

HEADHUNTER ADVICE

42 Tips to Navigate Your Career



By Tim Wielinski

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Introduction

Over the past 25 years of working with thousands of professionals and hiring managers, I've observed the actions professionals take to advance their careers and succeed. I've also paid attention to what sets them back. This information can help professionals at all levels take their careers to new heights.

In this book, I've compiled the lessons learned into 42 actionable tips that all professionals can use to advance their chosen careers. Even if you're a seasoned professional, you may benefit from a new perspective on hiring dynamics and career development.

Use these tips to transform yourself into a more competitive candidate, better prepared to meet the challenges of today's fast-moving business climate!



Tim Wielinski
Founder and president,
Horizon Search, Inc.

Career Choices and Advice

Five Reasons Not to Tell Your Company that You're Looking

Should you notify your employer that you're looking for a new job? With very few exceptions, no. Here are five reasons not to:

1. When your employer knows that you're looking for a better opportunity, relationships can change immediately. No new assignments will come your way. Coworkers may distance themselves.
2. Your employer may decide to end the relationship before you do. If you announce that you're looking, have a box ready to pack your personal belongings in. It may be your last day.
3. Even if your boss politely thanks you for the "heads up," they will start looking for someone else to do your job.
4. While you may have leverage today, there's no guarantee you'll find anything better...nor even as good. If you announce your intention to leave and fail to find new work, you may find yourself in a precarious situation.
5. Although you're trying to maintain control of your future, by cluing in the company, there's a good chance you're putting your future – and source of income – in their hands.

Just as you wouldn't tell your partner in a personal relationship that you're looking for something better, don't tell your employer.



Is Working from Home Right for You?

Working from home, at least part-time, is being increasingly accepted. It is a great option for many companies and employees. It saves on office space and other overhead costs, eliminates commutes, and gives workers more time with their families, among other benefits.



But, for professionals interested in advancing their careers, **it can limit promotion opportunities:**

- Video calls and meetings take time to schedule and can reduce productivity. A quick exchange with a coworker or manager as you pass their desk is fast and probably more frequent.
- Your absence in the office makes you invisible. As a “virtual” member of the team, you may lose the personal connection with coworkers.
- Situations that come up often require a fast response. If you aren’t immediately available, you will be limited in your ability to make important contributions in crunch time.
- On-site employees may have an advantage when pursuing promotions. It is best to be visible on a daily basis to the parties that decide who gets promoted.

There’s no doubt that the work environment has changed. Working remotely may be the perfect arrangement for you, but before you make a career decision about remote work, be sure you understand how it might affect your long-term goals.

Five Ways to Enhance Your Job Search

Be reachable. One hiring professional may prefer email. Another may want to call you on the phone. Include all – and I mean *all* – of your contact information on your resume: cell phone number, email address, LinkedIn profile address, and physical address.

Check your email spam folder to be sure messages aren't getting diverted. Mark email addresses of the companies you're applying to as preferred senders. Check your email and voicemail throughout the day, every day.



Be realistic. Understand the job market. If you're currently unemployed, you may discover that you don't have very much leverage to boost your salary above what it was at your last job.

Be aggressive. Pursue positions even when you feel you may not be ideal for them. There's no harm in exploring and you may uncover other opportunities along the way. No opportunity is ever the "perfect" fit.

Be open to moving. There's a whole world beyond your city limits and maybe that's where the best opportunities are found.

Be open-minded. Maybe landing a traditional, full-time position with another company isn't in the cards for you. Consider options such as contracting, temp-to-perm, and contract-to-perm.

Integrate these five fundamentals and you'll increase your ability to advance your professional life.

Underpaid?

Do you feel like you're underpaid?

You aren't alone; it's common. But understand: *You're earning exactly what your company thinks you're worth.*

If you suspect your employer is wrong, ask for a raise. That will clarify your standing and hopefully land you a salary increase.

It's a good idea to keep tabs on the market to make sure your salary is competitive. If your earnings lag too far behind, prospective employers will suspect it's due to under-performance.

If your request for a raise is declined, it may be time to explore new job options. Offers you receive will likely reflect the current market. Sometimes it's a reality check when offers are similar to your current salary!

Finally, don't set your expectations too high. A salary hike of 5-15 percent is average. There are exceptions, but careers tend to advance in increments, not in big steps.

It's fine to shoot for the stars, but don't damage your career by holding out for a pie-in-the-sky salary increase.



No Place Like Home

Smart professionals understand that career advancement needs to be managed and not left to chance. Talented individuals occasionally get curious about what other options might be available to them.

If that's you, take an inventory of your current situation. Make it as comprehensive as possible. Here are some questions to consider before you start making calls and sending out your resume:

- What do you like about your current job? Not like?
- What would types of opportunities interest you?
- What would need to be different, to motivate you to make a change?



Sometimes the motivation to move is for financial or personal reasons; e.g., you may want to be closer to family members who live across the country, or to a warmer climate.

If it's a money issue, approach management and ask for a raise. If it's about the location or a flexible schedule, request telecommuting. Try it out on a trial basis. The market is always tight for top talent. You may discover that your company is very willing to meet your salary requirements or give you the flexibility you need.

I've found that many professionals are often surprised when they realize that the opportunity they're looking for is located right where they are.

Sometimes there's no place like home.

Why You Must Rethink Job Security

For better or for worse, the days of signing on with a big company and enjoying long-term or lifetime employment are gone.

Here's a fact: According to a Conference Board study, the average lifespan of an S&P 500 company was 75 years back in the 1920s. It had fallen to 27 years in the 1970s. Now it's down to 15 years!

Most people equate the stability in their lives to the safety of their jobs. That safety is gone. We need to think of stability from a different perspective:



The only security you have is in your skills, and your ability to market yourself and your skills effectively.

There is no crystal ball that will tell you how well your current employer will be doing two years from now. Here's what you can do to "stabilize" your career:

- Study successful people. Learn what they have done and follow suit.
- Study those whose careers have floundered. Find out why and avoid those pitfalls.
- Stay current with technology.
- Be willing to move for a new job. Mobility is key today.
- Advance your professional education. **Never stop learning.**
- Understand the current problem sets companies are facing and be able to provide the solutions.
- Find a niche that combines your talents and your interests.
- **Become an expert** in your field.
- Be flexible. The business climate changes rapidly today. If you're inflexible, you'll be left behind.

