

## 46 Actions You Can Take to Optimize Your Job Search and Career Today

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When I used to apply for jobs myself, I would always go to the office supply store and purchase the absolute most expensive paper and envelopes I could. I remember, the paper I used to purchase was so expensive that you could only purchase 50 sheets of it at a time. The paper was so heavy that it was almost like cardboard and difficult to fit in the equally expensive envelopes that I purchased with the paper. This may seem like something that is ridiculous and far more over the top than necessary. However, starting from a young age, I have always believed in optimizing everything and the further I have gotten in my career, the more important I have realized optimization is.



Optimization means that in every single point, you are improving what you are doing by 10% or more compared to everyone else around you. In the case of the paper, I have received well over 1,000,000 resumes in my recruiting firms over the past 10 years and I have never seen anyone use paper like this. I would have remembered it if I saw it. The paper I had found was so heavy that it was made mostly of cotton. You could crumple this stuff up and then iron it to get the creases out if you wanted to. The paper cost a fortune but it was something that really made my applications stick out. It could be sitting in a pile of 500 resumes and anyone who saw a letter on this paper would reach for it and pull the resume on it right out of the stack.

What does paper like this say about the applicant?

- The person takes the job seriously
- Quality is important to the person
- The person wants to make a good impression
- The employer is important to the person
- The person does things as best as they possibly can be done
- The person wants the job
- The person wants to be noticed
- The person cares about details
- The person wants to look good

You can make your own list. My point is that something as simple as the paper you apply to a job on will make a huge difference. Every single detail of your job search is something that can make a huge difference. The results you get in your job search and in your life will come down to details. The better you pay attention to and optimize various details, the better off you are likely to be in your job search. This paper paid huge dividends for me in my job search. In fact, I am surprised that more people do not do this. People spend thousands of dollars on suits, plastic surgery and all sorts of stuff to look good when they are sitting there in person, but a resume sits in conference rooms and on the desk of hiring authorities before you show up for an interview and after. The resume better look good.

I run recruiting firms as well, and make sure I use the best paper I can. I use good paper and stationery because I want the candidates at BCG Attorney Search I represent to stand out. I have always done this. For several years, the paper we used could only be found in Europe and was manufactured by a small company in Belgium. Notwithstanding, we used it despite the fact that it costs much more than other paper. At the same time, all of our competitors were simply emailing and faxing out resumes. We continued to ensure that every resume went out on the best quality paper and, year after year, the company continued to grow while many of our competitors came and went. This happened not just because of the paper. It happened for many reasons, and most of this was about observing hundreds of little details like this and improving on each one constantly. You need to watch the details and improving on just one little detail can make all the difference in your job search and in your life, as well.

Why am I telling you about paper? Certainly, your job search does not come down to just what sort of paper you use. I am not here to tell you this. What I am here to tell you, though, is that your job search comes down to numerous things, like the quality of paper you use, and this and other things taken in tandem make up the entire impression you give the employer and have an impact on whether or not you are going to get the job. You need to hit every little data point you possibly can in the process of looking for a job and the better you do this, the more likely you are to get the sort of job you are entitled to and deserve.

I would like to ask you some questions about your job search. Each of these are points where you can optimize and improve just as I did with something as simple as paper. The more of these you adopt and follow, the better you will do in your job search.

