

# STAFFING **ADVISORS**

HOW-TO GUIDE

## The Staffing Advisors Guide to Senior Executive Job Search



# Take the Next Great Step in Your Career

After completing hundreds of executive searches, the Staffing Advisors team has seen firsthand how challenging the job search process can be—even for the most accomplished professionals. Drawing from our experience with both clients and candidates, we've put together practical strategies that have helped many job seekers achieve better results.

Our goal is to support you with the resources you need to navigate the job search and interview process with confidence.

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Here's a quick guide to what you'll find inside. Click any menu item below to jump to the section you're most interested in.

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## The Power of a Good Business Story

Since ancient times, humans have sat around campfires telling stories—we are instinctively drawn to narrative thinking. Today, stories remain our most powerful communication tool.

Stories help you stand out because interviewers understand and remember them. The right story brings your skills to life and provides the essential context your interviewer needs.

Don't worry if you're not a natural performer; this isn't about putting on a show. A well-told story is truthful, brief, and appropriate to the business context.

The hiring process is like a jigsaw puzzle, with your resume and interview responses as individual pieces. Your career story assembles these pieces into a cohesive whole, the entire picture of your career.

Build a narrative to explain your career trajectory, and you can tilt the hiring process in your favor. Focus on the issues you handle best, the impact of your work, and why these matter to you.

**Your ability to tell the right stories about your experience is every bit as important as the experience itself.**

### Use AI as a Thought Partner

A large language model (like ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.) can act as a thought partner to help you create a compelling narrative about your career and apply that to a new role.

[!\[\]\(faf942dc3e59ce8eb64b4ac481eca7e0\_img.jpg\) Using AI in Your Job Search? Here's How To Do It Ethically](#)

# Lean Into Your Superpower

In the world of executive hiring, you're not just evaluated on your own merits. Hiring managers are constantly comparing candidates to determine who can best solve their specific business challenges. You need to identify and articulate your career superpower—your competitive advantage—the combination of skills, experiences, and abilities that sets you apart from other highly qualified professionals.

The odds are good that you were repeatedly drawn into work situations that drew on your superpower. Here are three strategies to follow:

## 1. Map Your Professional Journey

Look back at your career with a comparative lens. Ask yourself:

- What tasks did you handle easily that others found challenging?
- Where did you consistently outperform your peers?
- In what types of environments have you done your best work, and when were your strengths underutilized?

## 2. Ask Around: What Makes You Stand Out?

Others often see our competitive advantages more clearly than we do. Reach out to colleagues, mentors, or friends who know your work. Their insights can help you understand how you stack up against the competition. Ask them (and take notes):

- How do you compare to others in similar roles?
- What do you do better than most of your peers?
- In what situations have they seen you do your best?

## 3. Find Your Niche

Consider the business situations you like best. Ask yourself:

- How do your superpowers make you better than your peers at dealing with that kind of situation?
- What roles or organizations are more likely to have those types of situations?

For example, some people live to bring order from chaos. They might be drawn to an organization that is restructuring or implementing a new system where they can leverage their change management skills.

Others may love the feeling of productivity from doing an established process well. They might be drawn to roles with more detailed workflows where they can do a great job without the threat of constant change.

**Once you name your superpower, you will begin to notice it even more. Communicating how it drives your career is a huge predictor of success in an interview.**

## Design Your Career Compass

The power dynamic in hiring can be uneven. Candidates often feel that the employer holds all the cards and can easily lose sight of their own needs. Every employer has a standard—a framework—for evaluating their next employee. We recommend creating a framework of your own.

