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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WSJ.com

CAREERS | JUNE 5, 2010

CAREERS

Getting in the Game

By DENNIS NISHI

Becoming a full-time employee after a career of free-lance and contract work isn't always an easy transition. Some employers view career free-lancers as a flight risk or as lone wolves not suited to working in collaborative environments.

What's more, some companies have trouble deciphering the résumés of longtime independent consultants and contractors since they often don't fit into traditional résumé style of company, title, years worked and responsibilities.

Approach Your Clients

To overcome the stigma, first, tap into your network of employers. Connect with past and present clients who already are familiar with your work as they may be more receptive to considering you for a full-time opening or even create a new role for you. Try getting a referral from an employee or trusted third party.

When you approach these contacts and potential employers, explain why you're ready to be a staffer now. "Clearly articulate why you're at this place in your life and career that you want to make this transition from [being] independent," says Diane Adams, vice president of human resources at Allscripts-Misys Healthcare Solutions, a Chicago-based creator of software for the health-care industry. She says it's important for hiring managers to hear that you want to contribute in specific ways and can learn something by being on staff, too.

Make sure you're specific about your experience -- both in your résumé and cover letters and in person. Even more than a regular job hunter, it's important to portray what you've done "in a results-oriented way," says Brian Drum, president of Drum Associates, a New York executive-search firm. "Companies will look at that more favorably because it's hard to decipher when you just say you're an accountant."

Mr. Drum adds, "What did you do? What did you accomplish? Show them." Even if your projects were short, list them on a résumé or discuss them in terms of revenues created, costs saved, new customers gained and the like.

You can use the job description of the position you want to apply for to prioritize your résumé and cover letter. "Usually, the skills and qualifications are listed in the order of their needs," says Mr. Drum. Your

résumé should be tailored to reflect that. "If you don't have the right key words for that specific job, you might get bypassed, regardless of the experience you have," he says. "Most résumés are not only scanned electronically, they're read electronically." Take some time to add key words and duties from the job listing to your résumé when they're applicable.

Work With Others?

One question you'll need to address quickly -- even before an employer brings it up: Can you work well with others? Be prepared to provide examples of collaboration, including how you've worked with clients, vendors and other third parties.

If you've done community work with a group like the Rotary Club or served on a nonprofit board or helped coordinate a big event at your child's school, use those examples to show you're a team player.

Finally, don't shy away from promoting the skills that have made you a successful contractor. Successful free-lancers are typically driven, hardworking and independent, which are qualities that you'll want to emphasize. Use your ability to handle many assignments or contracts as a way to show you are adaptable, say career experts.

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