

The Job Market Version of Catch 22

Billions of words have been written about job search tools and tactics in this job market of our discontent. Job board dos and don'ts. Twitter. Facebook. Building a personal brand. Improving your "findability." It's all good advice, but none of it will work if your career is sick. To put it in another and admittedly blunter way, don't bother looking for a job if you have a wimpy career.

You see, that's what's different about today's job market. Come as you are has been replaced by come as you need to be. The good old days of searching for employment with stand pat qualifications are gone. If you're out of work, your career needs resuscitation.

It doesn't matter that you got superior ratings on performance appraisals in your last job. It makes no difference that you have a track record of being loyal, dependable, and hard working. And, it is totally irrelevant that your employer went out of business, was acquired or for whatever other reason was the cause of your unemployment.

The plain, hard truth is that employers view people in transition as damaged goods. It's not fair. It's certainly not true. And it stinks. But it is reality. You won't find many recruiters who will admit it. And in most cases, they work hard to avoid the appearance of such a bias. But deep down inside, it's there. An everyday event confirms it: when presented with a choice between two equally qualified candidates, one employed and the other not, the offer will almost always go to the person who already has a job. It's the job market version of Catch 22.

So, what can you do?

Reinvent yourself. It doesn't matter how well educated, trained or senior you are in your field, change your image in the job market.

How? By fixing your career. By building up its strength, its fitness. There are many techniques involved in doing that, but perhaps the most important is pumping up its cardiovascular health. The heart of your career is your professional expertise, so go back to school. Right now. Even as you are looking for a job.

Build Career Fitness

Revitalizing your career in the middle of a job search involves two important steps:

- Step 1: Begin acquiring a new skill or refreshing one you already have. You might, for example, take a course in a second language at a local community college or attend a new certification program offered by your professional or trade association. You can choose almost any topic just as long as it will clearly and meaningfully enhance your ability to contribute on-the-job.
and
- Step 2: Add the fact that you're back in school to your resume. Note it in the Summary at the beginning of that document and, in its Education section, provide the name of the

course you're taking, the institution or organization that's offering it, the formal outcome if there will be one (e.g., the certificate or degree you will earn) and the term "On-going."

Those two simple steps will instantaneously transform you into a new person. First, they will enhance your skill set, making you a potentially more valuable employee. Second, taking a course of instruction or training program even as you are searching for a job demonstrates attributes all employers want but find it hard to identify in a candidate: resolve, fortitude, and determination.

Most importantly, this course of action will set you apart from other candidates by demonstrating that you have two very special attributes: you understand that in today's rapidly evolving world of work, staying competent in your field is an ever-moving target AND you take personal responsibility for keeping yourself at the state-of-the-art. You recognize the responsibility and accept it.

Become that person, make that transformation, and the playing field will level. You may be in transition, but you will no longer be at a disadvantage when compared to employed candidates. You will have reinvented yourself as a career activist, a person who is committed to continuous self-improvement no matter how senior or experienced they may be. An individual who has the right stuff—the skills and the attributes to be a champion at work.

Thanks for reading,
Peter
Visit me at Weddles.com

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