



CDI BEST PRACTICES TIP SHEET

Working Confidently and Effectively with Executive-Level Job Seekers

Surprise! In general, executives are easy to work with. Why?

Most are pretty clear on their goals, and they are used to a "bottom-line-it-for-me" environment. They are also usually comfortable taking risks—calculated risks based on their knowledge and experience. They will invest at a higher level than many other professions or personality types IF they see an advantage.

Also, they make sales decisions pretty quickly, and they give you information pretty quickly too. You can usually close them with a single conversation. They know what they are good at, and that makes your work easier. You may find you have to pull some accomplishments out of them, or ironically, prevent them from being too verbose, but for the most part, they are ideal clients. Remember to focus on fit when you sell and close them.

Assess Your Skills, Know Your Strengths

You will want to assess your skills before you work with executives. To do this:

- Look at executive resumes, LinkedIn summaries, and bios online. Look at a LOT of them. You'll see that they are pretty bad. Look at your work. Determine what the differences are; list as many as you can. How does your work stack up? Typically your work will be far superior. If it is, move on to the rest of this tip. If not, get some executive resume training and mentoring from one of the many programs CDI offers. (Note: The same principle works for coaches. Look at your credentials, the resources you offer, and the nature of your programs. You can identify your differentiators and you can enhance your skills through training).
- Once you've determined your work is strong, develop a series of talking points that describe the differences between run-of-the-mill resumes/LinkedIn summaries (or generic coaching) and your state-of-the-art work and strategies. Think in terms of the value you offer, not your process. What's the ROI of each thing you put into your session or final product? Use this information in sales conversations, blog posts, training, etc.

Put Prospects at Ease

- Build rapport in the initial meeting, this is one of the key elements to closing a sale.. Executives are looking for a coach/resume consultant that (a) knows their stuff and is an expert in their field, (b) who connects with them on a personal level, and (c) that they trust. Remember that people do business with those that they LIKE, KNOW, and TRUST.
- Executives want to know specifics from you. Be prepared to be able to confidently answer questions like: Have you ever worked with someone at my level before? What is your background? Can you provide me with the expertise to help me do what I need to do? Have you ever worked with someone from my company before? Do you know our culture?

It is important to keep in mind that success is not built on knowing their culture or having worked with someone in their company before. If you know these types of questions might be asked (by any level of client, really) then you can prepare positive and confident responses in advance that show that even if you don't have said experience, the prospect knows he/she is in good hands.

Take Control with Confidence

Always remember that this is your business, and you need to project confidence and control.

- Understand that executives are people just like you. They are not superheroes. You should treat your engagement with them as a peer-to-peer activity. Be on a level playing field with them as an expert consultant. Never call them Mr., Ms., or Miss. You are on a first name basis! From the beginning assume that this is OK. Do not ask.
- Executives are looking to see if you have the confidence to help them. If you don't seem confident, they will do one of two things:
 - Pull away from you. They are only interested in working with people who know their stuff as well as the executive knows his.
 - Push back. They will ask tough questions, even seem a little rude or abrasive. In reality, they are giving you a chance to show them what you're made of—show them your confidence and keep the conversation moving in the direction that you want it to go.

So, position yourself as an expert with an executive clientele. Like hires like. Executives want to be part of the same club: the "I've made it" club. It doesn't matter how humble they are (and many are humble); somewhere they have that thought that they are in competition with themselves and their peers to get to that place and stay there. Whether it's a personal journey or a power play, it's in their mind somewhere.

- Executives may seem abrupt or arrogant. They are accustomed to making decisions quickly. They will come to their meeting with you with a list of questions/criteria, either written or in their head. They frequently decide based on as few as three decision points. Does the product or service:
 - *Save me time*
 - *Save me money*
 - *Give me a competitive advantage*
 - *Keep me from looking stupid, weak, vulnerable or incompetent.*

Your best bet is to ask questions at the beginning of the conversation to determine what is important to them. Ask – they will tell you! Speak to those concerns and issues, give them a good reason to decide and they will do so quickly.

Be Concise

- Executives don't have time for lengthy information or meetings. They want to discuss, decide, and move on.
- Executives like a clearly articulated process or methodology. But, if you talk too much about process or detail, you risk losing the attention or focus of the executive client.

When you work with executive clients, think "executive summary." Think "bullet points." Match them with their quick and direct style for the best match.

Don't Underprice & Recognize Platinum Mindsets

It is important to recognize that most executives subscribe to the belief that you get what you pay for.

- While it won't serve you simply to overinflate your prices just to attract executives, be mindful that the majority of executives will pass over services in the \$100-500 range assuming they are fledgling and not up to their high requirements and standards. So, avoid undervaluing and thus underpricing your offerings.
- Executives frequently have a platinum mindset that leads them to seek out the higher-priced offering. It is not uncommon for executives to individually spend \$750 to \$10,000 in resume and career services from a career services practitioner. Note also, that many executive resumes are priced between \$1500 to \$2750.
- A platinum mindset also speaks to solutions and not band-aids. Most executives focus on results, and they understand there is a process to getting results – they use strategy and planning. Executives appreciate being offered complete solutions that will lead them to faster results. Never assume that executives (or any other level of client) are savvy to what they need beyond a little bit of coaching or resume writing.

Understand the Difference between Executive and Non-Executive Resumes

Hear this loud and clear – there is no difference between the needs of clients at varying levels beyond issues such as needing a few more supplementary documents such as a bio or project sheets.

- Any resume you write for any level of client should focus on:
 - **Targeting** the desired position and industry from top to bottom.
 - **Minimizing** pitfalls with dates, gaps, career/industry changes, schooling, and job longevity.
 - **Emphasizing** unique selling propositions and brand at the forefront in the summary area.
 - **Creating hooks** at the start of job descriptions that set the stage for the position goals and challenges.
 - **Utilizing** a model throughout the resume body such as CAR (challenge, action, result) to demonstrate the individual's contributions and accomplishments.
 - **Playing up** seemingly extraneous extracurricular activity and accomplishments as needed to meet the target and stand out for the position.
 - Developing a visual, easy-to-read and easy to navigate layout, that is attractive and engaging whether it has basic formatting or includes charts, graphs, and call out boxes.

These are not bells and whistles reserved for executives or sales professionals. When you do the things mentioned in this tip sheet, write at the CARW level, and apply them to executives and clients of any level—you will provide exceptional value to each candidate you serve.

Go forward with confidence—you've got this!

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Curated by Laura DeCarlo, edited by Posey Salem.