A Job Seeker’s Guide

About this Guide

This guide is designed to assist you in your job search. Included in this guide are many helpful tips that you can use throughout your job search process.

In this guide, you will learn how to:

- Apply job search strategies
- Write and format a resume
- Conduct yourself during a phone screen
- Excel before, during, and after an interview
- Dress professionally
- Master a behavioral interview
- Answer tricky interview questions
Job Search Strategies

Seeking new employment requires focus, dedicated attention, assertiveness and persistence. Use the strategies below to increase your success in finding your next position.

1. **Identify your strengths.** Reflect on your career and document your most significant accomplishments, successes and experiences. Be ready to clearly articulate why you are the best candidate for the job, and the unique attributes you could bring to the company. Practice your elevator speech: if you had 30 seconds in an elevator with the head of the company, how would you convince them to hire you? It is important to be able to quickly highlight your strengths and make them interested in hearing more about you.

2. **Chose your next job carefully.** Think about your best jobs and your worst jobs. Ask yourself what you want in your next opportunity. Conduct your job search with your skills, interests, and values in mind. Research companies to determine what opportunities best match your target position.

3. **Do research.** Try to determine who you can talk to at your target company so you can learn of opportunities and become a candidate prior to a job posting.

4. **Take action – be heard.** Use your voice. Cold calling prospective employers can be scary, but it can also be an important job search strategy. Once you have identified a position in which you are interested, ask to speak to the hiring manager who will be making a decision on filling the position. Ask for a few minutes on their calendar to discuss why you are a good candidate.

5. **Network Continuously.** Tell everyone (family members, friends, former colleagues, etc.) that you are looking for employment. Ask them to think of you when they hear of any opportunities. Join professional organizations to meet others who might be able to help you. Try to meet face-to-face with at least three or four people per day. Offer to buy them a cup of coffee. Tell them you are seeking advice and counsel for your job search. The purpose of your conversation is to build a relationship, rather than to ask for a job. At the end of the conversation, ask them who else would be good for you to talk to. Ask them if you can use their name as a reference.

6. **Seek outside advice.** Consider using an employment agency to help you. Spend time understanding the services they will provide and the costs of such services.

7. **Take advantage of temporary jobs.** Be flexible. Consider taking a contract, temporary or consulting position. Oftentimes, these types of opportunities can lead to full-time employment.

8. **Write succinctly about the position.** When sending out résumés, make certain your cover letter mirrors the position description and specific job requirements. Catch the recruiter’s/ hiring manager’s attention by highlighting how your skills and experience match what they are looking for.

9. **Document your search.** Write down all the jobs you applied to: include the title, company name, contact person & phone number, interview date(s), who referred you and follow-up dates/ actions.
Also, make a list of the people you are networking with. Keep their names and contact information in a contact file.

Writing a Stellar Resume

There are many resources online that provide excellent examples of both resumes and cover letters. These websites can be accessed by using a search engine such as www.google.com. Key words to use in your search include Resumes, Resume Writing, Cover Letter, Jobs and Employment.

- Spend time researching effective resume writing.
- Choose a resume format that best highlights your professional skills.
- Create a resume that represents your experiences and accomplishments:
  - Work experience bullet points should represent quantifiable/measurable goals or achievements.
  - Ask yourself “what skills and/or experiences make me unique from other applicants?”
- Two-page resumes are acceptable to describe your work experiences and accomplishments.
- Once you have created a resume, proofread it carefully to make sure that the spelling, punctuation and information is correct.
- Have someone review your resume and provide you feedback.

Conquering a Telephone Screen

Employers use telephone interviews as a way of identifying and recruiting candidates for employment. Phone interviews are often used to screen candidates in order to narrow the pool of applicants who will be invited for in-person interviews. They are also used as way to minimize the expenses involved in interviewing out-of-town candidates.

While you're actively job searching, it's important to be prepared for a phone interview on a moment's notice. You never know when a recruiter or a networking contact might call and ask if you have a few minutes to talk.

Be Prepared

Prepare for a phone interview just as you would for a regular interview. Compile a list of your strengths and weaknesses, as well as a list of answers to typical interview questions. In addition, plan on being prepared for a phone conversation about your background and skills.

- Keep your resume in clear view, on the top of your desk, or tape it to the wall near the phone, so it's at your fingertips when you need to answer questions.
- Have a short list of your accomplishments available to review.
• Have a pen and paper handy for note taking.
• Turn call-waiting off so your call isn't interrupted.
• If the time isn't convenient, ask if you could talk at another time and suggest some alternatives.
• Clear the room - evict the kids and the pets. Turn off the stereo and the TV. Close the door.
• Unless you're sure your cell phone service is going to be perfect, consider using a landline rather than your cell phone to avoid a dropped call or static on the line.

