



Staying ready

A career search doesn't end when you get a job

In this chapter you will:

- Understand that getting a job is an important milestone, but it's not the end of the road. Even if you love the work you are doing, you are still on the career continuum—it pays to be ready!
- Consider six ways you can keep yourself poised and prepared for the next time you need to search for a job.
- Learn how to efficiently stay ready for a future job search.

Congratulations! The good news is that you've made it. You have a great (even “dream”) job and you are on your way to connecting your profession with your passion. The “bad news” is that this is not the time to stop the activities that made your job search successful. Given the fact that most professionals today follow a nonlinear career path, your new job may be the first of many positions you'll hold during your career. As well, your recent travails should be a fresh reminder of how difficult and often unpleasant the job search can be... whether your job search was well planned and meticulously executed, or a stressful experience that often left you scrambling to make it to the next networking opportunity with your newest resume straight out of the printer. By staying “job-search-ready,” your next job search will be a lot less difficult. Thus, this bad news isn't all that bad: being prepared for your next career move is easier than you think.

After reading some, or hopefully all, of this book, you should realize that your career is an ongoing continuum. This means that you are never completely done. Dream organizations change and the perfect job can become something quite different over the course of even a few years. Beyond the fact that we change as individuals, with our passions and goals following suit, the world around us is ever changing. This inevitably impacts the organizations and individuals with whom we work. In short, it pays to stay ready! Below are six steps you can take to strengthen your current position and stay primed for a future job search, if and when that becomes necessary.

Step one: Repay and then bolster your network

Everyone loves a success story. So, as soon as you get acclimated to your new position, make a point of setting aside enough time to reach out again to the network of individuals who (in any way) helped you to connect with your current role. Since they were essential in helping you find your current position, let them know that you appreciate

all their assistance and insight. Articulate your eagerness to stay in touch (make sure they have your professional contact information!) and be sure to offer yourself as a resource in your current role. Find out what they need and how you can help them. You can share with them the mission and programmatic focus of your new organization. Encourage them to send people to you for information and assistance. Finally, let them know that you continue to view them as an invaluable resource and one who can help others who may come to you for assistance.

Ideally, you can also start connecting with individuals in your network to collaborate on projects you take on as part of your new position. This will not only help you to do the best work possible in your role, organization, and community, it will also help you strengthen your network for use in the future. If you can run workshops, collaborate on events, co-create materials, or otherwise strengthen your professional network connections, you will show those who helped you (maybe even without necessarily knowing your work ethic and professionalism) that their faith in you was justified and you will also quickly expand your network to include other individuals who know your skills and personality. Fostering these kinds of collaborations can allow you to try out new roles within your organization and connect with members of your network whose work doesn't directly relate to your role. For example, if one of your contacts works in printing and advertising but your new role focuses internally on direct service, talk with your outreach director or other staff in charge of your organization's "public face" to see if you can play a (small) part in working together with your contact's organization.

Step two: Establish new ties

While you are repaying and bolstering your network, begin to think about ways to create new contacts and connections. Your new role should put you in touch with contacts already established by your organization—ask your colleagues about their professional networks and see how you can get connected. These networks may even have a professional angle to them: associations, local leadership councils, and policy advocacy groups focused on passing legislation to help your organization's mission. Seeking out new contacts will allow you to do your job better (which helps your organization) while also improving your standing in professional circles. Being asked to speak at professional events or representing your organization during policy and planning meetings are ways to grow professionally and should also improve the standing of your organization.

Keep in mind, however, that networking *at* work is not limited to networking *for* work. New networking possibilities also include social and recreational circles. Maybe a new coworker is involved in an art club and you've been looking for a chance to break out the watercolors again. Maybe you can do a fundraising event with a colleague's walking group. If you focus on what networking really is—building relationships—you will find limitless opportunities to continue creating a strong network that can help you do good work, try fun new activities, and assist with any professional career shifts in the future. In the meantime, enjoy the camaraderie and new friends!



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Step three: Keep track of accomplishments

As you start your new role, be sure to recognize your accomplishments: how you contribute to projects, complete tasks, and learn new skills. It is a lot easier to keep track of these skills and accomplishments as they happen rather than trying to reflect back on years of work when you need to get your resume ready for a new job search. Regularly setting aside time to update an “Accomplishment List” is the best way to capture your achievements.

Most organizations have a three-, six-, and/or twelve-month review process to help your supervisor (in particular) and the organization (in general) stay abreast of what you’ve accomplished in that time as well as to develop a strategic plan for the next few months. Use this as a valuable opportunity for self-assessment. Take time to benchmark what you’ve done, consider what you would like to do before the next review, and reflect on your current role and responsibilities. See the review process not as a critique of your work but as a chance to reflect and grow. This regular check in with yourself and your supervisors can help ensure that you are still in a job you’re passionate about, still growing professionally, still doing work that excites you, and still with an organization that inspires you. Keep an electronic version of these reviews so that you can easily copy and paste your accomplishments into your master “Accomplishment List.”

