



The Career Center

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Top 10 Problems of Job Seekers

Most job seekers run into problems when looking for a new position. Overcoming each of these problems is a **learned skill** (and how to overcome them can be taught to you), but it helps if you understand what is happening behind the scenes. Here are ten common problems of job seekers. The following discussion presents one way to respond to each problem, although this may or may not be the correct way to respond in your particular situation.

1). *Need for your expertise does not exist in the community.* Typically people coming to a new area (especially from a larger city to a smaller city) are surprised to find that there is a limited or non-existent job market in their field. The best way to approach this problem is to look and think “outside the box.” When looking for an employer who might hire you, don’t limit yourself to the work contexts in which you have previously worked. Ask yourself, what is it that I (a) know how to do, and (b) like to do? Do not focus your job search on specific job titles you have held in the past, but on functional strengths and expertise you have developed. Then turn to the Yellow Pages Index in the phone book and check off those fields of interest where your skills might be valuable. The Index lists the page numbers in the Yellow Pages where those companies can be found.

2). *There are always more qualified candidates applying.* Many dual career couples land a job for one spouse and then move to Greenville without a job for the second spouse, expecting that in a reasonable amount of time the unemployed spouse will find work. Unfortunately, that creates an environment where there are a high number of very qualified, unemployed (or under-employed) people. This makes the positions that do open up very competitive. Job seeking in this “buyers” market increases the importance of your doing a professional job search. Everything becomes important; your resume, your cover letter, the way you conduct yourself on the phone, your preparation for the interview, the way you interview, and most important, the way you sell yourself in the interview. The most qualified person is not the one who usually gets the job, it’s the person who is most prepared and does the best job of demonstrating that he/she can do the job.

3). *Interviewers tell you that you are overqualified.* Today individuals and companies fear legal entanglements. Employers have been known to tell you are over qualified to keep from giving you the REAL reason why they won’t hire you. Human Resource personnel have also expressed concern that if they hire someone who is overqualified they will spend the time, energy and resources to train you, only to have you leave at the first better offer that comes along. I find that the best way to overcome this obstacle is to not let it occur in the first place. What reasonable company would not be willing to hire the best qualified person they can. It is your responsibility to demonstrate to them that they can not afford to not hire you. Show such a level of experience, expertise and excitement about the opportunities this job presents that they hire you. Then if a potential employer still tells you that you are over qualified, ask them to frankly share with you just what concerns they have about your ability to be a loyal, dedicated employee and do the job.

4). *You suspect that you are a victim of age discrimination.* Few employers will actually say you are too young or too old, because they cannot violate age discrimination laws, but often they will clue you in to their concerns by using phrases like, “We are looking for someone with a great deal of maturity for this position” (they think you are too young) or “Usually we hire someone for this position with a high energy level” (they think you are too old). The key to overcoming concerns about age is to be prepared with stories about difficult problems you faced or challenges you met that demonstrate the qualities they say they are looking for, followed by statements

to the effect that you have always been a hard working dedicated employee with a high energy level who can get the job done.

5). *You have sent out many resumes and applications but no one has called you back.* I'm sorry to be the one to tell you, but the hiring process doesn't work like that anymore. Twenty years ago it was a seller's market. Employers were looking for anyone with potential and the necessary skills. In today's job market, employers are looking for very specific qualifications and 80% of the good jobs nationwide are filled before they are ever advertised. Don't waste your money putting an ad in the paper for someone "seeking employment." It is your responsibility to identify what companies interest you; don't wait for someone to come to you. Don't expect that a generalized chronological resume sent out in a mass mailing will work. This is a market based economy and that includes the job market. Most companies who appear to take anyone with any background, from any field, are straight commission sales jobs with a tremendously high burnout rate that you wouldn't want in the first place.

6). *You have trouble picking up the phone and making the job search calls.* Most people feel uncomfortable admitting that they don't like making job search calls, because deep down inside they are afraid of being rejected. You can't help but think that since you talk on the phone practically every day of your life, it should not be so difficult to get on the phone and call someone about a job. The psychology of it though, is that we want everyone to like us. Calling employers about positions requires you to take the almost certain risk that many of the employers you talk to won't want to talk to you. It makes you feel bad about yourself. You say to yourself, "What's wrong with me, I can do that job." In most cases however, there are other variables involved you don't know about that cause them not to make you an offer. The key to successful phone contacts is preparation; anticipating what they will ask you and what may go wrong. Know who you need to talk to, learn how to get through the barriers to that person, have a pre-planned script covering what to say, and practice the call by speaking your script into a tape recorder and reviewing it.

7). *You are trying to get into a new career.* In a buyers market like Greenville, why would anyone hire you to do something you have never done before, when qualified, experienced candidates are also available? Well, they wouldn't. The key to overcoming this problem is to stop getting into a discussion with a potential employer about what you haven't done. Instead prepare anecdotes describing what you have done that relate to the positions you're after. Don't admit to yourself or to the employer that you are not qualified, sell your **potential**. Learn how to sell yourself for jobs in this field.

8). *You have been getting phone interviews but no face-to-face interviews.* If employers are calling you but not inviting you to a face-to-face interview, you have one of three problems. 1) Your marketing materials are too vague and do not "sell" you well enough, 2) You have not researched the company well enough to ask poignant questions in your phone call to get them interested in you, 3) You are saying the wrong things, really putting your foot in your mouth and turning them off. Try tape recording the next call you get. Set a tape recorder next to the phone and the next time a prospective employer calls, say "just one second," turn on the recorder and tape the whole conversation. If it sounds all right to you, let someone whose opinion you respect listen to the tape.

9). *You are getting interviews but no offers.* A really top notch job seeker researches the company, the role within the company of the person interviewing you and prepares a list of open ended, problem-focused questions that will turn the interview from a "cross examination of you on the witness stand" into a discussion between two peers about the needs of the company and how you can best help them meet the challenges they are facing. Interviewing is a learned skill: it takes research, preparation (prepare answers to those questions you know they are likely to ask you), and practice (try video taping a mock job interview with your spouse or friend). The most consistent problem however, is that you are not making an ally of the interviewer. People tend to hire people they like, who are like them. You must look for opportunities to develop a relationship with the interviewer through the interview process.

10). *You are receiving offers but they don't pay enough.* You may need help with specific aspects of the hiring process, for example, salary negotiations or employment contracts, but if you have researched the pay scales for salaries in your field in Greenville and you are consistently receiving initial offers below that average, you are doing something wrong. If your standard of living is realistic for the positions you are applying for and employers are “low balling” you, it generally means that you are not doing an effective job at making them want you. Think about the employer’s motivation. Why does this opening exist? What “problem” do they want fixed? What are the motivating issues that won’t be solved by themselves? What can you do that will make a difference? If you can’t answer these questions, you are not learning enough information to be addressing their perceived needs, hence they are only considering you as a “stop-gap” measure and they are not convinced you are the ideal candidate for the position.