

What You Don't Learn in School about Job Hunting

By

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Beyond the Interview

In "How to Interview Successfully for a Job," we shared our insight and experience for landing an interview and our best practices for having the best possible interview. While interviewing is a necessary step toward getting your dream job, there's much more to consider. What will make you happy in your next job? What will make the difference between a job you get excited to get up and do every day, versus one that fills you with dread? As we pointed out in our previous article, in many cases we spend more time with our coworkers and at our place of employment than we do with our families. When you have found the right position with the right salary and the right benefits, you will be happier at work and your home life will benefit as well. Jack and Liz are fortunate to have landed exactly where they belong, but it was not without some trial-and-error. We hope that the advice and experiences we share with you here will help you find the job that's the best fit for you.

Is It Always About the Money?

When thinking about your first (or next) job hunt, there are many factors to consider. Pay is important, but if you are going to switch jobs, give some thought to what nonfinancial aspects are important to you. When we discussed interviewing in "How to Interview Successfully for a Job," we compared the interview to a first date. In many ways, the nonfinancial considerations are similar to knowing what you need to be compatible with another person in a relationship. Rather than jumping in and taking the first well-paying job that comes along, we recommend that you consider the following. Do some soul-searching to decide what's meaningful to you, and look for those aspects during your job search. You will be much happier with your choices if you go through this process.

- *Opportunity for Advancement* Can you grow in this new position? Can you be promoted? We encourage you to think strategically about your career in three- and five-year time spans. Where could this job take you in five years? Would a mentor or a coach be available at the company to help you reach your goals?
- *Benefits* Important benefits are vacation, personal time, paid holidays, maternal leave, health care coverage, group disability and life insurance, 401K, ESOP, Health Savings Account, paid parking, and a pension (although pensions are increasingly rare, so look for a good 401(k) plan). Keep in mind that most company benefits are not subject to state and Federal income taxes. Therefore, the after-tax value is significant. For an informative article, read, "What Fringe Benefits are Taxable?" by Stephen Fishman, J.D., at <https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/what-fringe-benefits-taxable.html>
- *Variable Pay* This can be an important component of your compensation. Variable pay is pay for performance, such as commission, and bonuses, such as profit-sharing. If you are high up in the C-suite you may be eligible for stock options. If the company offers pay for performance, be sure to understand how it is computed.
- *Boss Fit* We think this is one of the most important aspects of any job. Take your time here; remember the "courtship" period when you are being recruited will soon disappear once you are on the job. Do some discrete investigating. Talk to those who have left the company and can speak openly and honestly about your (possible future) boss. Use your network to investigate. Jack says, "No one wants to work for a jerk." (For more on bosses read "How to Deal with a Toxic Boss" at <https://tinyurl.com/sgtsswd>.)
- *Company Culture* What is "company culture?" Jack asked an IBM executive who was making a presentation at a seminar that question. Her response was, "Culture is the way we do things around here." That makes a lot of sense, but the statement is deceptively simple. Culture combines the company values, the expectations of the employees, how people treat each other, and so on.

Finding out what the culture is like may be the most difficult part of your job hunt. Your network can be your best source for information when researching a potential employer. If the company has a toxic culture, it's better to learn that before you take the job, rather than later.

Here is an example of a toxic culture after the fact. Everything seemed ideal about this potential job, Jack's job as a marketing manager in a large research center at a Big Ten University. The executive director was a retired Army colonel. Many of the department heads were former military officers. The culture was autocratic and decisions were top down. Fear was the dominant emotion. Jack's boss was a PhD who had little empathy, and a self-promoter who was a terror to work for. She was detested by all her staff. Fortunately, Jack was able to leave after a year and get back to mainstream publishing, a better fit for him. A toxic culture can be hell; if possible avoid being stuck in such a culture. Aim for a trusting, open, and supportive culture.

- *How to Respond to a Job Offer* Rule number one: always get the offer in writing confirming all the specifics. If the company balks, ask politely once more and if the answer is "No" then that is not the job for you.

The job offer letter should include every important detail: starting date, starting salary, next performance review date, location of office, moving allowance (if applicable), moving policy, any variable compensation (bonus, pay for performance), how variable compensation is computed, digital equipment provided, benefits package, and if any administrative support will be provided. Is there a probationary period? The more detail in the job offer letter, the better.

- *Two Caveats:* First, get this letter signed by an executive and co-signed by the human resources representative. Second, don't resign from your current job until you have this letter in hand.

Here is why the job offer letter is important: Time after time, the employment terms for a new job change after a person has accepted a job because of a misunderstanding or outright duplicitous behavior on the part of the employer. To avoid misunderstanding and disappointment, a written job offer letter is mandatory.

