

A Matter of Approach

Have you ever spent time considering how people are perceiving you when you approach them for work? It is important that you do. You might just find that you want to reconsider how you are approaching people and the message you are giving them.

People are creatures of condition. As unflattering as it may be, more often than not, an individual will react to a set of circumstances the same way they did the last time they were faced with the same or similar circumstances. Rarely will they wait to hear all the information before assuming that it is the same as last time and come to a judgement. It is not that people are cold or callous but rather it is a survival mechanism of sorts. Take your daily life, if we did not make assumptions about certain things based on a little bit of information even the most ordinary task would take a long time to complete. For example in January, most Canadians, without going outside, without looking at a thermometer or hearing a weather report will automatically put on a coat, hat, boots, scarf and gloves before venturing out. It *could* be warm, sunny tee shirt and shorts weather, but probably not. People just know that if it is January it is probably cold. Now they could look at a thermometer or listen to a weather report but they make the assumption it is unpleasant outside, save themselves a few minutes and dress based upon that assumption. Occasionally they will be wrong, but not often enough to change they way they react to just one piece of information, the fact that it is January.

So what does that have to do with Job Searching. Put yourself in the position of an HR Manager. Among all the other HR duties they have to perform in their busy days, they receive phone calls from job seekers, unsolicited resumes from the unemployed, and unannounced visitors looking for work. So when an individual calls up asking if a company is hiring, it becomes a natural, time saving response to say 'thank you, but we're not hiring right now'. It becomes a condition response. Now you may be the best thing since sliced bread for a company but when mixed in with the thousands of others out there doing the same thing, it is hard to get two minutes to explain why you are different.

So where is the good news? How do you get someone's attention? It starts off by how we see ourselves and probably changing how we see ourselves. Most unemployed people view themselves as just that; unemployed. Unemployed, out of work, in between opportunities. No matter what you call it, they are looking for a job and we know what kind of response from HR people that will get you 99 times out of 100. Now imagine for a moment you were self employed looking to solve a problem that a company had. Would you call them up and say "Hi, I'm looking for a job?" No. You might say something like this: "Hi My name is Greg Laughton and I am doing some research on how companies in the Textile industry are preparing for the changes in Provincial legislation that will take effect June 1st. I have worked in the Textile industry for 14 years and these upcoming ones are going to provide significant challenges for companies, especially around government legislation. Who would be the best person to talk to about how it is going to effect your company?" Now, do you think they will have a pre-canned, conditioned response to that? Probably not. You now have the opportunity to engage

them in a conversation *not* about giving you a job but dealing with a problem that they are going to face. While the ultimate goal is to get a job, the first goal is to start to talk to people that you may want to work for by offering them something they need, in this case, knowledge about changing government legislation (you know about the changing government legislation because of research you have been doing and the trade shows and seminars you have been attending because you read Show me the [Hidden] Market, right?).

If both of the above calls were made, I would wager every time that the second person gets a foot in the door over the first person every time. If you want to get people to listen to you and have a chance to demonstrate what problems you will solve for them, you first must get them away from precondition responses that they are accustomed to giving out. Extend the same line of thinking to seminars, trade shows networking events. Ask yourself what message you are sending out if everyone you meet you tell you are unemployed and ask if they have a job for you? How you see yourself and how you approach companies and people whether it be cold calling, networking or the resume you send out, will have a great impact on how far you get with them. Maybe a simple business card over and a conversation about problems and needs is better.

So ask yourself which is better; looking for work or looking to solve other people's problems (and thereby solving your own)? I am willing to bet, if you sit down and think it through, the latter will win out most times.

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