

GET THE SCOOP ON...

What makes some job seekers more successful than others ■ Why your attitude may be more important than your qualifications ■ Common pitfalls to avoid with résumés and other tools of the search ■ The roles that focus and strategy have in job search success

Twenty Secrets of Successful Job Seekers

What is it that makes some job searches hum along as well as a finely tuned sports car while others cough and sputter, barely lurching out of the driveway? In the career transition firm where my colleagues and I coach thousands of job seekers each year, we see all kinds of searches. We see job seekers who secure so many interviews they can barely juggle the scheduling and who end up with multiple offers to choose from in no time. We see others whose searches drag on with no end in sight. They struggle to get even one interview; their phone calls don't get returned; and when they do finally land interviews, no offers materialize. Are these job seekers less qualified than the more successful ones? Usually not. Is it just lousy luck? Not really. The disparity often is linked to critical differences in the attitude, focus, tools, and strategies (or lack thereof) of the two types of job seekers.

Chapter 1

A (True) Tale of Two Job Seekers

Melinda was a technology trainer with strong credentials seeking a position in software training. Donna was a technology trainer with strong credentials seeking the same. Every time Melinda came in for career coaching to help with her search, she was glum, negative, unkempt in her appearance, and never smiled. Her search dragged on for months, and she became increasingly worried about money. She kept plugging away, sending unsolicited résumés to companies and tossing résumés onto the Internet, but nothing came of her efforts. Every suggestion from myself or my fellow consultants for how to jumpstart Melinda's search, including networking more, was met with a "yeah, but." Meanwhile, Donna's search had been dragging on even longer—over a year—and she, too, was worried about money. Even though she had her down moments as anyone would, Donna tried to stay positive. She smiled. She accepted advice willingly and thanked people for their help. She networked. She kept herself well groomed even when she didn't feel like looking good. Well, Donna and Melinda happened to end up interviewing with the same company—a software developer looking to hire several new trainers. Who landed one of those jobs? Donna, of course. Melinda eventually did land a position elsewhere but wasn't particularly happy with it. Moral of the story? Attitude, courtesy, proactive strategy, and willingness to accept feedback are often more important than credentials and timing.

Certainly economic, geographic, and industry-specific factors also make some job searches more difficult and lengthier than others. In the post-9/11 era, a laid-off middle manager from the airline industry faces a much tougher search than an

agile Web developer who's worked for all types of companies from start-up to Fortune 100. Similarly, after the downturn of such industries as telecommunications and manufacturing in the late 1990s and early 2000s, job seekers with all their experience in those sectors would take longer to find work than someone coming out of the more vibrant healthcare field, for example. In any economy a senior executive coming from the narrow tip of the organizational pyramid with a compensation level high in the six-figures, will be at it longer than a more junior job seeker who just needs any old job to pay the rent.

Online Bonus Chapter 4, "What to Do When Nothing Seems to Work," addresses ways to cope with these and other major obstacles that can slow down—or even completely stall—a job search. (Find it at www.wiley.com/go/michelleellier.) Meanwhile, however, let's take an "all things being equal approach." Let's assume that you have two job seekers with similar backgrounds looking for the same type of position at about the same compensation level in the same industries. What makes one more successful than the other? That's where attitude, focus, tools, and strategy come in.

Job seekers with a positive attitude who are confident in their ability to find work no matter what the odds, who know what they want and can make a case for why they deserve it, who equip themselves with all the best marketing tools and use a smart strategy—those are the ones who are successful. The remainder of this chapter lets you in on 20 secrets of successful job seekers, grouped into the four categories of attitude, focus, tools, and strategy.

Successful job seekers have the right attitude

Countless studies examining the impact of attitude on emotional and physical health have shown that a positive attitude works wonders at reducing stress and staying healthy. In fact, a recent study out of Carnegie-Mellon University even found that

people with positive attitudes—energetic, happy, and relaxed—are less likely to catch colds than those who are depressed, nervous, or angry. What do the common cold and a job search have in common? Well, a lot, come to think of it. Both can be stressful, annoying nuisances that won't ever seem to go away.

I've seen so many discouraged job seekers let the process get to them by becoming negative, bitter, and lacking in confidence, which only ends up making the job search last longer and be less successful. However, those who maintain as much of a positive attitude as possible, who feel confident and powerful, and who relax about the whole thing, find that their job hunts go more smoothly and often reach a successful conclusion more quickly.

In addition to problems with a negative attitude or pessimism, some searchers have what might be thought of as simply a "bad attitude." Some job seekers feel a sense of entitlement—the world "owes" them a good job—and may be unrealistic about what type of position they can land and how soon they will find it. These types also don't always show appreciation for the kindness and generosity of others who take time to help them. Even worse are those searchers who go so far as to be dishonest—embellishing their resumé's or lying in interviews—to get what they want.

