

Required Reading

Job Search Success Prerequisites

Six Foundational Frameworks for the Higher Education Job Search

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These six pieces build on each other in sequence. Read them in order on your first pass — each one assumes you've absorbed the concepts before it. Once you've read the full set, return to any single piece as a refresher.

PIECE ONE

The Bullseye Method: A Targeting Strategy for Career Clarity

by Christopher D. Lee, Ph.D., SPHR, SHRM-SCP

Picture a dartboard. A square frame, a circle, then successive rings narrowing down to a small center — the bullseye. The closer you land to that center, the better your outcome. That image is the simplest way to understand one of the most overlooked truths in job searching: vague targets produce vague results, and specificity is what makes a search succeed.

The Problem with "Anywhere" and "Anything"

Most people entering a career change or a new job search have only a rough idea of what they actually want. They know a general field, maybe a job title, but they have not done the work of narrowing it down. The result is a search that is wide instead of deep — and a wide search rarely lands close to the bullseye.

Consider two people who both say they want "a career in student services." That sounds specific, but it is not. Student services covers Greek life and student activities (high-energy, far from a 9-to-5 schedule), student conduct, residential life and housing, career services, admissions and enrollment, the registrar's office, and more — each with a completely different rhythm, skill set, and daily reality. Saying "student services" is like saying "I want to play sports." It is a category, not a target.

This connects directly to the three levels of fit: qualified, competitive, and match. Plenty of candidates are qualified for a role. A smaller group is competitive. But the people who actually win the job are the ones who are a match — and you cannot engineer a match without first knowing what you are matching against.

The same is true at the institutional level. Saying "I would work at a four-year college" sounds open-minded, but it actually signals you have not figured out what fits you. Four-year colleges and four-year universities are fundamentally different animals. Within "college" alone, you have got liberal arts colleges, women's colleges, religiously affiliated colleges, public and private colleges, and more — each serving a different kind of student with a different institutional mission.

Three Categories, Seven Dimensions

Job fit is not one variable — it is several, layered on top of each other. Research and two decades of coaching practice point to seven dimensions worth examining, and those seven sort naturally into three larger categories:

- **Who you are** — your personal preferences, fixed and slow to change
- **What you do, and how you like to do it** — your profession and the kind of work inside it
- **Where you'd be doing it** — the institution, the setting, the people you'd serve, and the specific bundle of duties on offer

Who you are comes down to your personal preferences — your skills, your style of working, whether you are methodical or improvisational, introverted or extroverted, drawn to qualitative or quantitative work. Beneath all of this sit your values: competition versus collaboration, and the ethical lines you will not cross.

What you do, and how has two parts. The first is the profession itself and its parts — every field spans a range from abstract thinking to applied action (a professor who theorizes versus one who consults; a food scientist versus a chef), and most professions split further into sub-disciplines that function almost like separate careers (a computer scientist in hardware versus cybersecurity; an HR professional in benefits versus employee relations).

The second part is a dimension that almost never shows up in how candidates think about fit, but shows up constantly in how organizations think about a role: **Fix, Run, Improve, Transform, Change** — FRITC, or "Fritzy" for short. Some roles need someone to come in and fix what is broken. **Run** environments need the train to keep arriving on time, predictably. **Improve** environments expect steady, incremental enhancement. Some situations call for **Change** — measurable, structural change across a wide swath of operations. And occasionally the organization needs to **Transform** the game itself: rethink the model, modernize, play at a different level entirely.

This dimension is almost invisible to job seekers, because it is rarely written into a position announcement in plain language — though elements of it are almost always there. It is something experienced candidates recognize and read between the lines of the announcement itself. Your personal disposition toward each of these states is not interchangeable — some people want predictability, others are energized by ambiguity — and a mismatch between your temperament and what a role actually needs is one of the most common hidden reasons a seemingly perfect hire goes wrong.

Suzy was overjoyed to hear from the executive search consultant about the chief human resources officer position at the liberal arts college in town, though she had never worked in higher education. She had over fifteen years of experience at a mid-size hospital and, more recently, a very large one. The college's size, scope, and complexity were a fraction of what she was used to, but the institution's national prestige came with a salary comparable to what she was already earning. It seemed like exactly what she needed — a change of pace from a 24/7 hospital environment and the constant churn of medical-staff turnover.