Practice Interviewing

Have a friend or family member conduct a mock interview and tape record it so you can see how you sound over the phone. Any cassette recorder will work. You'll be able to hear your "ums" and "uhhs" and "okays" and you can practice reducing them from your conversational speech. Also rehearse answers to those typical questions you will be asked.

During the Telephone Screen

• Don't smoke, chew gum, eat, or drink.
• Do keep a glass of water handy.
• Smile. Smiling will project a positive image to the listener and will change the tone of your voice.
• Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.
• Use the person's title (Mr. or Ms. and their last name.) Only use a first name if they ask you to.
• Don't interrupt the interviewer.
• Take your time - it's perfectly acceptable to take a moment or two to collect your thoughts.
• Keep your answers as short as possible, while still answering the questions fully.
• Your goal is to set-up a face-to-face interview. After you thank the interviewer ask if it would be possible to meet in person.

After the Telephone Screen

• Take notes about what you were asked and how you answered.
• Follow up with a thank you note which reiterates your interest in the job.

Interview Tips – Before, During and After

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW:

• Prepare:
  
  o Ensure you have directions to the interview location and know where to park.
  
  o Research the company and interviewer.
  
  o Review the job description.
  
  o Develop questions to ask interviewer about the position and the company.
o Determine salary expectations
  ▪ Discuss during an offer of employment only

o Bring clean copies of your resume and references.
  ▪ Provide references only if asked

• Practice:
  o Stay away from memorizing answers or having “canned” responses.
  o Work on your demeanor during the interview.

• Dress for success—make sure outfit is neat, tidy and ironed.

• Arrive 10-15 minutes early.

**DURING THE INTERVIEW:**

• Turn off your cell phone and throw gum away before entering the building.

• Greet everyone you meet, smile and shake hands firmly.

• Chat with the receptionist – this is your chance to make a good first impression!
  o Ask the correct pronunciation of interviewer’s name.

• Make an impression.
  o Smile and show enthusiasm in the position and the company.
  o Follow the interviewer’s body language. No slouching!
  o Make eye contact with everyone, even those not asking questions.
  o Sell yourself.
  o Keep it positive. Avoid speaking poorly about previous supervisors, coworkers, etc.
  o Avoid slang and/or poor language.
  o Stay away from pause words such as “like,” “um,” “uh,” etc.
  o Avoid personal and controversial topics.
Use specific examples from your experience. Never answer with a “yes/no.” Tell the truth!

Ask your prepared questions.

- Restate your interest in the position and ask about timelines and next steps.
- Thank your interviewers for their time, and request a business card.

**AFTER THE INTERVIEW:**

- Send a Thank You note—via email, handwritten, or both—within a day or two of the interview to each interviewer separately.

- Assess how the interview went:
  - What would you answer differently?
  - What information were you not able to present about yourself that you should have?
  - Would you ask better questions?

- Keep a record of the interview
  - Company, Date, Position, Names, Interviewers, Receptionists, etc.

**Dress for Success**

Your clothes say a lot about you and play a supporting role in getting a job. Appropriate dress attire supports your image as a competent professional ready and capable to work in a business environment.

**Women**
- Neutral colored suit
- Skirt length - a little above the knee

**Men**
- Neutral colored suit
- Neutral colored or conservative stripe shirt
• Blouses should be cotton or silk
• Simple accessories
• Minimal make-up in conservative tones
• Hair should be clean and neat
• Neatly manicured clean nails
• Minimal cologne or perfume
• Briefcase or portfolio case
• Neck tie
• Dress shoes
• Dark socks, mid-calf length
• Hair should be clean and neat
• Minimal cologne or perfume
• Limit the aftershave
• Briefcase or portfolio case

**Mastering a Behavioral Interview**

What is a behavioral interview? Behavioral based interviewing is focused on discovering how the interviewee handled specific employment-related situations. This interviewing method is based on the assumption that past performance can be a strong predictor of future performance.

**Traditional Interview vs. Behavioral Interview**

In a traditional interview, you will be asked a series of questions which typically have straightforward answers, such as "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" or "Describe your typical work pace?". In a behavioral interview, an employer has decided what skills are needed in the person they hire and will ask questions to find out if the candidate possesses those skills. Instead of asking how you would behave in a situation, they will ask how you handled a similar situation in the past.

