

30-Point Game Plan to Find Your Perfect Job



For many people, the job search process is stressful and full of dread. But with a little work and a strong system in place, finding a job can actually be a smooth, empowering experience.

This 30-point plan explains everything you have to do to find a new job. Each point supports the system as a whole, so take each step seriously.

1 Create a Daily Schedule – And Stick with It

When you're unemployed, your job is to find a job. You won't find the right opportunity if you search lazily. Rise at your usual work time, prepare for the day as you would any other, and commit yourself to six or eight hours of prospecting, networking, and preparing for interviews. Don't call it a day when you run out of opportunities to chase. Instead, network on social media or write blog posts to enhance your professional appearance. At quitting time, devote the evening to relaxation and family like you normally would. This schedule will keep you moving forward and stress-free.

2 Have a Discussion with Your Family About the Future

Whatever you do, do not hide your lack of work and your job search from your family. They deserve your honesty and they can provide immense support. Have an honest discussion with them about your situation and how you plan to fix it. Assure them that the family will be fine. Be clear that your unemployment doesn't mean you are available at all hours. Your priority is finding work.

3 Determine Your Career Goals

It's easy to fall into the mindset of taking any job with a paycheck as soon as possible, but that's likely to put you in an unsatisfying position. Unemployment is the perfect time to think about your long-term career goals. Ask yourself some hard questions: Is your career path right for you? Can you see yourself doing it for the rest of your life? Is there anything else you'd rather do?

4 Organize Your Personal Finances

A period without income can wreak havoc on your finances, so get them in order as soon as possible. It's smart to prepare yourself to live for six months without income (though a job search usually takes less time, especially if you treat the search like a job itself). Organize a budget if you don't have one already and tighten any unnecessary spending.

5 Determine Your Compensation Requirements

How much do you need to be paid to maintain your lifestyle? What benefits do you require (health insurance, vacation time, travel reimbursement, etc.)? Determine how much you'll request, how much you expect to get, and the absolute lowest you'll accept. Knowing this information before you negotiate will give you leverage.

6 List Your Achievements

Employers are more concerned about your achievements at previous jobs than your duties. Brainstorm things you achieved, conquered, or improved. For instance, "Reduced customer support tickets by 30% over six months" sounds far more enticing to a potential employer than "Managed the customer support ticket process." Use your achievements as resumé bullets and talking points during interviews and phone calls.

7 Create an Adaptable Cover Letter

It's smart to craft a unique cover letter for each job, but that doesn't mean you should start from scratch every time. Create a template document that hits all of the important points of your professional career, including everything that might be relevant. When it's time to send a letter for a particular job, just duplicate your template and customize.

8 Refresh Your Resumé

The last time you looked at your resumé was probably during your last job search. That might have been years ago. Employers are especially concerned with what you've done recently, so update this document with current information. The resumé should communicate your objective, qualifications, experience and accomplishments clearly and accurately. This is your first impression with a potential employer, so spend some time on this and consult a resumé writing service if you struggle.

9 Gather Any Addendum Documents

Depending on your career or previous jobs, you may have additional documents that will support your search and interviews. This may include references, a portfolio, awards, association memberships, diplomas, certifications, etc. Gather these materials so you don't scramble for them when you target job opportunities.

10 Update Your LinkedIn Profile

70% of jobs searchers find positions through networking, and LinkedIn is fantastic for it. Polish your LinkedIn profile. Update your experience and edit your summary to highlight anything new. Make sure to state your availability. Engage with your connections and relevant community groups to showcase your interest and meet new people.

11 Refine Your Elevator Pitch

An elevator pitch is a two or three sentence mini-speech that introduces yourself, explains what you do, and tactfully mentions that you're looking for work. Here's an example: "Hi, I'm Mike Smith. I'm an IT security specialist with 15 years of experience creating disaster plans. I used to work for IBM, but now I'm looking for a new opportunity." Eliminate any industry jargon, format your pitch so it sounds smart when you say it outloud, and practice it a few times so it feels natural.

12 Call a Recruiter or Employment Agency

Recruiters (whether a single person or an agency) are excellent sources of opportunity. They get paid by the employer when an applicant is placed, so working with one will cost you nothing. It's like having someone search for a job on your behalf. The recruiter will require your resumé and a brief phone meeting, so start this process early. Find a recruiter by Googling "recruiter [your industry]" to find one that specializes in your field. (Do not rely solely on the recruiter. Conduct your own job search alongside.)

13 Reach Out to Your Network

The most effective place to find a new job is your contact list. Not only do your contacts know what type of job would suit you, they'll also push to get you an interview. Hiring managers usually prefer to hire a recommended candidate, anyway. Speak to your old coworkers, your family, friends, and even friends-of-friends. Ask for leads about job opportunities or introductions to people hiring. Be completely honest with your network about your need for work and what you're looking for in a job.

14 Take a Personality Assessment

Unemployment is a perfect opportunity to evaluate yourself. A personality assessment will help you identify what you're meant to do with your life. A quality test will evaluate your personality, skills, interests and values. Use this information to determine the type of role that's best for you. Many people find these assessments enlightening.

