

# Career MAKEOVER SWEEPSTAKES

CareerBuilding 101:

## Your Career Makeover Guide

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# Career Makeover Guide: So You Want to Change Careers

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By Jan Torissi-Mokwa, founder of Congruence, Inc.

For some people, losing a job means a chance to start over and reinvent themselves. Sometimes this can be a good thing - the silver lining behind the cloud. More than one person who took a new career path has said these words: "Losing that job was the best thing that ever happened to me."

But it is important not to let emotions carry you away. Before you sell your home and open a fishing camp in Minnesota, it's very important to take stock of yourself, your abilities and your aspirations. It is the rare salesperson who can become a builder of sailboats.

Jan Torissi-Mokwa, founder of Congruence, Inc., a human resources consulting firm in St. Louis, says there are five basic steps people should take in assessing career change. A former human resources director for a major manufacturing company, she assessed her options herself when the company was absorbed by another.

Instead of getting out of human resources, she opened her own consulting firm specializing in professional services fields. "For me, the shift from manufacturing to services was invigorating, and I stayed in human resources."

## She advises people in a similar situation to follow these five steps:

**Step One:** Define your aspirations. This involves intense self-reflection. People should ask questions such as, "What are my talents, skills, passions and interests?" Torissi-Mokwa says most people are not skilled at this process and find it difficult. "In fact, most people spend more time planning their wedding or vacation than their career goals or aspirations." Some may need professional help to sort it all out. She recommends some books to help tap into your innate capabilities or unique talents such as: "What Color Is Your Parachute," by Richard Bolle, or "Discovering Your Career in Business," by Tim Butler and James Waldrop are recommended.

**Step Two:** Assessing aspirations - the litmus test of career decision-making. Your grandmother may have told you that "you can be anything you want to be." Grandma surely loves you, but maybe you should assess what she says. Basketball superstar Michael Jordan wanted to play major league baseball. He had intense desire, he had financial resources and he had fame that drew interest. But in the final analysis, he couldn't hit a curve ball. Maybe you love fishing and think operating a wilderness fishing camp would be a slice of heaven. Before you use your severance package to buy Camp Walleye, you'd better take inventory of the skills you will need. Could you fix a leaky cabin roof? Do you know how to keep the septic tank operable? Can you repair the outboard motors? How about managing the books? How are you going to market your place? Can you assess how to price your camp versus the competition?

"Assessing aspirations is the process of performing career due diligence," Torissi-Mokwa says. "It's analogous to test-driving a car before the purchase. You will need strong research, facts and opinions from those with relevant work experiences."

**Step Three:** Sharing aspirations. "Career aspirations are not realized in a vacuum," Torissi-Mokwa says. "There is great power in verbalizing one's aspirations or making them public." Back to the Michael Jordan example. If Jordan had not publicized his desire to play baseball, maybe he would not have gone as far as he did. Having

## So You Want to Change Careers (cont'd)

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made a declaration of his aspirations, he continued until he saw he could not continue further. The same can be true for others. "When we extrovert our aspirations, we bring them into consciousness and make them real." For people who have been laid off, friends and family are the best sounding board. They can provide either encouragement or a reality check.

If you are still working in your field but are feeling like you'd like to make a change, Torissi-Mokwa recommends you communicate with your employer. It's part of a new paradigm she believes is good for employee and employer. We are in a new era, she says, where the threat of downsizing and mergers leave employees feeling vulnerable. As a result, companies no longer enjoy the unwavering loyalty of employees who know they must take responsibility for their own futures. She recommends a common ground and dialogue about aspirations. If you and your employer both know your aspirations, dreams and goals, you may find your future right where you are.

**Step Four:** Acting on aspirations - the art of "Just Do It." If your due-diligence and self-evaluation in steps one and two have convinced you that you can make this career switch, the best advice is to "just do it," Torissi-Mokwa says. "Risk is required to move yourself closer to work that is aligned with your unique talents and your life's mission. You can't steal second base and leave your foot on first." On the other hand, you can't steal second base if you have a sprained ankle. Put another way; don't start toward second base unless you are assured you can at least make it a close play. Maybe you will have to return to school for a course or two. Maybe you will need to "apprentice" in a field before you immerse yourself. Instead of building sailboats, maybe you can sell sailboats, or write about sailboats, or do HR for a sailboat manufacturer. Put the skills you have to work in a field that interests you.

