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9 Reasons You're Still Unemployed

Career coaches reveal the nine bad behaviors stunting your job search

By Kristen Fischer – August 3, 2010



Captain Obvious says that, yes, the economy is poor right now. And in the media industry, not only has the dismal fiscal outlook caused companies to cut jobs, but the very nature of our business has changed, forcing those with outdated skills out the door -- along with the positions they excelled in.

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Yet, even as reports emerge that things may be looking better, some media professionals still find themselves unemployed. Is it simply a result of the recession, or can job-hunters do more to secure their next gig? If you've been laid off for a year or longer, the reason your phone isn't ringing with corner office offers could be... you. Career experts say that these common behaviors can hamper any well-meaning job hunt.

1. You're only using major job boards.

According to JobBoardReviews.com, more job boards are closing than opening. As old tactics are phased out, new ones have emerged -- namely, social media. Respondents to Jobvite.com's 2010 Social Recruiting Report said they planned to spend more on social recruiting than they do on job boards and headhunters, which means if you haven't registered for that LinkedIn profile, it's time to sign up. "It's not the same job market out there as the one job seekers are used to. In prior job markets, there were more jobs than candidates," says Phil Rosenberg, president of [reCareered](#). "Today there are five to six times more candidates than jobs."

So, if your job search has stalled, think outside the box. Tout your services in mediabistro.com's Freelance Marketplace or attend an industry conference. You may not want to stand out in front of the Condé Nast building like [this guy](#), or buy keywords for your dream boss' name like [this one](#), but taking any professional steps to get the job is generally alright.

2. No one knows you've been laid off.

A first reaction to being laid off isn't generally a positive one -- and those feelings can linger. Most people laid off in the current recession report problems with depression, anxiety and insomnia, in addition to general challenges such as paying bills and losing health insurance.

According to a *New York Times*/CBS News poll, almost half of those surveyed said they felt embarrassed and ashamed about being out of work -- especially men, most of whom felt they should be the breadwinners in their households.

"You aren't going to convince anyone you are top media talent sitting at home."

J.T. O'Donnell, founder and president of [Careerealism.com](#), says that it is easy for out-of-work media pros to want to avoid talking to people about their unemployment. But they need to get out there and start pitching what they have to offer, remembering that they are not "unemployed" but simply "between assignments."

"Find your Jerry Maguire-ness and show people your passion for the media business," she says. "Media pros know it takes more than words to attract an audience. Great media moments are about creating a feeling, inducing a reaction."

"You aren't going to convince anyone you are top media talent sitting at home," adds O'Donnell.

3. Your only network is the one you use for an Internet connection.

Once you've put the word out to people you know, it's time to mingle with those influencers you don't. Miriam Salpeter, owner of Keppie Careers in Atlanta, says she thinks people are not getting jobs because they are not meeting people who can connect them with the right opportunities. Companies report that more than 27 percent of their jobs are filled with candidates who were referred to them, she says.

"Stop applying for jobs and start identifying people you need to know to share information and advice and build relationships that will lead you to your next job," she adds.

Networking includes lots more other than handing out your card at a luncheon. It's best to follow up with contacts within a few days of meeting in person and try to stay visible long after that. Add the person to your LinkedIn network right away. Follow up with an email to see how they are doing. Try not to be too pushy, but do forge a relationship.

4. You only have one resume and one cover letter.

Customizing a resume or cover letter goes beyond changing the salutation. "We sometimes get lazy and just send out the same resume to all of the companies that we're applying to with minimal changes," says Erica Swallow, an editorial assistant at Mashable. "Sometimes it works if the companies you're applying to are very similar in industry and culture, but it can oftentimes be a mistake."

"Flopping duties on a sheet of paper and hoping a hiring authority will extrapolate accomplishments and figure out where you fit in the organization doesn't work."

Salpeter adds that resumes that are not targeted to a specific job will be outdone by the person who takes the time to focus on the specific opportunity and tweaks the resume appropriately. This isn't too time-consuming, either. Sometimes you can simply add some keywords or re-order bullet points to give it a new focus.

And unless you're a new graduate, it's time to ditch the "objective" and upgrade to a qualifications profile that talks about the skills and experience you have to offer. "Flopping duties on a sheet of paper and hoping a hiring authority will extrapolate accomplishments and figure out where you fit in the organization doesn't work," says Dawn S. Bugni, a certified resume writer and career coach.

5. You think Twitter is dumb or a waste of time.

Listen up, Ms. Too Cool for School. While you're at home sending your resume to that jobs@xyz.com address, the smart kids (and gainfully employed folks) are making valuable connections with media gatekeepers through social networking. According to Jobvite, 73.3 percent of human resources and recruiting professionals in the U.S. reported using social media in June 2010. Among the networks, LinkedIn ranked first while Facebook and Twitter came in second and third, respectively.

