

## *Managing Your Life During the Job Search*

After interviewing for a job, and before a job offer is made (or not made), an interviewee often feels helpless; there is nothing to do but wait and hope. While it's easy to understand why people feel this way—the ball, so to speak, is in the employer's court—passive behavior is not in an interviewee's best interests.

### **Follow-up Techniques**

Systematic follow-up after interviewing can be an important part of successful job hunting.

#### *Keeping in Contact*

Keep in contact with potential employers during the waiting period(s). After an initial screening interview, and after a final set of interviews, many successful job hunters will write a letter (or letters) to those with whom they spoke. The letter can communicate your appreciation of the way in which you were treated, your interest, your initiative, and the reasons why you think there may be a good match between your abilities and desires and the job. It can also help keep you visible, even though you're not there.

When visiting a potential employer, if you find that you share some professional interests with someone you meet, you may wish to follow up on that after leaving. Successful job hunters will sometimes stay in contact by letter or in person (if

the employer is geographically close by) with a few of the people they met at a particularly interesting potential employer. Such contacts can help produce job offers.

#### *Persisting and Persevering*

Recognize that the key to getting what you really want—not your second, or third, or tenth choice—often depends upon your own perseverance. Some people would argue that the key to the whole process of getting job offers is persistence. The following story, while not at all typical, is instructive in this regard.

Jim Howard began job hunting with a major focus on consumer product management jobs and a minor focus on advertising jobs. Primarily because he had a good understanding of product management jobs, of himself, and of why he would probably make a good product manager, he was enormously successful in his initial interviews with consumer product companies. He contacted ten such companies, got initial interviews with each, and was invited for a second set of interviews at all but one place. His understanding of advertising jobs and how he might fit in, as well as his commitment to an advertising career, was much lower. He contacted six ad agencies, was invited to interview with two, and was invited back to only one. All this occurred in January and February.

During March, while Jim was going through the second round of on-site interviews, he began to learn more about advertising through a course and his own research, and as he did he grew more and more excited about it. It became clearer and clearer to him that he

could be really good at account management and derive a lot of satisfaction from it.

In April Jim found himself in a rather unusual position. He was the envy of all of his friends—for he had seven attractive job offers. Unfortunately, all seven offers were in product management, which he was no longer convinced that he wanted. Worse yet, he had fallen in love with the ad firm in which he had a set of second interviews. And the attraction was not just emotional infatuation. The job and company sounded almost perfect in light of his self-assessment paper.

On April 15, five days before he had promised some employers that he would respond to their job offers, Jim tentatively decided to accept a particular product management job. But it didn't feel right to him. He kept thinking to himself—if you know what you want, why take anything else unless you have to?

The next day he called the one person at the ad firm who had seemed to respond the most favorably toward him when he had visited them six weeks earlier. He invited that person to lunch, saying he needed some advice. At lunch he presented his dilemma, including his detailed analysis of why he would probably do a very good job at that ad firm. He effectively ended by saying that unless he heard very convincing evidence to the contrary, he was going to turn down his offers and pursue the ad firm until it offered him a job. The man he spoke with was visibly impressed.

At 8:30 the next morning his luncheon partner from the previous day called and invited him to come down to the agency that afternoon. Jim spent the afternoon talking to other employees of the firm, much as he did with the first person the day before.

On April 19, one day before he was to respond to his other offers, the ad firm called and offered him a job. He accepted, and when last heard from was doing very well and was extremely pleased with his job and company.

This brief description of Jim's job search, especially his management of his life during the process, illustrates the importance of persevering. But it is difficult to portray in print the emotional ups and downs that one can experience during the job search process. Even more difficult is trying to prepare for the sometimes lengthy periods of anxiety caused by the uncertainty of waiting.

### **Keeping Things in Control**

#### *Managing Anxiety*

There are many reasons why people find job hunting anxiety-producing. Serious young students, in particular, often overestimate the stakes involved and then worry about making errors. Many people, who find rejection in any kind of social situation unpleasant, live in daily fear of being rejected by

some employer they are beginning to like. The stream of ambiguous information a job hunter receives from potential employers drives some people to despair. The relative success experienced by other job hunters leaves some people feeling like the "ugly child at the orphanage." And the stream of first positive (an invitation to a second set of interviews), then negative (a rejection), then positive (a job offer) stimuli can turn one's life into an emotional roller coaster.

It has been our observation that many of the poor judgments people make while job hunting are due to their own anxiety, or more broadly, to an emotional state that is increasingly out of control. An individual's success at managing his or her own emotional state can be a very important factor while job hunting.

