

Lessons to be Learned from Those With Long Searches: Job Hunters Prove the Power of the Five O’Clock Club Methodology

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Sometimes we hear about someone who gets lucky and lands a job in two or three weeks. While we like to hear about such happy endings, there might not be very much to learn from such quick job searches. Serendipity is nice, but it’s rarely instructive.

The normal experience for Five O’Clock Club members is that they can be at the level of receiving job offers within 10 to 12 sessions at the Club—that remains the average—IF they study the books, master the methodology and follow the advice of their coach and small group: if they do the work. We have heard people say that getting a job is such a relief, because, “Now I won’t have to work as hard as my small group at the Club made me work.”

But then there are those whose searches take longer than 12 sessions—not for lack of hard work—and we can often learn a lot when we listen to the stories of people who fought the good fight for many months, perhaps while employed. In this article we have included the stories of people who stayed the course longer than most members, and found a payoff in the end.

The Art of Career Change

As we survey the workplace landscape in the middle of a recession, we can see that job-hopping doesn’t have quite the stigma it used to. And, just as certainly, career-hopping has achieved respectability as well: reinventing yourself may just be part of life for the foreseeable future.

Of course, these days, coming up with a new career usually requires a lot of flexibility and creativity, since so many fields have been weakened by the recession.

But one of our job hunters, Pauline, managed to achieve a career U-turn by working The Five O’Clock Club methodology. She defied the odds to get back into a career she really loved.

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Pauline’s job as a VP of Marketing and Communications at a multinational real estate firm was eliminated—in fact, the company was in the process of folding—and her employer paid for her outplacement services at the Club. As she surveyed her work history, she realized that there were a couple of possible routes to take, based on the strong experience on her résumé. But what was she to do when both of her major careers had been in fields that weren’t doing well?

She realized at the outset that getting help from the Club would be a wise move. “I immediately got right down to it, reading the books, doing my Seven Stories and attending the weekly Club meetings.” She was given some extra breathing room when her employer called her, requesting that she come back on a consulting assignment as the company was winding down.

“So I had to figure out what my rate as a consultant should be. I got help from the Club’s book, *Mastering the Job Interview and Winning the Money Game*. After all, I now had to make adjustments for paying my own taxes and health insurance, and I negotiated a great deal for staying on for six months. That gave me an extra cushion.”

But she knew that real estate mar-

keting wasn’t her passion in the long run. Years earlier she had worked for one of the prestige auction houses. “Art was in my blood and soul. I even managed to work it into my real estate function, because I commissioned art work for buildings. **My group at the Club kept pushing me to make up my mind**—and they reminded me that my pursuing real estate was like trying to push the round peg into the square hole. Besides, the real estate market was pretty bleak.”

Unfortunately, the art market didn’t look much better. “I told myself that I should look at this transition time as an opportunity, but the high-end art world was depressed too.” Pauline took the Club’s advice about not chasing openings—because they are few and far between, and there will always be swarms of competitors when they do happen. She made a list of second- and third-tier auction houses that could be of interest to her and began attending auctions.

She focused on one house especially, and attended as many auctions as she could. In the process **she fell into conversations with one co-owner, and kept repeating her Two-Minute Pitch**. He eventually asked that they meet formally, but he was adamant that they didn’t have any openings: “We can’t hire you. We can’t afford to pay you, but we are trying to figure out how to manage our business better.” He was impressed enough at this meeting to ask the other co-owner to meet with her, as well. She struck a deal to show them what she could do.

I said, “Just give me a month—pay me a basic salary. I’m really good at marketing, and managing people and

systems. I can see your problems here. You're not doing as well as you should be. Trust me, I can get your people motivated and find revenue streams."

At press time, Pauline was near the end of her brief assignment when she came to the Club meeting to report on her successful search; she was confident that she would be able to leverage this new experience to recreate her art-based career. She had attended her weekly small group 19 times.

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Making the Most of an Online Posting

When Brenda reported on her job search at the Club, she admitted that her work history had been a disappointment. "I had done tremendous damage to my career," she says—by remaining in three part-time jobs over the course of 20 years. These had been in the area of social work and clinical research.

When she came to the Club, she had decided to put things right. "I worked privately with my coach, **Ruth Robbins**, studied the books, and listened to the weekly lectures." She also took to heart the counsel of her small group, and professed admiration for the "patience of the coaches as they worked with me in trying to get a career in place."