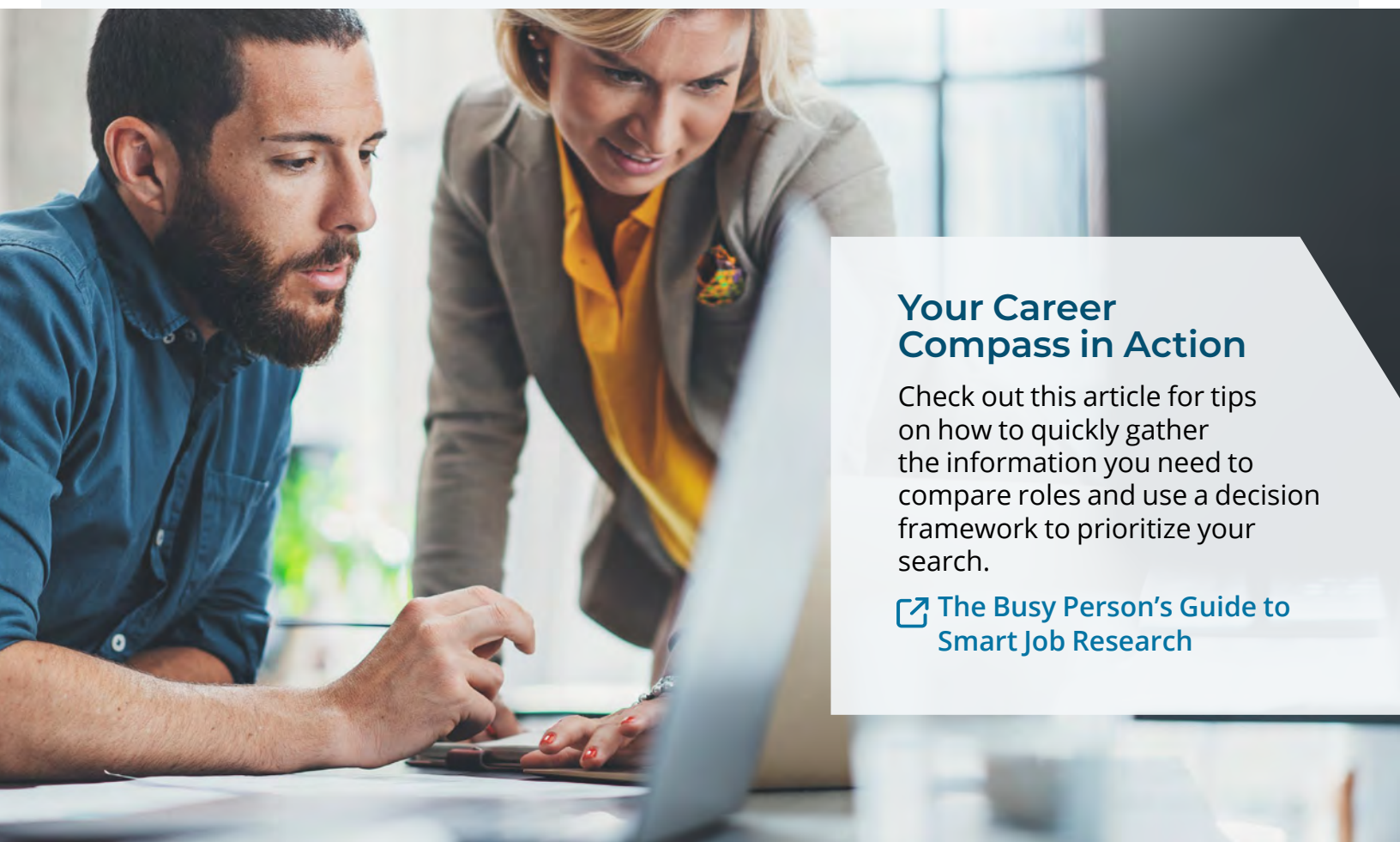
Think about what is most important to you. Here are a few ideas:

- Mission alignment
- Opportunities for career growth
- Daily commute vs. a remote or hybrid schedule
- Professional development
- Schedule flexibility

- Team engagement opportunities
- Salary
- Insurance benefits
- Retirement contributions
- Stability and the financial health of the organization

What combination of these would you need to accept an offer? Which carries more weight than others? What else is on your list?

Use this decision framework like a compass as you navigate your search. Compare each role you are interested in, including your current position. Which jobs do you want to invest more time in, and which do you want to pass by?



### Your Career Compass in Action

Check out this article for tips on how to quickly gather the information you need to compare roles and use a decision framework to prioritize your search.

[!\[\]\(870f5d5e9c0d57485634be3ecf52f3ca\_img.jpg\) The Busy Person's Guide to Smart Job Research](#)



# Engineer Your Resume for Impact

Your resume translates your career story into a compelling document that shows the context of your successes as relates to the types of positions you are applying for.

Most hiring managers and recruiters will only skim your resume for a few seconds before moving it to the top or bottom of the pile. Focus on content while keeping the format simple, making your competitive advantage crystal clear. Every statement should be factual, verifiable, and relevant.

## The Intro: Your Executive Summary

The summary can be the most powerful section of your resume if you stick to the facts. A good executive summary is provable and highlights the superpowers you want to apply to your next job.