Just knowing that it is not unusual to feel anxious, and knowing the typical events that create anxiety, can help you to reduce and manage your anxiety while job hunting. People become "out of control" when they are surprised and frightened by their own anxiety. When typical human anxiety becomes predictable, it becomes manageable.

A technique our students have found useful in putting the hectic events of job hunting in a rational perspective is to keep a diary. By spending just a few minutes almost every day to summarize job-hunting events, your own thoughts and strategies, and your current feelings, you create a "monitoring system" that can be very useful in keeping things under control. By periodically rereading the entries for the last few weeks or months, one is able to make current decisions based on a more accurate understanding of what has really been happening. Rereading the diary helps put things in perspective. An example of such a diary is the Henry Rock case you encountered earlier (pp. 245).

#### *Managing Time*

It should be apparent from our discussion in the past few chapters that job hunting can be a very time-consuming activity. People who have not recently had to search for a job seem invariably to underestimate the time involved. It is not at all unusual for a nonstudent to spend half to all his or her time for three or four months looking for a job. Even students will often spend about a quarter of their time for four months. Some individuals, in both cases, spend up to five times as long.

Because job hunting is time-consuming, it seldom fits very neatly into an already busy life. It causes

conflicts with school, work, family, and leisure time. Unless one is prepared for these conflicts and prepared to manage them, they can create a continuing sense of crisis.

Individuals who normally have a busy schedule, and who normally manage it well, tend to be quite successful at managing their time while job hunting. People who do not typically have a busy schedule, or who do not usually manage their time well, often run into problems while job hunting.

For the person who has problems managing time or who normally has an unbusy schedule, we offer two specific recommendations that can help to manage time while job hunting. First, get an appointment book (if you don't already have one). By recording in it all your time commitments (not just appointments) while job hunting, you can make it serve as an effective time-management tool. Second, every time you undertake a task, stop and ask yourself a few questions. Do I really need to do this? Can someone else do it instead? Do I have to do this now? Or is something else a higher priority? What is the most efficient way to get this done? And so on.

### *Managing the Scope of the Search*

As we mentioned earlier, people who are more successful in finding a very satisfying job tend to keep a narrower focus during job hunting. Among other things, a clearer and more structured focus helps one keep one's time demands within reasonable bounds.

Despite its importance and usefulness, however, maintaining a restricted scope while job hunting can be very difficult. Forces exist that push toward a widening of one's focus. For a variety of reasons, people sometimes do succumb to these forces, and they end up facing all the problems associated with an unfocused job search.

For example, most job hunters, at one point or another, begin to worry that maybe they just won't get any job offers. Some try to reduce that possibility by broadening the scope of their search. We've seen students who, after receiving their first rejection letter, panic, and discard any and all focus in their job campaign. Many people, once they have spread the word that they are looking for a job, receive a few unsolicited leads that are not even close to what they are looking for. But if they are attractive in some way, some job hunters will take the bait.

We've seen companies send telegrams to students telling them what wonderful things the company has heard about them and asking them to please sign

up to interview with the company when it is on campus. Students who have no interest whatsoever in the firm or its jobs will often sign up for an interview. Maintaining a rational focus in a job search is also difficult when one is around other job hunters whose enthusiasm for a different kind of job can be infectious. Some students seem to change the focus of their search almost daily to whatever the last excited friend they talked to was describing. The "grass-is-greener" phenomenon is very much at work here. Finally, some people expand the scope of their job search after they receive their first job offer. They seem to find their first "valentine" very exciting, want more, and so they go out and collect lots and lots of job offers.

If you feel yourself wanting to broaden your focus while job hunting, don't do it immediately. Examine the idea carefully over a period of time. You will probably decide it is not a good idea.

### *Managing Pressure*

Most job hunters get more than enough advice regarding what they "should" do from friends, professors, parents, spouses—even from a little voice inside them. While this advice is sometimes helpful, often it is not. One of the challenges of job hunting is not to succumb to well-intentioned but inappropriate advice and pressure.

When Fran Kelly's parents learned that she was not looking for a job in banking, they let her know (almost on a daily basis) how terribly disappointed they were that she wasn't following in the family tradition. When John Allen decided he would not interview anyone on campus or even look for a job until after he graduated and moved to the city he wanted to make his home, his peers gave him blank stares and an occasional, "Boy, does that sound like a dumb idea." When Frank Lenaro decided to change his career field after working for ten years, his friends made it a habit of saying (while Frank was present), "Frank's decided to throw out everything he has built up over the past ten years." When Kim Evans decided that she wanted to look for a job in an area seldom entered by graduates from her school, she was greeted constantly with puzzled looks and questions such as, "Why don't you want any of the good jobs?"

