



P R A I S E F O R

THE EXECUTIVE LEAP

“The Executive Leap provides savvy advice for executives considering a career move. It brings into sharp focus the level of detail and preparation that are required for an executive to successfully reengineer his or her career.”

—STACEY O’BRYAN

CEO, Quick Weight Loss Centers

“This is an excellent reference guide with proven best practices for executives to find and land the role they want. The Executive Leap reflects insights from a world-class executive recruiter that have proven effective time and again. I highly recommend this book for those searching for a role as well as hiring managers.”

—DIRK MONTGOMERY

CFO and EVP of global supply chain, Hooters International

“The Executive Leap is a must-read for the current or would-be executive seeking to expand on his or her career, as well as compensation. Mike Sudermann’s many years of experience in the realm of recruitment and hiring provide insight as well as strategies for finding and landing the right position, for the right compensation. Having worked with Mike, I can speak from personal experience and would do so again.”

—ALFRED M. PERRIN

VP of finance, Global Brands Group

“This book is an invaluable tool for anyone considering a career change. Mike’s rich experience as an executive advisor and coach is evident in his illustrative examples of real-life considerations. His passion, professionalism, and delivery are engaging and interesting. It was very enlightening to read about the importance of social media and expanding your personal digital footprint. The Executive Leap is an excellent investment for all executives.”

—JEFF STREADER

founder and managing director, Go Global Retail

“I’ve interviewed countless professionals who could have benefited from reading The Executive Leap. Mike shares his insider secrets from a world-class executive-search perspective that will help executives navigate the rough-and-tumble waters needed to reengineer a career.

Mike jumps to the heart of the matter with finesse and ease, embracing the latest technology and real-world practices to ensure a win-win for all parties.”

—DAVE BAKER

SPHR, CEO, Palmetto Leadership Center

“After reading The Executive Leap twice, I urge everyone in an executive capacity or otherwise looking to gain an edge in his or her job search to get this book and gain the knowledge and advice Mike’s extensive executive search experience highlights. I have worked with Mike personally and have experienced his strategic advice in action and up close. His strategies work. Mike works!”

—PATRICK D.

SVP Procurement, Fortune 100 Healthcare Company

**THE
EXECUTIVE
LEAP**

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**EXECUTIVE
LEAP**



**BREAKTHROUGH STRATEGIES TO LAND
YOUR NEXT TOP JOB**

MIKE SUDERMANN

Advantage®

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*To my dad, Fred Sudermann, the world's greatest relationship builder
who taught me to always do what is right, not what is easy.*

*To my wife, Emily, who has always been supportive throughout my
executive-search career. She has been there through the highs and lows,
and she and our kids, Jackson and Whitley, have endured my working
vacations. I love each of you with all my heart.*

DISCLAIMER

Names and other identifying details in the experiences Mike describes have been altered to maintain client confidentiality.



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A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

I'd like to thank all the executives I have worked with over the years. You trusted me to help you revamp your resume, discreetly market you, champion you into a client, advise you on interview strategies, provide counsel regarding job opportunities, offer negotiations, and more. Without your trust in working with me, none of the experiences shared in this book would have been realized.

I would like to specifically thank Michele Williams and Mitch Miles for sharing ideas and providing support in this endeavor. Lastly, thanks to my team at Advantage Media for their help in making this book a reality.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



In April 2006, Mike Sudermann received a call from a friend who had recently joined a boutique executive-search firm. His friend was adamant that Mike would make an excellent executive-search consultant and he should speak to the CEO about joining the firm.

Up to that point, Mike had spent the first seventeen years after graduating college working successfully in clinical education, banking, and entrepreneurial endeavors.

Looking for a career leap, Mike agreed to talk to the CEO, who hired him on the spot, with one caveat—he would have to make a placement within ninety days. Although never one to back down from a challenge, Mike was hesitant. After all, he would have to quit his current job and move to a new role in a new industry. After considerable reflection and a blessing from his wife, Mike accepted and entered the recruiting business.

Later Mike would learn the ninety-day time frame—the firm’s standard litmus test for “newbies”—had been achieved by only a handful of people in the firm’s twenty-year history. Undaunted, Mike met the challenge and within five years had created a formidable retained-search practice, placing executives in roles throughout the US. He had built a reputation as more than just a recruiter or headhunter: he had become an executive strategic-search advisor.