Negotiating the Job Offer

The average job seeker has limited leverage in negotiating the terms of a new job. In most instances, the hiring manager has a salary range they can offer you and that is it. As far as salary, we recommend that you have a "ball park" salary figure in mind. Research what others are earning in a similar position by calling upon your network and using online tools such as GlassDoor and salary.com.

You have some leverage when it comes to benefits. For example, Jack has negotiated for three weeks of vacation instead of two weeks, company support of his trade association participation (paid leave and pay for travel to and from), indoor garage parking spot, and an extra generous allowance for relocation expenses. Like the job offer itself, you want to get all of this in writing.

Some workers have significant leverage in negotiating a job offer. For example, a computer systems engineer with a graduate degree and ten years of experience has significant leverage. Likewise, a forensic accountant with CPA and MBA has leverage. But this is not the case for most of us.

Don't be hesitant to negotiate. Hiring managers expect some negotiation during the process. In fact, if you are an ambitious sales person, it may reflect negatively on you if you don't negotiate. Negotiate for all you can get but always be civil about it.

What Are the Risks in Switching Jobs?

Before accepting that new dream job, we urge you to think about the risks of switching jobs, particularly if you have a job you like with good pay and a boss who treats you well. What are the risks of switching jobs?

We think the biggest risk is that something could change boss-wise for you. For example, your boss could get promoted or leave the company and you could wind up with a boss that you may not like as much. Or there could be a corporate reorganization and/or a downsizing because of poor financial performance. In times of great economic upheaval, it's often the most recently hired people who are let go first.

Take your time; be diligent in your research of the financial stability of a potential employer. Use your trusted network contacts if you are considering working for a publically traded company, and get a copy of the company's 10K. For a nonprofit, you can usually get a copy of the IRS 990, which is the nonprofit's tax return. Talk to salespeople who sell products and services to that company. Talk to contract employees. Find out how reliable the company is in paying its bills and how long they stretch out their payables.

Sometimes you might not realize that the company's culture is less than desirable. For example, a company culture could be terrible and you missed that despite your best efforts during the interview process. Jack remembers when he switched jobs relocating from Boston to Milwaukee. His first week at his new company riding up the elevator, one of Jack's colleagues said, "Are you the new guy?" Then someone else said, "Why would anyone want to work here?" (Without going into the detail, there were significant changes about eight months later, Jack got a big promotion, a 28 percent pay raise, and things worked out fine for him.)

When Liz first moved from Phoenix to San Diego, she spent six months at a company that she knew going in was not a great fit. Her supervisor and the company owner had shouting matches every day, which was uncomfortable for the staff. Factions of the office were pitted against each other when there were problems. The company lore was full of stories about the awful ways in which past employees were fired (including one person being fired on his birthday). While the work she did was exciting to her, it was a terrible environment and she moved on when the newsletter she was hired to create was canceled.

There is one more surprise you can experience on a new job: You may find that your job description changed, generally with additional responsibilities and work. This is not necessarily a bad thing as you can broaden your work experience portfolio and maybe the new responsibility includes an increase in pay and a promotion. But don't always count on it. In such cases, make the best of the situation, embrace your new responsibilities, and do a great job. During your performance review, you can bring up the fact that you were hired to do <<insert scope of your job based on your job offer letter>> but when you started you quickly learned that you were also responsible for <<insert additional responsibilities>>. Point to your successes and diligence in doing the additional tasks and request that you be compensated accordingly.

Fear of Rejection

"Oh, I will never get this job." This is what one of Jack's mentees said to him when he was coaching her to prepare for an interview for her dream job. Jack's reaction was, "Whoa, why do you say that?" Jack then reviewed her resume, which made her more than qualified for this position. Plus the company knew her as she had done extensive freelance work for them and they liked her. Jack gave a pep talk to his mentee. Jack is happy to say that six years later his mentee has been successful in her job, regularly receives positive reviews and bonuses, and is well-liked and respected by executives and her colleagues.

We all have a fear of rejection in our endeavors. A fear of the unknown triggers a fear of rejection. "We typically have a history with whatever it is we are doing.... For example, the current role you're in, you're accustomed to the company policies, the systems you work on, the culture and you've built relationships with other team members." (Marsha Barnes, "Fear of Rejection Is Costing You Money," *New York Times*, April 2, 2020.)

We recommend creative visualization as a technique to battle the rejection syndrome. Creative visualization is envisioning what you want to accomplish. For example, before your interview,

visualize yourself having a successful interview and a job offer with the salary you want with the extra perks you requested. Creative visualization is an effective way to purge the defeatist pessimism that plagues many of us. We recommend the article by psychiatrist Abigail Brenner, M.D., “The *Benefits of Creative Visualization: How Practice (in your mind) Makes Perfect*,” *Psychology Today*, June 25, 2016. <https://tinyurl.com/y8jkexyv>.

