

The Savvy Networker

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There's more job-search mythology being passed around than even the ancient Greeks could have imagined. Some of the most well-traveled and persistent myths are also the most dangerous ones -- because following this faux wisdom could sabotage your job-search efforts.

Here are 10 of my favorite job-search myths, and the reality to replace each one.

MYTH: In your resume, you should talk about how you're great at everything. Have you ever seen a job posting that said, "We want to hire someone who's good at everything"? Individual department managers get approval to hire people to perform certain specific duties. The last thing you want on your resume is a message that says, "I can do Sales, Marketing, Finance, Customer Service, or Manufacturing!" No one will believe you, and you won't be the best fit for any job, anywhere.

Reality: Use your resume to talk about how you're really strong in two or three areas. If you need more than one resume, so be it.

MYTH: The people who get jobs are the ones who apply for the most jobs. The people who actually get jobs are the ones who create thoughtful, targeted approaches to the jobs they're especially well suited for. Lobbing dozens of random resumes with boilerplate cover letters into inboxes across America doesn't help you.

Reality: Approach each job opportunity with a targeted letter and, if necessary, a customized resume that links your background and the job's requirements.

MYTH: The more information on your resume, the better! Editing is an important business skill. If your resume includes the details for the jobs you held before 1990, your resume is too long. Two pages in an absolute max for non-academic resumes, and in those two pages you want to tell us the most important bits, not every task and duty you've ever been responsible for.

Reality: The best resumes are concise, pithy and specific. Less is more when it comes to describing your strengths and talents.

MYTH: If the job ad says "No Calls," you should call anyway -- it'll show that you're really interested. The quickest way to get your resume thrown in the "not now, not ever" pile is to ignore the instructions included in the job ad. Don't antagonize overstretched HR people by doing what they've expressly asked you not to do.

Reality: Email and snail mail are great follow-up mechanisms. Calling people who've specified "No Calls" is a bad one.

MYTH: A great way to network for a job is to contact people who work at your target companies, and ask them to get your resume into HR. Here's the scenario: You're sitting at your desk. You're doing your job. The phone rings, and on the other end is a person you don't know, who wants you to hand his resume into your HR department. This random, bizarre scene replays itself every day. Calling strangers to ask for help -- and worse, an introduction to the HR department, notwithstanding the fact that the "conduit" doesn't know you from Adam -- is not networking, it's telephone spam.

Reality: Your own friends, friends-of-friends, and friends-of-friends-of-friends can make introductions for you. Leave everyone else alone.

MYTH: When you get a call from HR and they ask you your required salary, you should lowball them to get the interview. HR people envision a special place in hell for candidates who say on the phone, "I'd love to come in and interview, and I need to make \$50K per year" when in fact, after three interviews, they decide that they need to earn \$75K per year. You can give a range on the phone, but you can't say that you're OK with a number that you're really not OK with.

Reality: If you're asked for a salary range, be truthful.

MYTH: In a cover letter, you should quote the job ad as much as you can to show that you're qualified for the job. Quoting the text from the job ad doesn't say you're qualified. It says that you can read, and type. Rather than quoting the job ad, use examples from your career history that illustrate your ability to perform the job.

Reality: Don't parrot terms from the job ad, but address the elements in your cover letter with specific examples from your past.

MYTH: If you get a call from a phone screener, you say it's not a good time to talk -- that shows that you're in demand. If you really can't talk (the baby is crying, the dog needs a walk, or you're not feeling well) then ask for a reschedule. But if you can take the call, do it! The more quickly you can get through the phone-screen process and be scheduled for a face-to-face interview, the better for you.

Reality: Don't find excuses to delay phone screening -- if you can manage to take the call when the phone rings, do it.

MYTH: You shouldn't use a "summary" section on your resume -- it's a waste of space. A summary on your resume is an absolutely critical element, as it ties together what you've done over the course of your career. A well-written summary shows your judgment, your writing skills and your ability to determine what's salient in your background. Without it, you're saying to the reader, "I've done a bunch of jobs, and here they are -- you figure out what it means to your company."

Reality: A concise, specific, and no-boilerplate summary is a critical element in your resume.

MYTH: The job market will improve this spring -- you're better off waiting out the next couple of months. This may be the most dangerous job-search myth of all, because if you're not working, the last thing you want to do is wait until your unemployment runs out before beginning your search. Employers won't be impressed by your explanation of how you took time off to hang out while the job market improved. There's no guarantee that things will get easier a few months from now. Don't delay -- get your job search engine in gear, now!

Reality: Don't let moss grow on your job search -- get your plan together now and jump into action!

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