



# Getting Unstuck: Heal your Life

## Day Five – Job Searches and Career Advancement

### Unemployment, Job Changes, Career Advancement, Entrepreneurship, and How to Work when there's No Work

#### The Good News: There's always work

Whether struggling through unemployment, looking to change jobs, seeking to advance a career, or pursuing a dream of entrepreneurship—people can navigate these successfully, even during slow economic times when there's no work available. Granted, it doesn't necessarily *seem* that way. But that's absolutely the case. In fact, slow economies even present their own unique opportunities.

Here's the thing about a slow economy—it's not a lack of resources. The day after the economy slows, we have all the same stuff we had before. It didn't go away, vaporize, vanish. A poor economy isn't scarcity at all. Rather, it's that resources aren't circulating as efficiently as before. That's what an economy is—the circulation of goods. Because goods are circulating slowly, markets suffer—but the means to stimulate them again are present.

And that's very good news, because it means that resources abound. In fact, more resources

than usual are available for use. Since they aren't circulating, they are idle, and can even be acquired at lower prices. And the same applies to labor—people are available.

I know. . .we call that abundant labor supply “unemployment.” But see the point? In a slow labor market, there are abundant resources (people), ready to be put back into production.

But there's more good news...in a slow economy, people still have needs—and that means businesses and jobs. Yes, consumers will likely back off of discretionary purchases. But even if they're tightening their belts, they still have many things they need to purchase just the same. They still have needs and concerns that need addressing. That means—they are still customers and clients, not only for existing goods and services, but also for new solutions to their current problems and difficulties.

What's not as good is the word getting out about these business and employment opportunities. Since times are slower, there's not as much need to advertise to find people. So it's a time to network, not rely on something turning up. 85% of jobs are never advertised—anywhere. They're still there, just silently so.

But that also means the competition for the work you find, whether as job seeker or service provider, is much lower as well. You may even be the only applicant, and with a network connection to the employer as well.

Don't let a poor economy scare you; there's a world of opportunity. It just needs some understanding of the circumstances and some priming of the market mechanisms.

### Business is about People

People often see the business world as a cold, bottom-line driven battle for riches, but it's really about people and relationship—what each person offers in the work force (including business owners), and how other people's needs can be served. Before we start looking at the business world—and when talking about a job, career, work, whatever your field or area, we're talking about business—we need to change the way we look at business.

Any good business looks to serve—because that's good for business. Whatever their customer niche seeks, that's what they provide. And people are seeking because they have needs and problems. Business solves these. That's why people pay them. Sure, a business could try to con buyers into purchasing, but they'd only have a customer once. Repeat customers drastically reduce marketing costs—and potentially make doing business a pleasure for both provider and consumer.

Marketers sit down to lay out campaigns not to scam (with some exceptions, of course, just as there are some unethical people in all walks of life), but to understand their customer niche, to state customers' problems better than they can themselves, to educate them to what's possible beyond these problems, and lay out the road to obtain the vision of what a

life lived without this problem would mean. That key ultimate result and a solid plan or product to get there means customers.

Building relationship with those customers is key to long term success. From repeat business to referrals, customers will work with and trust a business that builds a relationship with them. And that's exactly what people do—build relationships.

### A job seeker is in the business world

When talking about finding a job, career, work, in whatever field or area, we're talking about business—and we often need to change the way we look at business. And in this case, it's expecting the business world to come take care of us as employees.

It's not the job of business to pass out jobs. It's the job of business to address customers' problems and to hire the team necessary to do that. If you stay in the mindset of the employee, you are a resource, like the materials to make a product, and you'll be purchased as that labor commodity is needed—or not. And you're readily replaceable with more supply of your commodity (despite what people like to tell themselves about being irreplaceable at work).

Instead of being a resource, be a “business” yourself—in the business of solving the labor needs of your employer/client. Think like an owner running your one person labor supply business. Can you see how this would change your perspectives and approaches? You'd focus on being the best at serving your niche customer. You'd pay attention to market developments. You'd focus on customer loyalty. You could supply a few shorter term clients instead of a steady one. You could look for higher-end clients and enroll them.

See how much this would change your focus and freedom? See how much more attractive you would be to employer/clients?

Changing mindset is the first key step to navigating business.

### Three thought patterns to change

If nothing changes, nothing changes; clinging to erroneous attitudes, however attached to them, is simply counterproductive, keeping people stuck.

1) Do you find yourself jealous of successful people? Do you look at someone with more fame or money and think you're not getting your fair share? Do you find yourself thinking, “They probably cheated, lied, stole, manipulated their way to the top”? If you do—you will never be successful.

I learned this from Jerry Hicks, who in turn learned it from a minister friend, Chet. “Well it's true!” Jerry protested. “They lie and cheat and steal!” Chet set him straight.

“You can be against their lying and cheating and stealing,” Chet explained, “But you’re jealous of their success at lying and cheating and stealing.” There it is. Subtle, perhaps, at first blush. Is it the wrong-doing...or the success that’s the problem? Is the perception that “They all do it” just a justification, an excuse for not measuring up—admit it, if it bothers you—do you see it? Are you just frustrated you’re not getting yours, so you decide those who are successful must not be playing fair, instead of looking at your strategies and plans?

Yes, there are successful people who lie and cheat and steal and manipulate--and guess what...there are plenty of poor people who lie and cheat and steal and manipulate—who probably also argue, “You have to! It’s the only way to make your way in this world!” Plenty of middle class people too. And there are many, many people of all economic success levels who are honest, loving, decent and beautiful human beings. So let’s start by getting rid of this excuse. It’s. not. true. Success means having a good plan and seeing it through—that’s it.

Practice seeing things differently. Let go of the judgments and assumptions about earning money and the people who do. Shift the focus to you and what you are doing, about how your plans and strategies might be honed and improved. Learn. Find successful people and learn what they know about manifesting.

Drive around and look at beautiful expense homes, and think, “Nice! Good for you! Well done!” Read about successful people and think about all the positive things they had to do to achieve their status. Wish them well.

