

# Breaking the Myths of the Modern Job Search: 48 Lessons Learned on How to Find a Job and Yourself Along the Way



By James Warda

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[jwarda7@comcast.net](mailto:jwarda7@comcast.net)  
[www.jameswarda.com](http://www.jameswarda.com)

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## Introduction

Ok, so who am I and why did I write this guide?

Most importantly, I'm a former job seeker. So, believe me, I *get* it. I understand what you're probably feeling because I've felt it. I know that daily battle between panic and patience, between knowing I had valuable experience to offer – and wondering if I would ever get an interview again. But I made it through. And so will you.

After my job search, my job networking group leader asked me to write a one-page “lessons learned” document about what worked and didn't work for me during my search. He asked that of everyone from the group who “landed” (got a new job). Little did he know, though, who he was asking.

See, I'm a writer. And a speaker. And a singer. Which means I often have a *lot* to say – or sing. And that's how a one-page document turned into what is now a 29-page guide, as it now includes several updates from when I first wrote it.

Of course, these are *my* lessons learned. You'll obviously have your own. Some may be the same, but many will likely be different. The reason I'm sharing mine here is because the job search is hard, one of the hardest things many of us will experience since it gets right at our sense of worth, identity and belonging. And, because it's that hard, we all need to help each other through it – even when we're back working, as I am now.

So, with that, I wish you strength, peace, and courage all along the way.

Let's begin.

## Preparing

1. *Take a breath.* When you're first out of your job, especially if it was involuntary, take a breath and at least a week, if not a bit longer, to process what happened. Some people dive right into updating resumes and LinkedIn profiles, while getting hit by a “firehose” of well-meaning advice and instruction. But, in the beginning of your search and throughout, it's important to take care of your mental health, be in the present moment as much as possible, acknowledge the emotional side of the “journey,” especially on the most difficult days, and refresh and reset as needed.

(*Special Note:* The job search holds gifts. Ok, I know that's almost crazy to say when you're in a job search, especially on the darkest days when college loans need to be paid and severance is running low, but believe me, it does. You won't likely see these gifts until you're back working but, once you are, I'm guessing you'll agree with me. More on this later in the “After You Land” section.)

2. *Passion and purpose.* While you're taking that breath, think about what you most *want* to do. You don't often get the chance to do that. In fact, you probably haven't since you were younger. So, take full advantage. And don't worry if you don't know right away. For some of us, it's hard to know and even harder to say what we even want on our pizza. So, knowing what you want to do with your *life*, well, that can take a little time, meditation, journaling, long walks and longer talks with people who care and really know us, and more. Most important, consult with that muscular organ sitting slightly to the left inside your chest. Remember, we do well what we do with passion.
3. *Dumbledore knew.* Don't be afraid to take chances throughout the job search. Experiment. Reinvent yourself. Wear a new hat or hairdo. Start wearing a monocle and bowtie. Again, it's something we did naturally as children, but we likely will need to remember how to forget who we were and dream about who we could be. As Albus Dumbledore said to Harry Potter in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*: "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities." Choose often and choose differently when you feel it. And, if you choose something you end up not liking, guess what? They invented this new thing... it's called "choosing again."
4. *So, what do you do?* Many of us identify ourselves very strongly with our jobs. We see them so much as a way to be "employed" or "used for a purpose" – to the point where they become part of the fabric of who we are and where if we're "unemployed," that can feel like we have no purpose. Don't believe me? Well, when you go to a party and meet someone new, what's typically the first question they ask you after asking your name? Isn't it often "What do you do?" And how do you feel answering that question when you're not working? If you're like I was, it's probably a mixture of embarrassment and confusion. To counteract that feeling, especially if not being prepared for the question, prepare a brief answer ahead of time that feels natural for you. And, in that answer, with people you know well, don't hesitate to build in a "Call to Action," asking them to keep their eye out for opportunities. If you're talking to a relatively new acquaintance, you'll probably want to keep it to a more generic, "Well, I'm a writer and volunteer right now, and I'm looking for my next role," or whatever feels comfortable for you.

And while you're doing that, don't forget that *anyone* could be a connection to your next position – so keep your eyes and ears open. Obviously don't ask everyone you meet for a job application but also know that many great success stories started with a coincidental conversation.

5. *Campfires aren't the only good place for stories.* Learn how to tell your story well. Over time, as you continue to update your SARS (Situation-Action-Results) statements on your resume, for networking and interviews, etc., you're going to get better at telling

your story so that it comes out like you're actually saying it for the first time, and in a way that keeps people's attention. The easier and more naturally you can tell it, the more likely the person you're talking to will get and remember it. And a cool thing will happen as you continue to tweak your story. You'll begin to realize just how much you've done and can do, and how cool you really are.

6. *20 People, 20 Suggestions.* As mentioned above, in your job search, a *lot* of people are going to come to you with a *lot* of advice. For example, if you give your resume to 20 people, you're going to get 20 different perspectives – with some having more expertise in resumes than others. So, take in the advice you want, understand the background and expertise level of those giving the advice, process it all, apply the general themes from the feedback you've heard, and then don't forget to give it that all-important final "gut check." Because, after all, it's *your* job search. You're now a company of one, needing to make the final decisions on your branding, values, strategies, priorities, measurements and, most important, how you'll use your most valuable resource –time.

## Getting Going

7. *Don't isolate.* Find networking and accountability groups in your area and go to them! Also go to job fairs. Go on informational interviews. Find your nearest career center and meeting (often in community centers, religious organizations), etc. Remember, if you're only sitting at home on your computer, you likely aren't going to find a job, you won't be meeting as many new people as you could, and your body may be screaming for sunlight and exercise. Now, granted, you might be able to catch up on your daytime TV, but that's not always a good thing, *SpongeBob SquarePants* notwithstanding.
8. *Create structure.* Being out of a job after being in one for a long time can be disorienting. You won't have a structured calendar of meetings, things to do for the job, etc. You may no longer have a commute. You may not be talking to as many people right away. And you also may not feel like putting on those same business casual clothes when you're only going to be sitting at home.

But take it from me, as soon as you can, begin creating a structure that mimics a workday. For myself, while searching, I got up at the same time as I did when I had my job, showered, put on work clothes, and got right down to a consistent, regular day of networking, making calls, posting articles, etc. And, as often as possible, I'd get out of the house, whether it was to work from my local library or Panera, to attend a job group, etc. Because, as I said above, if you are inside for long periods of time, you're more likely to say inside – your home *and* your head. To quote Sir Isaac Newton's First Law of Motion, "An object that is at rest will tend to stay at rest. An object that is in motion will tend to stay in motion."

So, get in motion. But don't forget to take a rest every now and then, to refresh. It's all about finding your balance, which a job search, left unchecked, can knock you off.

