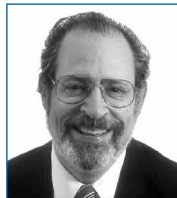


# CareerSmart Advisor™

Strategies & Solutions for Your Career Success

## A Note From Dave

ExecuNet's senior contributing editor, Joseph Daniel McCool, who writes our newsletter *RecruitSmart Today*, recently returned from attending the Association of Executive Search Consultants annual conference. One of the keynote speakers was Geoff Colvin of *Fortune*, whose remarks were focused on the eternal search for the magic potion that produces competitive advantage in the unforgiving world of business.



While Colvin talked about people, cultures and the relationship between the two, he also felt that in today's economy, and in a broader social context, things like ethics, leadership, executive transition and mobility also played key roles.

Really? Haven't they always? Certainly "leadership" (the holy grail of business) and ethics (a concept that seems all too foreign in many businesses these days — read Enron, et al) are important. We hear from members all the time who are thankful for the mobility factor. Why? Because it gives them the opportunity to look for an organization where they can apply their talents during the day, and walk out at night with a feeling of pride and not have to feel guilty for contributing to profit.

Surveys, such as our *Executive Job Market Intelligence Report* as well as many others around the country, have long reported disturbing stats around job satisfaction at the executive level; and Jerry Maguire notwithstanding, it's not about the money.

In my wishful thinking approach to life, I keep trying to convince myself that leadership, ethics, culture and profit are not terms that are mutually exclusive, or are they?

Sincerely,

Dave Opton  
ExecuNet Founder & CEO  
[www.execunet.com/davesblog](http://www.execunet.com/davesblog)

## Exiting Your Company Gracefully

By Marji McClure

You just accepted an offer for a new job. It's exactly the position you were looking for, and you can't wait to get started in your new role. However, it's a bittersweet time. You're still appreciative of everything you learned from your current company, your superiors and your team members; and you want them to value all of your contributions, even after you're gone. Making your final impression a good one is vital.

"In today's tidal marketplace, where passé jobs are being eliminated and fresh ones are created, the onus is on the executive to gracefully exit — find ways to sustain her integrity and marketability — and simultaneously create a runway to transfer knowledge and preserve relationships," says Cliff Hakim, founder of Rethinking Work, a career consulting and strategy firm based in Arlington, Mass.

"In this case, the executive is responsible for a non-threatening exit strategy: choosing words that inform her boss, colleagues and employees of her decision. She may also schedule meetings with her team to explain the move, share information, and answer questions that will better assure continuity and productivity."

When you decide to take another job, there are a lot of things to consider in order to leave your present position on a positive note. How you conduct yourself is a reflection of your character as a leader as much as the actions you display at your desk. "Today's scandal spattered marketplace leaves a void and an opportunity for the executive to exhibit the highest value of leadership: to set the example," adds Hakim.

Most important perhaps is communicating the news of your imminent departure to your boss and team members and making sure you leave the company in good hands.

### Breaking the News

The first thing you need to do once you've accepted a job offer is to tell your boss that you're leaving. This should be done at an in-person meeting or through the presentation of a resignation letter. After telling your boss, your staff is next. Bring everybody together (even virtual members of your team) as a group, suggests Janine Moon, master certified career coach at CompassPoint Coaching LLC in Columbus, Ohio. "This way,

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FastTrack Programs  
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Hosted by Dave Opton,  
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- 4/18 — **Warm Up to Cold Calling** — Nick Papadopoulos
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- 4/23 — **Raleigh/Durham** — Stuart Levine
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- 4/24 — **Chicago** — Melody Camp
- 4/24 — **Westchester/White Plains** — Nancy Hutter
- 4/25 — **Toronto** — Martin Buckland
- 4/25 — **Denver** — Karen A. Armon
- 4/26 — **Palo Alto** — Linda Holroyd
- 4/26 — **Minneapolis** — John Wetzel & Barbara Adams
- 4/26 — **Columbia, MD** — Ed Loucks
- 4/26 — **Atlanta** — J. Patrick Haly
- 4/26 — **Toronto Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Martin Buckland
- 4/26 — **Columbus** — Janine Moon
- 4/26 — **Dallas** — Bob Hueglin
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- 4/27 — **Detroit Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Marge Larsen
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- 5/2 — **Philadelphia Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Ed Kelleher
- 5/2 — **Cincinnati** — Mike Lynch
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- 5/2 — **New York City** — Judy Rosemarin

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## Your Career Advisor

# Media Savvy: Developing Confident On-Camera Presence

By Suzanne Bates

Whether you're running a worldwide firm or a start-up business from your kitchen table, positive press can do wonders for your business. Media coverage pays off ten-fold in building your industry reputation and impressing your important audiences.