2) Next—if you think business is all about the almighty dollar, that it’s a God forsaken wilderness, that the only thing that counts is the bottom line, that people just don’t matter to these soul-less money grubbers...get over it. The world is full of caring, committed business owners.

Suppose I run a decent size company, say 100 employees—who depend on the company’s income. They’ve been with me for a long time, most of them, and we’ve grown the company together. Now, these people have mortgages to pay. They’ve got kids in college. They’ve got various personal crises that arise from time to time—and they’re depending on this job to see them through all that. Do I care about the bottom line? Damn straight I care about the bottom line—these people are depending on me and this company—see what I mean?

One such company a few hours north of my home, a modular home manufacturer, had a major fire about a decade ago—and kept everyone on the payroll while they rebuilt. For several months, they kept their entire staff on full—a liability easily into the millions—even though there was nothing for them to do but sit at home. Why? Two reasons. First, they didn’t need to start over looking for people and training them. And second—what do you think happened to employee loyalty and cooperation after that? Good businesses know their

team is a valuable asset.

In one of my management roles years ago, a talented and dedicated employee came to me to complain that she was worth far more than the company was paying her—so I helped her get an open position at a competitor’s business. I told her I agreed, but at the same time, I couldn’t pay her more than that position was worth. What had happened was that she had grown in her position—and had now outgrown it. She deserved a new position, I explained to her, but I didn’t have one, and the company didn’t have one in other locations at that time either. But, I told her, I knew of a position open at one of our competitors—and I called them and recommended her highly. She took the job.

Why did I do that? First, it’s only natural that talented and dedicated people are going to grow. That’s a good thing. If I don’t have a place for them to continue growing, they’re leaving anyway, as well they should. But second, can you imagine the impact on trust that had on the rest of the staff? That story spread like wildfire. I was asked about it, and the effect was well worth the loss of an excellent person I wasn’t going to be able to keep.

Good businesses focus on people. I know of one owner of a small chain of convenience stores who pointed out that he could make more money by selling the business, wholly or in parts, and put the money in bank CDs and earn a higher return, just like that. So why didn’t he? “I’ve got 100+ people working for me,” he said. “What are *they* going to do if I did that?” Business is a lot of work—generally love of that business is a larger factor than simply money, as well as the impact that business has on customers and employees.

Interestingly, when a company forgets about people, even for seemingly important economic reasons, the model stops working. That same business was eventually purchased by one of the vice presidents. I remember his first management meeting as he tried to address the now struggling company, telling these people, “If you can’t be profitable, I can’t use you.” OK, fair enough—not a shock to any manager. But at the same time, managers’ requests for changes, improvements, adjustments, and in fact, all ideas for improvement, fell on deaf ears, as corporate headquarters gradually took over control, even hiding financial reports from these managers. The company started bleeding managers rapidly. And those managers took their ideas (they were there everyday—they know what needs to be done) to the competition. A business’ team is the key to success, and all good businesses know it.

3) Finally, get rid of the word “fair,” as in “It’s not fair!” Of course it isn’t fair. And it shouldn’t be—it’s unreasonable for you to expect otherwise. Consider—do you treat those close to you the same way you treat strangers? And why not? Do you treat a lover the same as a casual acquaintance? That’s not fair! And it’s not supposed to be. Do you consider every possible purchasing option when buying everything just to be fair? You’d go insane, and never finish. It’s a world, a market, not a game with “fair” rules.

As a business owner, it’s not my job to see to it life treats you fairly through me. It’s my job to run my company, helping my customers, employees, and suppliers in the process, and

often my community as well. Whether you're a good fit depends on my needs at the moment. Learn to make this shift—people aren't treating you poorly. It's just not the time and place for "fair."

### A shift in thinking

I encourage you to make a fundamental shift in thinking, whether as a job seeker, employee, free lancer, or entrepreneur—act like you're running your own business. If you're an employee, now or potentially, you're in the business of supplying labor, and your employers are your clients. This shift is profound.

To begin with, "Please give me a job" is a poor strategy. Even a relatively low paying job—say, \$20,000 (\$10/hr. for a 40 hour work week for 50 weeks)—costs employers quite a bit more than your salary. Consider benefits, especially health benefits, which continue to climb in cost. Consider training, which means somebody else stops working to show you how to work. Consider turnover, doing that all again for another employee. There's the employer's share of FICA, Medicaid, and so forth. All in all, the rough estimate generally used is that you cost 50% more than your salary--\$30,000 in this case. So, essentially, even for a "low" cost job, you're asking someone to gamble \$30,000 on you (considering the first year they find whether you're worth it). That's asking a lot. Too much. You need a better strategy.

Instead, think like a business. What are your clients' needs? What services do you provide exactly? What's visiting your establishment like—are clients impressed? Or are they treated like interruptions? Would they return to use your services again? If not, do you have other clients lined up? Or if they don't want to pay what your services are worth, does the market support selling to someone else instead? Is your business growing, or are your skills and services staying flat? Questions like these will sharpen your market awareness and position.

This may at first seem silly, but it's a powerful paradigm re-alignment. Many people think "I'll work hard when they pay me more money!" But no business would say "We'll perform well when people offer to pay more." That's why promotions and raises go to those working harder (or smarter) first. And that's why, if you don't get the raise you deserve, you can readily market your services elsewhere (or if you can't, you need to re-examine the market and your business situation). It also takes the power you give others and gives it back to you, where it belongs.

I have listened to many a job applicant recite the routine "I work hard, I learn fast, and I'm a people person." In fact, I don't think many have skipped that ritual. It's not impressive, and it tells the prospective employer nothing.

So let's do something that works instead, and let's start working on your marketing campaign. I'm going to address this as if you are job seeking, but the same applies to promotions. Later, we'll talk about what to do when there don't seem to be job openings.