Although you can't depend on a never-ending career at a major company today, remember that you still can rely on yourself. You just need to be smart and make an effort.

Home Ownership and Careers

Your dream house can be a career anchor.

I'm not waving anyone off from buying a home, but I am suggesting that you look at your priorities so you can properly balance home and location desires with your career goals.

Here are some questions to consider:

Are you the “settling down” type? If you are, this can close some doors on your career. However, that's a trade-off many are willing to make. That's fine because ultimately, it's your happiness and satisfaction with your life that matters.

You may be motivated to take a job that you believe comes with a lot of security so you can put down the roots that make you comfortable. However, recent history has taught us that many jobs considered “safe,” are not. A big house payment can morph into big worries.

Are you a person with a strong career focus? If you value career over home ownership and location, renting is often your better choice. It gives you the flexibility and mobility you need to move to your ideal career opportunities.

Have you found “heaven on earth” and need to live there? Perhaps you want to be near the mountains or the ocean. Maybe living in the same town as your family is your priority. In cases like these, you need to strategize how you can maintain some flexibility.

Your specific career path might not be heavily in demand in your desired location. Give thought to how you can apply your experience and expertise to other industries, or even change career paths – one that allows for easier transitions.

Other options include starting your own business, contracting, consulting, or finding an employer willing to allow you to telecommute. Although we're reading a lot about remote employees today, most companies would still prefer to have their team on site.

These situations make a professional consider some deeply personal and foundational questions about his or herself. And for many, there are family issues as well. My advice is to consider them early on, so you're prepared to steer your career in ways that reach your ultimate goals in life.



Six Avoidable Hurdles

Too many professionals create unnecessary challenges by making bad career decisions.

Had they seen the bigger picture, many would have avoided walking down the wrong path. Take a look at this list of six avoidable hurdles so you can steer clear of them and make the right decisions to keep your career headed onward and upward.



Quitting job without having another position lined up. Marketing yourself to employers, after having quit a job with nothing else lined up, can be very challenging. At the very least there will be suspicions. Are you the kind of person who can't resolve problems? Will you jump ship when the going gets tough? Even if those aren't accurate, the assumptions will cast a shadow over you.

Solution: *Tough it out. Don't quit unless you have something else lined up.*

Getting laid off, then taking time off. Idle time is not the jobseeker's friend. Companies will assume that you've been looking and have been turned down by other companies. Or, they might think you don't need to work.

Solution: *Start looking for your next job the same day you get laid off.*

Having multiple short-term jobs on your resume. Companies don't want to invest in someone they suspect may leave in a year.

Solution: *Don't job hop. If you need variety, consider working as a contract employee.*

Refusing to relocate. If local demand for your skills has dried up, you will either be stuck in your job, or face long periods of underemployment.

Solution: *Structure your life so that you can relocate if needed. Or try to break into the very competitive telecommuting world.*

Topping out in your field. If you've worked your way up to a level such as Senior Director or Vice President, your options for advancement may be few.

Solution: *Plan for that eventuality and be ready to use your experience to start your own company.*

Accepting a counteroffer. When you accept a counteroffer with a company, it's usually a short-term fix...for the company. When they find a replacement for you, you'll be shown the door.

Solution: *Once you've committed to another company, honor that commitment. If the counteroffer was sincere, they'll welcome you back in the future.*

Of course, there are exceptions, but the business world is not always fair, so be aware of these hurdles and avoid them when you can.

Think about Tomorrow when Signing a Lease Today

When you sign a lease, you need to consider your future and understand that a long-term lease can become an anchor on your career.

If you find yourself in that situation, don't be afraid to ask your landlord if you can opt-out. At worst, they'll say no. But frankly, your landlord doesn't care who is renting the space as long as *someone* is, so you could put these ideas on the table:

Propose a 90-day notice. That should give your landlord enough time to find a new tenant.

Ask for the option to sublet your space. This is especially attractive if you have someone in mind who could use the space. However, it puts the onus on you to find a tenant and ultimately, you're still responsible for the lease or damage done to the property.

Keep these outs in mind whenever you're negotiating a *new* lease as well. The landlord might agree, especially if you commit to a higher rent or longer rental term.

In the excitement of hunting for and moving into a new location – along with the anticipation of entering a new stage of your career – it's easy to overlook some decisions that can have long-term implications.

Take a thoughtful approach when negotiating a new lease so you have better options if you need to make changes in the future.



When You're Between Jobs

Ambition Impresses

I unexpectedly lost my job several years ago. I was earning a high income in IT before my employer decided to outsource my position. Overnight, I went from a six-figure income to unemployed with little savings and a small severance package.

My first day of unemployment found me running errands for the family. While I was in and out of local stores, I decided to put in an application for a job with an electronics retailer even though it wasn't in my field and the pay was low. I immediately landed the job and started working.



I hadn't given up on my IT job search, but I didn't want to remain idle. I reached out to my friends and sent out some resumes. A few days passed and I got a call to interview for an IT job. I landed the job, gave my notice at the store, and was back in IT after only a two-week absence.

It seemed odd that I got the job since I didn't have all of the required technical experience. I asked my new boss about it. Why did he hire me?

He said that he was confident that I could pick up on the technology but more importantly, I didn't sit around too proud to take a retail job after I had lost my IT position. (I did put the retail job on my resume.)

He explained: **You can teach skills, but you can't teach work ethic.**

Five Tips to Deal with an Unexpected Layoff

I didn't expect this!

Often, professionals who lose their job have a tough time finding work. They have strong experience, knowledge, and skills, but are shocked when employers aren't knocking at their door or responding to their resumes.



There is a fundamental truth in the job market: **It's easier to find a new job when you're currently employed.** Why? Potential employers assume that your current employer has vetted you and that you're performing well.

