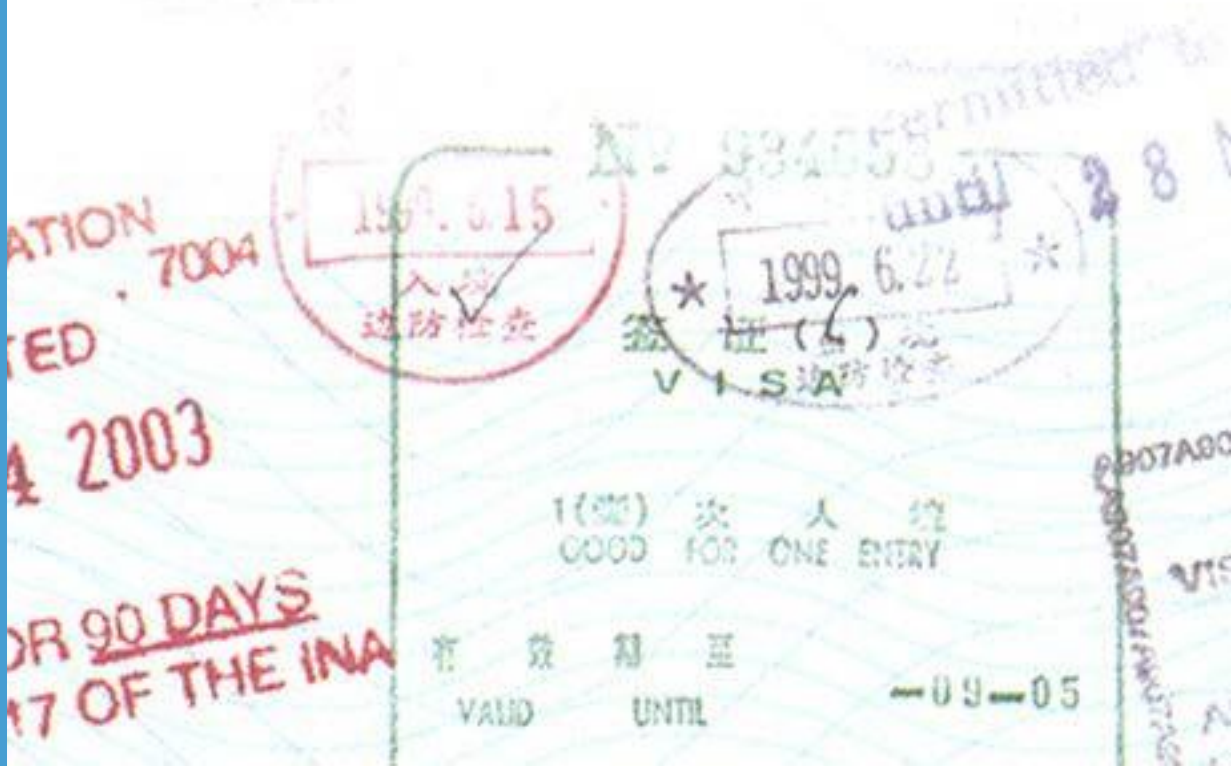
PASSPORT
TO EMPLOYMENT

GUIDEBOOK

Your companion for the journey to employment



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Introduction
Guide for the Job Search Journey

About Passport to Employment
Passport to Employment ("P2E") is an outreach to the unemployed, under-employed, and those who are dissatisfied with their jobs, serving the greater Indianapolis area and beyond. We are an employment search support and networking resource where we encourage and equip the job seeker with valuable skills and tools for finding employment.

Join our social media groups for current information on meetings, events, job postings, and resources.
- P2E Linked Group: *linkedin.com/groups/12582333*
- P2E Facebook Group *facebook.com/groups/97984122098*

Introduction
Create Your Own Personal Roadmap

It's often said that getting a full-time job is in itself a full-time job. Experience gives weight to this principle: the more you focus intentionally on developing a strategy, learning key best practices, and being diligent about applying them – the more likely it is that you will find a new career more quickly, and closer to your target position, than those who do not.

The best place to start your career search strategy is with the downloadable Roadmap spreadsheet on our website. You can customize your own personal roadmap by working through the 5 key phases:
- Discovery
- Strategy
- Branding
- Search
- Apply & Interview

The Roadmap has 2 views:
- The first tab is an overview where you can document goals and budget your time.
- The second tab is your weekly checklist of tasks to work through the process and stay laser focused on finding employment. On the weekly checklist, the 2nd column will refer you to various free resources we have online to help you with each phase and task.

Once created, you will have a plan for spending dedicated time each day to your job search.

Key elements of each phase

- Discovery — Know yourself: strengths, skills, interests, values; Take stock
- Strategy — Role clarity; Industry research; Target areas
- Branding — Brand audit; Qualifications, positioning story
- Search — Target company list; Weekly goals; Contact mapping-tracking; Networking; Recruiter engagement; Job monitoring; Pipeline follow-up
- Apply & Interview — Job application, résumé tailoring; Interviewer research; Interviews, follow-up; Offer negotiation

Benefits of a Bridge Job

- Income
- Network/Social connections
- Mental Health

Don’t Go It Alone

Career transition is not a journey you should take alone. Consider it a team effort in which we help one another with contacts, counsel, encouragement, and accountability. Most jobs that get filled are not posted publicly. Most are filled through networking. Networking is hard without relationships!

Keep asking yourself who you know or who you should ask for the help you need, whether that’s contacts, information about an employer, or encouragement to keep going.

P2E has designed weekly experiences to provide you a network (in addition to your existing network) to support you so you don’t have to go it alone. As part of your Roadmap, we encourage you to use the following opportunities to make connections, practice networking, sharpen your job search skills and get encouragement:

P2E Weekly Monday Meeting (Live and Zoom)

Monday evenings, 7-8:30 p.m.

Teach and reinforce key disciplines in a successful job search and practice networking in a safe environment and expand your network.

P2E Accountability Groups (Live and Zoom)

Practical, "sleeves-rolled-up" setting, keep momentum, what's working, ways to "get unstuck."

- Accountability check-in: progress, actions/next steps
- Weekly meetings and locations: Visit *onemoreindy.org/passport-to-employment* for specific times and locations

Engage WorkOne

Purpose: Orientation to the search and WorkOne resources at WorkOne office locations

- Enroll, get oriented, find a WorkOne Career Advisor
- Indianapolis/Marion County, Indiana: *employindy.org/workoneindy*
- Counties surrounding Indianapolis, Indiana: *workonecentral.org*

WorkOne offices have a variety of resources to help you learn and apply key disciplines, including:

Résumés and Cover Letters	LinkedIn
Career Networking	Informational Meetings
Interviewing & Interview Practice	Computer Skills (Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint)

Enroll via WorkOne Office / WorkOne Career Advisor

Connect with a P2E Coach

Request to connect with a P2E Coach – to help you develop your Roadmap/Strategy, to get specific help on any particular phase, practice interviewing etc.

Leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) to Accelerate Your Job Search

Searching for a new job has never been simple. It requires self-reflection, research, writing, networking, and preparation—all while maintaining focus and motivation. Let's face it - these tasks demand hours each week. However, today artificial intelligence (AI) offers powerful tools that can significantly accelerate the process.

Used effectively, AI can help you clarify your career direction, improve your professional profile, identify opportunities, and prepare for interviews. It can analyze large amounts of information in seconds, offer suggestions you may not have considered, and streamline time-consuming tasks such as editing résumés or drafting cover letters. However, the most important principle to remember is this:

AI should enhance your thinking, not replace it.

The most successful job seekers use AI as a collaborator - generating ideas, refining language, and organizing information—while ensuring that the final message reflects their authentic voice and experience.

Throughout this guidebook, we'll introduce tools designed to support specific aspects of your job search. We'll also provide sample prompts to help you get started using common AI tools/assistants.

Some of the general AI Assistants/Tools include:

- ChatGPT - a free version is available with limits on number of prompts
- Claude AI – a free version is available with limits on number of prompts
- Merlin AI - an all-in-one AI aggregator and browser extension that gives users unified access to multiple top-tier artificial intelligence models—such as OpenAI's GPT, Anthropic's Claude, Google Gemini, and Llama—through a single sidebar and interface. They do have a free tier with limited queries.

Important Considerations When Using AI

AI can be a powerful job-search tool but use it wisely.

Protect Your Privacy
Avoid entering confidential company information or sensitive personal data. Review the privacy and data-control settings for the AI tools you use and consider disabling data-sharing options. For example, in ChatGPT, you can turn off **Settings → Data Controls → Improve the model for everyone** if you don't want new conversations used to improve OpenAI's models.

Verify Important Information
AI can make mistakes or provide outdated information. Use its responses as a starting point for research, not a final answer. Verify important facts with reliable sources.

Refine Your Prompts
AI often improves with follow-up instructions. If the first response isn't quite what you need, ask it to expand, narrow, clarify, or revise the results.

Try Voice
Voice features can make brainstorming, practicing your introduction, and preparing for interviews feel more natural and conversational.

"The job search is about you, but the application of the job search is about them. Throughout this book, you will see this phrase, "It is not about you, It is about them." You are a worthy person and should be doing a job that is your passion. However, that is not why companies and organizations hire people.

People are hired because they have the skills that companies can use to either make a profit or complete their mission. Whether a profit, nonprofit, or government position, the skill the company needs and that you offer must match to be assured consideration for the job. A job search is the hardest work for the poorest pay of any job you will ever do.

If you are not spending as many hours in your job search as you are spending doing your previous job, you will probably not find a job you will enjoy on the same level that you were accustomed to."

Bruce Flanagan, author of the job search book "It's Not About You, It's About Them

Introduction

The Impact of Job Loss

In modern society, we tend to link some – or much – of our identity to our jobs, what we do for a living. When we lose a job, that's taken away in an instant. It has an impact. It leaves an invisible mark. Job loss often causes severe stress, anxiety, depression, and loss of identity.

"While finding a new job is at the top of your to-do list, consider this: In order to be job-ready, you must first acknowledge & work through your natural feelings of loss." (*Healing After Job Loss*, Alan Wolfelt, and Kirby Duvall)

Let's look at how we process "loss." Elisabeth Kübler-Ross was a Swiss-American psychiatrist and author who identified five common emotional responses that became widely known as the "five stages of grief."

Although Kübler-Ross originally focused on people confronting their own death—not specifically on bereavement—her framework was later applied to many types of significant loss, including job loss. Losing a job can affect income, security, identity, purpose, relationships, and confidence. As a result, people often experience grief:

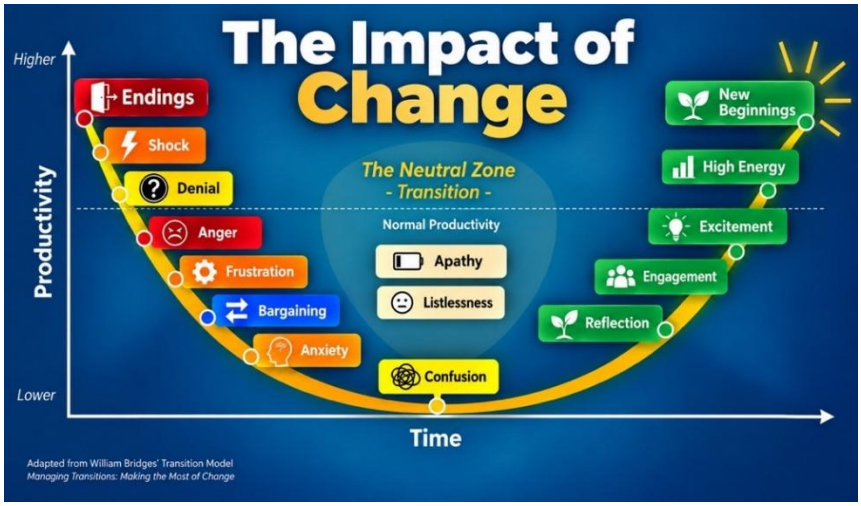
- **Denial:** "This cannot be happening."
- **Anger:** "Why did this happen to me?"
- **Bargaining:** "If only I had done something differently."
- **Depression:** Sadness, withdrawal, or loss of motivation.
- **Acceptance:** Recognizing the reality of the loss and beginning to move forward.

William Bridges, an author and consultant, distinguished between change and transition. *Change is an external event* or shift in circumstances—such as losing a job, taking a new position, or experiencing an organizational restructuring. *Transition is the internal psychological and emotional process* people go through as they adjust to that change.

Bridges described transition as a "change of state" involving three phases:

- **Ending, Losing, and Letting Go**: People must recognize what has ended and begin releasing familiar roles, routines, relationships, expectations, and parts of their identity. Job loss is especially difficult because it may affect much more than employment—it can disrupt security, confidence, purpose, status, and belonging.
- **The Neutral Zone**: This is the uncertain period between the old reality and the new one. People may feel confused, discouraged, or unsettled, but this phase can also create space for reflection, exploration, learning, and new possibilities.
- **The New Beginning**: People gradually develop a renewed sense of direction, purpose, identity, and commitment. They begin moving forward and engaging with a new situation or future.

Although the stages of grief are not a fixed orderly sequence, when aligned with Bridges's model it can look something like this: >>>>



Bridges' central point is that people cannot fully embrace a new beginning until they acknowledge and work through what they have lost. Effective change management must therefore address the human transition—not simply announce or implement the external change.

Ask yourself: "Where am I on this curve?" Recognizing your current emotions can help you understand what you need to move forward. The stages should not be treated as a fixed, orderly sequence. People may experience them in a different order, return to earlier emotions, feel several at once, or not experience every stage. The framework is most useful as a way to understand possible reactions—not as a timetable for how someone is "supposed to grieve."

Prioritize your EMOTIONAL HEALTH

As you work through your job search process, prioritize healthy self-care and emotional support practices. Your mental health significantly impacts your motivation daily as well as your self-confidence and ability to be energetic when networking and interviewing.

- Find support among family and friends. Do not isolate yourself!
- Determine to take care of yourself (health, diet, fitness, sleep).
- Maintain a consistent daily routine, as if you had a full-time job.
- Sense of Security: Develop a short-term financial strategy.
- Sense of Security: Consider a continuation of your health coverage, or alternatives.
- Volunteer and look for ways to help others.

Recognize professional counseling may help. A counselor or therapist can provide a safe, confidential place to process the emotions associated with job loss. Counseling is not a sign of weakness or failure - it is a resource for protecting your mental health, strengthening your coping skills, and helping you regain a sense of control. Consider seeking professional help when sadness, anxiety, anger, isolation, sleep problems, or loss of motivation become persistent, overwhelming, or interfere with daily life.

One helpful distinction: a *career coach* can help you determine where you are going and how to conduct your search; a *counselor* can help you address the emotional or psychological issues that may be making it difficult to move forward. In some situations, working with both can provide the most complete support.

The "Help Others First" Rule:

If you're wondering who can help you find job leads, turn your thinking around and adopt a new mindset that asks, "Who can I help?" For example, participate in structured volunteering events, and look for ways to help individuals with a skill or ability you have.

ENCOURAGEMENT - You are not alone!

Feelings of loss and uncertainty are natural human responses to significant change – it's how our brain chemistry reacts. Job loss is no exception.

Build and use your support network. Connect with family, friends, former colleagues, networking groups, faith communities, career coaches, and others who can provide encouragement and perspective. Some people will offer emotional support; others may provide practical help, accountability, information, or professional connections. Be willing to tell trusted people what you are experiencing and what kind of support you need.

P2E Job Seeker Quote:
"We are scared, mad, confused. Feeling a sense of blame, shame, uncertainty, and frustrated. Experiencing financial issues, and health issues. Already feeling undervalued, then getting ghosted week after week for job applications and interviews. We are facing pressure from ourselves, family, and others… the list goes on and on. Thank you for stepping into the mess with us."

Phase A: Discovery

Self-Assessment

Who you are at your CORE

Most people have some level of self-awareness. However, we have found in working with hundreds of job seekers that many haven't done a serious self-assessment. Let's face it – life is too busy; there are so many demands on our time and energy. So, we think of this as "*re"-discovering* yourself. Over the years, you've grown and developed in a number of ways through your experiences, failures, and accomplishments.

Finding MEANINGFUL Work

Work is more than just something we have to do — it's about putting in effort, both mentally and physically, to create something meaningful. According to Webster, work is "bodily or mental effort required to make something; purposeful activity." This means that work isn't just about completing tasks; it's about doing something with purpose and meaning behind it.

Think about it — when you consider your work, what are you really looking for? Is it about earning money, gaining knowledge, feeling accomplished, helping others, or maybe creating something new? Everyone has different motivations for why they work, and understanding what drives you can help you find more satisfaction and success in what you do.

People tend to view work in three main ways: for survival, for success, or for significance.

- For most people — say about 60% — work is primarily about *survival*. They work to earn money, pay bills, and support themselves and their families. It's about *having a job* and making a living.
- For around 30% of people, work is about *success*. They want to feel accomplished, gain acceptance from others, and earn a sense of status through their work. Success may mean something different to each of us – but it's often about reaching goals and *being recognized* for their efforts.
- Finally, about 10% of people see work as a way to find *significance*. They are driven by passion and a desire to contribute to something bigger than themselves. Their work gives them a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

Finding Your "WHY"

Understanding *why* you work can help you find greater meaning and satisfaction in your career. Many people are working at a job *without reflecting on its purpose – or theirs*.

People tend to approach work with one of three different mindsets: as a *job,* a *career,* or a *calling*. We'll call this "work orientation."

- If you see work as a *job*, you likely work to earn money, to meet your basic needs. You may not feel deeply connected to the work itself — it's more about paying the bills and getting through the day. Plenty of people are glad to leave their job at the end of each day. They don't particularly love their job – they can tolerate the mundane or less attractive elements to get to the stuff they like to do more. Sometimes they hate or even despise the job but can't envision doing anything else.
- Seeing work as a *career* probably means that you have a longer -term view: you're focused on growth, achievement, and advancement. You care about building your skills, gaining a sense of satisfaction in doing what you do well. You get a level of affirmation from earning recognition. You strive to increase your expertise and move up the ladder. Success and status tend to matter to you.
- If you view work as a *calling*, you feel passionate about what you do. Your work gives you a sense of purpose and fulfillment. You believe you're making a difference and contributing to something greater than yourself.

Understanding your work orientation can help you make better career choices and find more meaning in what you do. Are you working for a paycheck, for success, or for a deeper purpose? There's no wrong answer here – the question is, what motivates *you*?

What does "fulfilling" mean to you? Only you can answer that question for yourself. It might include some of the following:

- You are competent at it – it's something that you do well.
- You enjoy doing it and get some sense of satisfaction from it.
- You can get focused and absorbed in the activity – so much so, that you may completely lose track of time. Not because of a deadline, but just because you're so "into" it.

Phase A: Discovery
Personal Inventory

Understanding Yourself and Your Design

How are you "wired?" What are your innate talents, your character traits, the strengths that you have developed? What do you do the best? What do you enjoy doing the most? Examining these can help you reconnect with how God designed you in the first place – that tends to show up in how you approach to work. A key tool is to build a "personal inventory" of yourself:

Your Personal Attributes and Characteristics

Your personality and natural attributes, characteristics, tendencies, and preferences shape how you approach life and work

- A solid-state circuit board is "hard-wired." How are you "wired?"
- How would you describe yourself to others?
- How have others, or would others, describe you?
- What key words or phrases might best give a word picture of you?
- What are your natural preferences?

Your Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

What do you know? What can you do? What have you done? What are you good at? Best at?

Copy and paste your résumé, job description, or narrative write up into an AI assistant/tool and ask

- "What strengths and capabilities appear most consistently in this professional background?"
- "What transferable skills appear strongest in this professional background?"

Categorize your skills (or ask AI to) in terms of:

- *Transferrable ("Soft") Skills* - adapt to new jobs, companies, etc...
  Examples: Verbal & written communications, design & planning, sales/business development process.
- *Knowledge-Based ("Hard") Skills* - specific to a profession or industry or domain of expertise
  Examples: Server administration, Microsoft Office applications, insurance industry issues, and drivers

Your Strengths

Your strengths are a mix of Skills and natural Traits. What are your core strengths?