Understand—it is not the employer’s job to discover and evaluate your qualifications, nor is it the employer’s job to sort through all the applicants to see who’s the best candidate—you need to make that clear. It’s the employer’s job to get a qualified person hired so everyone can get back to work. Period. Anything else is wasting the organization’s time and money (and remember, that company is people counting on the business doing well). It is *\*your\** job to showcase your qualifications. And guess what? The employer will *\*appreciate\** this. It’s what that person wants to and needs to know—and only you have that information. Share it.

I can’t even begin to tell you the times I sat across from an applicant trying to drag out information while the candidate sat there quietly merely responding in short sentences when pressed with questions, most of it vague (useless) abstractions and generalities, until I finally gave up and thanked them for coming. Next applicant.

Don’t approach the job market as if seeking charity—what kind of business would say “Please? Buy from us?” Take some time to think through the needs of your “clients,” the services you bring, and how these are a good fit.

Have a sound strategy for your one-person labor supply business. Get the word out, provide good service, and continually evaluate and improve your “company.”

### Know Your Business

I strongly invite you to explore and gain clarity on this issue—rather than an employee seeking a job, what business are you in? Not generically, like “retail” or “the shoe business,” but really, what are your talents, your preferences, your experience, your forte?

What kind of problems do you solve? What needs do you fulfill? How are you of service to your clientele? What are the things you don’t do? Who do you like to work with? With whom do you work best? Who are the people you can help the most? Who are your ideal clients? Who are the people you don’t serve, and don’t want to?

What’s your niche? Where do you fit that no one else really does as well as you? In what subset of this business do you really shine? Where do the struggles and experiences of your past really enable you to help others struggling similarly? Where do you truly make a difference for people?

What’s your business plan? Short term objectives, one year goals, five year strategic plan? What innovations and improvements will you bring to your service? How do you stay on top of new developments? How do you continually expand your knowledge and skills? How will your business expand and grow?

What is your competition doing? What is your unique selling point in the marketplace? What clients should you be courting? How can you serve your current client(s) more (for

increased business)? How do you measure client satisfaction?

How do you track your progress and service? What strong areas are you showcasing? What weak areas are you developing? Who besides you is working on this with you? Who's on your team?

Are you telling yourself “the markets just aren't good now”? Or are you developing new markets? Or new products? Because that's what successful businesses do. Don't wait for good markets—make them.

What's your business plan? Don't rely on wishful thinking or chance. Have a sensible vision—and follow it. Adjust as needed.

### Your Marketing Campaign

Like a business serving a “niche,” getting the job you actually want is ironically easier than a “I'll take anything” approach. First, you can focus on those specific qualifications, and that already is a better approach, because the employer can see how you would be a good fit. There's an old adage in marketing, “The confused mind says No,” and a vague fit is an unclear picture, a “No.” Second, however dedicated you are to a “vague” job search, you can't help but put far more effort into a search that simply means more to you. You want it. You're determined to get it. You aren't going to let a few setbacks deter you. And finally, you bring an energy, a dedication, an enthusiasm to something you love that shines through—and that is something, when it's genuine, every employer is glad to see. That's the kind of people employers want in that job—the kind of employees that were made for it, the kind that love that work, a good fit.

By focusing on a specific market and a specific clientele, a business becomes more attractive to customers, because that business more clearly understands their customers' needs. In marketing, businesses often endeavor to find their “niche.” You should do the same. Who are the people you love? What kind of people? What do they like to do? What are their lives like? What challenges do they face? These are the kind of people you want to work with—and people who love you, as you are, for who you are, what you think, and how you can help them with a piece of their lives, so much so that they're happy to pay for it. When you find that fit, not only are you happy, but also the business that just hired you feels lucky to have you. The business and everyone served by it—or everyone it serves—fit together well.

Likewise, any good labor provider should know the market and the segment the labor provider serves to sell services effectively. Any good merchant needs to know his goods and who those goods are for specifically, and what needs they serve. Any good salesperson needs to...well let's start. Time to change our thinking again.

And sales does NOT mean hyper-pressure bullshit. Sales does not mean manipulation.



Sales does not mean playing games. Stop that already. Not many will be successful long with that ridiculous strategy.

Rather, sales is service. People have things they need done, and they look for people who can do the job. If I'm looking for a good bass player, I don't care about his rap—I want to hear him play. If I'm looking for a good graphic designer, I want to see a portfolio of her work. If I'm looking for a good construction crew, I want to know what else they've built. I want to know these are the right people for these particular needs.

And that's what good salespeople do. They identify needs and match their skills and service to the client's need. If you're an awesome heavy metal bassist, but I need someone for a jazz gig, you're not the guy, despite your talent. And that's OK. You're not going to hire my jazz bassist to sub for you at a heavy metal gig either. It's about matching needs to services. That's what you're going to do.

That's what good labor providers do too. They don't just look for jobs, but rather, take time to consider what they specifically bring to the labor market, who those skills best serve, what needs those skills address, and take that to the market as the problem solvers they should be. In this sense, those jobs are already looking for these employees!

Sure, the world is filled with poor sales people, and with poor job seekers. The world is filled with poor musicians too, but you don't let that become what music means to you—you listen to the many, many very good ones. Same here. Don't just wait for fate to strike, positive or tragic. Step up and hawk your wares—no one but you really knows what they are!

Far too many people post a resume online or mail out batches of resumes and sit at home waiting for the phone to ring. Good luck with that. Sure, everything works sometimes. And sure, try everything. But not as your primary strategy, and not if you're managing your time well. Prepare to be by that phone a very long time with such a low return approach.

Why do this? You're at risk if you're putting all the work on the employer. YOU are the product expert, because YOU are the one who knows YOU and YOUR SKILLS. Don't simply hope and wait. That's wishful thinking, not a plan. Besides, the employer simply needs a qualified body, and doesn't need to sort through all those resumes online or on the desk. That's not a good use of the employer's time. And it doesn't bring your skills and goals to the forefront of this interaction. The job of making an employment match rests with the job seeker—don't make the mistake of putting this chore on the shoulders of employers.

