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# CANDIDATE GUIDE

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Making the best individuals  
into the best candidates



**PRATAP**  
PARTNERSHIP

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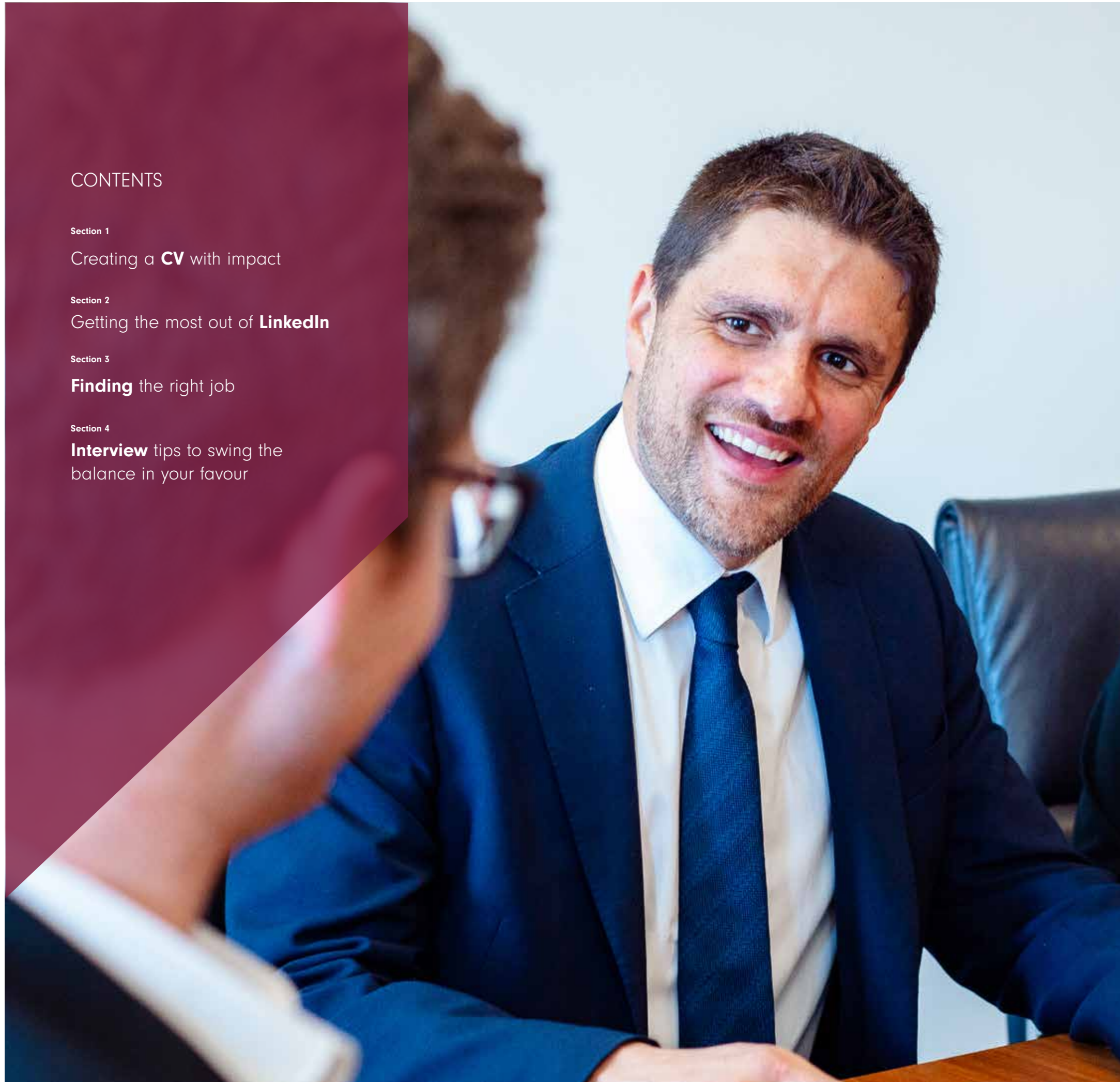
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## INTRODUCTION

We aim to make a major impact on the careers of all of the candidates who talk to us. It is unfortunately impossible for us to aim to place everyone we meet, but we can guarantee that we can add value, support and ideas that make a positive difference to everyone.

Our candidate guide has been put together from our collective experience of the finance recruitment sector in the North over the past 20 years.





## Creating a CV with impact

The most important question to ask yourself before preparing your CV...

### How can my CV make an impact

There are so many jobs advertised online and it is becoming increasingly easy to apply for them. The end result is larger volumes of applications to compete with.