Be brief and focused, with three sentences at most. Decision makers reading your resume are asking, “Can this person handle the challenges in this job?” Here’s example of an excellent executive summary. It’s short and specific with verifiable facts:

*“15 years of experience negotiating complex multimillion-dollar international trade deals. Proven ability to open new markets (Asia and Europe) while maintaining long-term relationships with Fortune 500 organizations.”*

## The Body: Your Skills in Action

The body of your resume should support the story presented in your executive summary. For each prior role, include a very brief description of the company, including industry, size, and primary work. Then it’s time to make your accomplishments stand out.

- Lead with the most relevant achievements that demonstrate the problems you like to solve.



- Provide details about the scope and scale of your work. If you increased revenue or drove engagement, how much over what time for what size initiative? (Use numbers judiciously—don’t inflate your resume with empty statistics.)
- Focus on the tangible impacts you made in your roles. Highlight

measurable growth and specific outcomes. How did your work benefit the organization, team, or larger community? What skills did you use to make that impact?

- Emphasize leadership. Did you mentor someone or lead a project, team, or department? Did you propose innovative ideas? Did you start a new initiative or reinvigorate an existing one? How did you evolve the job over time?
- Use language that matches the organization or functional area you're targeting, avoiding jargon or unfamiliar acronyms. Read ten job ads from other organizations in that field or functional area to compare.

## Get a Fresh Set of Eyes On It

Once your resume is written, ask a friend to scan it and share their key takeaways. At a glance, can they see the story you are trying to convey?

You can also use generative AI to analyze your resume relative to the job description. Upload both to an AI platform (like Claude, ChatGPT, or Gemini) and prompt it to:


- Identify areas where your skills and experience don't align with the job posting.
- Identify or suggest keywords that are relevant to your skills and the role.
- Provide suggestions to connect your past achievements to the performance expectations of the new role.
- Provide suggestions to match your language more closely to the job posting. For example, nonprofits often talk about growth in terms of mission impact, while for-profit companies often talk about revenue.

If you choose to use any AI-generated text, make sure it accurately reflects your skills and experience and sounds like you. A fantastic AI-assisted resume is meaningless if you can't authentically talk about and demonstrate everything during interviews.



### More Resume Tips From the Pros

Take a deeper dive into crafting a resume that catches the eye of busy hiring managers and recruiters.

 [How To Take Your Resume From Good to Great](#)

## Hook Them With Your Cover Letter

If the hiring organization requires a cover letter (most clients we work with do not), use it as an opportunity to introduce your career narrative. Keep it concise and business focused.

Here is a simple formula:

- Write no more than two sentences paraphrased from the job posting demonstrating that you understand the organization's desired results. Incorporate relevant information you have gathered from your research.
- Write a few sentences explaining why you're drawn to this type of work (hint: superpower).
- Close with a phrase like, "I look forward to discussing this opportunity with you."

A few things to avoid:

- Incorporating keywords from the job description that don't accurately reflect your experience and skills.

Using keywords is a good strategy, but they must be authentic.

- Making grand claims and promises about your skills or what you will do. Don't compare yourself to other candidates in any way.
- Sharing a famous quote or differentiating yourself with anything other than your ability to drive business results.

Once you're ready to apply, follow the submission instructions exactly. Provide all of the required materials and stop there. If they don't ask for a cover letter and you submit one, it's possible that no one will read it. If they have an optional documents section, carefully select only what adds value to your application.

A man with dark skin, glasses, and a green sweater is looking down at a white document he is holding. He is in an office setting with a window in the background.

### Be Your Own Career Coach

After you submit, pay attention to what happens next. If you are applying for jobs you are qualified for and aren't hearing back, that's valuable feedback that you need to revisit your resume. Learn other strategies to overcome roadblocks here.

[!\[\]\(4fe57c3593bf1b21d272ae7ac8dfaf77\_img.jpg\) How To Overcome Roadblocks in Your Job Search](#)



## Make Yourself Visible

Once you've applied, leverage your network to bring more attention to your application. Search LinkedIn to find a connection who works at the organization and reach out.

Most recruiters rely on LinkedIn as a fast way to search for candidates. Help them find you by updating your profile. Make your superpower visible with plenty of facts and context about your accomplishments and experiences. Provide vivid details about your story in the "about me" section. LinkedIn is a great platform to share the why behind what you do.