- 1. How many different methods are you using to apply to jobs?** I list this point first because this is one of the largest mistakes people make and it is also something that I feel quite invested in, as well. Incredibly, most people out there rely upon just a few methods of looking for a job. For example, they may join a website, like Monster, and search for jobs just on this site. This strategy is incredibly dangerous and something that has likely destroyed many careers and lives. When you are just looking for jobs on one site like this, you are only seeing a very small percentage of the job openings in the market. A site like Monster has a lot of jobs that employers are paying \$500 or more to advertise, but it certainly does not contain jobs from employer websites, jobs from association websites, and jobs from every other career site out there. You need access to every job out there, and this is what we do at sites like Hound and EmploymentCrossing. In addition to applying to open jobs, you should also be mailing companies in your industry and expressing interest in working for them regardless of whether or not they have openings. This is an incredibly effective strategy and something we do at EmploymentAuthority for our clients. You need to be using every single method possible to track down jobs and apply to jobs. You should never rely on one. The more methods you use, the better off you are going to be.
- 2. Do you know what types of companies/organizations are interviewing you the most?** You need to notice what is working the best for you and do more of it. For example, if you are an accountant and most of your interviews are coming from companies in the construction industry, then you should find more companies in the construction industry, and make sure you are applying to more construction companies. This is simple mathematics and odds playing. If you are doing very well with construction companies, then you are likely (for whatever reason) to do better if you apply to even more construction companies. The more construction companies you apply to, the better off you are going to be. Apply to every construction company you possibly can to increase your odds. Do this locally and wherever you might be interested in working.
- 3. Are you asking places that cannot hire you for referrals?** Believe it or not, this is a great strategy that alone could dramatically increase your job search success. If someone sends you a nice rejection letter in the mail after an interview (or even not), just give them a jingle on the phone and ask them if they have any ideas of where it might be good for you to work. This is an incredible strategy that can pay massive results. If someone rejects you for a job, tell them that is fine and you really enjoyed talking to them. Tell them that you were so impressed with them and liked their company so much that a recommendation from them of where to apply would be very meaningful to you. Oftentimes, this same employer that you are asking for the recommendation from will hire you. They will be so impressed at how much you seem to like them. If they do not hire you, a phone call, or referral to someone they know in another company can carry a ton of weight. This is something that can really assist you in a major way.
- 4. Do you ever use the phone to contact potential employers?** So many people are so much more comfortable hiding behind the computer keyboard. This is nonsense. You need to pick up the phone and call every chance you get. One of the most effective strategies out there is to call potential employers on the phone prior to sending a resume to express your interest, and then email the resume right after the conversation. People love this. Another great strategy is to leave a voicemail with an employer about how much you enjoyed meeting with them, or speak in person. Your voice is something that can convey more passion, excitement and connect more with most employers than an email. Whenever possible, follow up using your voice.
- 5. Do you notice what other job seekers are doing that appears to be working in the market?** You should be looking and investigating what others are doing when looking for jobs. They can tell you where they go to interviews, who called them seeking more information, what happened during certain interviews and more. They can tell you about something they did that helped them secure an interview or an offer. You need to get as much information as you possibly can from other job seekers and use this information to your advantage. Other people and the information they know about is like GOLD and something that you need to learn from. Find a peer group and others who can tell you about different information they learn about (and vice versa). This is something that can make a giant difference in everything you do.
- 6. Do you have special skills that you can make your potential employer aware of?** On at least one or two occasions that I can remember, I have been on the phone screening an attorney for a job, and they have started to tell me the most incredible things about themselves that were not on their resume--things like being a former basketball player at a major university, or even in one case being an Olympic athlete. On a couple of other occasions, I have met "child prodigies" that graduated from college at the age of 17 and then went to top 10 law schools. None of this was on their resumes. Being an Olympic athlete shows someone has a lot of drive. Being a child prodigy shows someone is smart. Other people may be gifted in doing computer coding despite being an attorney, for example. You never know what sorts of skills your potential employer may be interested in. You need to show them everything you've got!
- 7. How much do you allow employers to talk about themselves in interviews?** People love to talk about themselves, and employers are no different. Allow employers to talk about themselves as much as possible during interviews. Ask questions which allow them to show their bright side so they feel good about themselves. Make yourself interesting by being as interested as possible in other people. Do this with conviction. I have seen several people in interviews ask about an employer but do so in a way that is insincere, for example. This is not the right way. You need to ask questions in a sincere way that makes the employer believe that you are interested in them. Allow the employer to open up and talk about themselves personally, as well, if possible. Find affinity between you and the interviewer.
- 8. Have you had your resume professionally reviewed?** Several years ago, I was sitting in an interview and the person interviewing me discovered that I had a typographical error on my resume. I almost did not get the job. I had been using the same resume for years, and the typo was an obscure grammatical rule that I was not even aware of, but an astute attorney interviewer was. I do not know all the rules of grammar and I used to be a law professor. I am embarrassed to say that there are a lot of people out there who are simply much better with grammar and so forth than I am. Some people love this stuff! Let them worry about this stuff if you are not fascinated and obsessed with this. You do not need to have your resume professionally done, however, this can help. Sometimes professionals can see various things with our resumes that we personally cannot see, and they can come up with small improvements that can assist us a great deal. I have been running companies such as <http://www.PreferredResumes.com> that help people get their resumes professionally done for years. If you do not have someone else do your resume, then you should do everything within your power to ensure that you learn what you can about how to do a professional resume, and make sure yours is outstanding. Have lots of people look over your resume and make sure that you are making the best impression possible.
- 9. Could you apply to even more jobs than you are right now?** The biggest mistake people make is that they under market themselves. You should be applying to literally every potential job you can. Cast a wide net. If you are not casting a wide net, you are missing out on opportunities. There is nothing more tragic for your job search than missing out on

opportunities and not applying to enough jobs. Apply to everything. You never know where an interview can lead, and you never know how you can contribute to one organization and not another. Everything you do needs to be about optimizing your opportunities and taking advantage of every potential job out there. In all of my years in the career industry, this is one of the largest mistakes I have seen people make.

