

*"One organization with a long record of success in helping people find jobs is The Five O'Clock Club."*

**FORTUNE**



## The Power of Your Weekly Small Group at the Club

### Our Successful Job Hunters Report

by David Madison Ph.D., Director of the National Guild of Five O'Clock Club Career Coaches

#### Making the Best Use of the Wisdom of Peers

“Having been in HR for more than twenty years,” Julia points out, “I was aware of The Five O'Clock Club—and when I lost my job in 2007, I knew it was the



*"I've never said this before, but I hope it's you who gets this job."*

place to go.” However, she let a few months go by before taking the plunge. Her coach, Roy Cohen, noticed the bad effect of postponing taking action even for a little while: “When Julia started working with us, she was unfocused, but in the process of refining and clarifying her goals, she began hitting her stride and getting interviews.”

***"I had to honor my Five O'Clock Club group's hard work on my behalf by doing exactly what they suggested."***

Julia acknowledges two elements of The Five O'Clock Club system that played a big role in jump-starting her search. “The group was phenomenally insightful in helping me get both my résumé and Two-Minute Pitch into shape. In fact, without these folks I wouldn't have been able to do either. My group was made up of \$100K-plus professionals in a wide variety of fields. It was so important to give and receive feedback. The even-handed environment was invaluable.”

She credits her group in helping her to speed up the final offer. She attended six sessions consecutively before getting the offer that she accepted, and there is no doubt that the group played a key role in helping her wrap up things so quickly: “That's where I got my greatest inspiration and energy boost. I

#### Also in this issue

- ◆ Asking for a Pay Raise
- ◆ Leaving Other Job Hunters in the Dust



Roy Cohen  
Five O'Clock Club  
Career Coach.

knew I was responsible to the group—for reporting back. I had to honor their hard work on my behalf by doing exactly what they suggested.

The power of the group

cannot be overstated. It kept me going when I really didn't feel like it. Besides, I knew I had to come back and tell the coach, Roy, what I had been doing all week."

Julia also credits mastery of the Two-Minute Pitch as a key factor in her success. When she met with the president of the company she now works for—after having gone through several interviews already—his first question was the classic square-one request: "So tell me about yourself." She had already been vetted by everyone below him, but he wanted to hear her state her case succinctly. "I'm a seasoned HR professional," she replied, "with heavy experience in building and rebuilding HR departments." He was looking for someone to start the company's HR function. After stating her Two-Minute Pitch, she filled in the details.

But Julia recited her pitch whenever she got the chance—no matter what the context, because, "You never know where networking might lead. One day, with my face muffled by a towel, I gave my Two-Minute Pitch to my masseuse therapist! The Five O'Clock Club gave me such confidence to turn over every rock and advocate for myself as never before."

**Take the time to study and strategize your career.**

This was especially important for Julia because she was attempting to move from not-for-profit to for-profit, which she accomplished. Although she is in HR, and thus an industry transfer

may appear to be relatively easy, she realized that correct positioning was vital. "I had to discover how to make interviewers see that my experience and skills were applicable." Among other things, she found the Club's books useful: "The books are handy for reference. I was able to find the best ways to phrase the wording on my résumé and in my pitch."

Julia is thrilled with her new role—once more creating an HR department from the ground up, since the company is expecting dramatic growth in the next year. But she doesn't keep The Five O'Clock Club very far out of mind:

"Life has a way of dealing funny hands, and if that happens, I'll come back to the Club—although I hope that doesn't happen any time soon." For those who are still working hard on their searches, Julia offers these words of advice: "Keep attending faithfully—believe in the strength of the group."

**Looking Back 20 Years for Help Now**

Is it really true that the Internet makes a job search easy? Many people nurture the fond hope that clicking their résumés into cyberspace is an effective way to job search. In fact, it's an effective way to squander time and energy. Nonetheless, the Internet can be a very powerful tool for those who are hunting for critical information to enhance their searches. Maxine was prompted to dig a little deeper into her networking when she heard a lecture at the Club one night about "Jump-starting Your Search." One of the recommendations made in that talk was: reconnect with lost or stale contacts. In reviewing all the possible avenues for networking, it occurred to Maxine that past employers might be worth

exploring. So she went online to view the websites of the companies she had worked for in the last 25 years. One of these companies, where she had worked 20 years ago as a temp, allowed online access to its most recent annual report. And there she found the photo of one of her colleagues of two decades ago—much to her surprise, he was still there.