**Step Five:** Renew aspirations. This step encourages an objective review of the original assumptions and aspirations to determine if they are delivering the predicted results. An engineer for a manufacturing company loved engineering, but he also had a desire to earn more money for his family. He felt a management role would fulfill his goals. He had excellent people skills and was readily promoted when he expressed a desire for more responsibility. In fact, he became a vice president. However, he soon learned that he had to travel to China, spending weeks at a time away from his family. He had to deal with employee issues. He had to attend high-level meetings and had to represent the company at charity events and civic boards. Worst of all, he did not have a chance to do any engineering work. He realized he had made a mistake and took the very unusual move of asking for his old job back. He now knows that he let emotions control his actions. If he had done a better job of due diligence initially, he would not have made the change that seemed like a dream come true at the time.

# Career Makeover Guide: Time for a Career Check-up

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*By Robin Ryan, Career Coach*

Worried about your job security? Unhappy with your current position? Hoping to get a raise or promotion? Time to review your career management strategies to be sure you are in top form to move up or on.

In today's changing workplace, the average worker will hold more than 11 jobs during their working lifetime. Since career management is now your responsibility, learn where you stand with this brief check-up.

## **Have you established your career identity?**

Your professional reputation -- what bosses, co-workers, associates think about you -- is more important than your resume. It's others who decide your fate when it comes to raises, promotions and determining who to hire. So this year work on your strengths -- the natural talents you excel in. Results from an exclusive CEO survey we conducted advise people to create a reputation of being very good at something (i.e. writing, sales, designing, client relations, etc.) to advance and insure lifetime success. Foster your growth by networking, the top executives advised, both inside your company and with peers in associations and professional groups. Networking is the best way to get noticed and insure a future with many career opportunities beginning sent your way.

## **What new skills will you pick up this year?**

"Life-long learning is essential to keep yourself marketable", recommends CEO and How to Work Smart author Melinda Howard Erickson. If more education isn't in your plans, it may need to be. Employers demand highly productive workers that bring a contemporary skill set. You need to continuously add to the skills you can sell to an employer. Too many workers let this extra effort slide, only to see promotions go to other, more better trained and adaptable workers. If you are job hunting, you need to be able to jump back into the workplace with marketable skills employers want. Important ones to perfect are technical and computer skills, good writing and public speaking, leadership, sales, negotiations and managing budgets, are particularly valued.

## **Did you advance your technical competence?**

Employers want you to improve your job knowledge. To do so, take courses in your field offered by associations, colleges, and e-learning training programs. Read trade journals, stay up on trends, industry changes, and advances. Doing so makes you a more desirable employee to retain or hire. Join a professional organization. They provide needed education and resources to keep you current in your field. Through active participation you'll develop an important network of contacts. These people can become mini-mentors, offering guidance when you face work problems, share new ideas and advice helping you to perform better on the job.

## **Are you ready when opportunity knocks?**

Is your resume updated so you can send it on in a minute's notice? HR Manager Melinda Combs, who's hired hundreds of professionals, revealed HR offices sort resumes with a quick 15 seconds glance to determine if they should take a closer look, and eliminate 80 percent or more. Resumes get noticed when you describe specific results and accomplishments. Note what you have increased or decreased, how you saved money and contributed to productivity and the bottom line. By adding a "Summary of Qualifications" section with five to six sentences highlights your experience and top selling points to do the job, you will stand out.

Safeguard your future by planning out your professional goals for the next year -- today.

# Career Makeover Guide: What's Important to you in a Job?

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When it comes to finding a new job, the most successful seekers know that the best jobs are not always just about salary. The truth is, there are a lot of factors that go into every great opportunity, and these are not always the same for everyone. If you are looking for a new job or career, the important thing is that you know what your priorities are before you start your job search. Doing so might just save you from regretting your decision in the future. Consider the following workplace values.

