

The 27 Mistakes Job Seekers Make In Their Job Search

Are you making these mistakes in your job search? Chances are, you're making at least one or two — if not more! Go through this checklist and mark which mistakes you're currently making — and then follow the suggestions to learn how to stop making that mistake!

Mistakes Checklist

- [] **Looking for a Job.** Wait, I shouldn't look for a job? Don't just look for a job — look for a career. A calling. What are you meant to do? How can you use your skills, education, and experience for maximum benefit? You may not see that position advertised in a job posting. That doesn't mean it doesn't exist. What kinds of problems could you solve for a company? What kind of company needs those problems solved? Investigate how you could solve that problem for that kind of company.
- [] **Not Targeting Your Job Search.** What kinds of jobs are you interested in? What kind of company do you want to work for? If your answer is, "I don't care, I just need a job," your job search is less likely to be successful than if you spend some time thinking about where you want to work, and what you want to do (and how to get there!).
- [] **Not Making It Easy for an Employer to See How You'd Fit In.** Generic resumes don't attract employer attention. Instead, you need to show an employer how you can add value to their company. You need to customize your tool for the job. You wouldn't use a hammer to tighten a screw, would you? You can't use the same résumé to apply for vastly different jobs — for example, an elementary teaching position and a job as a sales assistant. Figure out what the key components of the job are, and then showcase how you can do those things in your résumé.
- [] **Quitting Your Job Instead of Keeping It While You Find a Better One.** Maybe your Mom gave you this advice: "Don't quit your job until you have a new one." Mom was onto something. It's controversial, but hiring managers and recruiters confirm that it's easier to find a job if you're currently employed. Job seekers who have a job are more attractive candidates. Maybe it's because unemployment can make you (seem) desperate. But study after study shows that currently employed candidates are hired more frequently than unemployed job seekers ... it's especially tough if you have been out of work for quite some time.
- [] **Confusing Activity with Action.** Are you confusing "busywork" with progress? Are you spending a lot of time researching jobs online and applying for lots of positions? While it's recommended that you spend at least an hour a day on your job search if you are currently employed (and two to three times that if you are currently unemployed), make sure you are tracking *how much* time you are spending, and *what* you are spending it on. Spend your time on high-value tasks — like identifying and researching companies you'd like to work for, and trying to connect directly with hiring managers and recruiters, and having coffee with someone who works for the company you're applying at — and not just simply spending time in front of your computer.
- [] **Paying Attention to Other People's Opinions.** "You have to do this," "Never do that," "My cousin's best friend got a job by standing out in front of the company wearing a sandwich board." Everyone's got an opinion about how to conduct a job search. Some of it is confusing, some of it is just plain wrong. Your friends and family can be wrong about how the job search works, and it might hurt your chances to get your dream job. Trust your résumé writer, and trust your instincts. Don't believe everything you read online, and remember that one person's opinion is just that — one person's opinion.
- [] **Doing the Same Thing Over and Over Again and Expecting Different Results.** "I applied for six jobs and haven't heard anything back." Well, then something's not working. Either stop applying for advertised positions, start following up on the applications you've already put in, or figure out a different way to connect with your dream job. It's been said that "the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." If what you're doing isn't working, do something different!
- [] **Not Paying Attention to What Worked for You Before in Your Job Search.** This is the opposite of doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. This time, we want you to achieve the *same result* as before — a great job. So look at what worked for you the last time you landed the job you wanted. Were you networking at a professional association meeting? At your child's basketball game and

struck up a conversation with the person next to you? Or did you apply on a company's website? Consider doing *more* of what worked for you last time and see if it works for you again.

- [] **Applying Through Traditional Means.** You see a job posted on Indeed.com for a job you're really interested in. Do you click "Apply Now"? Not without first looking to see if the job is advertised on the company's own website. Applying on the company's website is generally preferred to applying through a job search portal, even if the application button takes you to the same form. (That way, it will list the source of the application as the company website and not Indeed.com.) After you apply online, don't stop there. See if you are already connected with someone at the company. Reach out to him or her and see if you can find the name of the hiring manager. Connect with the hiring manager directly by email or phone. Follow up by mailing a print copy of your résumé.
- [] **Forgetting That People Hire People.** It's easy to get overwhelmed by the technology in a job search. How to make your résumé ATS-friendly (meaning, helping it get through the Applicant Tracking System software that many large companies use). How to use LinkedIn in the job search. Don't forget that ultimately, people hire people. Connecting to the right person at a company can make the difference between getting hired, and not even getting a response to your application.
- [] **Getting Frustrated.** The average length of time for a job search has steadily increased over the past few years. In a recent RiseSmart survey, 40 percent of hiring managers report conducting between 3-10 interviews before extending a job offer, and nearly three-quarters of those surveyed said their hiring process is three weeks or longer. So don't be discouraged if it takes days ... or weeks ... to hear back after applying or interviewing.
- [] **Putting All Your Eggs in One Basket.** "But this is my dream job!" While that may be true, you will have a better chance of getting a *better* job if you don't rely on a single opportunity. Wouldn't it be great to have two or three job offers to choose from? That's only going to happen if you diversify your job search. Apply for multiple positions — even a couple you think you wouldn't necessarily accept. You never know — you might learn in the interview process that it really *is* your dream job — or the company might even create your dream job for you, once they know what you have to offer them.
- [] **Not Spending Enough Time on Your Job Search.** You've probably heard it said that looking for a job is a job in itself. That's partially true. Yes, some people will hear about an opportunity from a friend and get hired (sometimes without even applying). But for the vast majority of job seekers, you'll have to invest time in getting your résumé prepared, applying for positions, following up, and more.
- [] **Spending Too Much Time on Your Job Search.** On the other hand, it is possible to spend *too much* time on your job search. It's easy to get wrapped up in your job search and, the next thing you know, it's 1 A.M. Remember, one of the best ways to find your next job is talking to people you know. So give yourself permission to "stop working" on your job search and hang out with your friends. (And maybe make some new friends while you're at it!)
- [] **Spending Too Much Time Online.** It's easy to think that a modern job search can be done entirely online. But it's estimated that 75 percent of jobs are never advertised — so it's likely that the job you want can't be found while you're sitting at your computer. Get out and talk to people you know! Meet new people!
- [] **Not Having a Support Network.** A job search can be difficult. It can be stressful. It can be exhausting. You need a support network to help you through it. That can include not only friends and family, but also paid professionals who are there to guide, motivate, and encourage you. A résumé writer, career coach, or even a mental health therapist can be a valuable part of your support network.
- [] **Not Engaging Professionals to Help.** Speaking of résumé writers, career coaches, and therapists, one common mistake job seekers make is trying to go it alone. If you wanted to climb Mount Everest, you'd hire a guide. When you're climbing the job search mountain, engage a "career navigator" to help you along the way!
- [] **Not Asking Others for Help.** When someone asks you for help in their job search, you willingly offer it (if you're able), don't you? So why is it that we're so reluctant to ask others for their help when we need it? People like to help other people. Don't be afraid to ask for help. But make sure you're asking for the right *kind*