It is not uncommon to receive over 100 applications for Finance Director advertised campaigns and competition for all levels of finance is tough. Our advice is to focus on the first page of the CV and make sure it delivers;

- 1 A positive headline about you as a candidate - tailored to the requirements of the job.
- 2 Introduce your personality - talk about your values or your key competencies.
- 3 Validate your statements. Think of your proudest recommendation or reference - it could be a comment on LinkedIn, a past reference or a former colleague who speaks highly of you and use it now. (If you wait until later in the process, it may be too late).

Although the quality of competition will increase as the process progresses, the longest odds exist at the start - **Throw as much at your application at this stage to make sure you stand out.**

Some typical metrics for a recruitment campaign may be;

STAGE	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	% OF PROGRESSING
Applications	<b>80</b>	<b>6.3%</b>
First interviews	5	40%
Second interviews	2	50%
Offer	1	

**Your chances of success increase throughout the process, get off to the best possible start with a quality, modern CV.**

# JAMES DOANE

## Finance Director with 15 years' experience of leading in successful, high growth, manufacturing companies

### PROFILE

ACA qualified from a Big 4 firm, I have specialised in leading the financial strategies of two specialist manufacturing companies to maximise growth and deliver on successful exits.

My expertise lies in working with a board and other stakeholders to set and execute a business plan, ensuring that this includes the right content across people, operational, commercial, legal and exit strategies.

I have worked in many high-pressure situations contributing my leadership, communication and organisational skills to the high-performance teams I have been a part of.

"James has been instrumental to the success of our business over the past five years. He is exceptionally talented at relationship-building, always organised and informed of all necessary details and commercial in his outlook to everything. The best Finance Director I have ever worked with."

Tony Short - Managing Director  
Great Products Ltd.

### EXPERIENCE

#### Great Products Ltd, Finance Director

January 2013 to date

Established in 1969, Great Products Ltd is a specialist manufacturer of building equipment. The original owners sold to the current private equity owners in January 2013 and I was brought in to work with the board of directors. Turnover was £21m with £1m EBITDA in 2012 and has grown to turnover of £35m and EBITDA of £4.5m for the past year.

#### My main achievements

- Working with the Managing & Operations Directors to deliver results ahead of the forecast sales and profit targets.
- Leading the post-acquisition transition with an improvement in reporting times and with no disruption to customers, suppliers and internal staff.
- Acquisition of key competitor in 2014 resulting in an increased turnover of £6m with increased total costs of £4.2m.
- Negotiating a new contract with major Chinese supplier resulting in a 4% price reduction.
- Negotiating a new banking arrangement with HSBC in 2017 to improve immediate working capital for new capital expenditure.
- Managing, leading and motivating the finance, supply chain and IT teams to consistently hit their individual targets.

#### Yorkshire Confectionery Ltd, Finance Director

May 2007- November 2012

With a history of over 100 years, Yorkshire Confectionery Ltd was a family owned FMCG manufacturer. The business had suffered losses and cash flow problems from 2004. I was approached by the owners and the bank in 2007 to lead the turnaround of the business. During my 5 years there, turnover grew from £9.7m to £14.9m, with EBITDA improving from (£125k) to £600k. This resulted in the successful sale of the company to AB Capital in 2012.

#### My main achievements

- Replacing the original Finance Director of 20 years in a challenging time for the business and the finance function.
- Working together with the bank, creditors and customers after a challenging period for the business had negatively impacted on relations.
- Working with the newly appointed Managing Director on a number of strategies and initiatives to improve the financial performance. These included product rationalisation, identifying better supply contracts and outsourcing distribution services.
- Reducing the annual staff turnover from 35% to less than 10% through benchmarking remuneration packages, implementing team incentives and reforming disciplinary policies.
- Working with PwC to identify over £150k worth of R&D tax credits.

#### Senior Accountant at KPMG, Leeds

September 2003 to April 2007

### KEY SKILLS

Business Planning	Turnaround
Restructuring	Mergers & Acquisitions
New products	International Trade
Private Equity	Debt Restructuring
Start Ups	IFRS
Contracts	Group Reporting

### EDUCATION

#### Academic History


2006	ACA qualified, ICAEW
2003	BA (hons) Economics, University of East Anglia
1999	3 A Levels
1997	9 GCSEs


### INTERESTS


I live in Leeds with my wife and daughter (6 years old).

A regular runner I have run several half-marathons and 10k runs and am a member of my local gym and squash clubs.