To deal with the unexpected job loss, here are five tips:

Actively network. Get yourself recognized and respected among professionals and leaders in your industry.

Keep your resume current. You'll want to start circulating it as soon as you sense there might be changes at your company, ideally, before you get your notice.

Consider jobs that aren't the perfect fit or may even be a slight step down. Weathering a few unpleasant days in your career is better than being out of work for an extended period and watching the bills pile up.

Think about relocating. Some areas of the country outperform others in job opportunities. The more flexible you are, the more options you will have.

Explore contracting. Employers are increasingly outsourcing projects. Contracting might be the first step on a path that leads to forming your own consulting company.

Unexpected layoffs can't be avoided, but always be prepared. Have a plan in place to work through it and you'll secure your next job quickly and efficiently.

Be Open Minded when Unemployed

Unemployed and choosy are not a good mix.

If you're a professional looking for a new position, you need to weigh those two attributes very carefully as you consider prospects. Unlike fine red wines, your job skills and desirability don't improve as they spend more time "on the shelf."

A generous severance package can lull some professionals into a passive job search. Remember, the money and benefits will run out, as will your value in the job market.

If you stay out of the job market for too long, hiring managers and others will question your skills. And even worse – they will question your motivation. It's a hurdle that is wise to avoid.

Some professionals delay their job search too long and end up having to take positions in unfamiliar industries, essentially starting their careers over from scratch.

Consider opportunities even if they don't exactly match up with the ideal vision of your future. Keep an open mind and explore all of your options. As time passes, it's much more likely that your options will narrow down rather than open up.

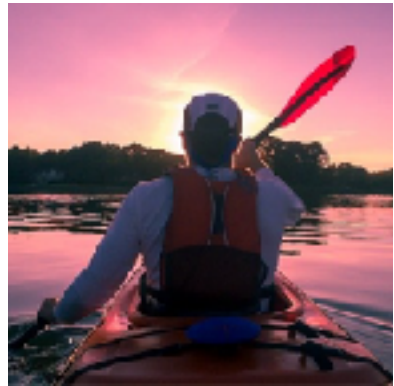
Remember, having a job that is less than ideal is far better than having to face the consequences of missed mortgage payments.



Don't Stop Rowing

If you're a job seeker or a candidate,
I have a parable for you:

You're out on the ocean enjoying a luxury cruise when suddenly the ship goes down, and you find yourself on a life raft. You take stock and see that you have provisions to last for weeks. The weather's not bad, so you decide to kick back and enjoy the solitude. You don't bother to look for land – let alone pick up the oars and start rowing. You even wave off a rescue ship that crosses your course.



It sounds crazy, right? But that's exactly the way many people deal with being laid off. Rather than "take the oars" and start actively looking for their next position, they decide to relax for a few months, to "decompress" or think about their future. Further, they dismiss out-of-hand job prospects that don't "sound perfect."

Fortunately, things turn out okay for some of these professionals...but not always. Idling away your time is risky, and here are some specific reasons why:

- Companies wonder why you haven't been able to find a job in six months.
- Your idleness screams "lazy."
- Your rationalization that you wanted to "take some time off" makes you sound unmotivated, which is the opposite of what employers want on their team.
- Eventually, you'll get desperate; not a quality that attracts employers.

Now for some encouragement. First, don't feel bad about being laid off; it happens to almost all professionals at some point in their careers. However, prospective employers will be subtly judging how you have handled your layoff. Show yourself to be a self-motivated go-getter who will prove that your previous employer made a mistake.

View your career as your business and steward it carefully. Don't "close your doors" and expect to be able to reopen in three months with any success.

Stop rewriting your resume – it will never be perfect – and get engaged. Make yourself available and if possible, be willing to relocate; that can make you desirable even if you're a little light on experience.

With the right attitude and a little time spent "rowing," your next position may be your best ever.

Laid off? Don't Let Pride Derail Your Future

One of the most distressing economic statistics from the last few years is the number of people suffering from long-term unemployment. It takes a huge toll on families, careers and self-confidence.

Having a gap in your resume doesn't merely reflect a period of great difficulty, it can have a profound impact on your ability to regain career momentum when conditions in your industry improve.

For these reasons – and more – I always advise people that if your employer is experiencing cutbacks, and offers other options that keep you employed, such as a short-term contract, **it's smart to take them**.

Eventually, you'll be in a position to get your career path headed back in the direction you desire and you'll need to impress some highly driven individuals, such as directors, VPs and CEOs. The men and women who make up these ranks of leadership sometimes can't relate to someone declining an opportunity that keeps them employed. Right or wrong – they may see it as a signal of low motivation.

No matter what situation you find yourself in life, you always want to be dealing from a position of strength. Positions of weakness must be avoided by all means possible. In today's highly competitive career environment, **being employed** is a position of strength, and should be maintained when possible.

If there are layoffs at your company, and you're offered a lifeline of continued employment, grab it. It's a compliment to the work you've done and will make your future job searches easier.



Considering New Job Opportunities

10 Reasons a Job May be Open for a Long Time

We avoid milk that's near its expiration date. We're leery of buying a house that's been on the market for months. And, we suspect something's wrong with a job that's been posted for a long time. That's often a false assumption.

There are many reasons a position may remain open:



1. It's a very tight job market. Not many professionals are "looking."
2. Filling the position may be a low priority for the company. *But, this can change quickly.*
3. It's a passive search. If the "perfect" candidate surfaces, the company will act.
4. Budget issues. *They're always fluctuating.*
5. Management turnover causes delays.
6. Internal employees fill in and get the job done.
7. Offers are turned down.
8. Compensation is below what the market is demanding. As time passes, companies often raise the level of salaries.
9. The location is unattractive to the targeted candidate market.
10. Other candidates took other offers or counteroffers.

Some of these reasons wouldn't impact you at all if you took the job, so what should you do when you're a little leery about pursuing a position that's been listed seemingly forever? **Simply ask why the job has been posted for so long.** Companies will usually tell you what the situation is and then you can evaluate it from there.

Don't reject older postings out of hand. It might be a perfect match for you. If the opportunity meets your criteria, explore it!

