



HOW YOUR NEXT EXECUTIVE ROLE FINDS YOU

WITH JENNIFER DAVIS, HEAD OF PRODUCT MARKETING,
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Are you future-proofing your career? Are you being seen and heard in a crowded job marketplace?

Many people run into a career-halting trap. Engrossed in work with heads hunkered downwards, many don't spend time building a professional development plan or forging relationships that could lead to easier career transitions.

This edition of How the Executive Job Finds You features Jennifer Davis, a marketing executive, creative growth strategist, and game-changing innovator. A customer evangelist and advocate, Davis builds diverse, high-performing teams and uses her expertise to in B2B marketing strategies to “build better businesses”.

Her expertise spans startups to Fortune 500s to include Amazon Web Services, Honeywell, Planar, and Intel. Her book, Well Made Decisions, is expected from New Degree Press in August 2021.

Davis walks the walk when it comes to articulating one's value proposition. She credits strategic career planning and fostering a healthy network of mentors. Only twice has she had to “convince a stranger” to hire her over the course of her career.

Jennifer Davis's career-story is an inspirational reminder we can “own our own careers” by creating and adjusting career plans to avoid feeling stuck. Jennifer's example demonstrates that we have control over our own career destinies.

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I find your career transition journey very inspirational because you've amassed a wide range of experiences. Was there a point in your career you felt stuck?

I've grown restless in my career many times. Sometimes, I feel a little tinge that I should be doing something else. Sometimes that led to changes and sometimes not. In the times of profound restlessness, I've looked first for opportunities to grow in place, like finding lateral moves to broaden my experience and exposure to new ideas.

Other times, I've taken on projects outside of work to make a difference and to grow, like serving on the board of a nonprofit, proactively taking on mentees, investing in training or achieving my MBA. I've even participated in peer organizations to stretch and expand. Other times, I have moved organizations to continue on my path.

I'm a big believer that you own your own career. No boss is going to do it for you, and you must continue to challenge yourself.



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So, you recommend stretching and growing in different size companies, different functional areas, etc?

If I wanted the same thing today that I wanted 15 years ago, what would that say about me? What would that say about my relevance in the marketplace or how I'm being a leader to my team? It would not be positive. You need to be thinking about the story you want to tell moving forward.

You are a self-described continuous learner with a deep curiosity about how businesses evolve. How has your curiosity impacted your career moves?

Ever since college, I have loved reading about different life-cycles of companies. One of my early mentors inspired me to not only read or write company history, but to "go make some history." That was good advice.

I realized I needed a collection of work experiences to make a big impact on a business. This prompted me to seek out diverse opportunities to be a well-rounded business leader.

I've intentionally exposed myself to startups and very large global companies, accumulating experience across marketing, product management, supply chain planning, customer service, operations teams, channel sales, integrating acquisitions, and

leading strategy programs. All of these opportunities helped me learn and grow in a variety of industries.

How has goal-setting helped you make decisions about your career moves?

At each stage of my career, I wanted to stretch and add different things to my list of skills and experiences. My bucket list got longer every time I have crossed something off. I wanted to work for small and large companies in different stages of their lifecycles. I wanted to work in product categories I wasn't familiar with. I wanted to be part of a leadership team growing a business while doing something meaningful for customers.

You've continued to accumulate very different skills over time. What would you advise people do to ensure they grow professionally?

Have a true curiosity about and commitment to learning. It underpins everything. Constantly push yourself to the point of discomfort to learn new things and expand into new areas. It isn't just about climbing up one narrow ladder. It's about checking new boxes.

Collect information and strategically think about the business at a different altitude. You might need to gain skills by taking a class or getting a

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stretch assignment. There are many ways to get breadth and depth if you have true curiosity about the drivers of your business.

The skill that makes the biggest difference in the long run is the ability to learn. Many people get into the trap of thinking narrowly. Many things we learn today might not be relevant to your job tomorrow. Maybe your job of the future hasn't been invented yet!

You need to be tenacious, have discipline, and the curiosity to learn new things.

What has helped you move from job to job?

I've only had two career moves where I had to convince a stranger.

In most of my career transition situations, I was referred by

people who knew me or I went to work for a former colleague. This has been really powerful part of my story. What they say is true - it isn't what you know, it's who you know.

Taking a page from David Avron's book, he says it is not who you know, it is who knows you. This rings true in my own experience and I've given this advice thousands of times. Racking up connections on LinkedIn or handing out your business card is not enough.

You want people to know you well enough that they think of you when they hear about opportunities. They know exactly what to refer you for and how you plug in.

People naturally want to be helpful. If you're a solution to somebody's problem, that's how connections are made. Leaders know they are going to be

judged by the quality of the last person they hired.

Every hire is fraught with risk. You need to do anything you can to lower the risk to the hiring manager by being known for how you fit and what you deliver. If you are seeking, it is your job to reduce friction in the hiring process to get a referral.

What do you want to be known for? That is what should permeate your conversations to help drive what you get involved in, how you build your brand, publishing, writing, speaking, or any of the other things that help showcase what you want to be known for.

Tell me how role models, mentors, and sponsors have played a role in your career.

I've had so many. Starting off, my parents were very big



believers in education, both of them educators themselves. I learned hard work pays off.

I've gone on to work for five different CEOs and presidents directly, as well as multiple leaders. Each teaches me something about this infinite game of business. They've all boosted my confidence by helping me understand where my gaps were and helping me close them.

