

Job Upward Mobility: Getting Better When You're Already Good

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ABSTRACT

You're a SAS® Programmer, or a Statistical Analyst, or a Data Scientist, or a Manager of SAS Programmers. You make a healthy six figures, or close to it. Perhaps you drive a Lexus, or other luxury car. You're reasonably happy in your career. Still, sometimes you can't help feeling a little stuck. You're curious about exploring opportunities, but you want to do it inconspicuously, and you don't want to jeopardize your current position. We will talk about the SAS job market. We will explore networking channels that work. Can using Social Media boost your career? Is it appropriate? Let's discuss. Some people say that resumes are dead – is this true? What about the cover letter – is it necessary? We will also examine interview tips and techniques. Even if you are happy at your current company, or in your current job, this presentation is for everyone, and it is appropriate for people at all levels. It's time to stop procrastinating and, perhaps, level up.

INTRODUCTION

Today we can share information with the click of a finger. It's easier than ever before to keep in touch with colleagues, business associates, and friends. Technology and automation have forever changed the way we work, creating both opportunities and challenges. Working people stay at their jobs for shorter periods than they used to. Years ago, having worked for one company for a long time was a kind of protection against getting laid off – but that's not the case anymore. Jobs are getting outsourced overseas, and more employers are hiring contract labor instead of employees. The truth is that job security isn't what it used to be.

Even if you do all the right things, jobs are sometimes eliminated. Hard work isn't always rewarded, and your best efforts aren't always enough. It's not necessarily your fault either. Industries grow and shrink. New job descriptions emerge and old jobs go extinct. Positions get down sized, shipped overseas, or replaced by new technology. For this reason, it's always wise to keep your skills polished, and to keep a pulse on who is hiring in your field. Track trends and develop relationships with industry recruiters and/or hiring managers. Hone your networking skills. Keep your resume (and your LinkedIn profile) updated. Stay connected and let your positive, polite and professional personality shine. Keep in mind that that every interaction is an interview.

I've been an Executive Recruiter specializing in the placement of SAS Programmers since 1999. Synchrony Solutions, Inc. was founded in July 2003 as a boutique agency focused on analytics staffing. We are a niche' provider of professionals in the fields of Statistical Analysis, Information Technology, Business Intelligence, Big Data, SAS, ETL, Predictive Analytics and Modeling. Our emphasis is on fast growing, emerging companies across multiple verticals nationwide. As Founder, CEO, and a working recruiter, I have been in the trenches of the SAS staffing world for close to 20 years. My goal is to share perspectives and insights which might motivate you to drive your career to the next level.

SAS JOB MARKET TRENDS

When I attend industry conferences such as SESUG, the query that I get the most often is undoubtedly, "How's the Job Market?" I can't see into the future, of course, but I will share my thoughts and opinions.

SAS remains a highly sought after skill set. Data Scientists, SAS Programmers, and Statistical Analysts are still in high demand. Companies are utilizing predictive analytics more than ever before. According to a large 2016 study from MONEY magazine and Payscale.com, SAS Analytics are among the most valuable skills to have in today's job market (Renzulli 2016).

The study "analyzed 54 million employee profiles, across 350 industries, with 15,000 job titles—from entry-level workers to top execs." The result was a list of top 21 skills considered to be the most valuable by employers. SAS skills topped the list. The study attributed this to the rise of big data. "...Companies can use this information to do things like target new customers, improve service, and offer more personalized products—as long as they employ folks who understand how to organize, analyze, and apply it." Moreover, with an average pay boost of 6.1 percent, SAS was considered #1 most valuable. Similarly, data mining and data modeling were also highly valuable skills.

Top data skills and their average pay boost:

- SAS (Statistical Analysis System): +6.1%
- Data Mining/Data Warehousing: +5.1%
- Data Modeling: +5%

The job market in 2017 seems to have shifted in a way that benefits employees and job seekers. The 2009 recession was painful to the economy, but those days seem to be behind us. The unemployment rate is slowly dropping, and the pool of job seekers is shrinking. High demand candidates like Data Scientists, SAS Programmers and SAS Administrators currently have more leverage than they've had in years.

According to Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Data, "the US unemployment rate rose to 4.4 percent in June 2017 from the previous month's 16-year low of 4.3 percent and above market expectations of 4.3 percent." The number of unemployed persons was little changed at 7.0 million while the labor force participation rate edged up to 62.8 percent. The BLS also shows that there is a labor shortage for computer programmers, correctional officers, occupational therapists, registered nurses, and HR managers.