Networking Is Indispensable

We are big proponents of networking; in fact, we consider networking to be absolutely essential for anyone in business or in the professional world. When you are looking for a job, your network contacts will be one of your most valuable assets.

Think about networking in the broadest possible terms. Your network may consist of people you’ve known for years, have helped out in the past, and are always willing to do a favor for you. On the other end of the spectrum, your network may be people you’ve just met or run into from time to time but don’t know very well...yet. Anyone can help you in your job search, so don’t limit your network.

Early in her career, Liz was job hunting and received the advice to “tell everyone you meet that you’re looking for a job.” That day, she ran into a neighbor who she’d said hello to in the past, but didn’t know well. Figuring that she had nothing to lose, she told this neighbor that she was job hunting. He asked what she wanted to do. She said that she was a writer and editor. As it turned out, this neighbor was very good friends with someone in the human resources department of the city’s newspaper. She had an interview at the paper that week, thanks to this conversation. While she ended up finding a job elsewhere, it was a good lesson and we hope it helps you in your job hunt.

For more about networking, see the three McHugh/Novak papers:
http://johnbmchugh.com/free_pub_guides.htm

LinkedIn® as a Job Search Platform

In our paper, “How to Interview Successfully for a Job,” we offer a number of tips for cleaning up your social media. We urge you to follow our advice, particularly if you are a recent college graduate about to enter the world of work. Once you have cleaned up your social media, you can concentrate on the one social media platform that has become a must for anyone wanting to succeed as a business professional; namely, LinkedIn®. LinkedIn has evolved into the number one go-to human resources job network and recruiting tool.

What about your LinkedIn profile? First, use a professional head shot of you conservatively dressed. Please — nothing cute, no baby pictures of you or of your dog — just a headshot showing you as a professional.

We recommend that your LinkedIn copy be short, crisp, and error free. Brevity will keep decision-makers reading your profile. Many social media experts advise that you write your “About” section in the first person. Once you have your resume up-to-date you can use that as the basis for your profile. State the facts, such as:

- Your job title, responsibilities, dates of employment
- Educational background (do not include graduation dates); GPA is appropriate for recent college graduates
- Any internships, certificates, and licenses

- Any awards or publications relevant to your industry

In your title, list any graduate degree you might have, such as MBA, or certificates such as CPA or PE. For example, Liz's profile page lists her as "Liz Novak, MBA, CAE."

Review your LinkedIn profile periodically to make sure it's up-to-date. Get in the habit of updating it every time you receive an accolade or learn a new skill set. If your company policy permits, ask your connections to write recommendations for your profile. In turn, offer to write a recommendation for them as well.

Quinteen Fortrell in a *Wall Street Journal* article January 31, 2015, advises: "Using key words ('presidents club' or 'project manager') instead of buzz words ('marketing guru' or 'sales ninja') and making sure your job title is detailed ('mutual funds analyst' instead of 'financial analyst'...." If you are in sales or marketing, avoid using hackneyed words such as "rain maker." When Jack works as an executive recruiter, he notes, "When I see fluff words, such as 'marketing guru,' it is a red flag. Clichéd words add nothing to what you offer an employer."

How About Internships?

Internships can play an important part in helping you launch your career. If possible, try to get one or more internships while you're still in school. If you aren't entirely sure what you want to do with your life, become an intern at the places that pique your interest. It's a low-risk way for you to try the job on for size. If you like it, then great, you are that much closer to landing your dream job. If you don't like it, be thankful that you figured this out now before spending years and thousands of dollars pursuing a degree in the field, and go somewhere else for your next internship. This is a great time to learn what you like and don't like in a job and with corporate culture. For example, do you prefer large companies or a small office? Do you need to be out, meeting with people face to face, or do you prefer to work at a desk with minimal interruption?

We like internships because the experience gives those starting out an immersion in the world of work. Interns learn valuable skills such as following instructions, working in teams, problem-solving, developing self-confidence, dealing with difficult people and a myriad of other lessons that you don't get from school. You'll also learn important work habits such as punctuality, listening to others, business etiquette, and more.

A drawback to internships is that often they are unpaid. However, there is incredible opportunity out there, so if you absolutely need a paid internship, chances are you'll be able to find one. If your dream internship isn't paid, you can look at it as an investment in your future.