Instead, target jobs—even niche within a small business. Each resume and cover letter should be tweaked depending on where it's going and for what specific position. Each interview should be carefully prepared especially for that job. And each follow up should solidify what happened at that interview. Be what the employer is looking for, and be ready

to ensure that happens, not simply to wait for it to happen magically. It is a huge mistake to just leave yourself open to whatever, applying for anything the employer might have. Rather than improving your chances, this actually hurts them, because you will never appear qualified, let alone best qualified, the majority of time. Don't scattershot—go for a direct hit.

When I was managing an independent New Age book store, we had one applicant who wasn't really knowledgeable about the store's contents overall, though she could get by as a sales clerk, a pleasant young woman, who revitalized our cotton clothing sales, because she knew how to construct outfits and she loved doing it. Now I, true to my gender perhaps, know nothing and care nothing about clothes. But Alya! She started spending all kinds of time back there instead of upfront. When I took a look, she had organized all the various clothes into outfits neatly pinned up at the end of each bookcase stack. "That's nice," I thought. But I missed the point. Instead of selling a few clothing items here and there, Alya sold people entire outfit after entire outfit. People started coming in just for the clothing. She was just doing what she loved—and the store benefited tremendously.

If we don't count sleeping, most people spend more time at work than at home with family—so spend it doing things you love. For yourself first—life is meant to be enjoyed. But also for your employer and for the clients you'll serve. Everyone benefits. And *that's* the way to sell your qualifications for a job. Success and happiness, both, stem from doing what you love.

You'll be more successful—and a whole lot happier. And remember—gratitude is key. Not gratitude later (though that's important too), but gratitude now, as you live your joy. Do what you love, and be grateful doing it.

### The Job Search Process

Rather than simply a chronological process, the job search is more of a targeted hunt, a corralling of the employer through presenting yourself in a better and better light at each stage.

Here are the Steps:

- Step One: Research
- Step Two: Cover Letter and Resume
- Step Three: Preparing for the Interview
- Step Four: Acing the Interview
- Step Five: The Follow-Up

Let's do them one by one.

## Step One: Research

The Research Step has four sub-sections:

- \*research the field
- \*research the company
- \*research the position
- \*research the interviewer(s)

Assuming you are applying in a field for which you have passion—or at least interest—this should be ongoing, and a labor of love. Subscribe to trade magazines (or read them at a local college library); every field has them. Each day, read one of the articles. Very shortly, you'll be very much up to speed on a variety of new and interesting things happening in your field. Think that's going to give you an edge in an interview? Correct. A career edge too. Passion and profession fit beautifully.

Find out about the company. Search local newspaper sites for stories about the company. Learn their history, what they're planning now, what they're building or going through. Ask people—lots of them. People know people who know people. You'll be surprised what you can learn just by asking.

Know the position within this field. A local college career office can help here. What are the general expectations? What's the salary range? How about career trends—is this a growing area? Be sure you well understand what you're aiming at here.

Find out who is conducting the interviews, if it's an advertised position. Who would you be working for? What are these people like? What do they look for? Try local newspapers again, and talk to people...who know people who know people. In fact, make it a habit to pursue friendly relations with those who come into your daily life. Find a connection to that real information. You do not want to interview the same way for whomever shows up.

Then get information! Don't strive to use manipulative tactics, but do appreciate what's important for whom you're talking about, and approach this person with the specific qualities you bring that fit what this person wants in that position. Information can also be power, helping you understand what's *\*really\** going on in an organization.

When I was ready to move on from my New Age book store management job, I contacted the top three New Age music wholesalers in the country. One was in Milwaukee, one in Vermont, another in New Jersey. I spent some time talking to each of them, with mutual interest in the possibilities.

One of these stood out, and after some promising chats, we agreed I would fly across the country for an interview and share the expense. We were a good fit; I had just promoted a concert by one of their label's artists, so they had seen my work first hand. I had also dealt with them as a buyer for years, so I knew their product and their operation well. So I

planned a trip to Milwaukee to meet with the owners and management.

I always had a brief friendly chat with Natalie, a fellow musician, before getting down to business when placing an order there. That friendship paid off. “Tim, I have to tell you something,” she said one day. “It’s a small place, and everyone knows you’re coming out here. But I overheard something you should know—you know, musician ears.”

I was certainly all ears now—and heard pertinent information that would have floored me at the interview. “They were talking about what to pay you, and one of the owners [there’s a nice one and a hard-ass...this was the hard-ass] said, ‘Well he’s a musician, and not used to making very much.’ So they’re planning to offer you a low salary.” I was certainly grateful for the heads up! And yes, they offered me only what I was already making, to move across the country! They were paying their manager twice that (more inside information). I explained what they already knew, that I could pick up the phone now and serve their customers, customers whose needs I knew thoroughly, coming from the same business as they did, knowing all the promotions that tripled my own store’s music sales, and would then increase their sales to their other retail customers. But the hard-ass had an ego at stake, and dug in. I flew home—and took a job in Vermont instead (Later, word was “we should have hired him when we had the chance”).

But the point is...inside information about what people are looking for is available. This is one anecdote, sure, but this is common. Word gets around. People know people who know people. And people like to talk.

Years later, I applied for a full time position at a community college. I had taught there part time, and volunteered for a few committees while I was there, and from that experience, gathered they would probably repeat their usual practice of coming up with a list of prepared questions they would ask all applicants at the interview. And that’s exactly what they did. I knew the people, so I just needed a sense of what they were going to ask, what aspects they were stressing in this particular search.

Relations between full time and part time professors had deteriorated, creating a strong “us vs. them” dynamic. Consequently, another adjunct, a friend also applying, and who had his interview a few weeks before mine, was only too happy to share what had happened, saying, “One of us may as well get this gig.” Immediately after his interview, we sat on a park bench while he reconstructed the questions and follow-ups from memory while I took copious notes. Usually, when I went for an interview, I would know what they were generally seeking and how I fit it. This time, I knew EXACTLY what they would ask and was ready with notes for answers and examples of my work for all of them. As is usual with committees, they weren’t entirely sure what they were looking for...but I nailed what they were asking, and was the only adjunct candidate recommended to the Vice President of Academic Affairs as a finalist. There’s usually some sort of tension in most organizations, and this leads to people willing to step outside organizational discipline.