- A strength can be a natural "bent" or preference. You may be extremely organized, and schedule-oriented, or very flexible and adaptable to changing situations.
- A strength can be a key Skill you know how to do extremely well.
- What do you most rely on, to deal with a problem/issue; when are you at your best?
  Example: Someone who has trained as a project manager, will likely *amplify* that skill with a predisposition of being organized and an attention to detail, more so than someone who is spontaneous, with an in-the-moment, come-what-may attitude towards life. So, Project Management is a core strength.

Your Interests

Your *interests* reflect the things that grab your attention and excite you – what you gravitate towards.

- What do you most enjoy doing?
- Where do you like to focus your time and energy?
- When was the last time you were so absorbed that you completely lost track of time? What were you doing?
- What are you passionate about?

Key Experience

- What have you contributed?
- What are you most proud of, or satisfied with, in your professional life?
- Highlight practical, quantifiable achievements and successes.

Phase A: Discovery

Key Themes / Impact

What patterns do you see?

As you review your personal inventory, begin looking for patterns. What themes appear over and over? What kinds of problems do you naturally solve? What contributions have you consistently made? Rather than focusing only on what you have done, think about the impact you have had:

- What became better because of you and what you did, especially over time?
- What kinds of results do you reflect on the most positively, where you feel the greatest sense of accomplishment? These themes also begin to tell the story of the value you bring and become the foundation for your personal brand.

Ask an AI assistant/tool "What themes stand out most in this professional profile?"

Self-Assessment Tools

There are a variety of personality assessment tools that can help bring personal attributes and characteristics to light and assist you in building your own outline. These instruments can help provide you with perspective on your personality and personal attributes, your preferred style, and work environment.

Using sentences, phrases, and key words from a personality assessment report, helps yield additional insights and ways of describing oneself that might not automatically come to mind.

They can also highlight potential career areas that may be a good fit for you. This can help especially if you are interested in changing direction, or if you feel stuck in a stereotype from your previous jobs.

Some of these are available from a certified practitioner (such as Myers-Briggs, Strong, and DISC), but free versions are often available online. Others are available for the price of a book.

- The Myers Briggs Company offers well-accepted personality assessment instruments. The key two that also have a career perspective are
  - Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Career Report) – Psychological or Personality Type
  - Strong Interest Inventory – Personality Theme Codes

  Both are offered through certified practitioners. To find one, see *mbtireferralnetwork.org* **OR**

  See Career Assessment Site: *careerassessmentsite.com/tests/career-tests*
- DiSC Profile: *discprofile.com.* DiSC model: Dominance, influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness. You can search online to find and pick a DiSC provider.
- StrengthsFinder 2.0 (Gallup) *gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/home.aspx*
- *What Color is Your Parachute?* (Career edition), by Richard Bolles
- A "Flower petals" exercise walks you through various ways of describing who you are
- **Key Words Exercise:** In addition to assessment tools and introspection, ask 4-6 people who know you well
  - What 3-4 words come to mind when you think of me?
  - Write down the words or phrases they give you.
  - Look especially for repeated words, or synonyms.

Discovery can be a fun part of the journey so take the time to work through it and move towards not just a paycheck but fulfilling employment!

Phase A: Discovery

Accomplishments: STAR Stories

What are STAR Stories?

STAR Stories are short narrative examples of your top accomplishments:

- a **S**ituation or **T**ask you were presented with,
- the **A**ction you took to navigate the situation, and
- the **R**esult

The logic is that how you behaved in the past will predict how you will behave in the future. You demonstrate how you helped provide value before as an illustration of how you can provide value to a new employer, department, or division.

Accomplishments/STAR Stories are used throughout the career search process.

- Foundation of your résumé to highlight skills, capabilities, and results.
- Bulleted to identify what you can do for the organization and why you are a good fit.
- Summarized and spoken in your 30-Second Introduction, interviewing, and other networking situations.

In thinking about which accomplishments to highlight, consider what you want to do. Orient your accomplishments toward your desired audience and the skills they need. This requires a clearly articulated sense of purpose plus an understanding of the needs of the individual, industry, position, or sector.

Six general guidelines for writing your STAR Stories

- Begin with stimulating action verb (see List of Power Action Verbs)
- Write in the past tense
- Show results gained from your action
- Be brief, yet stimulating
- Demonstrate what you are proud of
- Indicate what key skills you used

- **Situation/Task (ST): Why did you take the action?**
  - It was inefficient.
  - It was too slow.
  - I wanted to learn a new skill.
  - I was given a specific task or challenge by a manager.

- **Action (A): What did you do that was above and beyond the job description?**
  - Did I create something new?
  - What tasks did I perform?
  - Did I coordinate something?

- **Result (R): What benefit did you create from that action? (quantify where possible)**
  - Did my actions improve productivity?
  - Did my actions save time?
  - Was I affirmed or recognized for going "above and beyond" normal duties or receive an award?

- **What Skills did I use to do this?**
  - Technical skills that relate to specific performance of tasks (computer, publishing, analytical, etc.)
  - Functional skills that are obtained by virtue of the field, industry, or sector in which one works (HR, finance, marketing, government, finance, health care, etc.)
  - Administrative skills that are the managing "getting the job done" skills (organization, leadership, project management, facilitation, communication, etc.)

Your STAR Stories are evidence of your skills at work.

Identifying your accomplishments for STAR Stories

- Identify 6-8 examples from your past experience where you demonstrated top behaviors and skills that employers typically seek. Think in terms of examples that will exploit your top strengths/selling points.
- Some of your examples should be totally positive, such as accomplishments or meeting goals.
- Include situations that started out negatively but either ended positively or you made the best of the outcome.
- Vary your examples; don't take them all from just one area of your life. Use examples from your most recent work experience, but also internships, class projects, activities, team participation, or community service.
- Review any performance evaluations, key project reviews, etc. for key accomplishments for which you were acknowledged, or are most proud of.
- As an epilogue to your STAR Story, list key skills you used in the Action that you took.
- Ensure these skills are reflected in your personal brand.

STAR Story Primer Questions

Consider the following questions to assist you in identifying your accomplishments for STAR Stories:

Process Improvement/Efficiency

1. Did you suggest or implement a new products, procedures, or systems?
2. Did you solve a major problem for your section, department, or division?
3. Did you save the company money?
4. Did you identify and/or implement a better or more efficient way of doing a procedure?
5. Did you do a job with fewer people or in a shorter time?
6. Did you reduce errors?

Teamwork/People Management

7. Did you train/mentor anyone?
8. Did you improve employee performance?
9. Did you have a reputation for handling certain difficult problems, situations, or people?

Initiative

10. Did you develop or do something for the first time at your company?
11. Did you develop new business or enlarge a market?
12. Were you involved in any special projects or task forces?
13. Did you increase the scope of your Job – territory, number of calls, customers, level of responsibility?
14. Did you exceed your goals, objectives, or deadlines?

New Skills

15. Did you learn new skills or participate in any technical or soft skill training?
16. Did you fill in for someone / cross-train in other positions?
17. Did you learn new technology, new program, software?

Recognition

18. Did you receive any special recognition, bonus, awards, or letters (from customers, peers, managers)?
19. Were you promoted to a new position and/or advanced quickly for the organization/industry?

Examples (Advertising)

Situation / Task (ST): Advertising revenue was falling off for my college newspaper, and large numbers of long-term advertisers were not renewing contracts.

Action (A): I designed a new promotional packet to go with the rate sheet and compared the benefits of circulation with other ad media in the area. I also set up a special training session for the school of business professor who discussed competitive selling strategies.

Result (R): We signed contracts with 15 former advertisers for daily ads and five for special supplements. We increased our new advertisers by 20 percent year-to-year.

Here are more examples for different industries:

Administration/Customer Service

- Implemented policy and procedure for auditing reports, increasing accuracy rates from 65% to 90%.
- Coordinated, resolved, and responded to 300-500 consumer letters in a 5-day turnaround. Measurably improved customer satisfaction.

Accounting/Finance

- Prepared and presented training on computer system for 28 people, saving company $51,000 annually.
- Researched and determined status of uncashed checks and created system to help track future unclaimed obligations. Resulted in the initial savings of $184,000 and $20,000 annually.

Information Technology

- Implemented new EDI trading partners on all internal EDI processes, minimizing production failures below 90%.
- Designed/implemented standard pcExpress Financial Model that assured data integrity/ accessibility, eliminated analytical and data inconsistencies and reduced workload by 2 days.

Management/Project Management

- Directed the design and development of a software program that replaced manual preparation of promotional bulletins, saving $200,000 a year in labor costs and reduced promotional invoicing errors.
- Achieved consumer complaint reduction of 11% and 15% in 2000 and 2001.

Accomplishment Development Action Words

Draw from the following list to describe the things you've done to shape your STAR Stories:

When I worked with **DATA**, I have:		When I worked with **PEOPLE**, I have:		When I worked with **THINGS**, I have:	
Administered	Organized	Administered	Performed	Arranged	Installed
Analyzed	Planned	Advised	Persuaded	Assembled	Introduced
Arranged	Presented	Assisted	Presented	Balanced	Invented
Assembled	Processed	Coached	Produced	Bargained	Made
Assessed	Promoted	Communicated	Protected	Built	Modernized
Authored	Programmed	Conducted	Provided	Centralized	Opened
Balanced	Proved	Consulted	Reconciled	Conceived	Operated
Budgeted	Provided	Counseled	Recruited	Conserved	Organized
Calculated	Publicized	Decided	Reduced	Consolidated	Originated
Co-authored	Published	Delegated	Represented	Constructed	Pioneered
Compiled	Read	Demonstrated	Resolved	Converted	Presented
Completed	Recorded	Determined	Restructured	Created	Produced
Composed	Reconciled	Directed	Scheduled	Cut Costs	Purchased
Computed	Refined	Eliminated	Served	Demonstrated	Reconstructed
Condensed	Reorganized	Enforced	Shared	Designed	Redesigned
Converted	Reported	Established	Showed	Determined	Reduced
Coordinated	Researched	Expedited	Staffed	Developed	Repaired
Corrected	Revised	Facilitated	Supervised	Devised	Restructured
Defined	Setup	Guided	Taught	Eliminated	Shaped
Designed	Simplified	Headed	Tended	Established	Strengthened
Determined	Sorted	Hired	Tested	Expanded	Tended
Developed	Standardized	Initiated	Trained	Fabricated	Tested
Edited	Streamlined	Instructed	Traveled	Formed	Upgraded
Evaluated	Systematized	Learned	Unified	Founded	
Formulated	Synthesized	Led		Generated	
Identified	Tracked	Managed		Guided	
Integrated	Updated	Motivated		Handled	
Interpreted	Verified	Negotiated		Improved	
Marketed	Wrote	Operated		Innovated	
Modified		Organized		Inspected	

Phase B: Strategy

Career Possibilities

Where You Want to GO

The *Discovery* stage is about reflecting and focusing on understanding who you are at your core.
Strategy is all about where you want to go. Now that you have a renewed perspective on yourself, what do you want to be doing in a career? What shape could that take?

You're going to start with a big bucket of possibilities and begin to narrow it down through this stage.

1. Career Possibilities - *What possibilities fit those patterns?*

At this stage, resist the temptation to lock yourself into one specific answer too quickly. Instead, think in terms of possible directions, along a trajectory. What industries, occupations, or types of work fit your strengths, interests, and priorities? Brainstorm several possibilities, to then investigate and explore. Your goal is not to have every answer today, but to identify the directions that deserve your attention.

How do **Career and Life Goals** impact the **possibilities**— *What do I ultimately want?*
You're taking stock of your career. But this is a significant opportunity to take stock of your life, as well. Your career should support the life you want to build, not compete against it. Some live to work, others work to live. As you think about your next career chapter, consider both your professional aspirations and your personal priorities. What do you want your life to look like? What kind of work will allow you to use your strengths, continue growing, and support the life you want to live? The clearer your goals become, the easier it is to evaluate opportunities.

2. Career Focus - *Which direction will I pursue?*

One of the greatest challenges in career search is maintaining focus. Employers are looking for people who understand where they create the greatest value. Based on everything you've discovered about yourself, identify the type of work that best fits your strengths, skills, interests, and experience. Focus doesn't limit your opportunities—it helps others clearly understand where you can make your greatest contribution.

To shape your focus towards your career strategy:

- Decide on a list of roles or areas where you have the strongest interest.
- This list can include several ideas or options, across a wide range. Job titles and scopes continue to change and evolve.

Example: A client hired in Marketing, was promoted to lead marketing, then asked after several years to lead Operations (due to her flair for organizing and process). After being restructured out of the business, she realized she loved working with and developing people. So, she had three target areas: Marketing, Operations, and Human Resources.

AI tools can help you analyze your experience and identify potential career paths that align with your strengths. You can provide a summary of your background and ask an AI assistant:

- What themes appear in my experience?
- What roles might align with these skills?
- What industries value this type of work?
- What career paths might be logical next steps?"
- What roles could someone with this experience transition into with minimal retraining?"
- Copy and paste your résumé and ask "Based on the following résumé, what types of roles might be a logical next step in my career? Identify transferable skills and potential industries where these skills are valuable."

REFINING your List:

Once you have an initial list, then move to *refining* your list by investigating.

Investigation: What does each option look like? Act like a Private Investigator and do some research on each option. What can you learn about it? What appeals to you or excites you about it? What are some key activities that the job entails, that you do well and enjoy doing?

Resources: The Occupational Network (O*NET) is a database created and maintained by the US Department of Labor, found at *onetonline.org*

- You can look at an abstract and outline of over 1,100 occupational titles.
- You can search by occupation (job title) or by category, interest area.
- Each Occupation has an abstract, similar job titles, skills, and activities used in the job, and insights on salary/pay.
- You can also use the "Easy Read" feature for a highlights visual view of the role and job descriptions on various job boards for that role at different organizations posting for the position.

As you examine each option, you will almost certainly *narrow the list*. You may decide as you investigate a job role from your list that it isn't as appealing as you thought when you listed it. Now that you've really looked at it, you're not all *that* interested in it. This is a natural process of elimination. You want a smaller list! (It's hard to really pursue potential jobs across a list of say 6-8 options.)

***Exploration*:** After you've narrowed the list, take a deeper look at each option. Which ones still "speak" to you? Where do you have most skills that that option uses? What energizes you? Where do you see most fit with what you've discovered about yourself? Which resonate with the themes/patterns and impact you've uncovered about yourself?

Resources:

- Informational meetings: One of the best ways to learn about a role is to talk with someone already working in that role. How did they come to be working in it? What does a typical day look like doing the job? What do they most enjoy about it? What have they learned? What insights might they have about what looks like success in it?
- Salary data from public sources. You can start by asking an AI assistant/tool "What is the typical salary range for *senior project managers* in the Midwest?"

As you dig into each option, you may narrow your list further. You may find after speaking with someone, "well, if that what this really looks like, I want no part of it!" That's OK, and you want a small list of options to actively pursue.

3. Target Areas, Positions — *What specific roles will I market myself toward?*

Now it's time to become specific. What occupations, job titles, functional areas, or industries best align with your career focus? Develop your short list of target positions that reflect both your qualifications and your direction.

Pursuit: This is your list of target occupations / job titles / areas.

- This list becomes the foundation for your overall search strategy.
- It shapes your branding, (résumé, LinkedIn profile, etc.).
- Enables you to focus your energies on marketing yourself - networking, focused networking conversations, and actively applying to positions.

Consider using LinkedIn Career Explorer (AI tool). It is designed to help you find new career paths and transition into different fields. It matches your current skills to thousands of other job titles using data from the LinkedIn Economic Graph

Phase B: Strategy

Targeting Organizations

Many job seekers make the mistake of looking only or primarily at job postings as their target for activity and might have a list of a few organizations of interest. These tend to be "household names" – large organizations in the area, or that we've encountered in previous jobs. The list might be 6-8 firms. But consider this: the probability of any of those 6-8 firms are actively looking for someone with your skill set, right now, is pretty low.

What if we expand the list?
Before you even post your résumé to a job board, know your market. From the Strategy work you've done so far, what are the kinds of places where you want to work?

- Which Industries?
- What types or roles? (since job titles continue to change and evolve)
- What companies have you encountered in the past? Admired?
- At what organizations do you know people? Say fellow college alumni? Former co-workers?
- Who is setting trends or creating "buzz" in an area of interest for you? Posting blogs? Press releases?

The majority of people who are working in the market, are working for a company, firm, or public/non-profit organization. So, let's define our target area – where we might want to work. We'll use one of Stephen R. Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*: "Begin with the end in mind."

In his excellent book *The 2-Hour Job Search,* Steve Dalton gives a structured "Targeting" approach highlighted here:
Create a focused list of 40 target organizations – that's right, shoot for 40. You will

- Increase the likelihood that you may have a personal connection, or know someone who knows someone – who works there (more about that in Networking), and
- Increase the odds of finding a place who is actively hiring.

Think in terms of four major categories, and list specific organizations in each:

- Dream Companies: List the places you'd love to work—brands, organizations, or employers you admire from afar.
- "Alumni" Companies: where you know people! Your college roommates, classmates, lifelong friends, former colleagues, or other people you know are employed.
- Active Openings: companies currently posting jobs that match your skills and target job roles.
- Trending: Research your industry's growth areas. Which companies are publishing press releases, creating "buzz" in the news or on social media, expanding products, services, operations, or markets?

Dalton suggests that you can generate a list of 40 firms in 40 minutes. How? Use your favorite search engine, AI tool, and LinkedIn. Don't get distracted by digging into their website and researching them yet. Save that for later.

AI tools can help you analyze industries, companies, and hiring trends. These insights help you focus your search strategically. For example, AI prompt "Identify 15–20 companies in the healthcare technology sector within 25 miles of Indianapolis. Provide a short description of each."

TARGET ORGANIZATION LIST:
Make it a contest with yourself – set a timer for 10 minutes and see how many organizations you can name in your "Dream Companies" list. Then, repeat for each of the other categories. See worksheet for this exercise, with 5 lines for each category in the Templates & Worksheet Page on our website.

We can gain insights on Trending organizations by monitoring social media and keep our eyes and ears open. Example: You can use Groups on LinkedIn. Find Groups that are in your areas of focus or interests and join them. You will see notifications from people in that group in your regular LinkedIn "feed" and can see who is posting articles, where they work. Might their companies be of interest to add to your list?

Expanding the List

Once you go through this exercise, you should now have a number of organizations, but it may not be 40 yet. So how do you get there?

You can expand your list of organizations by considering the other organizations in the ecosystem for the companies you have on your list. Harvard Business School's Michael Porter's "Competitive Forces" model shows that each company in the market has natural forces with which to contend:

- Industry Rivals – natural competitors
- Threat of New Entrants – Start-up and smaller firms getting into the market
- Threat of New Products – Other firms with new offerings that compete
- Bargaining Power of Suppliers
- Bargaining Power of Buyers.

For each firm, look for companies that "surround" them in the ecosystem, and research

- Who are their **rivals and competitors**? Who does what they do?
- *To whom* do they sell? Who are their end **customers**?
- Who **supplies** products and services to them?
- *Through* whom do they sell? What are their **Channels or Routes to Market**, towards an end customer?
- What **alliances or partnerships** do they have?

Example: Larry is a CFO who was laid off when his company restructured. He was approached by a software firm that provides ERP applications, who had Larry's company as a customer. They were looking for implementation consultants and thought that Larry might know someone that might be a good candidate. Larry thought for a moment, and said, "what about me?" They interviewed him and brought him on board, where he has been working for several years – and he loves his job! So, he effectively jumped from a company to a Supplier organization.

There are organizations in one or more of those categories that you can target!