She knew that testing any new field required getting informational meetings. "I sent lots of letters in which I said, 'I'd like to have 20 minutes of your time to talk about your career and see if you can advise me about mine.'" After several months, this approach led to a consulting assignment that enabled her to learn a lot, yet would not have been a step in the right direction, but she now had momentum.

She spotted an ad published in a New York not-for-profit e-newsletter. She suspected that the ad was not as widely accessed as other online postings,

but she wanted to do her best to outclass the competition. One of her group members at the Club shared the template of a letter he had used for replying to online ads, and she consulted the Club's books as well. "I began my letter with a general statement of my background, then **I quoted directly from the ad, including each line that stipulated what was required. Then I wrote bulleted points under each one, listing my experience and accomplishments that applied. It took me four-and-a-half hours to write that letter.**"

Do cover letters work when you respond to online ads? Brenda emailed her letter and résumé on a Friday afternoon. By the end of the day she had been invited for an interview on Monday. "It doesn't take long to do something the wrong way," she says, "but doing it right can take a long time, and there's likely to be a much better outcome."

Brenda recalled the title of an early Five O'Clock Club book when she reflected later about the interview. "I would have gone through a brick wall to get that job (our 1992 book was called *Through the Brick Wall: How to Job Hunt in a Tight Market*)." **As she was introduced around the organization—which indeed offered her the job—she was complimented on her cover letter.** "All of my frustrations and lack of self-confidence melted away. I fell in love with it." She hand-delivered her follow-up influencing letters and reference information.

Her coach, Ruth Robbins, complimented Brenda on her intensive efforts: "The grade I would give her is A plus plus. She combined clinical expertise with business savvy. In the group she was an advocate for 'let's get out there and meet people, let's have conversations.' She conveyed that in her outreach letters." Brenda had attended 21 weekly sessions.

Going the Temp Route

Mark had worked in a finance role at a hedge fund, and his layoff at the height of the financial crisis in late 2008 came as no surprise. He realized

that job hunting in a crisis environment would require doing more than other job hunters were likely to do, and this prompted him to join The Five O'Clock Club and attend faithfully.

He felt that his ex-coworkers might become part of his larger network, so he reached out to as many of them as he could and described this outreach in Club terminology: "They became my Stage 1 contacts, and one of them recommended me to a temp agency—in fact, introduced me to a person there. Relying on agencies is passive, of course, as the Club always points out, but I was lucky that the agency got me set up for an interview for a temp finance job at a major university."

Mark's small group coach, **Chip Conlin**, points out that "he was great in the group and really savvy in his job search." In line with his recognition that the crisis job market would require extra effort, Mark reports, **"My group helped me prepare for the interview. I wanted to have my Two-Minute Pitch perfected,** to be sure that I would say the right things." The interview went well, and Mark was offered a four-month assignment, with no benefits. "During those four months I kept attending the group, to help keep me engaged and focused on my job search."

Near the end of the assignment, although the university was still operating under a hiring freeze, Mark was offered a six-month extension of the temp role, but this time with health insurance. "There may be hiring freezes," he points out, "but there is still work that has to be done. So don't overlook the value of taking temp jobs. They can be the backdoor into a full-time job. If you're in there, showing how good and hard-working you are, it's much more likely that they'll eventually find a way to keep you." Mark attended his group for 13 weekly sessions while he worked full-time as a temp until he landed his permanent job.

His Seven Stories and Two-Minute Pitch Changed His Direction

Timothy came to the Club looking

for a new job, after his had been laid off. **He had been sent to the Club by his company as part of a severance package. “I was entitled to a full year of help at the Club, and I’m really grateful for that.”** The one year of help is especially important for members who want to change careers or build their own businesses. While making his assessment at the Club, Timothy discovered that what he really wanted was his own consulting firm.

For Timothy, the Seven Stories Exercise was a revelation. “It helped me pinpoint the things in my career that had made me the happiest, and it turns out that my consulting roles had provided that. I really like sitting down with people at an organization and helping them to figure out how to do things better—using IT to improve the way things get done.”

His goal became even clearer when he developed his Two-Minute Pitch. He told his group, “I am an IT consultant with over 20 years of experience. I focus on helping small businesses and not-for-profits become more efficient and effective. That’s the kernel of my pitch.”