And again, despite the close-lipped culture, I was able to get all the information needed to interview there strongly. Never assume you can't find out what's going on from the inside—you can.

Gather information. Maybe not quite that much as in that example. But dig around—you know someone. Information is far more readily available than people realize.

Don't be shy about simply calling the company and asking who is doing the interviews, how to spell that person's name, what's the exact job title and so forth. Learn the secretary's name while you're at it, and thank that person.

Now that you know the situation, you're ready to target your campaign. There's no point in constructing an "effective" resume and cover letter until you have good information, because you're just shooting blind, and aren't likely to hit much for a while.

You won't always be able to do this as thoroughly as you might like, but you'll be doing a step most applicants miss—at their peril.

### Step Two: Cover Letter and Resume

Let's start with the resume.

Consult ten different sources, you'll get ten different takes on how to write a resume, and often, people have the idea that everything including the kitchen sink should be crammed into one. That's not the take here, at all.

Instead, our goal is an EFFECTIVE resume, that is, one that gets results.

So what IS the purpose of a resume? If you said "to get a job," subtract two points. This is the wrong rhetorical strategy, because it's unrealistic. No one is going to hire you based on a resume. Do not rely on resumes to get jobs.

The purpose of a resume is to get an interview. The purpose of the interview is to get the job—more about that in Step Four.

Right from the start, we're faced with a problem—the average employer glances at a resume for 10 to 20 seconds. That's it.

So...we're going to construct a resume that gets your message across with a glance. Here's how.

First, let's deal with content. Then we'll move to design and layout.

At the top of the page...do not put "Resume" – that's obvious. I'm looking at it. I can see

that. Don't insult me, and don't waste what little attention I'm going to give your resume on pointless "content." Instead, everything, everywhere on your resume will be practical and hard-hitting. Let's not water down your qualifications information.

Start with your name, right at the top, followed by your contact information: address, phone, and email. Make yourself easy to find. Be sure your phone has voice mail, and that you check your email. Make sure your email is appropriate for a business context...if your email is hotbabe69@hotmail.com, open yourself another email account with a more appropriate name—preferably your actual name. Undo the automatic underline and blue text for the email—this isn't a link.

Next comes a simple but often poorly used part: your Objective.

Don't get dramatic. The Objective serves one purpose, and one purpose only—to tell me why I'm reading this resume. And by that I mean what position are you seeking? Specifically. Am I reading a resume for the job vacancy I wish to fill? That's it. So just put that—for example, "position as Assistant Warehouse Manager," or "8<sup>th</sup> grade Math Teacher," and so forth. NOT "a position offering good income and opportunity for advancement." Why? It's a waste of the reader's attention again. EVERYONE wants good income and opportunity for advancement presumably. Don't include the company's name unless that's truly the objective—if you've dreamed of being an Animator for Disney all your life, then fine, put it down. If, however, Pixar or DreamWorks or Tim Burton would work as well, leave it at Animator. Just the actual facts, clear and simple.

Now come the decisions—starting with what type of resume you're constructing. You have three choices:

- 1) Chronological – this is the most common, and unless you have a lot of experience in the field, this is the one you should probably use.
- 2) Functional – this resume focuses on your skills, rather than your employment history. It can be useful for showcasing a significant skill set. On the other hand, it can also arouse suspicion that you're hiding something in your work history. Use this only when you are exceptionally skilled with long experience and your employment history is not in question.
- 3) Mixed – This most often is a chronological resume that begins with a Summary of Skills. Again, consider this only if you have significant, specific skills and long experience. The advantage is that you are showcasing the exact skills you wish to be considered.

For most cases, chronological is the most appropriate, so we'll continue in that vein.

Another decision—to lead with Education or with Employment History? Depends.

Which is strongest for you? If you are a young, recent graduate, with little experience in the

field, then clearly your Education is your major selling point at this time...so lead with it. If you are returning to the work force or changing jobs, and you have strong experience, lead with that instead (no one much cares about your education at that point in your career, as long as you have a degree). Make sure the employer's glance sees the most important one.

Let's assume Education is next.

The goal is reading with a glance...so don't create jigsaw puzzle resumes, where employers must visually search around for the various pieces and how they fit. That isn't going to happen. Instead, present information the way it's best processed with a glance, and grouped so we can see it as a single unit.

Let's start constructing a resume with what we have so far.

### Constructing your Resume

So, start with the Institution's Name, and end with the date:

Awesome University, 8/08 – 5/12

Notice I've used numbers for the month and year—don't write them out (e.g., August 2008 – May 2012), as it just consumes space and reader attention unnecessarily. Don't waste those few seconds of glancing!

Also, don't try to hide short times, say, 12/11 – 1/12, by using years, e.g., 2011-2012. No one is that stupid, and you are absolutely nowhere even remotely near to the first person who ever thought of that nonsense. If you've been somewhere very short and can't explain it well, just leave it out.

Next, put your exact degree title, and when it was awarded:

Awesome University, 8/08 – 5/12  
Bachelor of Arts in Applied Wizardry, May 2012.

This you spell out. It's the major accomplishment.

If you are still pursuing that degree, indicate that:

Awesome University, 8/08 – 5/12  
Bachelor of Arts in Applied Wizardry, expected May 2012.

If you have concentrations or minors, list them on the next line.

*What else goes here?* Depends.

GPA? If it's 3.0 or better—yes. Don't insult readers or waste space and attention with “out of 4.0” – we know...we're college graduates. If your GPA is under 3.0, don't advertise. Don't play games with “3.2 GPA in my major,” as that just flags that your overall GPA sucks.

*Dean's List?* It could go here. Probably should. It could also go under Honors. Just put the term and year, e.g., Fall 2011. Combine appropriately if for multiple terms.