Ways to avoid these common attitudinal pitfalls are covered in the first six of the twenty secrets of successful job seekers, which are as follows:

- Positive in the face of adversity
- I've got the power
- Doin' what comes naturally
- Honesty is the only policy
- I'd like to thank the Academy...
- Realistic expectations are great expectations



Bright Idea

Cognitive psychologists advocate the use of positive “self-talk” to lift your spirits and confidence during rough times. Repeating phrases like, “I am talented and capable” or “I am strong and get results” can reverse feelings of negativism, pessimism, or any other “isms” that might creep into your mind.

#1 Positive in the face of adversity

No one likes a whiner, or someone who even hints at being negative, angry, or bitter. No matter how irritated you are that you’ve lost your job and are having to look for a new one, you must try to project a positive attitude. If job loss is not the issue, you might be annoyed that you’re currently employed in a dull job or lousy company, have a nightmare boss, or whatever circumstance is causing you to have to get out there and pound the pavement. Under those circumstances, too, you must try to embark on your search with energy and enthusiasm.

Still another situation is that of the job seeker who starts out with high hopes and enthusiasm but finds all that waning as the search drags on with no results. Negativism starts to creep in and sabotages a formerly productive job hunt. No matter which situation resonates with you, if any, it is critical that you make every effort to have a positive outlook.

I know how easy it is to say, “Oh, just put on a happy face and be positive,” and how much harder it is to actually do it. I’ve

“Candidates who are considerate, well-prepared, flexible, and positive have many more opportunities available to them. They present themselves as committed to working with me and realistic of what it takes to find a job.”

—Lauren Sacks, *Managing Partner, CitiStaffing, LLC, New York City*

been in your shoes, looking for work when I resented having to do so, and tired of a search that was taking too long and not turning out how I wanted it to. I know how easy it is to slip into a negative mode. It's easy to lose energy, hope, and any sense of enthusiasm. The first secret of successful job seekers, however, is that they are more positive than their counterparts. They project enthusiasm, confidence, and an interest in what they're doing.

How do they do it? There are four tricks to becoming and staying positive, even when you don't feel like it:

Give yourself time to transition

If you're angry, disappointed, or demoralized as you embark on your search, recognize that making a transition into a more positive place in your life takes time. Don't deny the negative feelings. Go ahead and cry, scream, hide under the covers, vent, punch the wall (not too hard!), or do whatever you need to do to get it out. Only then can you start to feel ready to move forward and take action in your search.

Take baby steps

Don't dive headlong into a job hunt expecting to accomplish great things from day one and every day after that. You do have to take action—don't sit back and do nothing—but take action that is realistic and manageable given your less-than-motivated state of mind. Successfully completing one or two things each day—a draft of your résumé or a couple of networking phone calls—is more motivating than overloading your to-do list and not getting enough of it done.

Keep your eye on the prize

Always keep your goals in sight. Of course, your primary goal is to land a new job, a good job. You will most likely have interim goals, however, such as choosing a career direction before you fully launch your search. You may also have goals beyond the new job. You might be aspiring to reach a certain point in your career or to transition into a new industry or field, and the new

job you're seeking now will serve as a bridge to that longer term goal. Keeping any of these goals in mind will help motivate you and remind you what all the hard work is for.

Maintain balance in your life

Nothing sends attitude into a tailspin like burnout. Although your job hunt will demand large amounts of your time, make sure to take time to have some fun, relax, and spend time with friends and family. Don't forget about exercise also, which has been proven to serve as nature's own antidepressant. Exercise brings about chemical changes in the brain that relax you and improve your mood, so if you're not doing it already, start now!

#2 I've got the power

The second secret of a successful job search is to realize that you have more power in the process than you think. Most job seekers fall into the trap of thinking that the employers have all the power. After all, they're the ones who make the decision to return your calls or not, to invite you to interview or not, and, of course, to offer you a job or not. Although there's no arguing with those realities, the reality most job seekers aren't aware of is that they, the job seeker, hold much more power over the outcome of those "or not" situations.

You see, employers want to find the right person for the job as badly as you want to find the right job. Even though a given prospective employer, meaning an organization for which you would like to work, might seem like the almighty Oz, the reality is that the human beings responsible for hiring in that organization are worried that they'll choose the wrong person or that



Watch Out!

Don't get caught in "revision paralysis," thinking that your search will be more successful if only you revise your résumé yet again, practice interviewing one more time, or have yet another person critique your cover letters. It's more likely to be an attitude adjustment that you need.

**Bright Idea**

To increase your power in interviews, don't wait until the end to ask all your questions. Inquiring about an employer's needs, challenges, and goals enables you to convey how you could be an asset to the organization. The more you ask throughout the interview, the more leverage you acquire.

they won't find the right person quickly enough. They're human beings who lie awake at night worrying that they're costing their employers thousands of dollars in lost productivity by not having an open position filled or worrying that the decision they made that day to hire a certain candidate could be a big mistake. And, you thought you were the only one lying awake at night worried about making a match! They're not Oz, and you're not a girl with ruby slippers. You are both human beings who share a balance of power in the job search-candidate search process.

