

How to Move Ahead On Your Job Search -- WSJ

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FULL TEXT

By Kathryn Dill and Patrick Thomas

There are more than 10 million job openings in the U.S., so why do so many job seekers remain frustrated by hiring managers who ignore them and online application portals that delete them?

There are a lot of jobs out there, but a lot of rejection, too. It's easier than ever to apply for roles, so companies are swamped, leaving applicants – even ones who have been courted by recruiters – either facing a void or never hearing back again. Hiring experts at Tuesday's WSJ Jobs Summit said candidates can take steps to build relationships with the humans overseeing the hiring process – and bounce back faster when they are rejected.

"Job searching's probably not easy for anybody," said Brie Reynolds, a career coach and career-development manager at FlexJobs, an online site that lists flexible and remote job opportunities. "There's always a confidence piece there that you want to make sure you're building up."

Here are more tips from career coaches.

You're going to be ignored. Persist anyway.

Maintain reasonable expectations, and don't expect a reaction from every hiring manager you reach out to, said Christine Cruzvergara, chief education strategy officer at Handshake, a careers site for college students and recent grads.

"Sometimes you might not be the right candidate at that certain time," she said.

Knowing when to follow up after applying or interviewing for a job can be one of the toughest challenges for applicants – especially if early conversations seemed promising and now you have been left hanging.

"Organizations deeply appreciate persistence, as long as your persistence is generous," said Keith Ferrazzi, an executive coach and author of "Leading Without Authority." Sending a flurry of check-in emails is usually a bad idea, he added, but asking thoughtful follow-up questions by email and volunteering your knowledge to a potential boss can be a winning strategy.

"If your persistence is, 'What about me? What about me? What about me?' That's not generous," he said. "If your persistence is, 'I've been thinking about your company, I've been researching a little bit more about your company, I've had a few ideas about the conversation we had,' those are generous acts of reaching out."

Motivated job seekers should ask if there is anything they can do during the hiring process to demonstrate to the employer that they are right for the role, Mr. Ferrazzi said, and then follow up to prove it.

"Ask the person interviewing, 'Is there anything you are curious about relative to my ability to perform this job that I can do between now and the next call that could show you how I can perform?'" he said. "Actually start the work."

Nontraditional methods of communication can sometimes yield a surprise reaction, said Keith Wolf, chief executive of ResumeSpice, an executive and professional résumé-writing service. He advises reaching out to people you are eager to connect with on Twitter or Instagram instead of simply sending an email.

"Twitter – you can have a conversation with someone who will never return your email," he said.

Don't worry about beating the bots

People become obsessed with outsmarting résumé-reading applicant-tracking systems that most companies use to sort through candidates. It is a better bet to focus on the information and keywords provided in a job description

and incorporate them into your résumé, Mr. Wolf said.

"It's almost like you've been given the answers to the test," he said, adding that the skills and demonstrated experience spelled out in a job posting should be reflected in a résumé.

Mr. Wolf recommends using logical headers – such as experience, education and skills – and ditching fancy formats and fonts. "Anything you think is going to get a human's attention to really stand out can hurt you when it comes to an applicant-tracking system, and they won't allow your résumé to be read," he said. "Simple is better." Another tip: Eliminate the objective statement. Those few sentences at the top of a résumé, summarizing skills and the type of role a person is seeking, only makes it easier for recruiters to disqualify anybody who is not an exact match, Mr. Wolf said.

"It's a great excuse just to take you out of the pack," he said.

Another common mistake is using valuable résumé real estate to describe your companies instead of your work, said Ashley Watkins, a job-search coach at Write Step Resumes LLC. While it is tempting for job seekers who have worked for startups or small businesses to detail what their prior employers have done, a résumé should be all about you, she added.

"If I want to know about the company, I can Google them, as a recruiter," Ms. Watkins said. "The résumé is about you and the value that you offer, not your company."

Chip Cutter contributed to this article.

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