

# There is Life After the Bureau - Career Advice for Former FBI Agents

by Scott Moritz (1986-1996)

Some of you may not need any help finding your next great job — if not, you can stop reading this right now. This article is for the rest of you. I've been out of the FBI for more than 16 years, have held quite a few jobs in that time, have hired hundreds of people and interviewed many hundreds more. I have also talked with many of you about your job searches. I've edited resumes, spoken about your Bureau careers and tried to give good advice. I certainly don't have all of the answers, but hope that the following thoughts will help you better position yourself for your second career.

## **Your Resume is Your First Impression**

Of course, a resume is just a piece of paper (or an electronic file). In most cases though, it is the first impression you're likely to make. A few things you should keep in mind:

**Don't Use Government-Format Resumes** — Those government-format resumes that are used to pursue internal government roles and/or contractor jobs should not be used for a private sector position. They stand out from the clutter in a bad way — they use government jargon and are unlikely to be aligned with the position you're seeking. At the worst, someone could read into the fact that you're using such a resume as disinterest or a lack of understanding of the position.

**Emphasize Your Transferable Skills** — In many cases, meeting with a former FBI Agent is a curiosity, but most people don't have a clue what an Agent did or how that Agent's skills may be useful in a business setting. Making that clear in your resume and in subsequent interviews is your first priority. We all learned some very valuable skills in the FBI, some that are transferable and others that can cause a potential employer to question the fit. The fact that you were the principal firearms instructor, or are an expert in latent fingerprint examination, or attended several street survival classes, is unlikely to resonate with an accounting firm looking for someone to investigate financial crimes. If you

are conducting a wide search and are open to several job categories consider having several versions of your resume, each emphasizing those skills that line up with the position you are seeking. Emphasize crisis management, hostage negotiation, cyber-crime, leadership and investigative skills when seeking a corporate security role. If you are seeking a role in a Big Four accounting firm or similar large, consulting firm, take the time to understand what the organization is looking for and make sure that your resume emphasizes your skills that are aligned with the job that was advertised. Even if you spent the bulk of your career trying to keep the fact that you are an accountant or a lawyer a secret (and you know who you are!), now is the time to shout it from the rooftops. If you are in the running for a senior executive role, emphasize leadership, program management, execution and systems of measurement that you have used to demonstrate program effectiveness and drive accountability.

**Emphasize Certain Keywords** — Increasingly, employers mandate that all applicants apply online. It is a pretty humbling process. Worse, many companies use software to perform the initial screening of applicants' resumes in comparison to the job description. Using similar algorithms as search engines, the software looks for resumes that have certain keywords or phrases in common with the job descriptions. Stay away from Bureau jargon and acronyms. See if you need to tweak your resume by adding keywords from the job description to up your chances that your resume will make the first cut.

**Have Someone Who Reviews a Lot of Resumes Look at Yours** — Seek unvarnished feedback from someone who works at a senior level and reviews a lot of resumes. It is important

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to have the perspective of an employer. What do they value in a candidate and will this candidate transition well into the private sector? Some of our colleagues who were successful as Agents have stumbled in the private sector and there is a bit of a bias out there against government employees who have no recent private sector experience. Your resume should preemptively address this mindset by showcasing your skills that add value to a hiring organization. Don't assume that everyone is jumping at the chance to hire a former Agent.

### **Working Your Network**

If your whole plan is to search job boards and apply online, you could be in for a very long and humbling job search. Not that you shouldn't be looking at postings, you should. But there are several things you can do to up your odds of getting an interview by leveraging your network and your network's network.

*Keep Some Things to Yourself* — Agents tend to be pretty direct, doubly so if they happen to be from New York. You may be looking for a cushy job, 9-to-5 and no commute. That's fine – just don't say so out loud. I've interviewed and brainstormed with a lot of Agents and some couldn't understand that I was also deciding whether they would be a good addition to my organization.

Two memorable quotes from some of those exchanges over the years: "I don't want to sell anything" and "I want my commute to be under an hour." Right. To the first unfortunate utterance, most businesses are for-profit enterprises. "Selling" pays for the whole operation. An interview is the beginning of a sales process and you are the product. If you lead with "I don't want to sell anything" you're not off to a rousing start. Whether you realize it or not, selling is a big part of being an Agent. If you can convince a criminal or an agent of a foreign government to be an informant, that's arguably the hardest sales pitch in the world. And how about convincing an AUSA of the merits of your case or FBIHQ why you need buy money or a group 1? Selling is about believing in what you are doing and confidence in your own abilities. This needs to come across loud and clear in an interview. More about selling later.

