

Conscious Careering



Rookie Job Hunters Take Note! Here Are Five Common Mistakes You'll Want to Avoid...

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Given the pangs of economic indigestion we're all experiencing these days, on both a local and national level, it's a safe bet that a number of Puget Sound professionals will end up needing to venture out into the job market for the first time in a while. As a result, I thought it might be useful to share a few of the most common mistakes and missteps that can limit the success of those people who are facing the job hunting challenge for the first time in many years. Based on what I've witnessed, here are the "top five" mistakes you'll want to avoid:

#1: Focusing too much on the past. Time and time again, I observe job hunters talking at great length about their past experience, accolades, and accomplishments in both interviews and networking situations. As hard as it might be to hear, however, the reality is that companies care next to nothing about such things. They aren't going to hire you because you got an MBA degree, won an award five years ago, or brought in a huge new sales order for your employer back in 1996. They're going to hire you for one thing only: to solve *current* and *future* problems that they, themselves, are experiencing. So at each and every step along the way in the job hunting process, make sure to place the emphasis of your discussion on the brightness of your future, not the faded glow of your past, and if you catch yourself telling war stories, you're going the wrong direction!

#2: Exalting the resume. Many job hunters agonize *way* too much about their resume presentation—frittering weeks away developing version after version of their piece in the hopes that a brilliant tweak or two will break the floodgates open and lead hordes of employers to beat a path to their doorstep. In reality, however, the most pertinent data on any resume is one's education and work experience—and this material doesn't change much no matter how tricky you get in presenting it. So while you should still take the time to put an attractive piece together at the start of your search, and eliminate obvious mistakes, at some point you have to get off the sidelines and get in the game. Most businesses don't succeed or fail based solely on the quality of their brochures, when you think about it, and neither do job hunters!

#3: Chasing leads, instead of creating opportunities. As both formal surveys and anecdotal evidence confirm, only a small percentage (20-30% at most) of the jobs filled in the U.S. workplace ever see the light of day in the form of a published advertisement. The truth is that most hiring happens below the radar screen, through networking and word-of-mouth, thus reaping rewards for those professionals who interact regularly with lots of people and who focus on uncovering potential leads before they go public. Even in a down market, people retire, get promoted, or get asked to leave organizations, causing "churn" and producing a steady stream of new openings and opportunities. So if you're new to the job hunting game, recognize that at least 60-70% of your time should be spent with a cup of coffee, not a computer mouse, in your hand.

#4: Anemic activity volume. Alas, another common mistake many new job hunters make is to not channel nearly enough energy, activity, and effort into the search process. While the unemployment office may require a 3-contact-per-week quota in order to receive your benefits, most professionals seeking work in the Seattle area are advised to make *at least* 5 outbound contacts each day, every day, in order to build a solid pipeline of interviewing activity. Given the vast array of on-line tools now available to help people turn up suitable companies and contact names, however, this goal should be easily achievable by anybody who puts their mind to it.

#5: Analysis paralysis. Truth be told, most of us would be much more effective at job hunting if we got a temporary frontal lobotomy—and disengaged the part of our brains that tends to make assumptions and over-analyze things! Job hunting, however, is a sloppy process at heart. One random resume submission on the Internet could be the one that leads to the opportunity of your dreams. Or your next door neighbor, or hairdresser, or distant cousin could be the surprise person who tees you up with that one great contact who ends up hiring you. So strive to avoid "analysis paralysis" as much as possible and if you ever catch yourself wondering "should I call this company?" or "should I contact this person?" the answer is almost always yes—no matter how hard you try to talk yourself out of it. If you're not taking chances and getting out of your comfort zone every day, while job hunting, you're playing it too safe to generate consistently positive results. As my former mentor used to always say, "When in doubt, do!"

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