



An Insider's Perspective: Job Search Success Tips

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I have often thought that if candidates knew how recruiting worked in the real world, they would reconsider some of the ways they communicate with recruiters and potential employers. I decided to open the curtain and shed some light on some harsh truths in the recruiting world.

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Recruiters receive hundreds of new resumes every day, and the initial review is lightning-quick. You need to tailor your resume to every job for which you apply. If your resume doesn't "bleed" the job description or if the information is difficult to ascertain in those few seconds, recruiters are not likely to contact you.

Make it easy for recruiters to see that you are a strong fit for the role. Bullets rule in our world. Full paragraphs will be skimmed, but not read in great detail on first review. If need be, have several versions of your resume that focus on specific core competencies and the type of role you are seeking. That way it will be easier to "tweak" your resume for specific jobs.

Recruiters want answers to very specific questions when they review your resume.

What this means to you:

When recruiters review resumes, they are looking for answers to key questions, such as:

- What are your core competencies?
- Do you meet the basic job requirements?
- Do you show career progression?
- Are you a job-hopper? If not, why do you have short tenures?
- What is your educational background, and what insights can be gleaned from your professional and educational experience?

Once you have completed writing your resume, review it to make sure these questions are answered.

Recruiters love supporting details that define your core competencies.

What this means to you:

Proof of your core competency is in the numbers. Quantify wherever possible. For example, if you are a salesperson, your resume should include your sales quota, what percentage you were above plan, the number of new accounts you landed, etc. Make it easy to ascertain whether you are a "hunter" or "farmer," which verticals you sold into, etc. If you are an operations executive, make it clear how many people you manage, the size of your budget, examples of key projects, etc.

Agency recruiters & executive search professionals represent the hiring company.

What this means to you:

Clients (the hiring companies) engage external search professionals to help them find and screen candidates for particular roles. Recruiters keep the client's needs, requirements and ideal candidate profile at the forefront of every interaction with job-seekers. Sometimes candidates do not treat the interview with recruiting agencies as a "real interview." Be assured that it is. Recruiters must make sure the candidate would be a strong fit based on the hard and soft skills sought by the client. If, for example, a candidate seems unprofessional, too wordy, or shows low energy when speaking to the recruiter, that candidate will not be presented to the company. Treat this first-round interview with care and seriousness so you have the best chance of obtaining the interview with the client.

If you are not a fit, then be "legit."

What this means to you:

Recruiters receive thousands of resumes per job posting and this "information overload" creates a strong dislike for people that waste their time. If you are not a fit for a specific role or have to stretch your experience too far, then please don't apply for that specific position. Instead, send an email detailing your core competencies. When recruiters receive resumes applying for a specific vacant role and the resume contains very little relevant experience, more often than not your resume won't even be entered in the database. Your "random submission" creates the impression that you are desperate for a position ... any position. Please be selective and tailor your resume to each job for which you apply.

Don't assume that applying for one position at a company means you will be considered for other positions.

What this means to you:

In our experience, when executive or corporate recruiters have a new opening, they post the position and reach out to their networks. They check internal databases last. So, check the sites weekly to see if any new jobs are added, and apply for specific positions.

Your resume may be in their database, but the first candidates recruiters contact about an opportunity are those they know and who stay in front of them.

What this means to you:

Speak with recruiters on the phone and meet in person whenever possible, so they can put a face or voice with a name. Send them monthly emails with your resume attached to remind them you are still in "job-search mode." This may feel uncomfortable for you, but you need to advocate for yourself.

Your resume needs to be a "stand-alone" document.

What this means to you:

Given the volume of resumes that recruiters receive, cover letters are, at best, skimmed, or at worst, never opened. In addition, since cover letters are generally not forwarded to hiring managers, your resume needs to stand on its own. Make sure you add specific phrases from the job description so recruiters can quickly see your experience is a match. Long paragraphs won't be read, so use boldface to highlight important information. Treat your resume as your one true marketing document.

Don't include your total years of experience in your resume summary.

What this means to you:

We see many resumes that explicitly state "25 years of experience." This takes you out of the running for any position designating a 10-year person or someone with less experience. Instead, state "extensive experience" or "in-depth experience." This delivers the same message and makes you a viable candidate for a range of positions.

Unsolicited resumes that are not targeted to a specific opening are reviewed even more quickly than submissions for a direct job posting.

What this means to you:

Make sure your introduction includes bullets itemizing what type and level of job you are seeking, your core skill competencies, and your geographic preference. You want to make reviewing your resume as easy as possible.

Applying to a job through an online job posting should be your last resort.

