

# **AMPLIFY YOUR JOB SEARCH**

Strategies for  
Finding Your Dream Job



JEFFREY S. TON

Published by Ton Enterprises, LLC

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Cover Design: Jennifer Vogel

Interior Design: Lori Paximadis

Graphic Design: Jennifer Vogel

Amplify Dial Image: Copyright Le Moal Olivier

Ton Enterprises LLC

7575 Sargent Road

Indianapolis, IN 46256

Trade Paper ISBN: 978-1-7353090-0-2

Digital ISBN: 978-1-7353090-1-9

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020913199

*To L. Eugene Ton.  
My dad. My teacher.  
My guide. My pastor.*

*My best friend.*

*I miss you.*



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# Introduction

If you are reading this, chances are you are “in transition,” “in between jobs,” or “undergoing a career change.” You may find yourself in this position for the first time in your career, or perhaps you’ve been in this situation before. In any case, you are without a job and are looking for advice on how and where to find your next one.

I’ve talked with dozens, if not hundreds, of people just like you who are between jobs and searching for the next one. It can be lonely. It can be scary. It can be depressing. I spoke with someone recently whose search has been in progress for six months. She is the major breadwinner in her household. She was scared, and yes, she was depressed.

You may currently have a job and are seeking a new one, perhaps one that is more fulfilling, pays more, or provides an opportunity to move up the career ladder. You might have been with your current company for five to ten years or more, perhaps you’ve been there less than five years and feel it’s time for a change, or you might have joined your company less than a year ago and have realized it is not right for you. Like your colleague who is between jobs, you would like some tips and tricks to land that new role.

I recently talked with an information technology leader who had been in the same job for twelve years. He ran IT for a mid-sized manufacturing company. As he talked about his recent decision to start searching for something new, I asked him about his current role. “It’s okay, I guess. I’m just looking for new challenges, new opportunities. I’ve been in manufacturing for twelve years, and I don’t even like manufacturing.” No wonder he was interested in changing jobs!

You may be in a dead-end job, one that sucks the life out of you. You wake up on Monday morning exhausted and dreading going to work. Every day is like the movie *Groundhog Day*, just another day of the same sh—er, uh, stuff. I have news for you: It doesn’t have to be that way. You can find a job that gets you excited, one where you cannot wait to get to the office, one that ignites your passion. It’s true! It takes work, but given you spend at least a third of your day doing your job, wouldn’t it be great to enjoy it?

I had a conversation with someone who was a year removed from such a job. He had a role that required him to be available 24/7. It was a high-pressure, low-paying position. He hated work. His stomach was in knots from the anxiety of his position. He quit with no new job lined up. He put his health and marriage over financial stability. Using the strategies found in this book, he now has his dream job. He is a completely different person.

How do you approach your search? What strategies do you employ?

## **Shotgun or Laser: The Choice Is Yours**

When I was in transition several years ago, one of my mentors, John Frank, chief operating officer of United-

HealthOne, a division of UnitedHealth Group, told me, “There are really only two ways to find a job: a shotgun approach or a laser approach.” He went on to explain that a shotgun approach to a job search is one in which you are searching for a job, just about any job. Yes, you may have some parameters, such as it must be white collar, it must be within your skill set, or perhaps even in your locality. But you are not looking for a specific role within a specific industry. You may be applying for positions that range from individual contributor roles to executive management roles.

With a laser approach, you are zeroed in on a specific role, in specific industries, and perhaps even at specific organizations. You know exactly the type of job you want. You have a process to find that job, and you may pass up opportunities that don’t align with your focus.

Both searches are effective and will land you a position. The laser approach may take longer to bear fruit; however, I believe (and John believed) that by taking the laser approach, the role you end up with will be far more rewarding and fulfilling, your boss and you will be more likely to see eye-to-eye, and you will feel more a part of the company than one found by a shotgun approach. In fact, using the laser approach can help you land your dream job!

It will come as no surprise that this book focuses on the laser approach. In it, you will find a guide to finding your next position. While no one can guarantee success in finding and landing a job, much less your dream job, the steps and techniques described in this book have worked. I have used these strategies to land my dream job, and dozens of others have as well. These strategies are a culmination of insights from professionals around

the country through their books, blog posts, and podcasts; countless conversations with mentors and coaches, thought leaders, and executives (like John); and dozens, if not hundreds, of coffee meetings with professionals in transition over the last ten years.