## **Salary**

While salary isn't everything, it is important. After all, you can't use your health care to buy groceries. But you need to determine just how important it is to you. Start by figuring out just how much you need or want to make to be happy. How much do you need to pay your bills, have some fun and still save for the future? Then ask yourself how much extra you need above and beyond the basics in order for you to be truly satisfied. Once you have a range in mind, you can use it to help guide your search.

## **Benefits**

While salary is the top dog for some, the quality of benefits ranks higher for others. Think about your life and figure out what kind of benefits are really important to you. If you have a history of health problems, you should make sure your company's health care plan is one that offers low co-pays and provides affordable access to specialists. Check to see if the company offers flexible spending accounts for uncovered out-of-pocket expenses. Are you a woman who is planning on starting a family? If so, you should learn about and understand the company's maternity benefits. If you are not sure exactly which benefits you need or what kinds of benefits are available, you can look at leading companies' Web sites.

## **Family-Related Factors**

For some, a company's family friendliness is not a factor. However, it is a major issue for others. Do you need a company that can give you a flexible schedule? Do you want a company that puts an emphasis on work/life balance? Some companies offer family-related services such as on-site childcare, flexible scheduling, dependent care reimbursement accounts and more. Other companies do not put as much of an emphasis on families. Make sure you know what you are looking for in this area.

## **Retirement**

Retirement is something many younger workers neglect to think about, but it's an important area to consider. Perhaps having a higher-than-average salary is not as important to you as ensuring that you're taken care of down the line. If so, you need to look closely at the company's retirement plan. Does it offer a matching 401(k) program? What about profit sharing, pension or stock options? Most companies have some method of helping employees plan for the future - make sure you pay attention to this factor.

## **Location**

While location sounds like a secondary factor, it can be a major deal maker or breaker for some. Do you live in a city with a great deal of traffic? Is there access to public transportation? Would you mind spending two hours in the car each day getting to and from work? Some people don't mind a long commute, but others shudder at the thought. If you are someone who can't stand being in the car for long periods of time, make sure you don't settle for a job that is 40 miles away.

## What's Important to you in a Job? (cont'd)

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### **Vacation**

While some individuals do not need much time off during the year, others desperately need vacation time to re-energize. If vacation time is important to you, make sure you know how much you are getting and whether or not you can actually use it. Vacation is one area in which prospects can often negotiate when getting a higher salary is out of the question.

### **Other Factors**

Do you have other personal priorities you need to consider? What about training and educational opportunities? Or how about actual work hours? At some companies, working 50 to 55 hours a week is the norm, while others have employees punching the clock at exactly 40. Is it a big deal to you to work overtime? What about the overall work environment? Do you want a big corporate campus complete with a cafeteria, company convenience store, and maybe even a health club; or will you be happy in a small office with 10 employees?

The bottom line is that knowing what your priorities are at the beginning of your job search will help you make sure you are moving in the right direction and focusing your energy on jobs that will truly meet your needs.

# Career Makeover Guide: Hidden Costs of Changing Jobs

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By Kate Lorenz, CareerBuilder.com Editor

**So you found a new job and it pays more than your old one. Before you buy that Rolex - hold on! Salary is just one piece of the equation.**

*Health benefits, incentive pay, 401(k) match, tuition reimbursement and pension plans also are key components of your total compensation. And because it's not just what you earn, it's what you keep, city wage taxes as well as commuting, childcare, wardrobe and meal expenses all come into play. Take a look.*

## **Timing is Everything**

To receive certain benefits like 401(k) matches and stock options, however, many companies require you be "vested," which means you have to have worked at the company a certain number of years to be entitled to take the money when you leave.

If the vesting period is, say, five years, leaving a company after four-and-a-half could mean you forfeit some or all of the match. If you made roughly \$50,000 each year and your company matched you at three percent, hanging on another six months would mean an extra \$7,500 in your pocket.