Additional Resources | Ideas for helping you build your list:

- Indianapolis Business Journal's *The Book* of lists - *ibj.com/lists*
  - Area libraries and WorkOne Indiana offices in Marion and surrounding counties will usually have a hard copy.
- LinkedIn Search - Target Industry
- Your College Alumni page (where are fellow alumni working?)

Researching Organizations from Your Target List:

- Their company web page.
- Their LinkedIn page.
- Your College Alumni page (where are fellow alumni working?)
- Databases (often available via Public Libraries via their reference area, or online)
  - ABI Inform (Business database)
  - Morningstar (investment research, including stock and fund analysis)
  - Data Axle (business addresses and phone numbers) – can search by company name, business size, major industry group, or via SIC code if you have a list of codes. (Renamed from Reference USA).
- AI assistant/tool prompt: "Provide a brief overview of this company, its strategy, and recent developments."

Once you have built a strong Target List, the next step is deciding where to focus your networking efforts. Your highest-priority targets are Dream Companies where you have an existing connection (Employee, or Alumni, or some other business connection) and there is a job opportunity that genuinely interests you.

- By ranking these targets, you have a curated "roadmap" for where your networking efforts will have the most impact - a focused set of organizations that can help shape every conversation you have going forward.
- Next, compile a list of target contacts from LinkedIn (and other sources) with whom you want an informational meeting.

Adopting a networking strategy is powerful. At first glance it may seem random and "organic" – like watering plants in a and waiting for them to grow. With a targeted approach, you will move away from random "networking" towards a strategic, intentional plan.

Phase C: Branding
Personal Branding

What is "PERSONAL BRANDING?"
Branding in a business-to-consumer context involves the brand's reputation *(What is it known for? How have we experienced the brand?)*, and value proposition *(What can the brand do for me? Why would I select this brand's product or service, above other offerings?).*

"Personal Branding" essentially involves understanding and articulating:
- Who you are
- What you are good/best at
- Where you can best contribute
- How you add value to your target organization

Building Your BRAND
Once you have worked through your personal inventory you are ready to build your brand!
To build your brand, you want to come up with your most essential focus: **What are your "top things" (skills, strengths, experience), that most translate to value (to your target employer)?**

The key question to answer: What do you want someone to most remember about you, five minutes after
- You have given your 30-Second Introduction, and walked away
- They have put down your résumé
- They have viewed your LinkedIn profile

MARKETING Yourself
In this section, you will learn more about creating various tools and documents to market yourself including:
- 30-Second Introduction (elevator speech)
- Marketing Profile Sheet
- Business Cards

You are likely great at something! But does your Marketing Profile Sheet highlight it? Does your résumé reflect it? How about your LinkedIn profile? Do they reflect your brand, your focus? Following the process will help you work through all these different ways people learn about you and push you to:
- Write, rewrite, rewrite again
- Condense and distill: What are your Top 5 Attributes, Soft Skills, Hard Skills?
- Work toward key words and phrases

Phase C: Branding
Marketing Tools & Documents

While you want to create a "wow résumé," it is only one of your marketing tools. The next section includes guidance on a more comprehensive approach to marketing yourself.

- Prepare your Marketing Profile Sheet – a template can be found on our website.

- Create and order a job search business card (printed and/or digital)– see *Business Card template*
  - Business cards are easier to exchange than résumés
  - Job search business cards will be kept available by your network
  - Business cards set you apart from the competition and show professionalism

- Prepare and practice your 30-Second Introduction – a template can be found on our website.

- Contact Work One and register at *Indiana Career Connect*.
  - Sign up and begin taking weekly scheduled classes on basic job search skills
  - Enroll in online courses to receive additional job skills and certifications
  - Make yourself a friend of the career counselors

- Change your voicemail
  - Example: *Hello, you have reached the voicemail of (Name). (First name) is currently out seeking a new career in (Job market or title). When he/she returns from his/her job search, he/she will return your call. Please leave your name, number, and a brief message. Have a great day!*

- Leverage your LinkedIn account – see *Social Media - LinkedIn* section for more

Phase C: Branding

Marketing Profile Sheet

A marketing profile sheet is a one-page document you will use to highlight your key skills, work history, and big wins. It acts like a quick sales pitch for hiring managers.

When It Is Used

- Job interviews: Hand it to the hiring manager so they remember your top skills.
- Job/Career fairs: Give it to company reps instead of a long résumé.
- Networking meetings: Share it with contacts to show what work you can do.
- Job applications: Send them with your résumé to give a quick summary of your value.

The KEY Elements of a Marketing Profile Sheet:

HEADER

- Name
- Current Job Title (if applicable)
- Contact information, including LinkedIn profile
- Headshot (optional)

MARKETING PROFILE SECTIONS

- **Who I Am –** Brief e.g., 30-Second Introduction
- **What I Provide -** Key skills, capabilities, and personal attributes you bring to an employer, e.g., a condensed version of the summary from your résumé
- **What I've Done -** Key accomplishments, e.g., highlights from your top 3 STAR Stories
- **How I Add Value –** Ways that you can contribute to the new group's success
- **Target Role(s)** – Target jobs/areas of most interest
- **Desired Contacts –** Roles/Names

Value

Why are you qualified for the roles you are targeting? How do who you are, what you provide, and what you've done most contribute to the success of the places where you work?

A Marketing Profile template can be found on our website

Marketing Profile
EXAMPLE

Susan Seeker
Operations Management

Indianapolis, IN
317.555.5555
susan.career.seeker@gmail.com
linkedin.com/in/susancareerseeker

WHO I AM

Creative, hands-on business leader with 15+ years' experience with Fortune 500 firms, spanning product management, CRM, and delivery operations. Focused on innovation, customer service, and business process improvement through results-driven project management and operational excellence.

WHAT I PROVIDE

Strategy, Process improvement, and CQI
Data analysis
Financial analysis
Resource/capacity demand
CRM and Portfolio management
Lean Six Sigma – Green Belt
Microsoft Office, Project, SharePoint
SAP JMP, SAP/Business Warehouse

WHAT I'VE DONE

- Successfully managed process change, contingency plans, cost/benefit analysis to increase business performance and productivity, within budget.
- Managed diverse, multidisciplinary, and multi-site teams to promote sustainable change.
- Formulated policies, streamlined sales processes, and anticipated industry and market trends to create strategies and identify viable business growth opportunities.
- Implemented process improvements that reduced customer complaints by 60%, with a savings of $18,000-$20,000 annually.
- Developed a strong team of 20 Service Providers through training, mentoring, follow-up, accountability.

HOW I ADD VALUE

- Actively seek out opportunities to strengthen and exceed operational goals and objectives.
- Systematic with “big picture” vision, to convert complex requirements into actionable projects and plans.
- Deliver outstanding customer relationship management and retention strategies.
- Build strong teams by cultivating trust, instilling confidence, and collaborating with leaders, customers, stakeholders, and subject matter experts.

TARGET POSITIONS

- Operations Manager
- Operations Consultant
- Senior Business Analyst
- Project Manager

TARGET COMPANIES/INDUSTRIES

- Companies focused on superior customer service and fulfillment, who values customers and employees
- Healthcare/Life Sciences
- Biotechnology
- Pharmaceutical
- Energy and Environmental
- Insurance

DESIRED CONTACTS

- COO, Director of Operations
- Vice President/Regional Executive
- HR Executive

Phase C: Branding

Your Résumé

What Is An Effective Résumé?

An effective résumé is one that:

- Conveys your target role, and your personal brand; that is, a summary of the set of skills, abilities, strengths, and characteristics that describe you, and what you bring to add value to a prospective employer
- Helps you stand out from other résumés which an employer is considering
- Gets you noticed in a positive light!

If you have been applying for several jobs and are not getting called back, it may be time to examine your résumé against these best practices.

Résumé Best Practices

Use a format that **leads with your essential brand**. Note the following format (in outline form) that is widely accepted as a best practice in Human Resources and Recruiting arenas:

- Name, Contact information
- Target job role/title
- Summary
  - Brief narrative; 5-6 lines maximum
  - Include a bulleted list of strengths/core competencies
- Professional Experience
  - List of jobs
  - For each job role, provide:
    - Company, Job title, dates *(years only)*
    - Job scope *(Brief narrative – what do you do?)*
    - Accomplishments/STAR STORIES *(Bulleted list – what was result/impact?)*
- Education & Certifications
  - List with the most recent first, going backward in time

> "The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do."
> – Thomas Jefferson

Accomplishments/STAR Stories

Many people fall into the trap of listing key duties they performed, as their Professional Experience section. Instead, what will help set you apart:

- Job Scope: Highlight key areas you performed as part of the job. Include number of people managed, budget you were responsible for, and other key facts. An effective format is 2-4 sentences highlighting the scope, followed by a 'bullet list' of key accomplishments.
  - Never use "Responsibilities included…" This goes without saying and just takes precious space.
- Accomplishments: Here is where you use your *STAR Stories* !

Be careful of using catch phrases or clichés; that is, words and phrases so common that they get passed over.

As of 2026, the most Overused Words in Résumés came up as the following. But do your own search and ask an AI Assistant/Tool what is most overused in your industry or area.

CREATIVE ***RESULTS DRIVEN*** ***MOTIVATED*** ***EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE*** ***TEAM PLAYER***

Q: Why should I not use these words?
A: They don't say anything specific if just listed as an attribute (exception: STAR STORY that demonstrates it).

Q: Is there a time when these words are appropriate?
A: Yes, when they match key words or phrases (requirements) listed in a job posting you are targeting.

Forbes summed it up well: Human Resource departments sift through thousands of résumés each year. The vast majority use these catch phrases. Recruiters skip over such words hunting for nuggets of what the applicant has accomplished in prior jobs.

> Focus your résumé on what you have done, not how you have done it (save that for the interview!).
> Give relevant examples of past projects or tasks that highlight skills the new job will require.
> Align your résumé wording to the job description to show you understand what is required and that you have the experience necessary to excel. The easier you make it for a recruiter to hire you, the more likely you will be hired.

Look over the list of overused words above. For those that you believe describe you, think about how you might rephrase that with another word or 2–3-word phrase. Use a Thesaurus to help you. For example Creative = Imaginative, or Inventive

Phase C: Branding

Understanding the Automated Tracking System (ATS) & Leveraging AI Tools

Nearly every medium and large employer – and many independent recruiting and staffing firms - now uses Applicant Tracking System (ATS) software to manage online job applications. Before your résumé is ever seen by a recruiter or hiring manager, it is often reviewed electronically to determine how well your background matches the position. Some systems simply organize applications for recruiters. Others analyze résumés, identify relevant skills and experience, compare them to the job description, and even rank candidates according to how closely they match the employer's requirements. Modern ATS platforms are increasingly AI-enabled and more sophisticated than simple keyword scanners.

The ATS is not trying to eliminate qualified candidates - it is trying to help recruiters manage hundreds, sometimes thousands, of applications. Unfortunately, that means excellent candidates can be overlooked simply because their résumé does not clearly communicate their qualifications using the language and terminology the employer is searching for.

The good news is that you can dramatically improve your chances.

Your goal isn't to "outsmart" the software—*it's to present your qualifications in a way that's clear* to both the technology and the human recruiter who ultimately makes the decision

Think Like the Employer
Every ATS begins with one primary source of information: **the job description**.

The system is generally configured to look for the knowledge, skills, experience, certifications, software, and competencies identified in the posting. If your résumé demonstrates those qualifications using similar terminology, your likelihood of moving forward increases.

Tailoring Your Résumé
How do you best show the employer that you meet – or exceed – their qualifications? You tailor your résumé to each position. It's not that you copy the posting. Your goal is to accurately describe your experience using the employer's language whenever it honestly reflects your background.

A Practical Strategy
Before clicking **Apply**, spend fifteen minutes analyzing the job description.

Step 1 – Identify the Critical Requirements
Read the job posting carefully and highlight the *six to eight qualifications* that appear - in your judgment - to be most important, and most critical to doing the job. Look for:

- Required technical skills
- Industry terminology
- Software and tools
- Certifications
- Leadership expectations
- Desired accomplishments
- Business problems the employer is trying to solve

This becomes your checklist.

Step 2 - Value Proposition Exercise
Considering the key elements in your checklist, what do you offer to address each of these elements that you called out?

Then, look for underlying business *issues / "Pain Points"* that are indicated:

- Why do they need someone to do this job?
- What is your *value?* That is, how will you help them address these issues?

If you have trouble meeting the key elements or how you can bring value, consider if you should apply for this role.

Step 3 – Compare Your Résumé

- Have I demonstrated these skills? How? Which STAR stories serve as the best illustration?
- Am I using similar terminology?
- Have I highlighted my most relevant accomplishments?
- Is my strongest experience easy to find within the first page?

If an employer repeatedly uses the phrase **Project Management**, but your résumé consistently says **Program Coordination**, use Project Management if that accurately describes your work.
Remember—you are translating your experience into the employer's language.

Let AI Do the Heavy Lifting
This is where Artificial Intelligence becomes one of the most valuable tools in your job search.
Rather than manually comparing your résumé with a job description, ask AI to analyze both documents.

General AI Assistant/Tool Prompts to get started:

- Résumé improvement prompt - Review this résumé and identify three areas where clarity or impact could be improved.
- Résumé critique - Review this résumé and suggest improvements for clarity, impact, and relevance.
- Accomplishment rewriting- Rewrite these résumé bullet points to highlight measurable impact.
- Skills comparison - Compare this job description with my résumé and identify skill gaps.
- Value proposition statement - Help me write a concise professional value proposition based on my background.
- Review this job description and identify the 8-10 most important qualifications, skills, business needs, and keywords the employer is likely emphasizing. Then ask: Compare my résumé with this job description. What qualifications are missing, where could I better align my wording with the employer's terminology, and what accomplishments should I emphasize?

AI can quickly identify:

- Missing keywords and alternative industry terminology
- Critical competencies and skills that deserve greater emphasis
- Opportunities to strengthen your Summary of Qualifications
- Ways to better demonstrate measurable accomplishments

Remember: AI should suggest improvements—not invent experience. Never claim qualifications, certifications, or accomplishments you do not possess.

Validate Your Résumé
Once you've refined your résumé, consider using a tool such as *jobscan.co* to compare it against the job description.

Jobs can analyzes the alignment between the two documents and highlights:

- Keyword matches
- Missing skills
- Résumé readability
- ATS compatibility
- Overall match score

Think of Jobs can as a final quality check rather than the starting point. You can aim for 70-80% or better. There's no "gold standard" that will guarantee your making it through the ATS to be viewed by a human.

Other AI Tools to consider:

Word Cloud
"Word Cloud" tools available online help visualize textual content for most occurring key words. Some examples are:

- *edwordle.net*
- *worditout.com*
- *tagcrowd.com*

Recommended Word Cloud Exercise – Target Job Role

- Generate two Word clouds
  - Copy textual description and qualifications into a Word Processing document
  - Generate a Word Cloud using the target job info
  - Do the same with your résumé
- Compare the two visual images
- Are you aligned with key elements of the target job?
  - Where are there gaps?
  - Do you need to adjust your message? Or your skills and experience?

Rezi - builds and optimizes résumés to pass Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS).

Teal ai - an AI-powered career growth and job search platform designed to help job seekers organize applications, build tailored résumés, and optimize their job hunt

After using some or all of these tools, adjust your résumé to integrate additional key words. Match terms and key words in your résumé to the language the employer is using in their job description.

Spark My Résumé is a **FREE** service that allows you to stand out, get noticed, and get the Job! Fill out a profile online, answer a few questions about yourself and your job history, upload your résumé, and *print out a certificate that prequalifies you for hiring tax credits that the employer will get when they hire you.* So instead of HR looking at your résumé for 6-7 seconds, your certificate will get their attention and get you an interview!

SPARK your résumé today at ***sparkmyrésumé.com***

Phase C: Branding
Résumé Format and Tips

NAME

City, State 555-555-5555

johnsmith@att.net

LinkedIn: linkedin.com/in/john.smith

With increasing concerns of privacy and identity, current recommendations are to include just your city and state, vs. your entire home address. It's valid and appropriate for the employer to know your locale. But you can save the full address for a job application – it's not really needed on your résumé.

JOB TITLE

The title of this section is the specific title such as "Human Resource Director" or "Human Resource Management." (Note: It is suggested that you do not use headings such as "Objectives," "Position Wanted," or similar wording.) Or, if you do not have a single Job Title you are targeting, you can use an overall area, such as "Operations Leadership," "Learning and Development," etc.

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

The purpose is to summarize your professional experience and gain immediate attention of an employer seeking a candidate with your background. Common practice has been to use a narrative of 3-4 sentences, maxi- mum of 6-8 lines. However, HR staff are scanning a résumé in as little as 6-8 seconds, so it is critical to gain the employer's interest in the first half-page of your résumé! So, use a few "bulleted" items to highlight your key qualifications – why you have what it takes to perform in this area and deliver value. Grab the employer's attention!

- *Key Strengths that you have and use in your job*
- *Key skills – Core Competencies that you have, what you do the best, are most confident in, enjoy the most*
- *Make sure to include Transferrable Skills (or "Soft" skills), and more specific "Knowledge-based" skills specific to a domain (also known as "Hard" skills), such as industries, technical skills, or those that require professional certifications you have.*
- *Your impact – what do you do that is a consistent pattern of delivering results, or value*

Tell the employer your professionalism and what you can do for them – to resolve their problems, meet their challenges and increase their bottom line. Focus on the employer's needs.

Note: If the above information "zeroes in" on the available position and tells the employer what you can do to solve their problems and add to their bottom line, they will read more of your résumé, thus increasing your chances for an interview. When résumés are plentiful, the goal of the résumé screener is "how many résumés can be screened out" in order to get the number of résumés down to a manageable few to review.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Title (Also consider including 1 sentence regarding employer type, size, revenue, number of employees)
Employer, Address (City, State) **From ___ to ___ dates** (years only)
Job Scope (brief narrative text)

Summarize responsibilities: 2 to 4 sentences are usually sufficient. What is/was the heart of the job? Provide more detail and information on the more recent position(s) unless those positions are not relative to your cur- rent objectives. Emphasize experience related to the position/profession for which you are applying.

- List key accomplishments – Usually in a bullet format. Quantify as much as possible.
- Focus on the Action and Result from key STAR Stories during this assigned job role.

Note: It may be worthwhile to word and arrange (in order of importance to the employer) your key accomplishments to coincide with the needs of the employer. Also, never use the phrases, "Duties included" or "Responsibilities included" – these just take extra space away from the content you want to emphasize.

[Editor's Note] Keep your Professional Experience section to the most recent 10-15 years of your work his- tory, to avoid broadcasting your relative age. If you have additional experience prior to that timeframe that you want to highlight - that is relevant to your target role/area add a new section:

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

Early Career

If you have a lengthy employment history, the "early years" may be summarized. Do you have an extensive work history? Employers are most interested in what you've done recently, so consider focusing on the last 10 to 15 years in the Professional Experience section above, and for anything earlier, providing a brief summation.

As a rule, don't include dates in this section (it only highlights how long you've been around and might lead to age discrimination).

Options:

- Follow the format in the Professional Experience section, just list key positions but don't include dates
  - Job Title
  - Employer, City & State
  - (Job Scope is optional, unless there is something significant in the responsibilities or scope you want to reinforce)
  - Bulleted list of a few Key Accomplishments achieved while in this role
- List additional Accomplishments as bullets and then mention the position and employer.
  - Accomplishment – Job Title, Employer (City & State)

Focus on that experience that is most relevant to your target position. If it's less relevant (or not at all), there is no need to include it! (Especially college jobs or internships, or entry-level jobs before you got settled.)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT/TRAINING

Bullet special training, seminars, internships, etc. relative to your profession. Include computer training/ knowledge. List most recent activity first.

EDUCATION/CERTIFICATION

List education, and certifications that apply to the position applied for. List most recent certifications first, followed by formal education, college degrees, etc.