*Other Academic Honors?* Again, they could, or could go under Honors. You need to decide where these look best given your overall resume and what else is on it.

*Sports, clubs, other activities?* Unless they are job related, no. You might include them under Activities if you're really scratching for material, or if you have leadership skills here—you were captain, in student government, things like this.

*Related course work?* Maybe. IF it is truly relevant, and not just coincidental by subject.

*Other colleges?* Sure. List them in reverse chronological order (last one attended should be listed first). Indicate course of study.

*High School?* Not if you attended college. The only exception would be if you attended a specialty high school relevant to the job...for example, you're applying for a dance instructor position, and you attended the High School for the Performing Arts.

*Other training?* If it's job related, absolutely.

*Internships?* You might want to save these for the next section.

### What about Experience?

Which brings us to the next section! Called....well, that Depends. I know...I say that a lot. But it does Depend.

Typically, this would be called *Employment Experience*, or something along that line. But...what if you don't Have experience?

First, you Do have experience. If you're working age, you're too old not to have experience. Even if you've never held a job, you have experience. Did you volunteer? Help out at church events? Participate in a school function? Look carefully at your background—it might be easy to miss, but it's there.

But they weren't jobs? No problem—call this section *Work History*. That includes unpaid work.



Note—I am NOT advocating dishonesty. I AM advocating showing where you’ve earned work experience. Work is work. If you donated that time—that’s commendable. But you’ve had experience working.

Now...what if you Have experience, but some of it is relevant to the job, while the rest of it doesn’t really apply?

**Two options here. First, you can split your experience.** For example, *Management Experience*, followed by *Additional Experience*—or any other clear headings. *Writing Experience* and *General Experience*. *Restaurant Employment* and *Other Experience*. Remember...the key is to let your resume be read at a glance.

Under your heading—or headings—list your work history in reverse chronological order: Name of the place first, then dates, month/year, just as for the *Education* section.

Under the name, put your job title. If you didn’t have one—make one up. No, don’t lie or exaggerate. Come up with a title that accurately describes what you did...that’s the point. If you ran the office—you were the Office Manager. If you ran it under someone else’s supervision—you were the Assistant Office Manager.

After your title, put a brief job description. But here’s the thing—don’t just put obvious points. No “Cashier – took money, talked to customers.” Put contributions you made on the job. What did you do over and beyond what’s usually done or required? What suggestions, approaches, innovations, changes did you make while you were there? Keep it brief—use fragments; sentences will stretch it out and work against reading with a glance. So...

Wackiness Wholesale, 10/08 – present  
Warehouse Manager – Instituted automated inventory system. Cut costs 20%.  
Increased turns each fiscal year.

Get the idea? Good job. And by the way—you DON’T have to put EVERYTHING here. If a short job didn’t work out and you don’t want the subject to come up...don’t put it on your resume. Or if you have a lot of relevant experience and you’re short on space, cut the irrelevant stuff.

So what’s next? Could be a lot of things.

*Community Service* or *Volunteer Activities* are good. So are *Honors* and *Awards*. *Professional Organizations* if they apply to the job.

Skills—if they are specific. NOT “good communication skills” or “strong leadership abilities” or any similar generic clichés. Specific skills. Separate them into separate groups

perhaps, like *Computer Skills* and *Language Skills*. Computer skills should be real skills—Creative Suite 5, or InDesign, or CAD, and so forth. Foreign languages IF you are fluent.

Do NOT put *References* or “References available upon request.” Of course they are—it’s obvious. And it’s a waste of space and reader attention.

DO make the resume one page—one full page, arranged attractively. [The exception, if necessary, are education and engineering resumes—these may be two pages.]

OK! You have a resume! Now the cover letter...

Just as the resume has a specific rhetorical purpose—to get an interview (vs. getting the job)—so does the cover letter. It is not just to sit atop your resume. Rather, it is to tell employers what to see in your resume—no, not literally, implicitly—and yes, you really can influence that.

First, the cover letter is a business letter. If that’s new to you, be sure to follow the format precisely. Use the samples here as a guide. Be sure to have your name and contact information prominent at the top. And be sure to use the exact name and title of the person interviewing or managing the position. If you don’t know, call and find out. NEVER write a letter “to whom it may concern.” Make sure this is going to a real person.

The first paragraph should be short and to the point—why the employer is reading this letter:

\*Sentence one—what you’re applying for exactly (never apply for just any job they might have—target something specific) and how you found out about the opening (ad, colleague, whatever it was—be specific).

\*Sentence two—preview your three main qualifications. Make these specific, not generalities like “people skills,” “communication skills,” or other commonly used vague terms. Target this job with specific qualifications.

For example—

“I am interested in the Assistant Warehouse Manager position advertised in the Jan. 19 Warehouse Weekly. Six years of wholesale experience, automated inventory control, and increasing team productivity are among the qualifications I bring to your organization.”

That’s it for the introductory paragraph. With a glance at your letter, the employer can see what you’re applying for and what you bring to the table. Now the body.

ANYTHING general you say here is a complete waste of a narrow window of opportunity. Don’t waste it—be specific. Very specific. Here’s the rule:

Match specific job requirements with your specific qualifications and support with specific examples from your experience. Specific. Show yourself on the job. Kill the general. Kill kill kill. Get specific.

NOT—I worked in a variety of settings that gave me an opportunity to showcase my leadership skills.

INSTEAD—While at XYZ Worldwide Wholesale Company, I revitalized their inventory system by replacing the slower blah blah blah system an automated on-demand delivery. Inventory turns increased 250%, cutting inventory investment in half as product line increased. Shipping time dropped to 2-5 days for all areas of the country, increasing sales by X%. The main success, however, was the subsequent change in team productivity and moral. The yadda yadda yadda and the etc etc etc did the thingy thingy thingy and so forth for the rest of the paragraph...

Then write a second paragraph showcasing your strongest achievements. Again, don't simply list them, but rather, show yourself at work.