Her change of pace turned out to be a serious misfire. The recruiter and staff had indicated in interviews that there was real work to be done, but Suzy underestimated just how much had to be built, reworked, or changed from the ground up. She assumed that such a rich, prestigious college must already be well-run, and that the warnings she had heard were exaggerated. What she found instead was outdated processes and technology, loose policies and procedures, and a staff that was too small, overworked, and under-appreciated. She had wanted a smaller, more focused role with a better work-life balance. What she inherited was a fixer-upper.

The deeper problem was that her entire career had prepared her for the opposite kind of environment. She had spent fifteen years inside large, mature hospital systems with well-established policies, sophisticated systems, and state-of-the-art technology — and she had built her reputation running a well-oiled machine. She had never built compensation policy or HR infrastructure from scratch. The job looked, on paper, like exactly the change of scenery she wanted. In FRITC terms, she was a Run person who had just accepted a Fix mandate, and no amount of prestige or salary alignment could make up for that mismatch.

Where you would be doing it rounds out the picture: the institution's type, mission, and culture; the setting and environment (urban or rural, large or small); the population you would serve; and the specific position itself — the unique bundle of duties at one organization, which is often narrower and more particular than the job title attached to it.

There is an old musical aphorism that captures the spirit of all seven dimensions at once: *git in where you fit in*. People do their best work where there is real alignment between who they are, how they like to operate, and where their skills are actually needed and valued. Not every job can be a dream job where every star aligns. But knowing which stars to aim for, before the search even begins, dramatically increases the odds of finding what you are actually looking for.

Triangulating the Bullseye

Here is where the method becomes actionable. Imagine throwing three or four darts at the target. If they all cluster in the same quadrant, that is

valuable information — even if none of them hit the center. Clustering tells you that you are in the right neighborhood, and from there you can adjust your aim toward the bullseye. If instead your darts land scattered across all four quadrants, you do not have a target yet — you have noise.

This is why writing things down matters. Get the ideas out of your head and onto paper — that is the square, the outer frame of the target. Then look for where your scattered points actually cluster. The cluster is the signal.

A student once told me he was considering three paths — military chaplain, English professor, or law school. On the surface, those look unrelated, almost scattered. But look closer and a cluster appears: a love of language and how it is used, religious and ethical frameworks, the role of tradition and culture in shaping rules and meaning. Law is built on values and belief systems. Scripture can be read as literature. All three paths shared a thread — language, values, tradition, and meaning — even though none of the job titles overlapped. That cluster pointed toward real opportunities, including roles where governance, doctrine, and language intersect directly.

Not every story ends in convergence. Suzy's story is the cautionary version: every visible dimension lined up — prestige, salary, profession, even the lifestyle change she was seeking — and the search still went wrong, because the one dimension she never examined, the FRITC fit, was the dimension that mattered most.

From Qualified to Ideal

The progression looks like this: you start on paper, with no real target. As you cluster your dimensions, you move to an outer ring — closer, "getting warm." As you narrow further — institution type, mission, geography, role specificity, FRITC fit — you move to an inner ring. The bullseye is reached only when you can say something like: "I want to be a dean of students at a small, private Midwestern college with a social mobility mission, serving predominantly first-generation students, in an Improve-stage environment rather than a turnaround." That is a target you can actually aim a search at.

It is worth naming the difference between two outcomes that can look similar from the outside but feel very different from the inside: a **great match** and a **bullseye match**. Landing in the inner ring — a great match — is a genuinely good place to be; most successful careers actually live there. But why settle for great when the dead center is within reach? A bullseye match is the rare alignment where nearly every dimension converges at once. Only sustained self-reflection, and knowing exactly what to look for, can move someone from a great match toward that center.

Landing a great job that is not the right job is a pyrrhic victory. It satisfies the search but not the person. The Bullseye Method exists to prevent that

outcome — by forcing the clarity work to happen before the search begins, not after an offer lands and the mismatch becomes obvious, the way it did for Suzy.

Putting it into practice: take a blank page and write out the seven dimensions as headers — Personal Preferences, the Profession and Its Parts, FRITC, Institutional Type and Culture, Setting and Environment, Type of Student or Customer, and Position Match. Under each one, write your honest answer, not your aspirational one. Then look for where your answers cluster. That cluster — not any single dimension on its own — is where your search should aim.

The more dimensions you can name, and the more honestly you can locate yourself within each one, the more your search stops being a scattershot of applications and starts being a targeted, intentional pursuit of the role that is actually built for you.