PROFESSIONAL/COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES AND AFFILIATIONS

(Optional: Candidate Preference, Filler; Depending on room available; Max. 2 Pages)

General suggestion - list items that would be beneficial to the specific job/company/industry. Do not list non- job-related activities, fraternal organizations, religious organizations, civic activities, community activities, etc. (That said, use your judgement – some organizations value people who volunteer their time and energy.)

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

CONSISTENCY: Use consistent formatting features in spacing between lines, headers, font size, text justification, punctuation and use of formatting like bold and italics. Consistency will show that you are detail- oriented and will make your résumé easier to read.

FONT: Make your résumé easy to read (type size 11 to 13, depending on font type). Use capitalization and bolding sparingly. There should be an easy visual "flow" of the résumé contents – make your résumé easy to read. Too much information may be distracting.

COVER LETTERS: Cover letters are being used less frequently. So, using a cover letter sets you apart! Use it to affirm your interest in the job. Highlight how your qualifications meet the employer's stated requirements in their posted job description – see the section on Cover Letter and use a "T"-shaped format. It will make you stand out, make it clear how you fit and exceed requirements, and differentiate yourself from the great majority of others competing for the position.

RÉSUMÉ FILE NAME: When you e-mail your résumé, consider "personalizing" the file name of your résumé, for example: "Doe, John – HR Manager"

REMEMBER: - Think like an employer – What background, skills, competencies are they looking for to meet their challenges (solve their problems), increase their bottom line? Be aware of the employer's time and make it easy for them to review your résumé. Do not crowd the résumé with too much "stuff." Do not include activities that are not job related. There is no need to include references (or even "References furnished on request" unless requested or until the first (or subsequent) interviews. It's not a good idea to list everything you've ever done on your résumé. Instead, only include the highlights of your job responsibilities -- aspects of your work that show you're qualified for your career goal. Your background, training, education, interests, and competencies are unique. Capitalize on your uniqueness by determining what they are and presenting them in your résumé.

Check your résumé for these four must-haves:

1. An error-free presentation -- no typos and a consistent design.
2. A clear focus with an easily determined target job/area
3. Evidence of your accomplishments; show that you went above and beyond your job duties.
4. Keyword density. Include industry keywords so your résumé will be found in electronic applicant searches.

Phase C: Branding
Your Résumé & Recruiters

Headhunters: A Valuable Tool In Your Job Search by Marnie McCown-Guard

Headhunters are a valuable tool in your job search, and it pays to make their job easier by providing a résumé they can use!

Executive recruiters, or headhunters, view résumés from a totally different perspective than many résumé writers, career coaches, and outplacement consultants. However, they all understand that the résumé is the tool with which the candidate will gain entry. It is the first thing that a hiring manager will use to judge a candidate; therefore, it is important to understand how résumés are viewed from a headhunter's perspective. The information below is based upon interviews with several headhunters across the United States and represents the common blunders found on the résumés of their clients.

Résumés rarely get read: Since there are so many unsolicited résumés received daily, a headhunter does not have time to read each one. This makes it extremely important to have your "message" readily apparent. Essentially your résumé must tell the reader who you are and what you can do for them within the first few lines. Every job in every corporation can be distilled into having one of two purposes: 1) Make the company money, or 2) Save the company money. Your résumé must illustrate which one you offer to the hiring man- ager immediately.

Objective: [Replace with Summary or Summary of Qualifications] Most people start their résumés with an objective, outlining what they want. Very few corporations care about what you want; they are interested to know what you can do for them. Rather than an objective, write a brief summary of your background and why your experience makes you the best to either make or save money for an organization. Doing so will allow the headhunter to determine the best fit for you from among his clients.

Experience: Many headhunters want to see your employment experience in chronological order. A head- hunter is looking for job progression with increased responsibilities. Additionally, he is looking for continuity among jobs. If you have a short time of employment at several companies, it may be a red flag. However, job "hopping" can also be the result of downsizes, mergers and relocation of a military spouse. Be sure to explain this in your cover letter if any of those reasons apply to you.

Education: Always list your education in chronological order and if you are an honors recipient, be sure to list that also. Headhunters also like to see training classes that you have attended which are relevant to your field, position, etc. Be sure to provide the course name and dates attended.

Hobbies: Do not list your leisure pursuits. The only exception is civic or volunteer work. If a volunteer position is relevant to your role, such as a tutor for English as a Second Language when you are a grade-school teacher, it may benefit you to list it. Use your judgment when listing civic activities as it is not a forum to pronounce your political beliefs.

A good headhunter will not present you to their client if he doesn't feel you are a good fit. The best thing you can do is to remain open and honest with your recruiter and provide them all the information you can. This will assist them in presenting you to the opportunities that will best meet your needs and the needs of the client.

PUT YOUR RÉSUMÉ TO THE 10-SECOND TEST

Many résumé reviewers skim résumés for as little as 10 seconds during the initial screening, so your résumé needs to quickly relay your objective and key qualifications.

Show it to someone unfamiliar with your career field and see if the person understands your goal and top credentials after a 10-second review. If not, revise your résumé so your important selling points are easy to find at the top of the document.

[Editor's Note: Recent experience suggests this has dropped to 6 seconds, and you can use ai tools to review your résumé including ChatGPT to help you rewrite statements to have more impact.

-Kim Isaacs

Phase C: Branding
Résumé Example #1

John Doe
317-222-2222
Johndoe@gmail.com *linkedin.com/in/johndoe*

Career Coach

Career Coaching **Strong Training Skills** **Excellent Communicator** **Mentor**

SUMMARY of QUALIFICATIONS

- Currently a HR Career Coach at Dynamic Solutions. Work one on one with candidates to assess their individual career direction. This is usually driven by lay off or downsizing. Worked with local celebrities, people with Doctorates along with those just trying to make ends meet. This includes recently working one-on-one with a convicted murderer.
- Highly experienced Human Resource hiring manager. Routinely received 350 résumés and determined who would make the final cut. Technology has evolved in the job search with the advancement of Social Media and the ATS. It is now imperative that every employee candidate be coached to use the most up to date interviewing and negotiating techniques to discover a new career. Bring these up-to-date practices to the unemployed every day.
- Involved with various nonprofit organizations for 25+ years. Most of these positions were in some sort of public speaking format. This includes presentations on the prevention of child abuse, teaching business concepts to 8th and 12th grade Social Studies classes and teaching cancer caregivers on ways to cope with a cancer patient.

SELECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Worked with a number of unemployed and underemployed attendees providing support with the job search process and guiding these people to the job their skills fit. On one occasion the founder and Executive Director of Dynamic Solutions thanked me for my work with one particular individual, saying that if I had not worked with this individual, she would not have gotten the job.
- I remain the Mentor/Career Coach for several of my past direct reports. This includes one employee that left my prior employer some time ago. Instrumental in getting two of my direct reports in management positions. This includes one employee who several years ago "NO ONE" (including herself) thought was a candidate for the Managing Director position. She got the job and is doing an exceptional job!
- While at my previous employer we took my division of the Indiana territory from $2,000,000 in revenues to $10,000,000 in less than 12 years.

continued…

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Managing Director
Dynamic Solutions - Indianapolis IN 2007 - 2014

- Managed all production, staffing, and the profitable growth of the unemployed for the states of Indiana, Kentucky, and central/southern Ohio.
- Directed 12-15 employees in three offices growing the book to over $25M.

Managing Director
Dynamic Solutions - Indianapolis IN 1998 - 2014

- Supervised all production, staffing, and controllable income of Indiana territory, managing 5-6 employees in the Indianapolis office.
- Personally led the office in profitably growing gross revenue in the Indianapolis office from $2,000,000 in 2000, to $10,000,000 in 2012

EDUCATION

Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN BS Business Management

VOLUNTEERING/COMMUNICATION

- Delivered numerous Continuing Education courses in various Human Resource situations. Courses delivered to insurance agencies, Society of CPAs, and State of Indiana Department of Financial Institution Field Auditors.
- Speakers Bureau for Family Support Center, Educator for Junior Achievement in Indianapolis, Pro -gram Impact committee member for College Mentors for Kids and most recently Regional Representative for Cancer Companions.
- Past member of Toastmasters International in Springfield, IL and Indianapolis, IN.

Phase C: Branding
Résumé Example #2

Susan Seeker
317-555-5555
susan.career.seeker@gmail.com *linkedin.com/in/susancareerseeker*

Operations Management

Innovator **Operational Excellence** **Systematic** **Team Builder**

SUMMARY of QUALIFICATIONS

- Creative, hands-on business leader with 15+ years' experience with Fortune 500 firms, spanning Product management, CRM, and Delivery operations
- Focused on innovation, customer service, and business process improvement through results-driven project management and operational excellence.
- Actively seek out opportunities to strengthen and exceed operational goals and objectives. Systematic with "big picture" vision, to convert complex requirements into actionable projects and plans.
- Deliver outstanding customer relationship management and retention strategies.
- Build strong teams by cultivating trust, instilling confidence, and collaborating with leaders, customers, stakeholders, and subject matter experts.

Strategy, Process improvement	Data analysis, Financial analysis
Continuous Quality Improvement	Lean Six Sigma – Green Belt
Resource/capacity demand	CRM and Portfolio management SAP
JMP, SAP/Business Warehouse	Microsoft Office, Project, SharePoint

SELECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Successfully managed process change, contingency plans, cost/benefit analysis to increase business performance and productivity, within budget.
- Managed diverse, multidisciplinary, and multi-site teams to promote sustainable change.
- Formulated policies, streamlined sales processes, and anticipated industry and market trends to create strategies and identify viable business growth opportunities.
- Implemented process improvements that reduced customer complaints by 60%, with a savings of $18,000-$20,000 annually.
- Developed a strong team of 20 Service Providers through training, mentoring, follow-up, accountability.

continued...

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Director, Business Operations 2011 – 2019
Lightfoot Logistics, Indianapolis, IN

Trusted advisor to Lightfoot's executive team. Focused on strategic planning and project management. Single below-the-line budget resource. Managed operations teams including sales, HR, and accounting. Promoted over five years from Manager to Director within the Operations team overseeing all business and client-facing capabilities.

- Established 3-year strategic road map with leadership to move the organization to achieve $25M EBITA.
- Created and executed change management plan for integration of company acquisitions of Serenity Products and Challenger Logistics, to ensure culture consistency. Leveraged Lean Six Sigma process disciplines for increased business synergy, streamlined processes and workflow, and accurate financial reporting.
- Evaluated, proposed, and executed integrated CRM platform with SAP, leading to increased engagement, refined reporting and estimated $1M in time savings across the company.
- Developed annual cost savings plans resulting in $250K-$300K EBITA creation.
- Implemented policy and procedure for auditing reports, increasing accuracy rates from 65% to 90%.
- Helped coach COO to become more approachable and relational to staff, communicate more effectively, and improve decision-making.
- Developed high potential mapping for managers to assist in decision making – adopted and adapted by HR and implemented company-wide.

Manager, Sales Operations 2003-2010
Serenity Products, Cincinnati, OH

Developed best practices across the Sales organization. Extensive travel across North America. Managed company presence, activity, and served as C-Level executive host for major trade shows and events. Elevated over seven years from Coordinator to Assistant Manager to Manager within the Sales organization.

- Generated the first national sales plan and transformed assignment and attainment of $5M sales goals globally.
- Led collaboration efforts with Management team toward alignment of incentives to create clarity with organizational structure and greater satisfaction with compensation.
- Refined inside sales call management processes - implemented process improvements that reduced customer complaints by 60%, with a savings of $18,000-$20,000 annually.
- Managed operational productivity and spend resulting in the below-the-line budget for favorable variance each year for a 5-year span.

continued...

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

Coordinator, Sales Operations
Universal Exports, Plainfield, IN

- Partnered with senior sales leadership, Order Management teams to identify opportunities for sales process improvement.
- Facilitated successful implementation of new programs through sales organization by ensuring well-defined, efficient sales process in place for launch.
- Analyzed and explained changes in key performance indicators to field operations partners, key stakeholders

CERTIFICATIONS

Certified Lean Six Sigma Green Belt

EDUCATION

Master of Business Administration, Kelly School of Business, Indiana University Bachelor of Science, Sales and Marketing, Purdue University

Phase C: Branding

Business Cards

SAMPLE

*Templates and printing services available online through companies such as **vistaprint.com >>***

Can also be designed with a digital business card like DOT or Bling.

Name
Target Job Title

Tagline or 3 core strengths

Email address
LinkedIn personalized URL
Address/Phone number

Core strength 1
Core strength 2
Core strength 3

(Use a bulleted list of core strengths if you used a tagline on the front of the card. See below for other ideas of what information to include on the back of your card)

FRONT OF THE CARD

- Specific formatting is up to you (font, centered, or left/right justified)
- Use a tagline or 3 key skills/strengths
- Email address: This should be separate from your personal/shared email, dedicated to your professional persona and career search
- LinkedIn URL: Create a personalized URL vs. default assigned LinkedIn URL
- Address: You may elect to only use city and state if you are concerned about privacy and security. Keep in mind that you do want employers to communicate with you!
- DO include your mobile phone number

BACK OF THE CARD

- A back is completely optional. Many people don't use the back of the card at all to keep cost low.
- Purpose in using the back: convey key highlights from your "personal brand"
- Ideas:
  - Core Strengths
  - Key Skills (List top 3-4 skills)
  - Professional Certifications
  - Target Industry/Industries
  - Key Motivators

Phase C: Branding

30-Second Introduction

Purpose

The 30-Second Introduction is your opportunity to sell/promote you and your skills!

An introduction can be used during a job interview, during an elevator ride, or when talking with a potential network resource.

Your 30-Second Introduction is YOU. It is what YOU do and where you want to go. Opportunities occur when an employer or networker asks, "Tell me about yourself." YOU must be ready to take charge of that discussion, and it must become second nature when those opportunities occur.

What Is In The 30-Second Introduction

- Who are you?
  - Give your name
- What job(s) do you seek?
  - Job titles/areas of the company
- What are your strengths?
  - Briefly outline 3 of your key strengths
- What benefits or value do you bring?
  - Give 1-2 brief examples
  - "Sell yourself" and tell how good you are (brag just a little!)
- Where do you want to work?
  - List ideal job(s), ideal companies
- Close with your name the jobs being sought
- Ask, "Who do you know that I might speak with?"

A 30-Second Introduction template can be found on our website

Phase D: The Search

Networking

Employers' Approach when Looking for a New Hire *by John Inderstrodt*

Job seekers are often frustrated with the relatively low level of response they are getting from their search, from "surfing" job postings and submitting job applications. However, the way you approach this often does not align with how the employer is approaching their own search.

Compare how job seekers search, vs. how employers search for candidates and where Networking is utilized.

What Is Networking?

Simply put, "networking" means "making connections with people." It's probably the most important thing you can do to achieve professional success. Your network includes business acquaintances and personal and community contacts.

Effective networkers use a road map while others just wing it. Those effective in their job search utilize others and don't "go solo."

Unlocking the Hidden Job Market

While applying for posted positions is certainly part of a successful job search, **relying on applications alone is a low-odds strategy.** Why? Because many opportunities are already taking shape long before you ever see a job posting.

The Challenge: Applications Put You in a Crowded Field

When you apply online, your résumé may have to make it through an Applicant Tracking System (ATS), internal HR screening, and potentially hundreds of other applicants before you are invited to an initial interview.

And that's only for the jobs you can see. There is also a **Hidden Job Market**—opportunities that may never be advertised publicly, are posted only briefly, or begin with conversations inside an organization before a formal position is announced. Estimates vary widely on how many jobs fall into this category. According to BH Careers International, 80 percent of all available jobs are not formally posted. The exact percentage isn't what matters. What matters is knowing that these opportunities exist—and adjusting your job-search strategy accordingly.

The Strategy: Network Before You Need the Job Posting

The best way to access the Hidden Job Market can be summed up in one word: **Networking.**

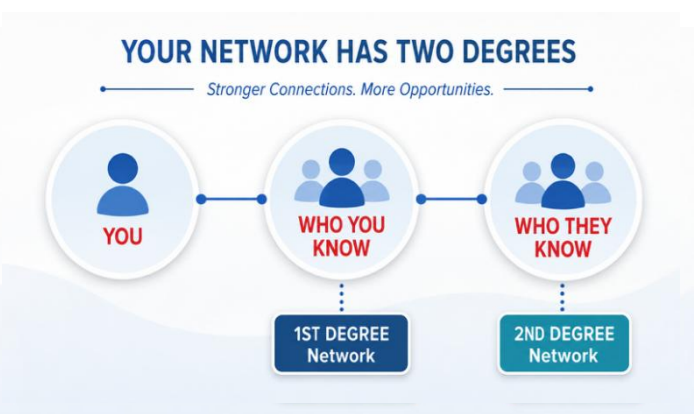
Networking means intentionally finding and talking with people who work inside organizations that interest you—**whether or not the company currently has a job posted.** When people within an organization know who you are, understand what you can contribute, and have had an opportunity to talk with you, you are no longer just another résumé in the system. You have begun building relationships that may lead to introductions, referrals, information about upcoming opportunities, and ultimately interviews.

The goal is to move from simply **applying for jobs** to **building connections that can lead to jobs.**

Who is in YOUR network?

The following networking contacts should be considered and contacted:

- Friends: Neighbors, relatives, prior employers and employees, customers, suppliers, social, business, and professional contacts, LinkedIn contacts, and others
- Strangers: Hiring managers, employer contacts, HR Consulting firms, recruiters/search firms and temporary services
- Get to know your 1st Degree Network AND your 2nd Degree Network



The VALUE of Networking

Networking will help attract employer's attention via your Private (1-on-1) and Public (online) presence, proving that you are a credible, clever, and viable candidate:

Networking is a place to give and not to get. Networking will enrich your life. Treat your job leads and referrals as golden nuggets. Treat them with loving care, as a referral is truly a significant competitive advantage.

How do you Network PURPOSEFULLY?

Develop meaningful relationships vs. one time only, one-sided requests for job search help. Not only might network referrals hire you (now or later); but their endorsement influences how others see your potential. When respected networkers know about potential openings, they recommend and refer talent.

Keeping in touch with key contacts means an early heads-up before an actual job is defined. Then you can design a personal marketing paper where you are the perfect candidate that the employer needs.

Networking – Who – Where/When – How:

WHO

- Building Your List - Write down the names of current and former colleagues, acquaintances from professional organizations, and the business associates of family and friends. Many companies count on employee referrals as a major source of new hires.
- Cultivate your personal network - neighbors, relatives, organizations, religious or community groups, book clubs, or fellow volunteers. Look to all generations for networking opportunities.
- Fill in the gaps by reconnecting with old acquaintances, getting involved in the committees of your favorite organization, or volunteering.
- Network with contacts who have strong connections to target companies. It's not just what you know but who, with hiring authority, appreciates your potential.
- Part of your Networking strategy is to target the right individuals for an *Informational Meeting*, to ask for information, help and advice – and also ask if they know someone you should meet!

WHERE/WHEN

- You should always be networking, no matter what your current job status. You never know when you will need to call on your contacts or when they may have a lead on an exciting new opportunity.
- Follow *The "3-Foot" Rule:* If you get within 3 feet of anyone, share your career transition experience with them. Talk to people outside of your immediate friends and family! Think of every place you go as an opportunity to meet people. That way, you can expand your network seamlessly.
- Stay in touch. Use polite, persistent "pings" periodically to cultivate interest and stay in touch. Networking is about relationships, not transactions. Out of touch means out of mind.
- Vary your contact mode by exchanging links, sharing leads and ideas, making referrals, offer help, and give praise.
- After you've met someone knowledgeable and interesting, send a quick email or a handwritten note saying how much you enjoyed meeting the person. If you want to learn more from him or her, propose lunch or coffee and say when you'll follow up.
- Keep a mix of face-to-face and electronic (LinkedIn, etc.) networking activity.
- **Intentionally spend time each week focused just on networking:** LinkedIn, phone, email, networking events

HOW

- Making Contact - Build rapport by contacting people when you don't need anything.
- Ask for advice, not a job. Draw out stories about your contacts' professional experiences.
- **Know your message – yourself, your personal brand:** key strengths and skills you have to offer, distilled to your *30-Second Introduction*
- Always have business cards with you and an updated résumé you can send upon request.
- Be patient and positive. Your major goal isn't for a job offer from everyone you network with. It's for others to know you, like you and trust you.

