**5 Tips to Help You Get Hired Right Now**

by

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Summary.    Ever been rejected for a job, even before an interview? You’re not alone. To get over your job search woes and get noticed by recruiters, follow these tips. Don’t fixate on just one job opening. Instead, understand that job searching is a numbers game. Not all job...

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Mark, a friend of mine, recently called me sobbing. “I just got rejected from my dream job,” he said. “When I read the job description, I thought I was perfect for the role. But, they didn’t even interview me. I’m ready to pull my hair out!”

Mark fell into a common job-hunting trap — he applied to a job listing online and jumped to the conclusion that he was a perfect candidate for what *seemed* like his dream job. He fell in love with the idea of the job without ever being interviewed and getting a chance to learn more about it.

I work in talent management, and over the last 20 years, I’ve hired hundreds of people for various roles. Time and again, I’ve seen enthusiastic candidates cluelessly fumble through the application process and get unceremoniously rejected. But I’ve also seen cases in which not securing an interview had nothing to do with the candidate. You may have the right skills and expertise, but still not fit the criteria of what a company is looking for at the moment.

Mark and I spent an hour discussing some (harsh) realities of job hunting. He slowly began to understand what he could and could not control in the process. Based on our conversation, and my experience, I’ve put together some tips to improve your chances of finding a job and actually getting hired.

**1) Accept that your “dream job” doesn’t exist.**

This is a hard reality for some people, but it’s important to acknowledge. While there are several reasons you may think a role is perfect for you — shiny perks, a company’s reputation, or a job description that instantly catches your eye — every job has good parts and dreadful parts. What you might label as your “dream job” (based on a listing) could turn out to be a nightmare if you don’t have a great manager, supportive colleagues, or a decent company culture.

Accepting this will take some pressure off of your search for the perfect role. Instead of riding that roller coaster of anxiety and disappointment, you’ll find it easier to evaluate the positives and negatives of each job you apply to, and you will likely apply to more. This is important because, when you expand your reach, you up your chances of landing an opportunity you’ll enjoy.

The job hunting process is like a funnel. The wide opening at the top represents everything you need to do during your search: networking, finding openings, and submitting applications. Your activity results in three to four interviews, which then funnel down into one or two job offers.

The catch is, the top of that funnel is the only part you can control right now. In tough times like this pandemic, when opportunities are scarce, you have to be active. Stay open to new opportunities — even if you’re not 100% sure about each one. Get creative with your search: Type in keywords related to your skills or areas of interest. You may find [openings in industries](http://www.scienceofworking.com/how-to-take-control-of-your-career-during-a-pandemic/) you haven’t considered that are a good fit.

**2) Don’t believe everything a job description says.**

Many job seekers read a posting and think they are a perfect fit. But, in reality, there’s no way to know that. No job description is 100% accurate.

Some [descriptions are poorly written](https://hbr.org/2020/03/write-a-job-description-that-attracts-the-right-candidate), updated every five to 10 years, and don’t reflect the changes made to a role over time. Others are written by recruiters who may not understand the technical requirements of a job, or by a manager who is still figuring out exactly what they want.

Picking a specific title is also not the best way to go about your search. Often, companies use the same job titles for what turn out to be very different roles in terms of experience and pay. A senior data analyst at a startup, for instance, may be responsible for strategic planning, generating weekly reports, and conducting team meetings. In a larger corporation, someone with that same title may be responsible for just one task.

Treat the job description as a guide. Look for jobs with your target job title and others that are similar but with different levels (such as *analyst* and *senior analyst*). Here’s a trick: Compare your experience and knowledge to the skills required, and apply if you meet 75% of those requirements. Have you done work that is similar? Are you confident that you can take on a responsibility, even if you don’t have prior experience with it? Remember, you don’t need to know it all. Managers want people who are excited and willing to learn.