**She attended only six weekly group sessions. "That's where I got my inspiration and energy boost!"**

Maxine dialed his number and he answered the phone! She had to keep the chat going for a few minutes until it finally clicked with the fellow who she was. Since all of his memories were favorable, he referred her to a woman in the company who might have an interest in her background—and Maxine remembered the woman as well! She called the woman and was invited in for an "informational interview only"—it could be nothing more because the company had a long-standing hiring freeze. It was the last week of November



*"Cell phone...must...have... cell...phone."*

when Maxine showed up for the interview. “Their holiday party was underway, so I had to wait a while. But I read all the company literature in the reception area.” And she was ready with her well-honed Two-Minute Pitch: “I made sure that I got across the three things about me that make me so valuable.”

Within ten days, she got a call from the company; they wanted to bring her on as an independent consultant—a second interview wouldn't even be needed. An employee had resigned unexpectedly, and Maxine was the favorite to replace her. When she came back to the Club to report on her success, Maxine had been in the new position for almost two months, and, as she put it, “I'm working hard to prove myself so that when the hiring freeze comes to an end, I will be brought on as a full-fledged employee.”



Win Sheffield  
Five O'Clock Club  
Career Coach.

Maxine had not been in the job market for about a decade, and had not been in a role that required Internet savvy. She admits that she was startled by the new world of

job hunt, and her job search buddy at the Club—a member of her small group—was especially helpful in getting her up to speed on the Internet. “She even came to my house to give me one-on-one sessions about navigating the web.”

Maxine looked forward to attending the Club meetings. “The most valuable thing for me? Having the group and the discipline of coming every week and doing the homework. It is so important to be persistent and to get comfortable telling everyone what you're trying to accomplish.” She had uncovered her new job by reaching into the past—in fact she had arrived at the Club following the same principle: many years ago she had heard a Five O'Clock Club coach give a speech

about job search!

Maxine reports that she and her job-search buddies remain in contact, determined to maintain a healthy network of professional associates. And in the spirit of giving back, she donated her remaining group sessions to someone in the group who was still looking.

**“I didn't take no for an answer. I found the name of the person I should talk to.”**

### Proactive for Career Change

“Life has to go on...” We sometimes utter these words when faced with bereavement, crisis or stress, because every day we encounter obligations, including meeting the needs of those surrounding us. Usually, earning a living is one thing we can't escape from; so no matter what may be dragging us down, we need to maintain some degree of focus on job and career. Hugh faced the burden that many folks have these days: caring for elderly parents. In his case, both his mother and father were seriously ill, which made it difficult for him to be devoted to a full-time job—or a job search. For a couple of years before he was referred by a friend to the Five O'Clock Club, he pursued consulting assignments that allowed him the flexibility he needed to care for his parents.

But Hugh was also looking for a career change. A marketing/sales professional, he had his eye on making a move into the not-for-profit world; in fact, academia held a special appeal for him. In this regard, he points out, “The Forty-Year Vision really helped. It helped put my goals in perspective.” The small group, headed by coach Win Sheffield, played a role in his progress: “Meeting on a regular basis pushed me to keep on the job hunting track”—even as the crises at home were a distraction. “The people in the group were very professional, many of us had similar backgrounds and there was a mix of employed and unemployed. I was underemployed.” Win was impressed

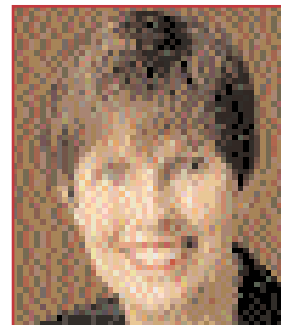
with Hugh's determination. “He kept coming back and coming back. He honed his targets and networked hard toward the goals he had set.”

