



Job Hunting Pitfalls

[Laura K. Gabel]

Watch your step when looking for your next position by reviewing these five job search “don’ts.”

There are five important steps to take in preparing for a job search in today’s highly competitive market:

Make a commitment to change;
Decide what you want;
Identify your marketable skills;
Understand the marketplace; and
Invest in your future.

Now, let’s take a look at five employment search Don’ts. These are things which should always be avoided regardless of your immediate status. If you are employed, underemployed, or unhappily employed, these are pitfalls which will limit your job hunting success.

1. Don’t Be Casual About Your Career. Take charge of managing your career instead of leaving it to your supervisor and the company’s human resources department. While harsh, it is an economic reality that they consider you as a resource to be used in providing goods or services to the marketplace. If there is a way to get things done more efficiently without you or if your employer encounters adverse conditions or just decides to make some organizational changes, the company’s interests will necessarily be served rather than yours.

The days of relying on an employer to satisfy job needs, let alone career needs, have long since passed. People can no longer count on beginning and 40 or 50 years later ending a career and retiring with the same company. No employer, even the federal government, can begin to pretend to be able to provide a

career’s worth of job security, setting aside advancement opportunities. Accept the fact that career entitlement no longer exists and that it’s up to you to manage your own career. Abdicating your career’s management to an employer, supervisor, or human resources department is the same as entrusting your fate to someone who, by nature, simply cannot put your best interest in top priority position. After all, it’s your career and your life, not theirs.

2. Don’t Shortchange Yourself. Often people think, “What could I possibly do? I’ll never be able to get the kind of job I want. I’m stuck for good.” This sort of reasoning just isn’t true and can easily become a self fulfilling prescription for failure. Take a school teacher who wants to make a change. Well, such a person has a lot to offer: Teachers like to work with and help others; they are educated and experienced in solving problems; they are good trainers and motivators; and they are good communicators accustomed to speaking in front of groups as well as one on one.

Now, let’s transfer these sorts of skills and see what happens. An expanding and always important area is that of customer service. It’s not easy to keep customers today so there are lots of organizations out there interested in customer service types of people, those who can communicate intelligently and like to work with others and be helpful. Later, follow on avenues include customer service supervision or training where skills like group presentations, motivating, and problem solving are essential. Too many

people don’t give themselves enough credit in the skills area because they seem to have tunnel vision about themselves and focus on only one thing when, in truth, they really do have transferable skills valuable in the marketplace.

3. Don’t Ignore Your Packaging. An easy way to understand this is to think of a common, everyday item, something like toothpaste. If you go to the store and you’re going to buy toothpaste, you typically see a generic or store brand and an array of heavily promoted brands. Which one will you buy? Chances are, you’ll probably buy the one you think has the most “zing”: A catchy jingle; an eye grabbing box; testimonials, studies, and surveys; and promises of a brighter smile and a fresher breath.

It doesn’t matter much to you that the brand you selected costs more than the store brand even though there is little, if any, real difference between the two. Price didn’t make the difference; rather, it was the overall promotional package. The same thing holds true in packaging yourself to succeed in the job search market. Try to highlight your measured accomplishments and remember that your resume is your box label. You need to separate yourself from the crowd of competition by promoting yourself. Identify organizations you feel could use your skills and tell them what you can do.

Think of yourself as a valuable product in the market, a product that will benefit from good promotional packaging. Overcome any feelings of rejection because each “No” only



moves you nearer to the next "Yes". Tooth-paste manufacturers know that persistence pays off in the long run; this is also true in the job market.

4. Don't Be A One Stop Shopper. This is especially important because so many people seem to have serious misconceptions about how to conduct a successful employment search. The unadvertised job market in the U.S. actually accounts for something in the area of 75 to 85% of the overall market. People who rely solely on employment agencies, executive search firms, or advertisements appearing in newspapers will miss the largest part of the market. In fact, these sources (the 42,000 agencies, all 3,500 search firms, and the ads in all U.S. papers for a whole year) cover only about 15% of the total.

The informed job seeker isn't a one stop shopper; rather, he/she pursues several different avenues all at the same time, including networking to tap the informal or unadvertised market. This increases the probability of success in a shorter amount of time because the individual is exposed to many more possibilities than would otherwise be possible.

5. Don't Follow The Path Of Least Resistance. If you are unsure about how to approach the job market, make an investment in having people help you. This could be a support group or a career marketing or consulting firm. It might seem to be a little easier at first to take short cuts but, as is usually the case, the path of least resistance leads to the place of least results. Few people really know how to market themselves into a new career. A U.S. Census Bureau survey found that 65% of unemployed individuals spent less than five hours a week on their job searches; only 13% spent more than 16 hours a week. So, for the rest of us it takes an initial investment in time and effort to learn the best methods and the right packaging and then it takes research, planning, and, yes, hard work. In the end it will all have been well worth it though because you will

have found what you want.

Your job search will be expedited if you avoid these five difficulties and conduct your search as a job or project in and of itself.

Laura K. Gabel is Vice President of Administration with Alan Randall Associates. Attorneyalternatives.com specializes in attorney transitions and is a service of ARA.