Lastly, during your interview, ask probing questions to get a better idea of what you’ll be getting yourself into:

* What does the boss expect from this role in the first six months?
* How does the role fit into the hierarchy and influence decisions?
* How much of the role is routine versus strategic (planning and looking ahead)?
* Who are the main people this role will be working with?

Answers to questions like these will help you understand the actual roles and responsibilities of the job and whether it’s a good fit for you.

**3) Look beyond what’s “available” on job sites or portals.**

Beware of online job listings. A lot of job portals, including LinkedIn, provide a great service by aggregating opportunities from hundreds of companies. But, sometimes, the information can be flat-out wrong.

I once saw a job listed as “new” on a job board. When I clicked on the link, it led me to a page on the company website with bold red type flashing: THERE IS NO JOB! Apparently, the job board had been automatically pulling text from the site for months, incorrectly listing a role as open and forcing the company to deal with frustrated job seekers.

On top of that, many large companies have a policy that every open job must be posted for the purpose of transparency. For some of these posts, however, an internal candidate has already been promised the job and external candidates may not be considered.

You can usually verify a job posting by checking the company’s website to see if it’s also listed there. On sites like LinkedIn, check the date it was posted. If it says, “posted 6 months ago,” it’s likely that the position is no longer open.

That said, as an applicant, there will be times when you can’t know the status of a job posting. Expect a certain percentage of “fake” openings. If you’re not sure, take the chance and apply. Remember: More activity at the top of the funnel is good — it compensates for the opportunities that may no longer be available.

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**4) Tailor your resume. Always.**

Big companies hire thousands of people every year. When you submit an online application, it goes into a pool that is screened by a recruiter. [Research shows](https://hbr.org/2020/09/how-to-get-your-resume-noticed-and-out-of-the-trash-bin) that a recruiter spends seven seconds or less on your application before they trash it or pursue it.

With the sheer quantity of resumes they receive, recruiters are looking for what instantly jumps out at them. If your resume reads like everyone else’s and fails to catch their attention quickly, it’s going to be rejected even before they get to know you.

To make sure your [resume really stands out](https://hbr.org/2020/09/how-to-get-your-resume-noticed-and-out-of-the-trash-bin), tailor it for the role and company you’re applying for. It should highlight your career progression, include skills and keywords that are in the job description, and showcase achievements that are listed as “must-haves” for the role.

Finally, when possible, describe accomplishments in quantitative terms (like units sold, money saved, amount of data processed, or the number of projects delivered). And don’t forget to spell check — you want it to be perfect.

I find that the best way to get through the initial screening is to have your resume reach the hiring manager through another employee at the company. Screen LinkedIn, your alumni group, and other networking platforms to see if you know someone who can help you get a foot in the door.

**5) Don’t forget that cover letter.**

When applying to jobs online, it’s easy to fall into the sticky web of a three-step application. You find a job, attach your pre-populated resume, and hit submit. But recruiters want to know you, not just your achievements. Your cover letter is how that happens, and it’s just as important as your resume.

I once reviewed a resume that failed to highlight the skills or experience I was looking for. It wasn’t until I reviewed the applicant’s cover letter that I read, in very eloquently words, how his previous work made him a great fit for the job. That cover letter earned him an interview that turned into a job and a great career.

[Write a cover letter that shows your unique personality](https://hbr.org/2014/02/how-to-write-a-cover-letter), explains how your skills apply to the position, and describes the specific outcomes of work you’ve done. You can mention internships and college leadership roles if you’re just starting out. You should also talk about why the organization excites you. Maybe you love their products, mission, or have heard great things about their work culture from others.

If nothing else, a cover letter shows that you are invested enough to take the time to write one. So make time to draft a thoughtful message. It can give you the edge you need to get to the interview stage.

Job-hunting is hard, especially now, when most people are struggling to find opportunities. I’ll tell you what I told Mark: Although much of the process is out of your hands, control what you can by preparing, exploring many different options, and keeping an open mind. And don’t take it personally if you get rejected. It’s just part of the process, for everyone.