

**Find and Keep
Your Dream
Job, the
Definitive
Careers Guide
Experts**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Introduction](#)

[Knowing When to Start Your Job Search](#)

[Getting Out Of a Dead-End Job](#)

[Warning Signs You Should Start the Job Search](#)

[Get your job Search Documents In Order](#)

[Identify Your Strengths to Impress Your Interviewers Crafting The Perfect Resume](#)

[Busting Common Resume Writing Myths](#)

[Avoid the Resume Black Hole Writing an Effective Cover Letter](#)

[The Secrets to a Successful Job Search](#)

[Starting Your Job Search: Are You Ready To Commit?](#)

[Landing—and Acing—an Informational Interview](#)

[Unorthodox Tips For Job Seekers What You Don't Know About the Job Search Can And Will Hurt You](#)

[Finding a Job No Matter Your Situation](#)

[How to Find a Job While You're Employed](#)

[No job Experience? No Problem. What To Do While You're Unemployed](#)

[How to Get Great References](#)

[Nailing the Job Interview Dress to Impress For Your Job Interview](#)

[Don't Let Bad Body Language Sink Your Interview Stay Calm to Impress Your Interviewer](#)

[Acing the Most Common Questions](#)

[Learn How to Talk About Your Biggest Weakness Avoid These Interview Miscues At All Costs](#)

[Ask the Right Questions to Leave Them Wanting More What to Look for At the Job Interview](#)

[What to Do After the Interview](#)

[How to Seal the Deal after the Interview](#)

[What to Do When You Don't Hear Back From HR](#)

[How to Turn Down a Job Offer with Class](#)

[Negotiate Your Pay—it's The Best Thing You Can Do Once You Get The Job](#)

[Navigating Workplace Obstacles](#)

Tips for a Successful Job Relocation
What Young Workers Need To Know To Succeed
People Skills Are Paramount. Play Well With Others.
Nonverbal Cues that Convey Confidence
How to Manage Your Emotions
How Bad Habits Can Sabotage your job
The Worst Workplace Communication Mistakes
Never Say These Phrases at Work
Becoming the Best Employee You Can Be
Be Indispensable and You'll Flourish at Work
What to Do During Your Lunch
Do These Things at the End of Every Work Day
Unitasking: The Secret to Being Productive At Work
Negative Feedback Will Lead To Success

INTRODUCTION

In life we're taught to plan for the worst, to be prudent, to hedge our bets. We're told, "Be realistic! Keep your dreams in check." For the most part that advice is sound.

However, these "words of wisdom" may be keeping us from pursuing our dreams, particularly in the job search arena. In many ways, finding a job is a job in and of itself-it time-consuming, stressful and contingent on demonstrating your skills and mettle to others.

Your dream job, unfortunately, won't fall into your lap out of the blue one day. That happens, but it's so rare that nobody should ever bet on that boon befalling him. No, finding a job first involves assessing your current station. Do you like your job right now? Is there room for growth? Does it capitalize on the skills you're best at?

If your job doesn't pass on these fronts, don't just send out your resume and interest. There is a right way and a wrong way to get a great job, and many, in their eagerness to find new work, fail to realize that the shiny new thing may not always be better. Best to research the companies you have interest in.

The guide that follows is a blueprint for doing just that during one of the hardest periods to find a job in recent history. Despite the economic headwinds, there are battle-tested, effective ways to secure good job leads (and no, they don't involve resume blasts or 1 min left in chapter 6% job sites), and some of our best careers and leadership writers, Jacquelyn Smith, Jenna Goudreau and Meghan Casserly, have collected this sage advice here. In fact, they were so good at synthesizing the ins and outs of smart job hunting that they have each scored new jobs in the last year.

Even if you don't think you need a new job, anyone in the workplace can benefit from the sections that identify your skill set and strengths, along with the sections suggesting tips to becoming a better worker. One of the scariest and most exciting things about having a 1 min left in chapter 6%

dream job is that the chances to learn and improve never end. This guide will help you do that and more.

GETTING OUT OF A DEAD-END JOB

Are you in a job where the only way to move up is to get out? Is your role becoming obsolete thanks to technological progress? Are your colleagues given opportunities that you're not?

If you answered yes to any of the above, there's a good chance your career has come to a standstill. That's right; you're stuck in a dead-end job.

"A dead-end job is one where you don't see any opportunity for growth," says Shweta Khare, a career and job search expert. "An everyday task seems like a burden, not an achievement. Or you're stuck at a workplace that offers no appreciation or acknowledgement for your work.

"Almost everyone experiences this at some point in their career, says Lynn Taylor, a national workplace expert and author of *Tame Your Terrible Office Tyrant; How to Manage Childish Boss Behavior and Thrive in Your Job*. "It is often difficult at first to discern if you're in a stagnant position. The realization rarely happens overnight because oftentimes the employee has offered to take on more challenging assignments, but that falls on deaf ears. After hitting enough walls, however, you realize that those efforts and energy could be better placed toward a new job search.

"But before you throw in the towel, you need to determine whether you're actually in a dead-end job or you simply don't like what you're doing.

"People often stay in jobs they don't like because they don't realize what else they can do," says Maggie Mistal, a career consultant, radio host and speaker. "Too often people assume work is supposed to be a chore so they don't even look for anything other than that when embarking on a career.

"Do a quick self-assessment. "Try making a list of the pros and cons of your job and what you'd want in your next job," says Dr. Katharine Brooks, executive director of the office of personal and career development at Wake Forest University and author of *You Majored in What? Mapping Your*

Path from Chaos to Career. Determine if there are ways to modify your situation while staying at the organization, or whether it's time to move on. "If at all possible, do not leave your current job until you have secured a new one.

" Figure out if it's you or the job you're unhappy with. If you're unhappy in your job because you're unhappy in life, the solution may be to seek help outside of the office.

Talk to your supervisor. If you're not happy with your schedule, your compensation or the projects you're assigned to, you should tell your boss. There could be ways to improve the situation, Dr. Brooks says, and it might be much easier than you think.

Don't quit immediately. If you have a job that provides decent compensation and that isn't unbearable, then consider staying put for right now, says Deborah Shane, a career author, featured writer, speaker, and media and marketing consultant. Oftentimes, the grass isn't as green when you're finally standing over it.

She adds, "Before you run from your current job, or decide to change or transition to another field, do the research and preparation necessary so you will be educated and qualified.

"If you're in a situation where your job is intolerable or unsafe, you should leave.

Change your attitude. Maybe you had one bad experience at work that left a sour taste in your mouth. If so, try to let it go. Says Dr. Brooks, "Even though you're unhappy and may leave soon, you want leaving to be your decision, not the organization's. If you're fired, it will be much harder to find your next opportunity.

" Here are some tell-tale signs that your job has reached a dead end. Your work offers no change in routine. Your skills are not being tapped. Your

superiors aren't interested in your career goals. You're subject to unfair treatment, you're not challenged, your thoughts and contributions are not valued, you can't get time with the boss to move projects forward.

No change in pay, title or tasks comes your way over time, and attempts to change or improve your job are not welcomed.

You get that Monday morning feeling nearly every day, your values and the firm's values are not aligned, you see favoritism or bias in management practices, you're not getting paid fairly, there's no praise in sight, your company hires outside talent when promotions open up or you're too complacent in your current role.

“But the most important thing is to take responsibility for your job quality and success,” says Joyce Reynolds, an expert business coach. “Don't blame a company for your situation.

” And don't forget to speak up. Says Lynn Taylor, national workplace expert and author of *Tame Your Terrible Office Tyrant; How to Manage Childish Boss Behavior and Thrive in Your Job*, “Some employees avoid all challenging communications with their supervisors and could have enjoyed the upward mobility they sought. Know how much effort is worth putting forth; what will be your return on investment? It's the company's responsibility to live up to its promises, assuming your performance is good.

” If you discover that you're stuck in a job going nowhere, here's what you can do about it:

Create a personal Document to examine what can be done, if easier in current situation. Examine the hastily weaknesses as well.

Be professional. Even if you plan to quit, keep doing your job well. You'll have good re-commendations when you do leave, Dr. Brooks says. And if your situation improves and you decide to stay, you won't be embarrassed

about your behavior. Remember: Burning 1 min left in chapter 10% bridges rarely ends well, no matter how dissatisfied you are.

Set career goals. Identify a compelling future for yourself and use it as a catalyst to take action. Figure out where you want to be in five years. It's a cliché, but one that works, putting what matters to you in perspective.

Gain experience outside of the office. If your dead-end job won't hone your skills, take a class instead, Tina Nicolai, an executive career coach and certified resume writer, says. Or volunteer during your down time to further develop your 1 min left in chapter 10% leadership skills and resume.

Change your job without changing companies—if you're content with your employer.

Do your homework so that you choose well in your next job. One way to do this: During job interviews, ask your employer about career development and advancement opportunities.

WARNING SIGNS YOU SHOULD START THE JOB SEARCH

If you're still unsure whether or not your career has reached an impasse, here are some signals that it may be time to seek out new opportunities. Be wary if you're given fewer projects and responsibilities. It's also not uncommon for new managers to clean house after a merger, acquisition or change in leadership, says Amanda Abella, a career coach, speaker and Gen Y lifestyle blogger.

If your boss sends you regular messages pointing out errors that are causing issues for the company, or if your performance review is continually coming back with recurring issues, there's a good chance you could be losing your job soon, says Ryan Kahn, career coach, founder of The Hired Group, star of MTV's Hired! and author of Hired! The Guide for the Recent Grad. And "if you're hearing on the news or at board meetings that the company is in financial hot water, it's a good sign your job is on the line," Abella says.

What should you do if you believe your job might be at risk?

Abella suggests remaining calm, stepping it up and calmly looking for an exit strategy. “First, although you may have a feeling that your job is on the line, you don't actually know for sure—so don't give them a reason to fire you. Second, if you go to another interview with an energy of desperation because your current job may be on the line, it may come off the wrong way to the recruiter. In other words, they may think you don't actually want to work for them, but rather consider them a backup plan and therefore aren't a serious candidate. Bottom line: play it cool.”

David Parnell, a legal consultant, communication coach and Forbes contributor, says that while approaching your boss about the potential issues may be the “right thing to do by the time you are sensing that there is an issue, it's usually too late. “Watching out for number one may be your best move; this includes getting your resume polished, putting out feelers, stirring up your network and any other actions toward finding your new home.”

An at-risk gig is not the only reason to look for new opportunities. If the scenarios below ring any bells, reconsider whether it's worth remaining in your current role.

You lack passion. “You're not waking up most mornings with a feeling of excitement towards your job,” says Teri Hockett, the chief executive of what's For Work? A career site for women.

Taylor says if you're not doing what you love, you will never tap your true potential. “It will just continue to be ‘a job,’ and eventually each day will seem more of a grind.”

You really dislike the people you work with and/or your boss, you're consistently stressed, negative and/or unhappy at work, or your work-related stress is affecting your physical or mental health.

You no longer have good work- life balance. When you find that you're spending less time with your family because of work, or you cannot commit

the necessary time to your job, you should consider looking elsewhere, Sara Sutton Fell, CEO and founder of Flexjobs, says.

You are experiencing verbal abuse, sexual harassment or are aware of any type of other illegal behavior.

It's easy to convince yourself you need a job, but don't let the security of a paycheck lull you into staying at a place you can barely tolerate.

IDENTIFY YOUR STRENGTH TO IMPRESS YOUR INTERVIEWERS

Landing a great job means convincing the hiring manager and any other stakeholders in the job search process that you have the skills and qualities they desire in their employees. But many people struggle to identify what they excel at and where they struggle. It's important for job seekers to know their strengths in order to demonstrate their worth to employers.

Some people have an “envision strength,” says Bergstrand, chief executive of Brand Velocity. “These folks are visionaries who get energy and solve problems by asking and answering the question, ‘where do we intend to go and why?’ It is common to find these strengths with strategists, marketers and CEOs.”

Second is the “design strength,” he adds. “Where the ‘envision strength’ is more subjective, the ‘design strength’ is more objective. These folks like to get to the facts, and are well-suited as planners and very good at answering the question, ‘what do we need to do when?’ We often find these strengths in newly minted MBA’s, analysts, planners and CFOs.”

Third is the “build” workplace strength. “Where the ‘design’ strength is more focused on facts and figures, the ‘build’ strength is more process-oriented—energized by how to best get jobs done. These individuals are energized by systematizing and systematized work. Where the ‘envision’ person typically hates repetitive work, the ‘build’ person thrives on it. You will typically find build people in functions such as manufacturing, logistics, and IT systems management.”

Finally, the fourth type of workplace strength is the “operate characteristic,” Bergstrand says. “With knowledge work, this term has a slightly different connotation than it did in the industrial age. With knowledge work, operators make things happen with and through other people, and get a lot of energy from human interaction. They focus on the who. Sales people and good mentors are often very strong in the ‘operate’ area.”

Independent human resources consultant Iy Canchola says: “From an HR perspective, workplace strengths are usually defined in terms of competencies such as leadership, problem solving or teamwork.” Parnell says that if you are looking to advance your career, finding and leveraging your workplace strengths is perhaps the most important thing you can do. “But if you are stuck in a position that doesn't leverage your strengths, your drive and performance will suffer along with your career advancement.”

One simple way to identify your workplace strengths is to “listen to your emotions when you are working,” Canchola says. “What activity, such as leadership or problem solving, provides satisfaction and happiness? A more complex way consists of validation from others. When others ask for your competency or praise you, that's usually a good sign that you have identified a workplace strength.” Characteristics of the “envision” workplace strength: -

Characteristics of the envision

Thinking strategically: Seeing past today's issues and focusing on a longer term destination.

