



HOUSING CHRONICLES
AN INSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE ON REAL ESTATE AND ECONOMICS

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The Housing Chronicles Blog

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Preparing for the employment rebound



With largely positive economic news over the last few months concluding that a sustained housing rebound may finally be on the horizon, 2012 could very well prove to be the year that building industry employment begins rising from its depressed lows. And yet since returning to that former job may be challenging at best or impossible at worst, it's probably time to update that resume and research exactly what companies – and their recruiters – are seeking in a new employee.

According to JoAnne Williams at JWilliamsStaffing in Irvine, California, business at her staffing and temporary services company was up by 75% for the first six weeks of 2012 versus the same period in 2011. Geographically, most of that increase has been seen in California, Texas and Colorado. However, for candidates wishing to stand out from the pack of other jobseekers, Williams has some sage advice: skip the objective in the resume and replace it with a brief, bullet-pointed skills summary.

Since so much of recruiting is now done online, be careful about how you save the name of the resume file you'll be attaching to your application, as something like "ResumeABCBuilder" may make it seem like you're artificially targeting your resume towards that company. Williams also suggests skipping a cover letter unless it's specific and engaging to the potential employer. Finally, even though it may seem like an anachronism in today's wired world, including recent reference letters adds a touch of class.

Matt Slepín, Founder and Managing Director for the executive recruiting firm Terra Search Partners based in San Francisco, says that those looking to re-enter the building industry should do so sooner rather than later. "They generally have a free pass for the beginning of the recession to be un- or under-employed, but at this point in the cycle it starts to become more questionable," he offers. Slepín also says that recruiters should be a small part of a comprehensive job search program simply because by the time an opening gets to a recruiter's desk their job will be to make the process highly competitive. "Better to get to an employer before the opening gets to a recruiter," he concludes.

Slepín also has some advice for those trying to be clever on their resume by using a functional format to hide gaps in employment or leaving off dates of college graduation or their first few jobs (which could make the reader conclude you're even older than you are). A traditional, chronological resume shows how a candidate grew and evolved in different positions, and although some companies might harbor some age bias, Slepín doesn't practice it. If you had a career detour into another industry or took time off to raise a family or start your own business, the best place to discuss those issues would be in a good cover letter and, hopefully, in an interview.

In general, recruiters such as Terra Search look for two types of candidates: those who fit a specific position, and those who are looking for a general conversation to begin a long-term relationship. In fact, the best networkers keep up with recruiters in both good times and bad and tap them as both a regular coach and career counselor. Don't simply use them when you're only looking for a job.

JoAnne Williams, also a veteran of the building industry and associations such as the BIA, stresses the need to reconnect with key industry leaders, attending events and keeping in touch without being a pest. Even requesting a introduction to someone, like a reference letter, can show potential employers that you're taking your search seriously. And when you do finally nab that interview, prepare for it in advance, as Williams suggests that a well-prepared candidate with less experience might get hired over a veteran who assumes they can rest on their resume alone.

So what's the best way to network your way into a job? Firstly, both Williams and Slepik agree that LinkedIn is the best social network for business. Secondly, demonstrating involvement in the industry can show that you know how these organizations are structured and have personal resources to bring with you. And thirdly, don't be a passive jobseeker: instead, research the hiring manager for a position and network your way into the company so you already know who you're talking to before that all-important interview.