While you may be experienced interviewing with reporters at your local newspaper or trade publication, it may seem easier than television because you are on the phone or answering questions by e-mail.

Television interviews require a level of confidence, presence and command of a topic. That can be intimidating, even to the most experienced professional.

Yet wouldn't you love to say yes, without hesitation when a TV reporter or producer calls? The goal of this article is to show you how to ace every interview so you never again want to pass on the opportunity.

Television interviews give you high visibility and can be a lot of fun. You simply need to develop skill and confidence so you don't freeze up or feel stymied, especially when you are live on camera.

What's the secret to calming your

nerves and feeling confident? The answer is to become media savvy. This means learning exactly what reporters want, how to anticipate questions, manage the interview, get your points across, and handle the "unexpected" questions that inevitably arise.

### What Do the Media Want?

The media like "cool trends" and cutting edge ideas. The best way to get interviewed frequently, or generate positive press, is to talk about these trends in your industry.

Come up with those topics by asking yourself, "What is the buzz? What are our clients, colleagues and people in the industry talking about?"

Being able to speak fluidly and concisely about hot trends and new ideas is a guaranteed ticket to television.

Whether you are pitching an interview or preparing for questions on a particular topic, jot down a few "big ideas" that are exciting to a general audience. What does the future hold? How are people affected by it? What problems need to be solved? Tap into your expertise and imagine what a general audience would really love to know about your topic.

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Suzanne Bates is president of Bates Communications, a communications consulting firm that helps business leaders and executives speak with an authentic voice of leadership and get a competitive edge in business. Her firm's clients include Fidelity, Mellon, State Street, EMC, Blue Cross, Interactive Data, and Cabot Corporation. Suzanne is also the author of *Speak Like a CEO: Secrets for Commanding Attention and Getting Results*, which has been translated into Russian and Chinese. Prior to starting her successful consulting firm, she was an award-winning television news anchor and reporter. She can be reached at [info@bates-communications.com](mailto:info@bates-communications.com) or by visiting [Bates-Communications.com](http://Bates-Communications.com)

## Who is Your Audience?

In any television interview, always assume you're talking to a general audience. Even if you are on a business program, your audience has a wide variety of interests and knowledge.

One of the most common mistakes business people make is assuming too much knowledge on the part of the reporter and the audience. Think about the average audience watching CNBC. In front of the television are people like your mother, brother or neighbor.

Unless the person actually is your mother, chances are 100-to-1 that lady doesn't know much about your company; and unless she owns the stock, she doesn't care.

Executives often make the mistake of speaking to reporters in jargon and "business speak." If you speak in jargon, television reporters and news anchors will interrupt you and insist that you speak so that everyone can understand. You want to make it easy for them to "get" what you're saying. If you're not sure whether you're speaking plainly about complex ideas, test your conversation with someone outside your industry.

## TV Savvy Interview Skills

**Use your time wisely.** If the interview is taped, you will not appear in the story more than once or twice, and your sound bites will be in the neighborhood of 7 to 12 seconds in length. If you are live, plan on delivering 20- to 30-second answers. Longer than that, and they'll start interrupting.

**Deliver your big messages right up front.** Don't build to your big point, say it first. Don't get into explaining eight steps or five reasons; the interviewer will never let you get past two. Put the big idea out there at the beginning of the segment.

**Manage the interview.** Interviewers like you to assert yourself. Answer the question briefly and then bring a new idea into the mix. This makes it feel more like a conversation. Sitting and waiting for the next question without coming up with some of your "own stuff" comes across as robotic.