As an executive strategic-search advisor, Mike wears several hats at once. He’s a trusted partner to his clients looking to hire top-grade executive talent and the job search expert that leaders turn to for advice on career moves, job offers, resumes, severance packages, compensation-package negotiations, interview strategies, relocation tips, and more.

From 2006 to 2011, Mike built his reputation on the increasingly in-demand industry of executive recruiting. During that time, Mike reviewed an estimated fifty thousand resumes, talked to over fourteen thousand hiring managers, and guided over five hundred executives in career-endeavor strategies.

In 2011, Mike started his own firm, Ascent Select Talent Capital—now called Ascent Select. Within weeks of setting up shop, Ascent Select was hired by a multibillion-dollar international apparel distributor for a large recruiting project—forty-five placements in eight weeks, nearly one placement per day. Fellow executive recruiters thought he was crazy to take on the contract, especially considering the time frame was originally twelve weeks which in itself was very aggressive and such a short length that even a “big city” search firm had first turned down the project. Within eight weeks, Mike had completed his placements and was asked by the client to take over the project management responsibilities of the other contract

recruiters to fill the remaining operations roles. Within six months, he had made over seventy placements.

The project grew to more than 160 placements in three years and included roles such as vice presidents of human resources, finance, tax, controller, technology, and treasurer; numerous directors and managers; and other team members. To achieve these numbers, Mike talked to more than three thousand candidates. Ultimately, Mike and Ascent Select built the IT, finance, operations, human resources, and customer-service departments for the apparel distributor. At the same time, he continued building strategic partnerships with other clients and made numerous placements throughout the United States.

Mike and Ascent Select have built a reputation for providing top-caliber talent quickly without sacrificing quality. To date, Mike has personally reviewed over eighty thousand resumes, worked with over one thousand executives, and made more than three hundred placements.

With a 2015 CEO search for a \$200 million apparel company in Sydney, Australia, Ascent Select forged its first international partnership. Today, the award-winning firm has handpicked nine affiliated search partners to work directly with his firm, alongside another one hundred-plus affiliate partners located in the US and around the world.

Recognized globally as a top-twenty search firm by NPA Worldwide, Ascent Select is hired for its expertise in placement of executives around the world; the company can present top talent in as little as seven business days, enabling clients to make hiring decisions in near real-time and fill roles in weeks instead of months. Mike works with clients on direct-hire placements, project-based recruiting, outplacement, and global employment outsourcing (GEO).



INTRODUCTION

MAKING THE EXECUTIVE LEAP

What is *the executive leap*?

Whether you're in the corner office at the top of the company building or still climbing the corporate ladder on the verge of a breakthrough to the top, the leap from your current job to a new executive role is one of the most daunting challenges you'll ever face.

A leap is a more than a big jump—when you leap, part of you understands that you don't quite know exactly where you'll land. That means a leap is often an act of blind faith.

But why would you ever leap on blind faith alone? As the age-old saying goes: “Look before you leap.”

This book is your opportunity to look—to learn my proven set of breakthrough strategies and land your next top job.

In today's world, the Internet and the automated hiring process have blown the rungs off the old executive-career ladder. The ladder is a relic of the past, from a predigital time when it wasn't so crowded at the top, when you could make a few calls on Monday, have a few lunches midweek, and land the executive role of your dreams over drinks on Friday.

I wrote *The Executive Leap* to help you break through the complexities of today's challenging job-search market. Today, 51 percent of *satisfied* workers are open to new job opportunities.¹ Add in those that have been downsized and you quickly become just another face in the crowd. Not only is the executive market plentiful, but it's only

If you don't look before you leap, you risk being passed by the competition—that is, unless you have an executive-level strategy to land your next executive role.

a few clicks away for hiring managers and executive recruiters. If you don't look before you leap, you risk being passed by the competition—that is, unless you have an executive-level strategy to land your next executive role.