Instead of Waiting for the ‘Perfect’ Job, Do This

Perfect is the enemy of good.

That saying has been around since the 18th century, and its wisdom applies to job searches today: There is no perfect job.

If you’re looking for a new position and have decided not to take any concrete action until you uncover the perfect job description, you better settle in for a very long wait. And even worse, if that plum position ever appears, it’s likely that the competition will be so intense, your chances will be slim...at best.



However, I’m not writing this to discourage you; in fact I want you to be encouraged – encouraged to apply for positions where you might not check all the “requirement” boxes, but where you have most of them.

Very frequently companies will custom tailor positions for a good candidate. They may either raise or lower the level of the position to get a good person on board. Job descriptions are not set in stone.

By casting a larger net, you will expand your opportunities and gain valuable exposure to more hiring managers. In fact, those managers might have a great position for you that wasn’t even reflected in the job description you originally saw.

Assumptions Can Limit Career Options

Fear of rejection is universal, but often it's an unfounded fear because it's based on false assumptions.

For that reason, it's important not to let the fear of rejection stand in the way of furthering your career.

Here's what happens: One hears about an appealing opportunity but doubts that they would have any real chance at landing the position. They may assume that:

- They don't have enough, or too much, experience,
- The company doesn't allow remote employees,
- There's an internal candidate already slotted for the job,
- Not having every skill listed in the job description will disqualify them from consideration, or
- Previously interviewing at the company and not getting the job means that they'll get turned down again.

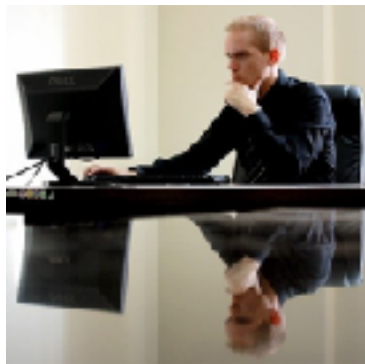
When these kinds of doubts and negativity start to trouble you, remember that you don't know the company's priorities, you don't know what options they are considering, and you don't know their decision-making process.

However, you do know one thing for certain: **If the company doesn't know you're interested, you'll never get hired.**

Your odds of success are often a lot higher than you can imagine. Hiring managers are practical, and they know that even the best candidates are seldom – if ever – perfect.

The bottom line is that when you find a job opening at a company that interests you and you have relevant experience, toss your name in the hat.

Good things can happen!



Bad Reports on Your Prospective Employer

“Oh, I wouldn’t work there! I’ve heard some bad things about that company.”

Family, friends, and colleagues seldom hesitate to offer their opinions about prospective employers, and that’s a good thing because they’re trying to be helpful. However, in the final analysis, it’s not wise to rely **solely** on what they say.

We all have different tastes and views on matters like these. I suspect you’ve worked at companies where everything was fine for you, but nonetheless there were some employees who left in a huff.

You need to find out for yourself! There’s a lot to gain, and you really have nothing to lose but a little time.

For one thing, it’s sad but true that bad news travels far and has a long shelf life. If you get to the interviewing stage of the job search at a company where you’ve received some negative reports, bring those issues up in your discussions.

The management will be glad you were open about what you’ve heard. You may discover that in the past there have been some problems but they’ve been recognized and management made the necessary changes. Frankly, that’s the kind of company you may want to work for.

Further, you might sense that what you heard just came from a former employee who wasn’t a good fit. Just as we have different tastes in restaurants, cars, and housing, not everyone shares the same opinion about career options.

Don’t let what you hear from others limit your career options. Keep an open mind!



What is the Salary Range?

Have you wondered what the salary range is for the job you've considered applying for?

There's really only one way to find out: apply, interview, and prove your worth. Show them how you can raise revenues, reduce expenses, or make their business more efficient.

There's usually no set formula for determining the salary when a company hires a new, talented professional. What the company wants to pay and what the company can pay is often different from what they will offer a specific professional.

Factors a company considers:

- Internal equity – what others in the company with similar duties, education, and experience are earning.
- The salary of the previous person who held the position.
- The priority level of filling the position.
- How motivated they are to hire you.
- Your level of enthusiasm about the opportunity.
- Competing offers, if there are any.

Your specific level of experience influences an offer greatly. For example, you may “wow” them through the interviewing process but have experience that's a little lighter than they were targeting. They'll want to hire you, but you probably won't get an offer at the top of their pay scale.

On the other hand, many professionals bring a higher level of experience and knowledge to the table, and companies end up raising the level of the position.

So, if you really want to find out what a position pays, apply for it and demonstrate your value.



Resumes and References

Six Reasons to List Your Address

A current trend is to omit addresses on resumes. Don't make this mistake.

If you want to work remotely, it may seem like a minor point, but hiring managers want to know where you live. They want to know:

- The length of your commute (a shorter commute might give you an edge),
- How far you are from an airport,
- The time zone difference,
- If their company is registered with the state you live in,
- If it would be convenient for you to travel to company headquarters, or
- How close you are to their client base.



Put your location on your resume – not the location of your current employer. Social media profiles are often out of date, so they won't rely on that information. If you're concerned about security, simply list your city and state.

Four Tips for Choosing Your References

If it's important to choose your friends wisely, it's even more important that you choose your references wisely!

Here are four crucial tips for selecting your references:

- **Try to include professionals who have supervised you.** Companies want to connect with the people you worked for. Senior level colleagues and clients will also score points for you.
- **Choose talkers.** You want references who your prospective employer can engage. Friends who are short on words and don't elaborate about your attributes won't serve you well.
- **Provide all contact information for your references.** Include email addresses, home phone, office phone, and cell phone. Make it easy for the reference checker.
- **Choose people who are responsive.** Tactfully let them know that their prompt response to reference checkers would be helpful and greatly appreciated. Be aware that most companies won't extend or confirm an offer to you until reference checks are completed.



Letters of Reference

We live in an age of reliance on personal recommendations. Platforms such as Yelp, Amazon reviews, and Facebook “likes,” play huge roles in shaping our decisions.