ADVANTAGES of Networking

- Goal is to meet more people so that they will know more about you. Your circle of acquaintances will expand!
- Meet people who want to help. One-to-one contact actually finds people who will not provide your ideal job, but everyone can suggest additional people for you to meet or network.
- Effective networking is obtaining referrals from Friends that leads you to connect with Strangers. Leads and contacts with Strangers move you that much closer to the hiring manager.
- There's high impact in a face-to-face meeting, in comparison to sending a printed or emailed résumé.
- Networking is a vital process that you can initiate. Rather than passively waiting for a recruiter's call, you can be just as active and creative as your time and energy permits.

DISADVANTAGES of Networking

- It's time-consuming. Making and keeping networking appointment is slow and arduous work.
- There's no confidentiality as you can't network without making your intentions public.
- You reach relatively few people. You're doing very well if you make and keep 2 or 3 networking appointments per day.
- Requesting favors from strangers isn't easy… Asking help from friends is hard enough; pursuing strangers and other people's friends is even tougher.

CHARACTERISTICS of some successful Networking CONTACTS

- They are willing to talk – grant an informational meeting
- They are personal acquaintance (knew before the job search) or referral/"warm" connection
- They have similar qualifications
- They are former colleague, still working in target industry – helped brainstorm other target companies and opportunities
- They are subject matter expert in target industry, knowledgeable about the industry, qualifications, options, able to brainstorm ideas and possibilities
- They are a stranger that has no preconceptions (or misconceptions!) about you

Networking EVENTS

Professional organization meetings, industry conferences, social events, career or job fairs, purpose-driven networking events (from the general, like "Sparks Indy," to the specific, like "meetup" events focused on interest or technology).

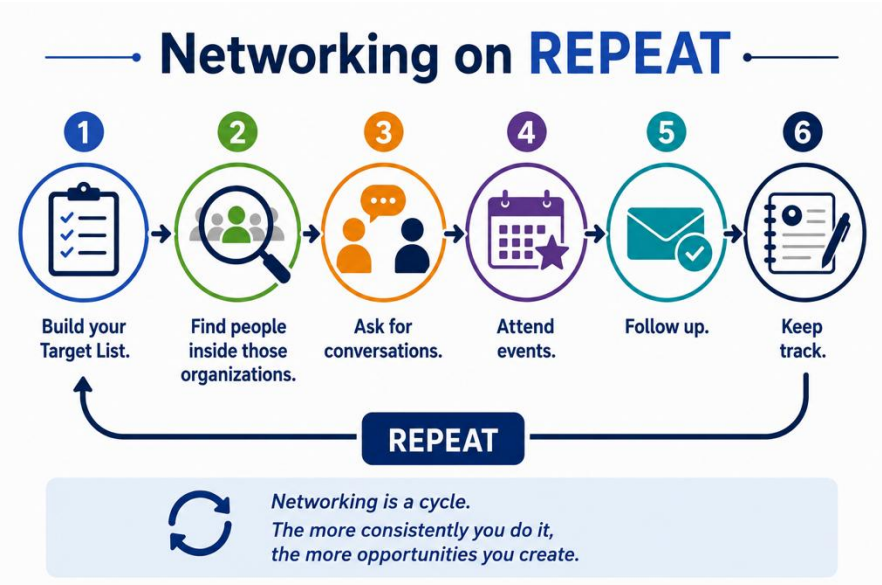
Yes, initially the setting can sometimes feel like a middle school dance…But take the plunge and introduce yourself to someone – you'll use your *30-Second Introduction.* Before long, you will begin to feel more confident.

SHIFT the Focus of Your Job Search to Networking

A successful job search isn't simply about submitting more applications. It's about increasing the odds that the right people know who you are **before an opportunity becomes available—or before your résumé lands in their system.**

To fill a job opening, the hiring manager routinely questions staff, professional contacts, personal contacts, asking "who do you know?" Why? Because a recommended candidate is cheaper, potentially quicker, and a better risk than a total stranger.

You have a better shot at a job if you know someone who knows the employer.



Don't just search for openings. Build relationships that can **lead you to opportunities—**including **the ones** you may **never see posted.**

Phase D: The Search

Leveraging College & Alumni Networks

You have a valuable resource in both your college or university long after you have graduated.

College Career Services

Most colleges have a Career Services or Career Placement office. While they primarily help undergrad students prepare for a job search many also help alumni – or would consider doing so if asked! Do a quick online search to find out if your college or university has career services for alumni."

College Alumni Directory & Linkedin Alumni Page

Your former classmates and college alumni are also key part of network to consider. Many colleges and universities also have an Alumni Directory. This is a valuable resource for reaching out to your college network - to catch up, let them know about your job search, and networking with them.

It's also extremely likely that your college has a LinkedIn page. Want to look for someone with a common interest at a Target organization where you'd like to work? A fellow alumnus or alumna is a great place to start!

Type in the name of your institution in the Search box, and then select that page. You will see a navigation bar down the left side – e.g., Home, About, Insights, Life, Jobs, and – Alumni. Select the Alumni item. You should then see a display of the total number of alumni (for example, Purdue currently has over 250,000) - LinkedIn members who have identified as alumni! You will see statistics by Where they live (city) and Where they work (Organization/Company). Major locations are listed – you can add a specific city or company.

"Other" Alumni – Former Colleagues

You also have a network – perhaps considerable, depending on your work history – of former colleagues, teammates, managers, and employees who have worked with or for you. These are alumni as well – you have a shared history, and you know many of them casually, some of them well, a few very well.

Use LinkedIn Advanced Search to find them. Click on the Search box, look for the People icon, and select it. You will see selection items for Connections, Locations, and Current Companies. Click on the All Filters action item.

> You can select 1st and 2nd degree connections, Locations, Current Companies. Scroll down and you will also see Past Companies (where these people have worked in the past). You can select a company from a list (which you might have searched before) and also type in the name of your Company of interest.

Getting Started

Once you have a specific person in mind – follow the disciplines outlined in Networking and Informational Meetings to initiate or renew contact. It's more comfortable when you already have an established common bond!

Phase D: The Search
Informational Meetings

OVERVIEW
Informational Meetings (sometimes called "Informational Interviewing") involve talking to people who currently work in your target field/company/job role to gain a better understanding of an occupation and to build a network of contacts in that field/company/role.

PURPOSE
The information meeting serves as a valuable job-hunting tool to find out what companies are hiring, what jobs are available, what skills those jobs require, whom to ask for job interviews, plus who you are able to get with face-to-face. Use of this approach might be the best way to find a position you really like, because the dynamics are entirely different from those of a job interview.

Reasons to conduct informational meetings:
- To clarify your career goals
- To expand your professional network; build visibility
- To build confidence for a job interview; invaluable interview experience; reduces anxiety
- To access the most current career information
- To identify your professional strengths and weaknesses

Guidelines for informational meetings:
- Identify your target occupation(s), companies, functions
- Identify people to interview
- Never ask for a job
- Prepare ahead of time

Scheduling the informational meeting:
- By referral
- By phone or in person
- By e-mail

BENEFITS of using Informational Meetings
You are making a first-hand impression on someone who can directly or indirectly benefit you over the long haul.

- You are establishing a personal relationship with an agent of potential employers.
- You are gaining insights that will greatly benefit you at a job interview.
- You are able to examine in advance whether you have located an employer whose corporate culture suits your nature and needs (working environment, career path potential).

General Procedure

1. **Preparation:** Determine your immediate and long-term job goals; general career objectives to show you're focused. Also, this helps the potential interviewer think as to where or how you might benefit the company. Use research to find companies that may be a good "fit" for your skills and abilities.
2. **List contacts:** Talk to friends, relatives, professional and personal acquaintances. Acquire names, setting your sights high; work to get to a potential decision-maker.
3. **Contact someone who works for the company:** the higher-level party the better and arrange a brief "fact-finding" meeting.

Ask for the meeting, ask for ADVICE, and ask for ASSISTANCE! Give name of mutual acquaintance, if possible. If no reference, validate in advance.

AI can help craft outreach messages and identify potential contacts to approach for one-to-one discussions.

- Networking outreach prompt - Draft a brief professional message requesting an informational conversation with someone working in renewable energy.
- Follow-up prompt - Write a short thank-you message following an informational interview.

Sample Introduction

Via phone or in person:

> *"I'm looking to make a career move, and <referral contact name> said you would be a good person to speak with for advice and guidance. I would appreciate the opportunity to have a short meeting with you soon. I would like to get your perspective about opportunities in the field."*

Remember, you are not asking for help or for a job, but for information and guidance. If the person can't or won't meet with you, ask for the name of someone else in the company who might be agreeable and/or more appropriate to meet with.

Electronically:

- Send an initial e-mail note or LinkedIn message with a contact that you have from someone at a target company, who pointed you to the target person
- Reference the common source of contact (LinkedIn group, P2E, individual, positive conversation with the mutual contact)
- Ask for a 20–30-minute informational meeting, to brainstorm/as a sounding board – about their company, their career/job/role, etc.
- Make it clear you are not asking them for a job or interview. A practice that has worked well is to include something like this:

  "I promise I won't ask for a job; won't bring my résumé; will respect your time, via timer on my mobile phone; will come to you, at your office" (or ask for a favorite coffee place)

PREPARE Yourself

1. Research the company: learn about products, service, competitors, reputation/status, and future growth potential.
2. Compose a list of questions designed to find out about career opportunities and the company in general:
   - pluses and minuses of career/job
   - qualifications need to succeed
   - current and future employment outlook
   - what problems exist, need to be solved
   - what is the corporate culture
   - who would be the best person to contact regarding specific job potential
3. Conduct the interview: at the conclusion, ask for the names of 2-3 people that you might contact to provide additional guidance.
4. Follow-up with a thank-you letter and include résumé if not shared at interview. Make sure you state you are not presupposing anything, but state you are providing a résumé so that the new contact may choose to share it with someone else who may have a need.

In The Meeting

Suggested flow of an Informational Meeting:

- Thank them for their time
- Use your *30-Second Introduction* to share something about yourself
- Set your phone timer or place your watch on the table or desk
- What can you tell me about your industry/company/role/this function within the company?
- Ask about their own career path
- Who do you know that I should talk to?
- Have your *Marketing Profile Sheet* with you, just in case – but do not "lead" with it

Some questions to ask:

- General questions about the interviewee's career field; interviewee's job; interviewee's career path
- Questions about opportunities within this company and your field
- Seek general advice and referrals from the interviewee

Tips

- Do your homework!
- Dress appropriately
- Be prepared to take notes
- Be a good and attentive listener
- Always try to obtain referrals *("Who do you know that I should talk to?")*
- Always send a thank you note
- Record, analyze, and evaluate the information received
- Send the person an update as to your progress

Phase D: The Search

AI for the Job Search

Think Like a Strategist, Not Just an Applicant

AI can save significant time on routine job-search tasks like researching employers, analyzing job descriptions, and refining résumés. Use that time to focus on what matters most: **building relationships, understanding industries, developing skills, and telling your professional story.**

AI can accelerate your work, but **your curiosity, relationships, and judgment remain your greatest assets.**

AI can also support ongoing professional development. Learning platforms now use AI to recommend courses based on your career goals and the skills employers are seeking.

AI can support ongoing development by:

- recommending learning paths
- helping you create content
- refining your professional messaging.

Learning platform:
Coursera - a major online learning platform that partners with over 350 top universities and companies—such as Yale, Google, and IBM—to offer thousands of courses, professional certificates, and fully accredited bachelor's and master's degrees

Building Visibility:

As you add new skills, make sure that you are including them in your branding (résumé, LinkedIn, etc.), including course completions and certifications.

You can also use AI tools to help craft professional posts that demonstrate thought leadership. As an example, a technology manager began posting short reflections about leadership and project management. With AI assistance, he refined the structure and clarity of his posts. Over time, his visibility increased—and so did inbound opportunities. His professional profile attracted attention from recruiters who valued his insights.

AI can also help create visual content such as presentation graphics, personal branding materials, or portfolio elements. Canva and PowerPoint both have AI tools embedded in their platforms that help with branding.

Bringing It All Together

AI is changing how we search for jobs, making many time-consuming tasks faster and easier. But the fundamentals of a successful job search haven't changed: **clarity, relationships, communication, and persistence.**

Think of AI as an **accelerator**—a tool to help you research, organize, prepare, and communicate more effectively. But your story, accomplishments, goals, and career decisions remain uniquely yours.

Use AI to move faster—but make sure you're still the one deciding where to go.

Phase D: The Search

Social Media - LinkedIn

A Job Seeker's New Best Friend

From Survive and Thrive in Your Job Search:
The Team Networking Group Process To Your Next Job
By Dale Hinshaw, SPHR, Tom Faulconer, JD, CFP®, and Mike Johnson, CPC
Julie Bondy Roberts (LinkedIn at linkedin.com/in/juliebondyroberts/?isSelfProfile=false)

As of 2026, Linked In continues to be the best online platform for professional networking, direct outbound sourcing via LinkedIn Recruiter/Sales Navigator, and white-collar or executive roles. Around 95% of recruiters use LinkedIn during their hiring process either to source or vet candidates.

LinkedIn Algorithms

There is no group of people sitting at the LinkedIn headquarters physically connecting job seekers. It is all done by computer algorithms (formulae) that try to make the computers find the right results and display them to the appropriate person. Those algorithms are the key to LinkedIn (and any technology-based company) and are not public knowledge. On top of that, they change them frequently in a constant effort to improve the results. So, in reality, something in your profile that makes you stand out to recruiters today may not work tomorrow. And, worst of all, you may not know why.

You may have heard of LinkedIn "All Star" status. LinkedIn's native "All-Star" profile strength meter and its explicit levels have been largely retired from public view. Nonetheless completion remains critical—with optimized profiles appearing significantly more often in recruiter searches.

The foundational criteria required to maximize search visibility remain consistent. We hear it from job seekers all the time – "I have a LinkedIn profile, but there's not much on it." Fact is, having a complete and optimized LinkedIn profile WILL increase your visibility to recruiters and boost your chances of getting hired – faster, and for the right kinds of opportunities.

LinkedIn's algorithms "prefer" complete profiles. Those with complete profiles land higher in a recruiter's search result. Those with incomplete profiles land at the bottom.

Core Requirements for Profile Completeness

1. Profile photo and background banner
2. Industry and location fields
3. Up-to-date current position with a descriptive summary
4. At least two past positions
5. Education history
6. Minimum of 5 skills (though 10+ with active endorsements is heavily favored)
7. About section (minimum threshold of text/keywords)

1. Profile photo

Although you may value your anonymity, when you are relying on the LinkedIn community to help you in your job search, that is no time to hide. LinkedIn users who encounter a profile without a photo often assume the profile is at least incomplete (and, thus, not accurate), or at most, dormant (meaning someone started setting it up then just didn't do anything more with it). Indeed, not having a profile picture sends the message that you have something to hide…or worse! By simply adding a profile picture, according to LinkedIn itself, you are 7 times more likely to be found when searches are conducted.

There is an art to choosing a profile picture for LinkedIn. Above all, it should be a professional photo. This doesn't necessarily mean that it has to be done by a professional photographer (although that is preferable). It simply means it should be a good, clear headshot of you in appropriate attire for the job you are doing or looking for.

2. An industry and location

LinkedIn allows you to select the industry you are in when creating (or updating) your profile. It also requests that you choose a location, usually an "area" near a large city such as "Chicago, Illinois area," or "San Francisco, California, area."

If, as a job seeker, you are interested in changing industries, consider changing your industry to the one you are looking for. That way, when recruiters and others filter by industry, your name will come up in those you want rather than the one(s) you are currently in or have been in previously. The same holds true for location.

3. Current position

When a person leaves a position, voluntarily or otherwise, the first inclination is to change current position to something like "unemployed," or "seeking new opportunities," or, worst of all, to leave it blank.

There is a true split among career coaches as to whether you should say you are unemployed or looking on LinkedIn. The argument is that the stigma of being out of work is still present. However, there are just as many people who have listed their current status as unemployed who found jobs quickly. According to Julie Bondy, Putting "unemployed" or "seeking employment" in your headline causes 2 unintended problems: 1) You put the focus on YOU rather than on what an employer needs. The most desirable candidates make their value to a future employer clear. 2) "Unemployed" and "Seeking Employment" are a waste of prime real estate; they are not words recruiters would ever use to find you. Instead, use words that convey your brand and your value.

The current position field actually presents an opportunity for job seekers. Many job seekers list their current position in terms of what they are looking for, or as a consultant to the industry in which they want to work. While this may feel a bit strange to call yourself a consultant when you aren't doing any consulting work, this is a proper strategy to employ. A doctor who is just starting his practice and doesn't have any patients yet is still a doctor! A builder who is between projects is still a builder! This way, when someone searches in the industry you want, you will appear in the results.

4. Two Past positions

While you may be interested in distancing yourself from your past or current position, especially if you are interested in changing careers, LinkedIn will only consider your profile complete if you include at least two past positions. These can be with the same company or different companies.

This is also an opportunity for you to explain what you did in each position, including skills and experience that are transferable to a new position or career.

5. Education

Be sure to include schools you attended. There is no requirement that you graduated, so include any and all schools that you attended – or are currently attending.

6. Skills

When creating a LinkedIn profile, you are able to select skills to be listed in your profile. You should be careful to select only those skills which you have as well as not trying to include too many. Someone with dozens and dozens of skills often looks suspicious to others.

A good tip for job seekers when it comes to skills is to choose your top 10 (minimum 5), preferably in order of importance, then send a message to people in your network letting them know that you have made revisions to your profile and would appreciate it if they would endorse you for those skills. Immediately, you can build credibility for your skills by increasing the number of endorsements!

7. About Section

The "meat" of your LinkedIn profile is the About section. It is a large canvas (2000 characters) on which you can paint your story, from what you have done, to what you can do, to what you want to do. Your About section should be more conversational than your résumé. It should be easy to read and tell the story of your "brand."

It is also prime real estate for keywords. This, like the headline, is one of the most searchable fields on LinkedIn. So make sure that you use those keywords that are appropriate to your industry and desired position prominently and often!

Being Found in Searches

LinkedIn's beauty is the fact that it is searchable on many different levels. Optimizing your profile is the most important thing you can do to be found by recruiters and others and, ultimately, to land the job you want. Certain elements of your profile are more important than others when it comes to search results.

Your Headline

The headline shows up first, right next to your picture, when anyone looks at your profile. LinkedIn allows up to 120 characters in your headline. These 120 characters are, perhaps, the most important in your entire profile in terms of search. Using keywords that are appropriate for your career is crucial. In addition, being creative enough to make someone want to read your profile after you are found is just as important.

Don't just list your job title and company name as your headline. "Industrial Engineer," or "Project Manager," while descriptive and accurate, do nothing to set you apart from others who do the same thing. Plus, using only 10 or 15 characters in your headline leaves lots of characters "on the table" that may be useful in both describing your value and making sure others find you and want to read on.

The lesson here is to use your headline to your advantage. Save your job title for the "position title" field.

Endorsements and Recommendations

LinkedIn allows both recommendations and endorsements. Endorsements are much more common since those that endorse you simply have to click a button next to a skill that you have listed that you have. For example, if you have listed sales as a skill, a click of the "+" icon next to the skill by one of your connections increases the count for that skill by one. Typically, people looking at your skills assume that the ones with the highest numbers are the ones that you are most proficient at. If a recruiter is searching for a human resources generalist, the fact that you have lots of endorsements for human resources would likely be a good sign to that recruiter.

LinkedIn indicates that the more endorsements you have, the higher up you appear in a search result. At the very least, ask your colleagues who know you to endorse you, and return the favor.