10. **Reapply to the same jobs.** When an employer puts a job on many commercial websites like CareerBuilder and HotJobs that are publicly available for anyone to browse, they may receive 1,000 applications or more. They receive so many applications that they literally do not look at them all. They pick a few applications that look good and interview those candidates. If these do not work out, they look at some more. You can increase your odds of getting many jobs by simply reapplying. "I sent my resume on X date but noticed this job is still open. I would like to bring a few changes I have made, to update my resume, to your attention and re-express my interest in this position." Reapplying can double or triple your odds of getting many jobs. Do not give up if you do not get the job the first time you apply.
11. **Do you make your greatest achievements for your past employers visible on your resume?** You need to list some of your greatest achievements on your resume. If you receive an award from your past employer, list it. If you were told you had the highest sales numbers in the history of the company, put this on your resume. You need to shine on your resume and, in your interviews, make your solid and strong achievements known. There is nothing wrong with tooting your own horn. You need to give people a compelling reason to hire you and "sound bites" they can use when they discuss you with others. Make sure people know the things you have done to help past employers, and make a list of all these things so you are ready to talk about them. An interview is not the time to be reserved and not bring these things up.
12. **Do you really believe you are the best candidate for most employers?** A relative of mine spent time in the Central Intelligence Agency as a spy and, one time, he was speaking with his boss, a man who was a very senior spy, and telling him about how he did not like someone he was charged with making friends with as part of a spying operation. "Don't think it or you will show it!" his boss said to him. I have always remembered this piece of advice because it is quite powerful and something that is very relevant in everything we do. Your mind is an incredibly powerful tool, and you need to believe that you are the best option in every single interview you are going into. You need to believe you are the absolute best man or woman for the job. When you think this, you will show it. Thoughts are things. Your thoughts about your strengths and weaknesses are going to control what happens to you. Make sure you are using your mind to the best of your ability and to set you apart in a positive way.
13. **Do you know the top reasons employers are not interviewing and hiring you?** Sometimes there are small reasons you are not getting the interviews and jobs you want; other times there are big reasons. One thing is for certain, though: You better know your biggest weaknesses in the job market. Your weakness may be you have had too many jobs, been unemployed for too long, got fired from your last job. Everyone who applies for any job out there is likely to have lots of weaknesses, just like you do. The best thing you can do with your weaknesses is ensure that you learn from them and that you are aware of them. When people spend years in therapy, one of the principle things they are doing is learning about their weaknesses. You need to do the exact same thing, and learning about your weaknesses is something that can be a massive benefit to you because it is something that every employer is going to be focused on when they are interviewing you, as well. The more you learn about your weaknesses, the better you can do your to steer conversations away from your weaknesses in interviews, avoid aspects of your resume that may compel an employer to dive into your weaknesses, and more. The more you know about your weaknesses, the better you can counteract questions and so forth about these weaknesses in interviews.
14. **Do you have compelling ways to address your weaknesses in your applications?** There is nothing wrong with losing a job or having other problems when applying for jobs. What is important, though, is what you do with the weaknesses you have in your applications and how you can address these weaknesses to the best of your ability when questioned about them. The secret to doing incredibly well in most interviews is making sure that you take these weaknesses and make them into strengths. You need to do your best to put a positive spin on all your weaknesses. One of the greatest marketing strengths is to often lead with your weakness and get it out of the way up front. For example, the rental car Avis says "We're number 2, so we try harder ..." and other brands do similar things to make the most of their weaknesses. You need to address your weaknesses and always think through them and the best way to put a positive spin on them. This is a strategy that can pay massive dividends. If you have a major weakness, you better believe that the employer is thinking about this when they are interviewing you. You should make sure you can address it if it is something that cannot be avoided.
15. **Are you using a specific strategy instead of just being tactical in your job search?** Most people are tactical in everything that they do. Being tactical means that you simply apply to jobs as they come across your computer monitor and interest you. Being strategic would be having a complete system in place for tracking down jobs, following up, and making your applications stick out as much as possible. You need to be strategic in how you track down jobs, how you apply to jobs, and how you do everything. Very few people are strategic in how they go about doing their job searches and, due to this, they do not get the results they should. When you are strategic, you can get a lot more "bang for your buck" in everything you are doing. Suppose, for example, you were interested in working for Apple Computer. A tactical person would apply for a job at Apple online. A strategic person might get to know people at Apple before applying, go to events where they were likely to meet people in Human Resources, find out what sort of things were important to the hiring personnel at Apple and so forth. You need a strategy, and having a strategy makes a massive difference in your job search.
16. **Are you sharing your performance reviews, if possible?** If you received good performance reviews in your current or past position, and there is nothing that prohibits you from sharing these performance reviews with a potential new employer, do so. A good performance review shows what you are likely to do once you show up for work and is one of the most effective possible things you can show a potential new employer. No one does this. If you do this, and it is not confidential, then you are going to really shine. Any time I have seen someone do this, it has reaped incredible rewards for them. A good performance review is like a testimonial--only stronger. It shows a potential employer that you are likely to make a very solid contribution with them as you have with another employer.
17. **Have you ensured your appearance is the best it can possibly be for interviews?** This is a very, very easy thing to do but, for many people, a real deal killer. You need to look your absolute best! You need to be well-groomed, your shoes should shine and be as well shined as possible, your shirts should be well pressed. There are a million little things you can be doing to look your best and whatever it is you can do--do it. You need to look your absolute best for all of your interviews and make sure that you are making a good impression. I do not want to get too far into appearances, but your

employer looks at you, and they think to themselves whether or not they want to represent them. If you are shabby, this reflects on them as well. You want to ensure you look your best.

