

Do Your Job Search on Heavy Ground

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

For the past several years I have been interacting with people who are looking for jobs on a daily basis. I have also been working with recruiters, who find people jobs. After many years of working with various people, it often occurs to me that those who get the best jobs do their job search in an unconventional way: *The best thing is to avoid doing what everyone else is doing when it comes to looking for a job.* By far, the most effective strategy for getting a job is to look where other people are simply not looking.

People who do things differently from everyone else often get the best jobs. I have seen this so many times it is difficult to believe. There are many unemployed people who believe a job search should be done in a certain way. Often, the people who learn to do things in a different way get the best results.

In the *Art of War*, Sun Tzu defines eight types of ground on which combat can occur. In terms of your job search, two of the most interesting are Deadly Ground and Heavy Ground.

- An excellent and very effective way to win any war is to go undetected into enemy territory before attacking. You use the element of surprise to win the war. This is what Sun Tzu called "Heavy Ground." Sun Tzu believes this is the best kind of battle. This is considered a battle of "art".
- In Deadly Ground, two forces meet face to face to fight and there is no means of escape. The battle is one of brute force and there are generally going to be heavy casualties on both sides. Sun Tzu believes this is the worst kind of battle. A deadly ground battle is without "art" and allowing this to happen reflects poorly on the commander of the troops.

In a Heavy Ground battle, a weak force can paralyze a much stronger one. Most people are taught to march in "unison" and do things in the same manner as everyone else. This is very common in the job market. People go to large websites and apply for jobs. They use the same recruiters. They look to others to understand what they should be doing, and how they should be conducting their job search. What I would propose is that you fight a heavy ground battle to find a job.

You should fight a heavy ground battle, because it will help you win and get a job where you otherwise might not. For example, if you are fighting on "deadly ground" you will be competing based on the strength of your resume alone compared to other resumes the employer has seen, and the timing of when the employer has seen your resume. The problem with this is that you are not giving yourself any discernible edge compared to other applicants, beyond what you already have. Instead, you are simply competing "face-to-face" with other applicants for the same job. The one with more firepower will win. In most cases you are likely to lose.

One of the most upsetting things to any form of established order is guerilla warfare. It is something that we read about and hear about in the news on a daily basis:

- Humvees getting blown up on roads in Iraq.
- People flying airplanes into buildings in New York.
- Soldiers popping out of bushes and killing American troops during the Vietnam War.

In fact, 'terrorists' seem to be all we hear about these days. Virtually every day I pick up a paper, I read about one terrorist or another blowing something up, or killing someone. Terrorists are everywhere and it is something that defines our world. Terrorists, by definition, are people fighting guerilla wars. The United States is currently fighting guerillas in Iraq and Afghanistan. Before that, we were fighting guerillas elsewhere. We will always be fighting guerillas.

Why do you think we keep reading about guerillas? The reason is that guerilla warfare works. Anytime you fight someone in a way that breaks the rules they are accustomed to, it forces them to develop new rules, and you introduce elements of surprise and uncertainty. Both of these make it very difficult for your opponent.

In American textbooks, one of the things young children study at a young age, is the guerilla warfare that American colonists used against the British in the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), also known as the American War of Independence. At the start of this battle, the British military was widely considered the strongest military in the world. Prior to this battle, Britain had defeated France in the French and Indian Wars and thus, secured a place as a world superpower. In contrast, the Americans largely consisted of hunters, merchants, and farmers, who only volunteered to fight when the battles got close to their homes.

The British troops had been taught to fight facing their enemies in open fields side by side. This military etiquette was something originally developed by Frederick the Great. The British also wore bright red uniforms into the fight. Under the British style they would walk shoulder to shoulder and when they got close, say 50 yards, they would level their musket and fire at the colonists. However, the colonists began fighting "Indian style", hiding behind trees and firing at the British when they were lined up like this.

American settlers were completely outnumbered by the British and if they had fought in a conventional manner they would have probably never won a battle. In order to win, the American settlers organized small groups of men who would fight small battles and then quickly retreat. In the American Revolution, the Americans would fire on the British while hiding in fields, from behind trees and other locations. This made the Americans hard targets. They would kill a few British and then retreat. In larger battles, the British would line up to fight while the guerillas would attack the flanks of the enemy and then retreat. They would ambush supply wagons, British messengers, and settlements of British Loyalists.