Setting a visionary destination: Establishing a positive future in the minds of others that doesn't exist today.

Thinking inventively: Conceptualizing a working solution that can ultimately convert into a tangible product-service offering. Generating imaginative ideas: Seeing and articulating possibilities that are not purely grounded in experience.

Thinking creatively: Offering new thoughts on subject areas that others have not considered. Pioneering new ideas: Creating a new line of thought that has not yet been proven in practice. Brainstorming new ideas: Working with others to co create new ideas and new solutions.

Characteristics of the “design” workplace strength:

Analyzing situations: Breaking down a situation into parts and conceptually understanding those components.

Defining clear policies: Establishing well-under stood guidelines to help groups of individuals work in a unified way. Defining detailed objectives: Creating explicit goals to direct the work of individuals and the overall organization.

Planning budgets: Allot ting resources efficiently to achieve organizational goals.

Establishing clear performance measures: Creating a standard mechanism to evaluate whether or not goals are achieved. Judging performance objectively: Weighing evidence independently and forming an opinion on personal and organizational results.

Making decisions by the numbers: Executing a final choice based upon quantitative reasoning and measures.

Characteristics of the “build” workplace strength:

Instituting standard processes: Getting work done effectively, efficiently and consistently, using a repeatable series of actions.

Implementing step-by step procedures: Using an established set of instructions or checklists to create successful work flows for your organization.

Planning important projects: Executing a planned set of activities to achieve a significant organizational or physical change.

Integrating programs: Unifying—and managing as a group—a series of projects to holistically achieve enterprise results.

Incorporating proven methods: Using well established procedures to improve enterprise performance.

Implementing practical solutions: Solving problems by applying tools and techniques that are proven to be sufficient, rather than relying on state-of-the-art moon shots.

Doling out roles and responsibilities: Allocating activities systematically through the enterprise's organizational structure.

Characteristics of the “operate” workplace strength:

Building personal relationships: Bonding with key people as individuals and groups on an emotional level productively and progressively.

Working in teams: Working with others in a way where you subordinate yourself as an individual to better achieve the goals of the group.

Coaching others: Helping people contribute more by facilitating their personal growth to achieve specific personal and organizational goals.

Supporting others: Counseling people to reach their goals and recover when they encounter problems.

Relating to people: Establishing a kinship with others, building upon commonalities and deemphasizing or diffusing differences.

Communicating: Transferring information verbally and non-verbally to achieve sufficient inter personal understanding and produce actions.

Changing spontaneously: Achieving better results by rapidly and successfully adapting to a dynamic environment.

CRAFTING THE PERFECT RESUME

Before you commence your job search, you'll first need a “stellar” resume.

“Today's employment environment is extremely competitive —more so than at any other time in recent history,” says Greg Faherty, a Certified Professional Resume Writer (CPRW) and owner of A-perfect-resume.com. “Employers are receiving more resumes for every open position than ever and are looking for any reason to weed out people they don't want to interview.”

Be honest. For instance, if you're applying for a job that requires a college degree and you don't have one, don't say you do. The employer might be willing to overlook a fib if you're otherwise fully qualified and a strong contender. But if you're not honest and the hiring manager finds out, you'll likely be written off completely.

Emphasize the positives. The first 25 manager, says Nicolai. So highlighting the core attribute of your career story at the top is a great strategy. “Your goal is to motivate your reader into an action to call you or email you,” she says.

Address the issue. Nicolai says you should use your cover letter, introductory email or the interview to speak to the issue at hand. Say it's been three years since you last held a job because you took time off to raise your children - briefly explain that you left the work- force by choice.

Ann Baehr, a CPRW and president of Best Resumes of New York, agrees. “Bad news or red flags should never be addressed in a resume. The resume is not the place to explain. If any- where, it would be included in the cover letter. Even then, be brief and use your discretion about discussing it during an interview.”

Don't make excuses. Addressing the issue doesn't mean you need to justify the problem. “Focus more on your qualifications and unique personal

brand, than on any reasons for a potential red flag,” says Laura Smith-Prouh, an executive resume writer and the principal of An Expert Resume.

Format your resume accordingly. A couple of tweaks make all the difference. If you've held 15 jobs in seven years across scads of industries, “you'll want to make lemonade out of lemons by breaking it all up into functional sections with headings, such as ‘Customer Services,’ ‘Sales Support,’ ‘Project Coordination,’ ‘Marketing and PR,’ etc.,” Baehr says. “Then place what you've done over the years in each respective section.” She says to add a line under ‘Professional Experience,’ that reads, “The following is an overview of broad-based experience working in diversified positions from 2005 to 2012.”

Network. Getting referred by someone with a connection to the company dramatically boosts your Chances that the hiring manager will give you the time of day, Red flags, or no.

These are general guidelines to improve and tighten your resume, but perhaps you have a specific issue that you fear will limit your chances for a good job. Here are some of the most common problems, along with tips to navigate these tricky situations:

Big employment gaps. Ignore short gaps of a year or less, but give a name to longer periods such as “Family Care,” “Volunteer Experience,” “Employment Search,” or “Graduate Studies” in your work chronology, says Smith-Prouh. “In this case, you can give a single-sentence description that helps employers review it, and then move on.”

Too many different jobs. Consider removing a short-term job of less than a year from your career chronology, but keep it on your resume. (An ‘Additional Positions’ section at the end of your work history solves the problem nicely.) Include it in your formal application, as it will be verified on your background check. Then, you can discuss the role, without letting it become an area of focus on your resume, Smith-Prouh says.

Unrelated experience. Connect the dots for employers, so they can see why you would be applying to this specific job, says Smith-Prouh—especially if your current job title is vague. “For example, if you hold the position of Financial Specialist, but you are pursuing an accounting role requiring knowledge of ERP systems, add skills alongside your current title (‘Financial Specialist— Accounting Skills Including Payroll, ERP & Oracle’) to make the connection.”

Too much work history. “Those 30 years of experience you've touted can not only show your age and expose you to potential bias,” says Smith-Prouh. “It also makes you look as if you're dwelling on the past too heavily.” Most employers are interested in what you've done during the past ten to 15 years. Older roles beyond that point can be listed in an ‘Additional Experience’ section at the end of your work chronology, with a one- or two-line description of the relevant expertise used

BUSTING COMMON RESUME- WRITING MYTHS

It's vital to separate fact from fiction when discussing resume pointers. Take note of these 11 resume-writing myths and learn where to focus your attention instead.

Myth: You must reference references. “Noting on your resume that ‘references are available upon request’ will not make your resume stand out,” says Lacob Bollinger, lead data scientist at Bright.com, an employment site with more than 2.5 million job listings.

Myth: You must keep your resume to one page. Not true! “Page count is not as important as the number of words on the page,” Bollinger says. “The number of words actually affected recruiters in a bell curve manner. So what's the magic word count that keeps recruiters reading (aside from your work experience)? About 390 words per page.”

Baehr says one-page resumes are best for early-career job seekers, but a second page is fine if there's enough valuable information to warrant it.

Myth: Spelling errors immediately disqualify you. It is very important to proofread your resume, but spelling and grammatical mistakes do not necessarily mean it will get trashed, Bollinger says. Recruiters are more focused on work experience to determine fit. But “reread your resume whenever applying. Fresh eyes can catch mistakes previously overlooked.”

Myth: Using graphs are a waste of space. Nicolai says graphs tell a compelling story of financial earnings, savings, turnarounds and more. “Graphs are a fantastic method of grabbing a person's attention.”

Myth: Fancy formatting matters. “The best format to use is the simplest,” Bollinger says. The resume-processing software many HR departments use often breaks fancy formatting; avoid this possibility altogether by keeping things basic.

Myth: You need an objective statement. Bollinger’s company Bright found that resumes with an objective statement didn't make any difference in whether candidates were deemed qualified or not.

Myth: Include all your soft skills. Dumping soft skills into your resume makes it generic.” A resume with achievements that tells a story is best, Baehr says.

Myth: Achievements should be highlighted in a separate section. Laying out your achievements in a separate section will likely cause recruiters to skip it in order to get to the meat of your work experience, Bollinger says. “To really put your achievements front and center, include them in a list under each relevant position.”

Myth: Targeted resumes are too narrow. “Take the time to focus your resume on the exact position you are seeking,” Nicolai says. “If you build a comprehensive strategy into the content, layout and design, you can build a targeted resume that can be used when posting for multiple (similar) positions.”

Myth: Hit the thesaurus for action verbs. Don't worry about coming up with a new action verb for every bullet point; it's ok to reuse them. Showcasing your skill set and qualifications to make the biggest impact matters more.

Myth: Full name, address, email and phone number are required. Having a contact section has no impact on a recruiter's decision, Bollinger says, "However, make the recruiter's job as easy as possible and include as much contact information as you are comfortable with sharing."

AVOID THE RESUME BLACK HOLE

All the tips and myth busting in the world don't mean a thing if your job application ends up in the resume black hole.

For starters, resist the impulse to sit back and hope for the best after you send in your application.

"Resumes end up in the resume black hole if the person just responds to a posting or ad and does nothing else," says Anita Attridge, a Five O'clock Club career and executive coach. "Today companies are receiving hundreds of resumes for each position and, due to the volume, are not acknowledging receipt of them. Most large and medium-size companies are using applicant tracking systems to screen resumes before a person looks at them. Smaller organizations may just review the ones they receive until they find enough qualified candidates and then set the other resumes aside.

"Ruth Robbins, a certified career counselor with the Five O'clock Club, agrees that using buzz words and key phrases that demonstrate your fit for the job will help you get on the employer's radar. Even with a perfectly tailored resume, there is no way to know if or when the hiring manager will review it.

“The best way to make sure your resume is seen is by net- working into the company,” Attridge says. “Let your net- working contact know that you have applied, and ask that person if he or she would send your resume to the H.R. department with an endorsement of you as a candidate. Another way is to try to determine who the hiring manager is and send a resume directly to that per- son, with a letter asking for an informational interview.”

Mary Elizabeth Bradford, an executive resume writer and author of the bestselling e-book series *The Career Artisan*, offers some alternative advice. “What works best in any market is for the job seeker to take a pure, entrepreneurial approach to their job search process,” she says. “I think it would be futile to call H.R. and leave repeated voice messages. A better way is to contact a key decision maker through hard mail and follow up with a phone call. Go around H.R. That’s provocative, right? Well, it works.”

WRITING AN EFFECTIVE COVER LETTER

Sixty seconds. That's about how much time a harried hiring manager gives to your cover letter, give or take a few seconds. And that's why it's so important to craft a cover letter that grabs his or her attention.

So, where to begin? To pique interest and show that you have an in at the company, mention a mutual contact in your first line. For example, “Carl Tatum recommended I reach out about the manager opening at Wunderbar Mifilin.”

Follow this up with a short summary of your career, adapted to fit the company you’re courting. It’s vital here that you know your audience. In this case, know the culture of the company that will review your application. Larger companies are less likely to give weight to cover letters. A short-and-sweet approach here works best. In this case, name your mutual contact, recap your career, list specific and relevant job accomplishments before restating your excitement for the job.

If it's a more traditional industry like banking, chances are a more conversational cover letter style will fall flat. But in media, tech or

advertising, especially at a smaller company, a personal and casual tone may resonate more. In either case, sprinkle anecdotes that lay out how you have the know-how to succeed on the job, and how you will add value to the job. Be specific whenever you can. It's much better to say that the marketing project you headed led to 33% more sales in the fourth quarter instead of "I have an extensive background in marketing, managing several projects that improved the company's bottom line."

Show that you know a great deal about the company, that you care about the work the company does and provide insight—using clear examples — into why you're the person who will excel at this job. Do not, under any circumstances, send a boilerplate cover letter, one that you've merely copied and pasted from other applications, even if the jobs are similar. If you want to stick out, a cut-and-paste job (even if it is your own work) is probably the worst way to do so.

STARTING YOUR JOB SEARCH: ARE YOU READY TO COMMIT?

The best time to look for a new job is when you don't need one. You're in control, and control's key to the successful job hunt.

Below you'll find some other tactics for jump-starting your job search. Do it before you hate your current job. Sounds obvious but if you don't, you become stressed out and unhappy, and this comes across in subsequent job interviews, Andy Teach, author of *From Graduation to Corporation* and host of the YouTube channel *From- GradToCorp*, says.

Do it after you've completed a major project for your present company. You don't want to spread yourself too thin and risk alienating your current colleagues, and the job search requires a big time commitment.

Do it after the New Year. "It's possible that some hiring managers will be more focused on filling positions now that the holidays are over," Teach says. "New year, new job, new outlook on life."

Do it after you've taken that big vacation. However, if an amazing opportunity presents itself just before your vacation, you should pursue it and put your personal plans on hold if necessary.

Do it after a major life change (not during it).

Lastly, don't wait for the stars to align before you begin your search. There is a natural tendency to want to tie up loose ends before pursuing new ventures, but if you yearn for complete closure before setting off for new shores, you'll paralyze yourself at the first sign of uncertainty.

LANDING AND ACING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Most professionals know that research and networking are important to the job search process. Savvy job seekers ask friends and family for leads, study corporate websites to learn more about the companies they fancy and stay up to date on industry news. But there's a tactic that trumps all these methods—one that offers job seekers both networking opportunities and occupational information—the informational interview.

An informational interview boils down to a conversation between you and someone who can one day help you land a job in a position or field you like.

Face meeting will give the interviewer the best chance for getting to know you.”

Sara Sutton Fell agrees. She says an informational interview is a great way for job seekers to get intel without a formal job interview. “Essentially, you find someone in your profession or who works at a company where you're interested in working, and ask them if they are willing to chat with you about what they do, potential career paths, their experience in the field and their advice for you. Informational interviews can be done with people who are in your network, which is generally easier, or people you reach out to out of the blue.”