**Questions in a Behavioral Interview**

Behavioral interview questions will be more pointed, more probing and more specific than traditional interview questions:

• Give an example of an occasion when you used logic to solve a problem.
• Give an example of a goal you reached and tell me how you achieved it.
• Describe a decision you made that was unpopular and how you handled the implementation of that decision.
• Have you gone above and beyond the call of duty? If so, how?
• What do you do when your schedule is interrupted? Give an example of how you handle it.
• Have you had to convince a team to work on a project they weren't thrilled about? How did you do it?
• Have you handled a difficult situation with a co-worker? How?
• Tell me about how you worked effectively under pressure.
Follow-up questions will also be detailed. You may be asked what you did, what you said, how you reacted or how you felt.

**Preparation for the Potential Behavioral Interview**

It's important to remember that you won't know what type of interview will take place until you are sitting in the interview room. Consequently, it is best to prepare answers to traditional interview questions, and also to refresh your memory on some special situations or projects you have worked on that were particularly challenging. Prepare responses that illustrate times when you have successfully solved problems or managed a difficult project successfully.

Review the job description, job posting or advertisement. You may be able to get a sense of what skills and behavioral characteristics the employer is seeking from reading the position requirements. Think about former projects or positions that present examples of how you demonstrated the desired skills.

**During the Behavioral Interview**

During the interview, if you are not sure how to answer the question, ask for clarification. Then be sure to include these points in your answer:

• A specific situation
• The tasks that needed to be done
• The action you took
• The results

It's important to keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. The interviewer is simply trying to understand how you behaved in a given situation. How you respond will determine if there is a fit between your skills and the position the company is seeking to fill.

**Answering Tricky Interview Questions**

**Why should we hire you?**
Here is your chance to really sell yourself. Briefly and succinctly lay out your strengths, qualifications and unique attributes you could bring to the position. Be careful not to answer this question too generically.

**Why do you want to work here?**
This is one tool interviewers use to see if you have done your homework. You should never attend an interview unless you know about the company, the competition and the industry. If you have done your
research, this question gives you an opportunity to show initiative and demonstrate how your experience and qualifications match the company’s needs.

**What are your greatest weaknesses?**
The secret to answering this question is being honest about a weakness, but demonstrating how you have turned it into strength. For example, if you had a problem with organization in the past, demonstrate the steps you took to more effectively keep yourself on track. This will show that you have the ability to recognize aspects of yourself that need improvement, and the initiative to make necessary changes.

**Why did you leave your last job?**
Even if your last job ended badly, avoid answering the questions negatively. Be as diplomatic as possible. If you do point out negative aspects of your last job, find some positives to mention as well.

**Describe a problem situation and how you solved it.**
Sometimes it is hard to come up with a response to this request, particularly if you are coming straight from college and do not have professional experience. Interviewers want to see that you can think critically and develop solutions, regardless of what kind of issue you faced. Even if your problem was not having enough time to study, describe the steps you took to prioritize your schedule. This will demonstrate that you are responsible and can think through situations on your own.

**What accomplishment are you most proud of?**
The secret to this question is being specific and selecting an accomplishment that relates to the position. Even if your greatest accomplishment is being on a championship high school basketball team, opt for a more professionally relevant accomplishment. Think of the qualities the company is looking for and develop an example that demonstrates how you can meet the company’s needs.

**What are your salary expectations?**
This is a difficult question, particularly for those with little professional experience. Research the salary range in your field prior to the interview to get an idea of an appropriate expectation for a salary amount. Avoid any discussion of salary specifics before receiving a job offer. Let the interviewer know that you will be open to discussing fair compensation when the time comes. If pressed for a more specific answer, always give a range, rather than a specific number.

**Tell me about yourself.**
Interviewees often have difficulty with this question because it is so broad. Remember that the interviewer’s primary motive is to get to know you professionally, rather than personally. Choose a few aspects about yourself that are particularly relevant to your professional experience and your career goals. Wrap up your answer by bringing up your desire to be a part of the company. If you have a solid response prepared for this question, it can lead your conversation in a direction that allows you to elaborate on your qualifications.

**Top Reasons People Don't Get Hired**

- Poor personal appearance
- Over-aggressiveness
- Inability to express information clearly
- Lack of interest and enthusiasm
- Lack of planning for career-- no purpose or goal
- Nervousness, lack of confidence and poise
- Overemphasis on money
- Unwillingness to start at the bottom
- Lack of tact and courtesy
- Lack of maturity
- Negative attitude about past employers
- No genuine interest in the employer or job
- No eye contact with the interviewer
- Incomplete or sloppy application form
- No sense of humor
- Arriving late for the interview
- Failure to express appreciation for interviewer's time
- Failure to ask questions about the job
- Vague responses given to questions
- No follow-up with thank you note or phone call