job can make work redundant or repetitive. Freelancing made work interesting and exciting. And the autonomy and flexibility was great. It allowed me to spend more time with my kids and coach their teams."

He also found monetary success, he said. But the honeymoon soon faded. French, who lives in Seattle and had previous in-house experience as a marketing manager at interactive companies, found that work was taking more of his time. While he was free to leave the office during the day, often he'd be back at his desk that night. And, he said, "one of the things I wrestled with as an independent contractor was whether the world needed one more marketing-services organization."

He also yearned to be back "in the boat," as he called it. Collaborating with other members of a single team,

helping to guide that boat, being a part of that success, French said, was ultimately more important to him than being autonomous. "What it came down to was that I have always wanted to be a part of a team that was building something. And that's the biggest thing that was missing, and that's what pulled me back to a full-time job."

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So last summer, French decided that if the right opportunity came along, he would go back to work with an employer.

While French was mulling strategies that would help him transition back to a full-time job, opportunity knocked on his door. One of his clients told him

about a new company, Mpire, an advertising optimization technology company that sells to agencies and advertisers and needed someone to do its marketing. "He told me I should get to know this company," French recalled. "He said they were doing some interesting stuff, and I'd be perfect for them."

Many of his previous clients were also Mpire clients. So he agreed and accepted a job at Mpire in November. "It was an opportunity to get into a company that I like in a market that I am excited about," he said. "I am using my ability to hone in and focus and see if I can build this company."

French said that anyone looking to make the transition from independent contractor to full-time employee needs to keep an open mind when considering opportunities. "You are never sure where great opportunities will come from. And then do your due diligence. Make sure this is the move you want to make."

But even if you're ready to give up on being your own boss, do the best work you can for the clients you have. Your reputation is on the line, French said. "It's so key," he said. "That's what will bring you opportunities." ■

mended combining them within the job descriptions and highlighting key successes as accomplishments.

What about the client relationships that went south or projects that didn't work out? Just don't list them, Burdan said. Never lie, but leaving something off your resume is not the same thing

as making something up. If it wasn't a good fit, it didn't work out and it isn't relevant to your search, then it's OK to skip it, he said. "If someone took a short-term job, and that job blew up, I would suggest they leave that job off the resume," he said. "It's all about giving impressions; you don't want to

give impression that you jump from one job to the next."

The rest is Resume 101. Be clear. Be concise. Rewrite; you can't have a one-size-fits-all resume, he said. "The job search is a race; you've got to gain any kind of edge that you can, without using steroids." ■

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“As a freelancer, you are a one-man team,” he said. “There were occasions where I had to direct a few other developers, but mostly I did everything for myself. HR departments are looking at how many employees reported to you and how big your teams were.”

Ceniza-Levine suggested the candidate pitch the potential employer the way he would pitch a prospective client. “Research the company, identify their pain points, find out what is keeping them up at night, and offer a solution,” she said. “The solution has to be framed around you being there, working for them long-term.”

Addressing his chances of moving into a management position, Wakefield Way’s Hall said Gilchrist does need to think realistically. “Managing other people and their performance is a skill,” she said. “I’ve seen people fail when they follow the line of thinking that to make more money, they need to move into management.”

Gilchrist wondered if he is thinking realistically by looking for openings at a startup, entrepreneurial company that might be looking for someone with years of IT experience, who can manage smaller teams, or even a group of independent contractors.

That makes sense, Hall said. “A startup is more likely in the same frame of mind that he has been in. They will speak the same language.” Still, it’s tricky, she said. Really to know if management is the right place for Gilchrist, Hall said, “the first thing he needs to find out is what the company’s expectations are, and have an honest conversation about whether you can be successful with their expectations.”

Entrepreneurs in Gilchrist’s position should find a trusted client or two, she counseled, who will give him an honest assessment of his personal skills and management style. “Find out how you work, how you drive performance. That way, you can be aware of how you motivate people, and you can bring that awareness into the new environment.”

Articulate your value

Even if someone has managed a staff for many years, her management style and value is a big question mark to a potential employer. After all, there are no performance evaluations, no peers at the company who can give her a recommendation.

After owning a successful landscaping and snow-removal business in Lake Tahoe for 30 years, Scott Schumacher was hit hard by the decline in the housing market. His clients in the upscale Incline Village area cut landscaping services from their budgets as a decline in tourism took a toll on the local economy and housing values fell.

“Business went from really good to mediocre to nothing,” he said. In the past year, he has sold his equipment and is looking to start over in another area of the country where he can use his expertise in managing crews and dealing directly with clients.

“I have been looking for a management position. That’s what I’m good at,” he said. “But nobody is hiring.”

Schumacher is not only trying to sell himself to a company, he’s doing it in areas far from where people know him. His first challenge is to articulate his value to those who don’t know him or his former business.

Rather than seeking an existing job, counseled Hall, Schumacher needs to think about creating business proposals for potential employers. “The idea is to co-create an opportunity with a company that has a need,” she said. “Think about how you can become an adjunct inside an existing business. How can you bring bottom-line results to the company?” In Schumacher’s case, this might mean selling his expertise doing estimates and bringing projects in on time and on budget.