Says Parnell, “While informational interviews are taken under the guise of ‘learning more about the company,’ their true purposes are to impress your

connection within the company, and to gather intelligence that might help secure a job there."

Dr. Brooks contends that an informational interview allows you to learn more about a profession than you would by just reading about it: the more knowledge you have, the better decisions you can make about your career. "You'll also be better prepared for the real job interview." You'll be interview-hardened, and now you have inside knowledge about how the job in question works.

Sutton Fell agrees. "It can lead to more information and contacts that may lead to a job." Even if you're not currently looking for work, informational interviews keep you tapped in and top of mind should you long for a different vocation.

Another reason informational interviews are key: Not all jobs are advertised. (In fact, most aren't.) But those on the inside may know about current or future job openings in their company or at another, Teach says. So how do you land one?

"Target specific people you want to speak with at a company you're interested in working for," Teach says. "You can do a search on LinkedIn or just Google them. Get the main phone number of the company they work for and call it. Ask the operator for your target person's direct phone number and then ask the operator to connect you."

Try not to leave a message if it goes to voicemail since it's less likely they will return the call of someone they don't know, he says, but you should have a 20- to 30-second speech ready that mentions why you're interested in speaking with them. "You want to talk about your background, why you're interested in their company and why you want to specifically meet with that person. You should also mention that you realize that there might not be a job available now but you'd love to speak with them in person for 20 minutes if they have the time."

If they say “no” or you can't reach them, try someone else in that department or company, Teach suggests. “Not everyone will have the time or desire to speak with you so be prepared for some rejection. It's a numbers game so the more people you call, the better chance you have of setting up an informational interview.”

And track down fellow alumni from your alma mater. You can find alumni by either doing a search on LinkedIn or by going through the alumni association of your college or college career center, Teach says. Sharing the same college means you already have a rapport.

Sutton Fell recommends that you start with people you know well when trying to land an informational interview. “Then, in these ‘low level’ interviews, you can ask the person you're speaking with if they have anyone else they wouldn't mind connecting you with for further exploration. It's how you expand your network.

If and when you land an informational interview, here's how to ace it:

Research the company just like you would for a job interview. Learn more about the individual you're meeting with. Boning up on his or her background means you can ask specific questions about her experience including why she chose her career and company.

Dress to impress and be pre-pared. “You will be judged as soon as you walk in the door by how you look, so make it count,” Teach says. “Always have a copy of your resume with you,” Dr. Brooks adds.

But remember: you're not on a job interview. “If you confuse the two, and ask or imply you're really seeking a job, you have defeated the purpose of the interview,” Dr. Brooks says. That said, sometimes the person you're interviewing may ask you if you'd be interested in applying for a job, which is fine —as long as it's his or her idea, not yours.

Have a game plan—it's your meeting after all. You're responsible for what you get out of these meetings. Express your gratitude early on and then get Q " @ ;A Q E 'V' For example, "How did you get into the field? What advice would you have for someone starting out in this field? Who succeeds in this field? What characteristics are needed?" And, "What do you see happening in this field over the next few years?" Coming prepared will show you're both engaged and professional.

Teach says you should use this opportunity to ask the questions you might not want to ask in a job interview. "Find out what qualifications are needed to excel in the types of positions they have. You can even ask questions you wouldn't normally ask in a first job interview that relate to salary and benefits," he says.

Be honest (but professional and polite). Beating around the bush about why you are really there will come off as insincere and possibly offend their intelligence, Parnell explains, so don't be afraid to be very straightforward. "Explain that you'd love to work there, and are hoping to get some guidance on how best to do that."

And don't be nervous—it's a learning experience not a job interview. That said, avoid putting pressure on your con- tact by asking for a job out- right. Make this chat advice oriented instead. Your goal is to impress them enough so that they will voluntarily offer to help you find a job, Teach explains. They're not going to refer you to others if you come across as being average or show a lack of passion.

Ask for referrals. "If you don't get one," Teach says, "ask them what they recommend as next steps for you. Listen carefully to what they say and thank them for their time." And follow up with a thank you note or email within a day of meeting, even if the interview underwhelmed.

Keep them informed of your progress. Email the interviewer after you've met with one of his referrals or after you've gotten a job, Teach says. Not

only does it make him or her more invested in your career, but it will also keep you top of mind should any leads come his way.

Each interview gives you valuable information and can also help you hone your interview skills so that when a real job interview comes up, you'll be prepared to ace it. The more informational interviews you have, Teach says, the better your odds of landing the job you want.

You're responsible for what you get out of these meetings. Express your gratitude early on and then get down to business by coming prepared with at least five questions, focusing your early questions on the interviewer. For example, "How did you get into the field? What advice would you have for someone starting out in this field? Who succeeds in this field? What characteristics are needed?" And, "What do you see happening in this field over the next few years?" Coming prepared will show you're both engaged and professional.

Experience' section at the end of your work chronology, with a one- or two-line description of the relevant expertise used in each job.

UNORTHODOX TIPS FOR JOB SEEKERS

As an applicant, be prepared to speak with the top brass, even if you don't think the scenario is likely to happen. Talking to the company's leadership may well be the reality for some candidates. According to Career- under, 38% of employers say that job candidates are required to interview with a C-level executive within their organization.

Make sure your online persona is free of "digital dirt." Too many job seekers don't take this seriously. Sixty-two percent of employers scour the Web for additional information about a job candidate.

Don't wait until you land an interview before you start cleaning up your online presence either. Some of the search activity happens before candidates are even called for a job interview.

Proper etiquette is required (throughout the entire process). It's imperative that job candidates make a good impression during the interview, but they also need to reinforce it afterwards.

"A thank you note enables you to reiterate your enthusiasm for the opportunity and why you're the best fit for the job. You don't want to skip that step," Rosemary Haefner, vice president of human resources for CareerBuilder, explains.

Practicing good etiquette shouldn't stop there. If you don't get the job, never bad mouth the employer online or to your friends. You don't want to burn any bridges.

Here are ten unconventional (but very effective) tips for job seekers:

Be vulnerable. It's okay to ask people for advice! "The best way to build relationships with people whom you'd like to work with (or for) is to start by being vulnerable, sharing your admiration for their work and asking for advice," says Isa Adney, author of *How to Get a Job Without a Resume* and the blog firstjoboutofcollege.com. "I recommend doing this with professionals at companies you'd love to work for, long before they have a job opening you apply for. You don't want to burn any bridges."

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Don't always follow your passion. "Follow your passion" is one of the most common pieces of career wisdom, says Cal Newport, author of *So Good They Can't Ignore You: Why Skills Trump Passion in the Quest for Work You Love*. "It's also wrong." If you study people who end up loving their

work, most of them did not follow a pre-existing passion, he says. “Instead, their passion for the work developed over time as they got better at what they did and took more control over their career.”

Create your position. Don't just sit around waiting for your “dream job” to open. Study the industry or field that you're looking to move into, and determine a company or two that you'd like to work for, Hockett says. “Then figure out their challenges through relationships or public information. With this, you can craft a solution for them that you can share directly or publicly through a blog, for instance.”

Learn how to listen. Job seekers are so caught up in conveying a certain message and image to the employer that they often fail to listen.

When you are practicing for interviews, don't just rehearse your answers to questions like, “can you tell me about your- self?”, “why do you want this job?”, and “what are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?” Practice listening carefully and closely without interrupting.

Start at the top and move down. “Why approach human resources in the hopes that your resume makes it to the hiring authority?” Parnell says. “Just get it there yourself. Be careful to use tact, respect and clarity during the process, but nevertheless, go straight to the decision maker.”

Build a relationship with the administrative assistant. “As the manager's trusted counter- part, there is often only a slight social barrier between the two,” Parnell says. “They know the manager's schedule, interests, responsibilities and preferences. Making friends or even engaging in some quasi- bartering relationship with them can make all the difference in the world.”

Don't apply for a job as soon as you find it. The worst part about job hunting is the dreaded scrolling of an online job board, applying for job after job, and never hearing back, Adney says. “When you find a job online that you're really interested in, applying is the last thing you should do. Instead, research that company and the professionals who work there, and

reach out to someone at the company before you apply for the job, letting them know you admire what they do and would love their advice.” Then, ask questions via email or phone about what they like and find challenging at their job, and ask if they have any tips for you. “Most likely they will personally tell you about the job opening (you should not mention it) and then you can ask them about getting your application and resume into the right hands,” she says. “It is a great way to keep your applications from getting lost in the black hole of the Internet.”

Focus on body language: Job candidates don't take it seriously enough. “Body language is incredibly important in job interviews,” Abella says. “Watching yours (posture, your hands, whether or not you're relaxed, confidence) will help you exude confidence. Meanwhile paying attention to the interviewer's body language can let you gauge whether or not you're on the right track.”

Don't focus on finding a job you love now. Most entry-level positions are not glamorous, Newport says. “The right question to ask when assessing an opportunity is what the job would look like in five years, assuming that you spent those years focusing like a laser on developing valuable skills. That's the job you're interviewing for.” Adney agrees. “Focus more on where you will have the greatest opportunity to add value to the company, network with top people in your industry and have the ability to get your foot in the door of a company that mostly hires internally.”

Become their greatest fan. Once you find a company you'd love to work for, become their biggest fan. “Becoming a brand loyalist may lead to becoming an employee,” Hockett says. “But of course, you have to establish or participate in a forum where you're constantly communicating that message; one they will see.”

WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT THE JOB SEARCH CAN AND WILL HURT YOU

You're most likely spending all your time scouring the Web for employment opportunities.

But did you know a majority of openings are never advertised online?
Probably not.

I'd also bet you've no clue how long most interviews last, how many other candidates are vying for your dream job or how much money you lose over the course of your career if you never negotiate pay.

Interview Success Formula, a program that helps job seekers to deliver powerful interview answers, compiled information from various sources, including the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Glassdoor.com, CNN, The UnderCoverRecruiter.com, and the Wall Street Journal, among others, to uncover facts and figures that may be useful to job seekers.

Here are seven things InterviewSuccessFormula.com found out about the job search process that you probably didn't know:

- There were 3.6 million job openings at the end of 2012. About 80% of available jobs are never advertised.
- The average number of people who apply for any given job: 118. Twenty percent of those applicants get an interview.
- Many companies use talent management software to screen resumes, weeding out up to 50% of applications before anyone ever looks at a resume or cover letter.
- On average, interviews last 40 minutes. After that, it usually takes 24 hours to two weeks to hear from the company with their decision.
- What do employers look for before making an offer? About 36% look for multi-tasking skills, 31% look for initiative 21% look for creative thinking and 12% look for something else in the candidate.
- In the Uganda, 42% of professionals are uncomfortable negotiating salary. By not negotiating, an individual stands to lose more than \$500,000 by the time they reach 60.
- More than half (56%) of all employers reported that a candidate rejected their job offer in 2012.

With these stats in hand, take heed of these job search preparation reminders:

Recognize that the job search is a separate skill and process. “Whether or not you are great at your job has little bearing on your job search success rate,” Alan Carniol, founder of InterviewSuccessFormula.com, says.

Identify your top accomplishments. Organizations want to know what results you can deliver to them—so your resume, cover letter and interview should focus on these specific results, Carniol says. “Remember to add numbers and be as specific and detailed as possible. If you can, develop a story behind each of these accomplishments.”

Prepare an elevator pitch. “In 60 seconds, you should be able to explain what you want as your next step and how you can create value (by highlighting accomplishments),” Carniol explains.

Polish your resume. It won't land you a job offer, but a bad one can eliminate you, he says.

Get on top of the trends in your industry. What new trends, technologies or jargon do you need to be aware of? What companies are up and coming (and may be hiring)? Are there any specific skills that you need to improve to be competitive in today's job market?

Inventory your network. That 80% of jobs that aren't posted will be discovered through your network, Carniol says. “And if you invest the time to map it out, your network will be far bigger than you expect.” Create a list of former co-workers, classmates, recreational sports teammates, fellow members of your religious congregation, family members and neighbors — essentially anyone that you know. Don't hesitate to reach out to them by email, phone or LinkedIn.

HOW TO FIND A JOB WHILE YOU'RE EMPLOYED

Sara Menke says having a job while looking for a job makes you that much more attractive to a potential employer. “Companies want to hire the best of the best and [those people] are usually employed,” she says. “Plus, quitting your job before having a job is a big risk that you should avoid.”

Teach agrees. He says most potential employers prefer job candidates who currently have a job because it provides a signaling effect that they’ll be a good hire.

Furthermore, having a job gives you confidence because you're not in a desperate situation. Says Teach, “You may need a new job, you may want a new job, but you don't have to have a new job, unlike someone who is out of work.”

Another reason to start looking while you're still employed: having a job while searching for new employment gives you leverage when it comes to negotiating terms for the new gig, Teach says.

While the experts highly advise against quitting or waiting until you're fired to start your job search—there are risks associated with job hunting while you're still employed.

Perhaps the biggest danger of looking while you have a job is that someone at your company will find out and blab, Teach says. If your boss hears word, he may take it personally and see it as a sign of disloyalty and grounds for dismissal.

“And if the new job you are seeking is with a major competitor, ethical issues will arise and even legal issues around conflict of interest. Depending on the job and environment, you may even be perceived as a security threat,” says international business speaker, president of Humor at Work and author Michael Kerr.

Be mindful of spending too much time getting a new job; you may not be giving your full attention to your current employer, says Hockett.

Navigating the job search successfully while employed takes tact, industry and thought. Following these steps will serve you well. Don't tell anyone at work, thereby avoiding the rumor mill. Make sure your LinkedIn profile is 100% complete—and don't indicate you're looking for work on the profile. Never bad-mouth your current employer; it's a surefire way to cripple your efforts and raises questions about your own integrity. And let your prospective employer know that your job search should be kept confidential.