18. **Do you have a prime prospect list of employers you can apply to even if they do not have openings?** One of the best pieces of advice I have for people and that has made the most difference in so many job searches I have been involved in is telling people to apply to the employers that they believe are most likely to be good fits for them, even if they do not have jobs. This is an incredibly powerful strategy because, regardless of what sort of work you do, there are likely to be numerous employers that are a "perfect fit" for your skill set. Apply to all of these employers and get your resume on file. Who cares if they do not have an opening? You have an obligation to them, and to yourself, to let them know you are available. You can make a list of these employers at a local library by doing research, or you can find them by doing research online or purchasing various industry directories online. You need to find all the employers in your industry that are likely to be interested in you and hire you.
19. **Do you shop from or use your interviewer's services (if appropriate), and do you let your interviewer know that?** Employers LOVE IT when you are very familiar with their product or service and have used it in the past. In fact, I have hired countless people who have used one of our products at our companies and had good things to say about it in the interview. These sorts of people understand what you are doing, and they also can be incredible brand ambassadors. Also, when someone comes into speak with me, and they know a lot about what we do, I am flattered and like them. When I like them, I want to hire them. If possible, you should always be a consumer of the services of an employer you are interviewing with and be enthusiastic about the employer you are speaking with and what they are doing.
20. **Do you write articles, take classes outside of work, participate in industry events, and do other things in your industry that employers know about?** The one ingredient that most job seekers are missing, and which they should address, is PASSION. You should have passion for your industry and whatever it is you do. By being passionate, you can separate yourself in an incredible way from everyone else out there. You need to show a lot of interest in your industry and showing interest can make you extraordinary instead of just average in your industry. You need to be passionate about what you do and be involved in it. The difference between employees out there is huge when an employer sees someone with PASSION for what they do. You need to show your employer you have passion.
21. **Are you using multiple marketing methods to track down and find a job?** Nothing is worse than using only one way to apply for a job. You need to make sure you are using every possible marketing method out there. This includes using email to apply to jobs, using letters to apply for jobs, calling employers on the phone, sending faxes, showing up at career fairs, networking and more. The more marketing methods you use when you are applying for a job, the better off you are going to be. You need to do everything within your power to use as many marketing methods as you can think of.
22. **Have you thought about the reasons you are the best possible hire for employers?** In business, one of the things I love to do is create lists of various reasons that one of our companies is the best possible choice. For example, I might create a list like "The Top 100 Reasons You Should Use Our Company to Get a Job." You should do the exact same thing with your job search. You should create a list of the most important reasons that you would be the best possible hire an employer could make for any job. You need to make a comprehensive list of all of your strengths and why you are the best person for any employer. Nothing is more important than being aware of all of your strengths, and the more strengths you are aware of, the more you can bring these up at the best possible time. In addition, the more strengths you are aware of, the more confident you will be. You need self confidence to get the best possible job. Empower yourself by being aware of all of your strengths.
23. **Are you taking advantage of every networking opportunity you can during your job search?** Networking is incredible. All you need to do to network is find events and other things and simply show up. When you show up, you will meet an incredible variety of people, and these people can all assist you in your job search. At night, instead of sitting around in front of the television, find events and go out and meet people. Get involved in your church, synagogue, or mosque. Start participating in whatever events you enjoy doing outside of the house. It is incredibly important that you get out and meet as many people as possible and do everything within your power to develop a network. You need to know people. Commit to meeting one person a day, exchange phone numbers, and get out there. It is important that you are networked and out there. Watch the paper for events, look up information about events online, and do everything within your power to network. This can pay huge and incredible rewards for you.
24. **Do you have a website that employers can look at for information about you?** If an employer is interested in hiring you, they will go out and try and find information about you online. Many families even have websites. I have seen lots of people lately who actually have personal websites--whether they are blogs, family sites, or simple sites dedicated to their interests. There are personal persona's and there are professional persona's. If you have a personal persona on the web that is likely to upset an employer, then the best thing you can often do is get it down. You need to be aware that an employer can find anything and everything about you online, and they will do so. Make sure there is nothing about you online that is likely to be offensive to a potential employer. Watch your image! I have seen countless people not get positions due to negative personal information that the person posted about themselves online. This is something you need to be very aware of in your job search. If there is a lot of information out there about you online, make sure that the information is something that the employer would want to see.
25. **Do you emphasize your benefits and not features?** One of the most important things you can do is make your application materials about the employer and not just you. Your application materials should talk about the benefits you can offer the employer and not just your personal features. For example, if you are someone who can type incredibly fast, you should tell potential employers that you can accomplish more typing for them in less time and with less cost to them. You need to focus on the benefits you can provide the employer and not just your personal features. If you can sell more of this or that than other similarly situated people, you should tell the employer you can assist them in making more money, moving more of a product and so forth. You need to focus on the benefits you offer the employer. Most people think more about themselves than anyone or anything else. You need to tell the employer what you can do for them and how quickly, effectively and efficiently you can do all of these things. Your employer is interested in what you mean for their business and how you can help their business. Focus on your benefits to your potential employer and not your features. For example, when antilock brakes first came out in cars, they did not simply say "this will help you stop". Instead, they showed commercials of people avoiding catastrophic injuries and death by steering to avoid accidents on mountain roads during rain storms and so forth. They also showed people of the age and demographic of the sorts of people that were likely to purchase their cars. They emphasized a benefit, and not a feature, and this sold cars.
26. **How often do you look for an excuse to follow up with an employer in an interview?** When I was single, I always