If your organization doesn’t have a formal review system, ask a supervisor to sit down and offer feedback or start your own personal review cycle quarterly or twice a year. This process shouldn’t take you more than an hour and can be split into two parts. First, create a list of projects and tasks you’ve completed since you started or since your last review. Be sure to note the various skills you used to get the job done. For example:

Promotional Material for the Organization’s Tenth Anniversary Fundraiser

- **Teamwork:** Coordinated with Executive Director, Outreach Director, and special Board of Directors “Anniversary Subcommittee” to agree on design and wording.
- **Computer Skills:** Used Photoshop Pro to create professional, distribution quality materials.
- **Budgeting:** Worked with outside vendors for printing and distribution of promotional flyers. Able to come in under budget by \$12,000 and still increase volume of distribution by 20,000 individual mailings.

Internal Needs-Assessment Intake Forms for New Clients

- **Research:** Looked at recent studies to decide key assessment areas for new clients. Conducted interviews with several leaders in the field.
- **Team Management:** Coordinated four planning meetings with a team consisting of Head Clinician, Intake Coordinator, HR Director, and all seven Counselors to ensure that intake tool was valuable and appropriate.
- **Editing:** Took old intake assessment tool and incorporated new research and planning meeting feedback to create a stronger organizational tool.

Now make a list of the pros and cons of your current role. Is the balance still tilted toward the positives? Does your job still challenge you? Do you still feel satisfied when you fulfill your responsibilities? On the other hand, have things changed (including your needs and interests) enough that your job is no longer the exciting opportunity it once was? If this is the case, you'll want to again tap into your network so that you can be aware of any opportunities that may be a better fit than your current role. This process of self-reflection can also help you structure a conversation with your current employer about what might need to change in order for you to stay with this organization.

Since it is easy to get swept up in a new position, set aside a dedicated amount of time (and make sure to put it on your calendar!) for self-assessments. This will help you to begin tracking your accomplishments as they happen. If this assessment is a regular part of your routine, you will eliminate gaps in your memory later on. It will also allow you to continue to assess whether your job is the one you want now and still satisfies your needs. Furthermore, performing these assessments regularly will make your next active job search significantly easier. Finally, maintaining a self-assessment process will allow you to fix problems as you proceed with your work, as opposed to having them build up to into situations that could cost you your job.

Step four: Continue to update your “master” resume

Many professionals treat working on their resume with the same level of enthusiasm they bring to going to the dentist, balancing the checkbook, preparing tax returns, or any one of a million “necessary evils” in life. It doesn't have to be this way. Your resume should be a living document that serves as a reminder of your constantly growing list of accomplishments, skills, and experiences. Most people who “hate writing a resume” feel this way because they wait until a resume update is absolutely necessary. “Absolutely necessary” tends to coincide with another major stressor: a job search. This addition can make the process of resume writing seem even more tedious and unpleasant.

While it is unrealistic to think that anyone has time to update their resume on a frequent basis, if you do even a marginal job of keeping track of your accomplishments over the course of a year, an annual “resume redux” is a simple task that takes less than an hour. Simply copy and paste your accomplishment list into your master resume and then format accordingly. This is a good time to consolidate old position descriptions, academic information, and personal information to make room for current accomplishments. And, yes, this is even the time to delete some of your older jobs that are no longer relevant to your professional future.

As you rework your resume, remember that this working document can be a bit longer and more descriptive than one you would send out in a future job search.



STAY INFORMED

Even when you have a dream job, it is essential to stay up-

to-date with what's going on in your field as well as what's happening in the nonprofit sector. Idealist.org makes it easy for you to subscribe to **RSS feeds and email alerts** that will keep you informed of new blog entries, groups, volunteer opportunities, or jobs on the site. See these links:

- Idealist.org RSS feeds
www.idealists.org/idealists/en/RSS/RSS/default
- Idealist.org email alerts
www.idealists.org/idealists/en/My-Idealist/Register/default

You can also search other career related sites (including local nonprofit job resources) and subscribe to feeds that relate to your specific interests.

You might also want to search for (and comment on) **blogs** that relate to the nonprofit causes that you're passionate about. Finally, save yourself time by setting up job search agents at career websites so that you will be automatically notified when new opportunities become available. Check with your college career center to see if they have RSS feeds or job search agents you can use to stay in the loop.

—Valinda Lee

In other words, this master resume should contain more information about all of your skills, experience, and accomplishments than you would necessarily use in a resume that you are sending to a potential employer. (See the [Chapter Eight](#) for more information on crafting the exact resume for the exact job for which you are applying.)

As is the case with networking, making time to keep your resume updated can have professional benefits even if you are completely satisfied with your current position. After all, resumes aren't just for job seekers. Your resume is also a tool that can demonstrate why you would make a great speaker at an event, member of a nonprofit board, or author of an article for a publication in your field. It doesn't take much effort to ensure that the story your resume tells about you is classified as "current events" rather than "ancient history."