#3 Doin' what comes naturally

Employers like to hire people they know. That means that getting to an employer through a mutual acquaintance, for example, by networking, is the best way to go. But, it also means something you might not have thought of. It means that even if the employer got to you in the completely opposite way, say through a random search on the Internet, you still must make an effort to have that employer end up feeling like they know you. That may sound like an impossible task, but it's really quite simple: Be yourself.

Most job seekers go into networking appointments and interviews on their best behavior. With shoes polished, smile fresh, and a firm handshake, they greet the prospective employer with a proper, professional demeanor. They start the meeting with polite conversation, dutifully answer questions throughout the meeting, sit with an erect posture, and try to do everything just right. Although there's certainly nothing wrong

with being cordial and professional and following the rules, there is a downside. You might come across as insincere, aloof, distant, or just hard to get a read on. You might even appear downright robotic.

Every time you leave a networking meeting or interview, or even when someone finishes reading a job search letter you've written, you want the person you just interacted with to feel like they got to know you. That doesn't mean letting down your guard so much that you come across as too casual or cavalier. It simply means being down-to-earth, personable, genuine, and even humorous when appropriate. Assuming the real you is a nice person, let the real you come through!

#4 Honesty is the only policy

Setting and maintaining the highest standards for personal integrity throughout your job search is not optional. Every move you make during your search is a reflection of how you would operate as an employee if hired. Do not even think about lying or merely stretching the truth, whether in your résumé, on an employment application, in an interview, or during a networking conversation. In recent years a number of stories have made the headlines about prominent figures lying on their résumés and then enduring the embarrassing situation of having their lies revealed after they're on the job. As a result, employers have become more stringent than ever about checking references to verify that your claims are true.

Even if you could never imagine committing such an egregious sin as claiming a degree you never earned or listing a job you never held, it's very easy for people who are usually honest and sincere to get caught up in the "I-must-land-a-job-at-all-costs" mentality and find themselves embellishing the truth to a dangerous level. If you can't back up facts and figures on your résumé and can't live up to claims you make in interviews, you will sorely regret your lapses of integrity. It just isn't worth it. Stick with the high road.



Watch Out!

Just because I advocate total honesty in your search, don't go so far as to shoot yourself in the foot by volunteering negative information about your past unnecessarily. Stay tight-lipped about any skeletons in your career history closet until someone makes a direct inquiry into them. Then be candid about them.

#5 I'd like to thank the Academy...

If you do your search right, you'll end up having a lot of people to thank, both throughout the search and after landing. The reason I say, "if you do it right," is that the best way to conduct a search is to involve large numbers of people. From the family and friends who will be your support system, to the career coaching professionals who'll provide advice, to the recruiters who'll connect you to job leads, to the many and varied people who make up the professional network that you will tap into, your search will be far from a solitary effort.

You will be amazed how helpful most people will be in your search. The old idea of "what goes around comes around" is very much at work when you set out to look for a job. Chances are, the people you seek help from got a leg up themselves when they were last in need of career assistance. They know what it's like to be in need of ideas and leads, not to mention a shoulder to lean on, when looking for a job and are usually more than happy to be on the giving end of the support this time.

Many of the people who help you will be very busy and have lots of higher priorities on their plate than your job hunt. Nevertheless, they will go out of their way to find the time to help you. No one owes you a job, no one is obligated to help you, but they will. I can make few guarantees when dispensing job search advice, but one I have no qualms about making is that I guarantee you will be incredibly amazed and pleased by how many people—many of whom barely know you—will be willing to go out on a limb to help with your job search. These people deserve your thanks. No question about it.



Moneysaver

When you want to send a gift to someone who has gone above and beyond to help with your search but money's tight, consider sending a basket of gourmet food or luxurious bath products from Wine Country Gift Baskets (www.winecountrygiftbaskets.com or 800-324-2793). Their site is unique in that it has a broader range of sizes and prices than most, and the quality is great.

Showing your appreciation can be as simple and quick as a brief note sent by email or a typed or handwritten letter or note sent by mail. For cases in which someone has really gone beyond the call of duty, you might want to send a small gift to show an extra degree of appreciation. Detailed suggestions for thank you notes and appropriate gifts are discussed in both Chapter 9, "Networking," and Chapter 15, "Clinching the Deal."

#6 Realistic expectations are great expectations

Successful job seekers are realistic about what they can land and when they'll find it. That doesn't mean they can't set the bar high, aiming for the best possible job in the best possible time-frame. I would never advocate that you settle for second best. The mistake too many job seekers make, however, is to be unrealistic about what they can get and when, as well as who's going to get it for them.

In an effective job hunt, you conduct sufficient research to know which industries or specific employers in the marketplace need what you have to offer. Through that research, you learn what is realistic for you to expect in the way of salary and other forms of compensation as well as level of position or title you could expect. You'll also become better informed about how long it is likely to take you to find work in a particular industry, functional area, or type of employer. Ways to conduct this research online, through print resources, and by talking to people are discussed in Chapter 9 and in Chapter 7, "Where Will You Find Your Job?" with salary research discussed specifically in

Chapter 15. Through all this, as a successful job seeker, you will always remember that *you* are the only person who can get you a job. Expecting anyone else to do it for you is unrealistic.