Don't use any of your current co-workers or supervisors as references; try to find a supervisor from a prior job or a place where you volunteer outside of work instead. Schedule interviews during non-work hours, lunch or personal days if possible. Otherwise make up the hours to maintain your normal levels of productivity. Don't use the company computer, Internet, fax machine or phone in your job search. Stay focused on your current job, especially as your search gets more involved.

Don't dress differently than normal. This one's tough; most people don't dress every day in interview-ready apparel. Try to bring your clothes with you in a bag and change on the way if possible.

Don't mention your job search in social media and don't post your resume on job boards; both are great ways to get spotted by someone else at your company. Always be honest if confronted by your supervisor or a manager. Nothing good can come from being deceptive on this count. Finally, slow down the search if you realize you're happy where you are. There's nothing wrong with staying put if you're at a good company with a supportive boss and opportunities to progress.

NO JOB EXPERIENCE? NO PROBLEM.

It's hard for new grads to find a good job this year, but the very fact that they're new grads makes it even worse. How are you supposed to gain experience if you're constantly turned down for lacking it?

Not acquiring experience while you're a student puts you behind other candidates who did get experience, says Dr. Brooks. "I think it's one of the biggest obstacles students face," she says. Employers want to know that you have skills that go beyond those of the traditional academic classroom, so if it's not too late, try to get as much experience as possible while you're still in school.

In general, try to choose positions that relate in some way to your college major, even if you have to volunteer due to the weak job market. Your education will have more meaning, and both pursuits will benefit each other. And remember: a job unrelated to your field of study is better than none, just be sure your studies don't suffer because of it.

Before you set about acquiring experience, think about what skills you want to develop, what talents you want to cultivate and use, and what experiences would interest an employer.

Most of all, don't despair if you can't find a good gig. There are other ways to gain valuable work experience. Start looking into volunteer opportunities for starters. "For a lot of employers, it's one part the initiative and one part skill development," says Nicole Williams, a Connection Director at LinkedIn and best-selling career advice author.

If you want experience in accounting, see if any local nonprofit agencies will let you volunteer with their accounting staff. Want to learn marketing? Offer to create a Twitter feed, write brochures or call prospective donors, she suggests.

"Select an organization that promotes a cause that you care about, and speak with the volunteer coordinator or someone on the management team about ways you can assist," Dr. Brooks says. "In addition, volunteering doesn't have to be an onerous time commitment. A few hours a week or even a month can go a long way if you're using or developing your skills."

Try to find an internship or temporary work too. Internships aren't just for students. In this day and age, they are considered the new entry-level job, Williams says. Find something you're genuinely interested in and ensure that the opportunity will allow you to develop the skills you need to get the job you want. Also use the opportunity to network.

You don't have to wait for an organization to offer you an internship. Create your own, Dr. Brooks says. "Consider looking around your community for small startup businesses. Most new business owners can't afford to hire help, so they could use your skills in a variety of ways."

For your resume and cover letter, be sure that you're highlighting the skill set you've groomed already, including any entrepreneurial activities where you've bootstrapped on the side, as well as college experiences that show off your initiative. It helps to make a list of all the college activities, assignments and classes you were involved in to take stock of what puts you in the best light.

When you don't have a ton of experience to rely on, the key is to build relationships with people who can vouch that you're the kind of person an employer should take a chance on, Williams says. For young people just starting out, networking is paramount. If putting yourself out there feels off-putting, keep it relatively informal. Invite someone who has a job you admire for coffee, or seek out established operators in your desired field by sending a short email expressing your interest in their area of expertise and desire to chat in person.

Don't be afraid to use social media to spread the word that you're looking for a job. Professors you have good relationships with, too, can be huge assets in your search as well by serving as good references or as leads for jobs you covet.

Lastly, if you belong to any groups or organizations, take on a leadership role by offering to organize an event or spearhead a job you admire for coffee, or seek out established operators in your desired field by sending

a short email expressing your interest in their area of expertise and desire to chat in person.

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WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU'RE UNEMPLOYED

“More than 40% of unemployed job seekers have been out of work for six months or longer,” says Haefner. “There's a sense that such a long gap on a resume negatively affects a candidate's chances, but the survey shows that is not true. That's very positive news for this group of job seekers.”

Eighty-five percent of those surveyed by the career website CareerBuilder.com in 2012 reported that they are more understanding of employment gaps post-recession. Ninety-four percent said they wouldn't have a lower opinion of a candidate who took on a position during the recession that was at a lower level than the one he or she had held previously.

But this doesn't mean you can sit around and wait for a sympathetic employer to offer you work. “By volunteering, taking temporary work or signing up for a class that develops your professional tool kit, you show employers that you've made the most of your time and will be ready on day one,” Haefner says.

Take a temporary or contract assignment—you never know, it may lead to more permanent work. And try your hand at a class in your desired field;

the networking opportunities alone are worth it. Volunteering makes you more marketable, shows you're passionate and demonstrates you're motivated by more than mercenary urges.

If you have the time and funds, start your own business. This is the ultimate way to bypass the normal HR chain of command, and you can do this in your spare time as you search for part- or full-time employment.

This last part can't be stressed enough: networking presents you with the best chance for employment. Start a professional blog to showcase your expertise to employers, follow stories on hot industries and emerging job functions, use this down time to come up with and crystallize ideas, and always, always try to make new and deeper connections with people in the industry you're working to break into, following up with employers, leads and new contacts whenever possible.

HOW TO GET GREAT REFERENCES

In today's challenging job market, a negative review can easily result in a candidate being disqualified from further consideration. "They often have numerous good, qualified candidates," says Jeff Shane, executive vice president of Allison & Taylor, a reference and background checking firm. "So checking references is one easy way to weed some out."

"Prospective employers really take into consideration what job references say about a candidate," Shane adds. "You're only going to say good things about yourself, but professional references are more detached and will be more candid, loose- lipped and revealing."

"Never assume that a former boss or human resources manager will sing your praises," Shane says. "They may have seemed to like you when you worked for them, but on the phone with your prospective employer they might end up saying something damaging. Employers love that, because they want to hear from someone who will talk about you good, bad or indifferent."

“Supervisors, former colleagues or professors can be great references, whereas, friends and family typically don't provide references that are quite as impactful,” says A1 Coleman, Jr., author of *Secrets to Success: The Definitive Career Development Guide for New and First Generation Professionals*.

The best people are those who have real knowledge of how your skills and capabilities will fit the potential opportunity. “You also want to ensure that the referrer has a good reputation, or a position that projects a strong reputation in the mind of the potential employer,” he adds.

Contact the reference. Send a note, make a call or visit in person so they know you're seeking new employment and that you want them as a reference. “Be sure to share with them your current resume and let them know of the position you're applying for, as well as the type of qualities the company is likely seeking. Give them the impression that their reference is critical to your obtaining the job,” Shane adds.

Give them a heads-up and as much time as possible to prepare. Verify your personal information. Refresh your reference's memory regarding the position you held while working with them and check with human resources to confirm that all information in your personnel file is accurate, Shane suggests.

Keep them in the loop. Let your references know each and every time you give out their contact information, Shane says. Also keep your positive references informed of your career and educational progress, he adds. “They will be more inclined to see you in a stronger light as you progress.”

Know beforehand what they are going to say. Unfortunately, many job seekers skip this crucial step. “Some fail to ask their references what they are going to say,” Shane says. “You have to know that they will offer a favorable commentary.” To make sure their references will be sparkling, have a discussion with them, learning as much as you can about what they'll say. And make sure to give back to your references for the time

they're taking to vouch for you with a kind follow-up note and/or a small token of your appreciation.

DRESS TO IMPRESS FOR YOUR JOB INTERVIEW

What you wear to your next job interview may be more important than you think. Whether you like it or not, the first thing people notice about you is your appearance and first impressions are usually formed within the first 30 seconds, says Brenda Ferguson Hodges, a California-based image consultant and career coach. “Appearance affects hiring decisions and plays a major role. Hiring managers need to be able to visualize you in that position they are trying to fill.”

Teach says that many, if not most hiring managers believe that people who dress appropriately for a job interview are more likely to be successful because they look the part. Conversely, those who dress inappropriately—too informal, for example—may be seen as having a more casual attitude toward work and authority, as well as possessing a naïveté for business etiquette.

Other common mistakes: Skirts that are too short or tight, too much cleavage, scuffed shoes, ill-fitting suits, excessive perfume or makeup, “or looking like you walked off the set of Working Girl circa 1985,” Williams says.

“The most important thing you bring to an interview is confidence. What you wear and how you wear it helps convey that. If you aren't comfortable in your outfit—that will come across in an interview.”

Another reason a job candidate might have difficulty determining what's appropriate: The days of the “interview uniform” are over, Williams says. As Teach notes, a suit isn't always the right thing to wear anymore.

“The workplace has changed in leaps and bounds in the last 15 years,” she says. “Startups and tech companies have embraced a much more casual approach to what is appropriate at the office”.

Strong says if you're interviewing at a company with a more casual dress code, dress as if you were going to a dinner party on a Saturday night. "When in doubt, bring a jacket and carry it with you. You can throw it on to formalize and leave it off to be more casual."

He also reminds us that appropriate dress for an interview often varies by industry. "My suggestion," Strong says, "is dress a half step up from what the typical daily dress is for that given industry."

Ferguson Hodges says as a rule of thumb, if you are interviewing for a professional, managerial or executive position, always wear a suit. "If the position is more casual, you should still dress professionally, wearing a 'business casual' crisp outfit. Crisp meaning no wrinkles, stains, lint, holes or snags. Absolutely no jeans for any jobs you are interviewing for—even if you talk to people who are currently wearing jeans to work. They already have the job; you don't yet."

If you fail to dress appropriately, you could face severe consequences, Teach says. "For example, you might not get the job simply because of the way you look. Again, it doesn't matter what you think is appropriate, it only matters what the hiring manager thinks is appropriate dress."

To avoid these sartorial pitfalls, thoroughly research the company's culture/typical dress code within the industry. Ask a contact within the company, or give their HR department a ring. Invest in a "power outfit," and it doesn't hurt to have a few go-to outfits in case you're called back in for more interviews.

And splurge in comfortable work-appropriate shoes; your interviewer could notice if you're lacking here. Have your interview outfits tailored and dry-cleaned, and be sure to test-drive them beforehand. Even better, practice your interview answers in the outfit. Do not wear perfume or fragrances; you never know who has allergies. Pay attention to accessories, belts, shoes, watches, jewelry, nail polish: keep colors neutral and on song with

the rest of your outfit so you don't distract. Pay attention to your grooming as much as your outfit. For men in particular, a good haircut is worth the extra cost. And last but not least, continue dressing for success, even after you land the job.

DON'T LET BAD BODY LANGUAGE SINK YOUR INTERVIEW

It's finally here—the Job Interview. Questions and answers will abound, and so will the body language that pervades this verbal tango. It's obvious, but it cannot be overemphasized—we send out hundreds of nonverbal cues during charged affairs like interviews. Take these suggestions to heart, and you'll pass the body language test with flying colors.

Once the interviewer greets you, make eye contact and offer a palm-to-palm handshake that is not too strong and not too weak. Keep an appropriate distance as he or she greets you. Relax your body and smile. “Don't freeze,” says Patti Wood, a body language expert and author of *Snap: Making the Most of First Impressions, Body Language, and Charisma*. “Candidates often tense up and stiffen their bodies and face when they are walking in to an interview.”

Once you're in the hot seat, find an appropriate place to set down your belongings. Don't put your briefcase or purse on your lap or on the table. Sit up straight, avoid touching your face and hair and don't cross your arms or hide your hands. “Don't be afraid to gesture,” Wood says. Gesturing shows that you're enthusiastic and expressive. It can also help access more information in your brain and create vocal variation.

Power and confidence are typically conveyed through body language; so are your stress levels as well as how open and honest you are. “An employer will get a sense of who you are and how you will perform under pressure by assessing your body language before, during and after the interview,” Wood says.

The most common body language gaffes include giving a weak handshake, invading personal space, crossing your arms, playing with your hair,

suffering from bad posture, failing to keep eye contact (think of it as a connection tool, and make eye contact when the interviewer speaks), looking uninterested, failing to smile, fidgeting and hiding your hands. All of these convey the wrong kind of cues to employers. Above all, relax, take deep breaths, think before you speak and smile. Do this, and you're well on your way to making a good impression before you even speak.

STAY CALM TO IMPRESS YOUR INTERVIEWER

Job interviews are stressful. There's no getting around that fact, especially when so much is at stake. Between the urge to impress, the potential for better professional and monetary prospects, and the threat of blanking on questions designed to stump you, there's so much that can go wrong. One antidote to this is good preparation. Learn as much as you can about the company, your interviewer and so on. Ashley Strausser, associate director of the Center for Career and Professional Development at Otterbein University, says: "The more time you spend preparing, the more confident you'll be. Those who have done their research and can articulate how their skills and qualifications align with the position will be prepared, even when they're asked the tough questions."

Try not to let other issues snowball into the larger anxiety of the job interview. That includes travel. Leave early so you're not falling behind before the interview even begins.

"People can be on two spectrums when they're nervous," says Nichole Lefelhoc, the associate director of career development and internships at Mansfield University. "For some people their thoughts will move faster and they feel as though they need to jump right into an answer without thinking it through. For others, their thoughts go completely blank and they can't think of an answer at all. You could be a perfect fit for a position, but if your nerves are getting the best of you, then you're not showcasing yourself to the best of your ability."