**Anticipate questions.** Think like a

## More Tips on TV interviews

- Arrive early. Give yourself time to get settled, review notes, have your microphone and earpiece tested. Collect your thoughts, talk to the producers or the reporter who will be interviewing you.
- Look your best. Wear simple lines, nice color and no small prints. If you are a professional, wear a suit. Ask a wardrobe consultant to assist you in putting together a television wardrobe if you plan to do interviews regularly.
- Wear makeup. Both men and women look better when skin tones are evened out.
- Once your microphone is on, assume people are listening, and never assume you are not on the air. Dozens of people can be watching in the control room or by satellite, and any remarks you make could go out over the air.
- If you cannot see the person interviewing you, look directly into the camera as if it is a person. One of the greatest secrets to success in these interviews is to come across as if you are just talking to a friend across the table.
- If the reporter or anchor is in the room, look directly at them. Do not look at the camera.
- While you may hear distractions in the room, most viewers will not hear, because the microphone doesn't pick it up — so generally it's best to ignore those distractions (such as ringing phones, people yelling across a room).
- Good posture is a must. Sit up straight, supporting yourself with your stomach muscles in a comfortable, relaxed position. Make sure that once you are sitting up straight, you relax the muscles in your neck, shoulders, arms and hands so you don't look too stiff.
- Stay STILL. Don't swivel, rock or sway, even if your chair moves. Television picks up the smallest movements and magnifies them.
- Use colorful, active language. This requires thought, practice and diligence. Watch TV interview programs and listen to the regular guests. They develop a bantering style, use snappy phrases and word pictures to bring concepts alive.
- Speak clearly, enunciate, but remain conversational.

reporter. If you were interviewing you, what would you want to know? Be sure to write down all the questions, even the ones you don't want to answer. That way you'll be prepared for anything. Then, write down your answers, and practice out loud, so that you are fluid and confident when you go live.

**Never be defensive.** Reporters ask provocative questions because that's their job. Unless you're on *60 Minutes*, they're probably not out to get you; their job is to inform and entertain. Never assume that a question is meant to attack or hurt; the reporter is there to play the foil, and most of the time they want you to succeed.

## Stay Visible

In today's business world, television is more and more important to visibility. Staying "under the radar" may be your company's strategy. However, for most people, television is simply great exposure. Not only do you have a live audience for the first-run, you can make a copy, put it on your website, and leverage the publicity.

Once you have a few good television interviews, you have a videotape that your PR firm or marketing director can send around to other programs.

## Formal Media Training

You should also consider media training. A few sessions with an experienced media coach will help you learn how to prepare, what to say, and how to feel more confident. People who take the time to master the skills needed to handle media interviews effectively reap the benefits in positive press and minimize negative coverage when problems arise, as they inevitably do.

By following these strategies, you'll build credibility with the press — an invaluable commodity. You'll exhibit confidence, knowledge and power in front of the camera. And this can lead to more and more positive press; because when reporters need to do an interview on a very tight deadline, it will be you they call, again and again. ■

## Exiting Gracefully

*Continued from page 1*

none of those who may have worked most closely with the executive will feel like they've been left 'out of the loop' by hearing the news through the rumor mill."

Moon says the message should be truthful and concise; and you should understand that some people may have a tough time hearing the news. To help soften the blow, Andy Borkin, president of Bridgewater, N.J.-based of Strategic Advancement Inc., a human resource consulting firm, suggests letting your team members know how much you enjoyed working with them. "Tell them it's just time for you to move on. Never be negative. It doesn't benefit anybody," says Borkin. "Always take the high road."

Also, make yourself available after the meeting for people to speak with you alone. "A group meeting may be followed up by individual meetings with people, not only to wrap up each work area, but also to allow each team member to say what he or she needs to say as the working relationship comes to an end," says Moon. "People may be in various stages of grief and have concern for their futures, and the executive's ability to be emotionally sensitive will help people move through these stages."

There are circumstances in which your boss may not want the news to come from you. You need to follow your boss' lead before anything is said; and if the company prefers to make the announcement without you being present, you have to abide.

### Leaving Your Leadership Skills and Knowledge Behind

If you're leaving on good terms, it's probably important to you that the company be left with solid leadership. But should you really be involved in the succession planning if you're not going to be part of the team going forward? Your company may decline your offer to help when you're departing, but take comfort in the fact that you have likely already improved the process.

"Today's best executives don't leave succession planning until they're ready

to walk out the door — they work with their teams on a continual basis to get the right folks in the right seats to move the organization forward," says Moon. "The more feedback and the more interaction, the more engaged the team; and the more engaged the associates, the stronger and the more prepared for succession the organization is."

Moon says the same holds true for knowledge transfer. It's something you typically don't, and shouldn't, wait for your imminent departure to accomplish.