noticed that if I had a party and 100 people showed up, that the one girl I spoke with and seemed to like at the party would always leave a coat or something at the party that she needed to pick up at a later time. This happened enough times, and did not happen with other people at the party, so I think that this must have been an "excuse" on at least a few times to follow up. You need to give yourself reasons to follow up with an employer. Bring up an article and send it after the interview. Touch base at a later time. Every single time you are making contact with the employer, this can help you. You need to follow up, and having excuses to follow up can put you in a good light with the employer and make a huge difference.

27. **Do you have a comprehensive database of everyone who has ever interviewed you for a job?** Keep a record of everyone you have ever spoken with when looking for a job. You can then follow up with these people periodically to see if they have openings. Sometimes, especially when you are a finalist for this or that job, the employer who does not hire you may be interested in hiring you later. This is just how things work out, and this can make a massive difference. Follow up with everyone you speak with and make sure that you stay in contact with them. Staying in touch can make a huge and profound difference in your job search.
28. **Are you applying to enough jobs?** That's right--apply to more jobs. Apply to every single job you can apply to. Nothing is a more stupid mistake when searching for a job than being overly selective in applying for jobs. Apply for jobs first and then worry about whether or not you want to work there after you get an offer. Have you heard bad things about the employer? So what! An employer may have 100+ different departments and divisions, and each one may be different. You may be applying to work in the best division with the nicest group of people imaginable! Never sell yourself short. Every person you meet is a potential contact and a potential job. Give yourself as many options as possible. You need to cast as wide a net as possible. This is about the most important advice I can give you. Get yourself out there to as many employers as you can. I cannot tell you how many times I have seen employers hire people who applied even by accident. One time I was representing a guy in Texas who lived on a farm raising chickens and had never left the state. All of the applications for the firm he was applying to in Texas were reviewed at the firm's home office in Philadelphia. They ended up hiring him in Philadelphia, and he moved to the city and raised chickens in his backyard in Downtown Philadelphia. You never know ... You need to apply to as many places as possible.
29. **Are you using the fax, mail and email in applying for jobs?** People hardly ever send faxes anymore. They send emails. When people started sending faxes, they stopped sending printed letters. A fax is often delivered in a special envelope, and it always has a sense of urgency in almost every company out there. If you fax someone something, they will almost always look at it. You should be faxing all of your applications, emailing your applications, and mailing your applications. Communicate in every possible way. Use all three methods. You want your stuff to get read, and it is better to overdo it than it is to underdo it. Make sure your applications stand out by applying in different ways. When a major advertiser goes on a campaign, it does not just advertise on the radio. It may do the radio, magazines, direct mail, television and public relations. The idea is that they get the word out in multiple ways. You too should get the word out in as many ways as possible. If people are not using the mail, and you do, this helps your application stick out. If people are not using the fax, and you do, this helps your application stick out. When you are applying for a job, you are advertising yourself. Effective advertisers try and reach you in multiple ways. If you are driving down the highway, you may see a billboard for Coca-Cola. If you turn on the radio in your car, you may hear an ad for Coca-Cola. If you go home and open a magazine, you may see an advertisement for Coca-Cola. If you turn on the television, you may see an advertisement for Coca-Cola. Effective companies do a lot of advertising, and they do it in different ways and through different media. Make your media email, fax and the mail.
30. **Are you testing headlines in your email applications?** You should have powerful and compelling headlines in your email subject lines. Do not just say "Application for Position #14895". Instead, you can say "I Want This Job" or "I Can Excel in This Job!" or something along those lines. You need to be specific and draw the employer to open your application instead of just glancing it over. Some employers will receive thousands of applications for one position and will not even open the applications because it hurts their mouse finger too much after awhile. You need to get the attention of employers with compelling headlines that get your applications opened! You can test different combinations of headlines, as well, if you are applying for enough jobs.
31. **Are you following up after your interviews with thank you notes or additional information?** You should follow up after interviews when appropriate. Make sure the employer remembers you, and that you are sticking out. It is always a good idea to get at the top of mind awareness with the people you interview with. Sending a short email or thank you note following an interview gets you in front of people and helps them remember you. Some companies may interview as many as 20 or 30 people for the average position. It is important that you are sticking out, and that the employer remembers you. A thank you note (short and sweet) can always help you be remembered. Do not be too mushy and do not appear too desperate. Just a short note is all you need.
32. **Do you appear incredibly interested in your industry to employers?** Employers want to hire people who have passion. You need to appear interested in your industry to your employer. You should be able to talk about the events going on in your industry, and you should appear to have passion for your industry. You need to know who the key players are in your industry, and you need to know everything you can about your industry. People prefer to hire those who are very interested in their industry compared to those who are not. You need to appear interested in your industry to potential employers.
33. **Do you appear too desperate?** It is important to be interested in your employer and working somewhere; however, the last thing you should be doing is appearing desperate to a potential employer. People do not want to hire desperate people--their needs to be a little bit of an element of chase to hiring you. The employer needs to feel like they are lucky to be getting you (but without you saying this). The more desperate you appear, the less the employer is going to be interested in you very often. A good analogy for getting a job is that it is very similar to dating. You do not propose to someone on the first date and, if you were to do this, it would be a real turn off. There needs to be an element of "chase" on both sides. It is very important that you have at least some element of chase in your job search and do not appear too desperate.
34. **Are you modifying your applications for each specific employer?** This is something that can make a huge difference. The more you modify your applications for each specific employer, the better off you are going to be, and the more jobs you are going to get. Instead of saying "I am seeking to work for a well-diversified conglomerate ..." your application should say "I have always thought that X company was my favorite producer of widgets. I have liked the people I have met from the company, especially X individual, and I am crazy about your new marketing campaign with the singing walrus!" When you personalize an application and show the employer you are interested in their company specifically, and are not just