Another consequence of nervousness: you won't come off as a confident contender. "Employers want to hire the best and the brightest," Strausser

adds. “Know yourself, reflect on your experiences and be able to articulate how you've developed the skills and abilities they seek.”

Worst of all, nervousness could prevent you from getting the job.

To head off any potential nervousness, plan ahead of time. Lay your clothes out the night before, print your resume copies out, check travel routes and traffic and try to arrive 15 minutes early. The fewer details you have to worry about the day of the interview, the better.

Rehearse. Don't memorize exact answers to likely interview questions; outline your points instead and think about the message you want to project.

“Sometimes anxiety can make thinking about an interview so unpleasant that we under-prepare, and then we really have a reason to be nervous,” says Dr. Tamar Chansky, author of *Freeing Yourself from Anxiety*.

“Practice makes prepared.” Arrive early and relax so you can gather your thoughts. Most of all, breathe. Think of the interview as a conversation, and keep in mind that your interviewer is nervous as well. Think positively and be confident. Visualize yourself knocking the interview out of the park, Strausser says.

Think friend, not foe. “Learn what you can about the person interviewing you—and make them into a human being rather than being a rejection machine,” Dr. Chansky says. “You'll be able to relax more and be yourself when you remember that they need you; they want to learn about you to see if you're right for the job.”

Sit up straight and don't fidget—the good posture will give you confidence. Focus on your strengths and your purpose. Breathe, take your time and accept the fact that mistakes will happen. Lastly, remember

ACING THE MOST COMMON QUESTIONS

Take some time to scan the questions below. They often come up, and if answered correctly they'll reveal a lot about your character and your fit with

the organization. Be sure you can give a great, not canned answer to these queries.

The 50 Most Common Interview Questions:

What are your strengths?

What are your weaknesses?

Why are you interested in working for (insert company name here)?

Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?

Why do you want to leave your current company?

Why was there a gap in your employment between [insert date] and [insert date]?

What can you offer us that someone else can not?

What are three things your former manager would like you to improve on?

Are you willing to relocate?

Are you willing to travel?

Tell me about an accomplishment you are most proud of

Tell me about a time you made a mistake.

What is your dream job?

How did you hear about this position?

What would you look to accomplish in the first 30 days/ 60 days/ 90 days on the job?

Discuss your resume.

Discuss your educational background.

Describe yourself.

Tell me how you handled a difficult situation.

Why should we hire you?

Why are you looking for a new job?

Would you work holidays/ weekends?

How would you deal with an angry or irate customer?

What are your salary requirements?

Give a time when you went above and beyond the requirements for a project.

Who are our competitors?

What was your biggest failure?

What motivates you?

What's your availability?
Who's your mentor?
Tell me about a time when you disagreed with your boss.
How do you handle pressure?
What is the name of our CEO?
What are your career goals?
What gets you up in the morning?
What would your direct reports say about you?
What were your bosses' strengths/weaknesses?
If I called your boss right now and asked him what is an area that you could improve on, what would he say?
Are you a leader or a follower?
What was the last book you've read for fun?
What are your co-worker pet peeves?
What are your hobbies?
What is your favorite website?
What makes you uncomfortable?
What are some of your leadership experiences?
How would you fire some one?
What do you like the most and least about working in this industry?
Would you work 40+ hours a week?
What questions haven't I asked you?
What questions do you have for me?

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the myriad interview questions out there. You'll likely find a few that have nothing to do with the above, especially if you're in a technical field.

To start, do your homework. Google the company you're interviewing with and read some of the articles that surface. Study the company's website, its mission, products, services and locations, and who their top executives are. Go to the Public Relations tab on their website and print out some of their latest press releases. "Study them so that you can talk in the interview about what's going on with the company now," Teach says. Talk with anyone who's sat through similar interviews and received job offers, and get their advice. Emulate what trial lawyers do and prepare a list of

likely questions in advance. Identify what the organization wants and needs. Successful interviewees focus on the manager's needs and the skill sets they're looking for.

Google yourself. Find out what the company knows about you, Teach adds. Interview yourself for the position. Before every interview, ask yourself: "Why am I a good fit for this job?" Identify what is unique or special about you. How have you gone above and beyond the call of duty? What did you accomplish that no one else managed to do? Did you volunteer to tackle a problem and solve it?

Practice and plan. If you are a college student, set up an appointment with your career center and have them conduct a mock interview with you. "Even if you're a recent graduate, many college career centers will conduct mock interviews to help alumni," Teach says. "Request that your interview is filmed so that they can critique you and you can study the film. Don't worry if you're nervous or you screw up. You're much better off screwing up in a mock interview than in the real thing."

You don't necessarily want to memorize responses—but try to have a general strategy for answering common interview questions. To prepare for "Tell me about a time when..." questions, you'll want to think about workplace experience stories that describe your accomplishments or show how you dealt with a tough situation, Khare says.

Reflect on previous interviews, figure out how to articulate your goals and be positive- whether you're talking about yourself or your old employers. Don't forget to get comfortable.

"Preparation and practice aside, the most important tip I would like to suggest to job seekers is to feel comfortable with the interview process," Khare says.

"You can read all the advice in the world about acing the interview, but none of the tactics will work out if you are not yourself during the process."

LEARN HOW TO TALK ABOUT YOUR BIGGEST WEAKNESS

“It’s the Hail Mary of the interview; a final last-ditch attempt to trip you up and send you in the other direction. But with a little planning, most interviewees can easily neutralize this question, even use it to their advantage,” says Andrew G. Rosen, founder and editor of the popular career advice blog jobacle.com.

It’s not a trick question and there’s no “right” answer—but interviewers are looking for something specific in your response to this challenging query. “Hiring managers are looking for examples of how a person faced obstacles in the past,” says Dylan Schweitzer, a group talent acquisition manager for Enterprise Rent-A-Car.

“Interviewers ask about weaknesses and failures because resiliency is a critical skill set which employees must have. As a manager, you expect to give constructive criticism to your employees and the ability of a person to take that and improve is important when choosing who you will manage.”

So to avoid this potential landmine, know and be able to identify your weakness(es). Take a few minutes to write them out so you can speak to them later. Be honest, but don’t mention essential skills. That just gives employers fodder to pass on you. To avoid mentioning a weakness that can crush your chances of landing the job, review the job description to see what exactly the employer is looking for and make sure your answer steers clear of anything the employer emphasizes in the application.

Talk about how you’ve conquered the weakness. “Be prepared to share an example of a previous failure or weakness that you’ve successfully turned into a strength,” Schweitzer says. “Do not discuss areas of opportunity that you are still working on and have not yet fixed.”

Don’t prepare an exact response - people can tell when you’ve rehearsed something canned. Keep the discussion professional: only discuss work-related weaknesses. Don’t say you’re a perfectionist or you work too hard. Schweitzer says common responses that are immediately dismissed are: “I

am a perfectionist," and "I work so hard that I don't allow myself to relax." "Interviewers hear these examples all the time and often will ask for another example or just move on knowing you prepared for that question. Use the weakness question as an opportunity to share how you've overcome a professional challenge and how you now are better because of it."

AVOID THESE INTERVIEW MISCUES AT ALL COSTS

Job interviews are hard to come by these days so be mindful of how you present and project your interest in the opportunity during your interview. Nerves are natural, and interviewers understand that applicants may be a little unsettled because of what's at stake.

"However," says Michael Erwin, a senior career advisor at CareerBuilder, "Employers are usually less forgiving of mistakes that have nothing to do with nerves and everything to do with a lack of preparation or professionalism."

Even common, seemingly minor blunders can be a sure-fire way to make a bad first impression. CareerBuilder asked hiring managers about frequent mistakes that will destroy a candidate's chance at employment, and 60% cited answering a call or texting during an interview as one of the biggest deal breakers. Sixty-two percent said one of the most detrimental mistakes a candidate can make is appearing uninterested. Dressing inappropriately, talking negatively about current or previous employers and failing to make eye contact are other common missteps that hiring managers won't tolerate.

Another item on the list of detrimental mistakes that stuck out for Haefner is talking negatively about current or previous employers. If you've had a negative experience in a previous job, focus on what you've learned from the challenges and stay away from bad-mouthing old bosses, Haefner adds. Otherwise you could come across as vindictive, disloyal or ungrateful.

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS TO LEAVE THEM WANTING MORE

A job interview is a two-way street. Yes, the employer asks questions to determine if the interviewee is the right person for the job. But the smart candidate also uses the interview to assess how he or she would fit in, if he or she would be able to do her best work there and how well aligned his or her goals are with those of the employer.

“There is only one way for you to determine if the job is for you, and that's to ask the interviewer the right questions,” Teach says.

There will come a time in the interview—usually toward the end—when the employer gives you the opportunity to ask questions. Not everyone takes it. “Candidates sometimes freeze and are caught off-guard when they have the floor,” says Taylor. “If you are interested in the job and don't have any final questions, you risk being perceived as someone who is not truly interested, and that's too big a risk to take,” Teach says.

So when the tables are turned and you're invited to ask questions, do it. “Remember that hiring managers appreciate an engaged conversation and value an inquisitive mind,” Taylor says. This may be your best chance to determine whether the job or the company is right for you.

“Asking the right questions also shows the interviewer that you've prepared carefully and are serious about the opportunity,” Alexandra Levit, author of *Blind Spots: The 10 Business Myths You Can't Afford to Believe on Your New Path to Success*, says. It also says you're savvy enough to take the additional opportunity to sell yourself. And finally, questions allow you to showcase your knowledge about the company and its industry, and to steer the interview into areas where you excel, Haefner adds.

Asking questions will only work to your advantage if you're asking the right ones. “I think hiring managers expect people to have thought through questions before for the interview,” says Attridge. “Asking a bad question is worse than asking none at all.”

Questions you should ask in an interview:

How would you describe the company's culture?

Can you please show me some examples of projects that I'd be working on?

What is the single largest problem facing your staff, and would I be in a position to help you solve this problem?

What specific qualities and skills are you looking for in the job candidate? Is this a new position, or did someone leave? If someone left, why did they leave or what did they go on to do?

What is the typical career trajectory for a person in this position?

What would you say are the three most important skills needed to excel in this position?

Who would be my manager, and will I have the opportunity to meet him or her?

Why do you like working here?

What does a typical day or week look like for the person in this position? Is there travel, flextime, etc?

How do you see this position contributing to the success of the organization?

What do you think distinguishes this company from its competitors, both from a public and employee perspective?

Does the company offer continued education and professional training?

How can I best contribute to the department?

What particular achievements would equate to success at this job? What would success look like?

Are you most interested in a candidate who works independently, on a team, cross-functionally or through a combination of them all? Can you give me an example?

What is your ideal communication style with your staff? Do you meet regularly with your team, rely heavily on email, use status reports or work primarily through other means?

How do you see me as a candidate for the job in comparison with an ideal candidate?

Do you have any concerns about me or about my qualifications that may prevent you from selecting me for the job?

What is the next step?

When do you think you will be making a decision?

Questions to avoid in an interview:

Never ask for information you could have easily found by Googling.

Never ask if you can change the job details, the schedule or the salary.

Never press about the interviewer's background.

Never ask about pay, time off, benefits, etc. (Wait until later in the process to inquire about these things.)

Never ask, "What does your company do?"

Never ask, "If I'm hired, when can I start applying for other positions in the company?"

Never ask how quickly you can be promoted.

Never ask, "Do you do background checks?"

Never ask about gossip you've heard.

Never ask if the company monitors email or Internet usage.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR AT THE INTERVIEW

You've just arrived for your interview. As you wait in the reception area your mind races. You want to run through your answers one more time, but put your rehearsed responses aside (it's a bit late for that anyways) and use this time to survey the workplace instead. In fact, you should be keenly observant from the time you arrive until you say your goodbyes.

Paying close attention to the workplace and people will give you a better sense of the company culture and will help determine whether the gig's a good fit for you. Interviewers can tell you what they want about the environment and personnel—but your own firsthand observations carry far more weight.

"If you're not offered a tour, be sure to request one so you can get a sense of the environment and its vibe. If possible, you should also request to meet some potential co-workers," Amy Hoover, president of Talent Zoo, a site for marketing, advertising and digital professionals, says.

"Just take thirty seconds to look around and see how formal the setting is. Do people have personal items on their desks? Is there informal and casual

conversation in the hallways? Is the feeling relaxed or tense? Does everyone seem like they are on an urgent mission? These are easily made observations despite personal nervousness," Dr. Brooks adds.

You should also think of it as an opportunity to evaluate the role, the prevailing culture, the company's leadership, the growth path and the boss, says Meredith Haberfeld, an executive coach and cofounder of the Institute for Coaching.

Start by assessing the parking lot, Kerr suggests. "Are there reserved spaces for VPs? If so, that can speak volumes about how hierarchical the organization is. Are there clues as to the organization's culture in the parking lot such as welcoming, even fun signs and easy access for clients?"

Note how you're greeted (or not) upon arrival. Was your appointment known to the front desk? Were you greeted in a friendly manner? Offered water or coffee? How did they treat folks who weren't applicants or employees? "The first impression a company decides to give to visitors (interviewees or others) can often indicate their philosophy on how employees are treated, as well," Hoover says.

Next, try to gauge how the employees interact with one another. "This is a critical observation," adds Kerr. When Kerr toured Zappos he stood in the lobby and was amazed by the level of energy and the way co-workers greeted each other in the morning. "You knew within minutes this was a workplace that had energy, a place where people actually wanted to be on a Monday morning, and a big part of that was just watching the genuine and outgoing ways people interacted with each other." Just taking the time to scan whether employees look happy or not serves as a good straw poll for the mood at that company.

How people answer the phone, especially in a larger organization, can reflect a few characteristics of their brand, Kerr says. It can tell you if it's a fun place, if they are truly customer-focused and if people are allowed to let their own personality shine through. "If they sound as though they are

reading from a script, this could be a sign that the culture is very controlling," he adds.

