

HR job career options – 2008

Quarter 1 of the new calendar year will be a great time for HR professionals to weigh up their career options. With the current strong market conditions set to continue into the New Year, a career move might well be well timed.

If HR professionals are looking to think about their careers in the early New Year, there are some things that they can do to prepare themselves in order to be in the best position to take advantage of opportunities that will exist in the market.

Some of the strategies to maximize the opportunities in the market are consistent with all levels of the profession whilst others are more specific to the type and level of the role being sought. Clearly the strategies that may fit an early HR career professional are going to be quite different to those of a highly experienced practitioner looking to lead a function, whether it be in a generalist or a specialist role.

All levels need to prepare

What are some of the things that all levels of HR professional can do to be prepared to go to the HR job market?

The most obvious is updating the resume. Whilst clearly an essential piece of homework, quite often this is where most people's advance preparations when going into the job market finish.

The resume is the marketing/communications document that informs others of what people have done in the past as an indication of what could be achieved in the future. What is equally important for the individual HR professional is having a solid idea of what sort of role they are targeting and why. With a wide range of different styles of HR roles available, this is a critical exercise to be able to target the right roles and most importantly, judge opportunities against some set objective criteria.

Some of the choices that need to be thought through are as broad as: what is the best move to continue the right direction for an HR practitioner's career, and general health and hygiene factors such as industry, location and work patterns that are important to maintain (or change) from the current situation.

Gaining information about the market is also important. Who is doing what and who are the good companies to work for etc? Whilst recruitment consultants play a role in building information, HR networks are also a great way to find out what companies are doing good things and what is generally happening in the market. Contacting a list of former HR colleagues that can

be trusted to keep confidences and who can extend an individual's understanding of the market is usually very useful.

Senior generalist and specialist roles

The first thing to appreciate is the time frame that it will take to make a move. The more senior the professional, the more likely the time frame associated with finding a role will be protracted. The reality is that with the finite number of senior roles in the Australian and NZ markets, senior practitioners can look for the right role for an extended period of time.

Mentally being prepared for this potential delay in processes can be important so that frustrations aren't experienced during a protracted job search or that the actual job search isn't left to the last minute. Often senior HR professionals in the Australian and NZ market make the mistake of observing the heat in the early career and intermediate levels and thinking that translates to the top end. Whilst the market is strong for HR roles, there is still fierce competition for the small number of good lead roles, particularly at the top end.

The message for senior HR professionals is: the best preparation for anyone in the top end market is to start the job search process before you need to!

The early career and intermediate HR market

The range and styles of roles in the market in 2008 will continue to be wild and woolly for some time to come. There is a strong range of alternatives in these markets for HR practitioners with early developed skill sets from strong branded companies.

HR practitioners in the early stages of their careers can best prepare for a job move by undertaking an objective career audit and identify gaps in experience and ensure that any future role will help fill these areas of weakness.

A general comment for practitioners in the early stages of their career is that when looking at roles, they should focus on alignment to a good company brand, working for a good HR leader in a business partner type HR structure – this is the passport to fame and glory.

2008 – Start the preparation now

The New Year is now on our doorstep. An early investment in preparation for a job search process will pay dividends. Irrespective of the level or the type of role, HR practitioners can reap the benefits from a "total campaign" approach, making sure that all the boxes are ticked before interview processes start. It could mean the difference between landing a great role or not!

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