*Increase Your Odds by Asking for an Introduction* — If you are applying for jobs online, do you have any contacts at that company who can put in a good word or put you touch with the hiring manager? If not, what about the people that you do know? LinkedIn is a powerful tool that can give you some visibility with the contacts of your contacts. The Society has a print and online directory of members, as do several other member organizations. Use these resources to ask for introductions and to reconnect with your former colleagues. A warm introduction is always a good way to make sure that someone seeking to fill a position gives your resume serious consideration.

*Seek the Advice of Agents Who Have Gone Before You* — Many of us have been there and are all too happy to help out. Plus, many jobs are not advertised on the Internet. Instead, they are filled by word of mouth. The Society has an

online Career Center for its members. A lot of former Agents are corporate security directors and are members of the International Security Managers Association (ISMA). ISMA has a jobs board and some of those postings only appear on the ISMA job board. Ask an ISMA member to give you a heads up if a job is posted that may be a good fit for you.

Other organizations, such as the American Society for Industrial Security (ASIS), the

## **YOUR SECOND CAREER TIPS & TOOLS FOR FINDING YOUR POST-FBI NICHE**

One of the goals of the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI is to help guide and accompany you, the members, through your post-FBI life. Our Web site — [www.socxfbi.org](http://www.socxfbi.org) — is a great place to start. It's a toolbox full of useful information, helpful forms and other unique tools for building your own niche outside the FBI.

Because most FBI Agents retire or leave the Bureau well before they are 60 years old, finding that Second Career is an important pursuit — one that ideally begins before you walk out that door.

### **ONLINE CAREER CENTER**

One of the most important tools you'll need in your search is a source for job leads. Our online Career Center is growing into one such important tool. Go to [www.socxfbi.org/networking](http://www.socxfbi.org/networking) to take a look. The jobs posted are all unique to the talents, skills and experience of former FBI Agents. Many employers who know the quality of our membership send leads weekly for posting on the Web site. It is growing quickly, and new features are planned to make it an even better resource. As a member, you may post job openings, find potential candidates, search openings and subscribe to new posting notifications.

**VISIT THE CAREER CENTER!**  
[www.socxfbi.org/networking](http://www.socxfbi.org/networking)



Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE), and the Association of Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialists (ACAMS), have job postings and membership directories that can be helpful in identifying points of contact at organizations that are hiring.

### **A Little Bit about Executive Recruiters**

There are two types of executive recruiters, retained search firms and contingency search firms. Retained search firms are retained by the employer to find candidates to fill a position. They are being paid to find candidates. Contingency firms only get paid if the candidate that they present gets hired.

In fairness to the profession, these firms are pretty good at grooming candidates and presenting them as potential hires. However, if you're not a good fit, they're not going to present your candidacy because it doesn't reflect well on them.

The fee to an executive search firm is typically one-third of one year's salary. From an employer's point of view, if there are two comparable candidates, one sourced by an external recruiter and the other identified without a recruiter, the economics are skewed in favor of the candidate who comes without a recruiter. So, why would you ever want to go through a recruiter? Here's what I think — You don't need a recruiter to introduce you to people you already know or that your friends know. Exhaust the networking and Internet research first. Part of what you should be tracking in your process is where you have contacts and warm introductions and where you don't. Recruiters that can gain entrée for you into an organization where you don't have contacts are worth it. Just understand that you are increasing your price tag when you work with a recruiter.

### **Practice Need to Know**

Be very cautious when dealing with any outside recruiter. They don't need to know where else you are interviewing; but it's OK to let them know that you're having discussions with other firms. Establish some ground rules about your candidacy and your resume, particularly when dealing with a contingency firm. Give them permission to present your resume to specific companies and make sure that they get your permission each time they send it out. Keep track of where they send it. Don't give recruiters carte blanche — they may end up presenting your candidacy to a close contact you didn't know was hiring (which theoretically should never happen if you've been networking) and then you will find yourself in the middle of an uncomfortable tug-of-war over you and a placement fee. Lastly, don't share anything with a recruiter that you wouldn't share with an informant. Information and industry gossip are their stock and trade, and they use it to demonstrate to clients how plugged in they are. Be wary about what you share with them about your personal or professional life.

### **Preparing for the Interview**

Your contacts, a thoughtfully conceived resume, warm introductions and your FBI pedigree will open a lot of doors and you'll find it relatively easy to get interviews. However, preparation is the number one difference between interviews that go well and those that don't. Do not wing it! Think of it as preparing for a subject interview in a criminal case. By the time you get to that stage of the investigation, you should know everything there is to know about the individual you are meeting with, their position in the company, the company itself, and their personal interests. Like a subject interview, you should have a game plan going in. What do you hope to accomplish? Getting the job is probably not the objective of the first interview. Most jobs require a series of interviews. And don't be afraid to say things like, "This is really my dream job" (if that's the case), "How do I compare to the other candidates you've seen?" and "When do you plan on making a decision?"