There is no silver bullet. You will not find a magic answer within these pages. Finding work is... well, work. Your job for the next several weeks and possibly months is to find a job. But not just *a* job—*the* job. The job that will make you feel rewarded and valued, aligns with your values and goals, and will take your career to the places you have always aspired to go.

## **Network Your Way**

As you may have heard, job searching begins and ends with your network. Over 80 percent of jobs are filled through professional networking. The old adage “It’s not what you know but who you know” is true in a sense. While that saying might have a bad rap in years past and ring of nepotism and cronyism, that is not the case these days (I’m not naive enough to think that doesn’t happen, but I do believe that to be rare). A warm introduction from someone in your network can separate you from the stack of resumes in someone’s inbox and get you a longer look, perhaps even that first interview. After that, it’s up to you!

What makes this book different from others you might have read is that it’s not written by an outplacement counselor, recruiter, or headhunter. It’s written by someone who has been there and done that. Someone who has experienced job-hunting bumps and bruises. Someone who has experienced the depression, desperation, and

feelings of low self-worth that some people will experience in their job search.

## **My Transition Story**

In 2009, after almost thirty years in the workforce, twelve of those years with one company and fourteen years with another, I was working at a commercial real estate development firm. It was going to be my last job. I was chief information officer, the top role for a career information technology professional. We were growing like gangbusters when I joined the firm in 2006 and would more than double in size over the next two years. I had no need for a professional network; I was going to retire from that place—early, maybe even at fifty. Besides, I didn't have time to meet people for coffee, lunch, or drinks, because I was putting in twelve-hour days, five or six days a week.

And then 2008 hit, and everything changed. The financial crisis. The bank meltdown. Commercial real estate fell off a cliff. By the time 2009 dawned, what was once a firm of 450 employees had fewer than 200 and was spiraling toward 50. My department of 25 was now a department of 3. I was able to negotiate a contract to go part-time during 2009 and lead the negotiation for downsizing of our technology contracts. By fall, I was unemployed. After trying to start my own business (2009 was not the best time to start a business), I realized I needed a job.

I had not had to look for a job in more than twenty years. The next one was always right there. In the age of the internet and social media, I had no idea where to even start. I started making phone calls, engaged an executive coach, read some books, and connected with mentors (like John).

During my search I was amazed at the response to my requests for help. Friends and family, of course, stepped in to help and talk. Professional colleagues asked how they could help. People I had not spoken to in more than twenty years said yes, they could meet. People I had never met said yes, let's do coffee and talk. In the months of my job search not. one. person. said. no!

When I landed my job, I made myself two promises. Promise number one: I will never ever let my network grow cold again. You never know when you will need it. Today, my professional network connections number in the thousands. Promise number two: Whenever anyone asks, my answer is "Let's do coffee. When and where do you want to meet?" During the COVID-19 outbreak, these "coffees" turned to virtual coffees over Zoom. I continue to have a lot of virtual coffees even as businesses open back up.

## ***Amplify Your Job Search Framework***

*Amplify Your Job Search* details the framework and the process I used to successfully find my dream job. It is the same process I have shared with countless professionals like you over the last ten years. Those who implemented this process successfully found jobs—some in a matter of weeks, some after a few months.

Finding your dream job begins by looking inside. In chapter 1, "It Starts with You," I'm going to introduce you to your first tool: your Transition Journal. I am going ask you to journal...a lot! If you are new to journaling, I provide step-by-step instructions. Throughout this book you will find journal prompts to guide your reflection on the process.

In chapter 2, "What's Your Sign?," we will use the first

of several “Amplifiers,” the Personal Brand Amplifier™, to help you define your personal brand. You will gain an understanding of your strengths, values, passions, and purpose.

In chapter 3, “You’ve Accomplished a Lot!,” we will use the Accomplishment Amplifier™ to capture all that you have accomplished over your career to this moment in time. This will serve as the foundation for your resume. Even if you have an existing resume, you will want to complete this exercise.

The Network Amplifier™ is introduced in chapter 4, “It Begins and Ends with Your Network.” I’ll discuss the different types of networks and the role they play in your search for your dream job. Spoiler alert: They are important—almost vital.

All of us can use some tips and tricks to effective networking. In chapter 5, “The Ins and Outs of Networking,” I provide some best practices. Even the most avid networker will pick up a few nuggets.

Your resume serves a key purpose in your search. In chapter 6, “Your Resume (It’s about Time!),” we uncover that purpose. Your Resume Amplifier™ will serve as the foundation for your resume. You will revisit this tool often. This tool will also help you to build the four (yes, four) different kinds of resumes you will need.