More important than your competition is your compensation. According to Forbes, when changing jobs, the average increase in compensation nationally is 15 percent. Executives who follow my proven strategies are typically seeing upwards of 30–40 percent and sometimes as much as a 59 percent increase in compensation. Why settle for 15 percent when you could double or even triple that national average?²

As a successful professional, you build and use strategies daily to successfully navigate business and maximize results. Making a job

1 Jobvite, *Job Seeker Nation Study 2016: Where Job Seekers Stand on the Economy, Job Security, and the Future of Work*, 4.

2 Cameron Keng, "Employees Who Stay In Companies Longer Than Two Years Get Paid 50% Less," *Forbes*, June 22, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/cameronkeng/2014/06/22/employees-that-stay-in-companies-longer-than-2-years-get-paid-50-less/#63d3e434210e>.

transition is no different. Try to land your next top job—and top compensation—without following a set of strategies and you risk failure. Reminds me of that quote from Ben Franklin, “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.”

When looking for a new job, professionals seek the following:

- compensation: 52 percent for millennials; 70 percent for established professionals aged 40–54
- location / geography: 50 percent
- growth opportunities 43 percent
- health benefits: 43 percent
- work-life balance: 33 percent
- flexibility / virtual working from home: 23 percent; 31 percent for millennials³

THE EXECUTIVE LEAP'S BREAKTHROUGH STRATEGIES

Over the past decade working with executives, I have personally reviewed over eighty thousand resumes, talked with tens of thousands of hiring managers, negotiated hundreds of compensations packages, made hundreds of placements, and have led thousands of executives through strategies for landing a new role. In that time, I can say that the executive job market has changed dramatically. It's no wonder so many executives out there get frustrated when looking to land a new role.

3 Jobvite, *Job Seeker Nation Study 2016: Where Job Seekers Stand on the Economy, Job Security, and the Future of Work*, 8.

The majority of the executives I speak with on a daily basis are overwhelmed by the prospect or are underinformed of the process of making the leap. They wonder why it takes so long to land a great job, with great pay, that meets their specific requirements. Many professionals think dusting off the resume, adding a few bullet points, and applying for a position posted online or contacting a few friends is all they need to do. Those measures, once the norm in the 1990s, are no longer enough, by any stretch of the imagination.

If you're used to networking with friends or calling in a favor, you'll be in for a big surprise.

What are executives looking to land a new role supposed to do?

To answer your questions in the simplest way possible, I wrote this book. In these pages, I've collected my thousands of hours of executive-advising experience, analysis, and best practical tips into a set of breakthrough strategies. Each point in the executive-leap process—from rebuilding your resume to accepting a job offer with top compensation better than the national average—is broken down into strategies, one strategy per chapter. Whether you need a resume that sings, a LinkedIn-profile makeover, or detailed practical instructions on the entire interview process, you'll find the strategy here to help you make the leap.



BREAKTHROUGH TIP: Hiring managers today are using social media platforms to search for candidates, review candidate accomplishments, and advertise job opportunities. Chapters 4 and 5 detail how to make the most of your online activities.

If you're like many other executives, maybe it's been a few years since you were last in the job market for a new executive role. Perhaps

you don't even realize that you're behind the times or need help until you're six months into the process and haven't landed a top job, so let me share one scenario that demonstrates why you need this book's breakthrough strategies to succeed in today's hiring climate.



PHILLIP'S STORY

Recently, Phillip, a CEO who had been in his current role for twenty-plus years, began looking to make a career change. In his previous role he had "hung the moon." The notes on him were: "highly regarded, maintains an extensive network, exceptional executive leader and visionary, and brings substantial value that can be leveraged by a new employer." Sound familiar?

To Phillip's surprise, he struggled to land a new role quickly.

Eventually, he realized that making calls to old friends was not enough to land a top job or top compensation in today's market. When he and I first spoke, we talked at length about his career goals, next role, industry, locations, and more. I advised him to update his approach. He willingly agreed, knowing that technology had changed everything about his business over the past decade, so of course he should expect the executive job-search process to have changed, too.

As his strategic-search advisor, I walked him through my breakthrough strategies, which include a standout resume rebuilt for the digital age, an advanced LinkedIn profile, surefire answers to trick-or-trap interview questions, and other pre- and post-interview essentials to break through.