It was about two months into his run with the Club, and attending the weekly meetings faithfully, when he decided to shift his focus way from looking for an on-payroll job to looking for a way to accumulate consulting assignments.

Timothy’s coach—also **Chip Conlin**—points out that he simply used the concept of the targeted search in another way. “Our job hunters build their target maps, of course, with lists of companies to aim for. Timothy targeted companies that might use him as a project consultant. ‘How do I target the right kind of clients?’ was his question.”

He had honed his Two-Minute Pitch with the group’s help, then followed the leads as they developed. He was still in touch with one of his clients from long ago and far away, in the 1990s, who referred him to his wife, who worked for a not-for-profit that needed help with an IT project. He was brought on for that, and, as it was

drawing to a close, he was referred to another not-for-profit...and then another. Timothy was also actively pursuing a growing network of potential clients, and attending the Club regularly—in fact, for 25 weekly sessions while he built his business. He was eager to come back to tell his full story.

Timothy came back to report on his successful job search after he had met all of his benchmarks for getting his own consulting business up and running.

“Coming here every week was one of the most important things. Sitting with my group and with Chip was tremendous in giving me feedback and cheering me up. Being here regularly provides discipline. You know you’re going to have to talk about what you’ve been doing. If you didn’t do anything during the week, then you’re going to have to fake it—and you don’t want to do that!”

It’s Not the 1990s Anymore

When Dominic came to The Five O’Clock Club he had been job hunting for about three months. He confessed that he found it “like being adrift at sea. I had been wandering in different directions and it was very ego-deflating.” He had last been in the job market in the 1990s, and, at that time, he had been in demand. “I was valuable. I have all of these qualifications and degrees, and **I was used to having recruiters call me. It was delusional thinking that my job search would work that way this time too.**”

When Dominic arrived at the Club he was asked by his coach to do The Seven Stories Exercise and the Forty-Year Vision, and thus got his first hint about how we do things differently. **No one else had ever suggested to him that assessment is the beginning of a sound job search.** “Frankly I rolled my eyes and said to myself, ‘When I come back next week are we going to hold hands and sing *kum-ba-ya?*’ But I discovered that this first step is a very important part of strategy. These tools were extremely helpful in getting me focused on the kinds of targets and jobs that I

should be going after. Once I had good targets selected and had my résumé perfected, my luck began to change.”

Dominic had been working outside of the U.S. for several years, and had neglected to keep his stateside network intact, “So I had to jumpstart the whole thing. But I was persistent and stuck with the methodology. There were certainly a lot of bumps along the way. There were jobs that I was sure I was going to get, but then nothing happened.”

He thus saw the wisdom in the Club’s advice about getting six to ten things in the works. At the end of his search, when he prepared an email to spread the good news that he had landed a job, he saw that his list of new contacts was well over 100. “I stayed in touch with some of them every week, others every month, and some less frequently.”

All of this activity resulted in three concurrent job offers, and then he found that the Seven Stories and Forty-Year Vision came in handy again. “At the start these were helpful in guiding me to select the best targets, then **when I had to weigh the three offers, I went back and reviewed the exercises**—they turned out to be a good guide. It was much easier to select the best job.”

Dominic accepted a position as VP of Strategy and Development for a start-up. He confesses that he has a higher tolerance for risk than a lot of other people, but because of his experience with the Club, he’s no longer so intimidated at the thought of being out of work.

“I learned that I can get through this unemployment thing. It’s no longer so scary. The Club’s methodology really drove home the importance of being proactive. I learned more about how to network effectively than I ever did before.”

Dominic’s coach, **Anita Attridge**, commented, “He added a lot of energy, humor and help in the small group. He found that the search can be an up-and-down process, but he persisted and ended up with three offers, which is our wish for everyone.” Dominic had attended 21 weekly Club meetings.

Getting Out of the Comfort Zone

Like many job hunters these days, Trent thought that the Internet would be the key tool in job search. “But if left to my own devices,” he admits, “I would probably still be in front of my computer posting my résumé and checking my email every five minutes—and wondering why no one was responding. Once I learned about The Five O’Clock Club approach, I realized I had to get out of my comfort zone. I started to call people directly.”