As chapter 7, “Marketing—with a Twist,” explains, you are now in sales and marketing. You are selling...you. We will explore some of the fundamentals of marketing as we determine your target market. Hint: Those are the companies that have your dream job waiting! The SOM Amplifier™ and its cousin the SAM List™ will guide the rest of our journey together.

Chapter 8, “Ready? Set? Go!,” will bring it all together

as you begin the process of networking, applying, and interviewing for your dream job. You will learn the value of your social media networks and the important role they play in this leg of your journey.

Aptly titled chapter 9, “Let’s Get Creative,” provides some creative ideas to further help you and your resume stand out from the crowd. Use these suggestions as is or use them as a springboard to come up with your own creative ideas.

As you begin dating—I mean, interviewing, chapter 10, “The First Date and Beyond,” will help you prepare for the interview. You may, in fact, be the most prepared candidate your new company will see.

We end our journey together with a few words about evaluating and negotiating an offer, or multiple offers. Chapter 11, “The End Game,” will guide you through using the SOM Amplifier to compare offers and determine if an offer is, in fact, the offer for your dream job. I will also offer some guidance on what to do after you have landed your dream job.

## **Your Journey**

You are embarking on a journey. It will be challenging. It will be frustrating. However, when successful, it will also be rewarding. You will be stronger and better equipped to handle the challenges ahead. I’m going to ask you to dig deep. For some, this will be way outside your comfort zone. I encourage you to get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

We are going to spend a lot of time in reflection, especially in the first part of the book. If this isn’t your thing, I urge you to power through nonetheless. Like the rhythm

section of a great rock band, this reflection is going to serve as the backbone as we build the harmonies and the melody for you to rock your way to your dream job.

Are you ready? I hope so, because your journey starts... with you!





## It Starts with You

You've been terminated. Laid off. RIFed. Fired. Time to blow the digital dust off your resume, add this most recent position to it, and start mailing it out! Right?

Wrong! Whether you are in transition between jobs, or you are currently employed and have made the decision to start a search, our work starts with you. How are you? No, really. Don't say fine. You are not. Whether it has been forced on you by circumstances or you've come to this decision yourself, you are embarking on one of the most challenging aspects of your career: a job search. Are you angry? Are you bitter? Are you disillusioned? Scared? Nervous? Anxious? Uncertain?

It's okay! We humans are emotional beings. It is okay to own your emotions. In these early stages of your search, we are going to focus a lot on you, what you are feeling, and what you are thinking. Spend some time now to explore those feelings and thoughts.

Perhaps you've been laid off due to a reduction in force (RIF) brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic or for

some other less dramatic reason. You didn't deserve it! You were a solid performer! Why wasn't Joe or Sally let go?

Or perhaps you were called into your boss's office one day, out of the blue, and she told you, "We're going in a different direction," or "Your performance is not meeting expectations," or "You are not driving the results we need." Seriously? You? You were doing your job. Don't they know the work you did every day? Why didn't someone tell you that you needed to step up your game?

Maybe you made a mistake and went afoul of a policy. You grabbed a six-pack of soft drinks from the company-stocked fridge and took it home; everybody does it. What? You've been fired? No warning? No second chance? Why are they singling you out as the example to make?

You've been at this company for several years. You feel it's time for a change. You're not sure why, but you are bored with your current assignments. You've spoken to your boss, but either they don't listen, or they have no other work for you. Surely, over at Acme the work is far more exciting. Maybe the grass is greener.

You may feel your work is worth a higher salary. The 3.5 percent raise you've gotten each of the last five years isn't cutting it. Heck, with inflation, you've lost money. You know the market value of your position is much higher. Last week over dinner, Bill mentioned his salary. It confirmed your suspicion: He is making far more than you, and you are in similar lines of work.

Perhaps your boss has unreasonable expectations. You have been busting your hump to try to get it all done. She keeps adding more to your plate. Your team is near revolt. They are stressed. You are stressed. You've raised your concerns. She just won't listen...and adds more. You must make a change before you explode.

No matter your reasons, you need to examine them. No matter the situation, there are always lessons to learn, lessons about yourself, your career, and your motivations.

## **Transition Journal**

One of the best ways to examine your situation and learn the lessons is to journal. As you proceed through the steps in this book, I'd like you to journal. It's not as hard as it sounds. I will guide you along the way. You do not need to be a writer to write a journal. No one is going to read it. It is for your eyes only.