### **Picture Yourself Working at the Organization**

A strong candidate has spent a fair amount of time envisioning what it would be like to work in the organization, the specific role that they would be playing, the skills they would use and the value they would create. Some may not understand that last part — Each employee of a commercial enterprise either creates value and contributes to the primary mission of the organization, which is to make money, or adds to the operating costs of the organization and therefore the employee's salary, benefits, office, computer and other costs must be justified in other ways.

The business case to hire you is either a combination of the value of the time you can commit to client matters and the value of new clients that the company has because of you, or the cost savings to the company that can be attributable to you. Whether you are on the revenue side or the overhead side of the equation, you need to be able to pay for yourself in order for your role to be sustainable. If you are interviewing for a client service position, it is about billable hours and revenue origination. If you are interviewing for a corporate security, information security, internal audit or compliance role, it may not be your job to justify your existence but it is probably your boss's job, so it is something to keep in mind.

Once you understand the business justification that has to be made to fill your role and to renew it periodically, you will be in a better position to picture yourself in that role. It's very important that you demonstrate that you've taken the time to do this. Here's where your research comes in. If the industry in which the company operates is subject to regulatory scrutiny (i.e. financial services, life sciences or health care) or has been touched by a recent scandal, this is an opportunity to showcase your knowledge of regulatory oversight and investigative and legal processes. But don't beat them over

the head with it. Instead, in a very even-handed way, express an understanding of the role that you would be playing as it fits into the big picture of the industry, regulatory framework and any recent scandal that may be driving the need to hire you in the first place. A well-placed example of a case you have worked that is relevant will help illustrate what a strong candidate you are. But be careful! Don't use all of your time telling war stories – keep it concise and save the more “colorful” details until after you have the job. If you don't have a personal example, then demonstrate your command of the issues from what you've learned doing your research. And don't be afraid to ask questions about what the company is currently doing and the direction they are headed. As former Agents, we are very good at asking questions and getting to the heart of the issue, so don't hold back when the opportunity presents itself.

### **It's About the “Benjamins!”**

Unseemly though it may be, jobs in the private sector either have a revenue-generating component or are a part of a business unit that has to justify its continued operation on an annual basis. I have been in consulting for more than 16 years and have been pretty successful because I consistently have been able to generate significant revenues.

When I first left the Bureau, I didn't have a clue about a lot of things but I had some good mentors who had left law enforcement for the private sector years earlier. They gave me some really good advice. One early conversation about revenue generation sticks in my head. I had apparently recoiled at the idea that people at the level for which I was being hired were expected to generate \$1 million per year. The matter-of-fact response was, “A million dollars may seem like a lot of money, but it's not.” Some of you are probably shaking your heads in disbelief, but I can tell you that the statement is true.

Global companies and top-tier law firms are faced with investigating and litigating multi-million-dollar disputes, financial crimes and regulatory violations. It is not uncommon for the losses, legal liability or fines to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Scandals can also significantly affect the share price of publicly traded companies leading to billions of dollars in lost market capitalization. Sorting through issues of this magnitude takes time and skill, often from many different disciplines.

A 40-hour workweek is 2,080 hours per year. With two weeks off, a consultant or lawyer has at least 2,000 available hours to work for clients. Let's say you leave the FBI and join a Big Four accounting firm or one of the big consulting firms as a senior manager or director. Your hourly billing rate will be roughly \$500 an hour — 2,000 hours at \$500 an hour and you've reached a million dollars already. Although you're unlikely to have 2,000 billable hours a year (more likely

1,500), you are also not likely to be the only person working on a project and your company will have many clients. Some large matters require quite a few people working on them, sometimes for many months. So, having a lot of billable hours is important in consulting. If you have a lot of billable hours, if you know what you're doing and if your clients and colleagues like you, you'll do just fine.

Agents tend to come into consulting organizations at a fairly senior level. The higher you are on the food chain, the greater the expectations are in terms of revenue generation. Many Agents find this intimidating – I certainly did. But here's some good news, we live in a very litigious society, law enforcement, prosecutors and regulatory agencies abound and many of them are focused on large scale, high stakes issues. Much of the consulting work you will be contending for is event-driven and the events are whistleblowers, lawsuits, criminal investigations and regulatory actions. The affected companies and their law firms have to hire firms to sort through the issues. If the person at the company or their law firm that is doing the hiring is someone you know and your company has the skills and experience to do the work, you will win your share of those opportunities and will be well on your way to being a rainmaker.