Body language speaks volumes about the energy level in a workplace and can often be more revealing than what people actually say, Kerr says. Are people walking with a sense of purpose? Do they look comfortable in this environment?

Do they get nervous when the boss walks by? Look out for nonverbal cues while you're in the office.

Kerr also says to look out for a gym, fitness center, showers and cafeterias with healthy options to get a sense of the employers' commitment to health and wellness.

Does the interview start on time? Was it conducted in a hasty or scattershot manner? A preoccupied interviewer bodes ill.

"If you get a chance, try and check out a few off the beaten path rooms such as a meeting room, lunchroom and even the washroom," Kerr suggests. "These communal spaces can often speak volumes about a work environment."

"Notice the décor," Phyllis Mufson, a career coach and catalyst for personal and career transformation, adds. "A plush reception area and boss' office coupled with dingy and drab offices for employees could indicate an emphasis on impressing visitors at the expense of caring for employees."

Take stock of how employees dress. You'll find out if a company is (literally) buttoned-up or more laidback. And don't forget to get a feel for the office layout. Is it an open office, or partitioned into a cube farm?

If you can, get a sense of how supervisors and managers interact with employees. This can be very telling as to the kind of environment, Kerr says. "It can send subtle clues as to how hierarchical the work environment is or how oppressive it may feel."

Lastly, take a step back and appraise the tempo in the office. If it appears that nobody is working, that may be an indication that business is slow. If

everyone looks exhausted and overworked, this could mean the company is under-staffed and indifferent to its worker bees. Should that be the case, you've canvassed well and will know to sidestep that quagmire after your visit.

HOW TO SEAL THE DEAL AFTER THE INTERVIEW

How you handle the interview follow-up can help you stand out from other candidates. First, avoid any aggressive or thoughtless impulses that come after the stressful sit-downs. Instead, follow these five crucial steps to seal the deal.

Immediately send a follow up email within 24 hours of the meeting, no excuses. If you've collected a business card from each person you spoke with, you'll have the correct titles, email addresses and name spellings. Don't forget to proof-read the email before ping your contact! The follow-up email should be personalized enough that it doesn't read like a standard form letter. Try to keep it to one or two paragraphs (approx. four to seven sentences). Interview coach Pamela Skillings suggests using the email to thank the interviewer for their time, reference what was discussed in the interview, highlight your interest and key selling points, and reiterate how you can be contacted.

Check in with your references. If you haven't worked together for some time, catch them up on your career trajectory and aspirations. Unless the person has an existing relationship with the interviewer, Skillings advises against asking them to initiate contact directly.

Review your social media profiles so that they accurately and professionally reflect your job situation. "Don't immediately send a LinkedIn invitation," warns Skillings, adding that any social media friending (unless specifically talked about in the interview) may come off as too eager, presumptive or personal. She likewise advises against any casual tweeting or updating about the interview itself.

Use your one phone call. If you haven't heard back about the status of the job after a week or so, email the interviewer, asking politely for an update. Generally one follow-up phone call is fine if the email goes nowhere. Any more than one call, however, could backfire.

“It parallels following up after a first date,” says Skillings. “You're cringing listening to the voice mails because they keep getting longer and weirder.” If you have the urge to leave that message (I thought the meeting went so well; why aren't you getting back to me?!), just say no. By following up correctly, you've set yourself up for success as best as you can.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU DON'T HEAR BACK FROM HR

Job candidates are a dime a dozen right now, which means that it's not uncommon for employers to give the silent treatment to the candidates they're just not that into.

Determining the appropriate wait time before soliciting feedback begins with the interview itself, Parnell says. “Be sure to determine, specifically, the next steps in the process prior to closing the meeting. This way, you have an idea as to when the employer should respond, and if they don't, when you should mobilize a more proactive approach.”

Understand that hiring managers are doing many more things than simply interviewing, and oftentimes estimates of response time tend to be very optimistic, Steve Kane, an HR expert, adds.

Take the initiative. After the interviewer's decision date passes, Taylor says to wait a few days then write a “check-in” email to your primary contact showing your continued interest.

Make a plan. Stick to a one email and one call strategy for your initial interview follow-up, then stick to a prudent “check-in” strategy if you get radio silence, and of course, be gracious when you do so. Check your social network for connections at the company. They may know more about the hiring status, and you won't risk bugging your interviewer or HR.

Move up the chain. Parnell says, “If you find that you're unable to get a response from them after a material number of attempts, move up the food chain. I've found that the higher up you go, the more respect you'll find for the interviewee.” Reaching out (directly) to the person you'd actually be working for can often reinvigorate the process, or at least bring it to a close. Follow your gut and be realistic. If your queries have repeatedly fallen on deaf ears, take the hint, however difficult it may be to swallow. If you can manage to accept the bad news, avoid taking it personally and bounce back quickly to pursue other leads, you're well on your way to landing a good gig, even if this hoped-for offer failed to materialize.

Keep the employer up to date. “Rather than calling them with ‘gimme, gimme, gimme/” Parnell says, “by offering them tangential, employer-related information that might facilitate their process, you will remind them that you are still in the hunt without sounding self-serving.”

Let this experience tell you about the company. Taylor says, “You might consider their lack of action a gift or preview —and a sign to move quickly to greener pastures.”

The post-interview job wait also hinges on what you refrain from doing. Never offer a self-imposed deadline without due cause (competing job offer, moving deadline, e.g.), never lie, never communicate with a hiring manager through their personal contact info, never criticize the company on social media, never complain to the employer about your frustration with them, never call or email relentlessly, never call on back-to-back days, never try gimmicks, never stop by with more information in the hopes that you'll gain points for enthusiasm, and lastly, never bribe or kiss up. You want to win the job out of merit and self-confidence, says Taylor, not out of ill-attempted forms of schmoozing or flattery.

HOW TO TURN DOWN A JOB OFFER WITH CLASS

Here's something most people haven't had to worry about for the last half-decade: turning down a job offer.

But now after years of layoffs and hiring freezes, plenty of corporations are starting to increase staffing levels again. Chances are at least some of those newly employed people were offered more than one position and had to decline an offer. It's a nice problem to have, no doubt, but it can be a difficult and uncomfortable thing to deal with nonetheless.

"There are many reasons why a job candidate might have to turn down a job offer, but it can usually be boiled down to three key areas: the money, the work itself or the people at the company," says Teach.

Whatever the reason, to avoid any awkwardness at spurning one firm for another, you should be as transparent as possible in the interview process about what you really need to make the position acceptable. Then, if the offer does not meet your stated requirements, it won't be a surprise to the potential employer when you decline.

Regardless of where you land, always show appreciation to all parties involved, following up with everyone you came in contact with at the company you're rejecting. And once you've made the decision to turn down the job, let the company know as soon as possible, preferably by phone. Don't forget to tell them what you did like about the company, and let them know you'd like to stay in touch for future opportunities.

If you know someone right for the role, recommend him or her for the job. And do be honest about your reason for turning down the offer; everyone's an adult here. They can handle the truth, but that doesn't mean you need to be brutally honest.

A few don'ts to keep in mind: Don't bad-mouth the company or anyone you met in the interviewing process, don't ignore the offer, don't expect them to extend the offer more than once, don't lead the company on if you've already decided on something else, don't negotiate unless you're truly willing to consider a revised offer and don't turn them down because you think another offer is on its way.

And whatever you do, do not accept multiple offers. That way madness lies, to quote the Bard, and you will burn bridges. Your reputation is everything, and you don't want to ruin your position of strength by acting greedily or rashly in the face of multiple offers.

NEGOTIATE YOUR PAY - IT'S THE BEST THING YOU CAN DO ONCE YOU LAND THE JOB

If you've scored a job, it's clear the employer wants you. But for some reason many successful job applicants fail to ask for more money or employee perks when they accept the offer. Perhaps it's the fear of upsetting the new brass. Or maybe the deleterious economy of late is compelling people to be grateful for what they're given. The truth is, if you don't negotiate no one is going to intercede on your behalf.

You're also likely leaving thousands of dollars on the table, if not now then in the future when your earning power will be dwarfed by the peers in your field who did stand up and ask for more. And for the most part, don't concern yourself with alienating your employer. Unless you hear an outright "there's no room for negotiations here" from your boss, then the chance is there to ask. The worst that can happen is he or she'll say no.

That doesn't mean that you should take the negotiation process for granted either. If you can swing it, meet in person for this discussion. It's harder to say no when you're saying it to someone's face, and even if you are nervous about meeting face-to-face, you'll likely state your case better in the flesh.

Before you meet, make sure you know what you want in advance. A salary range or a few salary pegs (like an ideal figure, an ok number and an unsatisfactory one) will help you frame the discussion, and you'll be better equipped to play ball once your employer starts throwing around numbers. A few things to watch out for: avoid justifying the negotiation with statements like "I really need the money to survive," or "But I deserve this!" Need and entitlement are not effective arguments for getting a better offer or a raise, and employers do not like having their heart-strings tugged for

mercenary ends. Instead, focus your argument on what you're bringing to the table. If your employer said you were the best person for the job when they hired you, use that to your advantage. And if you can back your argument up with data (for example, how similar roles in the industry are paying more than your current salary), use it. Keeping the discussion grounded in numbers, responsibilities and accomplishments, and away from more emotional terrain, will bolster your case.

Lastly, there are many other perks to the job than a pay-check. If your employer is unwilling to bump up your pay, perhaps the company will entertain other benefits like stock options, retirement fund matching, medical benefits, flex and vacation time, or a gym membership. When you negotiate, remember that everything is on the table and that facts frame the discussion. Stay calm, focus on data and don't be afraid to negotiate the noncash aspects of your job. Your career will thank you for it.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL JOB RELOCATION

Moving's stressful; there's no way around it. And moving because of a new job can be doubly daunting, especially if the turnaround for finding a place is short. And that doesn't even cover settling in afterwards.

Kahn says the process requires you to find a new place to call home, become acquainted with your new environment, master a new job and build a new support network—all at the same time.

Ted Stimpson, president and CEO of MyMove.com, says today's real estate market doesn't make it any easier. "Selling a house is one of the biggest complications that relocating homeowners face," he says. "Paying two mortgages is daunting—and often not feasible—which leaves many in the challenging position of selling their current home while securing housing in their new city of employment."

Another challenge faced by two-income families: finding employment for the relocating employee's spouse or partner. If you have children, you'll probably worry about their transition as well.

Staying organized is para-mount.

Know what's available to you. Some companies will pay for things like house hunting trips, transportation of your cars, assistance in selling or buying your home, help figuring out how to rent out a property and event organizers to settle you into your new home. They might also be able to help your spouse with job placement or employment leads in your new city, Stimpson adds.

If your employer doesn't typically offer relocation assistance, ask for it. Don't be afraid to negotiate, Stimpson says. Research moving costs (truck rentals, quotes from professional movers, transportation expenses, temporary housing, storage, etc.) so you can present your employer with a detailed estimate of how much your relocation is expected to cost you. Also ask about preferred providers when it comes to relocation companies and real estate agents. Reimbursement may be contingent upon the usage of designated professionals with whom your employer has established relationships.

Take time to get to know your new environment before you move. "Explore the neighbor-hoods in the area to make sure that you find the best-suited one for your lifestyle," Terry says.

If you can't make the trek beforehand, talk to people that live there or formerly did, and "get as much perspective as you can on what you're walking into," Kahn says.

You should also read the local news or any local blogs to understand the vibe and learn what's happening in your new town, Terry adds.

Know the cost of living in the new city. There are significant differences in cost of living among U.S. cities and states, Stimpson says. "Typically, these differences will be compensated for in your salary, but it's still important to check." Do the research and plan accordingly.

Don't make any long-term commitments. "Renting at first is a great way to settle into a new city without making a commitment to a neighborhood you might end up not liking," Terry says.

Kahn agrees. He says a common mistake many people make when relocating for a job is to buy a home or commit to a long-term lease immediately, and later find that they don't like the neighborhood, or the job. Stimpson says to ask about temporary corporate housing; your company may put you up for a period of time as you start the new job.

Find out if any of your moving expenses are tax-deductible. You might be eligible for partial reimbursement come tax time, which will ease some of your financial stress, Stimpson says. (See IRS Tax Topic 455 for details on which expenses qualify)

Build a social support network. "Use your friends to network to make new friends in the same way that you would try to network for a job," Kahn says. Take advantage of online services like Meet up to find others nearby with similar interests.

The faster you can build a support network, the more at home you will feel, he says.

WHAT YOUNG WORKERS NEED TO KNOW TO SUCCEED

Starting your first "real" job can be nerve-racking. You're probably excited to have landed a full-time gig—but also scared about meeting new colleagues, learning office etiquette and making the transition from your college classrooms to your corporate cubicle. (Or whatever your new workspace may consist of.)

Starting a new job requires some preparation and lifestyle changes. "A lot of people look at getting the job offer as the finish line, but really it's the start of another run," says Haefner.

Start by recreating your wardrobe and sprucing up your appearance. If you're dressed to impress, you probably will.

Relax. Be aware of your nervous habits and try to control them. If you ramble when you're nervous, make it a point to limit your chatter. Project confidence. That doesn't mean aim for arrogance, but show your colleagues you deserve to be there. Don't hesitate to share your thoughts. One way to exhibit confidence: invite your colleagues to lunch. Haefner says this tactic shows that you aren't the typical quiet new employee.

Be innovative. From day one, confirm that you bring something new to the table. Offer your boss or colleagues ideas for how to enhance the product or company, as long as it relates to your position. Most young professionals in a new job take the back seat the first few days, but Haefner suggests jumping right in.

