

# OVERCOMING *BIG* OBSTACLES TO YOUR JOB HUNT

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Occasionally a job hunter has a concern that he perceives as an insurmountable obstacle to getting hired. Age, a criminal record, or a disability are three examples. Here are three rules we offer clients who are paralyzed into inactivity because of extenuating circumstances:

- Rule one: Whatever problem daunts you, coming at it from a different angle (reframing it) almost always helps. For instance, an ex-burglar has plenty to teach security companies. So do computer hackers.
- Rule two: If you're not getting results, change your target audience. Poor targeting keeps more people from getting hired than any other cause. Ask yourself who most needs your skills, then choose your targets.
- Rule three: Network to find people who have had similar problems or histories. Study their approaches, successes, and failures. Learn from them.

Here are some of the most common causes of job hunter distress. *Age*

This problem may dissipate slightly in the next five years as workers 55 to 70 grow to outnumber workers 18 to 24 by three to one. Older workers will have to be taken seriously. In the meantime, make a list of organizations for whom long experience and

maturity would be of value. For example, if you are 65 and want a job with a university, fund-raising (development) or alumni relations would be one option. Older people prefer to be solicited for donations by their peers, not by twentysomethings. Likewise, selling products that appeal specifically to older audiences can better be done by a contemporary than by someone who is obviously too young to need the products. Not-for-profits are often easier marks for older workers but corporate America will soon be hiring plenty of retirees, especially part-time. If you are fifty and worried, you are not watching the same aging of America that we are.

*Excessive job-hopping*

You've been in and out of more jobs than anyone you know. You hesitate to ask friends to pass your resume to their contacts because they might be embarrassed by your history of excessive mobility. How can you demonstrate that the new you is likely to stay put (or if you're not, that you'll make a significant contribution while you are there)? Start by doing temporary or project work in your field of choice or a closely related one. Pick short-term projects. Generate rave reviews from every employer for six months.

Then start looking for full-time jobs with start-ups and organizations in flux. You will get hired. It's a matter of finding an employer who needs - and values - flexibility; one who isn't necessarily looking for employees who'll stay forever. Think small businesses.

*No recent experience*

You have a graduate degree but you dropped out of the workforce to rear children. Now those children want to go to expensive private colleges and you need money. You do not want to return to your field but other than that, you have no focus.


*Real estate is out; you hate selling. What should you do?*

Don't begin Job hunting until you have a focus. Start by writing a description of your life after you quit working full-time. What did you do with your free hours once your children were in school? What roles did you create for yourself? Did you volunteer? Do you have hobbies? We had a client who could repair anything. She started her own business, "Handywoman, Inc." She didn't spend a dime on advertising. Instead, she spoke annually to every service organization in her area - Rotary Club, PTA, etc. - on "How to Fix Anything Without Serious Tools." Her presentation included a slide show as well as live demos on items people would bring in. She generated more business than she could handle by herself and hired several part-timers from the retired population. She retired herself within fifteen years.

Another woman - a former librarian and a whiz at research - was an avid stamp collector. After courses at the community college and passing an exam, she obtained a license as an appraiser. Now she helps people decide whether Grandma's painting has any value other than sentimental. She is self-employed and works on a fee basis. She's doing very well.

*Prison record*

Yes, there is life after prison, contrary to what many ex-convicts believe. Remember rule three? Locate every agency or branch



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**Overcoming Big Obstacles...** *Continued from page 14*

of government that works with ex-offenders on re-entry. They have lists of companies willing to hire ex-cons. The Salvation Army might be a starting point. Network to find people who've turned their lives around. Contact them.

Don't lie about your past, especially on a job application. You will be surprised at how willing companies are - especially small ones still run by the founders - to give others a chance. Above all, don't take just any job. These days, it's a challenge to succeed in a job you like. Don't make it harder by taking the wrong job for the wrong reasons.

*Poor health history or disabled*

Don't tell us what you can't do, make a list of what you can and will do. Focus exclusively on that. You've probably met people who wanted to describe in excruciating details whatever health problems - current or past - they had endured. Nobody cares, especially hirers. They want the same questions answered that they ask of the most robust job hunter: "What can you do for us and how much will we have to pay?" Richard N. Bolles of *What Color Is Your Parachute?* Fame said this in the early 70s. Nothing has changed.

*Professional disgrace; public failure*

Will the surgeon at Duke University who caused the death of the Mexican teenager following a botched transplant ever work again? Certainly, and maybe even as a surgeon. Is Joseph Berardino, ex-CEO late of Arthur Andersen, unemployable based on his role in the firm's demise? There's no doubt that many would-be employers of a Berardino-type would not hire him but we're sure he has options, most of them working behind the scenes. He only needs one organization willing to pay him.

Your public drubbing couldn't have been any bigger than Joe's or Ken Lay's or Andy Fastow's. It's what happening in your head that matters. People who act as if they're washed up are treated as such. If you dread being asked about some details of your life or about the holes on your resume, work only through contacts who'll run interference for you and hand off your resume to a hirer. Contacts are the best way for anyone to get interviews and often the only way to get one with a hirer who would otherwise scrap your resume.

During interviews, avoid going on the defensive. Don't read criticism, discrimination, disdain or ill will into casual remarks. "It's nice to meet you," means just that. Don't over-analyze. What's important is that you have an opportunity to sell yourself

However great or slight your problems you should not launch a job hunt until you've spent several hours in mock interviews in front of a camcorder. Make a list of the nastiest, meanest-spirited questions you can think up and practice answering them. Watch your behavior change over time as you get more selfconfident. If you need money in the meantime, take a part-time, freelance, or temporary job. We knew a wheelchair-bound man who took a night factory job packing paper cups. His supervisor found him so congenial, industrious, and humorous that he campaigned throughout the company until HR found a day job for him.

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