

Job Search Strategies

Searching for a job is about marketing yourself to potential employers.

In order to do this effectively, you need to take time to identify, not only your skills, accomplishments and experience, but also your interests, values, and goals. Knowing what you want from a job and what you can offer prospective employers is important information that will help facilitate your job search. For example, if spending time with family and friends is a priority for you, then a job that requires you to travel frequently or work nights and weekends may not be a good fit.

Use the following list to identify the factors that will bring the greatest satisfaction in your work and life. Circle your top five and rank them in order of priority.

- Job security
- Working as part of a team
- Working independently
- Career recognition/professional status
- Intellectual challenges
- Work location /commuting distance
- Variety or repetition in daily tasks
- Financial rewards
- Fringe benefits
- Family-friendly policies (e.g., flex time)
- Creative environment
- Advancement potential

Identify what inspires you.

To identify areas of interest, look at the activities in your life that you enjoy the most. How do you enjoy spending your free time? Career tests are available through the Internet or college counseling if you need help identifying areas of interest.

Develop accomplishment statements.

One key to conducting a successful job search is to create accomplishment statements. Accomplishment statements summarize your most important skills and help you communicate them to prospective employers. Be sure to connect your skills concisely with the needs identified by the prospective employer. The most marketable skills are often those that are transferable to a wide variety of work environments such as the ability to communicate effectively, manage projects, and facilitate work teams.

Find a career match.

The next step is to explore career opportunities that align with your values, interests and skills. Many resources are available that may help you identify new and exciting career options. After thoroughly researching potential opportunities, target a few that you consider realistic and attractive.

Plan a job search timeline.

Set a target date for finding a job. Then, work backward from your target date to plan out a timeline for your job search. Schedule a time each day devoted to accomplishing job search-related tasks, such as updating your resume, looking at job listings, and attending career fairs and networking events. The greater the number of contacts you make and interviews you schedule, the more job offers you are likely to receive.

Customize. Customize. Customize.

To improve your odds of success when responding to advertised vacancies:

- Be sure your cover letter answers every requirement listed in the advertisement.
- Personalize your response as much as possible. Address your materials to a specific individual, not "To Whom It May Concern," or "Dear Sir/Madam." In the case of a blind advertisement (where the name of the organization is withheld) address your letter to a specific position title such as "Dear Customer Service Manager."

Network for success.

Reviewing posted positions is not the only way to find a job. According to an article in the *Harvard Business Review*, nearly 80 percent of the open positions are never advertised or posted online. For that reason, job-seekers should focus on establishing networks and identifying the hidden job market.

To develop a contact network, acquaint yourself with professionals in your chosen field. These professionals can provide you with an insider's view and open doors that might otherwise remain closed. Your network can and should include a variety of people, from family members and friends, to business associates and electronic discussion groups.

If you hear about an opening that is not being advertised, contact the employer directly. Send your resume and cover letter to the employer's Human Resources department or to a specific person, then follow up with a phone call. Do not be reluctant to submit your credentials to more than one manager within an organization. This demonstrates your enthusiasm and interest. When you call, be sure to emphasize your knowledge and interest in the organization. Even if you don't land an interview, the interaction is still valuable. They may think of you the next time they have an appropriate opening.

Stay in touch and stay organized.

Stay in touch with these company contacts on a bi-monthly basis. Always follow up with a thank-you letter or phone call when they have provided helpful information or suggestions. Maintain a careful record of all interviews, thank-you notes sent, referrals made and other follow-up actions. Job seekers who fail to record this information often lose valuable contacts as well as credibility with prospective employers. Templates for keeping these records are available through various Internet sources.

Don't forget to say thank you.

Once you have accepted a position, be sure to relay the good news to all the people who helped you in your search. A hand-written thank you note is a great way to demonstrate your appreciation.

Common Job Hunting Mistakes to Avoid

- Interviewing while angry with your former employer.
- Thinking or acting negatively.
- Procrastinating. As a rule, effort equals results. The harder you work at a job search, the sooner you meet with success.
- Thinking you're more marketable than you really are.
- Taking rejection badly.
- Acting desperate. Even if you feel desperate, don't let it show.
- Shooting too high (or too low).
- Settling for a "job" rather than for a good fit where you'll be happy.
- Asking for jobs, but never asking for advice, ideas, or referrals. Business contacts are generally willing to point you in the right direction, but they may feel uncomfortable being asked directly for a job.
- Not preparing for interviews.
- Coming on too strong. Being pushy can be counter-productive.