Review your skills & endorsements tapestry every 6-12 months to make sure they represent you accurately. For example if you used to be in charge of omni-channel marketing and your interests and experience is shifting to program development, update your endorsements section to reflect that.

Recommendations are more rare, and, arguably, more valuable. A recommendation comes from someone who actually writes about you and the good work you do. A recommendation is, therefore, much more of a commitment than an endorsement. When someone writes a recommendation for you, you will receive a notification before it is posted. While you cannot change someone's recommendation of you, you can elect not to show it on your profile or, opt to ask the person for changes before it is posted.

Some savvy LinkedIn users request recommendations from others and even provide a template to follow to make the recommendation that much easier. Be careful, though. If you have 10 recommendations and they all follow the same format, it will be apparent what is going on!

Your Contact Information

While LinkedIn offers the opportunity to send messages, like private LinkedIn emails, among connections, job seekers should strongly consider also including contact information in their profile. This is a good idea for a couple reasons. First, to contact you using LinkedIn messaging, the other person must be a contact of yours or have paid for the premium membership.

If you include your email and/or a phone number, anyone can contact you who sees your profile. Second, including ways to contact you allows you to include a call to action in your summary. Encourage others to reach out to you! Include a statement such as, if you are interested in working with the best process improvement specialist in Texas, give me a call! A call to action increases your chances that someone will reach out to you, potentially with an opportunity.

Letting Recruiters Know You Are Available

The most impactful "hidden" setting for a discreet job search on LinkedIn is the "Recruiters only" option inside the #OpenToWork feature. It lets you signal to hiring managers that you want a new job without showing the public green photo frame that your current boss might see.

Recruiters have a special membership to LinkedIn which is quite pricey. Through this special membership they are able to see things that others are not. So they will get the "signal" but no one else will. Don't Worry: Even if your company has the recruiter subscription, LinkedIn will hide your profile from your company and any affiliated companies.

To turn it on, go to your profile, click Open to, select Finding a new job, and choose Recruiters only under the visibility settings before you save.

Other Secret Job Hunting Settings

- Share profile changes: Go to *Settings & Privacy* > *Visibility* > *Share profile updates* and turn it off so your network is not alerted every time you edit your résumé or skills.
    - Use this when you are making significant updates to your profile. Once you're satisfied with how your updated profile looks, you can turn the setting back on.
- Anonymous browsing: Under *Settings & Privacy* > *Visibility* > *Profile viewing options*, choose Private mode.
    - This lets you view other people's profiles without leaving a trace.

To view a video highlighting how to do these, see [*How to Stay Hidden on LinkedIn During Your Job Search*].

- Hide connections: Go to *Settings & Privacy* > *Visibility* > *Who can see your connections* and change it to Only you so competitors or coworkers cannot track your network growth.

To view a video on keeping your job search activity private (such as from a current employer), see [*LinkedIn Privacy Settings for Job Searching*].

500+ Connections

There are two important levels in Linkedin when it comes to connections. The first is 50. The second number is even more important: 500. Good things happen in LinkedIn to those with at least 500 connections. While that may seem like a daunting goal, it is very doable and has some significant benefits.

First is credibility in the LinkedIn community. Those that are familiar with LinkedIn automatically recognize that you are connected and active when you have the magic 500+ moniker on your profile.

Second, the more connections you have, the more you appear in search results. This is because search results favor people you are connected to. Put another way, if you are directly connected to someone who searches for your job title, you will come up at or near the top of the list. Similarly, if you are a second degree connection of someone (that is, you are connected to someone who is connected to the person), you will still appear in the search, although not necessarily at the very top. Even third degree connections will get some preference when it comes to search results as compared to those people who you have no connection to at all.

Let's say that you are interested in a job with ABC Corporation, a mid-sized business in your town. LinkedIn allows you to search for people that work at that company.

If you have **50 connections**, each of whom has 50 connections, you have 50 first degree connections, and **2,500** second degree connections

If you have **200 connections** and so do your 200 connections, in addition to having 200 1st degree connections, you now have **40,000** 2nd degree connections. The chances that your search will be successful just increased by 16 times!

If you are at the magic **500** number and so are your connections, your 500 1st degrees will connect you to **250,000** other people! Surely you will be successful in finding what you are looking for now. That's an increase of 100 times over having 50 connections!

Follow Your Target Companies

It is also a good idea to "follow" companies you are interested in. This can be done by simply visiting the company's LinkedIn page and clicking the "follow" button. By following a company you will begin receiving any updates the company posts. Many companies also post their current job openings on LinkedIn, and you will receive the notification first. Plus, by following the company, you will get valuable information about the activities at the firm that you can use in your preparation for an interview.

Posting Updates on Your Job Search

Some job seekers use LinkedIn to post updates on the job search process. This can be a mixed bag, of course, and something you wouldn't want to do if you are still employed somewhere else. Some people believe posting job search updates not only alerts others that you are out of work (there's that stigma again) but also can appear to sound somewhat desperate. Others, however, find that their network can be very helpful in finding a new position.

The key to posting job search updates on LinkedIn is to appear upbeat while at the same time mentioning targeting goals. For example, rather than posting, "I am looking for a job after 10 years at IBM. If you know of any leads, please let me know," try something like, "I recently learned that BetterCross, Inc is looking for an executive assistant! I would love to work there. Does anyone have any advice?" This post invites others to help and mentions a company. More than likely, this will result in others in your network letting you know of connections they have at BetterCross, Inc.

Although we are talking about LinkedIn, this strategy can also be very successful on Facebook and other social networking sites.

Being Active on LinkedIn

Just having a great profile and lots of connections is not enough, unfortunately. To increase your chances of being found – and of your dream job finding you – you also need to be active on LinkedIn on a regular basis. And, like many other strategies, there are multiple ways to do it. They include:

- Regular posting of status updates including links and articles,
- Publishing posts relevant to your industry,
- Joining and being active in groups, and
- Generously "tagging" others.

The thought of regularly posting new content on LinkedIn is scary for most people. They can't think of anything to say or are afraid to create controversy and maybe make other people mad. But regularly posting an update is a key to increasing your visibility and, hopefully, landing that new role. Use these strategies to get you started:

Create Google Alerts: An easy way to approach this strategy is by using something called "Google Alerts." Simply search Google for Google Alerts and you will find instructions on creating a Google Alert. By choosing a topic (or two or three) that is pertinent to your industry or job search, for example, "training and development," and choosing how often you would like to receive the alerts (daily, weekly, etc.), Google will scour the internet for any new information on the topic you have chosen, in this case, learning and development. You will get an email at the chosen interval with links to articles from all kinds of sources on the topic. Then you can simply post the link as a LinkedIn update (preferably with a little introduction from you such as, "Great article on the future of L&D." Job done! People will read the article, may even react to it with a "like" or a comment, and most likely, new connections will want to connect with you. And if someone disagrees, they aren't disagreeing with you, but with the author of the article.

Tag Others: One of the most powerful "tricks" to use when posting status updates on LinkedIn is to tag others, especially those in your network. Whenever you post a new update or reply to someone else's update, whenever possible, mention someone in your network by name. As you begin typing the name, LinkedIn will show you the names of your connections that match. Select the one you want and that name will be included in your response. But even better, your post or reply will then show up in the feeds of all of that person's connections! Consider that for a second. Even if you only had 10 connections, if you mention a 1st degree connection with 1000 connections, you post goes, not just to your 10, but to her 1000! And if one of them reposts it or tags someone else in a reply, it keeps going!

Write & Publish Articles: LinkedIn also allows you to write and publish articles that are then made available not only to your connections but to anyone on LinkedIn to read. These do not need to be in-depth or lengthy; in fact, most are not much more than one page. And if readers like what they see, based on activity, it may be promoted to others outside of your network. This can result in increasing your credibility in the industry as well as others wanting to connect with you.

From the LinkedIn home page, you will see the option to publish a post. Choose a topic that is relevant and timely in the industry you want to work and write away. One tip: posts with a picture are read much more than those without!

Proactive Ways of Making LinkedIn Work For You

Thus far, we have looked at LinkedIn in a sort of reactive way. You are trying to be found and contacted by others. But you also need to be proactive.

LinkedIn has a very robust search engine allowing you to search for just about anyone by name, any company, and any job. For a job seeker, one of the most powerful searches is simply to search for "people who work at XYZ." This search will return everyone on LinkedIn who works for or has worked for XYZ. Of course, your 1st degree connections will be first, your 2nd degree connections next, etc. And, as illustrated earlier, the larger your network, the more likely you will find someone at XYZ in your network, and you can then reach out to that person for an information meeting. And, assuming you received too many results to be helpful, LinkedIn offers filters on the search engine to limit the results to just people in a given area, with a certain title, or those that are currently working at XYZ.

LinkedIn also offers another free benefit to job seekers, the LinkedIn Job Search App. The LinkedIn Job Search App is available for Android and Apple smart phones and is a great tool for getting the latest job posting on LinkedIn. You can set up alerts, save jobs you find that you want to apply to, see similar jobs from other companies, and even apply to some positions right from your phone using your LinkedIn profile.

LinkedIn is the most fertile ground for job seekers. It allows them to find open jobs, contact recruiters, make new connections at target companies, and showcase their abilities. Simply, if you aren't using LinkedIn to its full potential, you are probably missing out on some fantastic job opportunities.

Phase D: The Search
LinkedIn Profile Checklist

Fully COMPLETE Your Profile

- ✓ Updated and appropriate Profile Picture.
- ✓ Include both an industry you are in and a location.
- ✓ Have your Headline include different job titles or areas you are seeking.
- ✓ Use your About section to highlight your key qualifications, strengths, and key skills.
- ✓ Include your contact information in your About section.
- ✓ Provide your education. Remember, you do not have to have graduate to include a school you have attended.
- ✓ Current position listed. For those out of work now, consider listing yourself as a consultant in your industry.
- ✓ Include at least 2 of your past positions. Unlike your résumé where you may only include the last 10 or so years, include all of your past positions on LinkedIn. The more information you include on your profile, the more likely you are to show up in searches!
- ✓ Add your skills (minimum 5-10).
- ✓ Ask people in your network for an endorsement and even better to write a LinkedIn recommendation for your profile.
- ✓ Work on getting to 500 connections and more!

Just as important, BE ACTIVE weekly on LINKEDIN!

- ✓ Set a time aside each week to find and post content on LinkedIn. Pay attention to the type of content you post and the results you get. If one type of post garnered more views than another, try to do more of the type that got more results.
- ✓ With each post, try to find a reason to "tag" someone in your network so that your post is seen beyond just your own. (This can be an excellent way to grow your network as well.)
- ✓ Actively look at posts from other people and try to find a reason to offer a comment. Remember, comments are also viewed by the poster's network

Phase E: Apply & Interview

Job Application Strategy

Maximizing Your Effectiveness - *From Mike Johnson, Coach for Tomorrow*

Many in career transition focus almost all of their efforts and attention here. After all, you have to apply for the job if you want to be considered for it! However, keep in mind that for the most effective search, the majority of your time and focus will be in targeting, networking, and informational meetings.

Applying for a job has evolved to an almost entirely online, "virtual" experience. Even when you have a contact with a decision-making hiring manager, you are almost always directed to formally apply for the job using the employer's online application process. Like so much else in the career search arena, this continues to shift and evolve. The employer is increasingly bombarded with job candidates, often getting hundreds of applications for a single posted position. To help their Human Resources staff keep up, they have added tools and process, as a "self-defense mechanism." These include applicant tracking software that uses text mining to screen résumés for critical key words, and job application online processes that are growing longer and more complex.

Be aware of this trend and think of the job application itself as the investment of your time that it is! Before applying for a position – we strongly recommend that you do your homework:

- Research the company and culture, via their website, informational database (via public library, etc.), *glassdoor.com/index.htm.* If the company doesn't resonate with you "on paper," do you really want to work there?
- Consider this posting in the context of your overall search strategy:
  - Is the company in one of your target industries?
  - What is the level of alignment and interest, compared to your target roles?
  - If this is a potential bridge job, does it have enough depth and pay to meet your needs?
  - Do you have a networking contact at the company? Have you had an informational meeting with him/her? If not, reach out now.

Considerations In Applying For The Job

- Online job applications routinely will take 30-45 minutes to complete (apart from customizing your résumé). They can take up to over 2 hours.
- Some applications have questions with a textual response, within a character count (e.g., 3000 characters).
  - Be prepared to think and type!
  - Also be prepared to condense responses (e.g., *STAR Stories* in brief summary).
- Some applications use "tests" or even personality assessments as part of the process, some of which can seem obscure. One job seeker recently encountered a series of questions presented over 9 pages, ranging from a word problem analyzing statistical data, to math questions, to using Excel pivot tables and files from Dropbox, to salary requirements. The "exam" was a timed exercise.
- Some application dialogs will require your résumé and additional documentation in Microsoft Word, for others PDF is fine - it depends on the company and their process.
  - If you don't have "publisher" software, you should be able to download a "PDF generator" utility (e.g., Nitro PDF Creator), or "Save As" PDF format in Microsoft Word.
- Some applications require cover letter and résumé be submitted in a single document - for those, you can combine both into a single doc and save it using your word processor.

Some Tips For Online Job Applications

- Preview the job application prior to beginning the application online dialog. Assess how well you meet the requirements: all of the mandatory requirements, say 80% of the recommended requirements, etc. Ask an AI assistant/tool "What are the top five success factors in this job description?"
- Tailor your résumé – use one of the "word cloud" tools or *jobscan.co* to compare your key words to the posted job description qualifications and requirements for the target position. Adjust your résumé´´ accordingly, to include how the employer is phrasing key skills and requirements. You can also ask an AI assistant/tool "Résumé tailoring. "How should I modify my résumé to align with this job description?"
- Have the job posting printed beside you – as a reminder to use their key words, match your fit to their requirements.
- For textual responses, consider composing your response in your own word processing document for future reference. Sometimes you may experience a network connection issue, and you may lose your entire online application. Using a separate document helps you compose and edit, then copy and paste your response into the space in the online application.
- Craft your cover letter. Perhaps 50% of HR personnel won't look at it – but take the risk that the other 50%, will review it. It can help you stand out!
- So many of the online applications require you to create an account. You can use a tool to help you manage your accounts and passwords you use in your search. Ideas:
  - *lastpass.com*
  - *evernote.com/?var=1*
  - *snapfiles.com* - Go to the Freeware menu option then look for Password Management

Finally, to reinforce the opening point, limit your online time in actually submitting online applications for jobs.

- Maintain a time log weekly for your career search
- Consider spending one day per week in online applications – perhaps two half-days.
- Remember the power and influence of networking – spend more time in an average week in networking
- than you are in online job applications – check yourself against time spent in each area

Phase E: Apply & Interview

Cover Letters - Show You Are A Good Fit

Do Cover Letters REALLY MATTER?

80% of HR Managers say cover letters are a necessity. However, doing a cover letter poorly is worse than not having a cover letter at all. 76% of recruiters said they would not consider applicants with errors in their cover letter.

Contrary to common belief, your cover letter is less about you and more about how you match up with the job being advertised.

STEPS to an EFFECTIVE Cover Letter

Step 1: Customize your cover letter by reviewing the job description of the job. This is either from the ad itself and/or the listing on the company website. Then, note parallels between your own skills and those required for the position. These notes will then make up the body of the cover letter.

Step 2: Outline your letter. Pick out the strongest parallels using the job description as your guide. Identify the primary responsibilities from the job description and feature them. Your letter should never be more than one page.

Step 3: Write your letter. Cover letter preparation AI prompt - What are the top five or six success factors in this job description? After identifying those success factors, you can ask the AI to help structure a cover letter highlighting how your experience aligns with those priorities and/or edit what you draft. Here are layout guidelines:

- The header should include the date, recipient's name, address, and a brief salutation
- The body should include your interest in the position, the title of the position, any identifying code, and where you saw the position advertised.
- Begin a new paragraph and spell out in clear brief sentences how your experience parallels that of the job position. Sell yourself! Emphasize your qualifications for the job by highlighting your key applicable skills. Remember don't reiterate your résumé.
  - Use a 2-column format (often referred to as a "T" shape)
  - Title the left column, Your Requirements & highlight a key skill or requirement in the job posting
  - Title the right column, My Qualifications. Briefly highlight how your qualifications meet or exceed the requirement. Using the result from one of your accomplishments/STAR stories, illustrate why you are qualified.
  - Keep it brief – use short phrases and sentences and keep it to one page.
- In the closing paragraph, flatter your reader, by telling them why you want to work for their company or explain why you and this company are a good fit.
- Include your phone number with area code in your closing and thank the recruiter for his time.
- Lastly, after your signature block, type in "Enclosure," referencing your résumé.

Step 4:

Always have a friend or family member read your résumé for content, typos, and grammatical errors.

Quick Tips

- Don't send form letters. The extra effort pays off.
- Look for a specific person to whom you can send the résumé and cover letter. Avoid using "Dear Sir/To Whom it May Concern" wherever possible. If unsure of the person's gender (such as having a name like Chris or Terry), check out their LinkedIn profile or the company website.
- When touting your achievements, be confident, but do not exaggerate.
- Read and edit for errors.
- Do your research and take your time.
- KEEP YOUR COVER LETTER FOCUSED ON WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR THE PROSPECTIVE COMPANY.

COVER LETTER SAMPLE

JOHN DOE

9999 Blue Fox Drive
Grass Creek, IN 99999

317-999-9999

johndoe@home.com
linkedin.com/in/johndoe

April 14, 2010

Mr. David Koesters - Human Resources Manager
ABC Company
123 Main Street
Any Town, STATE 12345

Subject: *<Position Title>* Job Order # 1234567

Dear Mr. Koesters:

This letter is to express my sincere interest in the *<Position Title>* position with *<Company>* posted on the "Indiana Career Connect.com" website.

Please accept this letter and résumé as application for the *<Position Title>* position currently available with your company. Below I have highlighted some of my qualifications as they relate to your stated requirements.

Your Requirements	**My Qualifications or I Offer**
• BS (in Mechanical Engineering preferred)	• Bachelor of Science - Mechanical Engineering
• OEM sales experience, 5 years minimum	• Over 20 years of OEM Position Titling experience in the Automotive & Trucking industries
	• Tier 1 & Tier 2 supplier of sub-assemblies, engine, and chassis components
• Driven to meet customer's needs and possess strong customer service skills	• Solved customer design issues by providing engineered solutions
	• Instrumental in attaining multiple 'Outstanding Achievement' awards from Saturn Purchasing
• Must be self-motivated and work independently with minimal supervision	• Successfully managed over $50 million in business at strategic OEM accounts in a self-directed manner

My résumé and LinkedIn profile are attached for your review and consideration. Based on my skills and extensive *<Position Title>* experience, I am confident that the Company Sales Team would benefit from my addition.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss with you how I would make value-added contributions to the success of *<Company>* . I look forward to hearing from you to schedule an interview at your convenience. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
John Doe
enclosure

Phase E: Apply & Interview

Interview Preparation

You Landed The Interview!

Congratulations! You got an interview! The interview is the key point in the search process, where you have the most opportunity to make a positive impact by how you represent yourself, your skills, your strengths, and your interest or passion for the job for which you are interviewing. This section is designed to help you prepare for interviews, present yourself successfully during an interview, and pursue effective follow-up.

In the interview process, the employer is assessing three major elements:

1. **Can** you do the job?
   - Do you have the requisite skills to perform the job?
   - Do you have the level of knowledge needed?
   - Do you have adequate experience, producing results consistent with the needs of the job?
   - How adaptive are you to changing conditions and requirements? (Virtually no job stays the same year after year.)
2. **Will** you do the job?
   - What is your level of interest in the job?
   - How much energy do you portray in the interview?
   - What are your salary expectations, and are they consistent with the employer's?
   - What are your plans for the future, for career growth?
3. How well do you **match** the environment?
   - What is your work style? Is it compatible with the company and work group?
   - How well are you aligned with the company's culture and values?
   - How well do you communicate with others?
   - What kind of "chemistry" is there between you and the employer?