Successful job seekers have focus

Focus is one of the most misunderstood concepts in job searching. Most people assume that being focused means having a very precise job target in mind. They equate focus with knowing exactly what you want to do, right down to a label. “I’m seeking a position as a Director of Product Development,” for example. Well, what happens if a particular company needs a Vice President of Product Management, and you would be well qualified for the position? Or, what if another employer uses the term “business development” or “marketing” for what you think of as product development? There is such a thing as being too focused. Whether you communicate your focus through an objective statement on your résumé, in a cover letter, or when speaking with people, there is a danger in labeling your focus too narrowly.

Instead, you need to define focus more broadly, but at the same time very precisely. I know that sounds confusing, so allow me to explain. Having focus in a job search simply means that you know what you have to offer and what you are looking for. It means that you can communicate in your résumé, letters, networking, and interviews exactly what marketable assets you offer to an employer and exactly what you are looking for in a job, a work environment, and an organization. You don’t have to put a label on it. You don’t have to be able to say, “I want to be a [fill in the blank].” You do have to have a laser sharp focus on what you bring to the table and what you need. That’s where the precision comes in. The focus is broad in that you might be open to a few different job titles, types of employers, or sets of responsibilities.

#7 Know what you want

A critical step in attaining focus is to know what you want. Keeping in mind that you don’t need to put narrow labels on

what you're seeking, your task is to paint a general picture of what you're seeking. You must identify the types of responsibilities and activities that you want your new job to encompass and to be able to describe the type of work environment, organizational culture, colleagues, and bosses with whom you will best function. Your task is also to take stock of the internal and external rewards you need—things like moral fulfillment, a short commute, work-life balance, or a certain level of compensation, to name only a few examples.

In Chapter 3, "Marketing You, the Product," you'll have an opportunity to do some self-assessment to take an inventory of your interests, motivated skills, values, needs, and more. From there, you'll be better able to answer the question you're likely to face often while networking and interviewing: "So, what are you looking for?"

#8 Stand out from the pack

Successful job seekers know how to set themselves apart from the pack. When networking and interviewing, they know how to describe their background and strengths in a way that not only doesn't make the listener's eyes glaze over but causes people to sit up and listen. They distinguish themselves. As a career counselor, I often begin sessions by having clients tell me a little about themselves—particularly their work history—so I can know enough about them to help them. I consistently find that even the most articulate, personable people unwittingly describe their qualifications in a jargon-laden, detached manner, forcing me to ask the follow-up question, "Yes, but what do you do?" I get no sense of who they are—their passions, proficiencies, and preferences. I can't tell what makes them uniquely them. When talking about their work history, they often sound as if they're reading an official job description straight out of human resources, not describing an endeavor in which they have spent most of their waking hours.

The same is true in written communication as well. Too many cover letters focus on how someone meets the basic qualifications

The Power of a Customized Résumé

Distinguishing yourself from the competition is often a matter of going the extra mile to tailor your marketing materials to each targeted job or organization. Take the case of Frank, a job seeker with a background as a lawyer, corporate trainer, and human resources manager. Frank was downsized from his position in human resources with a major company. As he began his search, he was open to any position related to any aspects of his background, as long as the work involved managing diversity programs or preventing or fighting employment discrimination, as that was his primary area of expertise and something he believed strongly about. To market himself best, Frank created five versions of his résumé. There was the résumé for legal positions in corporations; one for work as a lawyer in a law firm; one focusing solely on corporate training; one emphasizing human resources; and another with equal emphasis on training and HR. Even beyond those five basic versions, Frank often tailored the content of each slightly to highlight or de-emphasize various aspects of his background as relevant to the job or employer at hand. He consistently received positive feedback about how focused his résumés were and ended up landing a position with which he was very happy (in human resources, managing diversity programs).

rather than making the letter stand out with its tone and marketable content. In the online Bonus Chapter 3, “More Self-Marketing Tools,” you can learn the best ways to distinguish yourself in your written marketing tools.

A final way to distinguish yourself is with your strategy. Job seekers who make the extra effort to be innovative and resourceful in the way in which they look for jobs and approach

employers are the ones who stand out from the pack. Take online job hunting, for example. Most jobs posted online are likely to draw hundreds, if not thousands, of applicants. Lazy job hunters apply for lots of positions online and sit back waiting for the offers to pour in. But, resourceful job hunters distinguish themselves from the competition by trying to network their way into an organization in addition to applying online. They also take the time to include a cover letter customized to that position and employer and to tailor their résumé to fit the situation. These and other strategies are discussed in more depth in Chapter 10, “Online Job Hunting.”

#9 Build a case with asset statements

Although employers are certainly interested in knowing what your responsibilities and day-to-day tasks are or have been on past jobs, which skills and abilities you have, and what credentials you hold, such as degrees or certifications, they are usually more interested in hearing about your accomplishments. They care more about your past performance at a given task and the results you brought about, than about the task itself. By hearing about the outcomes of your past efforts, they can envision how you could be of benefit to them in the future. It’s about showing off your assets.