This flows over into employment and puts a premium on letters of reference. They can have a great impact on your job search. I advise professionals who have been laid off to proactively get letters of reference from former supervisors and include them with their resumes.



Letters of reference have these advantages:

- They may result in immediate interviews.
- They can remove the discomfort that often accompanies initial conversations with potential employers about your separation from past employers.
- They will speed up the review of your application by streamlining your reference checks.
- You're making life easier on whoever checks your references. Letters of reference provide the information they need, saving them time and preventing frustrating rounds of phone tag.
- Asking in advance for letters of recommendation is also a courtesy your references will appreciate. It gives them time to consider what they would like to say. The letter will often replace the need for them to have conversations with multiple companies.

Tip: *Help your references. Compile a list of your accomplishments and offer a general template so your references can easily write the letter and hit all the points you believe are important to future employers.*

Resume Tips

The first step in virtually every job search is creating or updating your resume. You don't need to hire a pro to do it for you; just follow these easy tips:



- Use one of the excellent templates MS Word provides, but make sure it's ordered chronologically, not by function. Be sure to copy and paste the resume into a new Word document – don't try editing the template itself, it's too fussy.
- Include your full contact information: Name, address, personal email, and cellphone number. If you prefer not to give your street address, be sure to at least list your city and state.
- Use bullet points, they look good and greatly enhance readability.
- List your educational background toward the top.
- When you get into your work experience, think of the four W's: Who did/do you work for? Where? When? What did you do or what are you currently doing?
- Include any publications and presentations.
- List your memberships in professional organizations.
- When you think you have everything, go check your LinkedIn profile and make sure it aligns with your resume.
- Send your resume electronically in either .pdf or .doc file format.

Finally, you may have once heard somebody proclaim that resumes should be "one page maximum." Not true. Make it as long as it needs to be...and don't take career advice from anyone who tells you otherwise.

Interviewing

Say 'Yes' to the Interview

Remember the excitement of first dates, especially the ones that led to lasting relationships?

The interviewing process is a lot like dating. Most first dates are relatively unplanned. You may try to get a few tips about the person you're dating – a little "inside information" – but for the most part, you can't do a lot of planning because the person you're meeting is fairly unknown to you.



Further, many of those successful first dates happen merely because the opportunity was suddenly there for you. When the stars align just right, you have to act!

You probably had a few butterflies in your stomach and were uncertain how things would go. But something inside you advised, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

So, you went on a date and discovered more about the other person. One thing led to another, and eventually, you realized that it was a relationship worth pursuing, all because you gave it a chance in the beginning.

When you accept the first date, you open yourself up to wonderful possibilities. If you shy away from it, you may experience regrets later.

With these thoughts, keep regrets off the table. Accept interviews when a company invites you. Good things can happen.

Don't Send Up Red Flags

There's never a "sure thing" when interviewing. This isn't a lesson you want to learn the hard way.

A professional had received an offer letter after a series of phone interviews. Relocating was required so a final trip was made to the headquarters to see the company in person.

It was discovered that the department was in transition. There was a change in supervisors. Without realizing it the casual, wrap-it-up conversation, was, in fact, an additional screening interview.

There were common questions about standard working conditions and expectations, such as the start date, working hours, and telecommuting options. However, the candidate asked a few too many questions. Hesitancy was sensed by the company. Too much hesitancy. This spooked the company and they **rescinded the offer!**

The lessons are:

- The company is always evaluating you. They worry about making a hiring mistake.
- Never treat additional interviews as a mere formality.

Remember, from a company's perspective **there's no risk in not hiring you**. Get concerns clarified early on. Start thinking ahead in the event the company extends an offer. It's okay to express your questions and concerns but if you hesitate too much at the tail end of the recruitment process, red flags may go up in the minds of those responsible for bringing you on board. **Companies hire people who are excited about their opportunities.**



Seven Ways to Rise Above the Competition

To land the position you've been targeting, it's important to differentiate yourself from your competitors. Here are seven strategies to help you rise above the competition and maintain a positive image in the eyes of hiring managers:



- **Be persistent without being a pest.** Check back with companies to let them know that you're still available and interested, but keep it a "light touch." Offer more information about yourself, but in general, don't pressure them for feedback and timelines. If they don't want to share that information, you won't get a response.
- **Show enthusiasm.** Keep communication positive and upbeat. Some professionals play hard-to-get, thinking that it will up their desirability. It doesn't; it merely comes across as arrogant.
- **Be proactive.** Make your case. If you have letters of recommendation, share them.
- **Be careful about connecting on social media.** While many hiring managers appreciate the contact, some will see a LinkedIn connection request as presumptive. Tread carefully. When in doubt, let them initiate the connection.
- **Be responsive and available.** With cell phones, emails, and text messaging, every mode of communication today is instant. Delaying your response more than 24 hours may paint you as inattentive or disinterested.
- **Check back after some time has passed.** Even if it's been a few months don't shy away from reaching out again to the company. Sometimes positions get put on the back burner for a while. Alternatively, their new hire may not be working out, or new opportunities may have opened up.
- **Consider a contracting option.** A contracting relationship can be very attractive to a company. It often shortens the interviewing process and gives you the opportunity to prove yourself on the job.

Salary Discussions

Everyone understands that salary is one of your important considerations when you've put your name in for a new position. However, if you make it an issue during the interviewing process, you may ruin your chances.



Let's look at it from the company's point of view. When they start interviewing, they're getting a feel for their options. They often have a target salary range in mind, but most give themselves some flexibility to accommodate the exceptional candidate.

Often, it's okay to discuss general ranges, but by asking about salary specifics when interviewing, you're creating an extra hurdle they need to clear. Your competitors for the position may not be forcing their hand as you are. You don't want to be the candidate seen as difficult to deal with.

You may be thinking, *"Why waste my time in the first place if the salary isn't right?"*

That's a good question, but understand that both you and the company are getting to know each other during this process. When they find a highly desirable candidate – maybe you – they often raise the salary and may even elevate the job title.

Here's how to approach the situation:

- First, become the #1 candidate they want to hire.
- Show how exceptional you are.
- Communicate your skills and abilities.
- Demonstrate how you will improve their company.