15 Clean Up Your Social Media Profiles

Employers know most of us are on social media. To get an honest look at a candidate, they often visit our social media profiles. Go through yours and remove or hide anything you think an employer might object to. Even if everything has an innocent explanation, some might seem objectionable without context. Look at each post through the eyes of someone who doesn't know you well. For best results, make all of your profiles private (except LinkedIn).

16 Google Your Own Name

Someone may have complained about you on an obscure forum, left a poor review, or mistakenly accused you of committing harm or a crime. Or maybe there's mention of one of your accomplishments or an award you won. In either case, you can be sure a hiring manager will Google your name, so you should too in order to be prepared.

17 Call Your Old Competitors

The competitors of your previous employer may consider you for a position since they know you can perform your role in a similar environment. Even if they don't have positions advertised, it's worth your time to give them a call. When you speak to someone, make it clear that you have significant applicable experience.

18 Prepare Your Interview Clothes

Don't wait until interview day to try on your old suit or look for a nice pair of shoes. Select the right outfit for an interview, have it tailored, and place it somewhere safe. When your first interview comes along, the last thing you want to be worried about is your clothing.

19 Request References

Compile a list of people who know about your work, habits, and experience. They should be comfortable talking about you should a hiring manager call. You need at least one reference who will speak about your character (like a friend), one who speak about your job performance (like an ex-boss), and one person who speak about your expertise (clients or competitors). Then contact each person and request their permission to use them as a reference.

20 List Websites You'll Check Regularly for Job Postings

Not all job search platforms are equal. Some might be more suitable for your purposes than others. For instance, Monster.com has jobs for everyone, but JrDevJobs.com is a niche website for junior software developers. There's likely a job search platform for your field or industry. Make a list of websites you'll search daily and terms you'll search for. Commit to checking them every morning. If any of your sites offer automatic notifications by email, sign up.

21 Identify Companies You'd Like to Work For

In many cases, it's easier to identify the type of company you'd like to work for to narrow your search. You may even know specific companies you would consider. If this is the case, list these targets and create a plan of attack. Determine the best contact to reach out to for employment opportunities, then open a dialogue.

22 Create an Application Plan

While most positions are placed through a person's network, filling out applications is better than sitting around waiting for an opportunity. Completing these applications, however, can be grueling, especially when they each ask for the same 20-30 fields. Commit to completing five or six applications a day, spread throughout the day if you find the task especially monotonous. For each application, set a reminder to follow up seven days later.

23 Look Into Resources from Your Old Employer

If you were laid off from your previous position, your employer may offer resources (through the human resources office or a transition company) to help you find a new job. For instance, they might give you access to resumé writing services, job placement services, a specialty recruiter, or interviewing lessons. Take advantage of any help you can get.

24 Consider Consulting/Contracting

Consulting during your job search has a number of benefits: 1) It brings in income when money is tight. 2) It keeps your skills fresh. 3) It keeps you part of your industry so others see that you're still active. 4) It opens the door to new contacts who may hire you. 5) Most importantly, consulting shows future employers that you aren't lazy because you didn't use your unemployment period as a mini-vacation. You may decide that self-employment is the perfect job for you. To get started, reach out to your network. Inform them you've begun consulting and request they forward you any work they know of.

25 Look Into Temporary Employment

If you aren't able to consult or work as a contractor, consider joining a temp agency for sporadic, part-time work. These opportunities are great ways to bring some income home, stay busy, and meet new people. Once you find a permanent job, you can easily part ways with the temp agency without burning any bridges.

26 Chat with a Mentor

A mentor is someone you admire who gives sound, reasonable life and career advice. It may be a parent, grandparent or relative. It could be an old employer or manager. Or it might be someone you met through an association or online group. Open a conversation with a mentor and ask for their guidance about finding a new opportunity. They may have a unique perspective or advice that applies to your field.

27 Ask for Feedback from Ex-Coworkers

Self-awareness is important, which means you need objective, outside feedback from people who know you professionally. Call some ex-coworkers and ask them for their thoughts on your performance and work behavior. Insist they offer advice or identify areas for improvement. Use this information to improve how you sell yourself (through your resumé, cover letter, applications and interviews) and to improve your performance at your next job.

28 Vet Your References with a Third Party

It's important to know what your references will say about you before you give their contact information to hiring managers. It may seem sneaky, but it's useful to vet your references by having a friend call each one, posing as an interviewer. Your friend should ask the reference for their honest opinion of you, and then report back. If the reference's feedback is negative, don't give their contact information to hiring managers. (Ideally you would only use references who have something positive say, but this technique is a useful fail safe so you don't waste your time.)

29 Identify Potential Interview Questions

Brainstorm a list of questions an interviewer would likely ask. Consider general topics and questions specific to your career, experience and accomplishments. It may help to speak with someone (perhaps an ex-coworker) who recently interviewed for a similar position to find out what questions they were asked. Then, generate and rehearse answers to those questions.

30 Practice Interviewing

If you haven't interviewed in awhile, you're probably rusty. Have someone you know conduct a mock interview to roleplay the entire experience. Treat the mock interview like a real one: Dress appropriately and come prepared with talking points and questions. If interviewing causes you anxiety, this experience will help you become comfortable with the meeting.

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