

# Managing a Job Search

The Job Search is not an intuitive process and we're never really taught how to find a job. It is important to learn job search and career management skills that we can use throughout our working years -- which if you're like me, might be just about all of them! Since most people really don't know how to conduct an effective job search, they tend to spin their wheels, get frustrated and feel a sense of isolation and despair. Not meant as an exhaustive document on the subject, this handout is designed to help you get started on the right track or unstuck from a counterproductive search. After planning and planning about how you're going to go about your search, the focus should be on *taking action*.

## **An Active vs. Passive Search**

An **active** search is one where you decide what kind of position you want and approach the company/organization whether or not there are current openings. The active approach does take a great deal of energy, but it is effective. Key characteristics:

- Highly organized and structured.
- Heavy emphasis on networking.
- Puts the job seeker in the driver's seat.
- Requires a leap of faith.

A **passive** search, on the other hand, is when you wait for the ideal position to appear or "come to you," hoping you'll know it when you see it. Key characteristics:

- Random, "shooting in the dark."
- Emphasis on the newspaper and Internet.
- Job seeker feels completely out of control.
- Approach is common, but unproductive.

Let me introduce you to three power tools to use in your Job Search: the Career Profile, a Top Thirty Target List, a Stress-free Networking Script Template, and 5 Quick Steps to Get Unstuck.

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## **Step I. Career Profile**

There are scads of variables when it comes to finding the work we love. The clearer you can be about what you want, the easier it will be to describe it to others and the more obvious it will be when you actually find it! What you are doing is a sort of creative visualization that can be a powerful step toward the real thing. Remember, the idea is just to get out of your head and down on paper! Use the Description column for taking notes. Which are your top three characteristics?

<b>Characteristic of Ideal Job</b>	<b>Description</b>
Type of Organization: corporate or non-profit, well-established or new start up?	
Size of Organization: how big or small an employer do you want, fewer than 20 employees, 500 or more?	
Your Role: what kind of work do you see yourself doing there? (e.g. marketing/sales, customer service, project management . . .)	
Geographical Location: how far are you willing to commute?	
Salary: how much do you want to make and how much do you need to make?	
Other benefits: don't forget about health care, vacation time, and other forms of compensation.	

<b>Characteristic of Ideal Job</b>	<b>Description</b>
Professional growth/advancement opportunities: how do you want to grow in this position?	
Work environment: fast-paced and competitive, relaxed and creative, etc.	
Work/Play balance: what impact will work have on family and personal life?	
Organizational Culture: what is the management style, coworkers, reputation?	

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**Step II. Top Thirty Target List**

Another tool you have to have in your kit is a list of companies or organizations that are the most attractive workplaces to you. Who is doing work that you admire? What companies and organizations have a reputation for being great places to work and treat their employees well? Where do you think you might like to work? Start compiling a list and keep adding to it until you reach 30 different organizations. When you get there, you might sit down with your list and look for themes—do you find that there tend to be certain fields heavily represented? If so, you can organize your list by subcategories. For

example, you might find that your list contains primarily medical and health care organizations, followed by financial services and marketing companies.

Your goal is to have at least one good contact at each of the organizations on your list. If you're just not having any luck with one of the organizations on your list, ditch it and add another.

This task will require some research. To learn about all the organizations out there, try the following:

1. Visit the Metropolitan State Librarians. They are very helpful and have access to some powerful databases and information.
2. Stop in at the Career Services office and take a look at our *Book of Lists* published annually by the *Twin Cities Business Journal*. It's a great way to get a quick glimpse and profile of hundreds of Minnesota-based companies.
3. Try doing an informational interview or two. Talking to people who are working in your field and tapping their ideas on places to look can be a productive way of discovering companies to add to your list.
4. Research companies online. Beware of the internet's "black hole" effect, set an egg timer to keep your screen time to one hour per day.

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### **Step III. The Networking List**

Your next task is to compile a tally of networking contacts. This is a list of almost everyone you know: start with the easy ones, family, friends, and professors; then go to classmates, neighbors, former coworkers; and keep going with your child's t-ball coach, insurance agent, dentist etc. Be inclusive and give them the benefit of the doubt. Shoot for 100 contacts. This will be a valuable, renewable resource for you as you continue to manage your career down the road.

You never know who knows someone who will provide you with that golden lead or contact. There are quite a few amazing stories where the connection is made by somebody the benefactor never expected: the fourteen year old neighbor boy, the mechanic, the person in line at Caribou. Type them up in Word or Excel and start sharing your Target List with these folks. You might ask your networking contacts if they might know someone at one of the 30 organizations who you could chat with or if they might suggest other similar organizations that you might consider for your list.

**Step IV.** Networking can be hard and it helps to think about what you're going to say and just what you want to result from the conversation you're about to start. Before dialing the phone or meeting with that contact, take some time to think about how you want to approach them. Fear of not knowing what you're going to say is very common. Just as important as your words are *theirs*—listen carefully and learn as much as you can. This template will help you think through what you'd like to say and precisely how you think the contact can help you.

**Stress-free Networking Script Template**

Mention that you're looking:

Why you think it would be good to talk with her/him:

Two or three sentences about your background and what you're looking for:

Exactly what you need (be as specific as possible):

There will be times in your search when you feel like what you're doing (or not doing) is not working and you are just plain stuck. Action usually works better than thinking in moving you forward. Try this worksheet to regroup and bring your search back to life.

### **Focus on the Exact Next Action -- 5 Steps to Get Unstuck**

1. Stop. Breathe. If you have to, take a quick break to clear your head.
2. Answer these questions: Am I really clear about what the exact next action is? What do I think it is?

3. Then, answer these questions:

Why am I not doing it?

Am I missing information, do I need to make a decision first, or is there some other step that precedes this action? If so, what is THAT action.

And, can I do that action right now, or is there another action that precedes it?

4. Do the very next action. Surprisingly simple when the rest is clear!

5. Now, what is the **next** action?

There you go. Unstuck.

From [Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity](#) by David Allen.

Metropolitan State University Career Services

651.793.1528

[www.metrostate.edu/career](http://www.metrostate.edu/career)

**More resources:**

Join us for the free Job Search Strategies workshop, see the schedule of events:  
<http://www.metrostate.edu/career/workshops.html>

Usually twice a year, Career Services will also form a Job Search Group for those who are looking for a bit of support and camaraderie while they go through the process, call 651-793-1528 for more information.

Work through the Career Workbook for more suggestions and reading on Job Search techniques: <http://www.metrostate.edu/career>