From many years of experience, I can tell you that **companies exceed their targeted salary ranges all the time**. When they decide they want to hire you, they ask themselves, "What do we have to do to bring this person on board?"

Patience Can Pay Off

Let's face it; we live in a time when life moves quickly. We eat fast food, receive express packages, and pay people instantly with cellphone apps.

Patience is an endangered species.

However, we can't carry this attitude of immediate satisfaction over to our job searches.

If you submit your resume to a company and it seems to you that you're ideal for the position, it's tempting to think they'll be calling you at any moment. You'll wait in eager anticipation.



The hiring process isn't just about "the right fit," it's also about timing. And, if your phone doesn't ring right after you assume they've received your resume, don't conclude that you've been rejected.

There are a variety of reasons the company's timing may not be aligned with your expectations:

- Much is happening behind the scenes. Managers are also navigating conflicting priorities, budgetary issues, internal politics, and more.
- Companies are always dealing with turnover. They may launch a casual search today that becomes urgent a little further down the road.
- Recruiting is more of a roller coaster ride than a drag race. Typically, many individuals are involved who can influence hiring. There are always unexpected twists and turns along the way.

Finally, while it's impossible not to feel some disappointment if a new position doesn't materialize on your timetable, don't be discouraged. Sometimes "not interested" is actually "not interested **now**."

Circumstances within companies change, and your resume could suddenly be a top priority.

Many professionals have been pleasantly surprised to get offered an excellent position with a company months after they initially submitted their resume.

It can happen to you, too.

Don't be a Mystery

Some people, when they feel like they're under the microscope during a job interview, get hesitant about opening up and giving their possible future employer information about their background and what their motivations are.

Believe me, when the interviews are over, you don't want anyone to feel that you're still something of a mystery. If you do, you might get the "difficult" label – and difficult people don't get offers.

Being less than open can have consequences. For example, if you don't share information about what your targeted compensation is, don't be surprised if the company comes to you with an offer that's less than what you wanted. If that happens, you'll find yourself having an awkward conversation today that would have been prevented by a casual conversation several days earlier.

Be honest and open with your prospective employer:

- Explain your interests, goals, and motivations.
- Share why you're interested in the company.
- Tell them why you're interested in the position.
- Discuss why you're interested in the city if relocation is required.

The word "interview" comes from a French word that means "see each other." That gets to the purpose of a job interview. Each side of a job interview is trying to see if the fit is right. Think of it like dating: the other party won't get serious if you refuse to share your thoughts!



Requirements are Flexible

Requirements listed on job descriptions are often not requirements.

Job postings list desired/required skills and experience. Sometimes they're wish lists. There's often flexibility. So, if the company, product, location, and general outline of the position seem to be a fit, explore it!

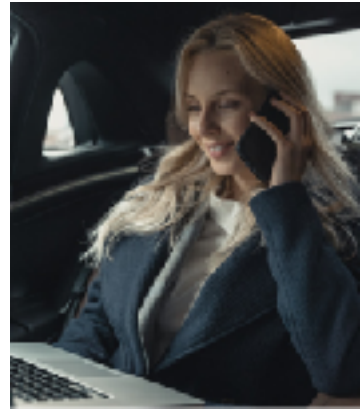
Many professionals find that:

- Companies that presumably don't allow telecommuting or flexible hours will make exceptions...for the right person.
- When job descriptions say five years of experience is required, and you have four, there's a good chance you'll get consideration.
- Stated salary ranges are often surpassed for the right person.
- Various skill "requirements" get waived for select candidates.

Remember, people are always coming and going at companies. Projects are changing and evolving. So, as the company is recruiting for a particular position, their needs may change.

Companies hire people they like. Even if you're not an exact match for the written requirements, go ahead and interview – you have nothing to lose and a lot to gain.

Prove your value and you'll get hired!



Option to Telecommute?

Current headlines have stories about the “gig economy,” “virtual teams,” “telecommuting,” and other modern working arrangements. Telecommuting is the issue most discussed with the professionals I work with.



Even though this is a hot topic in the news, it's difficult to predict the policies and attitudes about telecommuting at individual companies. In most cases, there's some uncertainty about the arrangement and how it may work out. If you ask if there's an option to telecommute, you probably won't get a definitive answer. It depends on the company's options, and you'll likely only get an answer after you've gone through their vetting process.

When you get to that point, both you and the company can properly discuss a telecommuting arrangement as well as issues such as compensation, vacation time, and travel expectations.

Remember that companies need to weigh your wants and needs versus what the rest of the company requires. They may be able to tailor a position to suit you, but there needs to be a certain level of balance.

A company may not usually allow telecommuting, but they may allow it for you after you've proven to them that there's a high probability that it will work out. It's important to be open about your goals and intentions, and understand that although it's not a perfect system, an agreeable solution or compromise is often worked out for both parties.

Interview with Executives? Here's How to Prepare

If you're like most of us, you weren't thrilled when your teachers gave you homework assignments. However, candidates interviewing with executives for a new position should be eager to do their homework. Taking the time to do your research not only shows your interest in the company, it demonstrates your thoroughness and allows you to converse on a higher level than other candidates.



- Research the internet for information on the company and the executives you'll be interviewing with.
- Look for articles they've written and read them. This may help you get a good perspective on their vision for the company as well as his or her management style, and perhaps even a glimpse into what they look for in professionals.

You probably know that hiring managers will be examining your presence in social media. Do your research too. See what the company and the executives are doing on the various social media platforms. In the business world, LinkedIn and Twitter are probably the two most important social media sites.

When you're sitting across from the CEO, be engaging and let them know that leadership is important to you. Ask questions, but stay centered on topics that are related to the business or profession. Ask about their goals and their journey to being a CEO. You want to show genuine interest without fawning.

Of course, at the end of the day, the company is looking for talent. Find opportunities within your conversation to discuss some of your professional accomplishments. Be proud of what you have done without boasting.

And one final tip: **Ask for the job!** If you've done your homework, there's a great chance you'll get the answer you were hoping to hear.

