

HITTING YOUR CAREER GOAL...OR THE SIDE OF THE BARN[®]

BY KATHY GRAHAM



BUCKSHOT AND HITTING GOALS:

Among hunters out in the country, there’s a saying that’s very applicable to individuals trying to grow their careers today. It is: “He couldn’t hit the broad side of a barn if he tried.” The person being described is an Elmer Fudd type character from the Bugs Bunny cartoons—remember him?



Elmer Fudd was the hunter that could never catch his goal, which was bagging Bugs Bunny, his rabbit dinner. Likewise, some individuals have an equally difficult time bagging their career goal. Perhaps their difficulty is the same as Elmer’s?

One of Elmer Fudd’s problems was accuracy: he literally “couldn’t hit the broad side of a barn if he tried.” Because shotguns are less accurate than rifles, it’s highly likely that Elmer was using a

shotgun loaded with buckshot. A shotgun fires a lot of buckshot pellets all at the same time, earning it the nickname “scattergun.”

Some individuals use a scattergun approach to reaching their career goals. For instance, say that a person wants to be a portfolio manager; i.e., they make investment decisions for others’ monies that have been placed in their control. A portfolio manager works with analysts and researchers, but it is the ultimate responsibility of the portfolio manager to establish an investment strategy; pick out the right mixture of stocks, bonds, and other assets; and then allocate each of those assets in the correct amount to meet the goals of the person or company who entrusted him with his monies. That person’s career goal would be the bullseye on the target on the broad side of the barn above.

So if a person knows their target so well that they can see it as a bullseye, why do so many land up not even hitting the broad side of the barn? What can be done to improve their accuracy? This article provides you with six ways to increase your accuracy so that you achieve your career goal (be it a new job, a higher level position in your current company, or new business if you’re an entrepreneur) instead of spending all your time chasing an elusive “wascally wabbit.”



#1: TRADE IN YOUR SHOTGUN

Many career builders employ a shotgun approach, shooting buckshot resumes everywhere and attending all sorts of events, hoping that something will hit a target, any target. Only about 20% of a shotgun approach actually even hits the broad side of the barn, let alone the target. In good economic times, the hitting the broad side of the barn ratio goes up. In downturns and recessions—just when you need it the most—hitting the broad side of the barn fails more.

A shotgun is a good way to learn how to shoot, but if you're after a specific target, why waste your time going wherever your buckshot lands? For example, that person wanting to move up to a portfolio position spent his precious spare time—the only time he had outside of his regular job—meeting with people for a position in the credit department of a bank and a consulting firm to the pension fund industry.

Neither of those positions offer portfolio management opportunities. Yes, this portfolio manager tale is a true story, one that career strategists hear all the time—it goes like this: “Hi, I spent my week meeting with X position people and Y position people. Yes, I know that I'm only interested in Z because that's my career goal, but you never know what you might learn so I accepted their invitations.” Has this person even hit the broad side of the barn?

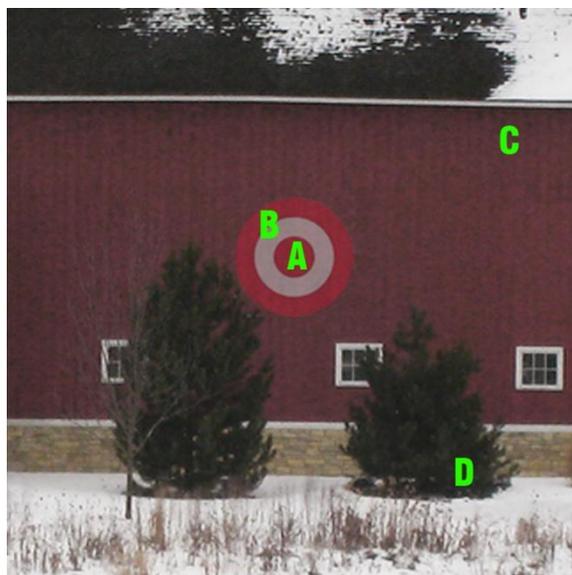
Other ways that individuals use the shotgun approach are:

- Spending all their energies on answering ads, replying to Internet job boards, and talking with recruiters.
- Attending career events where no skills are being taught or no hiring authorities are present—especially unproductive when the vast majority of the audience are also unemployed. Make it a triple whammy if most of the individuals attending don't know what your field is.

Note: there's nothing wrong or bad with working with recruiters or answering ads, etc.—it's just not as effective as developing your own aim for three reasons:

- You are not in control of what or where your resume and your future are going.
- The more unemployed there are, the less effective these means become in actually securing your bullseye job.
- These are indirect methods...and there's a direct method that is more effective once you learn its techniques. It involves you learning how to be a sharpshooter, a person known for their accurate aim, a proficient marksman who is consistently precise in hitting that bullseye.