Matthew Arrigale, VP for Human Resources, Americas, at Schott North America of Elmsford, N.Y., said it’s important to be able to tell an employer what skills you utilized in running

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“Think about how you can become an adjunct inside an existing business. How can you bring bottom-line results to the company?”

— Linda Hall

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your company. “Try to relate it to the gap the company has,” he said. “Explain how they can fill that gap by hiring you.”

The need to relocate adds another layer of complication for this type of job search. The strategy, said SixFigureStart’s Ceniza-Levine, is to pick a city or region where you might like to be (even if you aren’t certain) and start researching. “Look on LinkedIn to see if you can find professional groups in that area. Talk to the chamber of commerce; do good, old-fashioned research. In forcing yourself to commit to a target, you will find out quickly whether you’ve picked the right place. If it’s not right, you can move on. But at least you have started looking.”

The job-change challenge

Not all independent contractors have jobs that can translate into corporate work. Re-tooling yourself, and your resume, to fit a corporate job description presents unique challenges.

Kitty Koenig, who owns an international event-planning company in Connecticut, is facing those challenges. Her business has



Koenig

been hard hit by the recession, as Fortune 500 companies have pulled back on events. Koenig, no stranger to re-inventing herself, is considering how she could convert her skills as an international event planner with executive-level relationships, philanthropic fund raising and

command of several languages into a position as a personal assistant to a CEO or other high-level executive.

Koenig said her efforts so far have been frustrating. “These are the types of jobs where you need to be personally recommended,” she said. “I feel like I am sending my resume to outer space when applying to online job listings.”

Ceniza-Levine said Koenig is correct in thinking that this type of job won’t be found by sending someone a resume. “The person she wants to work for is not going to find a personal assistant by sifting through resumes,” she said. “And the fact that she is looking to change careers means someone is going to have to take a chance on her. She needs to take those great relationships she has had with her business and use them to get personal introductions. It’s a very personal job, and she needs to work her relationships. Most of her leads are going to come two or three degrees of separation out of her immediate circle.”

A resume, even if it’s not the first point of contact, is still an important part of the job search. For someone who is looking to make a change, Schott North America’s Arrigale said, you can position yourself as someone who is open to new challenges.

“Companies value diversity, new ideas and people willing to take some calculated risk,” he said. “That’s how entrepreneurs operate, and that’s attractive to many employers. Their resume should state how they were flexible and dealt with change and how they were able to innovate.”

Determining whether you are making the right decision to enter the corporate world — whether for a return engagement or for the first time — means taking the time to have some honest conversations, both with yourself and trusted colleagues.

“In this type of economy, people want and need to work. For whatever reason they make this decision, they should go into it with their eyes open,” Arrigale said. “People can be successful in different types of environments, but they stand a better chance if the company’s culture is in line with your personal values.” ■

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7 Job-Search Steps for Entrepreneurs

Tips to help business owners beat the special challenges they face when looking for a full-time job.

By Patty Orsini

AS YOU CONSIDER whether you want to trade your independent-contractor status for full-time employee, career counselors and human resources professionals offer this advice for determining if this is the right decision for you, as well as strategies for finding the right fit.

- **Build relationships**

If you are concerned about how you will work within a company, remember that even as a solo practitioner, you were building bonds and relationships with others, said Linda Hall, president and senior partner of Wakefield Way Consulting in Rochester, N.Y. “You have that skill, and you used it extensively. Now, you will have to use it to work with peers.”

- **Use your connections**

If there is a company you are interested in, said Hall, “I always tell people to find that six degrees of separation. Through your connections, you will know someone who is already in that company. Talk to them. Find out what makes people successful there. What are the core expectations of becoming part of that corporate family? You want to be sure that the culture will be a good fit.”

“Most of your leads will come outside of your immediate circle,” echoed Caroline Ceniza-Levine of New York career coach SixFigureStart. “Your ability to go two or three degrees out is where you will really open up opportunities.”

- **Find a partner**

Speak to someone who can help you focus your search and be a sounding board for ideas. “I encourage people who have been independent to find a professional peer or colleague who can help you stay in confidence building mode,” Hall said. “It’s particularly important to help you keep that long-term perspective.”

- **Market research**

Do diligent research, targeted specifically at the organizational culture. “Assess the fit between the culture of the organization and your own personal values,” said Matthew Arrigale, VP for Human Resources, Americas, at Schott North America of Elmsford, N.Y. Talk to current employees; try to find someone with the organization that has made the same transition.”

- **Pitch like a consultant**

“Identify what is keeping a prospective employer up at night, and present yourself as a solution,” Ceniza-Levine said. “Then, pitch like a consultant. In some ways, you are at an advantage because you’ve done these pitches. The solution has to be framed around you being there, in the office, working for the long term.”

- **Brag about the boss**

Your resume should reflect your entrepreneurial skills. Talk about how you ran the business, how you were flexible and able to deal with change, Arrigale said. Talk about how you had to think about the big picture but also rolled up your sleeves. Those are the same types of tasks you will do within an organization.

- **Name-drop**

Your resume should highlight your clients. A resume from an independent contractor should talk about the clients with which you have worked and what you succeeded in doing for them. “If you did work for a Fortune 500 company, that’s impressive,” Ceniza-Levine said. “If you’ve been published, if you’ve done speaking, make sure those are up high.” ■

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