Separate your personal and professional lives. Show that you are dedicated to your new job and that you want to be there.

Communicate. Speak up and ask questions, make suggestions and periodically check in with your boss. Challenge yourself. Haefner says it can take time to get to know the company itself, but it is important to do research, look back at old projects and find out what has worked for the company or your team in the past. Once you've had the opportunity to become acquainted with your new workplace, evaluate the work environment, observe your fellow employees, and survey the office protocol, work flow and discourse, you should set goals for yourself. Getting through the first few days, weeks or months in a new job is tough, but remember to focus on what you want to get out of the experience.

PEOPLE SKILLS ARE PARAMOUNT, PLAY WELL WITH OTHERS.

on a humane level in the office; the alternative is a sterile environment with low productivity. So, the more you demonstrate these abilities, the faster your career will advance. It's the 'office diplomats' with strong emotional intelligence who are most likely to be strong, effective corporate leaders. By

developing these skills, you'll reduce bad behavior in the office, and your positive approach will be contagious.”

The ability to relate to others. Hence, it's usually possible to relate to almost anyone,” Hockett says. Sometimes being able to relate to others simply means that you're willing to agree to disagree with mutual respect, letting them know you understand their position.

Strong communication skills. This is the most fundamental people skill because it encompasses your persona and ability to get along with other colleagues, persuade others to listen to your ideas and much more, Taylor says. “If you have a gift for the spoken and written word, you will always put your best foot forward. Being articulate is highly prized in today's workplace, when time is at a premium and technology requires constant communication.”

Patience with others. “If you're patient with others and can keep a level head in stressful situations, it will definitely be noticed by management and perceived as a very strong asset,” says Hoover. “When your boss is forced to deal with a situation where people have lost their cool, he or she will certainly remember the troublemakers when the next promotion comes available.”

The ability to trust others. “Without [trust], you can't get projects done or get cooperation,” Taylor says. “No one can operate in a vacuum for long.” Knowing how and when to show empathy. “Offer support, sympathy and feedback in your daily business life,” Taylor suggests. “It will bring you positive emotional returns- part of ‘corporate karma.’” If you contribute to a dehumanized company, both you and your employer will have limited growth potential, she says.

Active listening skills. Hearing someone and actively listening to them are two different things, Hockett explains. Most people hear someone speak and start to form a response in their mind (or worse, start talking) before the person even finishes what she's saying. “The key is to actively listen,

which takes more time but produces better results. It means you listen without interruption and then take the time to think and form a response before replying. It takes practice, but it pays off"

Genuine interest in others. People know when you're truly interested in them, Kahn says. "If you're not showing a genuine interest—asking thoughtful questions and considering their answers—your interaction can actually have an opposite effect to the one intended. Take care to remember names, dates and important life events."

Flexibility. "Your prison-bound uncle's personality may not be likeable at the Thanksgiving table, but it may serve him well once incarcerated. Supreme communicators have a keen ability to shift gears when the context calls for it, and a deep well of communication options to choose from," says Parnell.

Good judgment. This is a key people skill that derives from learning, listening to others and observing the world around you, Kahn says. Parnell adds: "Pay attention to your gut —it often has something valuable to say."

The ability to persuade others. At some point in your career you'll likely have to sell others on your ideas, products or services. Whether you're up for a promotion, pitching a project or selling clothing in a retail store, you need to be able to form a strong, convincing argument for why you, or your products, are the very best, or the "right" one.

Negotiation skills. Good negotiating skills are beneficial with both internal and external discussions, Hoover says. "Internally, job offers and salary discussions greatly benefit from solid negotiating, as well as when it's time to pitch a new idea or sway co-workers to your way of thinking. Externally, both vendors and customers often require negotiations and you can really become the hero when you are successful in either scenario."

The ability to keep an open mind. "To create trust and respect in others, people need to know that their point of view and feedback will be considered and used," Kahn says.

A great sense of humor goes a long way-especially to break the tedium of work.

Knowing your audience. Knowing what, how and when to say things to others is critical. This seems trivial, but it's one of the primary reasons why people encounter communication breakdowns with each other, Hockett explains.

Honesty. "Once you lose it, it's almost impossible to regain," Taylor says. Kahn agrees, "Honesty is the foundation of any relationship, particularly in business."

Awareness of body language. The importance of body language cannot be emphasized enough, since it makes up the majority of how we communicate with others. "We're communicating with people all the time even when we're not speaking. Being mindful of what our gestures, expressions, voice and appearance are communicating can greatly help or harm our people skills," Hockett says.

Proactive problem solving. Work is a series of problem- solving situations, but if you're proactive, you'll take the pressure off your boss and colleagues, Taylor says.

Leadership skills. If you can motivate a team and help those around you do their best work, you'll be more successful, even if you're not in management, Hoover says.

Good manners. "Using 'please' and 'thank you' goes a long way in the realm of people skills," Taylor adds. While obvious, some need little reminders. Keeping a post-it with a smile or another icon can remind us that work is more than getting something accomplished, it's how we get it accomplished.

The ability to be supportive and motivate others. Taylor says: "Not only should you praise and recognize your staff, all the while being accessible and upbeat, you should also be motivational around your boss and

colleagues. Employees at all levels want to be around enthusiastic people with drive and high energy.”

NONVERBAL CUES THAT CONVEY CONFIDENCE

Effective communication centers around nonverbal cues, and that applies to the work- place as well. Sure, what you say is important, but your message is so much more than your speech. Effective nonverbal communication is critically important for career advancement, says Darlene Price, author of *Well Said! Presentations and Conversations That Get Results*. “Among the top traits employers look for when hiring or promoting a candidate for management are confidence, professionalism and enthusiasm. Expressing these and other leadership traits requires sending the right nonverbal cues.”

Eye contact is your primary tool for establishing nonverbal floor, arms and hands visible, relaxed and uncrossed. With- out even trying, you're showing that you're confident and in control.

Initiate interactions. “Be the first to make eye contact, offer your hand to shake, have an idea or solution, go into a room and make the call,” Wood says.

If your significant other has ever said to you, “It’s not what you said, it's how you said it,” they were referring to your paralanguage, Price explains. “Like facial expressions, choosing the appropriate paralanguage is critically important because it conveys emotional meaning, attitude and impact.”

Give your full attention at work. When speaking with a person, point your toes and square your shoulders toward them, Price says. “This conveys attentiveness and creates open body language. Make sure your arms and legs are uncrossed. Also, avoid multitasking during the interaction.” And respond to others’ nonverbal cues. When leading a meeting, speaking to a group or interacting one-on-one, pay close attention to the other person's body language and voice tone, Price says. “Listen with your eyes. His nonverbal cues can connections with others, Price says. “It communicates your level of involvement, interest and warmth. When speaking to others,

ideally look directly into their eyes at least two to three seconds before looking away or moving to the next person. Merely glancing at someone for one second or less is known as eye dart and conveys insecurity, anxiety or evasion.”

Confident handshakes speak volumes. “Always put your hand out to shake hands,” Wood says. “A classic good handshake is one with full palm-to-palm contact.”

“Avoid the extremes of either a weak limp handshake or an aggressive bone-crushing one,” Price adds. “Strike the right balance—firm enough to convey confidence yet matched to the strength of the other person.” Use effective gestures naturally. “Strive to punctuate your words with movement that is natural, lively, purposeful and spontaneous,” says Price. “Be genuinely yourself and let your motions match your message. Avoid common distracting mannerisms such as finger-pointing, fidgeting, scratching, tapping, playing with hair, wringing hands and twisting a ring.” Practice a few answers in a mirror beforehand to ensure your gestures are on point.

Dressing the part goes a long way. Price says, “Make sure ‘business casual’ is not ‘business careless.’ Choose high quality, well-tailored garments that convey professionalism. Depending on your corporate culture, wear a business suit or at least a jacket for important meetings and presentations, especially with senior leaders and customers. Avoid showy accessories, busy patterns, tight garments and revealing necklines.”

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"Take up space," Wood advises. Use the arms on the chair or stand with your feet a bit apart. Price adds, "When you stand up tall and straight, you send a message of self-assurance, authority and energy." Whether standing or sitting, imagine a string gently pulling your head and spine toward the ceiling. Your weight is evenly balanced, feet solidly on the floor, arms and hands visible, relaxed and uncrossed. Without even trying, you're showing that you're confident and in control.

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HOW TO MANAGE YOUR EMOTIONS

It's important to be aware of your own emotional response patterns and try to handle them professionally at work, says Anne Kreamer, author of *Always Personal, Navigating Emotion in the New Workplace*. If someone insults you in a meeting and you feel like you might cry, she recommends excusing yourself to get some water. If you don't do it in time and cry in front of colleagues, call out the behavior that upset you. You could say: "Clearly what you've said disturbed me. Could you tell me why you said that?"

Work will feel particularly emotional in the beginning of a career, she adds, because young people have less experience in dealing with these situations and greater insecurity. "Over time, if you flex these muscles, you'll gain mastery," she says. It may also help to balance out your emotions and begin the day from a place of happiness by regularly exercising, meditating, writing in a journal, finding a time everyday to disconnect from work and creating a joyful workspace with personal pictures and mementos. "We all work all the time now," says Kreamer. "We need to demystify the role of emotion, so that employers show more empathy and employees find more balanced approaches."

HOW BAD HABITS CAN SABOTAGE YOUR JOB

“A single bad habit is not likely to get you fired immediately, but the cumulative effect of the bad habit over time can,” says Dr. Brooks. “The most unfortunate part,” Rick Myers, founder and chief executive of Talent Zoo, says, is that “people rarely realize they have these habits.”

Habits aren't something to obsess over; that would give you another habit to worry about. But be aware of your actions and the cues your colleagues give you.

To start, don't lie, no matter how small or justifiable you think it may be. Avoid procrastinating as well. It's one of the most insidious self-inflicted wounds in the workplace.

So many of us habitually gossip, whine or complain when things go bad. Work happens. But gripe too often and your job could be on the line.

Don't be tardy to work. It's the easiest thing to control, which means arriving late sends a clear message about how you prioritize work. Communication is key, which makes email important. This can involve everything from not responding to emails to not being aware of how you come across in an email.

While we're talking about online habits, social media addiction sounds like a joke, but fixating on social media will hurt you at work. Inattentiveness is a death by a thousand cuts. If you're always distracted—a bad habit that plenty of employees possess- or you fail to pay attention to detail, the resulting infractions will add up over your career.

You'll also want to be aware of personal habits that might be offensive or distracting to co-workers. “This can run the range from body odor, bringing strong-smelling food to your cubicle, playing music too loudly, telling inappropriate jokes or using your speaker- phone to make calls,” Dr. Brooks says.

Good attitude and composure are vital to the workplace. Communicate well by using proper grammar, having good manners and being thoughtful when you speak up; keep temper tantrums at bay; collaborate in the office when you can; and work smart i.e. be efficient above all else.

“Much of this comes down to communication,” Hoover concludes. “We all have little annoying habits, and top-down communication is really key [in making employees aware of

THE WORST WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION MISTAKES

Navigating the workplace can feel like an obstacle course sometimes. There's no need to make things harder by making any of these communication mistakes.

Off-color, inappropriate or racially biased jokes make people uncomfortable, even if an employee wasn't being serious. Don't make them, and if you think something's on the fence of good taste, it's probably gauche or inappropriate.

Keep your emotions in check. Tensions can run high in the workplace, but try not to let anger, tears or any other kind of emotion take over.

Cursing is an equal opportunity faux pas. It's generally considered unprofessional and unfitting of a leader. Interestingly, it's also a major mistake online, which in itself is a communication minefield.

Same goes with flirting at work. No matter how good an idea it seems at the time, perish the thought lest you want people to think less of you.

Avoiding eye contact makes it seem like you might be lying or have something to hide. If you're in a meeting, it may also give the impression that you're uninterested. On the other hand, looking people in the eyes makes them feel like you're listening. If you can't keep your message succinct and coherent, you won't appear in control. Learn to be comfortable with silence. It can even bolster your point if you use it effectively.

NEVER SAY THESE PHRASES AT WORK

If you want to be perceived as a leader in the workplace, a great place to start is by deliberately choosing to use empowering words and phrases in your speech. On the other hand, some words should never be uttered in the workplace.

“It’s not fair.” She got a raise, you didn’t. He was recognized, you weren’t. Don’t stew. Document the facts instead, build a case and present an intelligent argument to the person or group who can help you.

“That’s not my problem,” “That’s not my job” or “I don’t get paid enough for this.” If you asked someone for help, and the person replied with one of the above phrases, how would you feel? An unconcerned, detached and self-serving attitude quickly limits career advancement.

“This doesn’t mean you have to say yes,” Price says. “It does mean you need to be articulate and thoughtful when saying no.” “I’ll try.” “Imagine it’s April 15th and you ask a friend to mail your tax returns before Spm on his way to the post office,” Price says. “If he replies, ‘Okay, I’ll try,’ you’ll likely feel the need to mail them your- self.” Because that phrase implies the possibility of failure.

“In your speech, especially with senior leaders, replace the word ‘try’ with the word and intention of ‘will.’ This seemingly small change speaks volumes,” she adds.

“He’s a jerk,” or “She’s lazy,” or “My job stinks” or “I hate this company.” Nothing tanks a career faster than name calling, Price says. If you have a genuine complaint about someone or something, communicate the issue with tact, consideration and neutrality.

“But we’ve always done it that way.” “The most effective leaders value innovation, creative thinking and problem- solving skills in their employees,”

Price says. In one fell swoop, this phrase reveals you are the opposite: stuck in the past, inflexible and closed- minded.