This diagram shows Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey

Series Id: LNS14000000
 Seasonally Adjusted
 Series title: (Seas) Unemployment Rate
 Labor force status: Unemployment rate
 Type of data: Percent or rate
 Age: 16 years and over

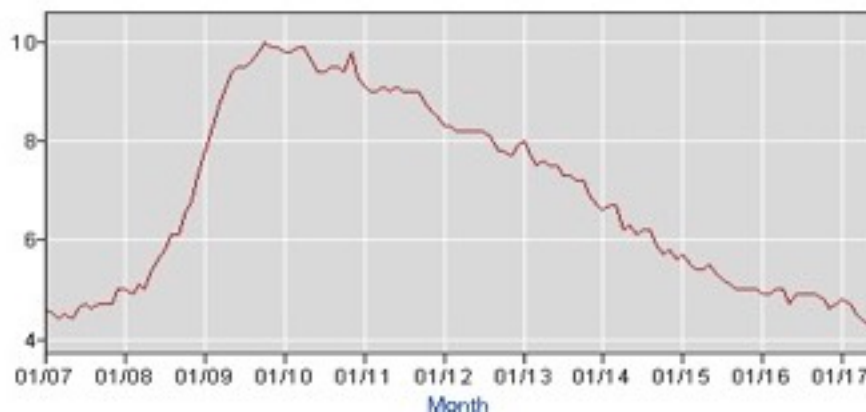


Figure 1. Diagram of Current Unemployment Rate

One of the best ways to measure the popularity or market share of software for Data Science is to count the number of job advertisements for each. Indeed.com is the biggest job site in the U.S., making its collection the best around. The graph below shows SAS, R and Python statistics from 2012 to 2017. We can see that the demand for SAS has decreased slightly, but overall things still look good.

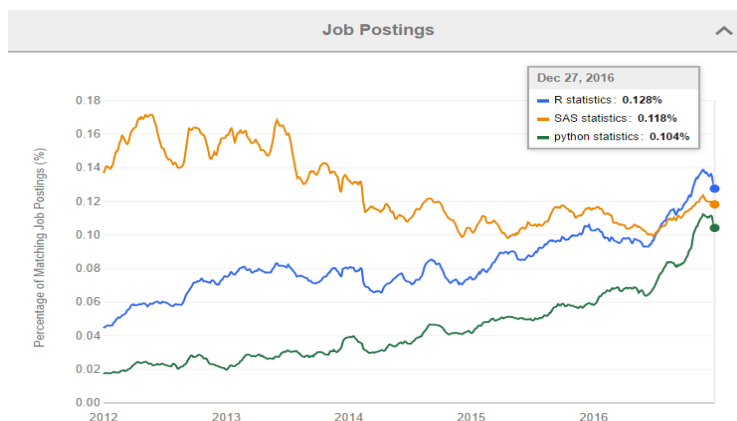


Figure 2. Job Trends in SAS, R, and Python from Indeed.com

We can see that SAS jobs have decreased slightly since 2012 as R and Python demand has increased. Indeed.com confirms that the title “Statistician” has been replaced by postings for “Data Scientist” but demand for both job titles remains high. The predictions are for Statisticians jobs to grow by 34% between 2014 and 2024, according to BLS data.

The graph below shows popular search terms in Analytics. February 2014 as compared to February 2017.

Search Terms	2/26/2017	2/17/2014	Ratio
Big Data	20,646	10,378	1.99
Data analytics	15,774	6,209	2.54
Machine learning	12,499	3,658	3.42
Statistical analysis	11,397	9,719	1.17
Data mining	9,757	7,776	1.25
Data Science	6,873	973	7.06
Quantitative analysis	4,095	3,365	1.22
Business analytics	4,043	2,867	1.41
Advanced Analytics	3,479	1,497	2.32
Data Scientist	3,272	974	3.36
Statistical software	2,835	2,102	1.35
Predictive analytics	2,411	1,497	1.61
Artificial intelligence	2,404	794	3.03
Predictive modeling	2,264	1,804	1.25
Statistical modeling	2,040	1,462	1.40
Quantitative research	1,837	1,380	1.33
Research analyst	1,756	1,722	1.02
Statistical tools	1,414	1,121	1.26
Statistician	904	1,711	0.53
Statistical packages	784	559	1.40
Survey research	440	559	0.79
Quantitative modeling	352	322	1.09
Statistical research	208	174	1.20
Statistical computing	153	108	1.42
Research computing	133	97	1.37
Statistical analyst	125	141	0.89
Data miner	34	19	1.79