Relax During Your Interview

Many people get very nervous about interviews, feeling the need to give a strong performance. The reality is, while you're probably very good at your job, you're not a "performer." You're a professional, not a **professional interviewer**.

If you have the right mindset before an interview, you'll find it's easier to relax.



- If you're currently employed, remember that you're really interviewing to see if it would be a **better** opportunity. You're exploring a career **option**. View the session as a meeting between two professionals to determine if there's a match; to see if the relationship would be mutually beneficial.
- If you're not employed, much of the same advice applies, but also keep in mind that you will have other interviews. Be confident that you will find the right position. Today's interview is an option that may or may not work out for you.
- It's okay to interview for a position that ultimately turns out not to be the right fit. Remember, companies usually hire just one person for the job.

To help maintain a positive and constructive attitude, always take something away from an interview, such as a new contact for your network, industry knowledge, or even feedback about yourself.

Finally, remember that nothing is a waste of time. Life and careers are journeys of small steps and sometimes you have to take several of those small steps to see the direction your journey is headed.

Keep Your Name Off the B-list

Everyone who has played sports knows what it means to be assigned to the “B-team.”

What you may not know is that hiring managers have a “B-list” of candidates when they’re working to fill a position, and to let you in on a secret: B-list candidates almost never get hired.

Here’s one trait that will help keep your name off the B-list: **Enthusiasm**.

If you come off as aloof, hard-to-get, or simply “ho-hum” about the opportunity, you won’t make the A-list. Further, the level of your enthusiasm will be judged throughout the process, including how quickly you respond to messages.

You might have better skills than anyone else up for the job, but the wrong attitude will kill your chances. Skills and knowledge can be taught, but you can’t teach desire.

You may discover that the job you’re interviewing for is a little less exciting than you had hoped. That happens, but it’s still critical to maintain your enthusiasm and make a great impression, because even if the first position doesn’t work out, there are often “**hidden opportunities**” out there for you.

Not all jobs are posted, and quite often, hiring managers know that an important position will be opening up soon. Convey a positive attitude today that might increase your chances for a great career move tomorrow.

Always present your best self. You have nothing to lose, and potentially, a lot to gain.



Thank-You Email

It's important to follow up on an interview with a quick thank-you email.

I recommend an email rather than mailing a card or letter. Speed matters. Snail mail can take days to reach your contact, assuming the person is even in the office.

4 quick tips:

1. Say thanks. Express continuing interest in the opportunity.
2. Keep it short. You want to connect to keep yourself top of mind.
3. Open the door for additional questions that the interviewer may not have asked yet.
4. Don't press for a timeline, their decision, or feedback. That can put them in an awkward position. If they're unsure of what to say, they may not respond at all.

It's always great to keep the channels of communication open, and a simple, short, thank-you email after an interview is a courteous and natural communication between you and your prospective company.



Interviewing Tips

Interviews today can take many forms. Here are some tips that apply to virtually any interview format followed by some specific pointers if you're interviewing over the phone or via a video conference.



- **Relax.** You're probably employed and only interested in a better opportunity. The interview is a meeting between two professionals to see if there is a match. Just be yourself.
- **Interviewing stress.** It's okay to be a little nervous; it's very normal. Companies expect it to a degree. Most people don't interview very often over the course of their career.
- **Learn more** about the challenges they're facing and how you can help. If there's mutual interest, great! If there's not, move on to other opportunities.
- **Research executives** you're scheduled to meet (Google, LinkedIn). Review their backgrounds. It shows that you care and creates a bond. Ask about *their* goals.
- **Be enthusiastic and inquisitive.** Ask questions about what the company is doing. Don't play "hard to get." It comes across as being arrogant and aloof. Companies hire people who are interested in the position.
- **Respond to messages within 24 hours** from both the company and the recruiter in a prompt, timely manner. Delays leave negative impressions, and companies start to question your interest. You may *be* interested, but if you don't *act* interested, companies won't pursue you.
- **Do not ask about benefits and salary!** The focus of the interview should be about whether or not the position and company are a good fit.
- **Highlight areas of your background** that are a good fit with the opening. Make sure that there is full understanding about your skills, experience, and abilities.

- **Keep the door open.** Leave a good impression. Even if you're not a good fit for this position, the company may consider you for other opportunities.
- **Your resume and education.** Don't make the assumption that your resume or education will speak for itself. Be prepared to demonstrate your abilities and explain why you're a good fit.
- **Location concerns.** If you have concerns about the location, such as the cost of living or crime, talk about them. Companies in San Francisco know that it's expensive, and they expect that it will be a concern, so don't hesitate to bring it up.
- **Location interests.** If you have a personal interest in the location, let the company know, and let them know why. They're more likely to hire you if they know you have personal reasons to stay in the area.
- **Thank-you note.** After the interview, send a thank-you email. Email is the best option because it's fast and allows for quick, direct feedback.
- **Handling awkward issues.** At some point in the interviewing process, you will likely have questions that you will want answers to, but won't be comfortable in asking. Contact your recruiter to get an opinion on how to best handle them.
- **When in doubt, use the phone.** Email is a great tool for transferring information and data. But, it doesn't convey emotion and tone very well. One wrong word can create an unintended message. If you are writing a long email and can't find the right words, use the phone.
- **Don't inquire about severance pay!** Yes, it's happened.
- **If flying,** take a carry-on bag for your interview clothing and any other essentials.
- **Review your LinkedIn profile.** Update, and make sure that employment, titles and duties accurately reflect your resume. Discrepancies can raise red flags.
- **Review social media profiles** and remove anything that might be viewed as inappropriate.
- **Get contact information.** At the end of the conversation, make sure that you have contact information for the people you've talked with.

Phone Interview Tips

- **Be in a quiet environment** with no distractions.
- **If the company doesn't call as scheduled**, and 10-15 minutes have gone by, initiate the call on your own. Often, they're trying to connect, but the call isn't going through. Leave a message or reschedule if necessary.
- **The goal of the phone interview** is to secure an on-site interview. The company wants to make sure that you understand the basics of the position, that you will relocate if necessary, and that you're available to start shortly.
- **Sound good on the phone.** Be aware of the quality of your voice on the phone. Speak directly into the receiver. Don't use a speaker phone. Ask the other person about the sound quality. If it's not good, it will be a distraction.
- **Have your resume or vita in front of you.** Review it. Others in the meeting will have it in front of them and will be basing some of their questions on it.
- **Write down questions** you would like to discuss before the phone interview. Focus your questions on the job and the opportunity.



