

Don't Sabotage Your Career—Take Control

By MARY BETH BOS, CFRE



Are you thinking about looking for a new job? Why? According to the *2014 AFP Compensation and Benefits Study* survey, the top two reasons why fundraisers may be considering a change are:

- Frustrated by the current work environment (30 percent of U.S. respondents; 28 percent of Canadians)
- Want greater career opportunities for advancement (23 percent of U.S. respondents; 22 percent of Canadians)

In order to take charge of your career going forward, there are several things you need to address.

1. Look at the current labor market.

In today's constantly changing job market, employers can find talented staff with exactly the type of credentials and background they are looking for, and more. While many applicants meet all the criteria to do the job, passion, fit, style and leadership are the critical factors that determine who gets hired. Soft skills such as work ethic, communications style, teamwork, personality, problem solving and critical and creative thinking all play an important role in today's HR search for professionals in the workplace. If you are deficient in any area or do not know what your soft skills are, you should seek assistance from a trusted mentor or colleague. Behavioral assessments, available through career/business coaches, can provide objective understanding.

2. Plan and research the job prior to application and the interview.

Because the job market is very difficult to maneuver today, it is extremely important to plan ahead. Ask yourself, "Where do I want to be in three to five years? What organization fits my strengths in raising money and mission? What strengths do I bring to the job? What are the important benefits needed?"

With the right research beforehand, the chances are better that you will find the right position. Read the Form 990, which each U.S. registered nonprofit must file yearly with the IRS (Guide Star is one resource), or the T3010 in Canada to determine a nonprofit's or charity's financials, stability and fundraising results. Is this an organization that meets its mission and fulfills a need in the community? Is it run efficiently? Is the culture in line with your values and working style? Can you be passionate about the mission and cause?

3. Have a compelling résumé.

Keep track of the money that you have generated during your career, and make sure your résumé reflects accomplishments rather than reading like a job description. Each job history listed should reflect, in "metric" terms, all achievements. A cover letter needs to state how your background and skills meet the job requirements, along with your passion for the organization. Your organizational and writing skills are being evaluated. Writing and good grammar are two of the most important skills for all careers. Your résumé should be two to three pages long, if possible. If you are transferring skills from the for-profit to the nonprofit arena, career objectives are critical. A summary or professional competencies section is recommended to highlight your strengths more quickly and to get you to the interview stage.

4. Listen during the interview.

The most common mistake that candidates make during an interview is talking too much. Listen to what is being asked, repeat the question if necessary and answer concisely. Then stop. The interviewer will ask a follow-up question if needed. Dress professionally. Casual dress may not convey the image and presence that an organization is seeking, which may cost you the job.

5. Qualify goals and challenges to be successful.

Before accepting a job offer, ask how you will be evaluated after the first 90 days and after the first year. What are the expectations outside of the job description? What is the allocated budget for development/fundraising? Who plays a role in raising funds, including the board of directors? What is the CEO's management style? There must be mutual respect and trust between the CEO and the development director for successful fundraising. Make sure to have these essential elements in writing. If your gut tells you an organization is not a good fit, move on.

6. Are you jumping ship too quickly?

A red flag on any résumé is a short length of employment at an organization. Three to five years is the amount of time that it takes to set and attain goals and objectives.

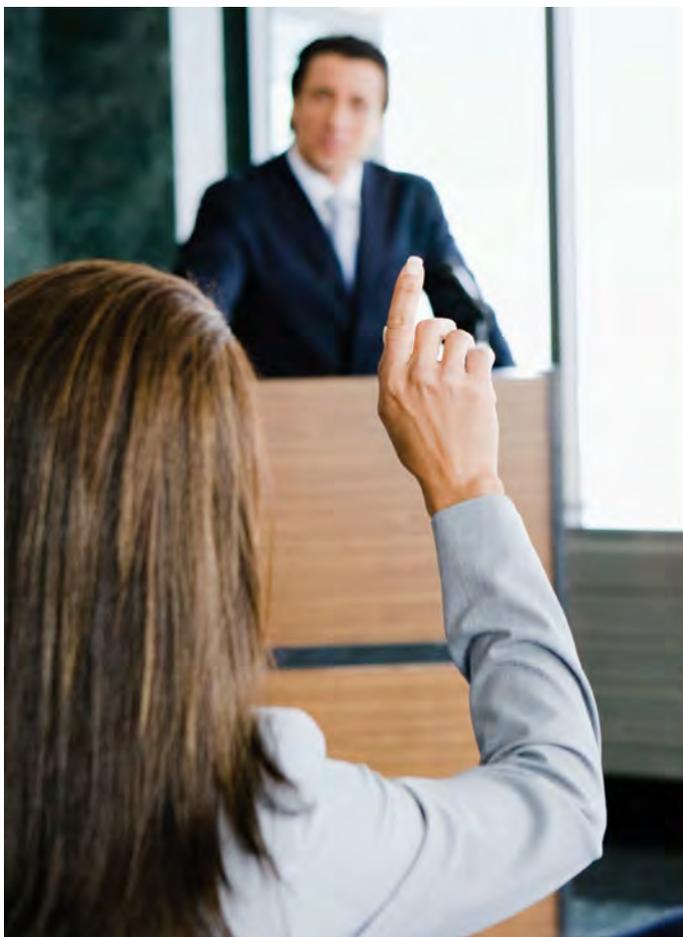
7. Know the salary you want, and research salary information.

The Form 990 will give you the salary information of the top professionals within the organization. You also should research what the current salary ranges are in the area by looking at salary surveys for development officers. The AFP, Guide Star and United Way compensation and benefits surveys are just a few sources.

8. Have an employment contract.

It is always recommended that you obtain an employment agreement or contract before you begin work. The agreement should contain the details of the terms of employment: the amount of notice for termination by both parties and the amount of salary and bonus, as well as issues for termination on behalf of either party. 

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