9. *Finding a job shouldn't cost an arm, let alone a leg.* Be mindful of what you pay for in the job search, besides the necessary stuff (e.g., online portfolio, interview clothes). For most of the things you need (e.g., resume and LinkedIn profile reviews, mock interviewing, coaching), you'll likely be able to find them for free through volunteers in your local job/career center or networking meeting. This is especially important at a time when your funds are possibly limited.
10. *Well worth it.* With that said, there *are* some career coaches and others who are worth the money, if you're comfortable with the price *and* you know they are good at what they do. Obviously, just be careful and get references and look for testimonials. I've personally met several coaches, both in-person and on LinkedIn, who were very helpful to my getting back to work.
11. *Watch out for scams.* Job seekers can be a particularly vulnerable group. Their information is often very visible because they're posting resumes, adding LinkedIn "Open to Work" banners on their profiles, filling out applications, etc. And needing a job can also make them more willing and wanting to believe in offers that offer hope, especially the longer the search goes on. I know I began to feel that way.

So, when you get an offer from a company you don't know, just put the organization's name in Google, along with the keywords "scam," "fraud" and "complaint," and see what comes up. This also works well when people you don't know send you emails with subject lines like, "Great job offer!" Of course, this isn't a full-proof method but it's a good place to start and can help you not waste time, while protecting yourself and your information.


Another good way to avoid scams is to go to the company's official website and apply for the job there instead of applying through a third-party email. Of course, some websites may be fake, too, but at some point, we have to believe in something, don't we, or nothing will ever happen.

These approaches won't obviously guard you against the flurries of emails from more legitimate companies that always seem to be looking for someone to put up their own cash to start an insurance agency or retail franchise. But, again, it will help.

12. *Give your handbill an extreme makeover.* One of the marketing tools that career centers/coaches recommend is a handbill, which summarizes your background in a way that provides different context than a resume. It's a tool you can take to job fairs and networking meetings (I would *not* recommend bringing it to parties!), and typically

includes a high-level summary, your areas of experience, your target titles and companies, your target industries, and your education, etc.


Immediately below is an example of the *first* version of my handbill I created:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>James Warda</b><br>Gurnee, IL 60031 • jameswarda@comcast.net • www.linkedin.com/in/jameswarda • 847-204-2555  |   |
| <b>Director of Communications – Business Alignment – Change Management</b><br><i>Building Content that Connects</i>  |   |
| As a communication leader with global experience across multiple companies and industries, I partner with leaders, direct cross-functional initiatives, build enduring relationships, develop teams, and lead large-scale change projects. My ability to create a connection with audiences through internal, external, marketing, crisis and M&A communications leads to greater trust and results.   |   |
|   |   |
| <b>What I do...</b><br>I drive engagement and performance for companies through my communications expertise and leadership. My experience spans a range of industries and channels, including marketing, publications, digital platforms (apps, intranets, social media), event management, video, and Media Relations integration, with added focus on crisis and M&A. In addition, I'm an author, speaker and adjunct professor for Loyola University Chicago's School of Communications and Quinlan School of Business.   | <b>Target Companies</b><br>Abbott, AbbVie, Astellas, Baxter, CVS Health, Discover, Gallagher, Motorola Solutions, NorthShore  |
| <b>How I add value...</b><br>I apply my experience and abilities through the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Strategically planning and executing</b> communications that are clear, concise and caring to drive trust and behavior change.</li><li>• <b>Driving cross-functional collaboration</b> by connecting groups to increase alignment and build enduring partnerships.</li><li>• <b>Applying change management principles while encouraging innovation.</b> "If we're doing the same thing the same way at the same time next year, we're doing something wrong."</li><li>• <b>Focusing on people</b> by hiring, training, coaching, <u>mentoring</u>, and managing – while developing high performers at all levels.</li></ul> | <b>Target Positions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Vice President of Communications</li><li>• Head of Communications</li><li>• Senior Director of Communications</li><li>• Director of Communications</li><li>• Assistant Director of Communications</li><li>• Strategy and Content Director</li><li>• Employee Engagement Director</li><li>• Digital Content Director</li></ul>   |
| <b>Employment History</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>James Warda Communications, Senior Consultant: (2018 -)</b></li><li>• <b>Loyola University Chicago, School of Communications: (2018 -)</b> Adjunct Professor (Part-time)</li><li>• <b>Walgreens Boots Alliance: (2012 - 2018)</b> Director of Integrated Communications, Team Lead</li><li>• <b>Boeing: (2009 - 2012)</b> Senior Communications Manager, Team Lead</li><li>• <b>Schneider Electric/Square D and JWCComms: (2006 - 2009)</b> Communications Manager, Team Lead, and Senior Consultant</li><li>• <b>Allstate: (1996 - 2006)</b> Special Projects Manager, Instructional Designer</li></ul>  | <b>Target Industries</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consulting</li><li>• Healthcare</li><li>• Financial Services</li><li>• Technology</li></ul> <b>Areas of Expertise</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Client Management</li><li>• Strategic Content Planning</li><li>• Executive, Employee, HR and Marketing Communications</li><li>• M&amp;A Communications</li><li>• Public Relations/Media Relations</li><li>• Crisis Communications</li><li>• Digital (app, intranet and social)</li><li>• Broadcast, webcast, podcast, video and photo production</li><li>• Event Management</li><li>• Instructional Design</li><li>• Brand and Corporate Identity</li><li>• Team and Project Leadership</li><li>• Change Management</li><li>• Continuous Improvement</li><li>• Metrics</li></ul> |
| <b>Education:</b> Loyola University Chicago, English Studies   |   |

Looks ok, right? But here's the problem. I'd go to networking meetings, and *everyone* would be sharing theirs, and many would have just as much, if not more, information. So, I'd take about 10-20 home but, with everything else on my plate, I very rarely had the time or energy to review them. This made me realize that others were likely having the same issue with mine.

So, I created a new handbill (see immediately below) that only included what I thought was the most critical information needed for others to help me: my name and contact info, a photo (photos are critical so that other job seekers can quickly put a face with a name at a networking meeting), a summary, 2-3 job titles I was interested in, 3 current target companies, added target geographical locations, and my main previous companies.

**James Warda**  
 Gurnee, IL 60031 • jameswarda@comcast.net • www.linkedin.com/in/jameswarda • (847) 204-2555



**Summary**  
*"I drive content that connects"*  
 As a communication leader with global experience across multiple Fortune 100 companies and industries, I partner with leaders, direct cross-functional initiatives, build enduring relationships, develop teams, and lead large-scale change projects. My ability to create a connection with audiences through internal, external, marketing, crisis and M&A communications leads to greater trust and results. In addition, I'm an author, speaker and adjunct professor at Loyola University Chicago.

**Target Titles**

- Vice President of Communications
- Senior Director of Communications
- Director of Communications

**Current Target Companies**

- CVS Health
- Discover
- Gallagher

**Target Locations**

- Greater Chicago Area
- Southeastern Wisconsin, including Milwaukee

**Previous Companies**

- Walgreens Boots Alliance
- Boeing
- Schneider Electric
- Allstate
- Baxter

Why is it important to have a condensed handbill? If you've ever seen someone's handbill, where they have a ton of information and over 10 target titles and 10 target companies listed, you'll quickly understand. If you still need convincing, look at my two handbills again and choose which one you'd be more likely to read.