In Chapter 4, “Your Marketing Plan’s Secret Weapon,” you’ll learn how to put together asset statements that help you convey your skills, knowledge, and positive personal qualities in a way that is relevant and meaningful for a prospective employer.

Successful job seekers have the best tools

Whether it’s a home repair project or open heart surgery, everyone knows how important it is to have tools that are handy, in good working order, and are the right ones for the job. Well, a job search is the same. Too many job seekers slap together a quick résumé and call it a day. But, there’s much more to

effective job hunting than a slipshod résumé. Not only does the résumé need to be a powerful marketing document, a host of other self-marketing tools also go into your job search toolkit. By taking care of these from the outset, you'll get off to the right start in your search and won't find yourself playing catch-up as the need for each arises.

Checklist 1.1 shows what a complete job search toolkit would contain. You won't necessarily need to use all items on the list, but you'll need most. (The optional items tend to be a bio, which is usually required only for executives; letters of recommendation, which are not necessary if you have a list of references who can be reached by telephone; and a portfolio, which is helpful but not essential.) All of these items are discussed in Chapter 5, as well as defined briefly later in this chapter.

Checklist 1.1. A Complete Job Search Toolkit

- Résumé(s)
- Self-marketing sound bite—written
- Self-marketing sound bite—spoken
- Job seeker business card
- Reference list
- Letters of recommendation
- Bio
- Marketing brief
- Approach letter / Cover letter template(s)
- Follow-up letter template(s)
- Portfolio

#10 Make your résumé a marketing document

Chapter 5 covers résumés in depth, including the best overall strategies for developing a résumé as well as a step-by-step guide to creating one. For now, you need to be aware only that a

strong résumé can make or break your search if you end up using many nonpersonal job search methods, such as direct mail campaigns, answering ads online or in newspapers, or circulating the résumé at job fairs or among recruiters. In those cases, you are not already a known quantity to the reader, so your résumé serves as the only introduction of you. It, therefore, must be easy to read, hit only the highlights (not every detail of your career history), and present information that is relevant to the employer and the position in question.

If you find that most of your job search activities center around networking, your résumé is important but becomes a little less critical. You are more likely to be introducing yourself to new people by phone, email, or in person, or re-introducing yourself to people who already know you and don't need to see your résumé right away, if at all. In those cases, a marketing brief can be more effective. Marketing briefs are defined in the "Assemble a Complete Self-Marketing Package" section of this chapter and are discussed in more detail in online Bonus Chapter 3.

“If a candidate can't get his or her point across concisely in a résumé, or if the résumé is too cluttered and long, I won't read it. I receive so many résumés that I must be able to skim it in 10–20 seconds and glean the most critical information.”

—John, Senior Corporate Recruiter



Watch Out!

Résumés for electronic transmission (sent within an email rather than as an attachment, or uploaded to a Web site) are often referred to as “text only” résumés. This is a dangerous misnomer. There's much more to creating an eRésumé than saving it in text-only format. Be sure to read Chapter 10 for more information.

Successful job seekers also have an electronic résumé, or “eRésumé.” The eRésumé is in a different technical format than the traditional résumé, a format that ensures the content will be readable when it is transmitted electronically. You’ll need an eRésumé whenever someone says they won’t accept an attached document and must receive the résumé within the body (the message field) of the email. The eRésumé is also used when you post your résumé online in a résumé bank or upload it to a Web site to apply for a position in a job bank. The eRésumé also works well when you know, or suspect, that your résumé will be scanned electronically to go into a résumé database rather than read initially by a person. When and how to use an eRésumé, not to mention how to develop one, can be confusing, but everything you need to know to demystify the process is discussed in Chapter 5.

#11 Assemble a complete self-marketing package

Effective job seekers realize that there is more to self-marketing than a résumé. Depending on the type of search you conduct and the type of positions you’re seeking, you will also need some other self-marketing tools.

Job seeker business card

Every job seeker needs a business card to distribute their names and contact information to people they meet during the search. It’s tacky to use the card from your former employer, and going out without any card means that you end up scribbling your name and contact information on scraps of paper. Not only is that not very convenient or professional, those scraps of paper are more likely to get lost than a business card would. Your job seeker business card makes it easier for people to get in touch with you and can serve as a mini-résumé if you add a tagline under your name or some brief text on the back that highlights what you have to offer and what you’re seeking.

Reference list and/or letters of recommendation

You definitely will need a list of people who can be contacted to serve as references for you, to verify your past employment, and if company policy permits, to comment on what you were like as an employee. You might also have letters of recommendation from past bosses, coworkers, customers, or others who have been pleased with your work. These are wonderful to have, but you'll find most prospective employers will not put much stock in the letters and instead will want to speak directly to those giving the recommendations. If you do have a lot of strong letters of recommendation, you may want to develop a portfolio to keep them in (see "Portfolios" later in this list).

Bio

For more senior-level positions, you might find that a biography written in the third person is an effective way to communicate your qualifications and credentials. Some prospective employers might even ask for a bio, so it's a good idea to have one on hand if you are among the senior management or executive ranks.