Timing is also important when it comes to qualifying for bonuses and other incentive rewards as well as benefits like tuition reimbursement. Some companies have clauses that require you to stay with the company a certain amount of time after receiving your education or you must pay back the tuition.

And of course, before making your exit, use the vacation days you have coming, otherwise you forfeit them, too.

## **Benefits**

According to the Congressional Budget Office Special Studies Division, benefits represent anywhere from 24 to 50 percent of an employee's total compensation package. And the plan offerings and value vary greatly from company to company based on the deal the organization negotiates with insurance carriers as well as the percentage of costs it chooses to pass along to employees.

When it comes to health insurance, for example, even among major companies, the percentage of total costs employers pay ranges between 70 percent to 100 percent. Meaning your healthcare costs can vary anywhere from \$150 to \$2,000 from employer to employer.

## **401(k) Match**

Large and small companies often match employees' contributions to a 401(k) plan. Depending on the company, the match equal can be anywhere from one to three percent of pay. Remember this is free, untaxed money!

## **Vacation Pay**

Consider the value and benefit of vacation time. Most companies grant vacation pay based on length of service. When a 15-year employee at a major food company went to work for a food broker, he went from having four weeks of paid vacation to one!

## Hidden Costs of Changing Jobs (cont'd)

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### **City or County Taxes**

Don't forget taxes. In several major cities, non-residents pay taxes on wages and salaries they earn within the city limits. Those working in Philadelphia, for example, pay nearly four percent in city wage taxes. Even smaller cities, like Englewood, Ohio, impose a wage tax (1.75 %).

### **Commuting Costs**

You have to get there, don't you? Parking, tolls and train fare adds up. With gas prices in many areas over \$2 a gallon, longer drives not only mean more miles and wear and tear on the car (think depreciation), but higher fuel costs. A marketing manager who took a job 12 miles further away ended up resenting not only the longer commute but the added \$1,500 a year she paid out in gasoline.

### **Childcare**

If you have children, longer commutes also mean shelling out more to care providers. Depending on the hourly rate you pay, this can add \$25 to \$75 a week to your childcare or after-school program bill.

### **Dressing the Part**

Casual dress codes not only allow you to be more comfortable at work, they can mean savings on expensive suits and dry cleaning bills. A financial analyst who went from a casual dress to a formal business dress environment claims her wardrobe and dry cleaning costs easily rose \$2,000.

### **Think Big Picture**

It would be ill-advised to pass up a great opportunity because you can't part with your company's subsidized cafeteria. However, it's important that when weighing an offer or negotiating your starting compensation package, you don't get blinded by that higher salary until you figure out your true costs of changing jobs.



## Marketing you

### **You are for sale.**

The interview process begins with the first contact and ends with an offer to buy or decline. It measures everything from the tone of enthusiasm to the confidence of a handshake. The more you are able to communicate professionalism with personality and skill, the better your chances will be to get the job. Every interaction is an opportunity to sell you. If you are the product the employer needs, your job is to let them know.

**There are jobs out there. This handbook was designed to not only help you find a job, but the right one for you.**

## Network

### **The only way in is through the front.**

When a door is unlocked, it's easier to open. Find out who has the keys. Attend industry and trade functions. Introduce yourself to speakers and panelists. Get an internship. Though they are often unpaid, internships are good opportunities to prove yourself and to meet the people who hold the keys you need.

## Your resume

**Walk the walk.** Learn the lingo. Your audience needs to know you understand it. Tailor your qualifications specifically to the company's needs and objectives. Use action words and quantifiable examples to illustrate skills and accomplishments.

**Send a message, not a cover letter.** A letter is just a combination of words and ideas. A message makes a statement. Be charismatic, concise and passionate. Customize your intentions to the position for which you're applying. Find out exactly who your audience will be and direct the message to it. Save long-winded descriptions for the interview process. The purpose of a cover letter is to formally introduce yourself and your intentions.