13. *Convey confidence throughout your search when you're in an interview or other external-facing job search activity.* No matter how much churn is going on inside, work to be clear, concise and compelling in asking for referrals, in your answers to interview questions, especially "So, why are you looking for a new position," and so forth. So, for example, if an interviewer asks about your most recent job and your position was eliminated, explain it briefly and move on ("My position was eliminated as part of a major restructuring. So, I'm now looking for my next position and that's why I'm so interested in your company and this role"). Belaboring the point may make you sound defensive and unsure. Oh, yes, and remember, if the nerves are jangly, it's ok to pause, take a breath, and then answer.

Now, this *doesn't* mean you shouldn't share your more negative feelings about the job search, just not obviously with the people who are looking to possibly hire you for your next one! Yes, the job search is a *hard* process, and we all need to share, vent, etc. – like needing a safety valve on a hot water heater. But I'd recommend sharing *those* feelings with other job seekers either in-person or virtually, your family, friends, a coach, etc., as



you see appropriate.

14. *Don't ramble on.* When you go to a networking meeting, be prepared to share your elevator speech. No more than 30 to 60 seconds: your name; 1-2 job titles you're looking for; and a quick summary of your background, e.g., for example, "I have experience in all areas of communications at several Fortune 500 companies and speak 3 languages," followed by the 2-3 specific companies you need connections in. (If people raise their hands or otherwise indicate they have connections in those companies, note who they are so that you can follow up with them later in the meeting.)

But if you ramble, go on for minutes or more, people will start looking at their phones. If you keep talking, you may have lost them completely, which means they won't be able to help you once they've left the meeting, even if they want to. Because remember, most everyone there is also looking for a job, and has a thousand things running through their minds and worries weighing them down. So, be clear, concise and memorable. If you *are* those things, then when they're back home or at their local Panera on their laptops and see a job title or company you mentioned come across their screen, they'll more likely send it your way.

How to be memorable? I've seen people do it in many ways. One fellow seeker called himself a "Supply Chain Maestro." One was an industrial engineer, so he brought in a food mixer he designed for a modern-day "Show and Tell" that made his skills and experience come to life. But, no matter what you do, do something that's right for you (just not too gimmicky or cheesy, of course, otherwise *that* could become your brand).

15. *Everyone but me.* When you're in job networking meetings or scrolling through job groups online, you're going to hear or read about other people landing new jobs. Of course, you'll be happy for them. But it's only human to feel envious, and possibly more frustrated about your own search. The lesson I learned on this one was to not beat myself up for feeling that way. It didn't make me a bad person. It simply meant I wanted to get back to work, too, and that it seemed like I couldn't figure out how to do it like *everyone else was*.

First, not *everyone* was landing a job; it just felt that way. Second, there are many factors that go into getting a job, including many we have no control over and many more we don't even know are happening behind the scenes. And third, remember, we're always comparing our insides to others' outsides. Meaning we have no real idea of what's going on in their lives along with their job search.

So, as much as you can, try to be happy for others and realize that, now that they've landed, they could be a powerful ally in helping you get back to work (see #19 below).

16. *It's a great job market.* When you're in those same networking meetings or online groups, depending on how the economy is, etc., you might hear how it's a "great job market," how there are so few people looking for jobs, and so on. And, meanwhile, you're going into the eleventh month of your search.

That's why it's important to listen with a filter. There is a lot that goes into those job reports and numbers (e.g., it might not say what kinds of jobs they are, etc.) and really, if it's not affecting your life directly, then take it with a grain of salt, or a sprig of whatever spice you prefer.

Because, again, the worst thing that can happen when you hear that there are a lot of jobs out there, and you're not getting one, is to think that something's wrong with you. It's a natural thought. In fact, I thought it many times myself during my search.

But there is nothing wrong with you. Or me. Never was. Never will be.

## Collaborating

17. *Buddy up – TWO important lessons.*

During my first job search over ten years ago, I wrote a "Letter to the Editor" to the *Chicago Tribune* about the experience. Someone saw that letter and contacted me, letting me know it meant something to him, because he had gone through something similar with his job. We got to know each other through the search, but when we both started working again, we lost touch – as often happens. But, when *it* happened again, losing our jobs at about the same time, over ten years later, he reconnected with me.

We then became good friends and job search "buddies," meaning we'd talk every day, to strategize, keep each other accountable, vent, and help each other through the tough times. Fortunately, when one of us was down, the other was up.

To that end, I'd recommend you also find a job search buddy, whether it's through a networking meeting or in your neighborhood, or in a local community organization. And, in my eyes, even though I landed a job, until my friend was back to work, I wasn't fully back.

Now, a second lesson related to buddying up.

I made a very important discovery by accident (hello, the invention of penicillin). That is, I learned that I got a much better response when I referred someone else for a job than when I was asking for help on a job for myself.

I don't know why it happens. Maybe it's a psychological effect where, instead of coming to someone in what might be perceived as a subservient role, asking for help for me, I was coming to them as more of an equal, asking for help for someone else.

In fact, I saw this play out several times. For example, there was one company I tried to get a response from for over six months. I went to my connections there and asked for help repeatedly. But I never heard back. Then, after landing my current position, I went back to the same connections asking for help for one of my colleagues. And I heard back in a matter of *hours*!

So, my advice is to find a buddy, and refer each other for jobs. Then see what kind of uptake you get. And, please let me know at [jwarda7@comcast.net](mailto:jwarda7@comcast.net) how it works out. I want to see if my hypothesis is correct. And, if you happen to be a professional in psychology, etc., I'd love to hear your thoughts on this hypothesis.

18. *Connect, connect, connect.* There's an oft-quoted statistic that people only get about 10-15% of jobs by applying online. With that statistic in mind, I personally got to the point where I would not apply to a job online unless I had a connection inside the company or to someone who had that connection (two degrees of separation).

With any new job ad, I'd go to LinkedIn, click on the job, then click on the company. When the company's page would come up, it would tell me:

- If I had any connections there
- If anyone at the company worked at any of the companies I worked at previously
- If anyone at the company had gone to my college
- If anyone at the company shared one or more mutual connections with me.

I would typically find one of the four, at least.

After I did that research, if the person I'd found wasn't a direct contact, I'd send a personal invite that mentioned how we were connected (e.g., former employer, school, mutual connections). If it was a job that I was interested in immediately, I'd mention in the invite that I was interested in a job at their company and ask if they were willing to connect. (Of course, LinkedIn doesn't allow a lot of characters in your invite, so you'll have to write like Ernest Hemingway, using his "less is more" approach.)

Then, if they accepted my invite, I could then send a message with the job link, and they wouldn't feel like they'd been ambushed. If I was simply interested in the company, but

didn't have an immediate job in mind, if they accepted, I would just watch for their posts and like/comment on them to start to build a relationship. In an intentional, sincere way, though, because many people can smell fake several miles away.

Of course, some people won't accept a personal LinkedIn invite like I one I sent. But there are also some who will. And remember, in the job search, success comes from a mixture of hard work, good luck, and simply playing the "numbers game." The greater the amount and variety of things you have moving all at once, the more those things will hopefully build up momentum, start to "pinball" against each other, and give you the fuel you need to escape the gravitational pull of Planet Job Search (and, yes, I know that was a particularly labored analogy, but I've found it to be true).