The conclusion, like the introduction, should also be short and to the point. Thank the reader and confidently but subtly ask for the interview. Here's one way:

“Thank you for your time and attention in reviewing my application. I'm looking forward to the opportunity to discuss my qualifications in greater depth.”

Notice what happened there? Quietly, the implicit promise of even more than your already targeted letter makes the borderline expectation of an interview a worthwhile proposition.

Do NOT—repeat, NOT—say things like “I know I am qualified” or “I'm confident I'm the right person for the job.” This is not your call; that's the employer's job. Don't say things like “This job would be very good for me” either—the employer isn't in the business of promoting your career, and isn't going to want to hire someone who's likely to leave shortly—turnover is expensive.

Sign your letter in blue or black ink—no festive colors. Black is a better choice, as your materials may likely be photocopied, and blue doesn't always show up well.

Don't end with unnecessary or pretentious addendums like “enc” – it's obvious. Put the cover letter on top of the resume—do not staple—fold, and send in a business size envelope.

### Step Three: Preparing for the Interview

So the phone rings—they want to schedule an interview! Awesome!

This step starts while you're still on the phone. Don't be afraid to ask questions! Tell them that's wonderful...can they tell you more specifically just what they're looking for in this position? In the ideal candidate? Who will be conducting the interview? Is that the person you would be reporting to? Get correct spelling of names and position titles. Follow up on the answers you get. And make sure you know where you're going—get directions if need be. Make sure you know how to get back in touch with this person (and remember this person's name). Thank this person for all the help!

Now research. I know, that was Step One—but now you have more information than you had before, and even if not, you have an interview to prepare for. So repeat Step One in greater depth. Ask around. Surf the Internet. And be sure to re-examine your background for more details that better match your growing understanding of the company and what they want in this position.

Revise your resume—make it even more strongly match specific job requirements with your specific qualification and give specific examples from your experience. Remember, only the specific is serving the cause.

Have a professional-looking folder to bring to interviews—not a manila or other paper one, but a nice one with a reasonably firm writing surface and pockets inside.

Here's what to bring in this folder:

- \*two copies of your cover letter
- \*two copies of your \*revised\* resume
- \*a note pad (8 ½ x 11)
- \*references (in case you're asked)
- \*your interview notes
- \*a list of questions

Your interview notes are what you will discuss during the interview. YOU are the one who knows what your qualifications are and how they match the position, so YOU should be the one decides what gets discussed at this interview (yes, along with what the interviewer wishes to discuss). So be prepared!

Make an A list, a B list, and a C list:

The A list is what you absolutely **MUST** discuss, no matter what.

The B list is what you would **LIKE** to discuss as well.

The C list is what you **CAN** discuss as well if you find there's more time.

Arrange these on a single page, so you can easily read and remember them.

→Be sure to include specific examples for each of these from your experience! THIS is what the interview should center upon! ←

And finally, have a good list of questions to ask. Not silly questions you should have already answered in your research, but (1) real questions that reveal your knowledge and research (and genuinely satisfying your curiosity), (2) real concerns and situations you want clarified and (3) questions about the hiring process.

Good questions are things like asking specific things about the business growth and direction (“I read in Business Bi-monthly that you recently expanding product line to \_\_\_\_\_,” or “that you’re opening 15 new stores,” or “have started using the new XYZ process” or whatever—and follow up on it. Ask too about new opportunities these developments might have.

If there are concerns—travel perhaps, if that’s a problem for you—ask, whatever they are. And ask too practical questions about their search...when will they be making a decision, may you contact them with further questions, what’s the best way to do so, and so forth.

But have questions. Lots of them. Thoughtful, insightful, meaningful questions. This says a lot about you, your interest, your preparation, and your value as a thinking employee.

Know where you’re going on interview day. Know the route. Check it out ahead of time if need be. Where will you park? What will you wear?

And practice interviewing. Be ready for this.

#### Step Four: Acing the Interview

Take Step Three seriously—be prepared. Also, understand that interviewing is a skill that can be learned. Practice! Get friends to role play with you. Apply for jobs you don’t even want just for practice—yes, seriously...politely decline if offered the position. You can learn this skill so well that essentially going on a interview is getting a job. Yes, seriously. Meanwhile, back at this interview...

Arrive in plenty of time—parking and all that. You’ll want rest room time to freshen up, and you want to arrive 10 minutes early. Too early, and you’re just hanging around nervously. Go over your notes to keep them fresh in your mind before you head out.

The interview starts the second you are within eyeshot of the company...you never know who is watching, so act professionally throughout. Find the secretary, whose name and location you should already know from previous telephone calls. Greet this person by name and introduce yourself and your purpose. You may be offered coffee or something similar. Politely decline, even if you’re a caffeine addict—you’re nervous enough, and this is just one more thing to juggle in your hands. Have a cup or two before you arrive if like. And breathe. Long, slow, deep breaths. Smell the flowers, blow out the candles, smell the flowers, and blow out the candles—it will calm you.

When the interviewer comes out, greet this person by name and introduce yourself with a firm handshake. Smile! Be warm and friendly. Don't be afraid to strike up the conversation yourself. If you're walking down a hallway, chat about what's going on around you as you go. Remember, it's not a trial. More like a blind date...you're there to get acquainted.

When you get to where you're going, offer your revised resume. Don't be surprised if there are other people in the room—offer the other copy as well if need be, and copies of your cover letter too. Don't sit straight across if you can help it, as this puts you as combatants; sit to the side if you can (i.e., at an angle). Continue the conversation about the business.

Unskilled interviewers will shoot off a bunch of questions. And most interviewers are unskilled. For these interviewers, keep focused on your notes, and work your A and B lists into your answers, with the specific examples from your experience. This cannot be over-emphasized: It's the specific examples from your experience that count! You can also predict many of the questions you'll be asked and be prepared with how you'll answer them. Some common questions:

- \*Tell me about yourself.
- \*Why do you want this job?
- \*What do you know about the position/company?
- \*What experience do you have? (Remember—you HAVE experience!)
- \*What are your greatest strengths?
- \*What are your weaknesses?
- \*So why should I hire you?
- \*What problems did you face at your last job?
- \*How are you as part of a team?
- \*How do you handle annoying people?
- \*Where do you see yourself in five years?
- \*Do you work well under pressure?
- \*If you were hiring for this job, what would you be looking for?
- \*Do you have any questions for me?