**When you answer a job ad, you will be one of 300 resumes. But when someone recruits you, you might only be one of 10 or 20. It's worth optimizing your profile to increase your visibility.**

## Level Up Your Interview Strategy

Interviews aren't everyday conversations. They are your chance to show the hiring manager that your superpowers are the solution to their problems. And that means you need to spend time to prepare.

### Setting the Stage for Success

Imagine you're about to brief the board of directors. You have limited time, a long list of topics to cover, and everyone's eager to end on schedule. That's your interview in a nutshell. Be bright and be brief. Before you begin:

- Dive deep into what the organization wants to achieve with this role.
- Filter out irrelevant issues.

- Focus on demonstrating that you possess the 4-5 key competencies that will help them reach their goals.
- Prepare stories that bring those competencies to life and point to your ability to deliver results.

### Handling the Unexpected

Here's a secret: not all interviewers are created equal. Some might rush in unprepared, glancing at your resume for the first time. Others might struggle to ask the right questions.

Many employers understand the big picture of what they are trying to achieve but not all the details involved with getting it done.

Don't let this throw you off your game. Be flexible and focus on communicating your value, no matter the circumstances. Prepare to:

- Guide the conversation if needed.
- Provide context for your achievements, even if not directly asked.
- Adapt your style to different types of interviewers.

### Master the Art of the Answer

Interviewers may be skeptical if you tell them about your skills—those are just your opinions. Instead, show your skills through good business stories using the CAR (Context, Action, Result) method.

Review the [50 most common behavioral interview questions](#) and choose those most relevant to the job. Develop CAR responses full of details about how your superpowers helped solve a business problem.


**Decision makers will also be listening for soft skills in your answers. Show your ability to work with a team and to include the perspectives of others, or other soft skills relevant to the role.**

In about 2-3 minutes, your answers should communicate everything the interviewer needs to understand your achievement and the scale of the initiative or project. When you are done, pause. Allow the interviewer to ask follow-up questions or move on to the next topic.

A good CAR answer will help the interviewer draw their own conclusions about you. You can prove you have the right skills for the job without ever saying those words aloud.

### Context. Action. Results.

The CAR/STAR method is the best communication strategy for an interview because it keeps your answers brief and focused and reduces the natural tendency to meander when responding.

 [Why CAR/STAR Interview Answers Are So Effective](#)



Be ready for some of the standard follow-up questions:

- Did you do that by yourself or with a team? What was your role?
- What challenges did you overcome? What resources did you use?
- What was complex or frustrating about it?
- What would you do differently next time?

And make sure that your references can back everything up. When a reference later verifies your story, you're on your way to a job offer.

## Answering the Hard Questions

If, like most professionals, you've had a "nontraditional" career change at some point, this may raise questions about your work history. Here's how to handle that (with examples).

 [How To Explain Resume Gaps and Career Changes](#)

## Making the Most of Your Q&A Time

Asking good questions during an interview can make a big difference in how the recruiter or hiring manager sees you. The more authentic you are, the more productive the discussion will be for everyone involved.

 [Elevate Your Interview Game: How To Ask Better Questions](#)

## Ask Questions That Count

Ask about things you genuinely care about and include context that shows you know the role, organization, and industry or field. If you want to prove you are strategic, ask a strategic question. If you want to prove you are process-oriented, ask a process question.

Ensuring the role aligns with your goals and values is equally important. Revisit your decision framework. What else do you need to know to determine if this is a good fit for you?

The interview is an opportunity for both parties to figure out the possibility of a future working relationship. Think about what you could accomplish in this job and how that would benefit both the organization and your career.



# Key Takeaways

## Lean Into Your Superpower

- Look back on your career successes and challenges
- Ask trusted colleagues what sets you apart
- Identify how your unique strengths solve business problems

## Design Your Career Compass

- List what truly matters to you in a role
- Use these criteria to evaluate opportunities and prioritize your search

## Polish Your Professional Profile

- Tailor your resume for the types of roles you want
- Include a fact-filled executive summary and strategic details about your accomplishments
- Customize your cover letter to introduce your story
- Update your LinkedIn profile and network to increase your visibility

## Ace Your Interviews

- Do your homework on the organization and role
- Prepare CAR (Context, Action, Result) answers that showcase your expertise
- Be ready to adapt to different interviewer styles and steer the conversation toward your ability to drive business results
- Ask questions that both highlight your skills and help you determine if the role is right for you

**Embrace those rare skills you possess and how they meet specific business needs. When you find an organization that needs what you can offer, you'll face less competition and find the work more rewarding.**

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