These guerilla tactics are widely believed to have helped America win the American Revolution. They caught the British completely off guard and were criticized by them for not fighting fairly in the war. The colonists learned to fight this way

mostly from fighting with the Native Americans. According to John Ferling, author of *Almost a Miracle, The American Victory in the War of Independence*:

[pullquote]The colonists learned how to minimize the chances of an enemy ambush, sometimes employed a hit-and-run style of fighting, often utilized a mobile strategy, and not infrequently adopted terror tactics that included torture; killing women, children, and the elderly; the destruction of Indian villages and food supplies. . . . In time, warfare in the colonies came to be associated with a manner of fighting that England's career soldiers variously called 'irregular war,' 'bush war,' or simply the 'American way of war'.[/pullquote]

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Also, the typical belief of the British was that war should be fought in a "gentlemanly" way. In this belief, hiding behind bushes, targeting officers and so forth was not a strategy that the British believed in. However, the colonists did not agree, and they fought differently. Officers in the British army were considered more like gentleman than soldiers, and they were used to the comforts of life in England. They were given these comforts even when marching near the battlefield. The Americans ultimately ended up winning the war, of course, and the United States was established as a country.

It is ironic that the Americans owe the establishment of their country to fighting as guerillas, yet we are currently fighting guerillas in various areas around the world. We are being fought against in the same way that we once fought.

When you are looking for a job, one of the most intelligent things you can do is search in a guerilla-like fashion and fight the battle on "heavy ground". In fact, nothing is more important than adopting this strategy when beginning your job search.

A central part of my job search philosophy and one of the reasons I have been so successful as a recruiter in the past has been due to the fact that I helped my candidates get jobs on "heavy ground" rather than "deadly ground". In every single year I recruited, I brought in over \$1,000,000 in fees. It did not matter if it was a recessionary year or a good year; I never failed to bring in fees like this. I say this not to brag but to show you how important I believe a "heavy ground" battle is. I do not have a lot of the traditional skills that typical recruiters have. For example, I am more "academic" than social. I am also not the greatest networker. I also do not have great sales skills. But I have always understood the importance of fighting on "heavy ground" and if there is a secret to my success, this is it. I will explain this below.

In the legal job search realm, many attorneys are led to believe that recruiters who submit candidates to law firms without openings are "unethical" recruiters. Because this is so drilled into attorneys and young attorneys, many of these attorneys never get this out of their belief system once they become recruiters. Before they will try and submit any attorney to an employer, the recruiter will first verify whether or not the law firm has an actual opening for that specific type of attorney. This is the way virtually every recruiter out there operates in the legal field. They only submit people to law firms that actually have openings.

When I first started recruiting at [BCG Attorney Search](#), it very quickly occurred to me that this did not make any sense whatsoever. The reason is because once a law firm had an opening, all the other recruiters in a given city would start submitting every candidate they could to the opening. They would also call a ton of attorneys in the city and start submitting all of the candidates they could possibly submit. The law firm would very quickly receive the majority of the qualified candidates in the city and have their pick among them. Generally, they would pick the attorney with the best qualifications out of the hundreds of candidates they had the opportunity to examine. The odds of any individual attorney getting the job were very slim.

Whenever I was working with an attorney, my objective was to ensure they got a job. I knew from experience that if my candidate was competing against numerous other people seeking a job at the same law firms, their odds of getting the job were going to be severely limited. Therefore, I started looking for jobs in unconventional places. For example, one day I read the *San Francisco Daily Journal* and an article quoted the partner of a small law firm to the effect of: "I have been in this business for 25 years and I have never seen more activity. We are so busy we have set up desks in the halls."

I immediately sent two attorneys, who had been trying to find a job for over a year to this law firm. One was a man who had not practiced law for five years because he had been discovered to be a polygamist and no one would hire him. He was a very talented attorney, however; this was widely known in the legal community. The other attorney I sent over to the law firm was a woman who had been sexually stalked and harassed by a professor in her law school. The law school had fired the professor and, unbeknownst to her, the law professor ended up getting a job at the law firm where she was scheduled to start working after graduation from law school. Incredibly, when she showed up to work at the law firm, the man was her boss again. She ended up quitting and later suing the firm, after the former law professor tried to break into her apartment one evening. Because of this lawsuit, which was widely known in the legal community, this woman was considered a pariah.