Figure 3. Number of jobs on February 26, 2017 according to Indeed.com

The table above was sorted by the number of jobs found on Indeed.com on February 26, 2017. Each column only displays counts taken on a single day, but the large size of Indeed.com’s database of jobs keeps its counts stable. The correlation between the logs of the two counts is quite strong, $r=.95$, $p=4.7e-14$. (Muenchen 2017)

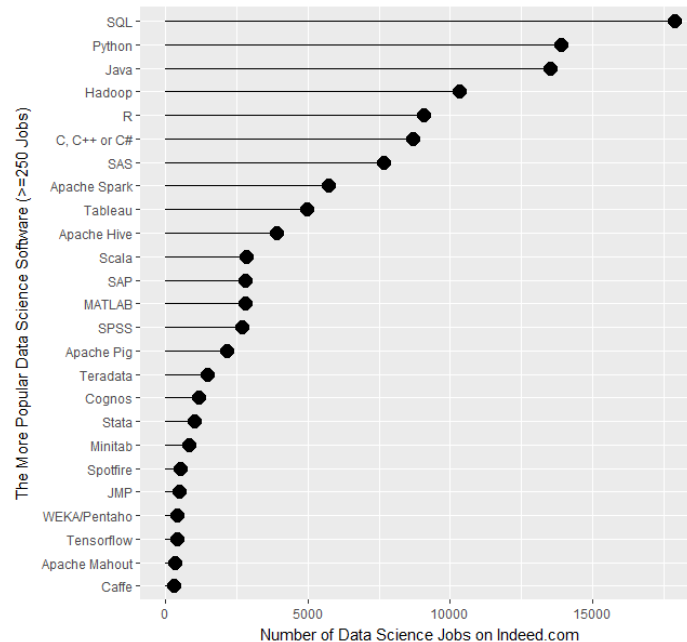


Figure 4. Most popular Data Science software, according to Indeed.com

The graph above displays the most popular Data Science software, according to Indeed.com. SQL is in the lead with nearly 18,000 jobs, followed by Python and Java in the 13,000's. Hadoop comes next with just over 10,000 jobs, then R, the C variants, and SAS.

Having an “in-demand” skill set does not automatically guarantee that recruiters and hiring managers will be banging down your door and begging you to work for them (although this does sometimes happen, which is nice). One of the best ways to ensure continued job upward mobility is through networking.

NETWORKING CHANNELS THAT WORK

Networking is the art of building alliances. It's something we are all familiar with, whether it's meeting someone new, connecting with old friends, introducing ourselves to strangers or developing professional relationships. Nevertheless, mention the word *networking* and it is often met with groans and protest. South East SAS User Group (SESUG) is an excellent place to practice your skills.

It is crucial to go into a mixer or networking event with the right mentality. I like to think of it as a chance to make new friends. Take a moment to scope out the scene. Then, if possible, warm up your networking skills by finding someone you already know. If you don't know anyone, don't fret! Most people at an event are in the same situation, and they don't know many people. They welcome ice breakers. This is your opportunity to step outside of your comfort zone.

When in doubt, just try the basics: ask what someone does or where they work, inquire why he or she is at the event, or even just reach out your hand and say, “hi.” Most people are receptive and will warmly greet you and/or welcome you into their circle. Your opening line isn't particularly important, it's more about what you can do after that.

An easy conversation starter is to discuss the setting or the event. Smile, relax, and be yourself. Be genuine. At SESUG you can say something like: “Did you enjoy the opening session?” “Is this your first time attending the conference?” “I saw your presentation this morning and I was hoping that you could elaborate on...”

I also like the reliable: “How's your day going?” This works in almost any situation. It's simple, classic, and open ended.

Every person in the room has at least a couple things in common: The event you're attending, the place it's being held at, and the food or drink you're consuming. So, strike up conversation about what's going on around you. Try something like: “I can't

stop eating these tacos. Have you tried them?" Or "What a beautiful venue. Have you been here before?"

It is also a good idea to arrive to the event early, or at least on time. This way you have the advantage of being able to start a conversation, rather than awkwardly joining one already in progress. Plus, this is a built-in conversation starter: "So are you chronically on time, like me?"