### **If You Really Want to Make an Impression, Write a Business Plan**

If I haven't talked you out of consulting at this point, you are made of tough stuff. If consulting is the route you want to take, I have one more suggestion — write a business plan and be prepared to share it with prospective employers. A personal business plan should include three items: **what** you know; **who** you know; and **how** you plan on leveraging the two for the benefit of your employer.

**What** you know — This is the transferable skills I mentioned earlier, with particular emphasis on what the company you are interviewing with does or hopes to do after you're onboard. This is a set of topics, such as financial crime, counterterrorism, money laundering, background investigations or other areas that relate to the services that you and/or your company will provide to clients.

**Who** you know — These are your best contacts that may have a need for those services. They should be fairly senior personnel or people who can introduce you to those senior personnel at large companies and prominent law firms.

**How** — This is the specific steps you will take to engage your contacts: how you will let them know about your new role and about the company and what it does; and how you will determine which of your contacts have current or recurring needs for the company's services, with the aim of meeting with you and one or two of your new colleagues. These specific steps should include at a minimum, the following:

Prepare a company resume (different style than the one you used to get the job)

Draft an announcement

Organize a mailing list of your contacts

Gather brochures of the firm's service offerings

Send a snail mail and e-mail to your contacts

Make follow-up phone calls to your strongest contacts in an effort to get in-person meetings

Track all of your activity in the firm's customer relationship management (CRM) system

Work with an in-house marketing team to identify, attend and seek speaking opportunities at key conferences and trade shows

The culmination of many interviews for consulting positions at a senior level is often a request that the candidate prepare a business plan. Many candidates don't do it, which is amazing to me. Regardless whether you are remotely interested in the job, you should do it — the plan is primarily for your benefit. It is about focus, ordering your thinking, organizing your time, developing a plan and then executing that plan. It is your personal operations order – Remember SMEAC?

**Situation** — Why you are seeking a new position?

**Mission** — What specifically are you seeking to accomplish and at what type of organization?

**Execution** — How do you plan on executing the mission and what steps are you going to take to accomplish it?

**Administrative** — How are you going to monitor, document and track your progress? If you don't have some kind of administrative process that you are following, you are apt to forget to follow up with people with whom you have had contact.

**Communication** — You are marketing yourself and the psychology of marketing and advertising suggests that it

takes multiple contacts, and sometimes it also takes different kinds of contacts, to make an impression. Don't get your nose out of joint when someone doesn't call you back or reply to your e-mail. Give it a little time and then try contacting them a different way.

So, even if no one asks you to write a business plan, you will still need a plan of attack.

### **In-House Positions are the Same, Yet Different**

Most of my frame of reference is from 16 years of consulting. However, my clients primarily have in-house roles as compliance officers, in-house counsel, internal auditors and corporate security directors. In these roles, your clients are internal stakeholders and not external. In addition, in-house personnel don't typically have to keep track of billable hours or generate revenue. But make no mistake about it, every year you or your boss will have to prepare a business case to justify the unit's existence, headcount and budget by demonstrating and quantifying the cost savings, economic loss prevented and legal liability avoided. In-house and consulting positions both have their merits but the upside earnings potential is greater in the long run in pursuing a consulting career.

### **Say "Thank You"**

Whenever someone goes out of their way for you in some way, take the time to send them a handwritten note thanking them for their time. Try to make it personal by citing some aspect of the conversation that you particularly enjoyed or that was especially helpful. Some people that you will be interviewing with are "old school" and expect you to send a thank you. They tend to make mental notes of those who don't send a note. Thank you e-mails do not have the same impact as a personal note, but they are preferable to not acknowledging that someone took time out of his or her day to spend time to talk to you about your career.

### **You'll Be Just Fine**

The Dutch scholar Erasmus said, "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king." The lesser-known Irish philosopher, retired New York Police Detective Lieutenant Brian Carroll, told me this as we were leaving a meeting. I had remarked that what we, as former law enforcement, knew from our experience was completely alien to most business people. This has played out many times in my career since. Because of this, there will always be a seat at the table for those of us who can relate our law enforcement experience and integrate what we know into a business context for the benefit of our employers and clients.

### **Pay it Forward**

Although it doesn't happen every day, sometimes I reconnect with someone that I helped in his or her career. They always remember what I did or something I said. Often, I don't remember doing anything for them but it is really gratifying to hear that what I did meant a lot to them. It's not why we help, but it does feel good to know that what we did was helpful.

A lot of what is outlined in this article entails asking help of others. Soon, you will be successful in your search and will be in a position to share what you've learned along the way. Don't forget where you came from and that you had help. Be generous with your time, give advice, make introductions and do whatever you can do to help. There are many Bureau sayings, but I'll close with a personal favorite: "We take care of our own." ✚

