

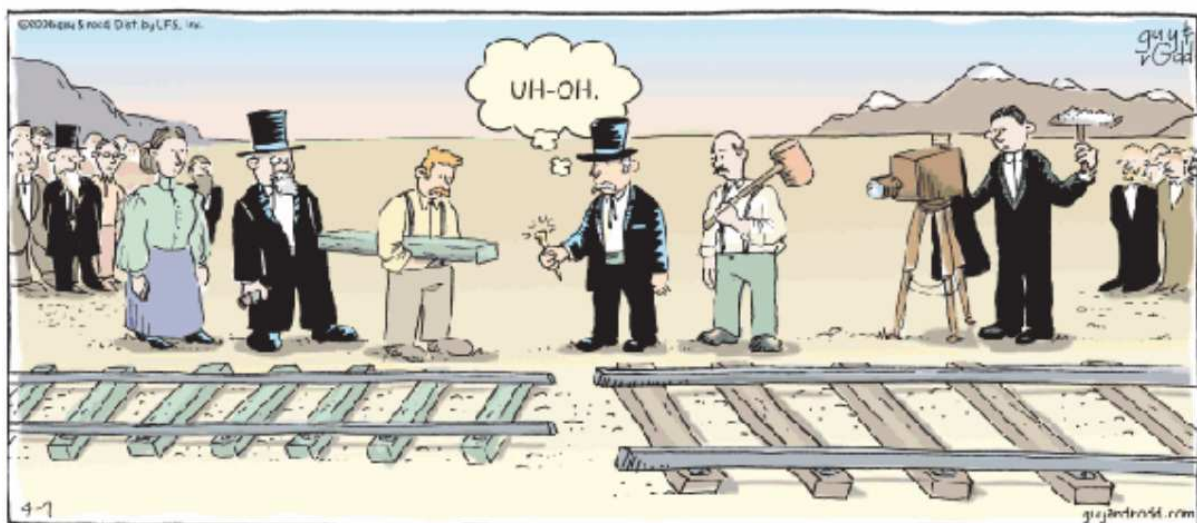
# Failing to Plan = Planning to Fail

**W**hen recounting job search mistakes, many people begin by describing resume gaffes and interview bloopers. While these are common areas where many job seekers make many mistakes, don't overlook the leading course of action - the job search itself.

Though you may be a dental hygienist, graphic designer, or first grade teacher, when it comes to job hunting even a phlebotomist has to be a project manager.

Most people dive right into their job search by writing a resume and bombarding job boards, with little thought for the big picture.

Failing to plan your job search is a set up for failure. <sup>1</sup>



## Begin With a Self Assessment

Many of us typically evaluate our personal state of affairs around momentous life events. For career moves to be successful, job seekers must treat them with equal consideration and give them more thought than flippant New Year's resolutions to get a new job.

- ▶ What do you **want** to do? Soul-search for what you really want to do - the same, or something different?
- ▶ What **don't you want** to do? Concede what you definitely do not want to do; taking an unlikable job is a recipe for misery and failure.
- ▶ What **can** you do? Pinpoint your talents. What comes naturally to you? What are you passionate about?
- ▶ What do you **need to develop**? Identify your weaknesses. Determine the skills you need to develop or hone for your target job.

- ▶ **Where** do you want to live? Make a decision on your willingness to relocate for that dream job. How much travel are you prepared to do?
- ▶ **How much** can you afford? Prepare a financial plan - know what you need and determine your absolute bottom line.
- ▶ What are your **values**? Acknowledge any strong religious, moral, or socially-conscious issues that might affect your job satisfaction?
- ▶ **When** do you want to do this? Plan around your time horizon; future career moves allow more time for skill development, logistical preparations, and financial planning.

Be sincere with yourself and don't forget teamwork. Discuss your career plans with loved ones to solicit their input, as well as to obtain concurrence and support. The last thing you need is a family mutiny because you made an isolated decision to relocate, or to take a lower paying job when your loved ones are anticipating big-ticket events in the near future, such as starting college or a planning a wedding.

### Create Your High-Level Plan

Though you may not be a project manager by trade, think of your overall career plan as your road map to get where you want to go - from where you are now.

After completing your assessment, determine the main topics you need to address. These may include things like:

- ▶ Resume
- ▶ Elevator speech
- ▶ List of networking targets
- ▶ Financial plan
- ▶ Health coverage options
- ▶ Research needed
- ▶ Reference lists
- ▶ Classes to take
- ▶ Associations to join
- ▶ Logistical arrangements if contemplating relocation

### Create Your Detail Project Plan

Using your high-level focus areas, drill down to each minute task needed to complete the topic and assign key milestone dates and a target completion date for the overall task.



A tactic often used in creating project plans is to work backwards from an absolute target date:

- ▶ If you need to have health coverage options decided by December 31, back up from that date to the present when assigning interim milestone dates; comparison-shopping for coverage and rates a week before doesn't leave much room for thorough analysis and decision-making.

Determine what additional resources you may need to complete a given task, and identify individual tasks that may be dependent upon others. This will help you prioritize tasks in your job search plan.

Illustration using Elevator Speech:

| TASK  | TARGET DATE |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Decide on the best format that fits your strategy: functional or chronological pitch.                |             |
| 2. List probable points to emphasize - strengths, skills, experiences.                                  |             |
| 3. Short-list to 2 or 3 key points.   |             |
| 4. Connect a strong example of using one of these points - biggest achievement, etc.                    |             |
| 5. Identify what you are seeking in a job.  |             |
| 6. State how you can benefit a potential hiring organization using these skills in a similar situation. |             |
| 7. Compile strong closing statement.  |             |
| 8. Rehearse with friends and associates.  |             |
| 9. Tweak.   |             |
| 10. Re-rehearse & finalize.   |             |

**Create Short Term Activity Plans**

Prepare a weekly activity log. Though you may not carry out activities in each topic every week, use a consistent template to help remind you of all the activities connected to a job search:

- ▶ Networking calls to make this week: \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Follow-up's from prior week(s): \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Job boards to review: \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Print advertisements to review: \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Company websites to visit: \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Pitch letters to write: \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Cover letters to write: \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Applications to submit: \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Thank You letters to write: \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Recruiters to contact: \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Social network boards to review: \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Interviews to prepare for: \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Scripts to rehearse: \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ References to contact: \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Events to attend: \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Research to do: \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Classes to take: \_\_\_\_\_
- ...etcetera...
- ▶ Reward for the week: \_\_\_\_\_  
*...yes, you have to reward yourself for your efforts.....*

Set goals for yourself in addition to jotting down names of people to call or company websites to visit.

Measure your progress against preset targets to call "x" people, submit "x" applications, or attend "x" events each week.

### Conduct Periodic Reality Checks

Equally important is to assess your progress at regular intervals and determine if / when you need to change your course of action.

- ▶ If your desire is to find a more senior-level job in your same field, but nothing is clicking after months and months of trying, maybe it's time for a more in-depth self assessment - perhaps it is too premature to shoot for that next level and you need to hone some additional skills and experiences first.



So as you embark on your job search, heed the words of New York Times best selling author and motivational speaker, Harvey MacKay, when he said...

*“Failures don't plan to fail; they fail to plan”*

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