PIECE TWO

Why You Need Three Resumes

by Christopher D. Lee, Ph.D., SPHR, SHRM-SCP

One size does not fit all. You have built the perfect resume, and you keep it updated with every accomplishment as it happens. It looks great on paper — literally. But a single, all-purpose resume does not perform well in practice. You cannot expect one generic document to resonate with every employer and every opening they might have at any given time.

Here is the secret most job seekers miss: you are never applying for "a job." You are applying for a *particular position*. And a generic resume — however polished — will not separate you from the pack.

The Math Behind the Advice

For a typical professional position, expect somewhere around 50 applicants. Of those, roughly half will be qualified — they meet the baseline requirements stated in the posting. About a dozen will be genuinely competitive — the right mix of education, expertise, experience, and exposure, and will likely get a phone screen or a video interview. Only about three will be invited to an onsite interview.

That is not a generous ratio. If you are sending out one resume and hoping it resonates with every search committee that reads it, you are playing a lottery — and the odds are not in your favor.

The Fix: Build Three, Not One

The good news is you do not need to start from scratch for every application. Most professionals with more than a few years of experience already have enough range in their background to support three distinct resumes — each one built to emphasize a different facet of the same career.

Take a senior professor as an example. That person might reasonably be qualified for three very different next steps: a named professorship, a department chair role, or a research center director position. Same person, same underlying record of accomplishments — but each role calls for a different résumé entirely.

- A **named professorship** resume should foreground the scholarly record: awards, citations, national reputation, consultancies, mentorship of graduate students and junior faculty, and a track record of external grants.

- A **department chair** resume should foreground administrative capability: budgets managed, personnel supervised, student complaints handled, reports drafted, funds raised — speaking the reviewer's language and the real work of an administrative position.
- A **research center director** resume should foreground a different mix again — administrative experience paired with a research agenda substantial enough to lead an institute, not just contribute to one.

Listing all 42 of your publications on a department chair application does not strengthen your case — it raises a question in the reader's mind: does this person actually want to administer, or do they want to keep doing research? Too much tangential information forces the reader to dig for your real qualifications, or worse, makes them wonder whether you are a match for the role at all.

The 75/20/5 Rule

Building three resumes is easier than it sounds, because you are not writing three documents from nothing. As a rough guide: about 75 percent of the content across your three resumes will be identical — your core experience, credentials, and history do not change. Twenty percent will differ by resume type, shifting emphasis to match the role category. The remaining 5 percent gets tailored to the specific posting you are applying to in the moment.

That slice of targeted effort is what gives you a real edge. For any given professional opening, there are likely a dozen or more well-qualified candidates competing for the same slot. The question a search committee is implicitly asking is *why should we choose you over the other eleven qualified people?* A tailored resume answers that question before it is even asked out loud. A generic one leaves the committee to guess — and guessing rarely favors the applicant.

Where This Connects

Three resumes only work if each one is actually aimed at something — which is exactly the work of the Bullseye Method. And once your resumes are in front of a search committee, how they are received maps directly onto the Qualified, Competitive, or Match framework: which resume gets you read, which gets you an interview, and which gets you the offer depends not just on the resume itself, but on how closely it — and you — actually match the opportunity.

There is one more way to think about what three resumes actually does: it turns one generalist document into three specialist ones. A single all-purpose resume has to speak to every audience at once, which means it speaks clearly to none of them. Building three targeted versions converts

you, on paper, from a generalist into three different specialists — a distinction explored further in *Generalist vs. Specialist*.

PIECE THREE

Qualified, Competitive, or Match: The Three Levels of Candidacy

by Christopher D. Lee, Ph.D., SPHR, SHRM-SCP

For a typical professional position, roughly 50 people apply. Of those, about 25 are qualified — they meet the stated requirements on paper. Around 10 are competitive — they bring the right mix of education, expertise, experience, and exposure. And only about 3 are a match — they have everything the competitive candidates have, plus something else: an intangible alignment of values, culture, background, and institutional fit that makes a search committee feel, *this is our person*.

Most job seekers operate as though "qualified" is the finish line. It is not. It is the starting gate.