### CONTACT

 Gorran, Martin Lane  
Bawtry, Doncaster DN10 6NJ

 01234 567 890

 email@live.co.uk

# SUSIE BOURNE

## CIMA qualified accountant with five years' experience of working in a multinational plc

### PROFILE

*Initially engaged on the Starpack plc graduate training scheme, I have spent the past five years working in the Management Accounts, Financial Accounts and F,P & A departments of a UK listed plc.*

*After gaining the CIMA qualification in 2017, I was promoted to the position of Finance Manager, working with the senior managers and customers in the commercial finance and financial planning teams.*

*My promotion was gained on the back of my professional qualification and on my annual appraisal that highlighted my ambition, drive and solutions-orientated approach to my work.*

*"Susie has made an impact in each of the roles she has undertaken with us and left a positive legacy. She is an excellent team player and would be a tremendous asset to any employer."*

*Marc Twibe, Senior Financial Controller at Starpack plc*

### EXPERIENCE

#### Starpack plc, Finance Manager

September 2013 to date

FTSE 250 listed and operating out of 15 different countries, Starpack plc is a leading, global manufacturer of packaging material. With a group structure of over 50 different entities, the business employs over 2,500 staff and has a turnover of £2.6bn.

Sept 2013 – Sept 2014 Assistant Accountant – EMEA Finance

Sept 2014 – Feb 2016 Management Accountant – EMEA Finance

Feb 2016 – Aug 2016 Financial Accountant (six-month project at HO)

Aug 2016 to date Finance Manager – F,P & A – RoW Region

#### My main duties

- Producing monthly analysis on six different sets of management accounts, investigating and explaining material variances.
- Advanced level excel skills to facilitate the budgeting and forecasting process.
- Providing regular support on costs and performance to the operations teams to facilitate the smooth running of the production and sales processes.
- New and ongoing investment appraisal of new capital expenditure and analysis of return on investment.
- Part of the SAP Superuser team, working on finding and exploiting systems efficiencies.

#### My main achievements

- I was promoted to Management Accountant within a year of joining. This was the earliest possible time period for the promotion and was achieved after hitting all of my deadlines and personal targets in my first year. I was awarded finance team "newcomer of the year" in 2014.
- In February 2016, I was selected by the Group Financial Controller to work with her on a project to test the financial controls in the shared service centre, general ledger and treasury. The project was successfully completed on time and identified a number of new controls that have benefited the business.
- I train all new graduate intake on systems and excel skills within their induction period. This was not an area that Starpack included in training at this stage previously.

### KEY SKILLS

Management Accounting	Commercial Finance
Financial Planning	Projects
Systems implementation	Investment Appraisal
Excel modelling	Costing
Treasury	Rebates
	Budgets

### EDUCATION

#### Academic History


<b>2017</b>	CIMA qualified
<b>2010</b>	3 A Levels, Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Wakefield
<b>2008</b>	9 GCSEs

### INTERESTS

I have been interested in martial arts since I was young, I am hoping to achieve my black belt in Judo in 2020.

I am an active member of the Leeds Young Professionals Networking Group, acting on the main committee and as Treasurer.

### CONTACT

 Gorran, Martin Lane  
Bawtry, Doncaster DN10 6NJ

 01234 567 890

 email@live.co.uk



Getting the best out of LinkedIn - for finance professionals

There are thousands of guides to LinkedIn. Not many of these focus on the right priorities for accountants in the North! We have prepared our top 10 tips with our network in mind.

1. **You have to be on it!** New employers will expect you to be on there. There are almost 600 million users on there now, with an estimated 1 in 3 professionals across the world. We have worked with several clients who have rejected any candidates without a decent LinkedIn profile.
2. Remember that LinkedIn is not just a way to be found, **it is also a way to be assessed**. Take time to ensure that your profile reflects you, your network and your interests. It needs to contain a lot of the detail of your CV, written in the first person, but with more of an insight into your personality.
3. **Use a profile photo**. This is a contentious point for many people but the statistics produced by LinkedIn suggest that you stand 11 times as much chance of being viewed if you have a profile photo, than if not. It goes without saying that the photo should be more of a "weekday" than a "weekend" nature - appropriately professional!
4. If you are currently in between jobs, use your last job title as your current one. **"Currently seeking new opportunities"** makes you harder for some recruiters to find and more likely to get unwanted contact from speculative recruiters.
5. Do not neglect the **"Summary" section**. This is an opportunity to write three to five paragraphs on your differentiators - your qualifications, key skills or personality.
6. **Choose your words carefully**; "A highly accomplished business leader, with exceptional commercial & financial skills and a track record of delivering growth" sounds excellent (and is), but the candidate who says "I am a Financial Controller" has more chance of being found by the recruiter.

