

TOP 10 EXECUTIVE TRANSITION TRAPS

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At Career Beginnings, Inc. we have worked with thousands of senior officers and executives in transition. Most complete their transition and find an exciting opportunity. Some however, somewhere in their job search effort, fall into one or more transition traps. As a result, they are delayed or sidetracked for a period of weeks or even months. Here are some of the more common traps:

1. **LACK OF FOCUS** – This is probably the most damaging trap. Since most executive positions are found through networking, you should use your existing contacts to find useful new contacts. If you cannot explain where you want to go, it is very difficult for your contact to reach for his rolodex and make appropriate introductions. The too common ***“I can do anything for anybody anytime, anywhere, what have you got?”*** approach doesn’t work very well.
2. **NO PLAN/WRONG PLAN** – Management by wandering around (MBWA) may be an accepted part of management theory but “job search by wandering around” (JSBWA) is not a proven search strategy. Successfully transitioning and finding a new position is very much like marketing a new product. Once you have product features and benefits and some research to identify potential markets, a structured approach using multiple, simultaneous marketing channels works best. Without an organized, specific plan for each channel (organized networking, industry/professional associations, search firms, the Internet, the investment community, etc.) most transitions lose focus and direction. A transition job search campaign centered around advertisements, the Internet, search firms, and direct mail is the usual fallback position and consistently leads to frustration and lack of success.
3. **THE 200 lb. TELEPHONE** – Searching via ads, letters, and the Web is frustrating, but doesn’t put you at risk emotionally. Making a phone call however, creates an opportunity to be rejected. Because of this, it is easy to defer phone calls. It is also easy to talk yourself out of following up on contacts because they are a long shot and won’t lead anywhere anyway. However, some of these long shot phone calls may lead to the golden opportunity. The best strategy here is to tenaciously follow every lead.
4. **THE EXECUTIVE EGO** – Highly successful officers and executives often find it hard to believe that they have to initiate a search effort. It is hard to ask others for help and difficult to make calls and not receive call backs. Some executives are happy to talk at length about their past successes, and presume the listener will identify their strengths. They miss the opportunity to listen carefully then sell to “customer” problems.
5. **THE “HONEYDO” LIST** – This trap is similar to the 200 lb Telephone Trap. Concern about rejection makes it easy to substitute other things, preempting the job search. One of our clients redid his house from top to bottom before starting a search. The good news is, he was able to sell it for a premium and took a position in the construction industry, but this is not a recommended strategy.
6. **THE ENTREPRENEURIAL VENTURE** – Many of our clients believe the best way to a new position is through starting or buying a company. Both of these options require significant time resources, almost to the exclusion of other search efforts. An easy trap is to devote 100% of your time to finding a company or finding financing for a startup. Six months or a year later, when the deal falls through and your resources are further depleted, you wonder why at least some time wasn’t devoted to a traditional search.
7. **DISCIPLINE** – Everybody says a job search can be a full time job. In many ways, this is true, but there is one big difference – no structure. In a job, you have a boss or a board, relatively regular

hours, a specific place to go, and a relatively organized support structure. Without these things, you are 100% responsible for the discipline of the search and the quality of your output. Things could be worse, however. You could still be on active duty with that whole support structure working to keep you from devoting time to your search. It takes discipline to do the most important search related activity first, taking a few minutes for yourself at the beginning of the day, then managing work for the rest of the day.

8. **CONSULTING** – A reasonably effective search strategy is to use consulting as a door opener. It can serve as a trial marriage with less risk for either party, and often provides the opportunity to understand a company’s real problems, creating a business proposition and create a position. If, on the other hand, it requires a full time commitment, takes you out of the search effort or doesn’t lead to new skills or new contacts, it should be evaluated very carefully.
9. **FINISHING A SEARCH** – Probably the worst mistake that a transitioning executive can make is stopping your networking and other career management initiatives when you find a new position. Career management, particularly when you are faced with the challenges of a new position, is difficult to do. Unless your new employer has offered you a lifetime contract, you will probably be in the market again. Make life easier for yourself the next time by remembering the lessons of this search. Keep your network up-to-date, stay in touch with search firms, and stay active in industry/professional associations.
10. **DOING IT ALONE** – Executive transitions are complex and clearly an emotional roller coaster. It is surprising how so few executives have established a support network when there are so many resources available. Many industry/professional associations have career related services; colleges and universities offer the same. Excellent career consulting and outplacement firms are available in every area of the country and ***we at Career Beginnings offer our Executive Career Management Program, specifically designed to facilitate efficient and effective professional transitions.***

If you are in transition, you should carefully assess whether you have fallen into one or more of these traps. If you are thinking about transition, you are now forewarned and forearmed!



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