19. *A recent job seeker who has now landed can be a job seeker's best friend.* There is often no better resource for helping you get a job than a job seeker who has recently gone back to work. Because they "get it," how hard the job search is and how important it is to help each other. Or, at least, they hopefully do.

Of course, there are some job seekers who go back to work and promptly seem to forget that they were recently looking for jobs – and disappear. I'm not sure why that happens, though it might be that they simply want to forget one of the hardest periods in their life. But, please, oh please, oh please, when you get back to work, reach back and help others onto dry land, too.

And, as an added incentive, remember that karma's got a keen sense of sight and hearing. It knows how you treat others, and it can easily buy a return ticket.

20. *No coffee breaks.* Contrary to popular networking guidance, during my job search, I didn't ask employed people to "have coffee." That's because I remembered that, when I was employed, before my job search, I was always busy with meetings and multiple priorities. So, it was often next to impossible to get away offsite for a "coffee." (Plus, some people may be concerned about meeting strangers in person.)

So, my advice is to ask employed people if they have time for a 15-minute phone conversation instead. That reduces the time pressure on the person being asked. They'll also likely appreciate that you are taking the realities of their day into consideration and possibly see you as more professional because of it.

If they agree to talk, next ask if they're open to your sending them a meeting invite to hold the time on their calendar – that should keep you firmly in their upcoming things to think about and also avoid your receiving a dreaded "I know we were going to meet but something suddenly came up" message 12 minutes before the scheduled time, making it even harder to reschedule.

Once you do hopefully have that phone conversation, there's no harm, depending on how it's going, in asking if they'd be open to a follow-up call, or even a conversation in person. Sometimes, if it's going very well, they may even suggest it. *That* is when you know you may be building to something.

21. *No Coke (or Coffee), Pepsi.* While I'm on the "coffee" topic, can we please stop discriminating against those of us who don't drink coffee? Yes, I know that admitting that fact may mean you're going to look at me suspiciously or that Starbucks may not rush to offer me their CEO position, but there are those of us who don't. No, I'm a loyal Pepsi drinker. Of course, saying "Would you like to meet for a Pepsi?" might get an odd response or maybe just silence.

Especially from a Coke drinker.

### Connections, Introductions, Referrals, Recommendations, and Feedback

22. *It's all in the ask.* If you're asking someone to refer you to someone else or make an introduction, make it as easy on them as possible to improve your chance of success.

What does that look like? It means sending them a concise note asking for the introduction and/or asking them to forward your information to a recruiter or hiring manager, and to possibly allow you to use them as an employee reference during the job application process (the better you know them, obviously the more likely they'll be to agree to this last part).

If they do agree to any of the above, then send them a concise message with the link to the job you're interested in and a brief summary/few bullets of your background relevant to the job that they can use in introducing you to someone else. Then, if you do get connected to someone through your referral, your professionalism in responding and following up will obviously reflect on that original referral source.

Also remember to ask the people you know and have worked with whether they'd give you a recommendation on LinkedIn. And do the same for others. Not only is it a nice thing to do, but it will speak volumes when people look at the "Recommendations" section of your LinkedIn profile and see that your "Given" number is higher than your "Received" number. (I'll wait while you go look at my LinkedIn profile and check whether I follow my own advice.)

23. *Leaders are just a personal invite away.* On a daily basis, search on LinkedIn for senior leaders and others with significant titles in your career areas or companies of interest and invite them to connect through a personal invite, if their profiles are set up to allow

them. Of course, in that note, let them know why you're interested in connecting, and mention if you have mutual connections, went to the same school, worked at the same previous company, etc.

If they do accept, don't try to immediately get them to help you, etc. Instead, build up the relationship over time by liking and/or commenting on their posts, sharing articles with them that you think they might find interesting, and seeing if you can help them in some way with your own network. LinkedIn works best when it works reciprocally.

Obviously, some leaders won't accept, but others will, depending on how relevant and sincere your note is. If they do accept, and if you build up a relationship, having a leader in your corner when applying at their company or to introduce you to others can be invaluable.

And, yes, I do know that [LinkedIn recommends that you only send connection invitations to people you know and trust](#) for your safety and the safety of the community. But I also know that one of the main purposes of LinkedIn, as I see it, is to help you meet *new* people. So, obviously, connect at your own discretion and simply be appropriate in any interactions you have on – or through – the platform, as I know you would anyways.

24. *Feedback. If one person says it, it's an opinion. If several people say it, it could be true.* Listen carefully to the feedback you get in networking meetings, from recruiters, from interviewers, etc., about your resume, LinkedIn profile, and other job search-related items and approaches.

As you receive that feedback, identify the common themes that you hear most often and/or the feedback that, though limited, has the biggest implications for your search and personal brand. Then, where and if *you* think it makes sense, make changes in your approach, your documents, how you interview, and so forth. Because feedback is only a gift if we use it.

The other benefit, of course, is that making needed changes over time will help you re-energize your job search, which translates into how you'll come across in interviews and other key conversations.

Why is this important? Well, have you ever had a conversation with someone who had very low or negative energy?

Enough said.

## Smack Dab in the Middle of the Search

25. *Keep your job search “pipeline” full.* This means that, every week, in addition to your networking meetings, try to have at least 3-5 major items moving. This includes doing phone interviews, taking online assessments for a job, doing in-person interviews, having informational interviews, attending job fairs, approaching senior leaders, writing articles and posts about your areas of expertise, guest teaching, etc. True power is in building momentum and having multiple things all going at once that work together.

Why does this work? Because, for some reason, all the items you have moving tend to give each other a synergistic boost of energy, which then also gives *you* one. Just remember again the second part of Newton’s First Law of Motion: “An object that is in motion will tend to stay in motion.” I’d add on, “... and tend to get other objects around them in motion, too.”

Yes, one of the true enemies in the job search is a too-long lull, or break, in your activity. When you have lulls, that’s when it can get tougher mentally, especially if you get a rejection for a job you really wanted, etc. Of course, it’s ok, even necessary, to get away at times, take a day off from the search, and so forth, but having lulls when you’re trying to make things happen can be like that “object at rest” wanting to just “chill” for the day. And, I’d add on, “... and tend to make other objects around them stay at rest, too.”

26. *Quick research.* Only have a few minutes to research a company because you just remembered that you have a phone interview coming up in half an hour (and, yes, this kind of surprise *does* happen when you’re trying to juggle something as time-sensitive, large, and complex as a job search – I speak from personal experience)?

Here’s what I’d recommend:

- Go to the company website and give it a quick going-over – and take notes (especially helpful to refer to during a phone interview, making it more like an open book test). What’s the company’s vision, mission and values? What’s their history? Who is on their senior leadership team? What are their main priorities, products and services? What is their commitment to their employees? How do they help the community? The environment? Can you learn anything specifically about the department and role you’d be working in?

- If they’re a public company, read the executive letter in their most recent annual report that typically summarizes their results, strategy, main projects and challenges, community support, any mergers and acquisitions activity, etc. If they’re a private company, you can still sometimes Google that type of information. And, if they’re a non-profit, Google them, too, and also go to [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org).

