

JOB SEARCH WITH A DEAD ALBATROSS HANGING FROM YOUR NECK.

You served your company proudly. Being a leader should have been a bright sash of honor. With that sash of honor draped across your chest, you should easily find an even better job elsewhere.

That's not going to happen.....

Each year brings a new crop of Albatross companies. Think of Countrywide, Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, Polaroid Corporation, etc. The list is constantly renewed.

And each generation brings a new crop of Albatross industries like textiles, print newspapers, etc.

How to you conduct a job search while a dead Albatross hangs around your neck?

A Real Dilemma

Here is how recruiters deal with the issue: avoid talking with Albatross candidates. Bringing in candidates from Albatross companies poses a risk most recruiters can easily ignore.

Your referral network will be the ones to open doors for you that you cannot open yourself. Your network must be primed to suggest that recruiters speak with you "despite" having worked for an Albatross.

No one wants to see you BECAUSE you worked for an Albatross.

If you do get to see a hiring authority, it is only natural to hope the Albatross issue doesn't come up in the interview: the topic is uncomfortable and you are angry with yourself for having stayed so long.

No News is "Bad News."

The discomfort with the topic is mutual. Hiring authorities like to avoid unpleasant discussions like the following: "After twenty years serving a discredited company, will you bring this company's 'winning ways' into our business? And if you say, 'Of course I won't,' how can I believe you?"

That is exactly what hiring authorities are thinking. If they bring up the issue, that is good news. It means they are comfortable enough with you to tell you what is on their minds. And if they fail to bring up the issue, that is a bad sign. It means they want a polite conversation. You won't be hired in polite conversations.

Polite conversation won't get you job offers. But being negative about your former employer also won't get you offers. The rationale is, "Today she is saying negative things about her former employer. What might she say about me if we part company?!!!"

Here is a format we find useful with our clients from "Albatross" companies or industries:

Ask: "What Do You Know About My Company or Industry?" This question allows you to gauge how large an albatross the other person perceives you have around your neck. If the person says, "I know very little about the company," then you can begin to frame your time with the Albatross your own way.

If the person says, "Here is what I know....." let the hiring authority go into the details about what he/she thinks is known about the Albatross Company. Don't interrupt. Don't disagree.

Here is a common scenario: the hiring authority states that the Albatross was tired, dysfunctional, inwardly focused, and responded too late and too poorly to changing business conditions. You respond with, "You are right. But our company was complex. And within my area of responsibility we did some exciting, innovative things. I'd like to talk about that with an understanding that I am interested in helping you be the best company you can be. I have no intentions of bringing in Albatross ways of doing business to your company. I know how to unlearn!"

Don't Insult and Don't Defend Your Former Employer.

Your mission is not to change other people's views about your Albatross. Your mission is to differentiate yourself from the public perception of that company or industry. Consider:

"There is no question that there was a great deal of short-sighted thinking going on at the top of the organization. The operation I worked in, however, was different from the rest of the company. I'd like to talk about what we accomplished."

The Best Defense Is.....

You will be hired despite coming from an Albatross industry or company. You will not be hired because of it.

Only by confronting the issue can you hope to control it.

You want references to describe your ability to unlearn old ways as well as grasp new technology/ideas.

And you want to remember that today's Albatross can be tomorrow's darling: think of General Motors!

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