"A strong leader will work at knowledge transfer on an ongoing basis, because he or she knows how critical it is to be prepared for a workforce that is more transient than any time in the last 50 years," says Moon. "As knowledge or project experience is accumulated, the executive leader will ensure that processes are in place to capture and/or transfer that knowledge."

But if this hasn't been done on a regular basis, it's not too late to create a framework for those remaining with the company or even for a replacement that joins after you've left.

"Go the extra mile to inquire about the needs of those you leave behind," says Linda Holroyd, CEO of Mountain View, Calif.-based FountainBlue. "Leave the new person better prepared and positioned to succeed by sharing methods, processes and relationship tips. These small acts will be much appreciated, leave a good final impression on others and

help build bridges with new people who may be helpful to you personally or professionally."

### Navigating Employment Contracts

Many executives sign employment contracts when they begin a new position. These contracts typically place restrictions on your future employment and staff. Non-compete contracts — which could prevent you from accepting a job with a competitor — are very prevalent. So there's a good chance you signed one — even if you don't remember agreeing to such terms.

In the newly released 2007 edition of ExecuNet's *Executive Job Market Intelligence Report* (EJMIR), search firm recruiters noted that nearly half of the compensation packages offered for executive-level positions included a non-compete contract. Corporate human resource professionals noticed more activity, with 86 percent of executive compensation packages including a non-compete agreement.

Oftentimes, employment contracts prohibit employees from recruiting colleagues to their new company. You'll probably want to take peers or direct reports with you as you build your new high-performing team but before you extend any invitation, you have to do your homework. If you have signed a contract that clearly states you can't recruit, you have to oblige.

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### Exit Interview Etiquette

Many companies charge their human resources team with conducting exit interviews on the employee's last day in the office. While the real value of these interviews is generally unproven, executives must still comply in a way that projects them in a favorable light. "What happens with the information [collected during the exit interview] and if that information is ever used to improve the organization is questionable," says Janine Moon, facilitator for ExecuNet's networking meetings in Ohio. "But the effective executive [should] provide the information he or she sees as important for leaving the organization better off for having been a part of it."

So what can you say that emphasizes that fact? Moon says that any information the executive can offer that relates to the organization's overall health can be beneficial. Avoid making it personal or confrontational.

"If an executive believes that the culture of the organization is one that fosters disengagement and poor teamwork, then he or she can say so...and also include why that culture is holding the organization back in today's globally competitive environment," says Moon. "This is at least an opportunity to educate anyone who may review the exit interview, as well as an opportunity to avoid any suggestion of 'sour grapes'."

## Exiting Gracefully

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If there is no contract, it's still smart to tread lightly. Borkin says it's best to wait at least 90 days or up to six months before approaching a former colleague about joining you. Even if former colleagues approach you discretion is still recommended. "Although it would be better not to mention employment opportunities at your new firm while still employed with your current employer, it is generally accepted to respond to specific inquiries initiated by others, particularly after a 30-day time period, assuming that the non-compete clauses do not apply," says Holroyd.

### The Counteroffer: A Good or Bad Proposition?

Before you even accept an employment offer, you need to be sure the new position satisfies all the requirements you have for a new post. Ask yourself if it provides the things that your current job doesn't. "The reason that an executive accepts an offer from a new company is that some satisfiers are not met by the current organization: challenge, support, satisfaction, culture, leadership, salary and resources," says Moon.

Counteroffers usually include a proposal of increased compensation and other perks; but they typically do little to address those satisfiers that really matter — the main reasons that an executive has decided to accept a new job.

"Executives who know their value and want to make significant contributions, who want challenges and organization values aligned with their own values, often leave for things other than money," adds Moon. "Those are the satisfiers and evidence of appreciation for human talent that the current organization doesn't have to begin with, and certainly cannot promise in a counteroffer."

Bottom line: the factors that led you

### Anatomy of a Resignation Letter

There's no real rule that you must submit a letter of resignation when you leave a job, although many individuals (and companies) do prefer this written communiqué over a verbal conversation. There are several thoughts — and things to consider — before you pen your resignation letter. Linda Holroyd, ExecuNet networking meeting facilitator in Palo Alto, Calif., offers the following tips on what should be included in the letter:

- A general thank you for the opportunity to serve in the roles that you served.
- A specific thank you to the person you served under. No matter how you feel about the person when crafting the letter, find something to thank him or her for, advises Holroyd.
- The time period served.
- Regrets for external circumstances that may have contributed to your leaving.
- Understated optimism at the opportunities ahead for you.
- An interest in continuing the relationship following your departure, but only if you're sincere. If you would rather not continue the relationship, a second thank you and close is fine.