Three Different Questions

Each level answers a different question a search committee is asking, often without realizing they are asking it in stages:

- **Qualified** asks: *Does this person meet the requirements?* This is a checklist exercise — years of experience, credentials, the right degree. It gets your application read. It rarely gets you much further, because at most institutions, half the applicant pool clears this bar.
- **Competitive** asks: *Does this person have the right depth and breadth to actually do this job well?* This is where education, expertise, experience, and exposure start to differentiate candidates from each other — the right degree, more years of experience, closer aligned roles, fluency in certain methods. Competitive candidates get the interview. They are real contenders — but contention is not the same as being chosen.
- **Match** asks an entirely different kind of question: *Does this person belong here?* This is felt more than measured. It shows up in shared values, similar operating style, a genuine connection to institutional mission, familiarity with the population the institution serves, and a career history that looks less like a series of jobs and more like a path that was always heading toward this one.

The difference between qualified and competitive is measurable — you can point to specific gaps in experience or credentials. The difference between competitive and match is felt. A search committee can usually articulate why someone was screened out for lacking qualifications. They struggle to

articulate why a perfectly competitive candidate did not get the offer — because what tipped the decision was not on the resume at all.

Why This Matters More Than Most Job Seekers Realize

Here is the principle worth sitting with: **being qualified gets your application read. Being competitive gets you an interview. Being a match gets you on campus — and often gets you the job.**

Most job search advice stops at the first two levels. It teaches people how to meet requirements and how to look impressive next to other applicants. It rarely addresses the third level, because the third level is not really about resume-writing technique at all — it is about the career choices that happened years before the application went in.

This is also where job seekers most often misjudge their own odds. A candidate who is genuinely competitive can walk away from a search assuming something went wrong in the process, when in fact nothing went wrong. They simply were not the match. Someone else's career path, geography, institutional history, or personal story lined up more completely with what that specific institution needed to feel.

A travesty happens, though, when someone genuinely is a great match, but their materials — the resume and especially the cover letter — and the interview itself fail to tell the full story of their connection to the institution, its mission, and its work. Being a match in the abstract does no good if nothing in your application communicates it. A search committee can only feel what you give them a reason to feel.

Your Choices Are Always Building Toward Something

Every institution you choose to work at, every population you choose to serve, every community you choose to live in, is either adding to or subtracting from your match profile for the roles you will eventually want.

Two candidates can hold the same title, the same years of experience, and the same degree — and still arrive at wildly different outcomes in the same search, because one spent a career building toward institutions like the one now hiring, and the other built away from it. Neither path is wrong. But only one of them produces a match for that particular opportunity.

This is why the work of the Bullseye Method matters before you ever submit an application, and why the resume you tailor for a specific role (see *Why You Need Three Resumes*) can only do so much. A well-tailored resume can present a competitive candidate compellingly. It cannot manufacture a match that does not exist.

This is also quiet advice for the competitive candidate who keeps getting calls from recruiters, or keeps landing interviews, but never lands the offer. Sometimes it is simply imprecise targeting. Match candidates get to compete in the medal round — the onsite interview — once the merely competitive candidates have faded away. The best course of action is to target only positions where you genuinely have a real chance at a medal, not just a spot in the field.

PIECE FOUR

Generalist vs. Specialist: Why Organizations Hire Narrow and Promote Broad

by Christopher D. Lee, Ph.D., SPHR, SHRM-SCP

There is a saying in the HR world: organizations hire specialists, but they promote generalists. When officials are looking to hire, they are almost always trying to solve one specific problem, and they want someone whose skill set matches that problem precisely. Once that person is in the door and proves capable across a range of things, breadth starts getting rewarded — more responsibility, more pay, more title. But breadth is rarely what gets someone hired in the first place.

This is also the mechanism behind the Match level of the Qualified, Competitive, or Match framework. A match candidate is, in almost every case, a specialist candidate — someone whose entire background speaks to one specific problem rather than several adjacent ones. Understanding why organizations favor specialists at the point of hire explains why match so consistently beats merely competitive.

You Do Not Call a Handyman for a Burst Pipe

If you have a water problem at home, you do not call a handyman. You call a plumber — someone with the specific skill to solve that specific problem. If that plumber happens to have done general carpentry or maintenance work before getting licensed, that broader background might keep them in your employ longer, because you probably have other things around the house that need attention. But you would not have called them in the first place for general handiwork. You called because you had a plumbing problem, and you wanted a plumber.

The same logic holds for an electrical problem — you call an electrician, not a maintenance worker. And it holds in medicine: if something is wrong with your leg or your respiratory system, you want a specialist who understands that particular problem and has treated it before. The general practitioner is one of the few professions built as a catch-all front door — and even then, a GP's job is often to triage you toward the right specialist, not to be the final word.

