

## **RIP-OFF PREVENTION: CAREER SERVICES**

Career services is a very tricky area. If you are reading this you are probably a little down on your luck --. you lost your job one way or another or, maybe, you just really hate your current job. If you assume that no one would take advantage of you because you're broke or you're down on your luck, you have two more guesses coming. It may be a small consideration to the potential scam artist that you do not have as much money as you did in the past. However, this is MORE than offset by the fact that they like to prey on people who are in a weak position. (We regret to inform you that there is probably no weaker position in our capitalist society than being unemployed. Everything -- income, health insurance, social benefits and retirement -- is primarily tied into employment. Also, wanting to switch employers brings up similar issues.)

Our golden rule in this area would be: NOBODY CAN GET YOU A JOB -- EXCEPT YOU.

Luckily, this is a much easier rule to follow these days than in the past. With numerous jobs sites -- many of them specialized in various professions or skill areas -- you should have little trouble finding jobs for which you are qualified in your commuting area. Applying for the job may be a little trickier. You need a resume and cover letters, you may need to learn how to make attachments to emails (depends on your computer skill level). If you are a planner, you would be legitimately concerned about interviews and salary negotiations which may be shortly down the road.

While your head is spinning from your employment condition and you have to deal with a job search -- which you may not have done for decades, that's when you have to be careful of career service firms. You may be used to hiring professionals, be they doctors, lawyers, counselors or financial managers, to help you with life's challenges. Getting professional help is usually a great move but notice that all of the previously mentioned professionals are licensed by the State, have very difficult admissions criteria and have Self-Regulating Organizations that keep the members "in line." Career Services have no such professional licensing, qualification or regulation. It is true that nearly all states regulate job search services (one of the principal regulations usually is that the job search candidate cannot be charged any fee; if there is a fee the prospective employers must pay it) but these rules do not apply to "career services" that mainly offer to make you "sexier" to employers with better resumes, cover letter and, recently, a website to help with your job search. They are not job search service: they offer to take you and help you with job search services and employers. They frequently imply that they have an "in" with various employers but these claims are rarely true.

So here's our recommendation: use any legitimate job search service you wish (remember the legitimate services are free), use the on-line services (also free) but DO NOT PAY FOR "CAREER SERVICES." Use only those specific professional services you need. Writing and creative help with your resume and cover letter(s), should only cost a few hundred dollars -- at most. Similarly, if you feel you are weak with interviews, pay for that specific service -- once again, maybe a few hundred bucks. Even better yet, most schools of any repute, offer life-time job search and career advice help. Call every school you ever went to and find out what help they have. Do not be embarrassed: they get these calls all the time. Since the services are free, you may have to wait a while for the help but you know for a fact that these school counselors have no ulterior motive.