Getting the  
most out of  
LinkedIn®

7. **Grow your network.** The average size of all members networks is 930, but we estimate the number in Yorkshire to be more in the region of 300-600. Only add people you know or who you would like to know. Add your auditors, customers, suppliers, banking and legal advisors, people you meet at networking events, people you went to school with, studied with or trained with. We can point to specific successes around linking in with people Nik played football with 20 years ago! Anyone can become a productive contact.
8. **Contribute to posts and discussions.** Not every accountant is a comfortable blogger and the idea is daunting to most. The simple way to get started is to just click "like" on comments you approve of. The next stage is to make a comment on existing posts. The last stage is to start the discussions yourself. Any of these will keep you in the front of your network's mind and give them an insight into your views.

9. **Set yourself a target for recommendations** on your profile - It is a very powerful way to create a positive impact. Think outside the conventional box of your line manager and think about your colleagues, your subordinates, customers, bankers and auditors - all of these angles provide a reassuring impact. Any finance professional should target themselves on at least 2 quality recommendations.
10. LinkedIn is a fantastic tool for **interview preparation.** You can look at the profiles of the interviewers, the board, the previous incumbents and many businesses will have their own LinkedIn page as well, giving information on latest news, deals and hires etc.







## Finding the right job

Job searching can be hard work and can sometimes seem like a full time job in itself. It is not just a question of finding any job - it is about finding the right job and the best opportunity for you.

The accountancy and finance sector is one of the most competitive but also one of the most established. It can be daunting knowing just where to start with all of the different websites produced by a simple search, and the reality is that there are almost 30 financial recruitment companies in Yorkshire. How do you pick the right one?

It is impossible for any candidate to position themselves for every position that may be appropriate. The market is too spread out (and it is impossible to register with every recruiter) and there are always discreet searches that will only target a very small audience. Our 4 points below will ensure that every candidate has the best chance of being found, of finding the right opportunities and of keeping control of the job search process themselves;

### Plan ahead prevents poor performance

It would be far easier if accountancy recruitment operated in "transfer windows" like footballers - This would allow every candidate to be presented with all options and make a comparative choice. The reality is that timing is a key factor in this sector and success or otherwise are often determined by the demand of employers - a force that cannot be entirely controlled. At the outset;

1. **Prepare your CV** - it always takes longer than you imagine! Contrary to some beliefs, you cannot use your LinkedIn profile to substitute your CV, you need to have both.
2. **Plan your expectations** - Being too prescriptive in your requirements is as potentially flawed as being too vague. Work out what is important to you and very importantly....make sure your family agree! (Too many recruitment processes are thrown off-course by a last minute intervention from a husband or wife!).

3. **Write down your current package** - This may seem obvious, but do you know your exact basic salary, car allowance, bonus (past and expected) pension contribution, healthcare details, holidays, study support and review dates?.

4. **Who can act as a referee.** Project yourself to the position where you are down to the last two candidates for your perfect job. You will do anything to swing the balance in your favour. Having a former boss or advisor who will speak highly of you could win the day. Do not leave this planning until the last minute.



## Pick the right recruitment consultant to support you

We would always advise prospective candidates to register with a small number of consultancies and initially with 1 for an exclusive period. To choose the right relationship for you, look for;

1. Expertise in the accountancy & finance sector with a dedicated consultant to your area.
2. A track record of placing candidates at your level and with employers who would appeal to you.
3. The best reputation among your peers and friends.
4. The first impression from your consultant should make you feel important. There should be a desire to listen and find out more about you, an appropriate sense of urgency and good advice from the outset. Make sure you are speaking to the consultant who is managing the clients and not a resourcer or candidate manager. (Something that is a fundamental principle at Pratap Partnership).

## Work effectively with your consultant

One of the biggest criticisms we hear from candidates goes along the lines of "They made me feel very welcome, promised a lot but I haven't heard from them in 4 weeks and they have stopped returning my calls". This is unacceptable. The biggest fault is the absence of any contact, but the expectations set at the first meeting are just as damaging.

There is no 'one size fits all' answer for how regular contact should be. (If you are available immediately with a rare skill set and looking for interim projects, contact should be daily. If you are a 6 figure CFO with a 6 month notice period, contact should be more ad hoc and no less frequently than every 4 to six weeks).

### The potential benefits of registering with a good quality consultant at the outset are;

1. A thorough initial meeting that will critique your CV (suggesting improvements), prepare you for interviews and give a thorough overview of the market and salary trends.
2. Agreeing on a small number of employers to approach on your behalf on a confidential basis. In a market that is so candidate-lead as it is, this can be the most effective way of finding the right job.
3. An agreement that if your consultant hears of any opportunities that are relevant for you, but they are not engaged on, they will inform you. Some of the best, long-term relationships between recruiter and candidate have been created this way.