A sharpshooter uses a rifle. A rifle has one bullet at a time that it shoots. That bullet can travel farther than buckshot and can penetrate to reach its goal better than a shotgun. It's easier to use a shotgun because your chances of bagging something are larger, but if you have a specific goal and a limited amount of time and energy to expend on reaching that goal, trade your shotgun in for a rifle.



#2: AIM YOUR RIFLE

You are a marksman using a rifle now, perfecting your skill by aiming at that target on the barn. In the photo above, there are four places that you can hit—A, the bullseye; B, the rest of the target; C, anywhere on the broad side of the barn; and D, not even hitting the broad side of the barn.



#3: FOCUS ON HITTING THE BULLSEYE

Your ideal career position is represented by the bullseye on the target. Therefore, it figures that the bullseye in the middle of the barn is where your “A” people reside. “A” people are the ones who have the ability to create an option for you. They are: in the right firm (RF); the right person (RP); at the right level (RL); and in the right department (RD).

Keep your eye on your ideal next career goal target, focusing your efforts on developing genuine relationships built upon real shared common interests and mutual rapport with the A’s, who have the power to move your career forward.

These individuals are the ones that you should give your resume to 99% of the time. If you’ve developed the relationship well, you won’t have to give your resume to an “A” person—the “A” person will ask for it.

Generally, these individuals hold a position two levels above your desired level. Be sure to correctly identify the exact title(s) of the individuals whom inhabit your “A” people status as these titles change from firm to firm, industry to industry.

Carefully script your introductory conversations with “A” people because these conversations do need to be carefully crafted to be effective.



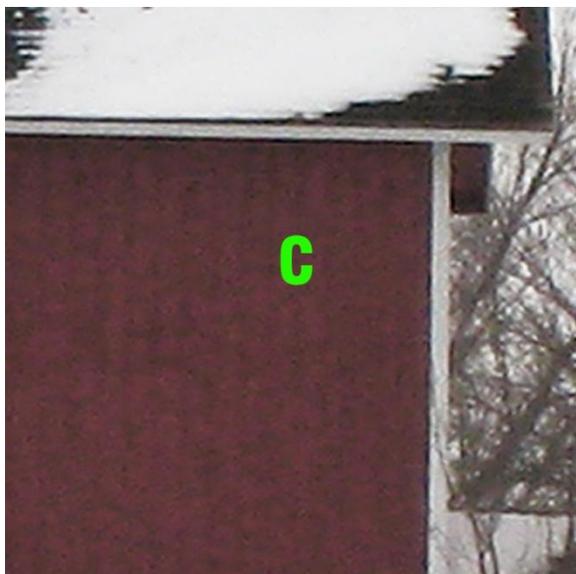
#4: THE VALUE OF THE TARGET

The target surrounding the bullseye in the middle of this barn is where your “B” people reside. They are in the right firm (RF) but one or more of the other “right” descriptions is off, i.e., not applicable to the description of this person.

For example, perhaps the person is in the wrong department or not at the right level to create a position for you in the area you’re most interested in. “B” people are usually knowledgeable about the firm’s dynamics, who the “A” people are, what characteristics the “A” people value and what they don’t, etc.

They are wonderful people to develop genuine relationships with, built upon real shared common interests and mutual rapport. “B” people are great to have in your network with only one caveat: try not to give them your resume 99% of the time. If you give them your resume, be prepared to: wait until they have the time and courage (they’re putting their reputation on the line by presenting you to their boss) and/or have your resume given to Human Resources (HR).

Notice how the building of a network of “A” and “B” people (the rifle approach) is much different than attending networking events (a shotgun approach), where you give and get business cards while saying your elevator speech. The shotgun approach is like speed dating with strangers. Sometimes it works, but it’s a lot of time and energy meeting a number of people whom you might have minimal in common with.



#5: THE VALUE OF THE BARN

The rest of the broad side of the barn that isn't the target or the bullseye is where the "C" people exist. They are at the wrong firm but they know either an "A" person or a "B" person.

They are wonderful people to develop genuine relationships with, built upon real shared common interests and mutual rapport. "C" people are great to have in your network with only one caveat: try not to give them your resume 99% of the time. If you give them your resume, be prepared to wait until they have the time and courage (they're putting their reputation on the line by presenting you to their contact) to introduce you.