Holroyd suggests executives not communicate any bad feelings in the letter. "Do not get spiteful, say anything negative about a past event, or say anything about how unfair it is and how ill-treated you were," says Holroyd. "There are other times and ways to say those things. They do not belong in a resignation letter."

Andy Borkin, president of Strategic Advancement Inc., a human resource consulting firm based in Bridgewater, N.J., agrees. "If you are going to submit a resignation letter, it should always be positive," says Borkin. "Say you enjoyed working for them, even if you didn't." Borkin suggests writing something like, "I enjoyed spending time with you, but it's time for another opportunity. Please let me know if there is anything I can do."

"In the letter, you should always leave the door open," adds Borkin.

to seek a new opportunity aren't going to magically disappear if you accept a counteroffer and remain at your current company. In fact, the environment may just worsen as a result. If you stay, you will likely just appear to your company's top brass as someone who is no longer devoted to the organization.

"You have shown them that you're not a team player anymore," adds Borkin, noting that companies will oftentimes pay the increased salary promised in the counteroffer, while they conduct a confidential search to replace the executive.

"The counteroffer comes most often from an organization wanting to prevent a loss rather than wanting to acknowledge value," notes Moon. That loss is usually inevitable. Nearly three-quarters of search firm recruiters who responded to the EJMIR said that candidates who accept counteroffers still leave their company

within 12 to 18 months. About half of corporate human resource professionals who responded noted that executives would still depart in that time period.

### Final Thoughts and Memories

When you walk out the door for the last time, you want everyone to remember you fondly — and exiting gracefully is the best way to accomplish that. At that point, it may seem unlikely that you will ever want to return to work at the company or come in contact with any of your former colleagues. But because you never know for sure where your career path will lead, burning bridges is never recommended.

"Burning bridges is a short-sighted response that is usually the result of an emotional reaction," says Moon. "When emotions run the show, our logical brain is relegated to the back burner until the time comes to do clean-up. Leaving on a good note keeps open the door for future possibilities, whether it be business connections or partnerships or good will. It's a much more productive place to be...on the high road, that is." ■

### Expert Resources:

Andy Borkin, Strategic Advancement Inc. ([SAI-HR.com](http://SAI-HR.com))

Cliff Hakim, Rethinking Work ([RethinkingWork.com](http://RethinkingWork.com))

Linda Holroyd, FountainBlue ([FountainBlue.biz](http://FountainBlue.biz))

Janine Moon, CompassPoint Coaching LLC ([CPCoaching.com](http://CPCoaching.com); [WorkforceChange.com](http://WorkforceChange.com))

## Books Worth Your Time

# Firing Back: How Great Leaders Rebound After Career Disasters

By Ellen Stuhlmann

The revolving door to the executive suite is turning faster than ever, sweeping great leaders in and out of power at an unprecedented rate. Headlines in the business press announce departures and arrivals, while stories of career disasters and comebacks abound. Some leaders crash, burn and never recover from a career disaster, such as Apple's John Scully, HP's Carly Fiorina, IBM's John Akers, Kodak's George Fisher and Priceline's Jay Walker. And then there's Vanguard founder Jack Bogle, entrepreneur Martha Stewart, developer Donald Trump and Morgan Stanley's John Mack, who were able to rise Phoenix-like from the ashes of their career disasters.

Why do some brilliant, well-connected, talented leaders, who are swept out of power or lose their footing and fall from grace, completely disappear from the corridors of corporate power, while others who faced similar defeat, setbacks and failures rebound and land triumphantly in new positions of power?

This is the question that Yale leadership expert Jeffrey Sonnenfeld and Andrew Ward tackle in their new book, *Firing Back: How Great Leaders Rebound After Career Disaster*. They identify what enables leaders to overcome defeat and failure, and they present the elements of the recovery process.

*Firing Back* by Jeffrey Sonnenfeld and

### Seven Lessons To Turn Tragedy Into Triumph

1. Failure is a beginning, not an end. It can even be the source for new success.
2. Ignore the advice of friends to lick your wounds and retreat.
3. No matter how dire the circumstances may seem, triumphant comeback is possible.
4. While it may seem the world is against you, there are people who support you and are eager to help — if you let them.
5. Get your mission clear — regroup quickly after a downfall.
6. Know your story and continue to tell and retell it to get the real picture of past events out there and to rebuild your reputation.
7. Comeback is not a matter of luck: it is taking a chosen path.