The other downside is that an internship can be strictly grunt work, such as photocopying, making appointments, and other "gofer" work. How can you avoid this and land an internship that will teach you more about your chosen profession? Ask questions, such as:

- Can you give me a job description?
- Who will I be working for and doing what?
- What skills will I acquire and what will I learn?
- Will I have a mentor?
- Will you give me a reference after I complete my internship?
- Will I have a chance for a full-time, paid position with the organization?

Fortunately, many companies are getting away from interns-as-gofers and provide rich, valuable internship programs. Best practices for internships include having a kick-off meeting so you can meet the other interns that start when you do, learn about the corporate culture, meet the executives, get a tour of the facilities, and see a schedule of what you'll be doing during your internship. In many cases, you might be given a very cool assignment and at some point during your internship, you may have the opportunity to present your work to the company's C-Suite. Even if you don't want to work for that company, this is valuable experience and you are making contacts that can help you with your job search.

The Best Career Advice We've Ever Received

To help out job seekers, we're sharing the best career advice we've ever received. We hope this gives you some food for thought:

Your first job should be at a company EVERYONE has heard of, so you don't have to explain what it is during future job interviews. It will probably not be your dream job – it's rare to land those right out of the gate (at the start of your career) – but having a big company name on your resume will open doors for you later on. Liz Novak's first job out of college was at CBS. She's never had to explain what CBS is all about. Her first publishing job was at Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, a tech publishing giant at the time. Having experience at both companies definitely opened doors for her later in her career.

After college, Jack McHugh worked for a major insurance company in Chicago's Loop as a financial analyst in the company's tax sheltered annuity department. The people were fine but he hated the work. So one day he quit with no immediate job prospects. His father gave him this advice: "The most important thing about working is to find work that you enjoy." Shortly thereafter he started his publishing career and over the years Jack has enjoyed the work on a daily basis. (If you have any special career advice please share it with Jack, see contact information at the end of this paper.)

What Is Important in Work?

"Important work" is any job you find satisfying. Find something you love to do so much that you'd do it for free, but be so good at it that people are willing to pay you for it. This is a different way of saying, "do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life." It can take some trial-and-error before you find that ideal profession, but give it some time and be honest with yourself. If you're in a job you don't love, try to learn as much as possible while you are there so you can add to your skill set. You never know when these additional skills and experience will make the difference in finding your dream job.

McHugh Career Management Advice For information call Jack McHugh. See contact information below.

Also of Interest at http://johnbmchugh.com/free_pub_guides.htm

- A-23, *Earning a CAE: One Candidate's Experience, An Interview with Liz Novak, MBA, CAE*, 2018, 3 pages
- PM-12, *Job Searching in Association Publishing vs. Commercial Publishing: Key Differences and Interviewing Tips*, 2015, 4 pages

- PM-54, *For Job Seekers: Eight Interview Tips and Four Questions to Ask*, 2014, 1 page
- PM-72, *Get Set for Success: Twelve Thoughts When Starting a New Job*, 2018, 3 pages
- PM-74, *The Many Benefits of Mentorship*, 2020, Co-author Liz Novak, 4 pages
- PM-75, *Beyond the Basics: Many Facets of Mentorship*, 2020, Co-author Liz Novak, 4 pages
- PM-78, *How to Deal with a Toxic Boss*, 2020, 5 pages

About the Authors

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Liz Novak has held various roles with the International Association of Plastics Distribution (IAPD) since joining the organization in 2011. She is currently the Senior Director of Advocacy and Editor-In-Chief. She is responsible for IAPD's government relations initiatives and political action committee, the editorial content for all of IAPD's publications and assists her CEO with responsibilities related to IAPD's Board of Directors and Executive Committee. During her tenure at IAPD, she also served as Marketing Director for seven years, before promoting her protégé to the role. Liz holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Loyola University of Chicago and an MBA from the Pennsylvania State University Smeal College of Business. She earned her CAE in 2018. Contact: www.linkedin.com/in/lnovak.

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John B. "Jack" McHugh is a 40-year veteran of the publishing business. Jack has worked as an executive for Houghton Mifflin, Wadsworth, and Saint Mary's Press. Jack is also an experienced association publishing executive. For seven years, he was Publisher and Director of Programs at the American Society for Quality and for a two-year period, he served as the Interim Publisher at the Project Management Institute. He is a member of the ASAE Advisory Board for Publishing, Communications, and Media Issues and Practices.

Jack's specialties include association/nonprofit publishing, book publishing, career management, executive recruiting, journal publishing, rights and permissions, new ventures, organizational design, and social media strategy and policy. Mc Hugh is also the manager of the LinkedIn™ group, **Association** and **Nonprofit Publishing**.

McHugh and Liz Novak, of IAPD, have written a series of papers on **Networking Techniques**.

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