Once he managed to get up to speed with the change, we implemented his new plan of attack on all fronts.

Soon he was interviewing for leading CEO roles, ultimately landing a position that gave him a new CEO role in his industry, a 30 percent increase in compensation, and a phenomenal benefits package. Without the breakthrough strategies, he would have struggled to make the executive leap, likely settling for a less-than role or less-than compensation.

THE #1 REASON YOU SHOULD READ THIS BOOK

“Great,” you say. “Mike, you’re the expert in executive search, placement, resumes, interviews, and online strategies, and you helped some yahoo get a job. Big deal. What else can you do for me?”

My reply? The breakthrough strategies in this book will show you how to land your next top job **and earn an increase in executive-level compensation at or above the national average of 15 percent.**



KEN'S STORY

A vice president of finance from a major beverage producer called me requesting a tiebreaker between him and his wife on whether or not he should take what appeared to be a very lucrative regional CFO job offer. While a fantastic opportunity, the couple was struggling with a decision. After talking with the executive and discussing the pros and cons of the position, he took my advice and declined the offer. Two months later the

beverage producer reached out again—this time, the company had sweetened the deal. He called me again to discuss, and I advised him to take the job—which he did.

Ken's sweetened deal meant an increase in compensation of 40 percent. Today, after several additional moves, he's the national CFO of that major beverage organization.

But that's not the end of the story.

Over the years, I've advised Ken about everything from job-search strategy, career transitions, and talent acquisition. I'm able to provide this kind of strategic advice to executives because I have assisted hundreds of executives on complex job offers, salaries, benefits, stock options, relocation packages, etc. As a result, I know what salaries and bonuses should be for specific roles: manager, director, vice president, senior vice president, and C-suite. I know exactly what salaries should be in different parts of the country; for instance, the salary in San Francisco may be similar to New York but substantially different than in Kansas City. I understand the impact of state taxes, or lack thereof, on salary, for a relocating executive—whether in the US or elsewhere in the world.

In short, I know how to create a variety of compensation packages for specific individuals. Today, that means more than just base and bonus. It means relocation bonus, sign-on, car allowance, stock options, equity, healthcare, noncompete, severance, gas cards, wellness memberships, and a variety of other add-ons.

CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

The Executive Leap's breakthrough strategies show how to make the leap that positions you as the top candidate and earns you the best possible compensation.

In the chapter's ahead, I'll take you step-by-step through every strategy needed to help you "look before you leap." Chapter 1 reviews today's job search and the value of having someone fighting for you in your corner—I call that someone a strategic-search advisor (which is an executive recruiter and advisor merged into one). Chapter 2 guides you through all you need to know to rewrite your resume, including resume myths, the concept of "city-bus marketing," and details on how to rebuild your resume in thirds. Chapter 3 explains the cover-letter strategy, with samples that show you exactly what to do (and not do).

After we've covered the traditional basics, chapter 4 discusses social media and the importance of expanding your digital footprint to ensure that people know about your industry niche beyond your resume. Chapter 5 shines light on your LinkedIn profile, the must-do social site for business professionals. (Don't even *think* about skipping the chapter on LinkedIn, as you'll need every strategy presented to land your next top role and top compensation!)

Chapter 6 discusses interview strategies: what to do before and during the interview to ensure that you maximize your competitive advantage and leap the competition. Chapter 7 gives you some trick-or-trap questions (and winning answers) to circumvent any interview obstacle. Chapter 8 walks you through the entire interview conversation. To wrap things up, chapter 9 covers what to do after the interview is complete. By the time we get to the book's conclusion, you'll have an excellent understanding of what to do to make the executive leap.



CHAPTER 1

TODAY'S JOB MARKET AND THE STRATEGIC- SEARCH ADVISOR

Whenever I speak with professionals looking to make an executive leap, I first remind them: “The executive job search world has changed dramatically over the past decade. If you’re applying for an executive role using the same strategies that you used in 2006 or—look out—1996, then there’s a high probability you’ll struggle to land a new role in a timely manner in today’s market.”

For many, hearing that landing a top job requires new strategies is a much-needed wake-up call. Before we dive into the latest strategic advice, here’s another: Are you willing to settle? Are you willing to lose to the competition and miss out on top jobs and top compensation?