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I'm thankful for the peers and leaders who've mentored me and I try to pay that forward.

I've also been blessed to have had formal engagements with leadership coaches and subject matter experts who have been willing to share their expertise with me.

When I think back to my talented former bosses, coworkers, friends, and classmates, I realize I could have been tapping into those resources more and found additional ways to give back to them. Your network gets stronger with use.

What do you recommend to executive level job seekers to be seen and heard in a crowded marketplace? How do you showcase your unique value proposition?

It's never been easier to get the experience you want and exposure you need.

You can write a blog, actively comment on other people's work in publishing, or attend industry events – many of which are virtual and free now.





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Actively participate in industry associations, start a business, or start a nonprofit.

If you want to get experience doing something, literally nothing stands in your way right now. So much of this can be done very inexpensively or free.

One of the biggest barriers to a strong job referral is professionals not being crisp and clear about what they want to be famous for. It is important to be well-known for delivering something specific and in demand. The problem is when somebody wants a fork, they don't go looking for a Swiss Army knife. The same is true of hiring managers.

If a manager gets approval to hire somebody, that manager has a problem that needs to be solved. They should articulate the problem in the form of a job description.

If a candidate interviews for this job and touts they can run, jump, and dance, but the organization needs to fill



WHEN I THINK BACK TO FORMER BOSSES, COWORKERS, FRIENDS, AND CLASSMATES I REALIZE I COULD HAVE BEEN TAPPING INTO THOSE RESOURCES MORE THAN I HAVE.



an anchor position in a four-by-100 relay, your general athleticism makes them think you are a risky choice.

I have to remind myself that even though I might be able to solve many more problems than I'm being hired for, that may not be the best way to secure that job or succeed in it. Initially, you need to solve the problem that is causing their pain. There will be a chance to exercise all of that expertise once you're on board. All your accumulated experiences will only make you a better solutions provider and partner in the end.

The leadership-level candidate should tie back to their value proposition. What problems do you solve? Where do your superpowers lie? How do your

unique experiences tell me you are the solution to the problem I have now? If you're not sure, ask people you've worked with, former bosses, and friends.

Using assessments, like CliftonStrengths, can also help you uncover more about yourself and how you craft your story.

I can't help, but bring my top strengths to my work - strategic, maximizer and activator combined with positivity and WOO (winning others over). This is how I show up. The same is true of everyone and their strengths.

How could a person hone and test their unique value proposition?

One exercise I recommend is to write your own press release announcing your appointment to your ideal position. What does the headline look like? These are never more than two or three sentences about what a person is bringing to the job, with a few career defining successes that help the audience rest assured the person being hired can solve the problem that has been identified.

Especially at the CEO level, leaders tend to specialize. For example, they become known for being a serial entrepreneur, turnaround specialist, one who implements digital transformation, or one with deep industry knowledge and connections.

Why is that? It is because they exercise those muscles and can easily convince somebody else that they can do it again. A business needs the right CEO for the right time of the organization's lifecycle. This is true in all leadership roles.

What are the common pitfalls or mistakes you see aspiring leaders make when they are looking to make a career transition or during an interview process?

First, not having a clear value proposition and understanding how their skills transfer to the new role.

Another thing candidates should think about is how the leadership team dynamics will change when they on-board. Whose job will change when you join the company?

Find respectful and diplomatic ways to figure out during the interview process what will change for the teammates so you are set up to be successful when you enter.

We've learned during the pandemic the future leader needs to show adaptability in how they approach complex problems. What is your take on this?

Many businesses and individuals have their adaptability hindered or enabled

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by decisions they made a long time ago. Many businesses are struggling or calling it quits because they were overleveraged with debt, implemented decisions poorly, or wastefully allocated resources. They are gasping for air as they run out of cash.

Others are using it as an opportunity to transform. What has led to most of the recent transformations? Has it been the vision of the CEO or board? No. Has it been the tools and technologies made available? Maybe. Has it been Covid-19? Most certainly, yes.

If you have choices and the ability to be adaptable, celebrate! We are facing a lot of ambiguity in the economy. We need to take the best of what we are learning and make this our new normal, whatever that ends up being.

Any final words of encouragement to leadership level jobseekers?

Organizations are naturally tapered at the top and there has always been fewer senior roles. If you are looking for this kind of role, you have to be patient and take a long view. Even when roles are identified and funded - the recruiting can take a long time. It is a test of patience on all sides.



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If you're in a position where you can't be patient, be strategic. Think about your next chapter in your career. The book is not closed, you're just adding chapters. What do you want to add to your story during this time? What skills do you need to have? What companies do you want to have worked for? Who do you want to work with and learn from?

Your plan might mean taking a different title, taking on a different scope of work, or having a different influence than you have had in the past. You've always been bigger than your job. So, don't stress. Just this next step as a way to get those career defining bullets that you're going to need. It is not all dependent on title or scope. It is about how you show up to do the work.

To find out more about Jennifer Davis – head to her website www.atjenniferdavis.com and her book website www.wellmadedecisions.com.

CONTRIBUTING WRITER'S PROFILE



Gina Riley Consulting & creator of the CareerVelocity System™. She is a career transition coach who helps leaders customize their career stories to land jobs where they can leave a legacy. She is an Executive Search Consultant for Talence Group.



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