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When Rachel asked me to help her husband find a job, I said no. You who know me know, I rarely say no. Especially to a challenge. But I told her, Pops (not his name, but what we call him) never does what I tell him to do. Everyone knows someone who won't be moved. For example, I can get a CFO to change a budget item, but I can't get my kid to drink orange juice. Put Grandma in the kitchen, and my son is quickly half-tanked on Minute-Maid.

We applied the Grandma theory to a discussion about, Who can help Pops? We settled on a mutual friend. I would pass the information along to the buddy, and the buddy would share the suggestions with Pops. This sounds complicated, but sometimes an indirect route is the best way to achieve results. In fact, most career plans now involve roundabouts.

One roundabout is education. You know you need it. But, "I'm too busy to finish my degree," is a common and understandable reason not to. That is, until you realize you are choosing, "Too busy" over "something better." Don't diminish your aspirations. You might have to step back in your career responsibilities and make time to learn new skills, either through an online class or continuing education program, but after completing that education, more doors will be open to you. Doors that lead to more money, more responsibility and more opportunity.

Another roundabout is job searching. I want Pops to stop applying for jobs indiscriminately online. Job searching is a numbers game, but not the way it used to be. The secret is not in applying to more positions; it lies in knowing more people at the company where you apply.

When my friend Nick wanted a shot at a Best Buy position, he gave his resume to (count 'em) five employees there. None of the five worked in the department Nick wanted to join, but all five passed along his resume because Nick had the qualifications needed and because he's a good guy. All Nick wanted was an interview. With five referrals, Nick got the interview. The rest was up to him.

Pops needs to use his online time more wisely, following companies on Twitter, exchanging messages with friends, relatives, associates and customers, and updating his LinkedIn profile to reflect his availability to work. Then, when he applies for that position online, he will have a referral from an internal employee who, by the way, might get a referral bonus out of the deal. Everyone wins.

If the straight and wide path ahead of you stretches on endlessly, you might want to try a side road. That roundabout strategy might be just the shortcut your career has been waiting for.

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