

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WSJ.com

MANAGING YOUR CAREER

By JOANN S. LUBLIN

The Keys to Unlocking Your Most Successful Career

Five Simple But Crucial Lessons Culled From Many Years of Offering Advice to Workers, Bosses and Job Seekers

FINDING a job, flourishing on the job and moving into a better job demand plenty of work—especially during a jobless recovery.



That's why I am offering my five best lessons for managing your career, gleaned since I launched this column in July 1993. They include the importance of out-of-the box networking, sweating the small stuff and knowing yourself well enough that you're always ready for reinvention.

More Lessons

- * Do extensive homework about a possible employer's culture.
- * Practice, practice, practice before job interviews and work presentations — in front of a video camera, mirror or close friend.
- * Bring thank-you cards to job interviews, write them before you leave and then hand them to the receptionist.
- * Assemble a candid "owner's manual" about yourself based on a selfassessment and associates' input.
- * Embrace potentially risky new assignments.

And here's how to do it:

1. Network effectively rather than aimlessly.



Focus on forging "strategic relationships" at 10 prospective employers, suggests Paul Anderson, a career coach in Redmond, Wash. That means avoiding an "elevator pitch" in which you button-hole people and give them your career pitch on the fly.

"Relationships can't be built in 60 seconds," Mr. Anderson insists. "People hire people they like and trust." So, work on building better ties with your contacts by being a reliable resource for them and offering frequent updates about your career.

You can land strong introductions through your closest contacts, social networking sites and good "connectors," who may have nothing to do with your line of work. These professionals, such as hairstylists, dentists, ministers and accountants, amass connections that cut across industries.

Connectors "make introductions because they like to," notes Diane Darling, a networking consultant in Boston. She expanded her connections and consulting gigs by creating a personal board of advisers.

For the same reason, attend industry conferences that attract targeted businesses. Scrutinize the guest list, pinpoint executives you wish to meet and schedule encounters there.

When Tayari Howard was an aspiring radio personality in the '90s, he attended about 10 public events hosted by a San Diego station before meeting a department head and pitching his candidacy for a job. "Persistence paid off!" says Mr. Howard, who was hired by the radio station in June 1995, and still hosts a nightly show there.

2. Sweat the small stuff.



Tiny missteps may derail your career. You appear unpolished when you talk like an adolescent, curse at colleagues or proffer a sweaty palm.

Outdated clothes, frayed cuffs, messy hair, scuffed shoes or excess cleavage also signal poor judgment. "Looking your best at any age is what you should aspire to," advises Patricia Cook, an executive recruiter in Bronxville, N.Y.

Even bathroom habits count. High-tech recruiter **Dora Vell** once worked for a major search firm where the receptionist alerted partners if candidates using the guest toilet near her desk failed to wash their hands. (She could hear the faucet.)

This lesson also applies to cover letters. Inspirica, a New York high school and college tutoring concern, found mistakes in 93% of 220 letters from tutor applicants over the past year. Many flawed letters came from experienced writing tutors.

"Pay attention to everything you write in cover letters," warns Lisa Jacob-

Dora Vell is the CEO of Vell Executive Search, a premier retained technology executive search firm in Boston. Ms. Vell is an internationally recognized expert in recruiting technology executives including: CEOs, COOs, CTOs, CMOs, CROs, board members and others. She works with VC-backed, PE-backed private companies and public companies. She can be reached at dora@vell.com.