What this means to you:

If you see a blind posting where the company name is not indicated, you have little choice but to send your resume, hope they receive it, and keep your fingers crossed that they will contact you. If the company is named, check LinkedIn to see whether you know anyone at the company or someone you know can introduce you to an employee who works there. Ask your contact whether they might forward your resume to HR on your behalf. You can also try to find out who in HR is handling the search so you can submit your resume directly to a specific contact. Be sure to follow up accordingly.

Don't assume anything.

What this means to you:

Recruiters are inundated with resumes. Don't assume they received yours, and don't assume a friend passed your resume on to the appropriate party. Follow up with recruiters or hiring managers via email to confirm that they received your resume, and ask what the next steps will be. Additionally, ask for feedback. At worst, they won't respond but on the positive side, you could potentially obtain valuable information on your candidacy.

"Job-hoppers" are especially difficult to place.

What this means to you:

If you have legitimate reasons for leaving positions after short tenures, such as relocation or downsizing, then include the reason(s) in your resume. The recruiter will definitely ask the question, so take the initiative to answer before it is asked.

Calling a recruiter is only half a proactive step.

What this means to you:

Many people call a few recruiters and count each interaction as one proactive step. The truth is that, initially, it is only a proactive step if the recruiter has a current opening that fits your background. Otherwise, your resume is placed in their database, and you may or may not be contacted in the future.

There are additional ways to empower yourself. I cannot emphasize enough the need to be your own advocate. Network, network, and network some more. Your job search is an opportunity to reach out to anyone you've worked with, met, seen, etc. (You get the point.) You can start by just letting them know you are in the job market and ask if they would be open to a call to share some of their insights on the industry, job market etc. Make the content of the message low pressure.

On a side note, make sure your LinkedIn profile is up to date, contains a picture, and contains searchable skills and industries, enabling recruiters to find you. Make it easy to ascertain what your core competencies are. LinkedIn is one of the most valuable marketing pieces you can utilize to showcase your skills, talent, ability to add value to an organization, and to clarify what type of roles would be the best fit.

When interviewing, your answers should be concise and to the point. If your answer is taking three minutes or longer, you are speaking at least a minute too long.

What this means to you:

Stick to the main points. The interviewer can ask a follow-up question at any time, if he or she chooses. Often, when candidates are nervous, they tend to give too much tangential information. Better to say too little than too much. You can always ask a follow-up question, or "Would you like me to go into more detail?"

People hire people they like.

What this means to you:

It's not enough to have the necessary skill set for the job. The intangibles – personality and corporate culture fit – are extremely important as well. Make sure you are warm and personable in your interview and show that you have the interpersonal skills/attitude to do the job.

A job search is much easier when you have a written plan in place.

What this means to you:

Every business has a business plan, and your job search is no exception. This includes having an actionable outline in place for daily, weekly, and monthly goals. Document what steps you have taken each day. Most people approach their job search haphazardly, and this adds to feelings of helplessness and panic. Empowering yourself during this time is invaluable.

Most job-hunters find it difficult to enjoy their free time. They feel guilty, believing they should be doing something for their job search all the time—but they aren't sure what.

What this means to you:

Have a plan in place so that each day you work for a specific amount of time and have a set of daily goals. Documenting what you have done every day also helps you clearly see the tangible steps you have taken. You can then go out and enjoy some time away from the search, knowing you have accomplished your goals for the day.

Keeping your energy up and your attitude positive is critical to finding a new position.

What this means to you:

When you meet a job-seeker in person, it's fairly easy to determine whether he or she has been out of work a few months or longer, without even reviewing that person's resume. Being out of work is extremely stressful, and more often than not, it comes out in a person's energy and presentation. Anxiety, desperation, fear, self-doubt, and frustration are all natural feelings, given the circumstances. In my experience, the people who exercise and stay active present themselves in a more positive light in an interview than those who don't.

Finally...get ready to be outside your comfort zone.

What this means to you:

It's often not easy to ask for help from your friends, past co-workers, neighbors, etc., but this is a necessary component of a successful job search. Prepare yourself mentally to accept the fact that some of these networking conversations may be uncomfortable, but know that preparing your "marketing message request" will make you feel more confident and comfortable in reaching out to people and letting them know you're in transition. Have casual conversations, not necessarily asking if they know of a job opening, but more like asking for their insights into the current job market, specific career paths, interview or job search suggestions, etc. People are more open to these discovery/open-ended conversations. If you just ask if they know of a job, then the answer may be "no" and the conversation stops there. Reach out to college alumni and former employers and co-workers through LinkedIn and just let them know you are in transition and would love to "pick their brain." Feel the discomfort and do it anyway. Remember, it's a marathon—not a sprint!

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