"New media and digital media... has completely changed the shape of how both business and media work," says David Metcalfe, a digital media specialist with XNet Information Systems in Chicago. It has also shifted the way companies hire people because they generally want those that are savvy with social networking, and those who have a stellar online reputation, too. Metcalfe says that if you are not proficient using digital media for yourself, companies may not think you will be effective working for them.

6. You're not on top of your industry.

Many laid-off media professionals knew how to do their jobs, but are not up on the latest technologies and aptitudes. "Know about technology changes and trends, business trends, and who is there [at the companies you target]," says Steven Savage, a California-based IT project manager in the video gaming arena.

Picking up new skills in blogging, podcasting and other Web 2.0 trends is likely a useful addition to your career. In fact, some employers say that they want multi-talented candidates, so instead of just hiring someone who can write news, they want the individual that knows how to post it online, as well -- so expanding your skill sets can really pay off.

7. You're a traffic reporter only looking for traffic reporting jobs.

"The media has changed so dramatically that many of the jobs no longer exist," says Mark Goldman, a media relations specialist with Goldman McCormick PR in New York City. In fact, numerous jobs that were eliminated will not return no matter how high the economy soars.

Mitchell York, a career coach and former executive at Ziff Davis Media and CMP Media, believes it is imperative to expand your job search -- and your skill sets, especially if you're in a declining field like print advertising design.

"If someone is great at managing the creation and production of a complex print ad campaign, they have skills they

can be used elsewhere, in functions like project management, negotiating, business development, managing contractors, and working under time and budget constraints," York explains. Playing up these transferable skills is a smart choice. "Most people hang on too long to the hope they can wait it out and get back to the kind of position they had."

8. You think big (companies), not small.

Mark Herschberg, the CEO of ZepFrog, a new media startup in New York City, believes that many media professionals are not familiar with the cultural values that smaller firms possess, so when targeting them, they don't fit in and don't get those jobs. "You can teach people tools, but you can't teach cultural values," he explains.

The transition from media giant to smaller-scale firm is possible, but you have to surround yourself in a more intimate setting. (And it doesn't mean you'll earn any less, either.) He recommends spending time at a startup or doing discounted consulting work to pick up on the values of today's smaller firms.

9. You focus too much on your years of experience.

Janet L. Falk, who formerly worked in media relations at an agency, was laid off in December 2008. Since then she has been seeking jobs in public relations and marketing but has been turned down, she believes, because she's overqualified. "When I specifically asked, I was told it is not a budget issue: The jobs have little growth potential for a more experienced hire," she said.

Similarly, it took Manny Otiko, freelance writer and vice president of social media at Desmond & Louis Public Relations in California, about a year and a half to get into his current role after being laid off. "Many companies simply do not want to hire experienced workers. It is particularly bad for workers in their 50s and 60s, because few companies want to take workers at that age," he says.

But neither should worry about what employers think, says Bugni. "If the job search and resume are focused on being able to do what the company needs, the extraneous information shouldn't even come into play. A resume is a sales and marketing document, not a 'tell-all' autobiography. Once the resume has compelled an interview, the change in career path and goals can be shared in a positive light."

In the end, the success of your job search depends on you. Polish up that resume, bone up on your networking, and even when things look bleak, keep a positive attitude. After all, even Bill Gates launched Microsoft during a recession.

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Anonymous 1 hour ago

1 person liked this.

Yo, Captain Obvious, perhaps you should reconsider your approach. We are in an extreme market. Why don't you just

say that you want to sell your service instead of attempting to prey on the insecurities of people who are already suffering in a difficult time job-wise.

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Jamz 56 minutes ago [in reply to Anonymous](#)

Thank u !

[Like](#)[Reply](#)

Anonymous 1 hour ago

1 person liked this.

Yeah, or maybe it has something to do with the fact that there are six unemployed people for every one position. (Probably higher in the media biz.) Otherwise, good tips.

[Like](#)[Reply](#)

Leslie 45 minutes ago

I liked the article, but dislike the subhed: "bad behaviors" makes it sound like you picked your nose during an interview or lied on your resume. It's more like "bad strategies" or "strategic errors." I almost didn't follow the link from Facebook because the language sounded insulting to those looking for work...

[Like](#)[Reply](#)

LostinAZ 3 hours ago

I'd add being mired in the past--if you're staring at the door that just slammed, you're not seeing the other one that's opening. Listen to someone else complaining about how under appreciated they were, how they got screwed...pretty boring, isn't it? Move on, people!

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