Even if you are already an avid journaler, you are still going to want to read this section. There will be some specific things you will want to know about your Transition Journal.

There are many benefits to writing in a journal. In his post "10 Surprising Benefits You'll Get from Keeping a Journal" on Huffington Post, contributor Thai Nguyen describes some of the benefits you will get from journaling. At least three (and probably all ten) will help you in your transition: achieving goals (your goal is to find a new job), healing (you may not be physically injured or ill, but you have probably suffered a trauma), and self-confidence (you may be questioning yourself and your skills right now).

I'd like to add a couple more benefits to the list. Keeping a journal can help you process what has just happened. You want to work through those emotions before you start to network for your next position and certainly before you go on your first interview. You need to make sense of what has just happened. Writing it down gives you the ability to reflect on your thoughts, feelings, and plans. You can refer to your writing to see how your thoughts, feelings, and plans have evolved over time.

The other benefit I'd like to point out is that a journal helps keep you organized. You will be busy in the days and weeks to come. It will be easy to forget some things and misremember others. Having a record of your daily thoughts and activities will help you to keep it all straight.

There are many different types of journaling. In fact, an internet search for "types of journals" returns dozens of articles about types of journals, including "17 Types of Journals to Keep Your Life Organized," "5 Different Types of Journaling and How to Select Best One for You," and "7 Different Types of Journals with Examples." In its simplest form, a journal is a written record of something. It might be a food journal, a weight loss journal, a bullet journal, or a dream journal. For our purposes, your Transition Journal will be a place to keep track of your transition journey: your thoughts, feelings, insights, and ideas along the way.

Just as there are many types of journals, there are different ways to journal. You can put pen to paper and write a physical journal, or you can put fingers to keys and keep a digital journal. You might choose to use a journal app, a leather-bound journal, a pad of paper, or the swag journal from the last conference you attended. I am going to encourage you to handwrite your journal. There are many benefits to writing in a physical journal. It forces you to slow down and be mindful. Studies have shown the act of writing forces your brain to focus on what is important (see the article by Virginia W. Berninger et al. in the bibliography for the results of one such study). With all that said, the *act* of journaling is more important than the *how* for our purposes. I'd rather you journal in whatever form (written, digital, video) you need to journal to form the habit and be consistent than not journal at all.

## The Habit of Journaling

If you are new to journaling, developing the habit is easy. As you begin the process, there are five key elements to keep in mind.

The **frequency** with which you journal is important. To help form the habit, set a specific cadence. For our purposes, your cadence should be at least once a day. While frequency is important, don't beat yourself up if you miss a day here and there throughout the journey.

**When** you journal will be a matter of personal preference. Regardless of when, set a specific time of day and stick with it. Knowing you have a designated time will help to form the habit. You will need ten to thirty minutes each day (including Saturday and Sunday). For me, personally, I find early mornings are best. The house is quiet, and the whirlwind of the day has not yet encompassed me. If you are a morning person, try setting your alarm (you are still setting an alarm, right?) ten minutes earlier every few days until you are getting up thirty minutes earlier than normal, and then spend those minutes writing in your journal. For you night owls, carve out some quiet time late in the day for reflecting in your journal.

**Place** can be a great tool to center our thoughts and set the mood for journaling. Journaling in the same place each day also helps to create the habit. I use my home office; others may want to sit in their favorite comfy chair or on the couch.

Knowing what to write in your journal can, at times, be the most difficult. Theodore Roosevelt kept extensive journals throughout his life. Once, on a very tragic day, he merely wrote a large X on the page. No further explanation was needed. Your Transition Journal is more than just a daily diary of your activities of the day, though that

is a good place to start. The journal is yours. Through the remainder of this book, I will help guide your writing with some prompting questions.

## **Reflect on Your Journal**

The primary purpose of a journal is to keep a record of your thoughts and activities. However, once written, it should not just sit on a shelf. Reread portions of your journal periodically. What stands out for you? Do you feel the same about a given event a week later, or a month later? What did you learn from the event in retrospect?

## **Getting Started with the Transition Journal**

To start your journal, write your story. Don't worry about the quality of your prose or your storytelling abilities; just write. Use as many pages as you'd like. Where were you born? What was your family like? Where did you go to school? Who were your friends? What was your first job? What did you like about it? What didn't you like? Why did you leave that job for the next one? Repeat those last four questions for each position you have held throughout your career, until you get to the most recent.

