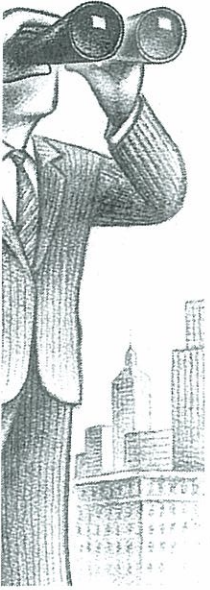


CAREER JOURNAL.

Outplacement Services



- Search for the right outplacement firm: If you have decided your assigned firm doesn't have the type of service you need, ask friends, family and former colleagues if they know of any good ones. An Internet search of "executive outplacement firms" in your city may also generate some leads.

- Pay attention to the office atmosphere: Visit the firm. Take a peek at the workspace. Are the other job seekers chatting in the office, sharing leads and industry intelligence? Do the coaches have time to mingle with the candidates? What about the support staff? Do they seem happy to help you with office needs like computer support?

- Conduct your own interviews: Find out who the good counselors are and how many candidates each one is required to see on a weekly basis. A caseload of 20 means you will probably be able to see your coach as often as necessary. If you don't plan to rely heavily on your counselor, then a caseload of 90 to 100 might be acceptable. But make sure that you're compatible with your career counselor and that she has experience in your field, understands what you do, and can help you network in your industry.

Also, find out whether other candidates at the firm have been successful getting a job in their field and at their experience level within their allotted time. Finally, ask questions of the other candidates: Are they happy with the service? Do they think you should sign on or look elsewhere?

- Sign on or make the switch: If you've decided you want to go elsewhere, call your former human-resources manager. Tell him you're unhappy with the service and explain why, and ask if the company will pay for your service at the firm you've chosen. Sometimes, all it takes is a request. "Most companies would fund a switch to an outplacement firm if the new service costs the same as the original service," says Charles Busuttill, Americas human-resources director for White & Case LLC, a global law firm.

If your former employer refuses to fund your switch, push it to contact the outplacement firm it chose and say you're not pleased. After all, the service is provided to help you find a job.

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v you work best: ice and try to deter- rst two weeks what l to succeed at your y not need a lot of rt, and networking easily. Perhaps you a few résumé-build- ng skills. But maybe ke an ongoing dia- r coach who can re- s or review letters t.

The Firm at Your New IT Job Was Just Acquired—Now What?

By **PERRI CAPELL**

Q: *I accepted a job offer from a technology-consulting firm. A few days later, the firm was acquired by a bigger company. I am concerned that as a new hire, I will be most vulnerable to layoffs. Should I rescind my acceptance?*

A: Layoffs often follow acquisitions, but don't assume your job is definitely at risk. Before making any decisions, do your homework on the acquiring company and why it's buying your prospective employer.

Go back to the recruiter, hiring manager and human-resources contact at your potential employer and ask why the acquisition is being made and what the purchase means to your department and job. Ask for their advice about what you should do.

Some acquisitions are made to gain technical expertise or build a new practice area. If you're a revenue generator or have a specialized expertise that the new company wants, it will probably want to keep you, says Denise Messineo, senior vice president of human resources for Dimension Data Americas, a 900-employee unit of a global information-technology consulting firm that has acquired other consulting organizations.

"There is a war for IT consultants right now, and I haven't seen layoffs of IT revenue generators in a long time," she says. "If you are immediately billable, the acquisition probably won't have an impact on you."

Your job may be more at risk if it's a staff or support role; if your practice area doesn't generate sufficient revenue; if the acquiring company has expertise like yours in-house or normally slashes costs after such deals; or if the consulting business slows down generally.

Review past acquisitions the new company has made and find out what typically happens to employees afterward, suggests Gaines

Baty, president of R. Gaines Baty Associates Inc., a recruiting firm in Dallas that works with consulting organizations. Determine whether it typically lays off staff, what the culture is like and whether your skills are complementary.

A consulting-firm client of Mr. Baty's announced it was being acquired after the recruiter had located candidates for openings there. The candidates talked with their prospective employer and researched the buying company's history and practices following similar deals. Almost all the candidates decided the purchase would probably improve their prospects, the recruiter says.

"They decided this could be more positive than negative, so they are still in the running," Mr. Baty says.

If the new company is larger and has more resources, you may be better off following the deal. If the purpose of the acquisition is to gain market share or a client list or to eliminate a competitor, you may want to consider other options, he says. If the answers you get aren't adequate, consider reactivating your job search.

Ms. Messineo adds that when acquisitions are imminent, firms being taken over often slow down recruiting for people who could be vulnerable after the deal is completed. Most likely, offer letters don't go out to candidates they don't plan to keep, she says. Laying off staff can be expensive.

"My experience is that unless it's to fill a critical role, there's a slowdown in hiring when a merger or acquisition is imminent because of the cost issues involved, such as paying severance or COBRA benefits," she says.

In making your decision, weigh your current situation. It may be worth taking the new job if you are unhappy at your present employer and are receiving a pay increase to move. If you decide to rescind your acceptance, be sure to explain your concerns and thank your prospective employer for its offer.

Send career questions to Perri Capell at careersqa@wsj.com.