Both of these attorneys were eventually hired again, and today have very successful careers. The law firm I sent them to had never used recruiters. Most recruiters would never have sent the attorneys there, because most recruiters would have required the firm have official openings. The law firm hired these attorneys, and it was because I used a "guerilla" tactic. By having these attorneys compete on "heavy ground," they got jobs. Had they applied in large law firms, their prior issues would have come out, and the firm would have simply chosen a "safer" alternative.

Doing your job search on "heavy ground" means applying to places to which others are not applying, finding openings others do not know about, and even sending your resume to places without current openings. For example, there are certain law firms that always look for certain types of attorneys, whether they be in intellectual property, litigation, or corporate. In addition, smart job seekers will often seek out jobs in smaller markets instead of larger markets when the market gets tough. They will be competing with fewer people. This is just good strategy.

The smartest thing you can do in your job search is find "heavy ground". In the job sites I run such as [EmploymentCrossing.com](#), I always list the old job listings that companies and firms have posted in the past in a separate section of the website. The reason I do this is because I know that if they have had a certain opening in the past they might have an opening in the future--or even right now. It is smart to apply to places that have had openings in the past concerning your area of expertise, even if the place does not have an official opening right now. Most people do not visit this portion of the site, though, because they are only interested in current job openings. Big mistake in my opinion. Someone may have left the employer and there may be a job opening that has not been advertised yet, or they may simply need more people like

you. You are much better off applying for this job right now (and without any competition) than applying for the job later, after it is posted publicly. We call this the [EmploymentCrossing.com](https://www.harrisonbarnes.com/) Archives, and I believe it is one of the best job search secrets out there.

When you do your job search on heavy ground, you are not competing with others. I am a firm believer in doing targeted mass mailings to get jobs. A targeted mass mailing means you send your resume (via mail) to companies or firms which are likely to be interested in someone like you. You send it via mail because everyone else is sending emails. You apply to places that do not currently have openings. If the firm brings you in for an interview, you most often do not have any competition for the job because you have not sent your resume to the employer in response to any actual job opening. A couple of my other companies, such as [EmploymentAuthority.com](https://www.harrisonbarnes.com/) and [Legal Authority.com](https://www.harrisonbarnes.com/), also help attorneys. They are incredibly effective. I do not think there is a more effective way to get a job.

I also love another site we have called [Hound.com](https://www.harrisonbarnes.com/). This site posts jobs from employer websites. Jobs on employer websites are typically not advertised. When I see sites like CareerBuilder and Monster advertising on the Super Bowl, I am not impressed. What this means is that the employers will be receiving hundreds of applications, and it is going to be much more difficult for you to find a job amongst all the competition. You need to apply to places that are not getting a lot of applicants. Since people typically do not congregate on the career pages of employer websites, this is a great way to get a job. You are going to have far more success and get more interviews and job offers from looking for jobs on employer websites than on major job boards.

These heavy ground ways of getting a job are often criticized by the establishment and the "order" who believe everyone should get a job in the same way. They are called "a scam" or other similar names by people who do not understand their force. I have been personally criticized a great deal for the job search methods I promote and stand behind. The British criticized the colonists for the way they used to fight and called it "ungentlemanly" and so forth, looking upon it with disdain. The colonists fought on heavy ground and they won. The same thing happened to the Americans when they met the Vietnamese in Vietnam: The Americans lost to their opponent, who fought on heavy ground.

My goal is for you to succeed in your job search. Your job search needs to be fought and conducted on heavy ground. You are going to have far more luck and success doing a job search on heavy ground than fighting on deadly ground. I have based my entire career around this, and if you understand the incredible force of working on heavy ground, it will never take you long to find a good job.

THE LESSON

When myriad candidates are applying to limited positions, practicing unusual tactics in your job hunt will prove far more helpful than following the established routine and waiting for positions to come to you. Much like in military strategy, well-planned and unconventional moves can help you conquer your goals without suffering significant losses. You can land an excellent position by focusing on companies' needs, rather than depending on job and recruiting advertisements.

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