Why Almost No Profession Hires "The Generalist"

HR is one of the few fields with an actual generalist title — the HR generalist is a real, well-qualified position. But very few professions work this way. Organizations hire an employment manager, a compensation

manager, a benefits manager — not simply "an HR person." In the computer world, there is no such thing as a computer generalist. There is an analyst, a programmer, a database administrator, a help desk technician.

Higher education works the same way. You do not hire a professor — you hire a professor of history, or mathematics, or biology, and often the specialization goes even narrower. The same is true in psychology, sociology, and most academic disciplines — hiring usually happens at the sub-discipline level, not the broad field level.

Student affairs follows the identical logic. "Student affairs experience" is a generalist idea. What is actually being hired, almost always, is a person for residential life, or a person for student conduct, or a person for a specific functional area, like admissions — because that is the specific problem the institution is trying to solve right now.

The Resume That Says the Same Thing Three Times

Imagine an opening for a residential life position with a mandate to build a strong co-curricular program. One candidate's resume reads: a little bit of Greek life, a little student activities, a little student conduct, a little admissions. Solid background, genuinely capable — but scattered.

Now imagine a competing candidate who worked exclusively in residential life — undergraduate housing, then graduate housing, then co-curricular programming tied to a new residence hall. They were an RA as an undergraduate. Their entire resume, top to bottom, says the same thing: residential life, residential life, residential life.

Both candidates are qualified. But only one of them is a match for the specific problem on the table. The generalist's breadth does not make them more competitive for *this* opening — it makes them less of a match, because the institution is not trying to fill a general student affairs role. They are trying to solve a residential life problem, specifically and right now.

Why Breadth Can Backfire in the Interview Room

This pattern shows up again at the interview stage, and it can actively work against a generalist candidate. Picture a hiring committee trying to solve a retention problem through a stronger residential life program. A generalist candidate shows up and starts asking questions about admissions, brings up student activities — their examples drift because their actual experience is spread thin across several areas.

That can read as a lack of focus, or worse, a lack of genuine interest in the specific problem at hand. The implicit thought in the room becomes: *if this person is not truly invested in this problem, I would rather find someone who is*. A committee facing a real, specific challenge usually wants someone

steeped in it — deep experience, deep interest, visible passion for exactly that work — over someone with broader but shallower exposure.

This is not an absolute rule. When things are going smoothly and there is no urgent fire to put out, organizations are often more open to a candidate with a broader base of experience. But when there is a specific pain point or a clear opportunity to seize, depth and focus tend to beat breadth almost every time.

Where This Connects

This is the organizational logic underneath everything the Bullseye Method asks you to do. It is not just that clarity helps *you* understand what you want — it is that institutions are, by their nature, hiring to solve specific problems, not to acquire generally talented people. Promotion is where breadth gets its reward. Hiring is where depth wins.

This is also why the Three Resumes approach works: instead of one resume that presents a generalist, three resumes curated appropriately present three different specialists — the same person, sharpened a different way for each opportunity.

PIECE FIVE

The Referral Economy: Why Networking Is Not Optional

by Christopher D. Lee, Ph.D., SPHR, SHRM-SCP

Most job seekers spend 80 percent of their time doing the thing that produces 20 percent of the hires. They scan job boards. They submit applications. They optimize their resume for applicant tracking systems. And they wonder why nothing happens.

The research is unambiguous: networking and referrals drive the majority of actual hires. Not as a side channel. As the main channel. Understanding this changes everything about how you should invest your time during a search — including how you apply the Bullseye Method, your three resumes, and your understanding of qualified, competitive, and match.

What the Research Shows

The numbers, drawn from government data, peer-reviewed research, and industry studies, tell a consistent story:

- **80 percent** of available jobs are never advertised — they are filled before they ever reach a job board (U.S. Department of Labor, citing Cornell University Career Center; Yale OCS; Ohio State Career Guide).
- **60 percent** of job hunters find their new job through friends, family, and acquaintances (U.S. Department of Labor, citing Cornell University Career Center).
- **70 percent** of professionals globally say they were hired at a company where they already knew someone (Wave Connect, 2025; Yale University Office of Career Strategy).
- Referred candidates are **4 to 5 times** more likely to be hired than candidates who apply cold through a job board (Wave Connect, 2025; CNBC; Jobvite).
- Only **7 percent** of applicants come through referrals — yet referrals produce **30 to 50 percent** of all hires (Jobvite, 2020; Careery, 2026; Zippia, 2022).
- **One in twelve** informational interviews results in a job offer, compared to roughly **one in two hundred** resumes submitted without a personal connection (U.S. Department of Labor, citing Quintessential Careers research).

