

Payoff For That Insider's Name Is Huge

By Amy Lindgren

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Of all the difficult tasks in job search, possibly none is harder than finding the names of people who hold specific posts inside targeted companies.

That said, I refuse to accept the plaintive wails of job seekers who tell me they can't get this done.

I have yet to meet someone who has applied enough elbow grease to impress me with the impossibility of the challenge. People simply give up too quickly.

Perhaps they aren't convinced of the importance of these names. Here's a quick refresher. In a reactive job search, you watch for ads, do what they say and wait to be called for an interview. Sometimes it works, but usually not.

The more effective strategy is a targeted job search, where you determine the type of work you want to do, list the companies likely to employ people in those roles and ask the managers of those departments if they foresee any openings.

While this system yields plenty of rejection, the potential payoff is huge: A meeting with the department manager to discuss a job before it's posted. That is, a private audience with no other candidates around. Jackpot!

But hold on — how do you get a meeting if you don't know who the manager is? Well, you don't. That's why it's so important to find those names. Then you can send a resume and letter directly, and follow up with a phone call to this person's desk.

Here, then, are 10 ways to get a person's name inside a specific company.

Try the first methods first. Remember that your inquiries will center around the department you hope to work in, so don't ask for Human Resources, unless that's your profession.

1. Call the company and ask. "Hi. Can you give me the name of the person in charge of your training department? Thanks — how do you spell that?"
2. Check the company Web site for department managers, then call to verify: "Hello. Is Jarrod Johnson still the manager of the purchasing department? Can I verify the spelling on his name?"

3. Use the Internet to search for the company name and the department name together.
4. Check LinkedIn for someone heading that department in your target company. If nothing comes up, look for someone who works at the company in any capacity. Email to ask if they can help you find the name you seek.
5. Send a group email to your friends, family and professional associates asking "Does anyone know who heads the IT department at this company? If not, do you know anyone at all who works there?"
6. Get to the best business library you can (in the Twin Cities, that's the Hill Reference Library) and check the back issues of local business magazines for articles featuring your target company.
7. Ask the professional association serving your field for a directory of members. If they won't share the directory, go back to your contacts to ask if anyone is a member of the association and would they mind checking their directory for you? Better yet, could they put out a query to the membership to see if anyone knows the name?
8. Call the company again, but this time ask for a sales representative. Once connected, explain briefly that you're not making a purchase today, but you're hoping they can help you find the name you're seeking. Why sales? Because they usually answer the phone, they're usually outgoing and they don't mind doing an easy favor for someone who is upfront and brief.
9. Ask vendors or contractors in the field for help. This is complicated to describe, but think of it this way: Which kinds of vendors do business with the person you seek? Find people in these fields, then ask if they serve this company.
10. Use subterfuge, but only as a last resort, and only if a company is really important to you. What kinds of subterfuge? I won't tell you what has worked for me, or it won't work next time. But I will say that ethics and a respect for the person's privacy remain tantamount.

Whichever methods you use, remember you are involved in a legitimate business inquiry: You aren't breaking any rules by sending a business letter to someone's place of business. Furthermore, just because someone is hard to find doesn't mean he or she is hiding or will resent hearing from you. Indeed, the harder you have to work at this, the more likely it is you will have this playing field to yourself. That's well worth the effort.

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