**Keep it simple.** The best way to stand out in the job market is to take the minimalist approach. Use simple bullets to separate duties and skills. Use bold and italics sparingly and keep the length as close to one page as possible. Don't be afraid to leave out your stint as a bartender. If employers want that kind of information, they'll ask.

**Your name is important but...** The emphasis should be on content, not the size of the font. Simple fonts such as Arial and Veranda look best between 9 and 12 points. White, off-white, cream and gray resume-quality papers are standard because they are the easiest to read. Your resume should stand out because of your skills, not because it looks different.

Your resume is the only way a company can decide whether they want to interview you. Make sure your resume is professional and concise. Check out Resume Services in the Advice and Resources center at [www.careerbuilder.com](http://www.careerbuilder.com).

## Trends

Use technology to your advantage. Technology has inundated us with options. Don't send a prospective employer an e-resume without following up with a hard copy, which requires more thought and effort. These are some of the technology trends that can reinforce the standard resume format.

### The Web Resume

Electronic documents posted on a personal website make transmission quick and easy. This also allows for easy updates:

- Use the top half of the page for key information
- HTML looks good but is not readable by every employer. Special keys and symbols should be avoided.
- Use simple fonts. Arial, Courier and Times Roman are best for web resumes.
- Set narrow margins (4.5 inches) and flush left to make your resume easy to cut and paste.
- Save your resume as a .txt file.

### Interactive Multimedia Resume

- Often called "Flash Resume," this format uses any combination of animation, special effects, sounds and music to involve the reader. These often include a photo and a formatted cover letter.

### Business Card Resume

- Exchanged during self-introduction and handshake.
- Flipside features a brief but impressive history of affiliations, job titles and achievements.

### Broadcast Resume

- Resumes transmitted through hand-helds, such as Palm Pilots or cell phones.
- Includes brief summary: contact information, qualifications and experience.

## Netiquette 101

**It only takes one mistake to fail the test.** Electronic communication is the fastest means of communication. Unfortunately, because of the Internet's immediacy, the message is often communicated without regard for spelling, grammar and content errors. Remember that you are creating a written record. Adjust your tone appropriately and convey a sense of warmth and friendliness without using sophomoric symbols, such as smiley faces or tiny hearts.

**Don't overdo it.** Be respectful of others' time. Do not abuse your e-mail privileges by over-using the medium to find out where you stand in the selection process.

**Be the early bird.** You should always attempt to respond to your e-mails within a business day. If you are vacationing or out of the office, you can use the auto-reply service provided by your e-mail host. It should indicate that you cannot respond immediately and either offer a time when you can, or refer the sender to an alternate contact.

**To e-mail or not to e-mail?** Know when to send e-mail and when to choose another mode of communication. As a general rule, bad news and sensitive information should always be communicated in person. If face-to-face is impossible, then a phone call will suffice.

## Interview Etiquette

**Arrive early.** Be in the lobby and introduce yourself 15 minutes before the interview.

**Dress appropriately.** No matter what the corporate culture, dress professionally for the first interview. Simple, conservative business attire for men and women is still the standard. No heavy fragrances, loud clothes or flashy jewelry.

**Turn off your pager or cell phone.**

**Bring a pen.**

**Take notes.**

**Don't talk too much.** Be a good listener so you may thoughtfully present your assets.

**Speak positively.** Don't speak negatively about previous employers or jobs.

**Don't act desperate.** Controlled and relaxed mannerisms let the employer know that you are confident and poised.

**Follow up.** Promise to contact the interviewer, then follow through within 48 hours. Write something that lets the interviewer know that you've learned something important about the company. A great follow-up will make you stand out among other applicants and tip the scales in your favor.

**All follow-ups should reiterate:**

- What interests you about the position.
- What qualities make you suitable for the job.
- Your appreciation for the interviewer's time in four lines or less.
- Your personality.