## Searching online

Solely relying on an online search for your next job is not best way to guarantee success.

Google will often find you the recruiters and job sites who advertise the largest number of jobs first - There are benefits to this, but just as many downsides. Do some research on the websites and look for adverts that are lengthy, well written and specific. These adverts would point to a recruiter who works with a manageable number of vacancies and offers a personal service.

1. Pick at least 1 job advertising website such as GAAPWEB or exec-appointments. These are often catch-alls that are used by most recruiters. Both of these websites allow simple job alerts to be set up on specific criteria and results sent quickly. The first call for anything of interest is to discuss it with your first choice consultant.
2. Indeed and Google for Jobs are 'aggregators' that will find adverts that are relevant to you from many corners of the web. As such, it is definitely worth reviewing and setting up alerts on. Not all of the information is totally up-to-date from our experience, but it is an important tool in allowing many candidates to feel in control of their own job search.
3. The job advertising section of LinkedIn continues to evolve. Ensure that you populate your profile with enough key words of what you do and what you are looking for. This will help LinkedIn to position appropriate adverts in front of you at the right time.



**Connecting  
brilliant  
people**

# Interview

## Tips

## Swinging the balance in your favour during a recruitment process.

For anyone reading this who has never attended an interview, there are thousands of interview guides and articles on line. These cover all of the bare essentials such as punctuality, presentation and body language...etc. Our guide is aimed at the more experienced interviewee, representing a list of fine details that may swing the balance in your favour.

Imagine the situation where, after a 2 stage interview process, you are down to the last two candidates for a very attractive job. It would be easy to say that your chance of success are 50-50. Just moving this slightly to 51-49 in your favour can change the outcome positively for you. Our list of tips below may each represent 1% of a difference, but that is potentially a material swing in your favour in total;

**We will be producing our guides to competency based interviews and to presentations during interviews later in the year.**

- 1. Research your interviewers and not just the organisation.** Even though we have lived with LinkedIn for a decade, we are still amazed and flattered when someone meets you for the first time and says "You went to Manchester University didn't you?" or "I enjoyed your comments on the Brexit article in the FT last week - very funny and I couldn't agree more"...
- 2. Research the mutual connections on LinkedIn.** Many close calls in recruitment processes have been decided by a mutual friend putting in a good word at the last minute.
- 3. References and endorsements.** These were always considered as being the last stage of the recruitment process. They were even taken after a verbal offer had been made and accepted. This is still the case but use them at the start of the process. One of the most powerful recruitment documents we have seen in recent years is a recommendation from a previous bank manager to an FD - it gave the potential employer full comfort that all of the skills of

that FD were tried, tested and 100% perfect. So many of us are shy when it comes to promoting ourself, it is far more comfortable and natural to let someone else sing our praises!

- 4. Take examples of your work in. Be mindful of confidentiality but you are not necessarily going to leave this with them.** It is not all about numbers and reports - presentations you made to the SMT and copies of your most recent appraisal can both show you in a positive light. It all shows a higher level of preparation and commitment to the opportunity.
- 5. Contact your interviewer(s) with a thank you email after the interview. Reference your interests in the job and your positive impressions of them as individuals.** This can be especially effective when you have been the first candidate to attend the final stage and there is a delay until the last - it keeps you in the front of their mind, maintains positive thoughts about you and opens up more possibilities in building up a relationship.





Gorran, Martin Lane  
Bawtry, Doncaster  
DN10 6NJ

T 01302 436437  
E [info@pratappartnership.co.uk](mailto:info@pratappartnership.co.uk)  
[pratappartnership.co.uk](http://pratappartnership.co.uk)

**PRATAP**  
PARTNERSHIP

*NK Pratap*  
Managing Partner

Yours Sincerely

I look forward to hearing from you  
[nk@pratappartnership.co.uk](mailto:nk@pratappartnership.co.uk)  
[www.pratappartnership.co.uk](http://www.pratappartnership.co.uk)

I am pleased to  
learn of partners  
personally writing to you.  
Our business is led by Nicola Ho  
recruiters and have worked together since  
immensely proud to work with the team in a  
experience, reputation and passion for what we do.

We will focus on all levels of accounting. I think we  
disciplines. We have invested in the way our  
together with our combined experience and  
right quality.

You may not have any immediate accountancy needs however  
and to gain an update on your business and to allow you to  
on [nk@pratappartnership.co.uk](mailto:nk@pratappartnership.co.uk) or 01302 436437. You can also  
[www.pratappartnership.co.uk](http://www.pratappartnership.co.uk)