

Adapted from
Ten Tips for an Effective Job Search

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There are three principal stages of career development. These include:

1. Self-assessment (Who am I?)
2. Career Exploration (Where am I going?)
3. The Job Search (How do I get there?)

An individual who has completed the first two stages will be more carefully prepared to take on the final stage. Getting started can be the hardest part, but investing your time will be worth the results.

A well thought out job search strategy can help you achieve your career goals. Research studies indicate that only 40 percent of adults surveyed in a national poll said they had planned their career path. However, those who planned their career path reported greater job satisfaction than those who did not. When you enter into the job search process you may expect many feelings including anxiety, stress, and fear. You may also experience a sense of optimism and excitement. Any job search is a complex and multifaceted project. It involves many variables in the decision-making process including your skills, values, interests, salary requirements, benefits, location, advancement, responsibilities and corporate culture. Essentially it should be a successfully executed marketing campaign.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, if you are like most workers, you probably will change jobs 10-12 times in the course of your working life. At least one of those job changes will be “involuntary,” and you will probably make at least three major career changes. Remember, 20-25 percent of the workforce changes annually. Finding your next job is important, but it is even more important in the long-term that you learn the skills to find a new job whenever the need arises. The following sequential and systematic strategies will help you take the mystery and fear out of this challenging undertaking.

1. Get Professional Assistance

If you need professional assistance, there are a variety of organizations that offer services to get your job search underway: One-Stop Career Centers, local schools and community colleges, libraries, non-profit organizations, and privately-run career counseling firms.

A trained career counselor can guide you through the three stages of career development. They can validate jobs that you may already have been thinking about or give you ideas you may not have thought about. They can also help you stay organized, focused and avoid distractions. Job searching can be a lonely and often frustrating process. By reaching out and forming a “dream team” of advisors, you can get the much needed support to stay motivated and become successful.

2. Conduct a Complete Self-Assessment

A career counselor will help you clarify exactly what you want in both your professional and personal life. You know you want a job, but a job doing what? Do you need to relocate? Will it be meaningful work or is making money more of a priority? These and other important questions need to be taken into important consideration. During the self-assessment stage, you will conduct a careful inventory of your skills, values, interests and personality. Often this is done with a combination of counseling and career testing.

Next, the career counselor can help you match up a summary of your personal profile with possible career and job options. Be honest and specific as possible with your career priorities. Perhaps you urgently need a job now, but also think about where you would like your career to be in three to five years. What are you willing to sacrifice in the short-term to achieve your long-term goals? Estimate how much it is going to cost you to cover travel or other career related expenses. I encourage you to commit to writing these and other professional goals and stay positive. Deliberate goal setting is the foundation on which all healthy career development is built.

3. Explore Your Options

In the second stage of career development, Career Exploration, you will do four things:

1. Reading and Research
2. Networking and Informational Interviewing
3. Gaining Experience
4. Evaluating Each Career Option

After you spend some quality time accomplishing these four tasks, you will want to prioritize your top 10 jobs into three types of Career Categories:

1. Ideal Jobs – “These are the jobs I really, really want.”
2. Back-Up Jobs – “These are realistic jobs I could probably get and would be somewhat satisfied.”
3. Safety Jobs – “These are the jobs I must take in order to stay afloat.”

Again, commit these to writing!

4. Research Your Job Search Prospects

The next step is to identify ALL of the prospective employers in each of the three Career Categories that reside in your geographical area of preference. I recommend that you use combination of print and online resources. Create an exhaustive list in a spreadsheet which should include a grid of the following:

Job Search Item Checklist	
1. Employer’s name	6. Date of first interview
2. Contact person	7. Date of second interview
3. Address, phone, email address, web site, and fax	8. Date thank you letter sent
4. Date resume sent	9. Job offer yes/no
5. Date of follow-up phone call	

Develop a record keeping system that works for you. You may need to submit 30-40 resumes or more that generate five to 10 interviews that result in two to three offers.

5. Develop Your Resume and Cover Letter

These are your most important job search documents, so spend some quality time making them persuasive. Your resume and cover letter is the very first impression an employer has of you. These documents summarize your education and experience and serve as essential marketing tools. A professional career counselor can provide samples that have been successful in the past. Be sure your resume and cover letter is tailored to a specific person and job. Contact your references and inform them of your career plans.