**Learn how to make a good impression, get interview questions and answers and more interview tips in our Advice and Resources center at [www.careerbuilder.com](http://www.careerbuilder.com).**

## Top 10 interview faux pas

Your grasp of etiquette can make or break you in the interview process. Memorize and avoid these top slip-ups from Emily Post's *The Etiquette Advantage in Business* (Harper Collins):

1. Arriving late
2. Bringing shopping bags or boxes
3. Loud colors in your outfit
4. Popping into a chair before the interviewer offers you one
5. Using first names unless asked to
6. Chattering on and on
7. Chewing gum
8. Smoking
9. Jiggling your knee
10. Playing with your hair

## 10 cities with the longest commutes

If you prefer television time to traffic jams, check out the U.S. Census Bureau's rankings for the longest average travel time to work:

1. New York, NY
2. Chicago, IL
3. Philadelphia, PA
4. Riverside, CA
5. Baltimore, MD
6. Washington, D.C.
7. San Francisco, CA
8. Oakland, CA
9. Los Angeles, CA
10. Boston, MA

## Top 10 Magic Resume Phrases

These phrases, when threaded into your resume, will have employers begging you for an interview, according to Susan Britton Whitcomb's *Resume Magic* (JIST Publishing):

1. Made money
2. Saved money
3. Saved time
4. Made work easier
5. Solved a specific problem
6. Became more competitive
7. Built relationships/image
8. Expanded business
9. Attracted new customers
10. Retained existing customers

## Top 10 mispronounced words.

According to Emily Post's *The Etiquette Advantage in Business*, the following words are often mispronounced:

1. Escape: Ess-CAPE, not ex-CAPE
2. Genuine: JEN-yoo-un, not JEN-yoo-wine
3. Heinous: HEY-nus, not HEY-nee-us
4. Interesting: IN-tur-est-ing, not IN-nur-est-ing
5. Jewelry: JOO-uhl-ree, not JOO-luh-ree
6. Library: LY-brer-ee, not LY-behr-ee
7. Nuclear: NYOO-klee-ur, not NOO-kyuh-lur
8. Pronunciation: pro-NUN-see-AY-shun, not pro-NOUN-see-AY-shun
9. Realtor: REE-ul-tur, not REE-luh-tur
10. Similar: SIM-i-lur, not SIM-yoo-lur

## Top 10 Interview Questions

According to a recent survey by ResumeDoctor.com, the following are the 10 most frequently asked questions in interviews:

1. Describe your ideal job/boss.
2. Why are you looking for a job? or Why are you leaving your current position?
3. What unique experiences or qualifications separate you from other candidates?
4. Tell me about yourself.
5. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
6. Describe some of your most recent career accomplishments.
7. What are your short-term/long-term goals?
8. Describe a time when you were faced with a challenging situation and how you handled it.
9. What are your salary requirements?
10. Why are you interested in this position? Our company?

## Top 10 Resume Verbs

Well-placed verbs in your resume can save precious space and spice up your qualifications. Here are 10 effective action words from Tom Jackson's *The Perfect Resume*:

1. Analyzed
2. Coordinated
3. Delivered
4. Developed
5. Eliminated
6. Improved
7. Managed
8. Navigated
9. Performed
10. Researched

# Ten Ways to Botch Your Resume

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More often than not, the company's first impression of you comes in the form of a resume, a simple piece of paper that includes your entire work and educational history, typically on one to two pages.

*With such limited space to convey such important information, it pays to make sure you get it right the first time. To meet this challenge, it's important to keep in mind 10 of the most common resume mistakes. While avoiding these mistakes won't automatically make you a shoo-in for the job of your choice, it will make sure you are on the right track.*

**Mistake #1: Writing your resume to sound like a series of job descriptions.** You need to give the reader an idea of what you have done throughout your career, but instead of focusing on the duties you were responsible for at your last jobs, list your accomplishments along with quantifiable facts to back up your claims. Saying you were responsible for a 10 percent growth in overall sales is more impressive than simply stating you managed a sales team.

**Mistake #2: Writing in the first person.** Your resume is not a personal correspondence, and should not include words such as "I," "my," and "me." Save the first person pronouns for your cover letter.

