
Find a Job Using Disruptive Innovation

By Hal Gregersen

Disruptive innovators ask the right questions, observe the world like anthropologists, network for novel ideas, and experiment to make things work. (For a more detailed look at these skills, see *The Innovator's DNA*).

Applying the skills disruptive innovators use to your job search can help you unearth more, and better, opportunities. Here's how:

Step 1. Start asking the right questions (and stop asking the wrong ones).

Asking questions can create patterns of activity that compound daily into solutions, for better and for worse. Instead of asking "What job can I find today?" what if you asked, "What kind of job can I *create* today?" The slight twist of one word, from *find* to *create*, might hold the key to more helpful answers.

To guide your job search, try a simple exercise we call "questionstorming." Take four minutes a day to write down nothing but questions about your job search. Doing this consistently for thirty days will take you down new paths as your questions change and your patterns of action follow. For example, an executive in his mid-thirties and in a career transition began by asking "How can I make a bucket of money?" Over time, that question changed to "What will make me happy for the long term?" Which then changed to "How do I create something for the long term?" As a result, he's moved into different kinds of job interviews, landing one with a big multinational company that otherwise would never have happened had he not changed his question.

Step 2. Start looking at the real job(s) to be done (and stop looking at the job you once did).

Several years ago Clayton Christensen (author of *The Innovator's Dilemma*) and colleagues at *Innosight* coined the phrase “jobs-to-be-done” as part of a methodology they use to build new billion dollar businesses. Put simply, when people become aware of a “job” that they need to get done, they search for a product or service to “hire” for getting the job done effectively. Disruptive innovators grasp the “jobs-to-be-done” better than anyone else because they spend hours, days, and sometimes months watching people use products and services to fully understand the jobs that people are “hiring” products and services to do. Sometimes the jobs are surprising (like Christensen discovered when watching adults frequently “hire” a milkshake to do the job of not getting bored during a long commute). Often these observations pay off with ideas for new products and services better-suited for the job that needs to be done.

The same approach can benefit you as a “job creator.” Ask yourself what jobs-to-be-done do you care most about. Which ones are you most competent at? Or, which ones are the companies your targeting in your job search willing to hire you to do?

Set aside time to systematically create richer, deeper insights about jobs-to-be-done. Spend a half day a week just watching, taking notes, and if appropriate, videotaping or photographing people using different products and services that are interesting to you (or with the products of targeted companies in your job search). As you watch, constantly ask, “what’s surprising or unexpected?” to help you discover new features, products, or services that might do the jobs even better, distinguishing you from other job candidates.

Step 3. Start networking to create a job (and stop networking to find a job).

Disruptive innovators approach networking in a unique way. They talk with people who don’t look, think, or act like them to help spark a deeper understanding of jobs-to-be-done that currently aren’t being done. They follow a “not like me” attitude when trying to get other’s perspectives to identify the critical jobs-to-be-done.

As a “job creator” you can approach networking this way too. When talking with people who are different from you, you’re more likely to spark new ways of thinking about jobs-to-be-done or other ways your skills might be deployed. Set aside a lunch or dinner once a week to visit with people who

see the world differently. Share your observations about important jobs-to-be-done and chat about how to do them better. Explore how the other person's background and experience might shape your initial ideas into something even better. After five to ten of these conversations, step back and look for trends and patterns. As with your observations of the world, look for surprises and unexpected angles that just might spur a new job creation angle.

Step 4. Start experimenting with things you've never done (and stop doing what you've always done).

A final avenue to new ideas comes from experimentation. Disruptive innovators experiment in one of three ways to get new ideas: some love to try new things, others take things apart, and still others rapidly prototype and pilot initial ideas to see if something half-baked just might work. Any of these avenues might prove fruitful in your job hunt, especially if you're trying to create a job that doesn't currently exist.

If you like to try new things, think about hobbies or activities you could engage in to develop new skills. This may not lead immediately to a new job, but it might lead to better conversations or interviews about a potential job, or produce insights about the creation of an entirely new job that leverages the newly acquired experience or skills that you've gained.

Another approach to getting new ideas for work is taking apart products, processes, or ideas to see how they work. If you're getting ready for a job interview, buy one of the company's products, take it apart, see what insights you gain about the jobs-to-be-done before you interview. We suspect that very few other job candidates will have done the same, and your insights could give you a unique hands-on perspective about the company.

The biggest experiment of all might be "piloting" a new skill. Perhaps you could volunteer, or find situations that require this new skill. Does the experience fit? Do you think you would excel using this new skill full time now that you've had a taste of it? It might surprise you as something that you actually love. Or it might lead to an insight about new job creation that you otherwise wouldn't have found.

In today's troubled economy, serendipity certainly plays a part in matching people with jobs. But you can get serendipity's strength on your side by engaging these four innovation skills regularly.

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