

15 Job Seeker Mistakes

By Rachel Zupke
December 7, 2007

You talk too fast. You avoid eye contact. You ask too many questions. You wear too much perfume. You lie about your work history. You show up late to interviews. You don't do your research.

And you wonder why you haven't gotten a job yet?

There's no such thing as an error-free job search, says Eli Davidson, business coach and author of "Funky to Fabulous." Most mistakes can be avoided with a little attentiveness.

"The best way to get a great job is to have a laser beam focus," Davidson says. "The more targeted and specific you are, the more powerful your job search will be."

Many people assume only young job seekers are making these mistakes; but in reality, both new and seasoned candidates face different challenges that cause them to slip up, says Kip Hollister, founder and CEO of Hollister Inc., a New England staffing firm.

Younger applicants approach their job search with a "what's in it for me" attitude, Hollister says. They lack humility and their expectations exceed their qualifications.

Seasoned job seekers, on the other hand, oftentimes come across with more attitude, indicating they may be uncoachable or won't adapt to a new career environment, she says. They're challenged with keeping their résumé competitive and they have unrealistic salary expectations.

Don't shoot yourself in the foot during your next job search. Here are 15 common mistakes job seekers should avoid:

1. Fire ... Ready, Aim

Don't waste your time shooting out résumés before you've aimed for your ideal job, Davidson says. "When you go after jobs you aren't qualified for, you are rejected more often. Take the time to ready your job search, aim for what you want and pursue your career with fiery determination."

2. Acting in a video résumé

"Unless you're looking to be cast in the next play, hiring managers are not interested in watching you act," Hollister says. Decide whether a video résumé is appropriate to the position for which you're applying before sending one.

3. Assuming you're on a first-name basis

Never call your interviewer by his or her first name, including interviewers younger than you, says career management expert Sally Haver. Until you hear, "You can call me Fred," or the equivalent, address the interviewer formally.

4. Your life's an open book

"Keep your private life private," Davidson advises. "Make sure all of your wild photos on Facebook or MySpace are not available to the public."

5. Winging it

"One of the biggest turn-offs for a hiring manager is when a candidate they are interviewing has not done the research necessary to understand both the position and the company they are applying for," Hollister says. Davidson agrees: "Unless you are more prepared, more practiced and more passionate than the other candidates, you are wasting everyone's time."

6. Neglecting your appearance

You've heard it once. You'll hear it again. "Don't dress too sexy, too casual, too outrageous or wear too much jewelry," says Bill Behn, national director of staffing for the Atlanta branch of SolomonEdwardsGroup, a CFO services firm. "Dress for the position you want to have."

7. Applying just to apply

Apply only for the jobs and companies that interest you, Davidson says. "Go after that job like an Olympic athlete goes for a medal." Don't waste time sending out résumés for positions you don't really want.

8. Not talking the talk

"An interviewer is not looking for a yes or no response to their question," Hollister says. "They do want a direct response, but it is OK to support your point with specific examples that are relevant to your work experience." On the other hand don't talk too much. It reveals nervousness or the inability to deliver a direct response.

9. Being unprofessional

"I actually had an interviewee tell me to contact her via e-mail at likes2party@aol.com," Behn says. "Needless to say, that person was not offered the job."

10. Sending a phone book

"Sending a 10-page résumé is a mammoth error," Davidson says. Highlight your abilities in one page. If you're having trouble, invite someone to help you. "Remember the person reviewing résumés has 15 seconds to decide to bring you in."

11. Doing it alone

"They say it's all about networking," Hollister says. "They're right." Not networking with everyone you know cuts your chances of finding a great job, Davidson says. The more people you involve, the better your chances.

12. Shunning assistance

Many applicants think asking for help is a sign of weakness, Davidson says. In reality, it's one of the most courageous and effective actions you can take. Ask someone you admire for help during your job search.

13. Forgetting to say thank-you

Always send a thank-you e-mail to the hiring manager. Use it as an opportunity to leave an impression on him or her by referencing something you discussed in your interview, Hollister suggests.

Behn says job seekers often "nail" the interview, get a job offer and then send a mistake-riddled thank-you note. "That's a great way to get your offer rescinded," he says.

14. Talking negatively about past employers

"Regardless of how valid your point-of-view is, it's not necessary to trash your past employer," Hollister says. If you're asked to talk about your previous job, be prepared to put a positive spin on it, showing you valued the experience.

15. Not asking good questions

"Not asking open-ended questions is a sure-fire way to show that you don't care about the company or the position you're interviewing for," Behn says.

Ask questions like, "Where do you see this position going?" "What is going to make the person who takes this position successful?" "Why is the position open?" or, "How do you see me fitting in here?"

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