Don't act like it's the Inquisition. Every question is an opportunity to showcase your skills and experience—even the seemingly negative ones. Weaknesses, for example...every quality has positive and negative aspects. Obstinate is persistent. Workaholic is dedicated. Additionally, overcoming problems and challenges is a positive trait. When sharing a difficulty you faced, also share how you resolved it. Every one faces these—if you didn't have problems at your old job, then you didn't do very much.

Keep answers job related. And remember to match specific job requirements to your specific qualifications and to support with specific examples from your experience. If you're thrown a curve ball question, say "I'm glad you asked me that, because it gives me an opportunity to talk about..." and then pick absolutely anything from your list. Just talk—you're there to showcase your qualifications. While talking, figure out how to pull it around

back to the question. Learn to think on your feet. This comes with practice. So practice!

A skillful interviewer won't throw a list of questions at you, but instead, engage you in a conversation. Questions only get the answers applicants think the employer wants to hear. Conversations get people talking, and they reveal much more about themselves without realizing it. But don't worry if you have a skilled interviewer—you are there to share what you're about and how you're a good match. Talk! It's what your notes are for.

Of course, unskilled interviewers can be Chatty Cathys, off on long tangents—so take control and keep turning the conversation back to you and your experience. All too often, applicants seem to hit it off with the interviewer—but don't get the job, because the interview never got around to much interviewing.

Now, a skillful applicant will be learning as well. Who is this person? What are the things the company really wants in the successful candidate? Which things are lighting up this person, or getting the pen scratching? What can you learn by what you're asked? Often an interviewer will explain briefly about the position—pay attention, and ask questions. Learning to read the interviewer means you'll know things the other applicants missed, things you can then target.

And follow up with questions! Not only your prepared ones, but also ones that come up during the interview.

At the end of the interview, again, thank the interviewer, shake hands, find out when they'll make a decision. On your way out, stop and thank the secretary/receptionist by name. You'll be amazed how much power people in this position often have in an organization. Make a good impression.

And throughout, remember that personality matters! These people have to work with you, as do their clients.

### Step Five: The Follow-Up

OK...you got through the interview! Well done!

Go back to your car, and pick up the notebook you left on the passenger seat specifically for this moment...

Immediately write down everything you just learned about the job, the company, the interviewer, specifically what these people are looking for, and absolutely anything else you just learned. Now. Right now, while it's still in your head. You're still calming down—you will NOT remember all this. Write. It. Down.

Do that first.

Next, review your own performance. What went well? What didn't go so well? What did you do especially right? What do you need to work on for next time? And anything else you can think of about your interview skills. You WILL get better as you do more of these.

Then—go home.

The minute you get home, take your notes from the interview and your notes from the car and immediately go to your computer to write a follow-up letter.

Note that I didn't call it a thank-you letter. It *is* a thank-you letter, and that's important, but this follow-up letter is much more than just "Thank you."

That said—thank you is important. When I was the administrative assistant at a music wholesalers, we were hiring for a new warehouse position. I sat in on the interviews, and my boss and I had narrowed the field down to three candidates.

"Jim," I said in a few days. "We need to get someone in here. Have you made a decision?" The candidates were very closely qualified, essentially equal.

"No," he said. "Have any of them called?" No one had.

Three days later, I broached the subject again. "Jim, we really have to pick someone—we need to get them!"

"I know," he sighed. "No one called to follow-up?" I shook my head, and in frustration, he picked up the three resumes on his desk and tossed them in the air. Two landed face down; one landed face up. Jim picked it up, handed it to me, and said, "Call him." That's how we got our new warehouse manager. If either of the two other candidates had pursued the job further—they'd have had the job instead.

You, though, are going to do more than just pursue the matter—you're going to look even better than in the interview!

This letter is similar to your cover letter, with these differences—

First paragraph, thank the interviewer for the opportunity to interview for the specific position title on the specific day and time of the interview...don't make busy people have to remember. Second sentence, do what you did for the cover letter, only this time, focus three main qualifications that match you much more closely to what they want in this position. Before, you were fishing a bit. Now, if you did a good job of learning at the interview, you KNOW. So target this—and hit the target squarely.



In the body, as you did in the cover letter, develop these new qualifications by supporting them with specific examples from your experience. SHOW these people you at work demonstrating exactly what they want to (and need to) see.

In the concluding paragraph, again, a thank you for the time and consideration in reviewing your qualifications (Note the implicit language? That you're qualified?), just as you politely asked for an interview, do the same for the job: "I look forward to the prospect of working for XYZ Corporation" or something similar.

And that's it. A targeted job search that has you looking better and better at every step of the process.

Enjoy your new job!

So what's your niche?

"Niche" comes from the French meaning to "make a nest," and even if this seems paradoxical when opportunities appear scarce, finding that corner of the world that's Abundant for you means to find and focus on who and what you Love.

Thinking of your *niche* as a *nest* really alters the perspective landscape. It's what you want. What you love. It's your home. You invite whom you want in your home, spend time with whom you want, work together with whom you want. Imagine a home life where, instead of making these decisions, you just brought in whomever and whatever was available and willing. Yikes! Don't do that to your work life either.

Neither life nor the business world are allied against you. It's about being clear about what you want and having reasonable strategies for getting there.

As Bob Proctor shares:

- 1) What are you trying to accomplish?
- 2) What's working?
- 3) What's not working?

Here's what to do:

- Stop doing #3...it's not working.
- Do more of #2.
- If nothing is working, do something different.

Happy Nesting! And remember...you don't build a nest once and that's it forever. Maintain your niche and your work life (and your home life), joyously creating/re-creating as you go.