

The Five Most Common Errors Made By Job Seekers

At Career Energy we meet many people who are looking for jobs. We come across a lot of job search techniques and different ways of looking for jobs, in fact it is quite striking how many different approaches there are to job hunting.

Many techniques, particularly those based on networking are highly successful. But sadly there are some ways of looking for a job which stand little chance of success, yet which crop up time and again.

These are the errors that catch our eye most often:

Misunderstanding the Role of Recruitment Consultants

Many Career Energy clients voice concerns about recruitment consultants and head-hunters. Their complaint is that recruiters do not go out of their way to help candidates to reposition themselves in the job market, that they seem to take no interest in job seekers and their long term career goals. Which is true but it is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the role that a recruiter plays, and their relationship to job seekers.

The job of a recruiter is to find people to fill vacancies. They are engaged by employers to do this. They have a brief which tells them what sort of candidate they are seeking, and they look at job seekers to determine whether they meet the brief. In other words their focus is on the job, not on the person. If the person matches the job specification their name may well go forward to the employer. If the match is not good then they will not be considered.

So the job seeker is effectively a commodity to the recruiter. If they can put you forward they will, if not they won't. But because they have many candidates on their books and only a limited number of vacancies to fill they will not get involved in helping candidates to reposition themselves for jobs that are not in line with their CV. However much the candidate feels they can do the job, unless they put forward a CV that shows why they are suitable the recruiter will just not consider them. It is not their role to do so.

The golden rule is: Don't go to a recruitment consultant unless you are looking for a very similar job to the one that you are doing, or have just left. Your energies are better directed elsewhere.

Misunderstanding the Purpose of a CV

Sometimes a new client will come to Career Energy with a rich and varied CV, demonstrating a wide range of experience and skills, and yet they are unable to get a job. They may have applied for as many jobs as they can, or they may have been very selective, focusing on just one particular route. In either case the outcome has been the same, they cannot get a job. And nine times out of ten it is the fault of the CV, nothing more.

All employers want to know that the candidate they are considering is able to do the job. They are looking for a CV that tells them clearly and unambiguously that the person applying has the relevant skills, and even more importantly, can demonstrate appropriate achievements in their earlier career. A broad ranging CV in which the required skills are diluted by other, irrelevant skills, tends to make employers think they are looking at a generalist rather than a specialist. Which is not what they want.

Your CV only has one purpose. Which is to get the person who is reading it to want to meet you. So put yourself in the reader's shoes. Read the person specification for the job then look at your CV and ask yourself, if you were advertising this job, would you want to meet the writer of this CV? Don't kid yourself that the reader will have a creative mind and offer you an interview even though your CV doesn't match the person specification; be realistic.

The trick is to make sure your CV has a theme. It needs to show a logical progression throughout your career, which leads directly to the job for which you are applying. This probably means having a variety of CVs, tailoring each one for each specific application. But most importantly it means you being able to see and understand the theme of your career; or to create one into which your history so far will fit comfortably.

Over-reliance on job adverts

Have you applied for a job through an online job board recently? What sort of response did you get?

Since online recruitment became a significant force it has of course become much easier to apply for jobs. A few clicks of the mouse and your CV is in the hands of the recruiter or the company who placed the advert. But think about it from the advertiser's perspective. The ease with which jobs can be applied for means that online adverts are likely to receive hundreds, if not thousands, of responses. Which in turn makes it very unlikely that you will even receive a response, let alone an invitation to interview, since nobody can accurately assess and respond to so many applications.

Online recruitment is cheap, quick and easy. But its greatest benefit is to the advertiser, not the applicant. The advertiser can, for example, sift a limited

sample of responses, confident that there will be several credible applicants amongst them. But the applicant cannot know whether their application is amongst them, or whether it was thrown directly onto the reject pile.

And it is not just online recruitment that is likely to disappoint you. Print advertising is also far less effective for candidates than most people realise. Even though statistically you are likely to spend more time responding to a newspaper advert than you are to an online ad (which probably means that print advertising is taken more seriously), you are still competing against scores or hundreds of applicants and the whole thing almost becomes a lottery.

Of course this does not mean that it is pointless looking at adverts. But they are only one tool amongst several, and all the evidence is that they are one of the least effective. Look at adverts by all means and respond to those to which you are best suited. But don't spend all your time on job boards and reading newspaper ads. Get out there and network. It is far and away the most successful job search technique.

Applying for too many jobs

Statistically you are likely to get one interview for every ten jobs you apply for and to receive a job offer for every five interviews you attend. Does this mean that if you apply for fifty jobs you are likely to get one? Sadly, it is not that easy.

The statistics are based on the experiences of typical job seekers. And most job seekers feel that the more jobs they apply for the better. Which is a mistake.

A good job application takes time to compose. It is not just a question of firing off a CV with a short covering letter. To stand a reasonable chance of getting an interview applicants need to really understand what the company is looking for, and why they are the right candidate for the job. This means researching the company in depth, finding out exactly what critical issues will need to be addressed by the person who gets the job, and then tailoring a job application which makes out a compelling case for interview.

It can take several hours if not a whole day to write a good application. Which means that the number of applications that anyone can write are limited. At Career Energy we firmly believe that quality is better than quantity. Irrespective of the statistics, one well tailored job application will stand a far better chance of getting an interview than ten hastily written, untargeted applications.

Looking for a job is a full time job. It is important to use the time wisely.

Avoiding Networking

It is an inescapable fact that most people are uncomfortable with networking. But it is an equally inescapable fact that more jobs are found through networking than any other route. So although the natural tendency is to avoid networking, it is a mistake and one that could cost you dearly.

The key to successful networking is to recognise that you are not asking strangers for help. On the contrary, you are meeting people to whom you have been introduced, for a discussion to help you gather information about the company, or field of work, that you are interested in. And equally you may well have something to offer the person you are meeting, maybe not now but possibly in the future. Networking is a two way process and should be approached as such.

Online networking is a growth area and should be included as part of your networking strategy. But it is important to remember that online networking will never be as successful as direct conversation with another person. You can't beat the power of interpersonal communication. So by all means use LinkedIn, Zing, Facebook or any other networking site that you find valuable, but use them wisely. It is very easy to while away too much time online, thinking that you are doing a lot but in fact achieving very little.

Because so many people find networking such an uncomfortable process we spend a lot of time at Career Energy helping our clients to become better networkers and introducing them to contacts with whom they are likely to establish an effective dialogue. If you feel at all uncertain about your networking strategies, or feel that you would like some professional assistance please do get in touch.

These are the five most common errors that job seekers make. There are of course many more. But if you begin by making sure you are getting these right, you will be well on your way to winning your new job.