

37 EF MEMBERS ATTEND EXECUTIVE RECRUITER PANEL

By Tucker Mays and Bob Sloane

On a sunny Saturday morning, thirty-seven Executive Forum Active and Alumni members attended an executive panel discussion represented by three prominent recruiters and the head of a newly organized interim management organization. The panelists were John Bassler of Korn Ferry, Bill Haldane of Haldane Diogenes, Andy Harris of Harris Heery, and Dennis Powers of Executive Interim Management.

The meeting began with personal comments by each of the panelists. They described their practice, and then offered their individual reads on the state of the current job market which is summarized as follows:

1. The current recession will continue for approximately 9 more months.
2. Searches are taking longer, an average of 6 months vs. 3-4 previously.
3. Job specifications have become increasingly more specific. Clients are more demanding, requiring most if not all of the specs to be matched. Looking for candidates who can “walk on water.”
4. Chemistry, style, and fit are often the lynch pins to landing, along with “what the candidate can do better than anyone else.”
5. Leadership is the No. 1 strength that is in demand by companies. When asked to define “Leadership” John Bassler commented that it meant having a combination of vision and team building/people skills.
6. Trend toward no severance.

The discussion was then opened up to questions of the panel from EF members. Key questions and panelists responses were:

1. Is being out still a stigma? Not nearly as much as it used to be. Chances are good that the hiring authority was out not too long ago. Greater sensitivity and awareness that the job market is in far greater flux these days. Tenure has shrunk significantly.
2. How does a varied background impact search today? More helpful now. A successful, multi-cultural, varied environment experience is more in demand in this job market.
3. How do recruiters react to consulting experience during job transition? Positively, if it is real, verifiable, and productive. Shows your skills are in demand. Best if you can demonstrate you had a level of executive authority. Explain why the consulting was valuable, relevant, and consistent with your career path.
4. What are the most common mistakes made by job searchers?
 - a. Number 1 by far is lack of focus. Candidates are often unclear who they are and what they have to offer. Don’t know how to proceed, have fuzzy job objectives/goals and weak self-perception. You must “chose and climb the right mountain.” Clearly define where you have been, what you have done, and what you want to do. Explain that your career moves have been a part of a logical, thought out plan.
 - b. Lack of enthusiasm, passion for what you are good at and love to do in your work.
 - c. Talk too much. “Sell me, don’t tell me.” Listen for the job need, and focus on how you can fill it.
 - d. Don’t distinguish yourself clearly enough from other candidates. Set yourself apart. What makes you better? The best?
 - e. Insensitive to the interview environment. Chemistry, fit, and style are still critical to getting the job. Blend in more with the situation. Establish rapport early.
 - f. How can I set myself apart, differentiate myself? Ask smart questions based on your in depth research of the company and important players. Establish rapport. Emphasize that you can achieve results quickly. You are a quick learner and implementer.
 - g. How important is the cover letter? Very important. Must be well thought out so that you are clearly positioned.
 - h. How long is it acceptable to be out of work before it becomes a serious negative? Two years is a problem. Six months is acceptable. One year or less is O.K.