Marketing brief

While networking to explore the market or generate job leads, you might find that a marketing brief is more useful than your résumé. The marketing brief contains elements of your résumé, such as a summary of qualifications and brief overview of your work history, as well as a few examples of accomplishment statements. But, it also includes information that the résumé doesn't cover, such as specific organizations you're targeting or examples of types of industries, positions, or employers you're targeting. Whereas a résumé is a document that is most often used to screen you in or out, the marketing brief is a document that the reader can use to see how he or she can best help you in your search.

Letter template(s)

You'll undoubtedly be writing a lot of letters throughout your job search. Some will be brief emails, others formal printed letters, and some casual handwritten notes. Some will serve as approach letters that introduce you to a networking contact or prospective employer, proposing that they speak with you about opportunities in a given field, educate you about the marketplace, or give advice about your search. Other letters will be what are usually known as cover letters—written correspondence that accompanies your résumé when applying for an actual position. Still others will be follow-up letters, thanking people for their time in networking appointments or interviews or trying to clinch the deal when you're in the running for a particular job.

Each letter needs to be customized to the particular situation and target reader, so you will not have one approach letter and one cover letter in your toolkit. What you can have, though, is a template form of each letter—a basic form letter that you can tailor, customize, and personalize as needed. Having this template will save you many headaches and hassles as you get into the thick of your search and have to start churning out letter after letter or email after email, often under tight time pressure. With the templates, you won't have to reinvent the wheel each time.

Portfolio

To wow a prospective employer or networking contact, you might want to develop and use a portfolio. Portfolios are collections of documents that advertise what you have to offer. Put together in a loose-leaf binder, two-pocket folder, or bound inexpensively, portfolios may contain: your résumé; letters of recommendation from bosses; letters of praise from clients or coworkers; writing samples (if relevant); other project/work samples; copies of diplomas, licenses, or certificates; press clippings featuring you or your work; and anything else that would market you well for the type of jobs you are trying to land.

All of the self-marketing tools described here are discussed in more detail, including tips for developing them, in the online Bonus Chapter 3.

#12 Have a self-marketing sound bite

The self-marketing sound bite is a brief pitch that gives a quick overview of your background and qualifications. It can be a written version that becomes one of the building blocks of your résumé and job search correspondence, or a spoken version—something you say as a way of introducing yourself on a cold call, in networking meetings, or to answer that dreaded interview question, “Tell me about yourself.” When spoken, the sound bite can take anywhere from 15 to 90 seconds to say, depending on what is appropriate for the situation.

A self-marketing sound bite is an absolutely essential item in your job search toolkit, but most job seekers don't have one. Every time they pick up the phone to introduce themselves to someone with whom they would like to network, they have to think of what to say about themselves in the first 15 to 20 seconds of the call. Every time an employer asks them to open the interview by telling a little about themselves, they ramble on circuitously for five minutes or more. By scripting and practicing a self-marketing sound bite from Day One of your search, you'll save yourself lots of time and worry after your search is underway and will communicate much more effectively than those who try to wing it.

#13 Communicate effectively

All the best tools in the world are worthless if you don't know how to use them. The self-marketing sound bite is one critical element of your communication, but there's more to effective job search communication than simply scripting and memorizing a brief personal pitch. Successful job seekers know that communicating well, both orally and in writing, is key.

If you don't speak and write clearly with proper grammar and syntax, and in a coherent, articulate manner, no one will

**Bright Idea**

If seeking jobs in a career field or industry in which you've never worked, try to speak the "language" of the new field rather than using jargon unique to your old field. You'll sound like more of an insider.

pay attention to what you're saying because they'll be too distracted by how you're saying it. This particular problem is a tough one to deal with, not because the solutions to it are difficult, but because most people don't even realize they have a problem. If you are a poor writer or an inarticulate speaker, chances are no one has had the nerve to tell you so. You must take it upon yourself to determine whether there is a problem—and then to fix it. Online Bonus Chapter 2, "Honing Your Communication Skills and Tools," discusses how to find out whether your communication techniques and style are holding you back and how to improve them. Also, don't forget that much of communication is nonverbal, so having the right image from attire and grooming to body language is critical.

Successful job seekers have a strategy

I have seen even certified project managers, chief administrative officers, and top-notch executive assistants, to name only a few, approach a job search in an alarmingly haphazard way. They throw together a résumé, apply for a few jobs online, and phone some people they know and call it networking. The next day they might do a little research, send out a résumé or two, and call a couple more people. These job seekers are the same people who, when on the job, map out detailed project plans and schedules, assemble major resources and tools before starting a project, and use careful tracking and record-keeping methodologies. So, what happens when they conduct their job searches? They don't equate looking for a job with coordinating or managing a large professional project, but that's what a job search is. It's a major, complex project that requires planning, organizing,

and strategy. Successful job seekers know this and know that having a careful strategy works.