Trent, who has more than 20 years of experience in publishing, made a big push to get informational interviews, and one of his former co-workers referred him to the president of a division of a major media company. She invited him in for a meeting, and while pointing out that she didn’t have anything for someone at his level, she referred him to three other people in the company. One of the three also invited him in for a meeting.

Keeping in mind the Club’s advice about surrounding the decision-makers, Trent send an email to the HR manager who worked with this person—with the result that they all met together. He was told, “Your timing is perfect, because we just had one of our magazine editors resign, and you would be good for the position. We want to have you meet with someone else for that.”

Knowing a lot about the magazine he was being considered for, Trent quickly interviewed several businesses that were subscribers to the magazine and put together a proposal detailing what he could accomplish in the first 100 days.

When he got to the interview, he was told that they might want him for a magazine that he really *wasn’t* interested in. “But **my Five O’Clock Club lessons kicked in**”

Trent reports. “**I showed the HR manager my proposal.** I said, “This is what I would do for the other magazine. I think a lot of it would apply to this other situation as well.”” But the topic of the other magazine was dropped, and Trent soon had the offer he was hoping for.

He finessed the salary question as well, with a touch of humor. When

asked what he was looking for he said, “Well, I know that the position doesn’t pay \$40,000—and that it doesn’t pay \$140,000 either. I’m sure we can meet somewhere in the middle.”

But Trent had generated other possibilities through his outreach. Another company had asked him to submit a lengthy proposal, which he did. He followed up repeatedly, but was continually put off. Were his efforts wasted? It turns out that **he was able to use much of his work on the earlier proposal on the one that did bear fruit.**

Says his coach, **Anita Attridge**, “Usually, whatever you do in your job search will propel you forward, even though it may not feel like it at the time.”

Trent appreciated the help he got from the group, over the course of 18 sessions, and from Anita, especially her tendency to keep him grounded in reality. “Whenever I would come in confident that something was going to come through, she would say, ‘Well, that’s great, but what else do you have going? What if that doesn’t work out?’”

How Much Follow-Up Is too Much?

Jackie came to the Club after she landed a new job. She knew that it wasn’t the right job: “I really wanted to move ahead in my career—and I knew that my résumé just wasn’t right.” She tackled the Seven Stories and The Forty-Year Vision, “But somehow I got stuck there. I wasn’t able to move beyond them to the right targets. So I had a few private sessions with my coach, **Anita**, and under her fine tutelage I was able to get through that.”

Since she had a job, Jackie wasn’t under great pressure to move ahead quickly. She decided to methodically set out to get as many informational interviews as possible, to come up with something in the area of textiles and fabrics. “For example, I made my list of 20 companies, then wrote very targeted letters to each one. Sometimes, these were to industry leaders I’d read about in trade magazines, so when it came time to make the follow-up phone calls,

I found that a little bit intimidating.”

Altogether, Jackie estimates that she went on 80 informational interviews during the course of a year. “Naturally, with careful follow-up I got to the point of talking about actual jobs with people.” **After one job interview, she received a rejection letter—from the man who eventually hired her!** Jackie took the Club’s message to heart about keeping in touch with people in your target market on an ongoing basis. The man had turned her down, but that company was still in her target market. She wrote again asking to be kept in mind for openings that might come up. “I actually called the man 40 times during the next six months. Of course, I didn’t leave 40 messages, but I did get to talk to him several times.”

This resulted in another interview, but indeed it was several months later that all of her efforts came to fruition. The company had landed a major project, and her skills were appropriate. She says, “Now that I’m sitting next to him every day, I see that he’s rarely at his desk to answer his phone.

“I was offered a 10-week consulting assignment, and they wanted me to be on the job full time. I pointed out that this would make it hard for me to continue looking for a full-time job, and they upped the money.”

At the time that Jackie came back to the Club to report—**after attending 20 weekly sessions**—she was about half-way through the 10-week run, and the company was making overtures about continuing the relationship: there were probably other projects that she could be assigned to.

Anita praised Jackie for her determination that translated into 80 informational interviews and 40 follow-up phone calls. “She’s very well organized and approached her career project with the enthusiasm that the Club recommends.”

Jackie is a great advocate, by the way, of not being daunted by the holidays. **“During the week of Christmas, I ended up with four interviews.”** ●