A widely cited figure — Lou Adler's 2016 LinkedIn survey, putting networking's share of hires at 85 percent — is methodologically weaker than the studies above and should be read as directionally supportive rather than precise. The underlying pattern, though, holds up consistently: the U.S. Department of Labor, Yale's Office of Career Strategy, and Ohio State's Career Guide all build student career education around it, and Granovetter's foundational research on weak ties — cited more than 70,000 times — established decades ago that loose acquaintances often produce better job outcomes than close contacts or formal applications.

The Part Nobody Talks About

Any honest treatment of how hiring works has to include who it leaves behind. The same evidence that makes networking essential for job seekers also reveals a structural inequity that honest career advisors cannot ignore.

Research on **homophily** — the well-documented tendency of people to associate with others similar to themselves in race, class, gender, education, and professional background — shows that when employers fill positions through referrals from existing employees, they tend to reproduce the demographic makeup of the workforce they already have. Networks are not neutral. They reflect the social segregation of the communities that produce them.

This means the referral economy advantages those who are already well-networked, and it systematically disadvantages minority professionals, first-generation professionals, women in male-dominated fields, people with disabilities, and others whose professional networks are smaller, more homogeneous, or less connected to centers of organizational power. Pedulla and Pager (2019) found that personal contacts are significantly less helpful for Black job seekers than for white job seekers — even when the network characteristics themselves are identical. Quillian et al. (2017) found that discrimination against Black applicants has not declined over 25 years, and that referral channels are not exempt from this pattern.

If your network is smaller than average — because of first-generation status, a career change, geographic isolation, or structural exclusion — the answer is not to abandon networking. It is to build your network more deliberately and more broadly than those who simply inherited theirs.

Informational interviews are a great equalizer. A 20-minute conversation with someone in a target role or institution is available to anyone willing to ask for it — it is the one networking tool that does not require a pre-existing network to use. Professional association membership, conferences, and committee work all provide structured networks open to anyone in the field.

Building Bridges Across Networks

Higher education is somewhat less susceptible to referral-driven hiring than other industries, but the pattern still holds — especially in faculty hiring. Most adjunct instructors are hired from a division head's personal network, and many adjunct assignments are never formally advertised. Look closely at a typical faculty department and you will find overlapping alma maters, mentorships, and informal ties running through it. The degrees of separation are often surprisingly small.

Administrative and staff positions tend to offer more equal opportunity, given legal mandates requiring published positions and open searches. Still, there is a great deal a job seeker can do to gain access to different hiring networks — starting with being intentional about it.

People naturally network along lines of shared identity — race, gender, culture, religion. But humans are diverse in far more ways than can be seen at a glance: shared hobbies, geography, professional interests, or even being parents of young kids. Each of these is a legitimate, unbiased way to build a genuine connection with someone different from you. Deliberately building bridges across as many groups as possible — not just the one you already belong to — is how a job seeker works against the natural pull toward sameness that shapes most hiring networks.

Five Principles for Working With This Reality

1. **Build relationships before you need them.** Networking is not a job search activity — it is a career management activity. The professional who is known, respected, and visible in their field gets considered for opportunities that never reach a job board.
2. **Use informational interviews as a primary networking tool.** One in twelve produces a job offer. One in two hundred resumes does the same. The math is not close.
3. **In higher education, conferences are hiring markets.** NASPA, ASHE, ACPA, CUPA-HR, and ACE annual meetings are where candidacies begin — often months before positions are ever posted. If you are not present, you are not being considered.
4. **Apply to posted positions and cultivate your network simultaneously.** A strong application starts a relationship. A strong relationship surfaces information about positions before they ever circulate publicly, or makes you a "known quantity."
5. **If the referral economy has not yet welcomed you, build your way in — deliberately.** Informational interviews, professional association service, conference presentations, and visible thought

leadership are all available to anyone willing to invest the time. The network advantage is real. It is also buildable.

Where This Connects

Knowing that referrals dominate hiring changes how you should allocate your time during an active search — which is exactly the discipline behind the 60/30/10 model for running your search as a campaign. It also reframes the Bullseye Method and Qualified, Competitive, or Match in a more urgent light: clarity about your target and honesty about your fit matter less if you never get in front of the right person to make your case.