If you’re willing to settle, then you can put the book down now. You can’t make the executive leap if you’re willing to settle.

What are the signs that you’re settling? Sending out resumes but getting little to no response; interviewing but never landing; receiving compensation-increase offers *at or below* the national average of 15

percent—each tells me that you're not correctly positioning yourself to make the leap. Each tells me that you're behind the times or need some serious strategic advice.

If everything has changed over the past decade, then what's the executive job-search and hiring landscape today? In other words: How do you position yourself to leap the competition?

THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY EXECUTIVE JOB SEARCH

As a successful business leader, you stay current with trends in your industry. You adapt with the regular changes in technology. Your executive job search requires the same approach.

Gone are the days when you sent your resume via e-mail or snail mail to a newspaper or job-board posting. Gone are the hiring managers who have all the time in the world to review resumes. Hiring managers today are often overloaded with multiple tasks, meetings, and massive time constraints. As a result, they have very little time to review a resume—today you're lucky if you get ten seconds.

In the past, a company would get your resume; and if luck would have it, you were invited for an interview; and if you were a good fit, you were hired. Nowadays, once a company gets your resume, they are already checking out your LinkedIn profile, Facebook, and other sites to make sure you are who you say you are—are you a thought leader in your industry niche? Does your profile suggest you'd fit in with the company culture?

Differentiating yourself twenty or even ten years ago was predominantly done on your resume. In today's talent market, you have to be savvy and have a strategy that includes not only your resume but also social media such as LinkedIn and a well-refined interview approach. *This is the bare minimum.*

Executive recruiters and hiring managers are experts at both judging a book by its cover and reading between the lines. For example: Resume fonts and formatting have changed over the years. By your resume alone, I can tell your approximate age, your energy level, and how successful your job search is going to be. By your cover letter, which speaks volumes about you in a positive or negative way, I can read how much you want the job and whether or not you'd be the right fit. One look at your LinkedIn profile tells me a great deal about your endeavor to be successful in your search for a new role. Finally, by the way you answer (and ask!) interview questions, I can tell if you're a small fish in a big pond or a shark that doesn't sleep.

You are judged by every last detail in the hiring process. Does that unsettle you? Be unsettled then, because the last thing you want is to do is "wing it" or approach the process the same way you did when you were saving your resume on a floppy disk.

Most executives learn the hard way that the job search has changed. The good news? Those executives behind the times are your competition. Apply my breakthrough strategies and you're already miles ahead.

THE VALUE OF BREAKTHROUGH STRATEGIES

At some point early on, soon after your decision to make the executive leap, did you do a Google search? Did you Google: "How to write a resume?" or "How to write an executive resume?" What about: "How to create an executive-level LinkedIn page?" or "How to prepare for an executive interview?"

Your Google searches likely resulted in hundreds of articles, some recent but many out of date, that promised you tips, traps, and "the top-ten tricks to consider." While some of the advice may be current or helpful, let me tell you, what you need is a one-stop shop

for every breakthrough strategy—current and *proven a thousand times over*—from the leading expert in the executive job-search field.

An article from a Google search can tell you how to craft a professional LinkedIn page—but it can't tell you how to make a LinkedIn page that will *wow* recruiters and hiring managers enough to garner you a guaranteed call from an executive recruiter or hiring manager.

As you've pondered the executive leap, you've likely spoken to someone outside of your family about what the leap entails. Did you ask a mentor or a colleague for advice and practical tips? Getting knowledge wherever you can is all well and good, but advice that works for one person doesn't always apply to another.

When reading all the articles and books you could find and speaking to all the mentors and colleagues in your network, did anyone ever mention how to receive a compensation increase of more than the 15 percent national average? That should be one of many strategic questions.

The difference between an online article or a mentor and this book is that my advice is based on the experiences of *hundreds of executive searches over the past decade*. Nowhere else—not on Google, not in your Rolodex, nowhere—will you find all the strategies collected together to teach you how to land your next top job. This book is your best companion for making the executive leap.

But what about a compensation increase *greater* than the 15 percent national average, you ask? Thankfully, you don't need to go it alone to find the answer.