flooded the market with the same letter over and over again, this makes a difference. People are interested in people who are interested in them. You want to be as interested in the employer as possible and show as much possible interest in the employer as you possibly can. The best way to do this is to have specific application materials for each employer.

35. **Are you improving yourself through self-improvement education?** Getting the best job and getting ahead in your career requires that you constantly be improving and getting better and better and better. One of the secrets of star athletes and people who manage to do the best in every single profession is that they have coaches and are constantly questioning what they do and improving in everything that they do. It is incredibly important that you are constantly looking for new ways to improve at the things you do. I remember several years ago sending one of our employees to a sales training course that met weekly for several months. After taking this course, his sales close to doubled, and they stayed there permanently. When you improve yourself and look for ways to do this in every area, it makes a giant and huge difference. You should continue improving at everything you are doing, and the best way to do this is to always be learning about self-improvement topics that interest you.
36. **Are you looking for jobs in every geographic area where you would like to work?** This is one of the easiest ways to multiply your offers and get more jobs. If you possibly can, one of the smartest things you can often do is look at numerous geographic areas and not just where you are from when looking for a job. Even in the worst of recessions, there are always areas that are going to be doing very well and ones which are not. I remember several years ago when I was starting out my career looking for a job in Detroit. It was not easy. Then, when I started looking for jobs in places like Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and other cities, the entire world opened up to me, and suddenly I was in incredible demand. When things are bad in one geographic location, they are good in others. You should be geographically open to numerous areas if this is possible. With certain skills, you can work anywhere in the world if you want, and you should be open to other areas if at all possible. Not being geographically flexible is one of the largest single mistakes that people make when they are searching for a job. You need to look EVERYWHERE and come up with the best options.
37. **Are you looking up old openings and applying to these, as well?** At EmploymentCrossing one of the things that we do is have the EmploymentCrossing Archives that allows people to look up every opening there has ever been in every company. Some companies are just plain always hiring. Most law firms are always hiring attorneys of some kind. Engineering companies are generally always hiring engineers of some kind. There are positions which companies, just by their nature, generally have open at most points in time. I always counsel people to go out and find these positions that are always likely to be open. For example, a company may have advertised a position on a big job board a year ago. During the year, the position has been filled, but the person who took the job may have left. Or, the company may have grown and now needs more people in that line of work. Apply to the job even though it looks like it is no longer open. As a recruiter, I have gotten so many people jobs using this strategy I cannot count. You need to get applications out there to old openings. Put yourself in the running for every single type of job it looks like you can do--even if the job looks filled. You need to go after every job out there, and this includes jobs that may have been filled a long time ago. Do you read the news? Some companies replace their CEO's every six months! If a job was posted on a job board six months ago, the person who was hired for it may have come and gone already. Track down every job you can out there.
38. **Are you using risk reversal where appropriate in your job search?** One of the smartest things you can do when looking for a job is to use risk reversal. This is often the most appropriate in jobs you may be applying for where you appear to be under qualified for the particular job, for example. If you are going into an interview for a job, and with a company where there is a ton of competition, or if the employer seems to be expressing a lot of hesitation to hiring you, you can often use risk reversal to get yourself into the company by saying something along the lines of the following: "Listen, I have wanted to work for this company for a long time. I am an incredibly good worker, and you are going to like having me here. I am fine financially, and I am just looking to work in a job I will really enjoy with people I like. I would like to work here for a month for free and show you what I am like. After one month if you do not think I am a good fit, just tell me, and I will leave no questions asked." This strategy can work huge wonders for your job search because people will see your enthusiasm and, based on this, will often just hire you. Enthusiasm aside, people may take you up on the offer. Risk reversal is something the best marketers use in every discipline. When you watch television infomercials, they tell you to try this or that for free and, if you are not satisfied, to send it back. The goal of marketers is to reduce friction so you will commit to purchasing whatever it is they are selling.