#14 Don't try to go it alone

Job searching can be a very solitary activity. You don't take your best friend, spouse, or mother into an interview. (And, if you were thinking of doing so, think again. If someone has to drive you to an interview, have them wait in the car or walk around the block!) You don't always have someone holding your hand when you make a cold call to someone whose name you've been given as a possible networking contact. You don't have a career coach looking over your shoulder helping you through tough salary negotiations in a prospective employer's office. It's just you against all the potential employers out there. As a result, the job search process can be lonely, frustrating and, at times, confusing. The good news is you're not on your own to get through it.

By turning to your network of friends, family, and professional colleagues, as well as experts with whom you might consult, your job search success will be greatly enhanced. Plus, the process will be more manageable and even enjoyable as members of your network can provide emotional support and encouragement throughout your search.

As you prepare to market yourself, members of your network can help you take stock of your skills and strengths as you prepare asset statements (as described in Chapter 4). Some people need an objective third party to point out their positive qualities or to recognize their achievements, so consulting people who know you well is key.

Networking is also useful in the research stage, whether you speak to people to help you make career choices, explore a particular field or industry, or identify job leads. Also, as you'll see in Chapter 11, "Preparing for Interviews," interview preparation requires more than reading a company's annual report and glancing at their Web site. You have to talk to people who know anything about your target employers. Getting the inside scoop

on your target employers is just one benefit of networking. You might also find that someone you know—or can get to know—knows someone at the place where you’ll be interviewing. Being able to drop a relevant, respected name during an interview is a sure way to jump to the head of the class of applicants (as long as the name-dropping is not done in a pompous manner).

Your network can also serve as a useful sounding board during the job search. Invariably, at times you will have questions about your overall technique and strategy. Having input from others can help you make good decisions and avoid taking wrong turns.

“ I use not only all the brains I have but all I can borrow. ”

—Woodrow Wilson

#15 Work hard and persist

Good ol’ hard work is a key element of your strategy. Most job seekers whose searches drag on for too long are not putting in enough time and effort. Landing a job is hard work. It takes a lot of hours per week, along with much concentrated effort and focus. There’s no magic to this secret of successful job seekers: just think back to times when you’ve had to work really hard to reach a goal and operate the same way with your search.

In addition to your hard work, be sure to be persistent. A common problem of less successful job seekers is that they give up too easily. You don’t want to be a pest or pushy, but assertively following through, staying in touch, and otherwise communicating with people in your network and prospective employers is not just appropriate, it’s critical. I cannot count the number of times—thousands at least—that I have witnessed job seekers reluctant to call an employer they had expected to hear from already or to loop back with a networking contact who may have forgotten about them. Out of sight is out of mind, and there are also countless examples of job seekers who land the job because

they happen to be the ones who call or email to remind the employer of their interest and check on the status of a hiring decision. Given two equally qualified candidates, the job offer often goes to the one who follows up.

#16 Do sweat the small stuff

By sweating the small stuff, I don't mean you should agonize over matters beyond your control or work yourself into a frenzy because you messed up on something insignificant. I do mean, however, that you need to be detail-oriented, organized, and just generally have your act together during your job search.

Your behavior during every aspect of your search, with every person you encounter, is a reflection of how you might conduct yourself on the job. Besides your résumé, references, and account of your accomplishments, recruiters and employers must rely on observations of your behavior as an indicator of how you'll act on the job. So, you'd better have your act together during all encounters no matter how insignificant some of them might seem.

Some of the ways to convey that you have your act together include being organized and punctual, following instructions, and living up to your commitments. Getting your foot in the door to a prospective employer, completing the interview process, and negotiating the terms of employment are like any business transaction. Documents are faxed and mailed, emails are sent, voice mail messages are left, appointments are set, instructions are given, and loose ends must be attended to. For example, you may have an initial screening interview by phone and promise to email a résumé after that conversation. Or you might have an on-site interview and have to follow up with additional information such as a college or graduate school transcript, phone numbers of your references, or a sample of your work. You might apply for a position online and find that there are specific instructions for how to send your résumé electronically and what information to include in a cover letter. If you are late in

doing any of these things, if you do them incorrectly, or if you don't do them at all, you seriously jeopardize your candidacy.

Not having your act together is not only inconvenient and annoying for the prospective employer, it also has implications for how you would handle the job in question. Many workplaces these days are busier than ever, requiring employees to handle multiple tasks and put out fires while also engaging in long-range planning. If you can't handle the relatively simple challenges of the job search, what message are you sending employers about your ability to handle the job itself?

#17 The danger of passive search methods

The best job search strategy is one that involves getting out and about, to see and be seen, while communicating with human beings. Unsuccessful job seekers tend to rely more on the passive methods, spending long hours at the computer applying for jobs online or licking hundreds of envelopes hoping that a job will come from a mailing of unsolicited résumés to a list of randomly targeted employers. Although online job hunting and even direct mail campaigns have a place in a good job search (if done strategically), most jobs are found through some form of personal contact. A friend or neighbor puts you in touch with someone who's hiring. You attend a professional association meeting and develop a whole new network of contacts who lead you to positions. Or you get active in an online networking forum where people from all around the country (or the world) point you in the right direction. However you define it, it's networking, and it works. In Chapter 9, you'll find a more in-depth discussion of how to network actively as a key element in your job search.