Now that you know the rules of the executive job-search game have changed and you're committed to reading *The Executive Leap*, you have two options:

1. You can apply my breakthrough strategies on your own.
2. Or you can work with a strategic-search advisor.

If you're an executive who wants a top job *and* top compensation, you may need more than a companion book. *You need a strategic-search advisor in your corner.*

THE STRATEGIC-SEARCH ADVISOR

I'm an executive recruiter—that's my unofficial job title. My official job title: strategic-search advisor. In other words, an executive **strategic-search advisor** is two roles combined into one:

1. **Executive Recruiter.** Companies hire me to identify, source, and recruit professionals that reside in the top 10 percent in their industry and functional niche and present them for specific roles. I recruit the cream of the crop.
2. **Advisor.** I counsel professionals, teaching them my proven strategies for making the executive leap. Together, we practice, practice, practice. As a result, they learn how to position themselves to leap to the next level in their career and compensation.

Of the many benefits to having a Strategic Search Advisor help you make the executive leap, one of the biggest is that I can help you see the forest through the trees. By that I mean you likely have a lot of information from colleagues, books, Google searches, and your own experience. My strategies will allow you to clearly decide how to *best* execute a leap.

As your strategic-search advisor, I understand the executive marketplace. I know the salary ranges for specific roles, what the opportunities are for your industry or functional niche, approximately how long it will take you to land, and where you stand compared to your competition. In addition, I provide certainty on every part of the

hiring process: from what to use on your resume to how to prepare for the trap questions in the interviews.

What sets a strategic-search advisor above the rest?

Your colleague's advice on how he or she made the executive leap is an opinion. My breakthrough strategies on how to make the executive leap are fact—field-tested and proven after hundreds of thousands of hours.

To show you what I mean, here's a real-life, strategic-search advisor story.



ANDREW'S STORY

A few months ago, a company retained my firm for a CFO search. After talking with more than a hundred professionals in three weeks, my team presented the top four candidates to the company. Each candidate could have done the job equally well. To decide their favorite, the company defaulted to the usual method: ranking the candidates by evaluating their resumes. Andrew ranked fourth. The company CEO thought Andrew's resume was poorly written and wasn't sold on him being worth the time to bring in for an interview. Fortunately, as the candidate's champion, I was able to convince the CEO to look past the resume and interview the candidate.

Prior to their interviews, I offered all four candidates my tailored strategic-interview session. I worked with the top-ranked candidate for only five minutes because he had limited time to talk. The number-two ranked candidate passed on the guidance because he said he was "good to go." Number three told me in our phone conversation that he was listening but not in a position to take

notes and did not have any questions for me during the call. Andrew asked a lot of questions, said he took several pages of notes, and called me the next day to review a few things prior to the interview.

Upon completing the interviews with the first three candidates, the client thought they were ready to make an offer, but because they had already scheduled Andrew, they honored the interview commitment. I'll give you one guess what happened next. Andrew knocked the socks off the CEO during his interview.

Immediately after the interview, a company representative called to tell me they wanted to hire Andrew and asked me to make him an offer before his departing flight home. Not only did he get the offer, but he received a whopping 59 percent increase in base salary and more than 100 percent increase in total compensation!

Bottom Line: I give strategic advice. I counsel you through your search endeavor, helping you make decisions that are appropriate for you and your family. If a job is wrong for you, I advise you against it. I won't shoehorn somebody into a role. If you're an ideal fit, I will advocate on your behalf.

TAKE MY ADVICE

By the time you finish this book, you will have the know-how to build a high-performance resume that compels any reader to call you for an interview. You will have keen insight on navigating social media and LinkedIn to your advantage and differentiate you from the competition. You will be equipped with the life-changing interview and

post-interview strategies to ultimately land your next top job and best-possible compensation.

I developed my breakthrough strategies having worked with thousands of executives over the last decade and spending countless hours researching to stay attuned to industry statistics, trends, and resources. As a result of my studies, experiences, and candid client feedback, I have developed proven strategies for helping executives position themselves to land their next top job.

The key to success is in your hands; these breakthrough strategies are proven and work wonders if you use them. Take my advice, don't settle, and you will succeed.