



THE 5 MISTAKES SENIOR LEADERS MAKE IN CAREER TRANSITIONS

(And Why They Keep You Stuck)

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WHO THIS IS FOR

I wrote this guide for senior leaders who spent 20+ years building a career that worked, until it didn't.

You had the title. The compensation. The scope. Then something changed. A layoff, a restructuring, a role that quietly stopped fitting. And now you're navigating a career transition that feels harder than it should.

I know this place well. In 2022 I was laid off from a tech leadership role after 20 years at Google, Accenture, and scale-ups. What followed was three years of rebuilding: not just a career, but a clearer sense of what I actually wanted next, and how to make the market see it.

That's the work I do now. I coach senior executives through career transitions: the strategic side and the human side. The positioning, the narrative, the interview preparation, and the loneliness and self-doubt that nobody talks about in a job search.

This guide covers the five most common mistakes I see senior leaders make when navigating a career transition. Most of my clients were making at least three of these before we started working together. If you recognize yourself in two or more, we should talk.



MISTAKE 1

APPLYING TO HUNDREDS OF JOBS WITHOUT A NETWORKING STRATEGY

You spend hours every week applying to roles on LinkedIn, company career pages, and job boards. You tailor your CV for each application. You write thoughtful cover letters. You hit submit and wait for a response that rarely comes.

The problem is not your CV. The problem is that you are competing in the most saturated channel available. Most senior roles are filled through referrals, internal moves, or direct approaches from recruiters who already have a relationship with the hiring manager. By the time a role appears on a job board, dozens or hundreds of other qualified candidates have already applied.

Why this is costing you:

Applying without networking is low-return activity disguised as productive work. It feels like you are doing something, but the conversion rate from application to interview for senior roles posted publicly is typically below 2 percent. You are spending energy on the least effective channel while avoiding the higher-stakes, higher-return work of building and activating your network.

The direction of the solution:

A successful job search at the senior level is built on relationships, not applications. The question is not how many roles you have applied to. The question is how many people in your target companies know who you are, what you do well, and that you are open to the right opportunity. Building that visibility requires a different strategy entirely.



MISTAKE 2

ONLY APPLYING TO ROLES SIMILAR TO YOUR LAST ONE

You search for roles with the same title you held before, in the same industry, ideally at companies that look like the one you just left. You assume that the safest path forward is the one that most closely resembles the path you have already walked.

This happens for two reasons. First, it feels safer. You know you can do the job because you have done it before. Second, you assume that hiring managers will only take you seriously if your last role maps directly onto the role they are hiring for.

Why this is costing you:

You are artificially narrowing your market. Many of the skills you have spent 15 to 20 years building are transferable to roles and industries you have not seriously considered. Leadership, stakeholder management, change management, strategic thinking, cross-functional collaboration—these are not industry-specific skills. They are universal at the senior level.

By only applying to roles that look like your last one, you are excluding opportunities where your experience would be valued and where the role might actually be a better fit for what you want next.

The direction of the solution:

The starting point is a clear assessment of what you have actually done, not just what your job title said you did. What problems have you solved? What types of teams have you led? What outcomes have you delivered? Once you understand your transferable skills, you can begin to map them onto roles and industries that may not have been on your radar but where your experience is directly applicable.



MISTAKE 3

NOT KNOWING HOW TO TELL YOUR STORY CLEARLY AND CONVINCINGLY

You struggle to articulate what you do, why it matters, and why someone should hire you. Your LinkedIn profile reads like a job description. Your CV is a chronological list of responsibilities. When a recruiter or hiring manager asks you to tell them about yourself, you give a 10-minute answer that loses them halfway through.

This is not because you lack accomplishments. It is because you have never had to sell yourself before. In your previous roles, your track record spoke for itself. Now you are in a market where track record alone is not enough. You need a narrative.

Why this is costing you:

If you cannot tell your story clearly, nobody else will tell it for you. Recruiters will not dig through your CV to find the compelling parts. Hiring managers will not infer your value from a vague LinkedIn headline. Networking contacts will not refer you if they cannot explain what you do in a sentence.

Your story is the foundation of every interaction in a job search. If it is unclear or unconvincing, everything else — networking, applications, interviews — becomes significantly harder.

The direction of the solution:

A strong narrative is built around three elements: what you have done, what you do well, and what you want to do next. It should be specific enough to be credible and broad enough to open doors. Most senior leaders I work with take 3 to 4 weeks to land on a version of their story that works. Once they do, every other part of the search becomes easier.



MISTAKE 4

DESCRIBING WHAT YOU DID WITHOUT EXPLAINING THE IMPACT

Your CV and LinkedIn profile list your responsibilities: managed a team of 20, oversaw a budget of 5 million, led the implementation of a new system. What they do not explain is what happened as a result. Did the team perform better? Did the budget deliver a return? Did the new system solve the problem it was supposed to solve?

This happens because most people assume their job title and scope are enough to convey their value. They are not. At the senior level, everyone managed teams, budgets, and projects. What differentiates you is the outcome you delivered. And what people said about you.

Why this is costing you:

Without impact, your experience sounds generic. A hiring manager reading "led a team of 30 across three markets" has no idea whether you were effective or just present. They cannot assess whether you are capable of delivering the outcomes they need.

Impact is what makes your experience relevant. It is the difference between "I was there" and "I made this happen."

The direction of the solution:

For every significant responsibility or project in your career, you should be able to answer: what changed because you did this? Increased revenue, reduced costs, improved retention, accelerated delivery, resolved a blocker — whatever the metric, you need to know it and be able to articulate it clearly. If you cannot quantify the impact, you need to describe the qualitative outcome in a way that makes it tangible (ex. What people said about you).



MISTAKE 5

AVOIDING THE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

You know you should be reaching out to your network. You know you should be asking for introductions, referrals, and advice. You know you should be having direct conversations with hiring managers and decision-makers in your target companies.

Instead, you spend your time on lower-stakes activities: refining your CV for the fourteenth time, researching companies without reaching out to anyone, reading articles about networking instead of actually doing it.

Why this is costing you:

The difficult conversations are where the breakthroughs happen. A referral from someone who knows a hiring manager. A conversation with a decision-maker that leads to an unlisted role. A request for advice that turns into an introduction.

Avoiding these conversations keeps you in a low-return loop. You feel busy, but nothing moves. The longer you delay the high-stakes actions, the longer the search takes.

The direction of the solution:

The difficult conversations become easier once you have clarity on your story and your target. The discomfort is rarely about the conversation itself. It is about not knowing what to say, or fearing that you will sound desperate, or worrying that you are asking for too much.

Once you know exactly what you are asking for and why it is reasonable to ask for it, the conversations stop feeling difficult. They become a normal part of the process.



WHAT YOU CAN DO NEXT

If you recognized yourself in two or more of these mistakes, you are not alone. Most senior leaders I work with were making at least three of them before we started.

The good news is that all of these mistakes are fixable. The challenge is not your experience, your qualifications, or your market value. The challenge is how you are approaching the search.

If you want to talk about your specific situation and whether I can help, book a 30-minute call. No pitch, no pressure. Just an honest conversation about where you are and what needs to change.

 **Book a call:**

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