Even

though he was aiming for a career change, Hugh managed to generate about a dozen interviews before he landed the one that resulted in his new job. This meeting followed his response to an advertised opening—but he didn't just wait for the phone to ring. At The Five O'Clock Club we caution job hunters that answering ads is a reactive technique—and hence will have less impact than more proactive approaches, such as networking and direct contact. Hugh had seen the ad in an academic journal and submitted his résumé. As we all know, days and weeks can go by after responding to an ad, and the silence, of course, means *no*. “I didn't take no for an answer,” he said. “I didn't hear anything, so I said, ‘Why don't I just call the college?’ I asked a few questions and found out the person I should talk to and sent him an email.”

Hugh's proactive approach launched the interview process, and a month later, he landed an offer, after five interviews. “I did the follow-up that The Five O'Clock Club recommends. I sent letters to the people who had interviewed me. They asked me to write a plan—so I wrote a plan.” He had to make such an extra effort because he was reaching for a career change, and had to demonstrate that his skills and knowledge were appropriate for the new environment. As we tell job hunters who are attempting to re-invent themselves: it is vital to sound like an insider.

With his marketing background, Hugh proved a good catch for a college that was looking for someone to recruit students for its study-abroad program.



Anita Attridge  
Five O'Clock Club  
Career Coach.



*"I'm sorry, but Mr. Roberts no longer takes meetings, phone calls, cell calls, faxes, snail mail, e-mail, messages, notes or appointments. Is there anything else we can do for you?"*

By being proactive after answering an ad, he demonstrated his frame of mind and his approach to the world in general. His advice to job hunters in general is "Think creatively, always try to think outside the box." Against the backdrop of his intense family obligations, he had other suggestions as well to people who may be struggling on more levels than simply a job search: "I have three words to ask you to keep in mind: Perseverance: you can overcome roadblocks; Resilience: family crises may be all-consuming at times and job search has to be put on hold, but you can bounce back; and Smile: this can be so hard, but try to remember to face the world this way."

**"When you have interviews, you're putting yourself out there. So use your small group for practice."**

**The Art of the Influencing Letter**

Why would a communications professional have trouble with a job search? After all, shouldn't it be easy for

someone who specializes in helping people connect and conveying information? Nonetheless, when it was Angelina's turn to job search, the prospect of self-promotion was daunting, especially since she had not looked for a job in seven years. Besides, she wasn't unemployed; she just felt it was time to move her career to the next level.

Coming to The Five O'Clock Club was not a hard decision, however, since

two of her relatives were members of the Club and had raved about the help that they had received. Although reluctant to face the job market, Angelina was highly motivated to give her career a boost, so she accepted all of the challenges that the Club suggests. "Do everything that the books tell you to do," she recommends, "especially the Seven Stories and the Forty-Year Vision. These really help you get focused. They take time and energy—and I'll admit I had my moments—but it's important to do every step. The Two-Minute Pitch is essential, and take advantage of the small group. Mine was great. After all, when you have interviews with recruiters and companies, you're putting your-



**Ruth Robbins**  
Five O'Clock Club  
Career Coach.

**The Job-Search Buddy System**

**D**o you wish you had someone to talk to—fairly often and informally—about the little things?



"Here's what I'm planning to do today in my search? What are *you* planning to do? Let's talk tomorrow to make sure we've done it." You and your job-search buddy could keep each other positive and on track, and encourage each other to do what you told the small group you were going to do: Make that call, send out those letters, write that follow-up proposal, focus on the most important things that should be done—rather than (for example) spending endless hours responding to job postings on the Web.

With your buddy, practice your Two-Minute Pitch, get ready for interviews, bounce ideas off each other. Some job-search buddies talk every day. Some talk a few times a week. Most of the conversation is by phone and e-mail.

Sometimes, people match themselves up as buddies. Just pick someone you get along with in your small group. Sometimes, your coach can match you up. However you do it, stay away from negative people who talk about how bad it is out there. They will drag you down.

The small group changes over time: people get jobs; new people come in. If you lose one buddy who got a job, get another buddy.