6. Implement Your Job Search Campaign

You will need to employ a number of job search techniques in order to be successful. Networking remains the most effective job search technique and also the most time-consuming. As a result, I recommend that you spend 80 percent of your time contacting friends, family, colleagues, the Department of Labor, alumni, and anyone in your email address book that can provide support, job leads and “connections.”

You will need to send out several resume and cover letters on a regular and disciplined basis in order to produce the right number of interviews and then offers. When you think about executing your search, develop a time frame that works for you. If you are serious, you will commit a few hours each week to job hunting. Typically, resumes and cover letters sent out today will not generate any interviews for several weeks. Set a pace that works for you by breaking down large tasks into smaller more manageable weekly assignments.

Start reading online career articles and job search books that can be found at your local bookstore or library. By reading at least 10 pages per night, you will continue to learn about what you need to do to land your next job. The more methods you use, the faster you will get results. Focus on networking, but don't ignore the other techniques listed below in order of effectiveness:

Job Search Techniques (ranked in order of effectiveness)	
1. Networking	6. Volunteer into a Career
2. Targeting Employers Directly	7. Using Professional Associations
3. Utilizing Career Centers	8. Internet Job Searching
4. Careers from the Classifieds	9. Attending Career Fairs
5. From Temp to Permanent	10. Job Search Clubs and Career Parties

7. Follow-up, Follow-up, Follow-up!!!

After distributing your resume, it is perfectly acceptable and recommended that you follow-up with a phone call if the employer has not contacted you within a reasonable amount of time. Be sure your voice mail sounds professional. When you get the person on the phone, politely tell him or her that you are checking on the status of your resume and cover letter, and you are still very interested in the position. Be politely persistent with interviewers. Your goal in this phone conversation is to convince them to schedule you for an interview. Remember: the resume does

not get you a job; its purpose is to get you an interview. Rarely does someone obtain a job over the phone. Typically, they will want to meet you to see if you are as good in person as you appear on paper.

8. Develop Your Interview Skills

Interviewing is the most important and most neglected part of the job search. Being a good talker does not guarantee interview success. The purpose is to determine “fit.” Most candidates are eliminated in the first two minutes because they lack what employers’ term “presence.” Your job is to help the interviewer see the match between your background and the job.

Before the interview you will want to properly prepare for what will happen during the interview. I recommend that you set up an appointment with your career counselor for a mock interview. This 90 minute appointment consists of a half-hour video-taped practice interview followed by an hour of play-back analysis. The career counselor asks typical questions tailored to your upcoming job interview. Traditional and behavioral-based interview questions are asked. After the interview, the career counselor will provide constructive feedback on body-language, eye contact, handling difficult questions and delivery designed to help improve your presentation. Come to the mock interview with a resume, job description and dressed as if it were the actual interview. I would suggest you review a list of sample interview questions prior to the appointment. The mock interview is an excellent opportunity to evaluate your strengths and to see what areas you need to improve. Few of my clients have considered the mock interview a waste of time.

During the real interview, be sure to express your energy and enthusiasm for the opportunity. Emphasize by examples the top three to five skills you offer. At the end, ask the interviewer, “What’s the next step?” Ahead of time, you will want to clarify if they need a transcript, list of references, application or other documents and when they will be getting back to you with their decision. Be sure to go home and take notes on what you learned. This will be important to refer to later when it comes to evaluating a possible job offer.

9. Send Thank You Letters, Be Patient and Follow-up

Within 24 to 48 hours after the interview, I suggest you send a sincere and tailored thank you letter. Only about 10 percent of candidates ever do this, but it can sometimes give you an edge over the competition. Depending on the company and situation, the letter can be typed, emailed or handwritten on a card.

You will also need to rely on your patience since the job search often takes much longer than you might expect. If the employer has not called you when they say they would, it is acceptable for you to contact them and reiterate your interest and see how the process is coming along. Depending on your situation and salary expectations, finding a job can take on average three to nine months. You will get out of this project exactly what you put into it; therefore, commit a set number of hours each week for accomplishing specific tasks on your list. Try not to feel overwhelmed or frustrated with all you need to do. Your search is more like a marathon than a sprint. Along the way, make sure your plan is flexible and reassess how you are doing and what activities are effective. Do you need to modify, redirect or revise your job targets and goals? Is it time to go after your “safety job?”

10. Evaluate Job Offers

Congratulations, after a longer than expected job search you have an offer on the table. Before you accept, be sure to carefully evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of this important decision. You should thoughtfully weigh such important factors as the job content, your supervisor, training, advancement prestige, salary, location, and benefits.