of help. Ask specific questions: "Do you know anyone who works for Company XYZ?" "How did you get your job at Organization ABC?" "Would you mind helping me practice my interview answers?"

- [] **Only Applying for Advertised Jobs.** Research shows that up to three-quarters of job openings are never advertised publicly. Many of these are filled through employee referrals and word of mouth. And sometimes, you can apply to a company for a job that doesn't even exist yet. Yes, companies do create jobs. Sometimes they will meet a candidate and not have a current opening that would be a match. In that case, they will sometimes create a new position that takes advantage of the candidate's knowledge and experience.
- [] **Networking the Wrong Way.** Second only to not using your network at all is using it incorrectly. Your network is comprised of all the people that you know and *also* all the people that they know. Don't just think that because you don't personally know anyone who works for Company ABC that you're out of luck using your network. Ask the people you know who they know. But remember that networking requires relationship building and relationship management. If you haven't talked to someone for five years, don't let your first contact with them be, "Hey, can you help me get a job at your company?" Author Harvey Mackay has a great book on this: "Dig Your Well Before You're Thirsty."
- [] **Unintentionally Broadcasting Your Job Search.** If you're currently employed, be careful with your job search. Don't set up a LinkedIn profile and send out so many connection requests that you go from 0 to 500 connections in a week. Be thoughtful about your job search, and deliberate. Turn off the setting that sends notifications to others in LinkedIn, especially as you build your profile. Don't apply to job postings that don't specify the employer. (That perfect job you're applying for might be your current position!) And be sure to let any recruiters you're working with know that you're conducting a confidential job search.
- [] **Not Doing Your Homework.** You wouldn't buy a car without researching the brand, make, and model a bit first, would you? Then why would you go to an interview without first doing a Google search on the company, looking at their website, and studying what they do? It's easier than ever these days to not only research the company, but also the person interviewing you and you may even be able to find out the salary range for your position at that company!
- [] **Not Asking What the Next Step Is.** You're finishing the interview. The interviewer asks if you have any questions. You don't ask any. They shake your hand and you leave. You've missed a huge opportunity. Thank the interviewer for his or her time. Tell them you're very interested in the position and then *ask* what the next step is! "Is there anything else you need from me at this point? What's the next step? Can I follow up with you next week if I haven't heard back from you? Would you prefer I call or send you an email?"
- [] **Badmouthing Your Current Employer.** Even if you're unhappy in your current job, keep that to yourself. Don't post negative status updates on social media and do *not* say anything about your current employer when interviewing for a new job. Stick to phrases like, "I am looking for a new challenge," or "I'm looking to use my skills and experience in a new setting, and when I heard about this opportunity, I couldn't pass it up."
- [] **Not Following All the Way Through.** Sometimes you'll apply for a job, get selected for an interview, and not get the offer. That's going to happen. The question is: What can you learn from it? If you don't follow through, you can't use the experience to get closer to your dream job. So follow up! Don't be afraid to reach out to the hiring manager and thank them for the opportunity to meet with them. Ask for their honest advice about what you could do better in future interviews. Ask about the person who got hired. What qualifications, skills, education, or experience did they have that you didn't? Sometimes you won't be able to get an answer to your questions — but imagine how helpful it would be if you did!
- [] **Being Unprepared for Your Job Search.** You need tools to help you succeed in your job search. An updated, targeted resume. A "complete" LinkedIn profile with at least 150 connections. Cover letters. Thank you letters. Answers to the top 20 interview questions you might be expected to answer. You wouldn't go into battle unarmed; don't go into a job search unprepared.
- [] **Not Thanking People Who Have Helped You Along the Way.** Once you've successfully landed your new job, don't forget to go back and thank those people who helped you with your job search. That will help ensure they're willing to help you the next time you're looking to make a move.