The more highly one is integrated into a network of friends, relatives, and acquaintances, the more pressure one is likely to feel from others while job hunting. This short-run pressure can, and sometimes does, push people away from a rational course of action.

Differentiating between inappropriate pressure and good advice can be difficult, especially if you are already out of control, and letting events and feelings direct your behavior. Periodically reviewing your themes and their implications from your self-assessment can be invaluable at this point. So can keeping a job-search diary. Both can help you keep on the right track.

### Assignment

Read the vignettes that follow. Then carefully outline how you would handle each situation. Be specific. Outline what you would do, what you would say, where you would go, and what the impact of your actions would likely be.

1. **REJECTION** After a long and particularly grueling week of classes during which you have been eagerly anticipating a response from your number one company choice, you receive a letter in the mail informing you that, while the company appreciated your interest, it is unable to offer you a position at this time. You still have not heard from the other two companies who have expressed interest, but they are not particularly attractive openings anyway.

2. **FATIGUE AND OVERLOAD** It is Sunday evening about 7 P.M. You have just returned from a cross-continent recruiting trip and are exhausted from the flight. You have a major paper due the following morning that needs some polishing and one or two additional exhibits. You also have two very stimulating classes scheduled for the following morning in subjects you feel are important to your education, but you have not yet read the cases. The phone rings. An old, close friend from out of town who is here for one day wants to go out to dinner.

3. **RESPONSIBILITY** Your field project team has scheduled a very important meeting to pull together the data and analysis for your term project for Thursday night. Today is Wednesday, and you have just received a telephone call from your number-one recruiting choice asking you to fly to its city on Thursday evening to be there for Friday morning interviews.

4. **LATE** You are walking out of class with two of your friends who are excitedly chattering about the job offers they have received, the benefits associated with them, the high salaries offered, and the thrill of being wanted by companies of such prestige. You, however, have not yet received any job offers, and in fact have not yet received any strong expressions of interest.

5. **DATA** You receive a telephone call from your number one choice. The personnel director on the other end of the line thanks you for your recent

company visit and expresses to you how interested they are in you. Then he says that, of course, in the recruiting process they have been interviewing a number of students from the business school, and wonders if you have any observations that may be of help to them on the following three people.

6. **LOCATION** You have received two job offers, one that seems to fit your career objectives, personality, and skills perfectly, and the second which is less well matched. The first, however, happens to be in a rural community in the Midwest, and the second is located in a major urban center with all its attendant opportunities. While you are eager to accept the position in the Midwest, your partner feels very strongly that he/she would rather live in the urban location.

7. **PARENTS** You have received three offers from firms in different industries, one of which is clearly more prestigious in the eyes of the world than the other two. Nevertheless, the second option seems to match up more closely with your personal interests and career objectives. When you describe the three options to your parents over the telephone, it is clear that they hope and expect that you will accept the most prestigious offer.

8. **SALARY** You are sitting in the pub having a snack and a drink with several of your classmates. The talk naturally turns to the job recruiting process, and several of them start talking about the salary offers they have received. The only offer you have received at this point is more than \$5,000 less than the lowest offer the others have mentioned.

9. **FRIENDSHIPS** Your parents are coming for a short visit on Sunday, and you have blocked the day off. You have a major paper due on Monday, and have scheduled Saturday to do the final analysis and writing. On Saturday morning, as you are sitting down to write, your roommate and close friend at the business school calls from a city two hours away to say that his car was stolen with his wallet in it. He wants you to come down, pick him up, and bring him home.

10. **HOLDING OUT** Your number two choice has made you a reasonable offer and asked for a reply next week. Your number one choice has just called to say that they enjoyed your visit. They also report that since some people are going on vacation, you will not be notified one way or the other for two weeks.

11. **CHOOSING** You have received two job offers, both of which, although in different parts of the country and with different job descriptions, seem to fit very closely the goals and objectives you had had for a first job. The more you analyze the two alternatives, the more equal they seem. You have promised one of the firms that you would let it know the following morning.

12. **PRIORITIES** You have received two offers. One includes a salary that is well above last year's

class's mean salary, but is in a location that you find distasteful. The other offer has a salary that is slightly below last year's mean salary, but is in a location that meets your life style objectives well.

13. OTHER SITUATIONS There may be other

situations that you could imagine or have heard about that take place during job search and that tend to disrupt one's routine or one's emotional equanimity. Describe one such situation, and how you would feel, and devise a response to it.