

25 Ways to Sabotage Your Job Search

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You know the friend who constantly dates the wrong kind of person? The one who's endlessly frustrated that he or she is going to die alone because all the good ones are taken?

After enough venting sessions, you realize something your friend doesn't: He or she is the common thread tying together all of these -- let's just say it together -- losers. Someone needs to speak up and say, "You're doing this to yourself."

You'll find this same pattern can be true in a job hunt. Granted, we're in tough times and plenty of reasons out of your control can keep you from getting hired. But that's just one more reason to do everything within your power to be the best job seeker you can.

With that in mind, look over these 25 ways you might be unknowingly sabotaging your job search:

1. Assuming you'll never need to look for another job

You love your current job and that's great. If you're happy there and see a promising future, I hope you never have to leave. Nevertheless, you should always be prepared for the day you have to move on. Even if the boss loves you, things can change. Buyouts, economic disasters or changes in leadership can affect your employment. Continue to update your résumé while you're employed so that you have an accurate record of your accomplishments.

2. Burning bridges

We love the scenes in movies where the disgruntled employee finally tells off the boss and storms out of the office, only to live a happy, fulfilling life. In real life, these idols are probably unemployed because they don't have good references, and no employer wants to hire someone with a tarnished reputation.

3. Keeping mum on your job search

Most people aren't keen on being unemployed, and if you were laid off it's understandable

that you don't want to spend all your time talking about it. But you need to network; it's one of the most effective ways to find a job. A friend of a friend of a friend often gets you the interview that lands you the job -- but that won't happen if no one knows you're looking for new career opportunities.

4. Looking for "The One"

Although you want to conduct a focused job search, you need to keep an open mind. With any luck, you'll land the perfect gig, but sometimes you have to take a job that possesses most of the qualities you want -- not all of them. If the pay is right, the requirements are in line with your experience and the opportunities for promotion are good, then you might have to overlook the fact that you have to wake up 30 minutes earlier than you'd like.

5. Not searching at all

This mistake probably seems obvious, but as anyone who's been on a lengthy job hunt can tell you, discouragement is easy to come by. A few weeks or months without a job and enough news segments on layoffs are enough to convince you that no one is hiring. Without question the market's competitive, but if you're not actively looking for work, don't expect it to fall in your lap.

6. No cover letter

Including a cover letter is an easy way to play it safe during a job hunt. Although not every employer wants one, surveys continually find employers who automatically remove job seekers from consideration if they don't include a cover letter. Why would you give any employer a reason not to hire you?

7. A generic cover letter

The only thing worse than no cover letter is one that could be sent to any anonymous employer. Starting with "To Whom It May Concern" and filling the page with phrases like "hard working" will signal the reader that you're blindly sending out applications to every job opening you see. Hiring managers are looking for someone who fits their needs, and their needs are different than another employer's. Don't treat them the same.

8. Typos

If you received a wedding invitation full of misspelled words and poor punctuation, you'd probably wonder why these two people didn't take the time to proofread the page. After all, it's an important event and a lot of people will be reading it. Employers will wonder the same thing about a résumé or cover letter filled with errors.

9. All "I" and not enough "you"

Your cover letter and résumé are definitely about you, but they're not for you. Employers are interested in you only in the context of what you can do for them. Whenever you reveal information about yourself, use it as proof that you offer something to the company that no one else can.

10. Giving bad contact information

When hiring managers like what they see on your résumé and cover letter, they're going to look for your contact information. If they see that your e-mail address is BeerFreak80@email.com or that your current work number is the best way to contact you, they're going to think twice before reaching out. The only thing worse is forgetting to include your contact information at all.

11. Running late

Every boss wants an employee who is dependable and a good representative of the company. Someone who's tardy to an interview is neither.

12. Dressing for the wrong job

Appearances matter in an interview, and you should dress for what's appropriate in your field. Find out what the dress code is before you show up so you fit in with the company culture. Wearing a suit when you're told jeans are the norm can make you seem stuffy; wearing shorts and sandals when everyone else is wearing suits makes you look oblivious. You're better off erring on the side of too professional than too casual.

13. Gripping about past employers

Keep in mind that you're not guaranteed to be with any company forever. When you talk trash about your last company, your interviewer's thinking, "What are you going to say about me once you leave?"

14. Not asking questions

One quintessential interview question is, "Do you have any questions for me?" Sitting there silently suggests you're not invested in the job. When you go to a restaurant, you probably have a few questions for the waiter. Shouldn't you be just as curious about a new job?

15. Not doing your research

Research for a new job involves two important subjects: the position and the company. Find out as much about the position as you can so you can decide if you even want it and so you can position yourself as the best fit for the job.

Knowing all you can about the company will help you decide if you like its direction and share its ideals. Plus, when it comes to the all-important "Do you have any questions for us?" portion of the interview (see above), you have plenty of material to cover.

16. Thinking the interview starts and ends in a meeting room

The formal interview occurs when you shake hands with the interviewer and ends when you leave the room. The full process begins when you're called or e-mailed to come in for an interview and it continues every time you converse with someone at the company. Were you rude to the recruiter or the receptionist? You never know what gets reported to the hiring manager.

17. Talking about money too soon

As eager as you are to land the job and cash your first paycheck, let the employer mention salary first. Broaching the subject first implies you're more eager about money than about doing a good job.

18. Acting cocky

You never want to beg for a job, but you should act as if you care about it. If your confidence level spills over into arrogance, you'll guarantee no employer will want to work with you.

19. Being so honest you're rude

Not every job will turn into a lifelong career, and you might have no intention of staying at the company more than a year or two when you interview. Still, hiring managers don't want to hear that you're taking this job just to pass time until you find a real job that you care about. You don't need to commit yourself to the company for a decade, but don't make yourself sound like a flight risk, either.

20. Forgetting your manners

Common courtesy can get you far, and in a job hunt you'd like to get as far as possible. After an interview, send a thank-you note (via e-mail or regular mail) to show your gratitude to the interviewer for taking the time to meet with you. This will leave him or her with a good impression of you.

21. Stalking the hiring manager

If the interviewer gives you a deadline for hearing back from him or her, go ahead and call to see if a decision has been made. Do not call, e-mail and visit every day until you finally get a response -- which will probably be, "You definitely did not get the job."

22. Not keeping track of your applications

Because a job hunt can be lengthy, you should have a running list of where you've applied and whether or not you've heard back. Although you don't think you'll forget where you applied, after a dozen applications your memory can get fuzzy. Sending multiple applications to the same employer says, "I'm either disorganized or I'm just sending out bulk applications."

23. Not learning from mistakes

You're bound to make a mistake here and there during an interview. If a question trips you up, think about what went wrong and prepare for it the next time. Don't forget mistakes from your past, either. Look back at jobs you hated and try to avoid landing one of those jobs again.

24. Assuming you got the job

Don't ever assume you have the job until you actually hear the hiring manager say, "You got the job." Several factors can complicate whether or not you get hired, so don't halt your

job search until you receive an offer. Keep searching for work because the deal might fall through at the last minute or you might find an even better job.

25. Forgetting the lessons you learned during a job search

When your hard work pays off and you do land a job, don't forget all the trials and trouble you went through to get it. Just because you have a paycheck doesn't mean you've looked for your last job. Remember how important it is to maintain a network, keep track of your achievements and have good references. If you do find yourself looking for work again, you'll have a much easier time.

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