39. **Are you committed and not a dabbler?** There are a ton of people out there who are dabblers and never really seem to get "off the ground" in anything that they do. They start this or that and do it for some time and then move on to something else. You can find people like this in every profession. I remember several years ago I was shopping at a men's clothing store, and I met a salesman there who was in his mid-50s. He had a special card made up and gave me a copy of his card. He took down my contact information including my email address and phone number. He then proceeded to call me every single time the store had a sale. He sent me Christmas cards and birthday cards. He emailed me from time to time about the store and events they were having. In a word, this guy stayed in touch and was always in touch with me. Other sales people in the store never did this. They were generally young, good-looking kids who had moved to Los Angeles to be actors and were "dabbling" in the job. There are different guys like this every time I go into the store. The guy I was dealing with, however, is still there and he has been there as long as I can remember. I am sure he makes a ton more money than the other sales guys. His secret is that he is not a dabbler. If you are going out to interview for a job, you should do so as someone who, in the eyes of the employer, and your eyes as well, could conceivably be doing the job for the rest of your career. These are the people employers want to hire because someone who is committed to a job, and not a dabbler, is always going to do a better job in almost every case. You need to be committed and not a dabbler, and you need to show the employer this is who you are.
40. **Are you using testimonials in your application materials?** Nothing sells more than showing the employer that your former employer and co-workers loved working with you. People are trained to instinctively question the things we say about ourselves; however, they are much more likely to believe things that others say about us. This is why, when you are watching television, you will see people paraded in front of the camera offering a testimonial about this or that. The advertisers always show us these testimonials because they know that we are much more likely to be influenced by what someone else says about us rather than what we say about ourselves. If you have people, such as former employers, friends and others that can say good things about you, then put quotes and other information from them in your application materials. It is incredibly important to do this because it shows that others trust you, and others have good things to say about you. Testimonials also will humanize your application materials and make you seem more human to the employer rather than less human. Use testimonials.
41. **Are you making it easy for employers to interview you?** I have seen more people lose potential jobs by being difficult to

interview than anything else. If you want to work in Las Vegas and are not getting any interviews there, plan a trip to Las Vegas. Call everyone you applied to work with there before you leave, tell them when you will be there, and that you can talk to them at that time. If an employer wants to interview you at 10:00 a.m. next Tuesday, do not tell them you have a doctor's appointment and play games with what time you will be there: Figure out a way to get there at 10:00 a.m. next Tuesday. You need to be accessible when an employer is expressing interest in speaking with you about a job. You need to be available and ready and willing to talk to the employer on their terms. If the policy of the employer is not to pay to fly you out to another city for interviews, then find a way to get out there. If the employer wants to meet you for coffee at 9:00 p.m. on a Saturday, then meet them on Saturday evening. When you are looking for a job, you need to show that you are ready and willing to meet anytime and any place. Your objective is to be available to interview people. When I call people to interview them and ask when they are available, and they say "I am 15 minutes from your office, so I can be there within 30 minutes ..." I am very excited. Not only do I know the person wants the job, but they are also sending the message that they are likely to be very responsive to the needs of the company if they come to work for us. Trying to get a job is not a time to play "hard to get" and beat around the bush. You need to go after the job, be available, and make yourself available.

