

Summer 1990

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Recommended Citation

Killinger, Lisa (1990) "New Opportunities, New Directions," *Woman C.P.A.*: Vol. 52 : Iss. 3 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/wcpa/vol52/iss3/8>

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New Opportunities, New Directions

By Lisa Killinger, CPA

When it comes to the professional accounting, finance and banking fields, women have indeed "come a long way". I can vividly remember my first day at a large national accounting firm many years ago where we all wore uniforms of blue suits, white shirts and red ties - without regard to gender.

Just as fashion trends in business have changed, opportunities for women have also changed considerably. Most companies have gone beyond the chauvinistic tokenism of having a woman on their management team to truly giving equal opportunity. And with these opportunities come options as well.

While "networking" may be all the rage, the hard facts are that most positions are still filled through two major methods: the classified advertisement in a newspaper and the employment firm.

For women, the use of employment firms as a path to management is becoming a significantly more viable option than in the past. There are several reasons for this:

- While the "old boy" network may work for men, the number of women actually in top management is still sparse. Therefore, the front door is still the most common way into a company for women.
- The personnel and human resources fields have become fertile ground for women to advance through a company. At the same time, many women are involved with employment firms. There is a great deal of networking through professional associations at this level.
- The truth is there is a shortage of qualified management personnel in many areas of the country. Companies who believe their greatest asset is their people have become more open to using employment firms to obtain the



ON THE WAY UP!

best available personnel.

For the woman looking to move into management, the advantage of using an employment firm is a "no lose" proposition. For professional-level managers, virtually all companies pay the fee. In addition, the woman is able to be completely honest about her professional goals and objectives with the employment firm and doesn't have to waste valuable time interviewing for jobs that won't meet her requirements.

There are basically three categories of employment firms: outplacement, career counselors and recruiters.

Outplacement firms are typically hired by a company to assist company employees during layoffs. These firms make an ideal way for the company to soothe its corporate conscience about the layoffs and can provide some viable help. For example, when a company in the same field learns of the layoffs through an outplacement firm, it can pick from the "cream of the crop".

However, most outplacement firms provide more emotional support than real job leads. They will help you develop a resume, practice interviewing, learn to negotiate salaries and how to make "cold calls" seeking jobs. The counselors at these firms are more often psychologists rather than professionals in your field. They don't usually actively solicit job leads from companies and often do not have a significant understanding of the skills required for managers.

Similar companies are career consultants, or marketing consultants. On a more personal level, they provide the same services an outplacement firm offers - except you pay the fee instead of the company. They may also offer batteries of psychological, career and intelligence testing.

Fees can start at \$1,000 and run upwards. As with



outplacement firms, it is understood and agreed upon that the actual job hunting is up to you.

This leaves the most common type of employment firm, the recruiter, also referred to as search-and-placement firms and "headhunters". These firms have a vested interest in seeing you get a new position. They only earn their fee when you do. In terms of legality, these type of firms can be compared to the real-estate broker. The broker represents the one who is paying the fee and has a legal fiduciary relationship.

The recruiter also wants to have a productive and continuing relationship with client companies. They must be successful placing employees who are assets. A recruiter is going to do all that is possible to create a viable match. While this sometimes can be a problem when they find a position you are ideal for, but don't want, you can be in control of all your options. Both the company and you have been prescreened before any interviews occur. Chances are you will be going on more productive interviews.

Another benefit of working with a recruiter is that you can pick a specialist. My company, Romac & Associates, for example, specializes in accounting, banking, finance and data processing.

It's more likely that the specialist agency will know more about the position than the personnel department and be able to determine if a match will work. This eliminates the time spent being interviewed by a personnel person only to find out on the second interview that there has been a complete mismatch.

Recruiters also save the candidate a lot of valuable time in arranging interviews. In virtually any situation, this can be a tension-filled experience if you are using a company telephone - which you often must because their office hours are the same as yours.

Setting up an interview often takes from three to six phone calls. Multiply that by ten possible positions, and you can have a nightmare on your hands. It can inevitably reflect poorly on your current job performance and lead to suspicion, especially if you aren't on the phone that often. In addition, today's computerized

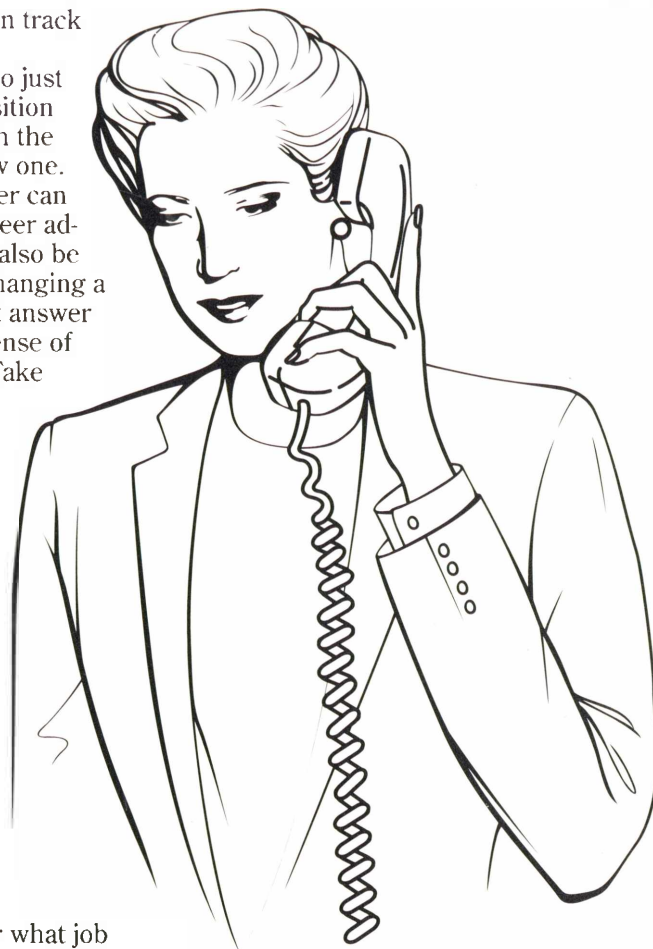
corporate telephones can track all your phone calls.

Many women prefer to just stay in their present position instead of going through the hassles of seeking a new one.

While using a recruiter can be a smart move for career advancement, you should also be prepared to advance. Changing a job may not be the right answer until you have a clear sense of where you want to be. Take an honest appraisal of your goals in terms of where you want to be one, three, five and ten years from now.

All too often, women don't plan careers properly. If you want to take time out for child rearing, that's fine. But don't make a career plan that includes advancing into management at the time you get pregnant. It will only cause stress and confusion.

Remember, no matter what job you have, you make the ultimate decision.



Lisa Killinger joined Romac & Associates, Atlanta, Georgia following four years of experience with Peat, Marwick, Main & Co. Her positions in public accounting included two years in audit where she specialized in financial institutions and service industries. She also had two years in tax planning and preparation with energy and related industries.

Lisa is a CPA and received her B.S. in accounting from the University of West Florida in 1982. She was elected to "Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities", and is now active in such associations as the Georgia Society of CPAs, The United Way, The Atlanta Women's Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Accountants.

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