

THE BEST WAY TO JOB SEARCH:

Helping People with Barriers Shine & Save Time

by Elisabeth Sanders-Park

In the beginning, the hiring process is about who not to hire! So, a job seeker's first goal is to AVOID BEING SCREENED-OUT (especially if they have distracting barriers). Then they should focus on marketing what they offer so employers can decide to hire them. Keeping it simple, there are 3 ways to market to an employer... paper, phone and person. Credible references are 4th category, but even these come to employers on paper, over the phone or in person. Understanding this, and asking a few key questions allows anyone to job search in a way that lets them shine and saves them time.

PAPER: Any opportunity an employer has to experience the candidate on paper or on-line, including applications, cover letters, resumes, thank you notes, letters of reference or introduction, email correspondence, point by point letters, business proposals, portfolios, personal websites, what comes up when they "Google," samples of work, etc. On paper, grammar, spelling and punctuation, handwriting, and even the quality of the paper and pen can help or harm.

PHONE: Any opportunity for an employer to experience the candidate over the phone, including cold or warm calls, calls of introduction, Backward Career Path™ or investigative calls, phone interviews, follow-up calls, etc. Over the phone, voice tone, diction and grammar, accents or speech impediments, as well as the answering message, background noise, and anyone who answers the phone when an employer calls (fair or not, they represent the candidate!) can help or harm.

PERSON: Any opportunity for employers to experience the candidate in-person including the interview, but also cold walk-ins, going in as a customer, introduction by a mutual acquaintance with a great reputation, job fairs, community, business and charity events, investigative interviews, internships, job shadowing, volunteering, and anywhere else a potential employer could see them in action... Starbucks, the grocery line, kids' soccer game, etc. In person, dress, grooming, body language, the handshake, and observations made when we're unintentional such as smoking, outbursts or doing the extra can help or harm because the employer assumes what it will mean over 40 paid hours a week.

Choosing the Best Strategy & Tools

So, how does a person choose? Consider yourself... your education, experience, personal style, barriers, strengths. In general, how do you make your best first impression to employers? Paper, phone or person? Having asked thousands of professionals this question, I guess that less than 10% say paper, fewer say phone, and most say person. Consider the difficult clients you serve... how do they make their best first impression? The numbers are the same. The problem is that we spend much of our time teaching them to job search with paper. But no gets a job with paper!... because no employer reads an application or resume and declares, "Call her and tell her she's hired!" The very best result from paper is a phone or in-person interaction. Job search strategies that work allow candidates to make their first

impression in a way that lets them shine. This is easier than you may think. Ask the following questions to identify the best general approach (paper, phone, person) and specific tools in each category:

Minimize Distractions: Considering my barriers, which approach & tools should I avoid?

To avoid being screened-out, someone with a difficult accent or speech impediment should avoid the phone, those with a visible disability might avoid first impressions in person, and someone with poor work history should avoid applications and perhaps resumes (though a point by point letter or letter of reference could work).

Let Them Shine: Considering my strengths, which approach & tools should I focus on?

To impress the employer, an attractive person may choose to lead with in-person interactions, while someone with great education and experience may choose paper, and someone with a pleasant voice and good communication skills might initiate contact over the phone. In each case, they choose specific tools within the category.

Demonstrate Ability: Considering the job qualifications, which approach & tools should I use?

To let the employer see them using the skills for the job, someone pursuing an outside sales job could go in person, a hopeful Dispatcher could lead with the phone, and a proofreader could start with paper.

Last & least... Employer Preference: Considering the employer's preference, which approach & tools should I consider?

Job seekers who can play within the employer's rules and win, should. When they have the talent, but the rules ensure they'll be screened-out early, bend the rules! If the employer wants resumes and no calls, but their talent for the job isn't easily seen on a resume, they may call first, hand-deliver the resume, or do something else to let the employer see what they offer (so they're already sold or at least hooked when they see the resume).

You see, no one hires the disabled, felons, welfare recipients, etc. They hire people, people they believe can do or learn the job, who they trust, who fit into the team, who happen to have a disability, have a felony, be making that transition, etc. Effective job search strategies present the candidate as a person, with talent, experience, passion that benefits the employer... who also happens to have barriers (as we all do).

In the end, the job search is like the old joke... Two men are hunting in the woods and suddenly come upon a bear. The bear looks angry and hungry, and the men realize they look like lunch. One man whispers, "I'm gonna run for it." The other replies, "You can't outrun that bear." The first man says, "I don't have to outrun the bear... I only have to outrun you," and he takes off running! Your client doesn't have to be the slickest job seeker or greatest salesperson ever, but they do need to outrun their competition. These ideas will help them avoid getting screened-out and outshine their competition so employers can see what they offer and hire them. I wish you joy and success! Keep in touch.