#18 Creative and resourceful thinking

In addition to getting up off your duff to go out among people who can help you land a job, another important element of your job search strategy is to call upon every creative and resourceful bone in your body—or synapse in your brain. Instead of seeing dead ends, see possibilities. There is always a way to get to the

information, people, and places you need to reach. Let's say, for example, that you want to break into a particular company but don't know anybody there and don't know anybody who knows anybody there. Instead of crossing that item off your wish list, be creative and resourceful. Look up the officers of the company on their Web site, then do a keyword search to find out anything you can about those people. Find out what boards they sit on and which nonprofits are their pet community projects. Find out what they've written and where they speak publicly. Find out everything you can about them! Then, go back to your network and see whether anyone you know has any connection with the people and places with which your target is connected. Still reaching a dead-end? Then find something the target person has written and published in print or online. Or find something written about him or her, such as an announcement in the press about a promotion or special project. Read it and write to the person with congratulations about the promotion or a comment about their article or project. Then ask for a few minutes of their time to seek advice about your search and to get their insights into their profession or industry. Don't ask them for a job (at least not yet)! Follow up with a phone call or email until you get an answer. May sound like a stretch, but it works. All it takes is some willingness to go out on a creative limb.

#19 Don't sell yourself, consult

If there is one phrase I'd like to banish from the vocabulary of all job seekers, it's "sell myself." Too many job seekers think that the candidates who land the jobs are the ones who sell themselves the hardest. They see selling themselves as being the most convincing or most persuasive, or being the ones who shout the loudest or use the best gimmicks. Not true. Have you ever considered buying a product only to be turned off by a pushy salesperson who just tried to sell, sell, sell, without ever asking what you want? That's why selling yourself in a job search is not the strategy to use.

**Bright Idea**

If you find yourself saying, "I'm going to be interviewed for a job," switch that to, "I'm going to speak to some people about how I might be able to help them reach their goals." You go from being the powerless job seeker at the mercy of the prospective employer to being like a consultant who has valuable expertise and knowledge to offer.

Instead, you need to put a consultant's hat on. What do consultants do? They go into a situation where there are problems and challenges, assess the needs and desires of the client, and develop solutions to fix the problems and overcome the challenges. That's what a job search is all about. Employers have needs, and you have the knowledge, expertise, and skill to meet those needs. It's as simple as that.

#20 Prepare, practice, and practice some more

At times it can seem that communicating with prospective employers or with network contacts is like speaking a foreign language. You will find yourself talking about your experience, strengths, and goals in ways that you probably don't do in the course of a routine day. The only way to speak a new language effortlessly is to practice it. Winging it usually doesn't cut it.

To be a successful job seeker, you must do your homework before every networking meeting and interview. And, you must not only prepare what you are going to say and how you'll conduct yourself while saying it, but you also need to practice. Whether you simply practice your replies out loud (perhaps in front of a mirror) or formally in a videotaped mock interview, you must simulate the networking meetings and interview process in some way before they actually take place.

It is important, however, that you not go overboard with your practice and become over-rehearsed. Practicing means that you are getting used to some of the communication and behavior

that might be called for in your search. Over-rehearsed means that you have a script to memorize and an act to perform. Remember that an interview is not a theatrical production. Be yourself. If you write scripts for your replies to anticipated questions or for your self-marketing sound bite, get to the point where you're so comfortable with the script that you can ad-lib casually to sound more natural and unrehearsed.

Twenty secrets summed up

Qualifications, timing, and luck often play less of a role in landing a job than you might have thought. What really makes the difference between you and the competition is attitude, focus, tools, and strategy. Within those four categories of differentiators, the 20 secrets are as follows:

- Positive in the face of adversity
- I've got the power
- Doin' what comes naturally
- Honesty is the only policy
- I'd like to thank the Academy...
- Realistic expectations are great expectations
- Know what you want
- Stand out from the pack
- Build a case with asset statements
- Make your résumé a marketing document
- Assemble a complete self-marketing package
- Have a self-marketing sound bite
- Communicate effectively
- Don't try to go it alone
- Work hard and persist
- Do sweat the small stuff
- The danger of passive search methods

- Creative and resourceful thinking
- Don't sell yourself, consult
- Prepare, practice, and practice some more

No matter what sort of job you're hoping to land in any industry or market sector, and whether you're entry-level or a chief officer, being clued in to these secrets of successful job seekers will dramatically improve your chances of success.

Just the facts

- Having a positive outlook, including feeling powerful and confident, as well as being yourself and always being honest, can make the difference between you and an equally well-qualified candidate.
- Distinguish yourself from the competition by taking stock of what you want and what you have to offer and being prepared to convey your marketable qualities with asset statements.
- Don't stop at the résumé when preparing the tools of your search; be sure to include a full range of self-marketing items in your job search toolkit.
- Assemble a solid network and support team to help you through your search rather than trying to go it alone.
- Employ a strategy that is carefully thought out, detail-oriented, proactive, and creative.