Step five: Keep your options open

When it comes to job inquiries and offers from other professionals, the old adage, "It is better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it," rings especially true. While you may feel as though you're being disloyal toward your current employer if you don't flatly state your disinterest in other job opportunities, you are really only doing yourself a disservice. There will likely come a time when you will need to contact your network to let them know you are actively beginning a career search. Another option is to be clear that you are always open to new opportunities so that people in your network will think, "Edgar might find this interesting. I'll call him," rather than, "Too bad Edgar would never think of taking another job because this opportunity would be great for him."

Walking the fine line between letting others know you are completely satisfied with your work yet still open to hearing about new opportunities is best done by being straightforward (and a small dose of humor never hurts). A statement like, "Thanks for letting me know about that. To be honest, I'm really enjoying my work right now and not looking elsewhere, but you never know when that will change [pause for chuckle] so please keep me in the loop," conveys this sentiment concisely.

Finally, being open to hearing about new opportunities will help you regularly and honestly assess your current situation. This means keeping a realistic understanding of where your current role, organization, and salary fits into what is available to you elsewhere. Just as you should transmit opportunities to folks in your network, you should never stop looking at what's out there for yourself.

Step six: Continually self-assess

Remember that the career process is an ongoing part of your life that you should continually re-evaluate. Make a commitment to periodically do a self-assessment



A time may come when you need to contact your network to let them know you are actively beginning a job search."

(for many ideas on self-assessment, see [Chapter Three](#)). This can mean staying open to new roles, objectives, and skills as well as assessing past experiences to use in the future, asking for ongoing feedback, and periodically checking to make sure your “inspiration tank” is not running on empty.

You should never stop asking yourself if this job is really what you want to do. Remember that you started this journey in order to connect your passion with purpose. You may find that what you thought you wanted when you took this job is no longer where your interests lie, and you should not feel like it is inappropriate to continually reassess what you want to do with your life.

Get real. Who has time for this stuff?

Sure, we are all busy people with social, professional, and family obligations that constantly pull us in different directions. So how can someone realistically live their life and do their job while simultaneously staying ready for new opportunities or the possibility of another job search? The answer to staying ready is the same for the job search as it is for so many other tasks in life: break it down into small, manageable pieces.

- Consciously incorporate networking into your daily work life and create new ways to connect with people you know and people you'd like to know.
- Create opportunities and take the time to attend events to stay visible in your community so that people think of you first when something new comes along.
- Set aside 30 minutes a few times a year to update your “Accomplishment List” and resume.

When all is said and done, staying “job-search-ready” and keeping aware of how your current position fits in with who you are now and where you want to go shouldn't take more than the equivalent of one to two days of work per year. Considering the alternative—a frustrating and time-consuming scramble to get up to speed while real financial and application deadlines breathe down your neck—a few days of intentional work is a very small price to pay. You may even find that maintaining fruitful relations with established contacts and meeting new people, enhancing your skills and trying new roles and responsibilities, and taking some time to reflect on your successes is actually... enjoyable!

SUMMARY

It is important that you avoid the temptation to put your resume, network, and other job search tools on hiatus after starting a new job. Continuing to stay job-search-ready doesn't take a lot of time and can really pay off. Use these steps as a way to stay ready and avoid some of the pitfalls of a future job search:

Repay your network by contacting everyone who helped you in your search. Actively create ongoing ways to collaborate with your network in your new role (pages 177-178).

Continue to **create new ties** in order to strengthen your preexisting network and allow you to do the best work possible in your new position. Ideally, these new ties will help you expand the scope of your work and may help you in a future job search (page 178).

Regularly **keep track of your accomplishments**. It is easier to recall the details of your work as they happen rather than months or years down the road. Use organizational review processes or create your own review schedule to benchmark your accomplishments (pages 179-180).

As you track your accomplishments, **keep updating your “master” resume**. Even setting aside time once a year to perform a “resume redux” will help ensure that you don't have to scramble to update your resume when new opportunities arise (pages 180-181).

Always keep your options open. Just as you should share opportunities with people in your network, make sure to stay abreast of opportunities your network may send your way (page 181).

Make self-assessment an ongoing part of your professional life. Interests, lifestyles, circumstances, and your level of satisfaction can all change over time. Self-assessment is necessary to make sure that the professional choices and opportunities you pursue still fit in with who you are and who you aspire to be (pages 181-182).

If you **make a little time for these tasks on a regular basis**, it is easy to stay job-search-ready. That way, you'll be well prepared for your next move along the career continuum (page 182).

You are here

- This is **Chapter Eleven**. The entire book is available free of charge at www.idealists.org/beginacareer.

About Action Without Borders, Idealist.org, and this book

Action Without Borders is a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 with offices in the United States and Argentina. **Idealist.org**, a project of Action Without Borders, is an interactive site where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, find opportunities and supporters, and turn their good intentions into action.

The Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for First-time Job Seekers is a product of Action Without Borders' Nonprofit Careers Program based in Portland, OR. This team works to support individuals and organizations with graduate education options; HR and volunteer management resources; and job, internship, and volunteer opportunities.

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