Sources

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The Search Campaign: Why Finding a Job Is a Job

by Christopher D. Lee, Ph.D., SPHR, SHRM-SCP

Most people approach a job search the way they would approach an impulse purchase — react to what is in front of them, apply when something looks interesting, hope something sticks. That approach treats the search as a series of reactions instead of what it actually is: a campaign.

A real job search takes homework, research, preparation, and sustained effort over time. In every meaningful sense, it functions as a part-time job. It has phases. It has strategy. It rewards focus and punishes scatter. This piece is about how to run the campaign itself: where your time goes, in what proportion, and why.

The First Decision: A Job, or The Job?

Before you allocate a single hour, answer one question honestly: are you trying to stop the bleeding, or are you trying to build a career?

These are not the same campaign, and conflating them is one of the most common reasons job searches go sideways. **A job** pays the bills. It solves an urgent, immediate problem — a sudden non-renewal, a layoff, a financial cliff. When that is your situation, speed and income matter more than perfect alignment, and that is not a failure of strategy — it is the correct strategy for the circumstance.

The right job — the one that fits the type of work you have actually done, enjoy, and want to keep building toward — is a different pursuit entirely. It is slower, more selective, and more demanding of the self-knowledge work in the Bullseye Method.

Most people are running some blend of both, but you should know which one you are actually running, because it changes how the rest of this framework gets applied. A "stop the bleeding" search compresses everything that follows into weeks. A "build the trajectory" search can stretch it across months. Same model, different clock speed.

The 60/30/10 Allocation Model

Here is the core discipline: rank your target opportunities into three priority tiers, and allocate your time and energy accordingly.

- **Priority 1 — 60% of your time and energy.** This is the intersection of where you are most competitive *and* where your genuine interest is highest. This is where the bulk of your research, networking, tailored applications, and follow-up should go.
- **Priority 2 — 30% of your time and energy.** A solid second lane. Still a real match, still worth serious investment, but not where the majority of your effort belongs.
- **Priority 3 — 10% of your time and energy.** This is your stretch opportunity — often the lowest probability of success, sometimes the biggest reach. It deserves a foothold, not a headline.

The logic runs against instinct: most job seekers do the opposite. They chase the exciting long-shot with disproportionate energy and treat their strongest, most realistic match as an afterthought. It makes no sense to spend half your time chasing an improbable dream while neglecting the lane where you are actually most likely to succeed. The 60/30/10 split forces depth where depth pays off, instead of scattering effort evenly — or worse, inversely — across opportunities with very different odds.

This is also where having three targeted resumes physically meets your calendar. The work of figuring out who you are and what you want is not complete until it has been translated into where your hours actually go, week to week.

Adjusting for Time Pressure

The 60/30/10 model does not change when time is short — but its pace does. A career-building search might run this allocation across six to twelve months. A "stop the bleeding" search runs the identical allocation in a fraction of the time — the same three tiers, the same proportional discipline, just compressed and intensified.

When time is the scarce resource, **informational interviews become the highest-leverage tool available.** One in twelve leads to a job offer, compared to roughly one in two hundred resumes submitted cold. An informational interview is, in effect, intense networking — a direct, human shortcut into the referral channel that produces the majority of real hires. When you do not have months to build a network the slow way, informational interviews compress that timeline into a series of focused, deliberate conversations.

Running the Campaign

Put together, the sequence looks like this:

1. **Know your target** (Bullseye Method) — without this, you cannot even build the three tiers.

2. **Build your materials** (Three Resumes) — one resume, sharpened, for each tier.
3. **Know your fit** (Qualified, Competitive, or Match) — this tells you whether your aim was any good.
4. **Sharpen your positioning** (Generalist vs. Specialist) — make sure each resume reads as a specialist for its tier, not a generalist speaking to all three at once.
5. **Understand the mechanism** (The Referral Economy) — referrals and informational interviews, not job board applications, drive the majority of real hires.
6. **Allocate your time** (60/30/10) — and run the whole thing as a sustained campaign, with intensity calibrated to whether you are solving for income now or trajectory over time.

A job search treated as a campaign — researched, prioritized, and resourced like the part-time job it actually is — outperforms a job search treated as a hopeful series of applications almost every time. Not because it requires more luck, but because it requires less of it.

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