Another great approach is to look toward the outskirts of the room and find someone who looks a little lonely. Maybe that person sitting by themselves at the table doesn't know anyone and is hoping that someone will come talk. Be that person, and try one of these lines. "These networking events can be so crazy. Mind if I join you over here?" Or "I'm trying to make myself meet new people here instead of just talking to the usual suspects. Do you mind me saying hello and introducing myself?"

During your conversations look for ways to help other people. Perhaps you can provide a valuable contact, or the title of a great reference book, or even a recommendation for a great restaurant. When the conversation turns to you, briefly articulate what you are looking for and how others may help you.

In other words, Have an "elevator pitch." Describe what you are in 60 seconds or less. (Here's mine: I am a niche provider of SAS Programmers and Statisticians. Do you anticipate having any hiring needs in the next 6-12 months?). Don't forget to bring business cards and a pen. Or take out your phone and take a picture of their name badge so that you can connect on LinkedIn later.

On the other hand, don't worry too much about making your elevator pitch while networking. Use this time to make authentic connections, not sales. I've made genuine friendships at this SESUG. Contacts that I've made at through this and other SAS conferences have become lifelong friends.

Once you make some great new contacts, don't forget to follow up. Most people forget to reach out to contacts they've made at the event. Try to follow up with a brief e-mail or connection request while it is still fresh in your mind. This increased the chances that you will stay in contact after the event is over. One great way to keep in touch is through social media – especially LinkedIn.

CAN USING SOCIAL MEDIA BOOST YOUR CAREER? IS IT APPROPRIATE?

By this time, we are all familiar with social media. I've heard it said that social media is the biggest shift since the industrial revolution. The Industrial Revolution changed the face of manufacturing and transportation. Currently, the social media revolution is changing the methods through which companies can communicate with consumers. Some statistics, as of August 2017:

- Blog accounts - Over 357.7 million
- Facebook – Over 2.01 billion active monthly users
- YouTube – Almost 1.5 billion users (1,325,000,000)
 - 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute
 - Number of videos viewed on YouTube per day – 4,950,000,000
- Wikipedia – 5,451,777 articles in English Wikipedia
 - Number of articles increasing by over 20,000 per month
 - Studies show that it's more accurate than Encyclopedia Britannica
- LinkedIn – Over 500 million users
 - More than 200 Countries represented
 - More than 10 million active job posts
 - Data on more than 9 million companies
 - Over 80% of companies use LinkedIn as a primary tool to find employees

The fact is that people – your colleagues, employers, friends and network – use social media. It's where they are. Thus, social media, used correctly, is invaluable for job upward mobility. As you can imagine, resumes come across my desk every day. One of the first things that I will do when I get a resume is to check out your social media profile. My preferred site is LinkedIn. LinkedIn is more than just an online catalogue of former employers and responsibilities. It's a tool that can have a significant

positive impact on your life, especially in the business world.

Reasons to use LinkedIn:

- Your LinkedIn profile is public, so it is viewed 100 times more than your resume.
- 9 out of 10 clients or prospective employers will check your profile on LinkedIn.
- Often jobs are not posted, but recruiters can find you on LinkedIn.
- Companies regularly use LinkedIn to find passive candidates.

Whatever your age, profession, or employment status, you are almost certain to benefit from learning to use LinkedIn. Use it to search for a new job, network with other professionals in your industry, establish an online presence, or learn about prospective employers.

When I look at a profile I'm checking to see: Do we have any mutual connections? Do you have a picture? Do we belong to any of the same groups? Have you shared any interesting content? Do we have any shared interests or hobbies? I'm also checking to see if information on your resume matches up to your on-line profile. The more complete your LinkedIn profile, the more impressed I am, and the more likely I am to reach out and interact with you to tell you about jobs in the hidden job market. According to LinkedIn data, users with complete profiles are 40 times more likely to be seen by other members.

LinkedIn Tips:

- Complete your full profile, including past jobs, education, even hobbies and interests.
- Use a current, professional photo. Preferably one where you are smiling and wearing business attire. You are 14 times more likely to be viewed if you have a photo, according to LinkedIn data.
- Increase your visibility by adding connections.
- Improve your approachability by joining groups and participating in discussions.
- Get and give recommendations.
- Add a custom headline.
- Create a custom LinkedIn URL
- Add a summary

LinkedIn is key for getting discovered by the hidden job market. The hidden job market is a term used to describe jobs that aren't posted online or advertised. Most jobs getting filled these days aren't even marketed. Many employers will choose alternatives such as working with a recruiting firm, or incentivizing employees to provide referrals, rather than deal with the headache of job postings. The irony is that while online job applications are everywhere – but they are almost universally ineffective. At least 60% of all jobs are found through networking – and many sources list far higher percentages. It is likely upwards of 80%.