42. **Do you have a comprehensive database of people in your industry you can call for advice about finding a job?** There is nothing more powerful, many times, than calling people you know in your industry and asking them for advice about the job market. If you have not started building a database to do this, you need to do so now. You need to create a little database of everyone you meet in your industry and start staying in contact with them. People are one of your greatest resources in finding employment. When you have a large network of people, you can always call upon them when you are looking for a job. Even if you are unemployed, continue going to industry events and making sure that you get to know people in your industry. Make friends with these people. Have coffee. Go out to lunch. When you know people, they will also naturally ask you about your career. When you tell them you are unemployed and looking for work, they will be able to help you with contacts and other advice. This is something that can pay massive dividends for you and really assist you in your job search.
43. **Are you trying to just get your foot in the door?** Once you get your foot in the door, you can almost always move up when something better in the company opens up. I am sure that you, like me, have heard countless stories about people who start out in the mail room, sweeping floors and so forth, and then rise to become the head of a major company. This is true, and a lot of it has to do with people having the ability to just get their foot in the door. Once you get your foot in the door, and if you are a hard worker, you can take advantage of other opportunities in the given company you are interested in working for once they open up. At many employers, you may be expected to start out small and at the bottom before you are allowed to rise. Going into an interview and telling the employer that you will take any job to have the opportunity for a better job when one opens up, because you like the company so much, is an incredible motivator. People generally and instinctively like people who also like them. You should do everything within your power to get your foot in the door.
44. **Do you have one powerful thing about you and your candidacy that will stick out for potential employers?** In sales and marketing there is something called a Unique Selling Proposition ("USP") that everyone is supposed to have. A USP is something that is memorable about a product and defines the product in the customer's mind. For example, when you think of Volvo, you think of safety. When you can package yourself to also have mind share for one thing, then you are going to be better off. Your USP may be "fanatical attention to detail" or "gets along incredibly with others." It does not matter so much what your USP is as long as it is something that the employer believes will benefit them. After an employer interviews someone, they will always have one or two powerful things about most people they end up hiring that they will remember. For example, they may remember that you are a former soccer player. They may remember you went to the same university they did. It is important that you have one or two things about you that stick out in a positive way that employers can remember. Many people are under the impression that they need to be "generic" when they are conducting a job search, and that it is important for them not to stick out. While this may certainly be true for a small subset of employers, generally, you want to be remembered and have some defining characteristic that enables you to be interesting to the employer. Think about strengths you may have and what you could be remembered for. Package yourself to have something memorable.
45. **Are you bonding with your interviewers?** One of the worst things that people can do in interviews is act too professional. I want to be clear that everyone is human. Everyone has human problems and everyone does human things. Avoid the tendency with most interviewers to not be too human. You will benefit in a major way when people see you like them. People who are human have problems, they have frustrations, they have pain and they endure various struggles. You can bond with your interviewers when you can share issues they have had and more. One of the best ways to get jobs is to bond with your interviewers on multiple levels. You should feel like they feel and be understanding and open with them. People want to help those who are like them. You should do everything within your power to be like your interviewers and bond with them. If you are invited out for drinks after the interview then go out for drinks. While I hate to say this, when many people are making hiring decisions, they are hiring people that they feel they could be friends with. They are working with the same person all day, every day and want to like the person and feel comfortable with them. You need to bond with your interviewers, and the better you do at this, the more likely you are to get hired. There are limits to this, of course. You should never start a romantic relationship with an interviewer under any circumstance (at least until you have been hired and have been working with the employer for some time!). But you need to bond.
46. **Are you following the money in your job search?** One of the biggest mistakes that people make when they are looking for a job is they go after jobs and industries where there is no opportunity, or where the opportunity is diminishing. For example, if you were in the business of manufacturing vinyl records 30 years ago and were looking for a job, it might not be a good idea to seek a job doing this now. You could seek a job in the "music business," however. Similarly, if you are working in Detroit in the automotive business at the present moment, it might not be wise to seek a job there. You could seek a job in the transportation business instead. By "following the money" I mean that you need to see where the opportunity is and where people are making money. You want to be working in the industries where people are doing well and succeeding, and not in industries and jobs that are dying and going away. You want to make sure that you are putting yourself and your career to the highest and best use you can, and that you are working in doing something where you are actually in demand. This means thinking about your career and life and seeing what is going on in the market and where things are going. It is important that you put yourself in an area where there is a lot of demand and not where the demand is dying. This is true for the types of jobs you are applying for, and it is also true for the geographic areas you are interested in working in. I call this "following the money" and you need to follow the money in your job search.

One of the best ways to get better at anything is to optimize what you are doing. When you optimize what you are doing, you

can increase the effectiveness of anything--not a small amount, but by a massive amount over time. Very few people, for whatever reason, ever decide to do their best to optimize what they are doing. When you optimize every single touchstone and every single thing you are doing, everything changes.

### **THE LESSON**

In any given situation, you must consistently do 10% more than those around you; this is the essence of optimization, a vital tool for career success. Self-optimization changes everything, and is one of the best ways to improve in anything you do. Even seemingly minor changes can yield major results, so pay attention to the details.

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