

HOW TO BREAK LOOSE FROM THE CHAINS OF YOUR EMPLOYMENT PAST

Summary: Learn how to land a higher level job after working as an administrative assistant in this article.



Question: Is it possible to be taken seriously once you've been an administrative/ executive assistant? I have an MBA, but I just can't seem to get my foot in the door of important firms. Some say I'm overqualified; some want to know why I took such a "lowly" job in the first place.

Answer: You're facing that frustrating "let me out of this box" dilemma that anyone trying to change or upgrade careers is forced to confront. You'll need a full-blown attack plan because, unfortunately, people love to stereotype. First, get some experience in the function you're targeting. For example, if it's market research you're interested in, approach a company for a paid internship or seek a temporary assignment through a contract house. Go back to your MBA faculty for suggestions and leads.

Next, revise your resume to focus more on skills and knowledge that relate directly to your target position. Sticking with market research as an example, you might include specific coursework and cite a major paper you wrote on a hot topic that employers are wrestling with (e.g., using web-based technology to conduct market research). Join the professional association that fits your interest (e.g., the American Marketing Association) and get involved in one of that association's special interest groups (e.g., its Market Research Special Interest Group). Use the association as a vehicle to incorporate the lingo into your vocabulary and make contacts that can offer valuable insights and possible leads on job openings.

Have a career counselor or someone in your field critique your presentation. Positioning is key. The message you're sending must convincingly shift the focus to your new job target. Don't apologize for your executive assistant experience; instead, transfer key lessons learned from it to provide a competitive advantage in your new role. If you come across as focused and confident, the probability of an offer will be enhanced tremendously.

A final consideration: you mentioned "important firms." You may want to broaden your base of potential employers to get your foot in the door with a smaller, less prestigious organization that you can use as a training ground for the more coveted firms.