It's important to note that there is a **relationship** between you and your employer, and that the interviewing process is the start of that relationship. So, communication and a level of "chemistry" are important, just as they are in any human relationship. We may think that hiring decisions are based solely on the technical merits - education and experience- of the individual applicants, but employers are also looking to minimize their risks. Building a genuine, respectful rapport with the interviewer(s) helps ensure that you stand out from other applicants.

Interviews are conducted in stages:

- Screening interviews assess whether you can do the job. They are usually held over the telephone, by a recruiter or a Human Resources representative.
- Qualifying interviews are usually held in person by HR and a hiring manager, perhaps also including peers. They are focused on "can" and "will" you do the job, and also to what extent you are a "match" for the company's environment.
- Approval interviews are virtually always done in person, moving to the "will" you do the job, and especially if you are a "match." Often employers will make a hiring decision after a second interview. Additional interview(s) are needed based on the scope or level of leadership. For management positions, often additional levels of employer management are involved in the interview.

The interview process is often compared to a sales process, where **you** are the "product" or "offering" and the employer is the "Buyer." So it is helpful to keep this in mind, and to show during the interview(s) that you are aware of their needs (why they created the job in the first place) and can articulate how you will match their needs. At the same time, you are judging the employer to determine if this company and role will be an environment where you can thrive.

Interview Prep Checklist

Pre-Interview

- ☐ Clarify the opportunity: role, responsibilities, employer needs, and fit. Research the company, division, industry, and interviewers.
- ☐ Tailor your message and materials to the job description. Prepare evidence: strengths, accomplishments (STAR Stories). Prepare for difficult and behavioral questions.
- ☐ Prepare thoughtful questions for the interviewer.
- ☐ Plan your presentation: clothing, arrival, materials, and professional presence.

During the Interview

- ☐ Manage verbal, vocal, and visual communication.
- ☐ Demonstrate that you can, will, do the job and are a good fit.
- ☐ Close confidently: interest, concerns, and next steps.

Post-Interview

- ☐ Follow up promptly and professionally.
- ☐ Evaluate the offer carefully before accepting.

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1. Clarify the opportunity

Before preparing answers, understand why the position exists and what the employer needs. Review the role, core responsibilities, required skills, preferred qualifications, organizational context, and likely challenges.

Ask yourself:

- Is this role aligned with my target industry and career direction?
- Is it a good fit in responsibility, culture, compensation, and growth?
- What problems does the employer need this person to solve?
- What evidence can I provide that I can solve those problems?

The interview is a two-way relationship, not merely an examination. The employer is assessing the candidate, and you, the candidate, are also evaluating the employer. The objective of this stage is to ensure that you can highlight your unique talents and skills that address the problems that this employer needs solved.

2. Research the company, division, industry, and interviewers

Research the company website, mission, vision, products or services, recent accomplishments, competitors, industry conditions, culture, and public information. Review the LinkedIn profiles of everyone expected to interview you. Look for shared interests, career paths, organizational connections, and useful conversation starters.

Use professional contacts, informational meetings, company LinkedIn pages, the public library or WorkOne resources, and salary and culture sources where appropriate. Research should help you ask informed questions and connect your experience to current organizational needs.

3. Tailor your message and materials

Compare the job description with your résumé and prepare a one-page requirement-to-qualification comparison. Highlight:

- Key skills and core competencies
- Additional skills and preferences
- Key terms, acronyms, and industry language
- Accomplishments that demonstrate the required capabilities

Tailor your résumé, marketing statement, LinkedIn profile, and examples to the position. Keep the focus on what you can do for the employer—not simply what you want from the employer.

Prepare a professional portfolio or interview folder for each interviewer when appropriate. Include copies of your résumé, reference list, marketing profile, LinkedIn profile, relevant work samples, certifications, licenses, awards, and accomplishment notes.

4. Prepare evidence: strengths and accomplishments (STAR stories)

Know the strengths you bring and be prepared to prove them. Prepare six to eight concise STAR stories from work, education, projects, volunteer activities, or other relevant experience.
Quantify results whenever possible: money saved or earned, percentages improved, customers served, time reduced, errors prevented, employees trained, scope managed, or goals exceeded.

Emphasize results rather than duties. Take appropriate credit for your contribution while remaining accurate and collaborative.

5. Prepare for difficult and behavioral questions

As a general rule, your answers should follow this general pattern:

Acknowledge → Brief context → Ownership → Learning or improvement → Relevance to the role

For behavioral questions, use **STAR**: - **Situation – Task – Action - Result**

For negative or uncomfortable questions, use a **positive → direct response → positive** structure. Be honest, brief, non-defensive, and forward-looking. Address the concern behind the question without oversharing or blaming former employers. For questions that are not relevant to the job, remain calm and ask how the question relates to the position. Be aware of your tone and body language. There is additional guidance specifically on "Murder Questions" (extremely difficult to answer like about legal/criminal background) and The Elephant in the Room" (about physical or psychological attributes, disabilities or conditions that are obvious to the employer, but they are not legally allowed to ask about.

Practice concise answers to all kinds of interview questions.

See *Appendix* for a common list of Interview Questions categorized into the following categories along with the skills the questions are designed to evaluate.

1. Career direction and motivation
2. Work history and performance
3. Weaknesses, mistakes, and self-awareness
4. Employment gaps and unusual career history
5. Termination, layoffs, and difficult departures
6. Relationships, conflict, and emotional intelligence
7. "Elephant in the room" and personal circumstances
8. Compensation and practical fit
9. Research, preparation and commitment
10. Pressure, ambiguity and unexpected tests
11. 25 Most important Hard questions to practice answering

Leverage AI as you practice - AI tools can simulate realistic interview scenarios. Some tools allow you to record responses and receive feedback. Here are some to check out:

- Yoodli - a speech and communication coaching platform that acts like a "Grammarly for speech." It provides private, real-time, and judgment-free analytics on delivery metrics like filler words, pacing, eye contact, and body language.
- Google Interview Warmup - a free, AI-powered practice tool created by Google under the *Grow with Google* initiative. Designed to help job seekers build confidence, it allows users to answer industry-specific and behavioral interview questions either by speaking out loud or typing. The tool uses machine learning to transcribe responses in real time and provide immediate insights.

Ai assistants/tools can be used to ask the following prompts:

- Interview question prompt - What interview questions are most likely for this job description?
- Response improvement prompt - Provide feedback on this interview answer and suggest ways to strengthen it.
- Behavioral interview practice - Generate five behavioral interview questions related to leadership.

6. Prepare thoughtful questions for the interviewer

Write questions in advance and ask questions that matter to you. Strong questions demonstrate research and help determine whether the opportunity is a good fit.

Examples:

- What are the most important objectives for this position?
- What does success look like in this role?
- What are the greatest challenges facing the person who takes this job?
- What are your expectations during the first 30, 60, and 90 days?
- Who will I work with and report to?
- What are the core responsibilities that matter most?
- Where do you see this position heading over the next two to three years?
- How would you describe the organization's culture?
- What do you enjoy most about working here?
- Is there anything about my qualifications or experience that concerns you?
- What are the next steps and expected decision timeframe?

7. Plan your physical presentation

Make a strong, professional first impression. Dress appropriately for the organization whether you are interviewing live or virtually; when uncertain, ask what is appropriate. Wear clean, polished, conservative clothing and shoes. Keep grooming, fragrance, jewelry, and accessories understated.

Arrive early—approximately 15 minutes early is a useful standard. Rehearse directions and plan for parking, building access, security, and reception. Be courteous to everyone you meet, not only the interviewers.

Bring:

- Multiple résumés
- References and relevant work samples
- Portfolio or interview folder
- Business cards
- Pen and notepad
- Copies of your LinkedIn profile if useful
- Certifications, awards, or proof documents when relevant
- Thank-you notes and envelopes

Turn off your phone before entering the interview.

8. Manage verbal, vocal, and visual communication

Interview communication includes more than words. The reference material presents the commonly cited guideline of **7% verbal, 38% vocal, and 55% visual** communication. This is best treated as a reminder to align words, tone, facial expression, and body language—not as a universal formula for every communication situation.

Verbal - Use clear, specific, relevant language. Answer the question asked, connect your experience to the job, and avoid jargon, exaggeration, vague claims, or unnecessary detail.

Vocal - Use a calm, business-like, energetic tone. Vary pace and inflection naturally, speak clearly, pause when thinking, and avoid sounding rushed, defensive, or disengaged.

Visual - Smile naturally, maintain appropriate eye contact, sit upright, or lean slightly forward, nod to show understanding, use restrained hand gestures, keep feet still, and remain relaxed. Avoid staring, fidgeting, slouching, folded arms, rapid nodding, nervous coughing, adjusting clothing, or looking hurried.

Listen actively. If a question is unclear, ask for clarification or briefly paraphrase it. Stop talking once you have answered; do not ramble.

9. Demonstrate that you can, will do the job and are a good fit.

Throughout the interview, address the three employer concerns:

Can you do the job?
Show relevant skills, knowledge, experience, adaptability, and results. Use specific accomplishment stories.

Will you do the job?
Show genuine interest, energy, reliability, realistic compensation expectations, career direction, and willingness to contribute.

Do you match the environment?
Demonstrate communication, teamwork, interpersonal effectiveness, work values, leadership style, and alignment with the organization's culture and expectations.

Remember that technical qualifications may get many candidates into the interview. Professional chemistry, trust, communication, and evidence of value will distinguish the final candidate.

10. Close confidently

Near the end, affirm your interest based on what you learned. Ask a trial-close question:
Based on our conversation today, do you have any concerns about my ability to do the job?

This gives the interviewer an opportunity to raise concerns and gives you an opportunity to respond before leaving.

Then ask:

- What are the next steps?
- What is the decision timeframe?
- When would be an appropriate time to follow up?
- Who is the best point of contact?

Obtain business cards or contact details for everyone involved.

11. Follow up promptly and professionally

Immediately after the interview, record:

- Names and titles of interviewers
- Key points about the role and organization
- Questions you answered poorly or need to clarify
- Commitments you made
- Follow-up dates and the expected timetable

Send a personalized thank-you message the same day or within 24 hours via email or a written thank you note.

Thank the interviewers, reinforce your interest, mention a relevant point from the conversation, and briefly restate the value you can provide.

Complete any promised documentation or references.
If the stated timetable passes, follow up politely by phone or email.
Remain positive even after rejection; professional follow-up preserves relationships and future opportunities. If appropriate, consider letting them know you would be interested in future opportunities.

12. Evaluate the offer carefully

When an offer arrives, review the job description, responsibilities, salary, benefits, working hours, location, start date, vacation, flexibility, and other compensation. See later section on responding to and negotiating the job offer.

13. Final reminder

A successful interview is prepared, evidence-based, conversational, and two-way. Research the employer, know your value, tell concise stories with measurable results, communicate consistently through words, voice, and body language, ask meaningful questions, address concerns directly, close with confidence, and follow up with gratitude.

Phase E: Apply & Interview

Interview Preparation: Portfolio Layout

What To Include - *This information adapted by Dennis Cake*

Having a bound portfolio keeps you organized, whether for virtual or in-person interviews

Portfolio Pockets (Are Available To Handout As Needed)

- 20 business cards
- 5 or more copies of your résumé
- 5 or more copies of a cover letter "T Chart" relating to job requirements
- 5 or more copies of your marketing statement
- 5 Marketing page

TOOLS FOR YOU

- 3 pens and 2 sharpened pencils
- Calendar book if smart phone is not available
- Calculator if smart phone is not available
- Something for taking notes
- 7 thank you notes/envelopes (write immediately after interview and send or email)

For Your Reference (index your sections to find easily and place in plastic sleeves)

- Résumé, Marketing Profile
- Personal Reference lists and copies of references
- Copy of High School or College Degree, or Military Record if applicable
- Certifications, Completion Certificates, Licenses
- Volunteer/community service thank you notes, honors or awards
- Letters of Exit from previous jobs
- Copy of documents you wrote (first 5 pages only), reports, studies
- Sample of presentations, business plans, tweets
- Copy of past work (pictures, examples, flow charts, news articles)
- Accomplishment pages (detailed list of previous jobs, dates, and tasks)
- Job requirements and Star Stories
- Completed copy of a general job application form

Company Specific Reference Tools

- Copy of job description related to interview
- List of your questions/notes
- Articles/notes pertaining to that company
- Interviewer information
- Closing points

Phase E: Apply & Interview

Virtual Interviewing Tips

By Dennis Cake & Jeff Crane

In addition to all the standard interview preparation, use the following tips for virtual interviews:

Personal Prep

- Make sure the interviewer will have your information/résumé.
- Plan your clothing
  - No busy patterns
  - No bright clothes (blue, black, or gray with a touch of color)
  - Minimal jewelry, no jewelry noise
- Your online username should be professional (example: not "The Man")
- Make sure the time of the call is set by time zone

Equipment & Space Prep

- Remove distractions in front of you on your desk.
- Remove any distractions from behind you that the camera can see.
- Make sure your background is simple and not distracting.
- Pull all your notes out in front of you on your table or desk including your questions.
- Have your résumé and job description on your table or desk.
- Set-up camera at eye level – if using laptop camera, set your laptop on books or platform to get the eye-level height.
- Test your equipment works (camera, mic, and internet). Choose a good Wi-Fi area.
- Make sure lighting is good (not too dark – use lamps and windows to adjust, avoid glares etc.).
- Test the online platform (zoom, google meet etc.) ahead of time.
- Plug computer/camera into power to avoid battery problems.
- Keep phone handy in case the sound dies. Know what number to call.

Just Prior To The Interview

- Close the door and make sure there is no outside noise
- No kids or pets in the room. If your pet or kids could be loud outside the room, see if you can take them to a friend's house.
- Close out all other software on your computer and silence your phone.
- Check your hair and clothes.
- If family or friends might be around or might show up, let them know you won't be available for the next hour or more.

For The Interview

- Be energetic. Consider Standing up which generally helps you feel more energetic.
- Don't zoom in too much, try from the chest up.
- Look at camera, not just screen.

Phase E: Apply & Interview

Personal References

References are used by Human Resource departments to validate your work history and overall performance evaluation. You are normally asked to provide 3 references or more once a job offer is pending (or sometimes toward selecting a finalist). Plan to have 5-6 references you have validated and documented ahead of time.

References are a Human Resource department's nightmare, because applicants normally only list the person's name, job title, company, phone number (hopefully not the switchboard), and an email address. Getting your references to quickly respond can be a problem, as well as not knowing what the relationship is to you (i.e., former manager, peer, subordinate, customer, vender/supplier, etc.) Generally, only the HR department personnel look at your references and get responses, not the decision maker.

As a job applicant, you need to use your references as a self-marketing tool. At the end of the first face-to-face interview, present each person involved in the interview with a copy of your references saying, "I would like to give you a copy of my references, so you can check them out before I start working here." This makes it clear that you want the job. Your references should include your relationship to the person as notated above. They should also include 3-4 bullet points of positive comments made by your reference about you.

In building your reference sheet, call or meet directly with your reference and ask, "When a company representative calls, what will you say about me?" Then, take these comments and place them on your reference page. There is no point in telling someone what you want them to say, as they will not remember weeks later when a HR representative calls or emails them. Since you would only put positive comments on your reference sheet, the interviewer now sees the positive things others think about you, thus improving your chance for a job offer. Each interviewer will pause and read why you are the best candidate.

EXAMPLE of a Reference

Don Jones, Director of Transportation The Hoosier Company, Indianapolis, Indiana 317-555-1000

djones@hoosierco.com

Relationship: Reported to Mr. Jones for 7 years

- John is responsive to his responsibility and always goes the extra mile.
- He is a good communicator with his team and superiors and provides positive feedback.
- He has an eye for detail, which prevent delays and conflicts.
- I am absolutely confident that John would be an excellent addition to any company that is fortunate enough to hire him

BIGGER IMPACT:

Ask your references to provide a brief Recommendation for you on LinkedIn. They have already agreed to be a reference, and LinkedIn Recommendations reinforce that digitally!

Phase E: Apply & Interview

Interview Preparation: 30-60-90 Day Plan

Miracle Workers In An Interview

What Is A 30-60-90 Day Plan?

A 30-60-90 Day Plan is just like it sounds. It is a plan for the first three months you will be in a new job. Create a list of actions you understand you need to do in that time period to be successful.

This is a goal-setting exercise that will help you answer questions in your second interview. Creating this plan also shows your potential new boss that you have focus, drive, energy, initiative, and dedication to success. It will elevate your conversation about the job to a more significant problem-solving discussion, instead of a flaw-seeking interrogation.

In an interview, hiring managers normally look for you to show three things:

- You understand the job for which you are applying
- You can do the job
- You will do the job if hired

Your 30-60-90 Day Plan will:

- Elevate your conversation far beyond what your competition is having.
- Allow you to stand out far above others they are interviewing.
- Prove you can do the job by showing how you plan to set things into action.
- Demonstrate how hiring you will ultimately benefit the hiring manager.
- Help the hiring team see you in the role, which gets you closer to an offer.
- Create a discussion of ideas to solve their problems, which will make them see you as a partner.

How Do I Write A 30-60-90 Day Plan?

First 30 Days:

This period is typically focused on training and learning everything you need to know to function successfully in this position. It may include company policies and procedures, software systems, products and services, customers, and clients.

Second 30 Days (60 Day section):

During this period, you must begin making a contribution. You may be able to address some small problems and generate a quick win. This is a period of less training and more activity. It is critical that you encourage or request feedback from your report directly to stay focused on their agenda.

Third 30 Days (90 Day section):

This is the time to initiate new projects, acquire new customers, solve bigger problems, etc...

To write a great plan, you must listen and take notes in the phone and initial interview. You must ask questions like, "What are the greatest challenges in this job?" or "What will it take to be successful in this position?" You must think critically about this job and what it would take to be successful. You must do your research. The more specific you are, the more you will impress them.

30-60-90 Day Plan

SAMPLE - Adapted From Charles Vaughn

ACTIVITY	COMPLETION DATE
FIRST 30 DAYS	
The Learning Stage - Know the Organization and the Business	
Meet staff and other key contacts within the organization.	
Begin learning the existing policies and procedures that govern my position.	
Schedule time with key managers; Learn and review annual business plan and YTD performance. Focus on top 3 issues that need addressing.	
Work with functional management to review process improvement plans and product investigation tools.	
Meet with supervisors and do an initial assessment of their skills and talents. Identify immediate issues that are barriers to their success.	
Understand performance metrics, budget, training programs, etc.	
Review accident investigation programs to identify causes and how to prevent.	
Accelerate learning by working with other Senior Managers to learn effective strategies and tactics for managing the shift.	
Review quality system and develop plans to continuously improve.	
Meet and review progress with my hiring manager and make sure progress is on schedule. Modify plan where necessary.	
FIRST 60 DAYS	
The Review Stage - Know the Customers	
Review and complete plans from the first 30 days.	
Do a secondary assessment of supervisor skills, experience, and historical performance. Review actual performance versus goal results; share my expectations.	
Learn expectations for any new product information.	
Review performance and customer satisfaction feedback with each supervisor and formulate process improvement plans, as necessary.	
Meet and review progress with my hiring manager and make sure progress is on schedule. Modify plan where necessary.	
FIRST 90 DAYS	
The Planning Stage - Look to the Future	
Review and complete plans from the first 60 days.	
Work with management to ensure there is alignment across all shifts.	
Continue to evaluate team and look for developmental opportunities.	

Phase E: Apply & Interview

Responding to an Offer & Negotiations

Receiving a job offer is exciting! It represents the culmination of your job search and validation that the employer believes you are the right person for the position. But - you're not quite done. Before you enthusiastically say "yes," take a deep breath. This is your opportunity to ensure that the role, compensation, and overall employment package align with your career goals and personal priorities.

If you receive a verbal offer, thank the employer, express your enthusiasm, and ask for the offer in writing before making a final decision. It is perfectly acceptable to request a day or two to review the details.