Whereas "B" actually works at the same place that you're interested in as a potential future employee (or as a client, if you're an entrepreneur using this method to reach your career goal of growing your firm), "C" people do not work at that firm. They know that company and its "A" and "B" staff because they:

- Used to work at that firm.
- Are friends with those individuals because of some outside work relationship (perhaps they live in the same neighborhood or attend the same religious institution or association, etc.)
- Are vendors or customers of that company.
- Are a friendly competitor to that firm.
- Are related by blood or marriage to those individuals.



#6: MINIMIZE MISSING THE BARN

All the other space outside of the barn is where the "D" people exist. Their alternative name could be "The Great Black Hole" as you give them your resume and often never hear from them again. They consist of the gatekeepers, such as human resources, internet job boards, most contingency recruiters, and, to a degree, retained recruiters in a recession.

The "D" people—just like the "B" and "C" people—are great and caring folk or you wouldn't be talking with them and they wouldn't be offering to help you. Each of these "D" people have a specific function to fill, which is only peripherally related to your goal. They are not paid by you nor do they work for you. Most importantly, they don't have the power to create a position for you nor, in many cases, can they generate as much enthusiasm for getting you employed there as can the "A," "B," and "C" people who really know you.

With contingency recruiters, there's an additional consideration: they charge a fee for referring you, which is something that many companies—especially in a downturn—are loathe to pay so you get sidelined.

Because "D" people are more numerous, more easily accessible, and less fear-inducing to talk to, most career builders concentrate on this sector. End result: a lot of their time and energy gone without reaching their goal.

THE #1 WAY PEOPLE GET HIRED IS ?

For as long as anyone can remember, the number one way that people get hired is through their personal network. For as long as anyone can remember, the number one way to build a business is through established relationships. A network is an interconnected system of people. The interconnection is their relationships to each other.

The rifle approach is where you spend your time outside of work and personal life developing genuine relationships with “A,” “B,” and “C” people in the field of your ideal career. As these relationships are developed with the “A” people in those companies that you now know well and truly want to work for or do business with, you have a conversation with the “A” person regarding your ideal career goals. If done correctly, that conversation will move you closer or actually result in you achieving your ideal career goal.

Remember that individual whose next career goal was to be a portfolio manager? He decided to put his shotgun aside and took shooting lessons with an expert so that he could learn to use a rifle, just like a marksman. Here’s what occurred:

- First, he **limited his time reaching out to “D” people**. With the recruiters he liked, he discussed their fee dimensions and established in writing his control of his resume distribution. Why stay in touch with some recruiters? Because the number two way that people get hired is through recruiters. Spending some time—but not all his time like before—developing genuine win-win relationships in this area is useful.
- He also always **talks to HR professionals with the utmost respect** because he realized that they are part of the hiring process—it’s just not their job to grow his career. What he has changed is relying on HR professionals to be his only source of career growth.
- With the extra time, he **identified the companies he wanted to work for, the people that work for those firms, and the associations that service that industry**, etc.
- With this information, he **joined and became actively involved in the organizations that were of interest to him that were also places others in his ideal career scope were members**.

- He hired a professional to teach him how to **develop and maintain genuine relationships with the “A,” “B,” and “C” people that he didn’t know but really wanted to meet**.
- Before he even had to ask, several “A” people introduced him to other “A” people, one of whom made him a job offer that he couldn’t refuse.

The preceding bullet is not the end of his story. He learned to always keep his professional network well oiled as a rusty rifle won’t fire. Also, now that he’s someone’s “A” person, he delights in getting to know others coming up the career ladder who approach him in an appropriate manner. Of course, those who call him up using a shotgun approach (i.e., “Hi, I’m X—do you have a job for me? What does your company do, by the way? No opening? Goodbye, as I’m on to my next call.”), he kindly passes on the information to HR.

Author’s Bio



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Connecting professionals with what they need.

Kathleen “Kathy” Graham is a Principal with HQ Search, Inc., a retained executive search firm that she co-founded in 1997. Graham incorporated three more companies in 2006: HQ Seminars, Inc. (custom designed webinars and seminars); HQ Scripts, Inc. (boutique publisher); and HQ Services (compensation studies, brainstorming/focus groups, etc).

In addition to a track record of always being a star recruiter, she has a BA in Business Administration and Marketing from North Central College and an MBA in Finance, Analytic Finance, and Econometrics & Statistics from the University of Chicago

Graham is a well known career strategist, helping numerous professionals grow their careers to the next level. She is also an author of three books and a frequently requested speaker for numerous local and national groups that includes the Boston Security Analysts Society, CFA Society of Chicago, Financial Research Associates, Managed Funds Association, Northwestern University, and University of Chicago.