SOME PEOPLE SAY THAT RESUMES ARE DEAD – IS THIS TRUE?

We have demonstrated that social media is one useful tool for job upward mobility. Does this mean that you're off the hook and no longer need a traditional resume? Unfortunately, no. *You still need to have a great resume, and you need to keep it updated.*

There are many rules to writing a resume but it all boils down to two things: It should be easy to read, and the message it conveys needs to be clear. I like a standard resume, in reverse chronological order. I prefer to receive resumes in Word Format, and I most likely won't click on the link if you're trying to redirect me to a resume website. Your resume should be something that you can attach to an e-mail and send to me.

As Rebecca Otteson says in the WUSS 2013 Paper, *Your Resume – Selling Yourself Using SAS*, “Your resume should demonstrate strengths and skills, cite meaningful performance metrics, quantify contributions to the organization, and set you apart from the competition, all while being concise and staying to the point. As a SAS user, it is likely that the skill set you would like to showcase involves programming and data analysis, so it seems perfectly natural that you should use these skills to create content for your resume. A well thought out SAS graphic or table might be the perfect selling point to catch the attention of a hiring manager.”

The top one-third of your resume is what a recruiter or hiring manager scans to determine if they will read the rest, and it's been said that they only give it 3 seconds – so make it good. Use of the word “Objective” is a thing of the past. Instead, write a great “Qualification Summary.” Tip: (This can be the same as the “Summary”) section of your LinkedIn profile). Use this space to highlight achievements, attributes, and technical skills.

Resume Writing Tips at a glance:

- Include your full name, address (city and state), e-mail, and phone number
- Use the correct format – reverse chronological
- List quantifiable accomplishments
- Liberal use of Key Words – find key words on the job description you are applying for, and distribute them throughout
- Use targeted Job Titles – Use the same Titles as the job description you are applying for, if possible
- Use bullet points
- Be honest
- List your technical qualifications in a ‘Qualifications Summary’ near the top
- Include whether you are a US Citizen or require sponsorship
- *Make sure there is no typos or grammatical errors* - very important and more common than you would expect
- Do Not call your resume file "Resume.doc" or anything else except something including your name.

You would be surprised how many resume's I receive that are incomplete. If your resume doesn't have a First Name AND Last Name, for example, I won't read any further. I understand if you don't want to include your street address for privacy purposes, but I need to at least know City and State.

If you have a long work history, include only information from the last 10-15 years of your career. Unless you have a particularly notable achievement from decades ago, that experience is no longer relevant and only makes your resume longer than it needs to be.

Keywords from the job description will also catch my eye. I might be scanning for “SAS Visual Analytics” for example, or “SAS DI Studio.” Tailor your resume to each job listing to make your skills and qualifications more relevant to the position. When editing your resume, try to use the same terminology the company uses, and in the same order the company uses it in the job listing.

According to TheLadders, Recruiters and hiring managers primarily look for six key pieces of information in the following order: name, current title and company, previous title and company, start and end date of previous position, start date of current position and education.

WHAT ABOUT THE COVER LETTER – IS IT NECESSARY?

So now you have a LinkedIn profile AND a resume. Do you still need a cover letter?

I like a cover letter. If we have an established relationship and we have worked together in the past then a formal cover letter

probably isn't necessary. But if we only shook hands once, and it was 5 years ago, then I do appreciate some information in the body of the e-mail that tells me why I should open the attached resume. Ideally, your cover letter should no more than two or three paragraphs. Make one or two points about why you are a match perfect for the job or company, or what you've accomplished in similar positions in the past.

I get a lot of inquiries that say things like, "I'm applying to your job posting." As an external recruiter, I work with multiple companies simultaneously, and often have many job openings at once. It is appreciated when you are specific about which position you are applying for. Express a high level of interest and knowledge about the job. The cover letter is also a great place to explain any discrepancies or gaps in employment. Also, in your signature it's nice if you include your phone number, and the best time to reach you during the day.

INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES TO GET THE JOB

The things that we have been discussing thus far - tracking job trends, networking, having a great LinkedIn profile, having a fantastic resume and cover letter – have brought you to this moment. You have made it through the initial obstacles and you're invited to go on-site for a personal interview. This is the final step before you get an offer letter.

Interview tips at a glance:

- Do your homework. Search online for resumes and profiles of people who work at the company.
- Research the company, and its competitors, before the interview.
- Dress professionally. Wear a suit, even if the company is more casual.
- Arrive on time (5-10 minutes early is on time)
- If the job is advertised, or you have a job description, analyze the required skills to figure out what you will be doing if hired.
- Have some prepared answers to common questions that tell a story about your accomplishments.
- Be aware of body language
- Show enthusiasm for the job – ask for the offer.
- Follow up with a prompt "thank you" note via e-mail

The fact is, unless you've been job-hopping every two years, your interview skills are probably out of practice.

A job interview is a sales call. It's about selling you, your experiences, skills, and talent for the role. I am frequently asked, "What is the client looking for in the interview?" and "How should I prepare?" Before your first encounter with anyone from the company, you should have read all you reasonably can about the business. Check out the on-line LinkedIn profiles of the people you are schedule to be speaking with. At this stage of the process, the prospective employer already knows that you have the required technical skills. Now they want to get to know your personality. They are trying to discern how you might handle stress, how you present yourself, and how you interact. Try to relax, smile, have positive body language, maintain good eye contact, and be yourself.

When interviewing, remember that confidence is key. The hiring manager is determining not only if you can do the job, but also if you have the personality to get along with other members of the group. It is recommended that you listen more than you talk. The 80/20 Rule states that in an interview situation, ask questions 20% of the time and listen 80% of the time. Being overly talkative during the interview can make you come across as being desperate or aggressive. On the other hand, being too quiet during the interview might give the impression that you are distant and aloof – even if you're not. Although it can be confusing, try to understand the difference between confidence and arrogance. Be humble.

Without going overboard, show that you are excited about the possibility of joining the company. Be prepared with a good answer to the question: why are you interested in this role? And why you? Also, note that first encounters and early interviews are not the time to talk about money or vacation time.

Be aware of body language. Folding your arms will make you seem closed off. Don't crack your knuckles, play with your hair, of fidget. Put your phone away and silence it. Don't lean back in your chair or get too casual. Don't invade the interviewer's space. Try to sit upright with a straight back and maintain good eye contact.

Universal turn-offs during interviews include: lack of enthusiasm, bad mouthing former employers, and generally coming across as a negative or curmudgeonly person. It is also not good to come across as a know-it-all. You should seem competent but not arrogant. I also suggest that you come prepared with some key stories. Before the interview try to think about some examples of times when you solved a problem, acted as a leader, or were the ever-sought-after team player. This will help you to nail the obvious questions and boost your confidence through any questions that you are less prepared for. The bottom line is that companies hire people they like, people they feel comfortable with, and whom they feel understand their needs.

CONCLUSION

We all dream of a better life, filled with prosperity, purpose and happiness. People get excited about work that stimulates their heart and brain. That's why it's important to get a job that means more than just a paycheck. Hopefully your career provides intellectual stimulation, confidence, credibility, contacts, new ideas, and a feeling of accomplishment. In 2017, the SAS job market remains strong, and analytics continues to be a growing industry.

Many people assume that the job hunt is a quick process. The reality is that it can be upwards of six months. The elephant in the room, of course, is that the ideal way for a successful person to entertain further possibilities is through a relationship with a professional recruiter. Recruiters often have exposure to the hidden job market, and we can help you to find jobs that you might not otherwise know about. We know hiring managers personally, and know things that go beyond a basic job description. We can brag on your behalf, and many times we can negotiate a higher salary.

Change can be scary, but it doesn't need to be paralyzing. Look at it as an opportunity for personal growth. Regardless of whether you choose to work with an industry recruiter, or go it alone, try to have fun with the process. The best thing that you can do to bring your career to the next level is to remain proactive. Attend industry conferences, network, practice your "elevator speech," have a solid on-line presence, write a great resume and have prepared answers to popular interview questions. Remember that every interaction is an interview, and always try to keep your sense of humor.

Speaking of "sense of humor," I'd like to close with a joke:

A statistician walks into just your average bar.
The bartender says, "We don't serve statisticians."
The statistician says, "Well you're just mean."

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