

The Best Way to Prepare for a Job Search and Interviews

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Several years ago when looking for a position in Los Angeles, I interviewed with numerous [law firms](#). In virtually every one of these interviews I ran across an attorney who knew not one, not two, not three—but numerous, numerous attorneys in my current firm. If this is the case in a market the size of Los Angeles (and the market in Los Angeles is huge), I cannot even imagine what it must be like in smaller markets. For example, I'm from Detroit. I grew up in a suburb of Detroit. When it came time for me to decide where to work after [law school](#), when I started interviewing with firms in Detroit I knew many of the attorneys before I even arrived at the interviews—they were the parents of people I grew up with.

The following are my suggestions for the best way to prepare for a [job search](#) and interviews:

1. Know you are always being watched, observed, and judged

When I was in high school, I remember one of the best looking girls in my school was known to be a prude and someone who would date boys but never let anything all that exciting happen. She was also a star athlete and a [student council leader](#) and a very respected student. My parents were divorced and lived about an hour apart. I lived with my father. The funny thing is that this same girl also had parents who were divorced and spent a lot of time in one city visiting a parent.

The girl had the exact opposite reputation in the city where she didn't live full time. Her strategy it seemed, like the strategy of many, was to have two separate personas. She knew that if she behaved one way in her school and around people there she would experience fall out. She also knew that by keeping her “wild side” in another town this wouldn't affect her directly in her own back yard.

In life we are always being observed. We are being observed in our communities. We are being observed in our jobs. We are being observed by our peers. We are being observed by our superiors. There are a lot of people out there who understand that. The smart woman discussed above certainly understood that (albeit, in a different context).

When I went to [look for a job](#) in Detroit, despite the fact I hadn't spent time in the city since high school, I already knew which firms I would likely [get jobs](#) in and which ones I likely wouldn't. This had nothing to do with the prestige of the firm—it had to do with the people inside the firms. I knew I had been close to certain people growing up and their parents liked me. I also knew I hadn't been close with others and had made some enemies along the way. Sure enough, when I started applying for jobs in Detroit I was preceded by my past. The Detroit legal community is small enough that most people know one another.

In everything you do in the public arena, you are likely being observed, watched, and judged. The people you need today will likely have some impact over events that may happen to you tomorrow. It's as simple as that. Like the woman discussed above, you need to do everything you can to maintain a strong public face at all costs.

One thing about interviewing is there will likely almost always be someone where you are interviewing that knows of you. That person will likely have a say in what is happening to you in your new position. Be aware of this and you will be preparing for interviews every second of every day.

2. Remember the best employees can spot other good employees and you cannot “fake it”—you are always preparing for interviews just by doing a good job with your current work

There are many people out there who go to work in jobs and for whatever reason aren't challenged. Most often, the people who claim they aren't challenged are the same people who go out of the way to not challenge themselves. We all know the type of person who doesn't challenge themselves in the job. These are the sorts of people always looking for shortcuts and other methods to do as little work as possible. I've never understood this sort of person—but they are there. This sort of person is also the same one who is likely to be very defensive when asked about something they don't know but think they should know—“Oh, I already know that!” they will say.

When you are good at something and really doing your job you have the tendency to get “immersed” in your [subject matter](#). Over time, the subject matter and its intricacies and innuendos becomes almost second nature to the good student. You also become more astute and a level or presumed understanding emerges between people who understand the subject matter well. Little tidbits and other bits of understanding emerge. Two people who are very good at something share a similar understanding.

When you are interviewing with a truly excellent person, they will also be able to tell if you share this level of understanding. If you are a slacker and not a hard worker, or someone who doesn't consistently challenge their mind, they will see right through this. This level of understanding is particularly important at the higher levels. You need to always be working hard and doing good work even when you may not want to make long-term plans to be at your current firm. This is essential.

3. You need to go into your job with a sincere and 100% desire to make it work and switch jobs infrequently—if at all

Until the 1980s, the majority of workers in America hardly changed jobs—if at all. One of the major changes that happened was when the Japanese started importing cheaper and better cars into the United States. American car makers (a major industry at the time) could no longer afford to be as loyal to their employees and mass firings and layoffs became increasingly commonplace. Furthermore, pensions were fairly rapidly phased out at most companies in favor of 401ks—because employees began to be more “portable” in their jobs.

Despite that fact that people can switch jobs on a whim, switching jobs is not always the smartest thing to do. Young people like to feel as if they are in control and more valued by their employers than they value them. In addition, young people are likely to move for a slight bump in salary, a person in the firm they don't like, or some other trivial sort of factor.

These are not good reasons to move. In fact, there are few good reasons to leave most employers. The best reason and the only reason is if there is something inside your firm that is so endemic to the firm and so pervasive that unless you leave,

your career will never go forward. These factors also should be near 100% beyond your control. When you join an employer, it is much like getting married. If you show a lot of commitment to your current employer you will be respected if you have to leave due to factors outside of your control.

The reason all of this is important is because the person interviewing you wants to trust you. If the person or organization interviewing you doesn't trust you and believes you may leave for a trivial reason then they will be unlikely to hire you. If your reason for leaving is sound and the next firm who hires you believes you are likely to remain on board in the face of adversity then they are more likely to hire you. People want to have those with staying power in their organizations. No organization is perfect and all organizations go through ups and downs.

Conclusions

In everything you do—both inside and outside of work—you are always preparing for your job search and interviews. You need to remember that the time to prepare for interviews and a job search is before you ever know you will need to prepare. Being a good employee and a job searcher is something that takes the same amount of time and effort to achieve.

THE LESSON

Everything you do is a form of preparation for your job interviews, as you are always under some form of scrutiny. The best employees can always spot other good employees, and you cannot “fake it.” Merely doing a good job in your work is a form of interview preparation. Always put your all into your work, therefore, even if you don't have long-term plans to remain at your current employment. Switch jobs as infrequently as possible. The time to prepare for a job search is before you even realize that you need to do so.

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