- Do a specific Google search for news about them. To do so, put in the name of the company and click the “News” tab on Google. That will give you recent information about any new products, acquisitions, executive changes, issues, etc. If you view their older news stories, too, that will help you see how they’ve grown, or haven’t grown, and changed, or haven’t changed, over time.

- Do a final overall general Google search on the company, like checking out who their main competitors are. This is also where things you didn’t think about researching might come up.

27. *To refer to, and take notes, in the interview or not?* For me, the answer to this question is “Yes.” Now, as a communicator, I take notes regularly as part of my job. But I do believe it’s accepted practice now to bring notes to, and take notes in, an interview. (Yes, some recruiters and hiring managers may disagree with me, but I do believe it’s very much in the way you present the notes. If you try to refer to them or take them like you’re cheating on a test, it will come off that way. But if you use them like you would any other professional resource, referring to them when asking questions, etc., I believe that goes a long way. After all, if you do get the job, wouldn’t you be bringing and/or taking notes in meetings there, too? Again, though, it’s your call. Do what feels right to you.

Now, for the specifics from my job search.

For each interview, ahead of time, I’d start on the left-hand side of a blank spread in my notebook, and write down high-level notes from my research (e.g., info about the company, summarize the job description, a few bullets detailing my main background stories that I’d be pulling from during the interview – a few to show business results and a few to show how I led and worked with others, etc.). Then, on the right-hand side, I’d write down 5-10 questions to ask.

(And, yes, I said “write.” That’s because I still write.... on paper. Ok, ok, enough snickering back there, yes, I may be showing my age. I know many of you will be doing everything online. But for me, there is something more tactile and immediate in writing it down. As always, do as you do.)

During the interview, I’d take notes on the right-hand side of that same spread, under my pre-planned questions, and in the following pages. These notes were invaluable in two ways. They’d give me “jumping-off points” for asking questions in the interview (these “from the interview” questions often would take priority over the pre-planned ones, to demonstrate my engagement in the interview, that I could think on my feet, that I could take their answer and strategically expand on it, etc.). These notes would



also give me content to include in my customized “Thank you” emails afterwards, especially to help me keep track of which interviewer said what – again, an important thing to remember as you customize each email.

Now, if taking notes into and/or during an interview makes you uncomfortable, of course, don’t do it. Or you can ask at the beginning of the interview, “I was going to take a few notes. Does that work for you?” Again, whatever works best for you and doesn’t add to the stress of an already stressful situation. Will you come across a few people who don’t like that you’re taking notes? Yes, possibly. Would you want to work for them? Well, that’s your call, of course. For me, not so much.

For the customized “Thank you” emails, I’d have a core message that would stay the same across all of them and then include 1-2 sentences in each according to what that specific person had mentioned in the interview. This also saved valuable time if I needed to send multiple “Thank you” emails during several levels of interviews.

Before the interview ended, I also made sure that I asked for and wrote down the interviewers’ email addresses, if I didn’t have them already, explaining that I would use them to send “Thank you’s.” These email addresses are obviously critical for those follow-up notes, and it avoided me having to contact the recruiter afterwards and ask for them, which could look a bit unprofessional.

With those “Thank you’s,” if my interview was in the morning, I’d get those sent by the end of that same day. If my interview was in the afternoon, I’d make sure those emails were waiting for the recipients in their inboxes when they got into work in the morning.

28. *THEIR Big 3 questions in the interview.* I heard a great summary of what interviewers are looking for in an interview: 1) Can you do the job? 2) Do you want the job? and 3) Will you fit in?
29. *YOUR Big 3 questions in the interview.* As the interviewee, I see having three major questions, too: 1) Can I do the job? 2) Do I want the job? and 3) Do I want to work for *this* person, on *this* team, in *this* organization, and in *this* industry? Of course, you may already know some of those answers from your research but there’s nothing like seeing it all in person to make your decision.
30. *Don’t wait on anything!* You just had a final interview. They flew you out to their headquarters. Wined and dined you. All signs point to your getting the job. In fact, they just asked to do a reference check, too. So, what should you do? Sit back, relax, cancel the other interviews you have coming up, and put on a rerun of *The Office*? Of course not. Because, until you have the offer, you don’t.

Remember that, please. Until you have the offer, you don't. That one has bitten too many job seekers. I've seen it up close and personal.

I also have a few toothmarks on me to prove it.

No, instead of slowing down or stopping altogether, just like a long-distance runner, when you get close to the finish line, the key is to *speed up*. Sprint across that line. Keep everything else moving, keep searching for jobs, networking, taking part in interviews, writing articles, guest teaching, etc. After all, the universe seems to know when we job seekers let our foot off the gas and put all our eggs in one basket. If we do, we often end up out of gas, stranded on the side of the road, and cleaning up yoke from the floorboards.

Remember, an object in motion...

31. *Try not to label*. Remember that everyone on every side of the job search, e.g., job seekers, recruiters, hiring managers, coaches, etc., is a real, live human being deserving respect. So, even if you're rejected, ghosted, etc., don't paint with a broad brush, thinking that everyone will act that way. It will be very hard at times not to launch right into a "Can you believe *these* recruiters?!" or "Why don't you *these* job seekers understand that I have way too much on my plate to get back to each one?!" but try.

And, with apologies to Yoda, trying is often half the battle.

## After You Land

After you land your new position, your immediate job search is done, but your search for your next job or opportunity *after that* is just starting. Plus, you've likely got some fellow job seekers still out there in the waves, looking for a way to shore.

32. *Make networking a way of life*. Once you land your new position, continue to keep a "networking" mindset, to help with your new job but also to build the walls up around your employment harbor to protect it from future job loss storms (yes, I know that was a particularly cheesy and somewhat clumsy analogy but it's all I've got time for right now, please check back with me in a few months).

Also keep your resume and LinkedIn profile updated regularly, document your ongoing accomplishments, continue to interact on LinkedIn, volunteer to help other job seekers, keep writing articles and guest teaching, etc.

You can even approach relationships with people you're working with in your new job

differently than before, like colleagues, agencies and vendors, knowing that you're building relationships that should stand the test of time and future job searches –and that your main goal should be to build your relationships in a way that, if you needed it, they'd write you a recommendation. Again, we're not obviously building them that way to *get* a recommendation. But it's a nice spot on the horizon to aim for.

Remember, “networking” = “building relationships.”

33. *Continue to give and get recommendations on LinkedIn.* As mentioned above, and as you know personally as a job seeker, LinkedIn recommendations can be worth their weight in gold. And don't forget to still ask for them, even after you're back working. You can never have or give too many. Plus, I've personally had recruiters tell me that they looked at those recommendations like a preliminary reference check for a candidate.
34. *Transferable skills do indeed transfer.* When you get back to work, you're going to realize that you've learned critical new skills from your job search and/or better realized the importance of existing skills?

For example, when you're employed, you understand that it's important to document your accomplishments, prioritize well, and build relationships, but when you're actually looking for a job, you realize just how vitally important these skills are.

In fact, as mentioned previously, one of the most important skills you'll take back into the “world of work” with you will be knowing how to really network – and to not be afraid of contacting *anyone*, no matter what their level or position. That skill, in and of itself, will be valuable as you work to get things done in your new role.