Your buddy does not have to be in your field or industry. In fact, being in the same field or industry could keep you focused on the industry rather than on the *process*. But you *do* have to get along! The relationship may last only a month or two, or go on for years. Some buddies become friends.

Of course, you should see your Five O'Clock Club career coach *privately* for résumé review, target development, salary negotiation, and job interview follow-up. It's usually best to get professional coaching advice for these areas. ●

self out there—so use your small group to get the practice.”

Angelina was fortunate enough to establish a good relationship with an executive recruiter who saw the clear advantage in being her advocate. The recruiter shared all of the details of a great job with Angelina—and it turned out to be the position that she ultimately accepted. But the experience proved to be a good lesson in the hard work of job search. There’s nothing easy about the process just because a recruiter gets you in the door. You’re likely to have lots of competition, and you probably need to demonstrate star quality to justify the company’s paying the recruiter’s fee.

One of the keys to outclassing the competition is effective follow-up, and Angelina made full use of the influencing letter, rather than the thank-you note, to move the process forward. She wrote a letter to the recruiter following their first meeting, and she wrote a letter to the recruiter after her first meeting with the company—just to keep her in the loop about the follow-up that she planned to do with the company. The hiring process proved to be grueling: Angelina had to meet with eight people before she got the offer, but she saw the value of staying in touch to maintain momentum, both for herself and the company.

“During the interviews I promised to provide work samples, and after the interviews I always did. Which means I always had a good reason to keep calling back—rather than just calling up to say, ‘So how are things going?’ Of course you don’t want to be a nuisance, but you want to keep talking to those who will make the hiring decision.”

Angelina ended up with the offer, and became Manager of Corporate Communications for a Fortune 500 company. Her coach, Anita Attridge, reflects on Angelina’s success: “She did a marvelous job. She attended the Club regularly, and overcame her fears. It was not easy for her to make those calls. I admired her persistence. Even though

she was working, she managed to make calls and do the follow-up. She knew it was in her best interest in the end.”

### Overcoming a 12-Year Gap

Sometimes life doesn’t work out the way we think it will. Sometimes we just don’t fit the mold. Jonathan came to the Club with the confession that he “hadn’t worked in twelve years. When my coach, Ruth Robbins, saw my résumé, she probably wouldn’t have hired me to do yard work.” In fact, Jonathan, who has an MBA, had worked a lot during the previous decade—he just didn’t have a traditional job. He had started out in a financial role, but then had decided to march to the beat of a different drummer. “My interests are in the creative realm; I’ve worked with artists, I draw and I write.”

---

### “My coach made my résumé into a living document.”

---

As we all know, however, success in the job market depends a lot on positioning. Ruth faced the challenge of helping Jonathan position all of his various pursuits and interests in such a way that the résumé could make sense and spark interest. “When I first saw the document,” Ruth admits, “it was a real smorgasbord.” One of the first steps in creating an effective résumé is the Seven Stories Exercise. “I took this very seriously,” Jonathan says, “in fact I did all of the assessment exercises in *Targeting a Great Career*, including the Forty-Year Vision. But it was Ruth’s guidance that made such a big difference and the feedback from the group. We were able to fine-tune the résumé and highlight the things that were really important to me. We made it into a living document.”

Clearly, with a 12-year gap in employment, Jonathan knew that, to achieve credibility in the job market, he had to get experience with an employer. And he knew that he had to explore all avenues. One of the modern avenues, of course, is craigslist.org. There he found an ad for someone to assist with

event planning at a small not-for-profit, and since event planning had been one of his many endeavors during his years on his own, he applied for and was brought in for an interview. “Actually the interview went very well. I took a proactive approach. I steered the conversation toward my strong points—I had so many weak points, I didn’t want to talk about them! So I just kept asking what they needed, and everything they brought up, I had done.”

Jonathan took the Club’s advice about follow-up. “If they don’t call you when they said they would, it doesn’t mean anything. You have to call—don’t be afraid. The woman had said they would call me in two days. On the morning of the third day I called. I wanted to find out what she thought of my writing samples. She said to me, ‘I thought you weren’t interested—I didn’t get them.’ The samples had been caught in the spam filter.”

