

by James F. Fitzgerald, CPA



Seven Obstacles to a Successful Job Search

Given the current downsizings and lay-offs, let me share these thoughts with you. Here are the most frequent and major obstacles that I have seen people stumble over during my years as an outplacement consultant. To enhance your job search you will need to overcome these stumbling blocks. The seven obstacles are:

1. Overcoming inertia.
2. Handling rejection
3. Getting organized
4. Seeing people
5. Developing persistence
6. Being in control
7. Doing your homework.

OVERCOMING INERTIA

Being unemployed dissipates a person's energies. Otherwise very active, energetic, people acquire the habit of procrastinating when in a job search. They cross into the world of Gonna. They are "gonna" contact that company. They are "gonna" call that prospect. They are "gonna" look up the information. Dick Bolles, author of *What Color Is Your Parachute*, says that about two thirds of all job seekers spend five hours a week or less in their job search. Do you know anybody who is successful in their career by working five hours a week? So your competition is really only about 15-20% of job seekers: those who are seriously looking for work. The real test, as it relates to success in the job search process, is: Can you get yourself moving? Can you think of ways that will prompt you to do something? Set attainable goals and work towards their achievement. Get into exercise; it will help to keep up your energy.

HANDLING REJECTION

This concern seems to go to the core of our existence. What's been your experience? Who gets enthused about being rejected? Have you heard people speak eloquently about how they were turned down? Nobody likes rejection. But, consider the rule of thumb used in the insurance business; 10 good calls will result in 3 meetings which will result in one sale. So, if accomplished insurance agents can only close on one out of ten prospects, why is it then, that as a job seeker we expect to close on every sale/interview. No one bats 1000.

Do you expect to win (succeed) at every single interview? We need to deal with the realization that even the best athletes, insurance sale rep-

resentatives, and job seekers, do not win all of the time. Can we mitigate our need to succeed by redefining success? Have an alternative strategy if you see a "NO" coming. Flatter the interviewer a bit and ask for referrals. Don't leave an interview empty-handed.

GETTING ORGANIZED

The job search process seems to drain us of every organizational cell that we have. You have to apply the same organizational skills that have made you successful to your job search. Quite early on in the process, you need to develop a system. The precise composition of the system is not nearly as important as its very existence.

Many people get caught up in processing data. They don't distinguish between activity and achievement. For example, making two good network contacts is a far better use of time than writing ten target letters to companies you picked out of some directory. Should you write to a target company on a "cold call" basis? Certainly. But you have to deal with the realities. A personal contact is more likely to be productive than sending your resume to a total stranger. And yet, many job searchers describe their activity level by how many pieces of paper they mail each week.

SEEING PEOPLE

While watching an NBA game several years ago, I heard a statement that still speaks to me. John Stockton, the outstanding guard for the Utah Jazz, was not guarding his man closely. Magic Johnson, the color commentator, said that John had to get in the player's face in order to stop him from scoring. To Magic, it was simple—if Stockton's is in his face, his opponent will not score. If Stockton lays off the guy, he will score. If you accept the analogy—to be successful in finding a job you have to get into people's face. You must let them know that you are out here. Let them know what you seek. Develop a two or three sentence introduction for yourself. If people know even a little bit about you they will feel more comfortable with you. They are far more likely to be of help. So your task is to make a friend out of a complete stranger.

Remember that there are different levels of contact or intimacy. If you write to somebody, it is not interactive. There is no immediacy associated with it. The recipient could be reading your letter on a commuter train. There is only a

second level of intimacy to a telephone call. For example, you could talk to a person for 20 minutes on the phone, walk out of your office, stand next to the same person on the elevator, and not even know it.

The ultimate goal is face to face contact. Once you have met a person you can never treat them quite the same way as if you hadn't met them. They have entered your psyche. And, of course, the whole notion of seeing people should culminates in a "real" interview: the ultimate purpose of contacts.

DEVELOP PERSISTENCE

Can you think of a single business leader, politician, or religious figure that you admire that is not persistent? Do you really admire anybody that isn't persistent?

You have to get in front of people. Some people are always saying that they are going to contact some specific person. Finally, when they contact the person, they get hired or at least they get referred to a very vital situation. Somehow or another, once something succeeds, nothing is more obvious and logical. Remember that a year before Mr. Clinton was elected president the first time, you could not get odds on his candidacy in Las Vegas. But Mr. Clinton is an enormously persistent man. He got his job, can you get yours?

BEING IN CONTROL

Many job seekers simply give up the reins of their search to their outplacement consultant, some friend, or a mentor/colleague, associate/significant other. Somebody else dictates the process. Don't allow that to happen to you. Don't allow your contacts to dictate to you. People say things like, "Well, my contact doesn't want me to talk to the

referral until he/she does first." That could be weeks, months, or even never. Who is going to let you know when this event finally takes place? Is your friend going to let you know? The person receiving your resume does not see your job search with your same sense of urgency.

DOING YOUR HOMEWORK

Many job seekers simply don't do the fundamentals. They don't prepare an achievement-oriented resume. They don't make sure that their resume is typo-free. So consider these three simple concepts when developing your resume: A) Make it readable B) Keep it crisp and neat. C) Give yourself enough credit.

Are you prepared to be interviewed right this minute? Most of us are simply not prepared to talk about ourselves. Do you have a crisp five minute presentation

ready? Can you answer fundamental questions like, "Why should I hire you?" Have you thought about these things. You need to hone your interviewing skills continuously. Ask a close colleague to conduct an interview.

Take thirty minutes to review these seven obstacles with somebody else in the job search mode. Discuss how you will overcome them. Discuss how you might help each other. You can be assured that your job search will be significantly shortened if you learn how to deal with these seven obstacles. Carpe Diem.

James F. Fitzgerald is the president of James F. Fitzgerald & Associates, Inc., an Oakbrook Terrace, Illinois-based senior executive career transition/management and executive coaching firm. 630-575-2973. Email: jamesifitz@aol.com *

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