Long story short, you are going to get or expand a heaping helping of transferable skills from the job search (including leadership, project management, sales, and communication skills), and you'll be coming out of that job search battle-hardened and ready to “get at it.”

I'll say it again. Give me a company made up of professionals who've been through a job search, and I'll be able to take over my market, and then the world! (In a kind and generous way, of course.)

35. *The peace of presence.* As mentioned at the beginning of this guide, it's important to find a way to stay in the present moment as much as possible during the job search. After all, it's natural for the brain to think back on the rejection of the day before or worry about not yet having received a request for a second interview on another job you thought was a perfect fit.

For me, staying centered and present during my job search included talking with several different types of people, including my wife, my family members and friends, my job search buddy, fellow seekers, career coaches, and more. I also built relationships “across the desk” with recruitment professionals, agency leaders, and others.

I also continued my meditation practice and, in fact, expanded it, when needed. Now, hopefully by this point, most realize that meditating doesn’t mean you have to wear a robe, light candles, and chant. Of course, for some, it does. But, for me, it simply means taking time for focused breathing and listening internally – or using guided meditations each day.

As part of that practice, I use the free version of the “Insight Timer” app available through [www.insighttimer.com](http://www.insighttimer.com) (you can upgrade to some cool features, as desired). The free version has great basic features, like a simple timer with bells, thousands of guided meditations (someone talks you through the session), and an online global community where you can share your stories and experiences. If you do go into that global community, you’ll quickly realize again how very similar we all are, no matter where we live.

There are, of course, many other meditation apps and resources available, so just find the one that best does what *you* need it to do.

Now, if you don’t have time to meditate because you’re just about to go into an interview, enter a job fair, etc., you can still take *one good breath* a day. What’s that look like? It’s taking a moment to relax wherever you are, noticing your thoughts but not attaching to them (they’re just clouds floating by), breathing in for a few seconds, holding it for a few longer, and then breathing out slowly for a slightly longer stretch, letting your lower jaw and shoulders drop down. If you want, you can then do two breaths in a row, etc. You’ll be amazed at the effect. For more on this type of simple breathing, check out this “Wellness Tips” [article](#).

Now, I can hear a few saying, “Come on, James, how hard can it be to remember to do one simple breath a day?” To that, I’d answer, try it. You’d be amazed at how the hurry and worry of the world can distract you and make you forget to even do *one*. But again, watch and feel what happens when you do it. It shows why being mindful of breathing is so important in life and in so many arts and sports, like running, dancing, and swimming.

## All the Other Important Stuff

36. *Contract roles are jobs.* Explore contract and freelance roles of varying engagement lengths. Many companies are using contractors, freelancers, and interim/fractional employees in longer-term positions now as part of their regular staffing models. In fact, some companies *only* fill certain positions by going through a contracting agency. The good news is that if you do contract, once you get into the role and start to shine and make their lives easier and yourself indispensable, the manager over that role may start to wonder how they ever got along without you. That's when they may likely start figuring out how to make a full-time hire happen. (It's amazing what a hiring manager can do with their budget when their life has gotten easier, *and* the organization is better meeting its goals.)
37. *Think "gig economy."* While you're waiting for that next full-time or contracting role to materialize (if that's what you're looking for), consider tutoring, taking a part-time job, writing a book or a column for the local newspaper, becoming an adjunct professor or guest speaker at your local college, etc. It will often bring in money, get you out of the house, help build up your network, give you new content for your resume, and help you answer that interview question you just know is coming, "So, what *else* have you been doing while looking for a job?"
38. *Volunteering is valuable in so many ways.* Create a profile on the excellent professional volunteer website, [www.catchafire.org](http://www.catchafire.org). You can do everything from a simple 1-hour call with an organization that needs help to working with them on longer weekly/monthly engagements. It will help you stay sharp with your skills, learn new skills, meet new people, get familiar with new areas and industries, fill up your resume with current activity, give you something to post about on LinkedIn, and hopefully bring in more recommendations. And, just as important, you'll be helping people in the process!
39. *Find reasons to smile and move.* During your job search, find something fun to do every now and then. It's important for your mental health. And, if you're sitting at home on the computer, try to get up and move around many times a day. That can mean taking a walk in the neighborhood, picking up a paintbrush or guitar, shooting baskets, baking something new, doing a chore or two, going to the library, etc. Anything to get you up and out of the chair – and your head.

Most important, spend some of that time with those you love. Once you get back to work, you'll regret any extra time you could have spent with them – but didn't.

40. *YOU are the company.* Create an ongoing mini-LinkedIn marketing campaign for your own brand. Go to a site like [www.canva.com](http://www.canva.com) (you can use the free version or upgrade for additional features), grab an image, put content on it, and then give yourself a

headline for an ongoing series you can do on LinkedIn. So that, every week, you're doing a few of them, which will position you as an expert, increase your visibility, get you out in front of more recruiters, give you something enjoyable to do to break up the job search monotony, etc.

You can also then put this image you create in the different LinkedIn groups you belong to related to your area of expertise. For example, I write, and still do, a LinkedIn series called *Communicator's Corner* (see immediately below). I put it in my main LinkedIn feed, and in the different professional groups I belong to on the platform, e.g., International Association of Business Communicators. Interestingly, when I interviewed for the job I most recently got, one of the interviewers mentioned reading my series. And a recruiter prominent in my field separately told me that it increased my visibility with her.



41. *LinkedIn group engagement is low-hanging fruit.* Many of the larger groups on LinkedIn don't have much engagement (people liking and commenting on posts) for a variety of reasons. So, to take advantage of low-hanging fruit, go into these groups – especially ones related to your industry or desired field – and like and/or comment on the different posts. It may get you more visibility, especially with any executive and recruiters who are in the groups and help increase the visibility of those who posted the content and sometimes lead to those people reaching out to connect with you. Plus, you can post your mini-marketing campaign items in the group, too.

## Update #1: From the Other Side of the Search

I originally wrote this job search guide in the Fall of 2019, soon after I started a new full-time position after an eight-month job search. After I took on that position, though, I realized that I was still learning lessons relevant to the job search – but this time, from the other side of the desk. Lessons that, as a job seeker, I would have found valuable.

So, here they are – for your consideration:

42. *I forgot what the pace was like.* When I got back into a full-time position, it immediately reminded me of how much there was to do each day. Of course, I was learning a new role and about a new organization and industry. And I was meeting a lot of new people. Plus, during my search, it was easy to forget just how many emails, meetings, projects, standard reports and processes, and a thousand other things, there were to do in a typical week back at work. After all, I was searching for a job. *That* was what I was focused on at the time.

So, my advice for job seekers would be to remember what that pace is like on the other side of the desk when you're expecting a reply to an email, asking to meet for (a Pepsi?), waiting to hear back on a position, etc. Now, of course, sometimes people and organizations can be disrespectful and just not get back to you and that's not right. But, other times, it could also be that they're just plain busy or other things have leapfrogged you to the top of their "To Do" list – like the company is going through a major organizational change or preparing for an investor call or annual meeting.

