20 top tips to reveal hidden opportunities

1. **Be positive and realistic.** Dedicate time to the process and recognise it's a long-term investment. Develop key skills such as telephone technique, high-level research and networking skills, perseverance and an acceptance of rejection. Accept rejection as a part of the process.

2. **List your existing network of contacts** – family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, past lecturers, present and past employers. Find out what careers they're in and how they can help in your job search and if they know anybody else who can help. Ask people for an advisory interview (see Tactic 6).

3. **Be prepared to take a few stepping stones** to your ideal job. You may need to take a temporary or lower-grade job to create the right networks. Remember it's easier to get a job when you're in one already.

4. **Identify two or three people working in your chosen field** and seek an advisory interview. Ask how to research the market, who to speak to, where to find information and what questions to ask. Keep them informed of your progress.

5. **Get as many people as possible looking for you.** Sign up with a recruitment agency, let previous employers and current contacts know you're available and send out speculative letters.

6. **Identify one or two sectors** in which you would ideally like to work (hopefully growing ones) and do market research. Look beyond the big names to their suppliers, distributors, customers and competitors. In particular, look at the small businesses growing within these sectors.

7. **Scan your local paper** for signs of growth, eg companies that are expanding, new developments, government lenders and awards. Make contact before new jobs are advertised.

8. **Keep in touch with changes** in your chosen field by reviewing journals, trade magazines, newsletters, electronic media – databases, teltext, internet, CD Rom rs and attending conferences and trade fairs. The information section librarian can prove an invaluable ally.

9. **Look for work-shadowing opportunities.** Find out whether companies have open days/visits. Look at where they promote their products or services. Use careers fairs and employer presentations to find out what job roles involve.

10. **Pinpoint three or four professional or trade journals.** Contact authors of any interesting articles for an advisory interview. Also look for companies appointing staff – it may indicate expansion (but regular ads may mean high staff turnover).

11. **Find a forum for meeting new people** who can help your job search, eg join a professional association; volunteer for community, civic or professional projects and extend your social network. Tap into new networks.

12. **Always do your groundwork** before sending off speculative letters. Know who you're targeting, what you're asking for, develop a persuasive covering letter and follow up with a phone call. Be persistent and play the percentage game.

13. **Volunteer to work** unpaid or on a trial basis (particularly useful in small businesses which see recruiting new staff as risky). Use any opportunity (eg a specific project) to show your abilities – and make sure your client spreads the word to colleagues and their networks.

14. **Get on the inside track** by keeping in touch with people in your chosen field/organisation. Tap into their information networks, eg internal vacancy lists, newsletters, press announcements etc.

15. **Draw up a hit list of organisations to target.** Get names from Yellow Pages, trade association directories, professional journals, Chambers of Commerce, National Training Organisations (NTOs), local business associations, Business Links and Government Training Organisations. Make a speculative application or give them a phone call.

16. **Advertise yourself** – eg write articles for the local press, business magazines, professional journals, the internet, or promote yourself at trade fairs – anywhere businesses may look. Keep your CV up to date and adapted for different jobs. Offer your services as a consultant or freelance. If you can't get a job, get a client. This year, you may only have one client, next year two... and so on.

17. **Enrol in a class or join a network** related to your field/industry. You'll not only learn new things but also build new contacts. Try to link into different types of networks.

18. **Catch opportunities before they go public.** New contracts, people retiring or leaving their jobs, market changes, new regulations, company relocation, entry into new markets and increasing share prices are all signs of potential new jobs.

19. **Get yourself out and about.** Walk or drive round your local business park, office complex or your local environment. Check all the business opportunities on your doorstep. Pick up any relevant information (promotional literature, brochures, chat to receptionist etc) and use this to make a speculative phone call or application.

20. **Learn from experience** – your own and other people's. Seek as much feedback as possible in order to improve your technique. Buy a book on creative thinking or innovative job search techniques. Make the most of traditional options. Remember that thousands of people complain about rejection – but it's usually an excuse to avoid making the effort to try the ideas we've been looking at.

Most people want things on a plate. Make up your mind to be different and show initiative.

Never forget that creating your own opportunities is an ongoing process. You can also be using these ideas all the time to grow your own job – not just when you're looking for a new one.