**Mistake #3: Including unrelated and personal information.** As mentioned above, you do not have much room in a resume, so why take up valuable space with information unrelated to the position you are seeking? Leave the details about your personal life, marital status, hobbies and other interests on the cutting room floor.

**Mistake #4: Using passive language or no action words.** Your resume needs to make a bold, strong statement, and the best way to do this is by utilizing action words to describe your accomplishments. Words like "coordinated," "achieved," "managed," and "implemented" will spice up your resume and make it more interesting and relevant to the reader.

**Mistake #5: Repetition.** While using action words is important, it is also key to make sure you have variety in your resume. Don't pick a couple of words and stick with them throughout the entire document. Utilize a thesaurus, career advice Web sites and other sources if you are having problems coming up with new ways to say the same thing.

**Mistake #6: Poor formatting or formatting that is too flashy.** While the most important part of your resume is the content, there is no question that the document's overall look and feel is also important. By now, you should be comfortable enough with a word processing program to create a clean, polished-looking document. Use consistent formatting for headings and bullet points. In the same respect, steer clear of flashy formatting or overly creative resumes with unconventional fonts or graphics, unless you are seeking a highly creative position. Keep your resume simple, bold and professional.

**Mistake #7: Sending a resume without a cover letter.** One of the worst things you can do is send a great resume without an official introduction. Resumes and cover letters should be inseparable. Make sure you don't give up your chance to really sell yourself with a cover letter.

**Mistake #8: Sending an unfocused or generic resume.** While your work experience doesn't change depending on the job or industry you are targeting, your resume certainly should. If you are seeking a sales-related position, your resume will include details that are different from those that would be included in a resume for a management job. Make sure you write to what you are seeking and make it easy for the reader to see why you are a good fit.

**Mistake #9: Including typos and other spelling or grammatical errors.** Before you send out your resume, make sure you have proofread it several times. Many hiring managers will automatically throw away a resume that has typos or other errors.

**Mistake #10: Sending your resume to a nameless, faceless person.** Want your resume to get thrown out with the recycling bin? Just send it to the company's "Hiring Manager," or "To Whom It May Concern." Do yourself a big favor and take the time to find a real person at the company who is responsible for hiring in the department you are targeting. This is often the first and most helpful step to getting your foot in the door.

# How to Overcome Eight Interview Stumbling Blocks

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## Does the thought of going on a job interview cause your palms to sweat and your body to break out in hives?

*Stop itching; you're not alone. The vast majority of job seekers admit to emotions ranging from mild uneasiness to downright panic leading up to their interviews. The good news is there have been no reported cases of job seekers who died of nervousness during a job interview. So relax and follow these simple tips for keeping your anxiety at bay before and during your interview.*

**First, take the proper amount of time to prepare for your interview.** Being well-prepared will boost your confidence and lower your anxiety. Experts recommend that you spend at least three hours preparing for each interview. You should draft answers to the most common interview questions and practice speaking them out loud. You also should read up on the company with which you will be interviewing and prepare some questions of your own. This lets the interviewer know that you are truly interested in the company and the position. As a final step in your preparation, make sure you have good directions to the interview site. Some job seekers make a dry run to the interview site to ensure the directions are correct and to estimate the amount of time they will need to get to the interview on time.

**Going into a job interview is often like entering the great unknown.** Although every interviewer is different and questions vary from industry to industry, there are some questions that are common across the board. Reading through the following questions and developing your own answers is a good place to start in your preparation. Once you have done that, remember practice makes perfect! Nothing impresses a potential employer like being ready for whatever is thrown your way.

### Why should we hire you?

Here's the chance to really sell yourself. You need to briefly and succinctly lay out your strengths, qualifications and what you can bring to the table. Be careful not to answer this question too generically, however. Nearly everyone says they are hardworking and motivated. Set yourself apart by telling the interviewer about qualities that are unique to you.

### 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, its direction and the industry in which it plays. 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 a 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 yourself better.