Video Conference Tips

- **Dress professionally.**
- **Close other computer programs** that may be taking up memory and impair performance.
- **Have phone numbers nearby** in case you lose the connection, or it starts to freeze too often.
- **Have a good background.** Remove anything that might be inappropriate or distracting.
- **Get balanced lighting.** If there's a bright light behind you, you'll look too dark.
- **Test video chat** a couple of times with others to make sure that the sound and picture are good.
- **Look at the screen.** It feels most natural and makes the best impression.
- **Have your notes at eye level** so that you're not required to look down.
- **Be aware** that the party you're talking with may be looking around at others during the video conference.



Offer Stage

Low Salary Offers

During your career, you may find yourself out of work but with an offer in hand that is less than what you were previously earning.

If this happens, take a deep breath and don't act on emotions. Consider the positives. An offer is a good thing! The company likes you, believes you're a fit for their culture, and is confident that you'll do a good job. Also, understand that **what your previous employer paid is often irrelevant to the company courting you.** They likely have many reasons for calculating the offer that they extended.



Assuming that it's a job you want, consider the situation:

- Will your cost of living be going up or down?
- Will the difference in pay impact your lifestyle?
- What are your other options? Is another offer imminent?
- Will the new position move your career forward or at least be a lateral?
- What are the risks if you turn down the offer? Remember, your market value tends to decrease as unemployment time is extended.

Any salary is better than \$0. In how it may impact your lifestyle, a slightly lower salary often makes very little difference. \$1,000 over the course of a year is approximately 50 cents per hour.

If you feel strongly about needing a higher salary to accept, present your case to the company. Show them your value. But remember, sometimes during a career, a degree of pragmatism is required to stay afloat.

Don't Turn Down the Offer – Try this Instead

You've received an offer for a position that seems very desirable. You'd like to work there, but there's a problem...or two. Your first response may be disappointment, but don't let your second response be to turn it down.

Declining an offer is closing the door, and you don't want to do that until you've explored all the options. Instead of just saying no, call the company and explain, "I can't accept the offer as it stands. Here's why. Let's see if we can work this out."

Whether it is the pay, the benefits, or any details around the working arrangement, let the company know what the issues are, because once they understand, they may be able to make some adjustments that will turn things around for you. They might be able to boost your salary, increase your vacation days, allow some flex time or telecommuting, or help you out in other ways.

Many offers get adjusted so that companies can land their number one choice. Of course, there's no guarantee anything will change, but you'll never know unless you talk about it.



Offer Tips

Most companies extend a verbal offer first, to confirm that you're interested. If you're happy with it and ready to pull the trigger, accept it, and get ready for some new challenges. Once you give your verbal acceptance, you can expect the company to follow up with the written offer.

But what if you're not ready to accept the offer? Then you have to handle the situation thoughtfully:



- **Don't turn down the offer.** (Check out the previous tip [*Don't Turn Down the Offer – Try this Instead*] – where we explore this situation in more detail.) Get clarification as needed. Don't try to renegotiate on the fly. Take enough time to calmly evaluate the offer. Be sure all of your conversations end on a positive note.
- Don't act out of emotion. Let them know that you want to give the offer some thought and that you will get back to them. Don't take more than a day or two to make your decision – companies want to get closure with your offer and if it doesn't work out, move on to someone else.
- When you have the information you need, let them know that you want the position but can't accept the offer as it stands. This keeps the doors open to work out the details.
- Promptly return emails and phone messages. Going "dark" is a red flag and they're likely to move on to a candidate who is acting more interested and responsive.
- The candidates who are the most enthusiastic and responsive tend to get the best offers.

The Transition

Leaving the Boss You Like

It's not personal. It's just business.

I'm sure you've heard those words before. They are important when it's time to leave a boss you like to take a position that will advance your career.

Your boss may be more of a friend than a superior at your workplace. It's a good thing to have a friendly relationship with your boss but set those personal feelings aside when it's time to make career decisions.



For example, will you tell your boss when you start looking at new career options or when you have an offer that you're considering? How would that impact your current working relationship if you fail to land a new position? For perspective, do you think your boss would feel obligated to inform you of their next career move?

In most cases, it's best not to tell your current employer that you're exploring new job opportunities. If you decide to inform them, have a moving box ready at your desk. It could be your last day on the job.

If the two of you truly are friends, your friendship should be able to survive a career move. If it can't, then it was a business relationship, not a personal relationship. A friend will support a move that advances your career.

There will likely be a little sadness and sense of loss when you leave. That's testimony to the fact that you've been a key contributor to the company and have developed good working relationships during your tenure there.

Don't allow emotions to derail your ability to do what's best for your career. Some opportunities don't come around a second time.

Sample Resignation Letters

Example 1

Dear (Former Employer),

I am sorry to inform you of my resignation from (ABC Company). My last day will be (date) of this year.

The decision to leave was a difficult one, however, I feel the need to expand my business experience outside this organization, develop new skills, and experience diverse corporate cultures.

I will miss the people I work with and hope to retain these friendships for a long time. To allow a smooth transition, I'll be happy to spend the time to brief my replacement.

Continued success to you and the (ABC Company), and should any questions arise after I am gone, I'd be happy to answer them.

Sincerely,

cc: current supervisor

human resources manager (for your permanent record)

personal file at home

Example 2

Dear _____,

I've decided to resign from _____ Co. Inc. as of _____.

This decision does not reflect any dissatisfaction or unhappiness with my current position at _____; on the contrary, my job and the company have been very helpful to my career development.

However, an opportunity has presented itself, which I simply cannot turn down. I do not wish to consider a counter offer and ask only that you wish me well in this new career endeavor.

I have enjoyed working with you and will always speak very highly of the Company and you personally.

Sincerely,