Andrew Ward offers a clear plan for anyone who needs to recover from a career setback. If you or someone you know needs to rebound from a career disaster and reclaim lost prestige and reputation — I highly recommend this book to you. In a conversation with ExecuNet, the authors graciously shared their insight into what leaders should do to recover from career setbacks:

**Q. Your research shows that about 40 percent of failed CEOs disappear from the work force. How come some leaders have such difficulty overcoming failure?**

**A.** Some of the problem has to do with why they left office. If it was gross misconduct or overt incompetence, a comeback is certainly not as easy to explain as common envy or sabotage by rivals — but it is still possible. Some of the problem has to do with the type of culture in which they failed. Those industry cultures we classify as “baseball teams,” for example, are those in fluid fields like media, software, consulting

and biotech. And with highly mobile professionals who regularly work in unstable firms and with creative bosses with volatile temperaments, it is common for executives to lose their footing. In other cultures, failure can have a more damaging stigma.

Some of the problem, however, is the shame we feel over job loss. And we try to disguise what happened to not scare off others. There is also often a sense of rage over a perceived sense of betrayal by others that led to the situation or a denial that it really happened. This parallels standard grieving processes over other losses; but if a leader gets sucked into an emotional whirlpool, it is very hard to climb back out. A critical step is to acknowledge the failure, however embarrassing, and to ignore the well-intended advice of friends to just move on with your life without addressing or correcting the problem. Big career failures cannot be swept under a carpet convincingly, and, if unaddressed, will haunt your efforts at recovery.

**Q. Does the reason a leader has been fired impact chances for recovery?**

**A.** Yes, in profound ways. It is true that leaders who have left office in disgrace can still return to their office. Consider Senate Republican leader Trent Lott, who was forced out over charges of racism. Or, home design and media entrepreneur

Jeffrey Sonnenfeld is the Senior Associate Dean for Executive Programs at Yale University's School of Management, where he is the Lester Crown Professor-in-the-Practice of Management as well as founder and President of the Yale Chief Executive Leadership Institute. He is the author of six leadership books, including the widely acclaimed *The Hero's Farewell*, along with hundreds of scholarly articles. Andrew Ward is a member of the management faculty at the Terry College of Business, University of Georgia, and author of *The Leadership Cycle*.

Continued on page 7

## Books Worth Your Time Continued from page 6

Martha Stewart, who actually served time in federal prison. Such rebounds are especially difficult. The more the offense impacts the executive's personal reputation, the less likely career recovery becomes. We studied hundreds of career exits and grouped them into six main reasons for forced exit:

1. poor corporate performance;
2. personal misconduct;
3. illegal or improper behavior;
4. strategic disagreement;
5. political or personal clash; and finally,
6. merger or takeover.

As expected, illegal or improper behavior had the greatest negative impact on a leader's reputation and also most negatively impacted a CEO's chance at

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The more the offense impacts the executive's personal reputation, the less likely career recovery becomes.

”

returning to the office or landing a new top job.

**Q. A common thread throughout *Firing Back* is the idea of resilience and reputation recovery. What should**

**a leader do the moment that she or he is immersed in a crisis?**

**A.** Reputation is one of a leader's most valuable assets. As soon as they see that their success spiral is unwinding — or has smacked into a wall — they must forget their sense of entitlement to instant trust and instead begin the hard work of earning it back. Often, this entails the demeaning tasks of clarifying exonerating facts or showing contrition over explainable mistakes.

Their future adventures will have to show that they have retained the wisdom learned from any past errors. They will also need to turn to allies close and distant to leverage their recovery as reputation recovery can never be accomplished by muscling your way back alone. The worst mistake of all, however, is to look the other way and allow your adversaries to define events for you. ■

## Insider Insight

# Consider it a Compliment the Next Time a Search Consultant Calls

By Steve B. Watson

The next time you get a call from an executive search consultant, take it as a compliment.

Don't tell this individual you're not interested or that you'll call him back with no intention of doing so. Regard the call as potentially your next big break, because you can't bank on job security in corporate America. And circumstances beyond one's control could leave even the highest level executives looking for their next jobs.

The best search professionals do their homework, so if you do find yourself at the other end of a phone call or across the table, consider yourself fortunate. You have been selected from a stack of references and résumés as a potential candidate or a referral source. Either way, this headhunter likely holds the key to a position today or, perhaps, in the future.