“That’s impossible” or “There's nothing I can do.” Are you sure you've considered every single possible solution and the list is now exhausted? Instead of negativity, try some- thing like, “I'll be glad to check on it again,” “Let’s discuss what's possible under these circumstances” or “What I can do is this.”

“You should have... ” or “You could have... ” You probably wouldn't be thrilled if someone said: “You should have told me about this sooner!” Substitute these guild-inducing phrases with, “Next time, to ensure proper planning, please bring this to my attention immediately.” Or, “In the future, I recommend... ”

“I may be wrong, but... ” or “This may be a silly idea, but... ” These phrases are known as discounting, Price explains. They diminish the impact of what follows and reduce your credibility. Assert your recommendation instead “To reduce travel costs and increase time efficiency, I recommend we conduct the quarterly meeting online.”

“Don’t you think?” or “Okay?” These phrases are commonly known as hedging-seeking validation through the use of overly cautious or non-committal words, Price says. “Instead of hedging, make your statement or recommendation with certainty.”

“I don't have time for this right now” or “I’m too busy.” To foster positive relations and convey empathy, try instead, “I’d be happy to discuss this with you after my morning meetings. May I stop by your office around 1pm?”

These are common phrases that might be difficult to eliminate completely from your everyday conversations, but the trick is to gain awareness of the language you're using. “As is often the case with bad habits, we are unconscious of the fact we're saying career- limiting words and phrases,” Price says.

BE INDISPENSABLE AND YOU'LL FLOURISH AT WORK

Job security is a serious concern for many employees in today's workforce. "But in any workplace, you'll still find people who are absolutely indispensable—productivity would grind to a halt if they were suddenly no longer there," says Rita Friedman, a Philadelphia-based career coach and resume writer.

Some people mistake indispensable for irreplaceable, Hoover says, but they're not the same thing. "As they say, everyone can be replaced. But to be indispensable means that you are so good and efficient at your job, that your boss and co-workers don't want to imagine replacing you," she says. "You are the go-to person they count on; the one who simply gets things done."

Being indispensable also puts you in a comfort zone because you won't have to worry as much about losing your job, "which is one less stress you won't have to endure," Teach adds. "You have greater job security—and will (hopefully) be the last one to go if your department or company is forced to make layoffs."

Other benefits of being indispensable at work: you're more likely to get a raise or promotion and you may be sought out for special projects, opinions and direction, says Marsha Egan, a certified workplace productivity and business leader coach, and chief executive of The Egan Group, Inc.

To make yourself indispensable, do work that matters, not work that's easy. If you can monopolize a particular skill, do it—your unique talents will make you stand out.

Be willing to go the extra mile. Says Teach, "Most employees just execute, but if you're one of the few who are constantly coming up with new ideas and are taking on new responsibilities that aren't required of you, this will go a long way in making you indispensable."

Make your supervisor's job easier, gaining his or her trust at the same time. Try mastering a language not required of your position. Managers highly value employees who can communicate well in multiple ways.

Be productive, but don't make it a race. Take your time to do the work correctly and thoughtfully, and you'll likely find better, more efficient ways to get your job done. And always try to offer solutions where you can.

Monopolize an important relationship. If you are the only person who is a trusted advisor to your company's biggest customer, you will be essential to the company, says Robbins.

Be a team player, which means have a good attitude even in the face of adversity, be committed (if you add value to every transition, you'll win over your employer), and be reliable and trustworthy at all times.

Self-improvement at work is critical: stay current with technology and trends, improve your oral and written communication skills, and stay organized and on task. And don't forget to start each day off right, with a clean slate and a proper breakfast. As trite as it sounds, eating well makes a huge difference for your happiness and energy levels at work.

Check in with your colleagues at work, organize your workspace, don't let your inbox distract you, place important calls and emails early in the day, check your voicemail and plan a midmorning break. Check in throughout the day with yourself to make sure you're tackling what matters most. Staying in the present at work is a great way to ward off procrastination and any moodiness that can derail your efforts. And try to mix things up from time to time; it'll break up the monotony of work, and you may discover new solutions to difficult problems.

At the end of the day though, no one is truly indispensable. "The strategies above, however, will give you a chance at being perceived as indispensable, which is what you really care about," Robbins says.

WHAT TO DO DURING YOUR LUNCH BREAK

Don't let anyone take your lunch break away from you. Sure there will be times when you have to eat hurriedly at your desk because a big project looms or an emergency commands your attention. But what you do during your lunch hour can be just as important as what you do with the rest of your work day, and that time shouldn't be overlooked. Taking a midday break during which you refuel and re-energize can not only make you a better employee, but also a healthier and happier person.

Make a plan. "Don't squander your lunch break because it's 'free time,'" Taylor says. Time is a nonrenewable resource, wherever you are, whatever the time of day. Try your best to plan it out and make the most of it. You should also plan your activities immediately after lunch, Kerr suggests.

Take a real break, getting up from your desk or work space if you can. Breaking from work for 60 seconds to chow down your lunch at your desk doesn't count.

Eat. Don't starve yourself for the sake of being a hard worker, Taylor says. You're only hurting yourself in the long run.

Enjoy your food. It's OK to splurge from time to time- you've earned it—but try to stick to healthy meals as often as possible.

Do what you can't do in the morning or evening. "Be strategic and use your lunch break to accomplish some of those personal errands that can't be handled before or after work, or on the weekends," Taylor says.

Use the time to connect with someone new. "Take some time to get out of the office, grab a sit-down lunch and get to know your co-workers," says Michael "Dr. Woody" Woodward, PhD, an organizational psychologist and author of *The YO U Plan*.

Catch up with old friends occasionally, and use the break to network when you can. Even if you like your job, it never hurts to build relationships over a

good meal. Have a system for dealing with your absence. It will help you relax and avoid obsessively checking your email during lunch.

Engage in activities that will help you re-energize. Take a walk outside, visit the gym or meditate. Get out and do something that will make you feel better about yourself. "A quick dose of sunlight and fresh air is the perfect elixir for the mid-day blues," Dr. Woodward says. Don't get stuck in a routine, avoid all screens (your eyes will thank you later) and don't take too long or too short of a break. You do have a job to get back to after all.

DO THESE THINGS AT THE END OF EVERY WORK DAY

The easiest way for work to intrude on your personal life is to leave things up in the air when you punch out. For your peace of mind and your prospects at work, end your day on a positive note by following these steps.

Evaluate your to-do list. Make sure you are where you need to be on these activities and that you've accomplished as much as you could, says Attridge. If you can quickly get something done before you leave, do it. This will save you time the next morning.

Review your schedule for the next day. Make sure you're aware of any meetings or calls for the following day.

Check in with your boss and colleagues. Depending on how hands on your boss is, you may want to visit with him or her to discuss the status of any projects you're working on, Taylor suggests. You'll also want to get end-of-day updates from co-workers.

Tidy up. Before walking out the door take a few minutes to toss any trash, organize your paper-work and straighten up your desk. You should also clean out your inbox. This will give you a fresh start when you arrive the next morning.

Complete non-peak hour work. “Emails, reports, status memos and thinking projects are best handled when phone calls, texts and other distractions have subsided,” Taylor says. The end of the day is also the time to determine who you need to reach first thing in the morning.

Make a new to-do list. Determine what you must accomplish the next day and have a plan of how you will use your time to manage your priorities, Attridge says. You'll probably update it the following morning, but it doesn't hurt to compile a preliminary list the night before.

Reflect on your best achievement that day—it will put your work into focus and leave you on a high, especially if you write down what that accomplishment was.

Resist last minute, low priority emails and calls, say goodbye to anyone you see on your way out, and most of all, disconnect if your supervisor allows it. It will help you leave stress at the office and give you the space and time to properly recharge away from work. This sounds counterintuitive, but distancing yourself from your work after hours will reinvigorate you once you're back in the office.

UNITASKING: THE SECRET TO BEING PRODUCTIVE AT WORK

Multitasking is necessary and extremely beneficial at times— and you might even be praised by your boss for doing it at work—but the truth is, dividing your attention among multiple things may prevent you from allocating the time and attention necessary to do an excellent job, and it can make you more susceptible to errors. “It also consumes more time and energy than one might think,” Lindsey Pollak, career expert and author of *Getting from College to Career*.

When you have to engage in an important conversation, make a major decision or a complete big project, you'll need to focus exclusively on that one task. This is called “uni tasking,” and many of us don't know how to do it.

Pollak believes it is particularly difficult for young professionals, who have always been bombarded with technology. Undivided focus and energy lead to the best possible solution to any given problem, says Hockett. “When a project reaches a critical phase, or a deadline must be met, where nothing else matters but the task at hand, I want to be surrounded by people who recognize and understand that their complete attention—or unitasking—is of utmost importance.”

So, how do you unitask success- fully?

Teach says concentration is critical. “To successfully uni- task, you need to do the same type of thing; eliminate any outside distractions.”

Schedule time to unitask. You'll likely spend a majority of your day multitasking, but if you know you have an important memo to write or a big decision to make, schedule time on your calendar to devote all of your attention to that one task.

Allocate a specific amount of time. “There’s something scary about having to focus, but if you give yourself a set amount of time, like ten minutes, it might make it less scary for some people,” Pollak says. It's not always feasible to spend hours or an entire day on one task, but if it requires that much time and attention, and is that significant, then you should try. Use browser addons that block social media sites and other distractions, and set a timer on your phone to stay on task if you need help blocking out distractions.

Choose the right time of day to unitask. Pick a time when you'll have the fewest distractions, or work on it over the weekend. “Sometimes you can accomplish a task that might take you the entire workday to do, in an hour on a Sunday,” she says.

Ask your colleagues to give you some time to focus on the task at hand by sending out an email, or even better, verbally informing them of the situation. You shouldn't make a habit of this, but sometimes it's necessary

to get things done. Only tell those who really need to know, like the colleague who sits next to you or the one you're working on a project with.

If your workplace is noisy and distracting, consider finding an alternative work space. If you stay at work, clear your desk.

Disconnect! This one is extremely difficult for most workers, and might not even be possible for some, but if you can, turn off your email, phones, computer, etc., while you're unitasking. If you can't disconnect completely, at least silence your devices and disable notifications.

If you are on an important call or need to clear your head, turn your chair around to face a wall or the door. It's a great way to show colleagues you're busy while focusing on that one task.

Lastly, if you have trouble tackling an important task, even with these tips, mix things up. There's no point in doing the same old when it's not working. The key is being mindful of what makes you productive and aligning your workplace and habits to hit that sweet spot of productivity.

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK WILL LEAD TO SUCCESS

Most employees loathe negative feedback. Being told that you've failed to meet expectations or that you've done something wrong at work can be a serious blow to the ego. But criticism is an inevitable part of life in the office. Don't avoid negative feedback, because it could be the key to your success.

“The truth is, receiving negative feedback is an incredible opportunity to show your capability for learning and growth,” says Rebecca Thor- man, a speaker, blogger and careers writer at Kontrary.com. “An employee who is able to take negative feedback and act on it will likely be more valuable than an employee who never takes risks in the first place.”

If your manager or colleague is sharing feedback, whether negative or positive, it's a sign they care about the growth and trajectory of your career.

Employees tend to forget this in the heat of the moment. “One of the biggest problems I see among employees, especially younger ones, is they take negative feedback as a personal attack,” says Eve Tahmincioglu, a career blogger, director of communications at Families and Work Institute, and author of *From the Sandbox to the Corner Office*.

Tahmincioglu says the key is distancing your emotional self. Next, accept the negative feedback with openness and gratitude, Nicolai adds. “Even if you do not agree, you must keep in mind that feedback is intended to relay information. What you choose to do with it is your decision after the meeting. In the moment, it is advisable to say, ‘thank you’ and ‘I appreciate you taking the time to bring this to my attention.’”

Finally, you'll want to turn this negative feedback into a positive learning opportunity.

Alexander Kjerulf, an international author and speaker on happiness at work, says these steps only apply to constructive, well-meant criticism.

“Unfair and overly negative feedback is also used as a tool by bad managers and workplace bullies to demean and control others,” he says. “Do not put up with this kind of attack. If you do, it will persist.” Own it and hone it. Accept the feedback and make any necessary changes. “Make a list of the action items that were delivered by the boss,” Nicolai says. “Jot down in a column the solution for each negative piece of feedback. This is your planning guide. Plan your work and work your plan.”

Assume good intentions. Don't automatically jump to the conclusion that the person criticizing you is “out to get you,” Kjerulf says. “Also remember that they're criticizing your work, not you as a person. Never take negative feedback about your work as a criticism of you as a person.” Once you're able to do this, it should be much easier to make positive changes. Use negative feedback as a chance to clarify expectations and goals around your position. “Be proactive about understanding your role,” Thorman says. Maybe you didn't completely understand what was

expected of you before. Now you do, and can make improvements accordingly.

Treat negative feedback as an opportunity to bond with your manager, Thorman says. “Their job is to help you develop, while yours is to bring results. This is a prime opportunity to deepen your relationship.” Schedule regular meetings to discuss your progress and goals. Get to know your boss and understand what he or she values most in an employee.

Find a mentor or strengthen your relationships with co-workers. If you're in a situation where you need help or support, this is a great time to build those relationships.

Think of this as a time for self-reflection. Use this opportunity to think about all the ways in which you can improve your behavior and attitude.

Show that you're open to change and capable of growth. Negative feedback is a great opportunity to show your employer that you're mature, cooperative and able to make necessary changes. Ask questions, but try not to question your manager's judgment. Show how willing you are to fix any problems.

Remember that all constructive feedback (even negative feedback) is a sign of interest and a sign that people want to help you do better, Kjerulf says. “It would be far worse for people to notice you doing bad work, and not say a word.” If you can manage to accept negative feedback and recognize it for what it's worth, you'll become a far better employee.

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