Knowing this means you should **simply give everything a bit more time than you think it would take**. If you think you should get a response in a week, don't be surprised if it takes two. If, after an interview, you don't hear anything right away, don't give up hope. Of course, you can decide when and how often you check back in, but if you do it in a way that acknowledges that pace, it will likely be more well-received.

At the same time, I know that job seekers are busy, too. In fact, often busier. I don't think I've ever worked harder for longer hours than when I was looking for a job, including early mornings, late nights, weekends, holidays, etc. But the obvious difference is that the job seeker's main priority is *getting* a job, whereas the employed person's main priority is *keeping* the job they already have.

So, again, my suggestion is that a job seeker who wants a response and/or help will have better success getting those things if they continue to demonstrate their awareness of that pace on the other side of the desk and adjust accordingly – even though I know how hard it is to be patient when the bills need paying and you're the only one in the house not leaving for work in the morning.

43. *I'm not on LinkedIn anywhere near as much now.*

As a job seeker, LinkedIn was my main base of operations to do initial networking, look for jobs, post, etc. But now, I'm typically only on the platform in the early morning and after work. And there are some days when I'm not on at all.

So, for job seekers, that means that a message or invitation you send on LinkedIn might not get seen right away.

And, with other employed people, who might be on LinkedIn once a week or a few times a month, it can take much longer. I know some executives, in fact, who have LinkedIn profiles who haven't seemed to check their messages in months, if not years, or even forgotten they even have a profile. So, a job seeker might be thinking their message has been ignored when it hasn't even been seen.

My suggestion – if you've tried to reach out through LinkedIn and haven't heard back, try another way. For those professionals who include their email address in their Contact info on their LinkedIn profile, which means it's appropriate to be able to send them an email. I wouldn't typically call them, though, unless there was some reason or context for that call. But that's me. As with all things, do what you do.

44. *Job seekers likely have a much better chance of success in networking with employed people if they can be clear and concise in talking about their background and what they're looking for.* Again, I knew this as a job seeker but, being back in a full-time position, I was reminded of two things.

First, as we just said, people in full-time positions tend to be busy. So, the more a job seeker can be mindful of that, the better for both parties.

And the second thing is how I'm typically better able to help a job seeker if they can concisely tell me what role (e.g., no more than 1-2 job titles) and what geographical location (e.g., near the city, in the northwest suburbs) they're looking for. The more I know that, and the clearer it's presented to me, the more likely I'll remember it and, when I do see something come across my computer, remember that seeker and send them a note.

Or, if they're interested in a specific job at a specific company, sending me the job link, a summary of their background that shows why they'd be a great fit for the role, and their resume. The easier they can make it more me, the more likely I am to do it – and do it quickly and well. Again, I'm balancing helping others and doing my job. Of course, then, it's important that I keep the job seeker updated if and when I hear something back. I need to viscerally remember what it's like to be a seeker waiting on a reply.



45. *Don't leave a monkey on the back of the person you're asking for help.* In a now-classic *Harvard Business Review* article from 1974 by William Oncken, Jr. and Donald L. Wass, called [Management Time: Who's got the monkey?](#), readers learned that the most effective managers don't allow their team members to come into their office and leave them with their *monkey* (work problem). If the manager takes the monkey, then the team member leaves without any accountability or responsibility, and without the opportunity to grow as they work through a difficult situation. At the same time, the manager can quickly become overwhelmed as multiple monkeys cling to her or his back – which makes it hard to drive home, too, unless you have a seatbelt extender.

Well, I look at it the same way with the job search. To be most effective, I would advise that job seekers be careful not to give the person they're seeking help from too much to do before, during, or after the call or meeting. Yes, they will hopefully see if they can find a hiring manager or other connection to refer the job seeker to, will send possible other resources, etc., and that's important.

But being on this side of the desk now, I always have an immediate reaction when I'm talking to a job seeker, and they want me to do the "heavy lifting" for them by gathering information they could gather themselves or by being the only one to leave that call with a "To Do."

When I was a job seeker, I tried to be mindful of not asking the other person to do too much because, again, they were likely busy and the more I asked them to do, the less likely they'd be to do it.

Being back at work now reminds me of why I acted that way then.

Also, a quick note on whether to send scheduling links like Calendly. If you make initial contact with someone and, at the same time, immediately ask them to schedule time with you through a scheduling app, like Calendly, understand that you've just given them something additional to do. So, consider sending them a couple of day/time ranges instead and send additional ones, as needed, to fit with their calendar. Of course, others might not see sending scheduling apps in this way, so do what feels right for you.

46. *Target those targets.* As a communicator/marketer, I have worked in a variety of industries and always felt that the best approach in my profession was to be able to come up to speed quickly no matter the industry, company, product or service. I also enjoyed working in a variety of industries and learning as much as I could across them all. Of course, many job search experts will tell you how important it is to target companies. I'm not arguing with that – I'm just saying it wasn't my approach, but it should have been.

Because as the COVID-19 pandemic most definitely revealed, if I were a job seeker, I would very much *target companies and industries that are best positioned for the current and foreseeable state of the economy and environment.* So, that would mean,

for example, when the pandemic hit, I would have targeted companies in healthcare and pharmaceuticals, technology and telecommunications, consumer products, etc.

It's basically thinking about how the world is working at that moment and will likely be working for a while and positioning yourself in that "sweet spot" of opportunity to help companies solve problems, create innovative approaches, and so on.

In terms of companies having to solve problems, for example, if you look at consumer products during the pandemic, just remember how hard it was to buy a webcam, especially as everyone began working remotely and would be for the foreseeable future. Or to have tried to buy puzzles, board games, or crafts or anything else people were needing at home to pass the time. Or baking, cleaning and disinfecting products. Oh, yes, and toilet paper?! Well, you get the picture. And, knowing this, you can target the companies that offer the most needed products and services at any particular time, or help a company find new ways to source current products – or create new products to fill the need.

You can also present yourself as an innovative solution to help companies re-position themselves for new environments. Such as, again, during the pandemic, travel-related companies or any entertainment/sport where people had to gather in large groups. How would they need to do things differently to survive, let alone grow?

Also, think about the foreseeable future. With the pandemic, again, what skills would be most valuable in a world still mainly working remotely? Knowing how to conduct a virtual meeting, especially when it had the need for some complexity like breakout rooms and polls? How about knowing how to translate an in-person workshop or event into a virtual format? After all, creating engaging virtual experiences takes time, skill, and experience – and possibly an understanding of new technology. Learn how to do it *ahead of time* and you've just made yourself that much more valuable to a company or client.

As I would always tell my teams at work... in every crisis, there is an opportunity to get better – whether it's get faster, be more accurate, cost-effective, and collaborative, etc. So that, no matter what the world looks like, the company will be stronger and more sustainable. And *you* will be a big part of the reason why.

Now, granted, I didn't have to really be back in a full-time position to learn this lesson, but being back has, for some reason, helped me see it more clearly.