NEVER accept a verbal offer!

When you get a call, be ready with questions:

- Job description – go over it again for clarity
- Salary
- Start date and working hours
- Location
- Let him/her know of any upcoming pre-planned time off you may need for medical, vacations, etc.
- Negotiation: Salary, additional compensation, benefits, vacation, flexibility.

You want to be in a clear state of mind to discuss the offer. Remember:

- DO NOT answer your phone if it is an inconvenient time (driving, errands, tending to children, etc.).
- Talk only when it is quiet and you have time to think and focus.
- Thank the caller for the offer and let them know you look forward to receiving it in writing.
- Ask for time to consider it and get back with your response. Example: " I need a couple of days to review it and give it full consideration."

NEGOTIATING the Job Offer

Many people feel uncomfortable negotiating because they worry they will appear demanding or ungrateful. In reality, employers expect reasonable discussion. They have invested considerable time and effort in finding the right candidate—and that candidate is you. As long as your approach is respectful, professional, and supported by facts, negotiation is simply part of the hiring process.

<u>Start with Evaluating the Entire Offer</u>

Never evaluate an offer based solely on salary. Review every aspect of the position to ensure you clearly understand what is being offered. Consider questions such as:

- Does the job description match what was discussed during the interview?
- What are the reporting relationships and performance expectations?
- What are the work arrangements (hybrid, remote, schedule, flexibility, location, travel)

Then evaluate the complete compensation package, including:

- Base salary or hourly pay
- Bonus or incentive opportunities
- Health, dental, and retirement benefits
- Paid time off/vacation and holidays
- Equipment provided
- Automobile or mileage reimbursement
- Professional development opportunities and other benefits.

RESEARCH SALARY Before You Negotiate

Successful salary negotiations begin long before the job offer arrives. Do your homework so you understand the market value for someone with your experience, skills, and geographic location. You can start by asking an AI assistant/tool "What is the typical salary range for *project managers* in the Midwest?" But that should only be your starting point.

Reliable sources of salary information include:

- Recruiters who specialize in your industry
- Members of your professional network
- Professional associations
- Salary research websites:
  - *salary.com*
  - *payscale.com*
  - *glassdoor.com/Salaries/index.htm*
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
  - *bls.gov*
  - *onetonline.org*

No single source is perfect. Salary websites often use different data sources and methodologies, so compare multiple resources and look for a consistent range rather than relying on one number. Your network and recruiters can also provide valuable local market insight.

Establish Your Salary Range

Avoid entering negotiations with one "magic number." Instead, establish a realistic salary *range* based on your research. Your range should include:

- Ideal salary – what you would be delighted to receive.
- Target salary – what you believe is fair based on your experience and the market.
- Minimum acceptable salary – the lowest amount you would willingly accept.

Be comfortable with the low end of your range. If you cannot honestly accept your minimum, it isn't really your minimum. Knowing your range allows you to negotiate with confidence instead of reacting emotionally during the conversation.

When Salary Comes Up Early

Some employers ask for salary expectations on the employment application. Others wait until later interviews or after deciding you are the preferred candidate. Whenever possible, *postpone the discussion* until the employer has determined that you are the candidate they want. At that point, you have greater negotiating leverage.

If you are asked—or pressed—for a salary expectation, avoid giving one specific number. Instead, first ask, "what is your expected budget range for this position?" If they defer to you, provide your researched salary range and explain that your expectations are based on the responsibilities of the role, what you've seen in the market, and the overall compensation package.

For example: "Based on my research and the responsibilities we've discussed, I believe a salary in the range of $65,000 to $80,000 would be appropriate. Of course, I'll consider the overall compensation package."

This approach keeps the discussion flexible while demonstrating that your expectations are based on objective market information rather than wishful thinking.

Negotiating Professionally

Successful negotiation isn't about squeezing every possible dollar out of an employer. It's about reaching an agreement where both parties are excited to begin the relationship. The employer wants to hire someone who will contribute and stay; you want an opportunity where you can succeed and grow. The best negotiations end with both sides feeling they made a good decision.

The highest salary is not always the best offer. The best offer is the one that advances both your career and your life.

If you decide to negotiate:

- Ask for a conversation rather than negotiating through email. Schedule time with them if needed.
- Explain the reasoning behind your request.
- Use market data—not emotion—to support your position.
- Be specific about what you are requesting.
- Ask questions such as:
    - Salary: "I see a range of $x - $y in the regional market for this role."
    - Vacation: "Between the level of experience/seniority, another week of vacation seems appropriate."
    - "What flexibility do you have?"
    - "What are you able to do?"
    - "What options exist?"

Remember that negotiation is a conversation, not a confrontation. Your goal is to reach an agreement that both you and the employer feel good about.

Evaluate the Opportunity as a WHOLE

Finally, compare the offer against the decision criteria you established during your career search. Ask yourself, how well does the offer align with your key criteria:

- Skills . . . Use my key/favorite skills & strengths?
- Special Interests . . . Key interests or special knowledge?
- Social . . . Types of people, how I want to interact?
- Standards . . . Alignment with my values?
- Surroundings . . . Workspace, style, management? Is this an environment where I can succeed?
- Scale . . . Size of team; growth/development? Does this role provide the growth I am seeking?
- Salary . . . $ and level of responsibility; Is the compensation appropriate for the responsibilities?
- Site . . . Location: where I want to live and work (including office/hybrid/remote

Does this opportunity support my long-term career goals?

More Than Just Salary

When most people think about negotiating a job offer, they think only about salary. In reality, many parts of an offer may be open for discussion. Every employer has different levels of flexibility, so don't assume the first offer is the only offer.

Remember: **Everything is negotiable—until it isn't.** The worst outcome is that the employer says, "no" to an element you are negotiating.

Compensation

- Base salary
- Hourly rate (contract positions)
- Signing bonus
- Annual or periodic performance bonus
- Commission or other incentive structure
- Profit sharing
- Stock options or equity
- Retention bonus

Time Off
- Vacation days
- Paid Time Off (PTO)
- Personal days
- Holidays
- Flexible scheduling
- Delayed start date for planned commitments

Work Arrangements
- Hybrid or remote work
- Work schedule
- Travel requirements
- Four-day work week
- Flexible start and end times
- Office location or assignment

Benefits
- Health, dental, and vision insurance
- Retirement contributions
- Life and disability insurance
- Tuition reimbursement
- Professional certifications
- Conference attendance
- Memberships in professional organizations

Resources
- Company vehicle
- Mileage reimbursement
- Computer and technology equipment or allowance
- Mobile phone allowance
- Home office equipment
- Parking or public transportation assistance

Career Growth
- Job title
- Reporting relationship
- Scope of responsibilities
- Leadership opportunities
- Training and development
- Performance review timeline
- Salary review after six months instead of one year

A Few Words of CAUTION

Not everything can be negotiated. Some organizations have strict compensation policies or standardized benefits that apply equally to all employees. Others have considerable flexibility, particularly with senior-level positions or difficult-to-fill roles.

Before asking for changes, consider these guidelines:

- Prioritize the two or three items that matter most to you.
- Support your requests with facts, not emotions.
- Be reasonable and professional.
- Don't negotiate simply to "win." Negotiate to create a better fit for both you and the employer.
- Once an agreement is reached, accept it graciously and move forward with confidence.

The employer has already decided they want you. Approach the discussion with confidence, professionalism, and appreciation. If the final offer meets your needs and supports your goals, *congratulations!* Accept it enthusiastically and begin your new opportunity with confidence!

Why We Do What We Do

We hope and trust that this Guidebook will be an effective resource for you along the journey toward your next season of employment. People that come to P2E consistently thank and affirm us for helping them with perspective, direction, and the various disciplines that are part of today's career search. Our P2E Staff are routinely asked why we give so much of our time and energy without cost to those looking for a new job or career. This initiative is prompted from a desire to care for others in need – the need for better employment.

The fact is that we are inspired, even compelled, to care for others, as an outflow of the care that God has given to us through the life of His Son, Jesus Christ. We do what we do as a reflection of that care and concern for people – in our meetings, in our workshops, in our groups, and one-to-one.

If you are interested in learning more about this Person of Jesus, we invite you to contact the Pastoral Staff at Church at the Crossing, 317-844-9355, or *info@golove.org.*

If you would like some perspective of Jesus in all of His impact, we invite you to view this history of His life, taken from the book of Luke in the Bible (available in English and over 1,700 other languages):
jesusfilm.org/watch/jesus.html/english.html

Thoughts behind our motivation, from the Bible:
For He has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; He has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help. - Psalm 22:24

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be… eager to serve. – 1 Peter 5:2

All of our best – and His best – to you.

Appendix: Additional Resources & Articles

Recommended Books

- *It's Not About You, It's about Them: Job Search Today*
  Bruce Flanagan (Dog Ear Publishing)
  Order via *Amazon*
  Contact Bruce Flanagan, *bruce.flanagan@lejunlimited.com*

- *Survive and Thrive in Your Job Search*
  Hinshaw, Falconer, and Johnson (Abbott Press)
  Order via *Amazon*, or
  Contact Mike Johnson, *mike@coachfortomorrow.com*

- *Absolutely Abby's 101 Job Search Secrets*
  Abby Kohut (Staffing Symphony)
  Order via *Amazon*, or
  Contact Abby Kohut, *akohut@absolutelyabby.com*

Appendix: Additional Resources & Articles

Example Interview Questions

1. Career direction and motivation

- Why do you want to work in this industry?
- Why do you want this particular role?
- Why do you want to leave your current job?
- Why did you leave your previous job?
- Why have you changed careers?
- Why should we hire you?
- What makes you different from the other candidates?
- What motivates you?
- When were you most satisfied with your work?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What are your long-term career plans?
- What would make you stay with this company?

What the interviewer is assessing: motivation, commitment, career logic, and likelihood of retention.

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2. Work history and performance

- Tell me about yourself.
- Walk me through your work history.
- What accomplishment are you most proud of?
- What was your greatest professional failure?
- Tell me about a mistake you made and how you handled it.
- What is the most difficult problem you have solved?
- Describe a time you failed to meet a deadline.
- Tell me about a time you disagreed with a decision.
- How would your previous supervisor rate you?
- What would your previous employer say is your biggest weakness?
- What did you like least about your last job?
- What would you change about your previous role?

What the interviewer is assessing: results, accountability, judgment, self-awareness, and professional maturity.

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3. Weaknesses, mistakes, and self-awareness

- What is your greatest weakness?
- What criticism have you received repeatedly?
- What is a misconception people have about you?
- What skill are you currently working to improve?
- What do you do when you do not know how to complete a task?
- What is something you are not good at?
- Tell me about a time you received difficult feedback.
- What is the biggest mistake you have made in your career?

What the interviewer is assessing: honesty, coachability, emotional intelligence, and whether the candidate can improve. A strong answer should identify a real but manageable issue, explain the corrective action, and show measurable progress.

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4. Employment gaps and unusual career history

- How do you explain the gap in your employment?
- What were you doing between these two positions?
- Why did you not accept another job sooner?
- Why did you leave the workforce?
- Why did you not finish your degree or credential?
- Why is your career path unconventional?
- Why have you held several short-term positions?
- Why are you returning to this field?
- Why are you changing industries?
- Why are you overqualified for this position?

What the interviewer is assessing: reliability, relevance of experience, current readiness, and risk of early departure.

Be truthful but selective: briefly explain the circumstances, highlight productive activity or learning, and end with present readiness.

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5. Termination, layoffs, and difficult departures

- Why were you fired?
- Why did your last position end?
- Were you laid off or terminated?
- What happened with your previous employer?
- Did you have a conflict with your manager?
- What would your former boss say about you?
- Why should we believe this job will be a better fit?
- What did you learn from the experience?

What the interviewer is assessing: accountability, honesty, conflict management, and whether the same problem is likely to recur.

Avoid blaming former employers or co-workers. State the facts briefly, accept appropriate responsibility, explain what changed, and connect the answer to the position being pursued.

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6. Relationships, conflict, and emotional intelligence

- Tell me about a coworker you did not get along with.
- Describe a conflict with your manager.
- Tell me about a time you had to work with a difficult person.
- How do you respond when someone challenges your ideas?
- Describe a time you had to give difficult feedback.
- Tell me about a time you received unfair criticism.
- How would your friends describe you?
- How would your team describe your leadership style?
- What is the biggest misconception people have about you?
- How do you handle a confrontational coworker?

What the interviewer is assessing: collaboration, composure, empathy, communication, and ability to resolve conflict without assigning blame.

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7. "Elephant in the room" and personal circumstances

- Is there anything in your background that might concern us?
- Is there anything about your experience that requires explanation?
- You appear nervous—are you comfortable in high-pressure situations?
- Is there anything that could affect your ability to perform this job?
- Do you have any restrictions that would affect the role's requirements?
- Why does your background look different from the typical candidate's?
- Is there a reason your qualifications do not match the conventional career path?

What the interviewer is assessing: whether an obvious concern affects job performance, attendance, communication, or fit.

These questions must be handled carefully. Address a relevant concern briefly, focusing on capability and accommodations where appropriate, and avoiding unnecessary personal disclosure. Interviewers should also avoid questions about protected personal characteristics unless directly relevant and legally permitted.

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8. Compensation and practical fit

- What salary are you looking for?
- What is your current salary?
- Would you accept less than your previous salary?
- What are your compensation expectations?
- Are you willing to relocate?
- Are you willing to travel?
- Are you willing to work nights, weekends, or overtime?
- When could you start?
- Are you interviewing elsewhere?
- What would cause you to reject our offer?

What the interviewer is assessing: expectations, availability, negotiating position, and practical compatibility.

Candidates should research the market range and avoid anchoring themselves prematurely when the question can be answered by discussing the role's range and total compensation.

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9. Research, preparation, and commitment

- What do you know about our company?
- What do you know about me?
- Why do you want to work here rather than for a competitor?
- What do you think of our product or service?
- What would you change about our organization?
- What do you think our biggest challenge is?
- What would your 30-, 60-, and 90-day plan be?
- How do you see this position contributing to the value of the organization over the next one to two years?
- How would you measure success in this role?
- What questions do you have for us?

What the interviewer is assessing: preparation, commercial awareness, initiative, and genuine interest.

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10. Pressure, ambiguity, and unexpected tests

- What would you do if you disagreed with your manager's decision?
- How would you prioritize three urgent assignments?
- What would you do if you made a serious error?
- How would you handle an angry customer or stakeholder?
- What would you do if you were given unclear instructions?
- Explain a complex topic to me as if I knew nothing about it.
- Solve this problem on the spot.
- Give us a presentation or demonstrate a relevant task.
- What would you do during your first week here?
- What is the most difficult decision you have made?

What the interviewer is assessing: composure, reasoning, prioritization, communication, and adaptability.

For role-playing or presentation exercises, clarify the objective, audience, constraints, and desired outcome before beginning.

Most important "hard" questions to prioritize

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why do you want this role?
3. Why are you leaving your current job?
4. Why did your last job end?
5. How do you explain your employment gap?
6. Why did you change careers?
7. Why did you not complete your degree or credential?
8. Why should we hire you?
9. What is your greatest weakness?
10. Tell me about your greatest failure.
11. Tell me about a serious mistake you made.
12. Describe a conflict with a coworker or manager.
13. What criticism have you received repeatedly?
14. How would your previous supervisor rate you?
15. What did you like least about your last job?
16. Why are you overqualified for this role?
17. What motivates you?
18. Where do you see yourself in five years?
19. What salary are you seeking?
20. What would you do if you disagreed with your manager?
21. What is the biggest misconception people have about you?
22. Is there anything in your background we should discuss?
23. What would your former employer say about you?
24. What would your 30-, 60-, and 90-day plan be?
25. Why should we believe you will stay?

GUIDANCE Answering "Murder" Questions

Some questions may be extremely difficult to answer, such as having been indicted or convicted of a crime. In such cases, follow these rules:

- **Be honest, but selective**: Tell the truth, but don't overshare or volunteer unnecessary detail.
- **Keep it brief and structured**: Give a concise explanation, then move forward.
- **Take ownership – no blame**: Own your situation without blaming others or sounding defensive.
- **Reframe to growth or learning**: Pivot quickly to what you learned, improved, or gained.
- **Connect back to the role**: Tie your answer to why you're still a strong candidate.
- **Maintain a calm, confident tone**: How you say it matters as much or more than what you say.
- **Avoid red flags**: Don't speak negatively about past employers or co-workers, don't appear evasive or inconsistent, do not get overly personal or emotional.
- **Land on a forward-looking note**: End with where you are now and what you bring today.

GUIDANCE Answering "The Elephant in the Room"

You may have a physical or psychological attribute, disability, or condition that will be obvious to the employer but is something they are not legally allowed to ask about. Here are some rules to follow if applicable:

- **Be proactive-but intentional**: Only raise it if it is likely negatively influencing the interviewer's perception.
- **Address it early (but not first)**: Bring it up once rapport is established-not as your opening line.
- **Keep it brief and matter-of-fact**: Acknowledge it simply-no drama, no overexplaining.
- **Neutralize the concern**: Directly answer the unspoken question: "This will not impact my ability to succeed in this role."
- **Reframe positively**: Turn the potential concern into a strength or non-issue.
- **Project confidence, not defensiveness**: Your tone should signal, "This is handled."
- **Control the narrative-then move on**: Address it once, clearly, then pivot back to your qualifications.
- **Avoid oversharing or sensitive specifics**: You are not obligated to disclose deeply personal details (and the interviewer does not want to hear them).

Appendix: Additional Resources & Articles

Working with Recruiters

9 Secrets To Getting A Headhunter *This information adapted by Dennis Cake*

1. Prepare a professional LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter account with contact information visible. Be aware of your online presence, and Google yourself.
2. Be visible, attend forums, conferences, seminars, and civic group gatherings.
3. Give out your business card freely.
4. Work bridge jobs, i.e., temporary, part time, contract positions. Register with staffing agencies in your field.
5. Say YES to all invitations, even if not interested. This is an opportunity to gather useful information and meet people of influence.
6. Be a well-rounded professional. Volunteer with trade organizations as well as local charity or community outreach groups.
7. Contact Recruiting firms in your field. Just remember who is paying - the client is paying the headhunter, not you.
8. Act in good faith. Headhunters will ask and need to know your salary expectations, benefit package content, restrictions, etc. There should be no surprises.
9. Know the difference between a headhunter and a recruitment consultant.

Appendix: Additional Resources & Articles

Reasons I Didn't Hire You

What May Be Hindering You

This information adapted by Dennis Cake; compiled from interviews with Human Resources and Hiring Managers

1. **I never saw your résumé.**
   - Lacked the key words and phrases the Applicant Tracking System is set up to find
   - The contract résumé reviewer did not select your résumé

2. **I did not understand why you were applying.**
   - You must be a good fit
   - You must be crystal clear on your qualifications
   - If not exact experience, you need to show evidence of transition steps – i.e., classes, conferences/seminars, added responsibilities in former position

3. **Your résumé did not grab me.**
   - Explain what you did in your prior role
   - Explain what you accomplished

4. **The telephone interview was a nice chat.**
   - Always address why you should be hired to fill this position

5. **You never said you wanted this job.**

6. **I didn't hire you because I heard back from someone else first.**
   - Did you send a thank you note to everyone involved?
   - Did you get an internal person to recommend you?
   - Just before the hiring deadline, did you send an email, letter, or make a phone call?
   - When hiring decisions are delayed, did you send an item of interest to the hiring manager?

Review this list against your own experience, your résumé, and how you handled your past three interviews. What adjustments do you need to make.

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This Passport to Employment Guidebook is coordinated and organized by Passport to Employment, a ministry of One More and supported by Church at the Crossing, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Passport to Employment is an outreach to the unemployed, under-employed, and those who are dissatisfied with their jobs, in the greater Indianapolis area. We are a support and networking group where we teach job search skills: we help people with their career search strategy, résumés, cover letters, networking, interview skills, and much more. Our vision is to help people land in fulfilling careers, not just "find a job."

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