Tell the story of your most recent position. Why did you leave? Or, if you are still there, why are you considering a change? Use one or two of the circumstances described earlier in this chapter to serve as your guide. Be brutally honest, with yourself and about the company. Be as blunt as you want—it's your journal. Think back over the past weeks or months. Were there signs?

It may sound silly to start at the beginning of your story. You may think you don't have a story to tell. But trust me, you do, even if you are just telling yourself. There will be themes in your story. There will be facts

you uncover you can use later. It will help you to process. You will thank me later.

Bookmark this page. Go spend time with your journal. This first set of entries will be important. The rest of this chapter can wait.

## **Strengths and Weaknesses**

The advice to maximize your strengths and make your weaknesses irrelevant is often attributed to Peter Drucker. This advice has been used to train managers, executives, and leaders to focus on their strengths, ignoring their weaknesses in the hopes of making their weaknesses irrelevant. We have done a disservice to several generations of leaders. How, you ask? By not also sharing this quote from Drucker: “Cultivate a deep understanding of yourself—not only what your strengths and weaknesses are but also how you learn, how you work with others, what your values are, and where you can make the greatest contribution. Because only when you operate from strengths can you achieve true excellence.”

We’ve all taken countless assessments: StrengthsFinder, DiSC, Myers-Briggs, Enneagram, PAIRIN, Kolbe, and more. You may have taken some of these more than once. They are all incredibly valuable. However, if you are like me, you don’t have a copy of the results from any of them. (I am going to share a fantastic offer later in this chapter that will fix that problem going forward!) I am going to suggest that you take one or two assessments, but as you will see, I am also going to recommend that you work with a career coach or an executive coach, and they will probably have a preference for which ones they would like you to take.

It is important that you have a deep understanding of

your strengths and weaknesses—in fact, it’s more than important; it’s imperative. Too many times we tend to assume we know what our strengths and weaknesses are. But if we don’t take the time to have a deep understanding, we may miss strengths, miss weaknesses, or miscategorize one as the other. While any of those errors could have consequences, the miscategorization of a strength or a weakness could impact the trajectory of your career.

In the book *Leadership and Self-Deception*, the Arbin-Institute describes a little-known problem that can be the root of many organizational problems (and some personal ones, too): self-deception, a systemic distortion of oneself and others. Through the fictional story of Tom and his career at Zagrum, the authors describe self-deception and the problems it causes. Lucky for us, they also describe how to overcome it.

For our purposes we are going to focus on self-examination. You must look at yourself without any of the guises of self-deception, hold yourself up to scrutiny, and truly understand your strengths and your weaknesses. If you don’t do this, you may be trying to maximize a strength that isn’t your greatest strength, or you could ignore your weaknesses in an attempt to make them irrelevant, when that trait may be the key to your success.

Take out your Transition Journal. Write a list of your strengths and weakness. We are going to dive deeper into this in future chapters, but for now write down as many as you can think of in each category. Ask a trusted advisor if you can’t list more than ten of each.

Before maximizing your strengths and making your weaknesses irrelevant, you must review your weaknesses. In your role as a leader, which of those weaknesses could you rely on others around you to complement? Which of

those weaknesses are ones you cannot delegate to others? The latter weaknesses are ones you should attempt to gain proficiency in at the least, and perhaps even mastery.

Say, for example, you aspire to executive leadership. As you list your weaknesses, you have listed public speaking among them because you are uncomfortable presenting to a group, perhaps even a group of your peers. You stammer or stutter due to nervousness. Even the thought of standing in front of a group to share your thoughts makes your palms sweaty.

As a leader of a division, could you delegate board presentations to one of your direct reports? How about communicating your vision to your department or your company? Could someone else present your vision and have it be so compelling that those in your department would rally around you and follow you? No. I dare say the board, your department, and your company would be embracing and following your surrogate.

Review your list of weaknesses. Think about each one. Think about what you are trying to achieve with your career. Will that weakness be a liability? Can you mitigate that weakness by hiring someone on your team who is strong in that area? What if you were able to improve that area of weakness through training or study—would that impact your career in a positive way?

This time of transition is a perfect time to hone your strengths. It is also a perfect time to work on your weaknesses. You may discover that what you thought was a weakness, once developed, is a strength. You may never become a great orator, but knowing you can convey your thoughts and ideas to others will increase your confidence and make your strengths stand out even more.

## **Transition Journal**

In your Transition Journal, reflect on your lists of strengths and weakness. Write a plan to work on the weaknesses. Write a commitment to yourself to carry out the plan.

Trust me, this works. When you read your own commitment later, you will hold yourself accountable!