Some simple preparation could be valuable the next time your phone rings.

### Always Be On Your Game

As a top-level executive, you should always be professional, courteous and upbeat in a phone conversation and in person. Headhunters generally size up a candidate within the first 20 seconds of a phone call or a meeting. Be in control, courteous and outgoing. If you are meeting search firm professionals in person, look everyone in the eye.

### Executive Presence

Search consultants continually seek this often intangible characteristic. This is determined in seemingly innocuous conversations. For example, if you are asked, "Would you like a cup of coffee," an appropriate answer might be, "If it's made, yes, I would love a cup," which shows decisiveness as opposed to a non-committed answer like "I don't care."

While not a deal-breaker, this type of interchange can leave an impression.

### Non-Business Conversations

Strong candidates are aware of the world around them. This could involve sports, politics, food and hobbies. The best candidates read volumes and can discuss issues other than work. Keep in mind that a session with a search consultant isn't for you to espouse your political beliefs, but should be a forum for showing diverse interests and an ability to connect with others. Much of the first contact is about chemistry.

### Discuss Your Weaknesses

Nothing alienates a search consultant more than speaking with a candidate who says with bravado that he/she has no weaknesses. Every high-level executive has taken risks and failed. The key is to take responsibility, don't blame others, and

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discuss what you've learned. How has that defeat improved your performance, and are you working on it to improve?

**No Time for Ulterior Motives**

For candidates seeking a new position, the call and/or meeting may provide temptation that isn't appropriate. In short, don't use the session with a search consultant as a way to get a bargaining chip for another position.

Don't tell a headhunter what he/she wants to hear simply to strike up a relationship for future positions. Saying that you're qualified for a position out of your range only serves to sever the relationship with a search professional. Everything you do is a demonstration of your honesty and integrity.

In other words, don't waste our time. Do that and you'll most definitely get crossed off the list for a position down the road that may be a perfect fit.

**Gaps in the Résumé**

Gaps in résumés aren't always bad. Sometimes they can reflect positively on a candidate. It's okay if someone took a year off after a high-pressure assignment to spend more time with the family or write a book. For example, one candidate went through a divorce, got custody of the kids, and decided it was better to stay at home for a period of time. There are positive reasons for gaps. They can be red flags, but can also be assets.

Steve B. Watson is managing director of the Dallas office and international chairman for Stanton Chase, a retained executive search firm. The 350-member organization conducts local, regional and international executive search campaigns for many top companies worldwide. Stanton Chase currently has 55 offices in 35 countries. There are 14 offices in North America. For more information, visit [StantonChase.com](http://StantonChase.com)

**Résumés Should be Comprehensive**

We want to know everything about a candidate — since high school. So, if you played sports or participated in collegiate, industry and/or community activities, especially in a leadership role, put it on the résumé. More is better when it comes to a résumé. Most important, don't EVER lie about your age or education. We'll find out.

**Everything is Relevant**

Nothing goes unnoticed by the search consultant during phone calls or personal interviews. Speech, dress, manners and demeanor are all noticed.

**Demonstrate Interest/Knowledge**

Do your homework before the interview. Read about the search firm and the company that has the opening.

**Be Honest and Forthcoming**

Be up-front about relocation and fully disclose your current situation — why you're considering a move, issues with your current employer, etc.

**Be Appreciative**

Don't be angered if you're not the right person for the position. Show your

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Nothing goes unnoticed by the search consultant during phone calls or personal interviews.

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appreciation to the search professional and indicate that you'd certainly like to be considered for other positions. You might also offer some other colleagues as potential candidates. Remember, it's all about building a relationship.

Search consultants are retained for good reason — to find the brightest and best candidates for their clients. If you happen to be contacted, take interest, because very few executives today will retire with the 25-year gold watch.

So, take your time and be polite, because you never know where this conversation will lead. ■

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**Founder & CEO:** David Opton

**Executive Editor:** Lauryn Franzoni

**Senior Editor:** Robyn Greenspan

**Contributing Editor:** Marji McClure

**Copy Editor:** Carol Hamilton

**Layout/Design:** 5050Design.com

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ExecuNet  
295 Westport Avenue  
Norwalk, CT 06851  
Phone: (800) 637-3126  
E-mail: [info@execunet.com](mailto:info@execunet.com)



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