### Why did you leave your last job?

Even if your last job ended badly, be careful about being negative in answering this question. Be as diplomatic as possible. If you do point out negative aspects of your last job, find some positives to mention as well. Complaining endlessly about your last company will not say much for your attitude.

### 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

## How to Overcome Eight Interview Stumbling Blocks (cont'd)

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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 one of the hardest questions, particularly for those with little experience. The first thing to do before going to your interview is to research the salary range in your field to get an idea of what you should be making. Steer clear of discussing 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.**

While this query seems like a piece of cake, it is difficult to answer because it is so broad. The important thing to know is that the interviewer typically does not want to know about your hometown or what you do on the weekends. He or she is trying to figure you out professionally. Pick a couple of points about yourself, your professional experience and your career goals and stick to those points. 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.

# Five Tricks to Job Search Secrecy

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**Finding a job requires the right qualifications, the right search tools and often the right timing. For job seekers, the right time seems to be right now.**

*Thanks to the growing employment optimism, more people are poised to make the move to a new job. One of the biggest job seeker groups expected is those currently employed. In fact, four-in-10 workers plan to change jobs this year.*

Due to the dismal job climate over the past several years, workers have become more dissatisfied. They have taken on more responsibilities and toil longer hours for the same pay. Leaders are seen as out-of-touch and incapable. Burnout is rampant. And the fear of losing one's job often postpones badly needed vacations to recharge, causing even more burnout.

Are you one of the people waiting for the right time to make a leap to a new job? Here are some tips for conducting that stealthy search while still employed from Neil Lebovits, president and COO of Ajilon Professional Staffing in Saddlebrook, NJ.

## **Be smart about e-mail.**

Play it safe, says Lebovits. You need to keep your current job until you have a new one. E-mail watch policies vary by company, so you'll want to use a separate account, like Hotmail, when discussing job search-related items. Plus, employers would rather receive correspondence from personal accounts than from competitor addresses. And most importantly, you don't want to send a message to a potential new employer that you conduct job searches on company time.

## **Don't wear your interview suit to your biz casual office.**

Nothing sets off a red flag like wearing a suit to your dressed-down office. So how should you handle the wardrobe dilemma? For both men and women, suit bottoms (i.e. pants, skirts) are always passable for business casual. Lebovits suggests bringing a shoulder bag/duffle with a jacket in it, and change en route to/from the interview. For women, it is especially easy to wear a casual shell under a suit once a jacket and stockings are removed, no one will detect an afternoon interviewee. For men, make sure your shirt stands on its own without a tie and you can easily make the switch.

## **Be discreet when gathering references.**

It all comes down to discretion. Former coworkers who have left the company are usually the first ones to turn to if you want to keep your search confidential. However, current coworkers are really the ideal names to pass along to your potential employer. Put a significant amount of thought into who will keep your confidence at your current job. "Oftentimes, people find peers rather than managers to be safer bets," says Lebovits. "As long as your reference can speak to your work ethic, enthusiasm, drive and accomplishments, you don't need to search high and low for a senior executive to speak on your behalf go with who knows you best."

## **Use your time wisely.**

The breakfast interview is an ideal forum. Meetings scheduled at 8 a.m. are often over in time to arrive at work by 9 a.m.. If they run over, any number of reasons can be offered for a delayed arrival. "I'd caution the use of excessive creativity when devising excuses for taking time off," warns Lebovits. "Personal time for a relaxing respite is still an acceptable reason for taking vacation time. Those who offer the 'sick' excuse run the risk of being asked to log on and work from home, or at least make themselves available." The best maneuvers are those when an interview can be tacked on to other pre-planned time off (long weekends, etc.) or non-work hours, he adds.

## **Don't slack off at work.**

Never stop giving your all, advises Lebovits. Job seekers often experience intense paranoia at their current job. If you devote yourself fully to what you're doing in the hours you're there (and job search with a vengeance in the hours when you're not), you'll continue to get the praise and recognition to keep you on track at your current job. In the end, the possibility always exists that you'll stay. Don't shoot yourself in the foot by causing suspicion where you are and maybe not landing anything else.