#### 47. *Mind the gaps.*

I knew this before I was back to work but, as a hiring manager again, I remembered how important it is to not have unexplained gaps in work experience years on your resume or LinkedIn profile. Remember that your LinkedIn profile and resume tell a story. And stories have chapters. If, on your profile and/or resume, there are missing years in your

work experience with no explanation as to what was going on during those years, that might keep you from moving forward in the process.

Now, that *doesn't* mean you had to be working at that time, but the logical question a recruiter and hiring manager will ask is, "What were you doing during that time?" Again, the answer can be anything that is true. But the last thing you want to do is have someone reading your profile and/or resume on their own and say to themselves, "Huh, I wonder *what* they were doing then?" If they do, you may have just lost your ability to get that position since there's no one there to answer their question for them right then. If a tree falls in the forest...

You can also fill that gap with freelancing, contracting, consulting, volunteering, community work, part-time or guest teaching, adjunct professor positions, etc.

## Update #2: Other Voices

There are a lot of smart and caring people out there with valuable guidance to share about the search whether they're other job seekers, former job seekers, recruiters, hiring managers, career coaches, and so on. So, for this update, I asked several people who were important in my search to share a few of their lessons:

- **Jeff Carrigan** is the **Co-Founder and Chief Marketing Officer** of Big Shoes Network, a job board for creatives (<http://www.bigshoesnetwork.com>). During my search, Jeff was always a great person to bounce search ideas off plus he's what the job seeker needs – a kind and generous running an important jobseeker resource. Here are his lessons learned:
  - So, I'm a simple man who likes to keep things simple. Therefore, I'd like to share three lessons/tips that most folks don't do...
    - Keep in touch with past colleagues. It can be difficult at times, but it's worth the effort. They know you. They know your accomplishments and work ethic. They can be a valuable resource (e.g., job leads, references) in the future.
    - Keep up to date with your skills and industry knowledge. Once again, it's difficult. Things change so fast in the advertising/marketing/public relations world. If you don't, you'll be left behind.
    - Keep networking even if you have a job. It's time-consuming and sometimes costly to attend industry events, but necessary. Maybe you can be a blessing to others. Maybe they'll bless you. Whatever the case, it's smart to be out there meeting other industry pros.

Hope this helps. It's nothing new. Just what I hear and see in many years of doing Big Shoes.

- During my search, [William Hickey](#) and I collaborated on a LinkedIn article series, called *Two to Tango*, in which a talent management professional (him) and job seeker (me) discussed major job search topics. Here is his lesson learned:

- The recruiter is one of the most misunderstood positions in the job search process. Here are two items that will help you better understand the relationship between the job seeker and the recruiter.
  - *Recruiters don't find people jobs.* There is a misconception among job seekers that says, "Find a recruiter and they will find you a job." This is not the case. Recruiters don't comb through job boards and call other recruiters to see if they have something that will be a good fit for you. In truth, those duties are more in line with those of a job search coach.

Instead, recruiters – both internal and external – are assigned to fill a specific position for a specific company. Therefore, it is critical that job seekers understand the industries and roles that a recruiter is working on.

The key is to identify a specific need and offer a solution to the recruiter. In this case, the solution is you.

- *The relationship between a recruiter and job seeker is a partnership.* Now that we've established what a recruiter does, we can take steps to build a partnership. As a job seeker, closely examine your skills and experience and ask one question: *Can these help this recruiter?*

Recruiters aren't "one-size-fits-all" positions. With that said, they will be happy to let you know what roles they are searching for. The goal is to find a match between the recruiter's needs and the resources provided by the job seeker. That's why communication is key.

Like all good partnerships, this one relies on transparency, clear expectations, and understanding.

- [Jen Morris](#) and I connected after I started a LinkedIn Group for job seekers called "You're Not in This Alone" (since closed). What drew me to her work as an Executive Job Search Coach was that her work was *good*, and Jen didn't have a price tag on everything she did. Yes, she offers valuable paid services, but she also offers free advice and resources. She also has been on many sides of the search, from recruitment to hiring to being a job seeker herself.

Jen had these two important lessons to share:

- *You don't have to reach out to your network in desperation mode:* Job search is all about who you know. In fact, 70% of executive jobs are landed through networking and referrals. When you reach out to the right people with the right information and a specific request, your network will step up and deliver for you. Asking for help can take on many different forms. Be specific and intentional in your job search.
- *You're not "entitled" to interviews:* For people to want to hire you, they need to know that you can help solve their problems, and that means you need to *tell* them that. If you want to land interviews, connect the dots for decision-makers. Make it your job, day in and day out, to discuss the value you provide.
- **David Warden** is an exceptional Sourcing and Procurement Consultant, who has helped my business on many occasions. He also became my "job search buddy" (see Lesson Learned #17) and a good friend – and had these two important lessons to share:
  - Make and follow a daily plan. Resist looking at the long-term. As Mark Watney, played by Matt Damon in the movie, *The Martian*, said: "You start by solving one problem. And then you solve the next problem. And then the next. And if you solve enough problems... you get to go home."
  - Don't completely stop playing golf during your search and be surprised that you are in mortal pain when you start playing again. But maybe that one is for a different guide!

### Bonus Lesson and One Last Question

48. As a job seeker, you are going through one of the most challenging things anyone can go through, outside of the biggest ones (e.g., health concern, death of a loved one, divorce, etc.). So, *be easy on yourself*. It's very hard at times. So, at these times, reach out. Don't isolate. There are a lot of people around you who are going through the same thing, and who are there to listen.

Also, one other thing. Please remember that being a job seeker doesn't make you *less than*. You're still super cool and super smart and can offer a lot to a similarly smart company or client. And, from what I hear, you also have a devastatingly great sense of humor.

So, with that, I wish you the very best. Oh yes, and I promise you something. When you've made it through your search, and you *will*, you are going to come out stronger, wiser, believing in yourself more than ever, and hopefully ready and willing to help the next seeker.

Finally, since originally writing this guide, I've come out with my second book, [\*How Does Disney Do That?: How Disney Makes Us Feel and Why It Matters\*](#). That followed up my first book, [\*Where Are We Going So Fast?: Finding the Sacred in Everyday Moments\*](#). And, yes, both books have questions as titles. That's because I'm curious by nature. Leaving me with this last question for you...

"What are you about to find out about yourself as a job seeker that you wouldn't have found out if you still had that job?"

Take care,

James

## James Warda

### Biography

James Warda is a keynote speaker and author of *How Does Disney Do That?: How Disney Makes Us Feel and Why It Matters* and *Where Are We Going So Fast?: Finding the Sacred in Everyday Moments*. He also has written for the *Chicago Tribune* and Pioneer Press. In addition to being a communications and marketing executive for multiple Fortune 100 companies and a national nonprofit, he's a former adjunct professor for the School of Communications at Loyola University Chicago, where he sat on their Communications Advisory Board. Plus, he has been a guest speaker for DePaul University of Chicago and is a professional musician.

### Contact Information

- Email: [jwarda7@comcast.net](mailto:jwarda7@comcast.net)
- LinkedIn Profile: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jameswarda/>
- Websites:
  - [www.jameswarda.com](http://www.jameswarda.com)
  - [www.howdoesdisneydothat.com](http://www.howdoesdisneydothat.com)