But that turned out to be the least of Jonathan’s worries: there was actually no approval in the budget for the position. He knew, however, that there were too many positives in the situation to let it go. “I agreed to work *pro bono*—I wanted to get the experience, a job with an organization, to go on my résumé.” His gamble paid off, and within three weeks he was on payroll. He started working three days a week, then moved to four. And even if, with the small not-for-profit, the job doesn’t last long, he is on the road back to an on-payroll career. Jonathan attended the Club for nine sessions before being hired, and Ruth Robbins praised his adherence to the methodology: “He was strategic, but there is enough of a rebel in him that he wasn’t going to be pushed down. He came to the group regularly. He always had something positive to say, and once he found his possible niche, he worked hard to become an insider.”

---

### “My buddy personally brought me up-to-date on computer technology.”

---

**Overcoming a Four-Year Gap**

Vanessa can also tell you that life doesn't always work out the way think it will—it can take some strange turns. After a ten year career in human resources, she had to settle for a position as an executive assistant, and this derailment had gone on for four years.

How to get back on track? "I had been trying for more than three years. I had sent my HR résumé all over the place," Vanessa points out. But when she arrived at the Club, she learned that positioning is paramount.



Chip Conlin  
Five O'Clock Club  
Career Coach.

"I had to learn how to address the biggest objection that came up: Why wasn't I in an HR role anymore? I knew I had to be able to handle

this, the worst question." Coach Chip Conlin helped her in working with her small group to overcome this hurdle. She also used Chip to put heads together in her private sessions.

Vanessa went on from there: "Once I had my answer well crafted, with the help of my group, I was able to move forward. That Two-Minute Pitch was crucial—and that's what had been missing during my search. And my job-search buddies played a big role in getting me through it all.

They were the best. I had two of them, and they pulled me up when I was depressed and feeling insecure."

Through a referral, Vanessa landed an interview for an HR position, and before she reached the finish line, she had to face four more interviews. After the first interview, she was asked to write an outline of how her experience matched the requirements of the job. "With the help of the group I hammered out a three-page influencing letter. I described in detail what I could bring to the table, and I was pretty sure that I had competition. Someone in the group said, 'Send it priority mail,' which I did. Two days later I got a call from the head of HR. He said, 'I liked your letter. We'd like to have you come back.'" Of course, Vanessa couldn't take anything for granted. "The five interviews were pretty grueling and I had to write more influencing letters." But her career is back on track. She was hired as HR Manager at a major foreign corporation. "Looking back on it all," she says, "my strong Two-Minute Pitch was what I needed to overcome my detour out of HR." ●



*"There's a Mr. Tilbin here to see you, Sir. Shall I tell him you're on the phone, in a meeting or out of the office?"*

**The Job-Search Buddy System**

**D**o you wish you had someone to talk to—fairly often and informally—about the little things?



"Here's what I'm planning to do today in my search? What are *you* planning to do? Let's talk tomorrow to make sure we've done it." You and your job-search buddy could keep each other positive and on track, and encourage each other to do what you told the small group you were going to do: Make that call, send out those letters, write that follow-up proposal, focus on the most important things that should be done—rather than (for example) spending endless hours responding to job postings on the Web.

With your buddy, practice your Two-Minute Pitch, get ready for interviews, bounce ideas off each other. Some job-search buddies talk every day. Some talk a few times a week. Most of the conversation is by phone and e-mail.

Sometimes, people match themselves up as buddies. Just pick someone you get along with in your small group. Sometimes, your coach can match you up. However you do it, stay away from negative people who talk about how bad it is out there. They will drag you down.

The small group changes over time: people get jobs; new people come in. If you lose one buddy who got a job, get another buddy.

Your buddy does not have to be in your field or industry. In fact, being in the same field or industry could keep you focused on the industry rather than on the *process*. But you *do* have to get along! The relationship may last only a month or two, or go on for years. Some buddies become friends.

Of course, you should see your Five O'Clock Club career coach *privately* for résumé review, target development, salary negotiation, and job interview follow-up. It's usually best to get professional coaching advice for these areas. ●