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The 12 psychological stumbling blocks of looking for a job

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Author: Toni Bowers

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What a lot of career advice doesn't address are the psychological aspects of looking for a job. You get all kinds of tips for writing the best resume, crafting the perfect cover letter, and networking with other professionals. But even with the best practical advice out there, looking for a job is tremendously taxing psychologically.

That's why I thought a book, *Winning Job Interviews*, written by Dr. Paul Powers was interesting. Powers, a "management psychologist" writes and conducts seminars to help people find and keep jobs they love. For this blog, Dr. Powers shares an excerpt from his book. The topic is *The Deadly Dozen: Roadblocks of Job Hunting*:

From more than 20 years of working in different areas of the career field, I have identified a dozen major psychological roadblocks that can sidetrack, confuse, and discourage even the most dedicated job hunter. They are among the strongest reasons that many people stay in dead-end jobs or try to avoid the job-hunting process at all costs — to the detriment of their careers and the overall quality of their lives.

Roadblock #1: Lack of a crisp, clear, realistic goal

The first step in any successful job search is to develop a clear, crisp, realistic goal. If you can't describe what job you are looking for in one or two sentences, then you are not ready to be out there in the job market asking for interviews.

Roadblock #2: No control over the timing of the job hunt

If you are resentful that you have to job hunt at a time not of your own choosing, you must address this issue and get it out of the

way. Seek your employee assistance program, outplacement consultant, or career or unemployment counselor for advice. Locate and join a job-search networking/support group.

Roadblock #3: Nobody likes being a rookie

One of the unrealistic expectations of job hunting is that most people feel they must excel in a process at which they are not very good, and if they don't succeed fairly quickly, they believe their lives will be screwed up. If you feel this way, you need some realistic data from the job-hunting world. Through your network contacts, unemployment office, or outplacement counselor, find a couple of other job hunters who are further along in their job hunt than you are in yours. Ask how they got up to speed with their job search. Be sure to pick positive-thinking, motivated people to help you overcome this common roadblock.

Roadblock #4: It's all about rejection

How many of us really thrive on rejection? I don't — do you? The job-hunting process is nothing but a series of rejections with an occasional piece of good news thrown in just to keep you from sticking your head in the oven. Getting rejected doesn't mean you're doing it wrong; it means you're doing it right! In fact, I tell job hunters that if they aren't getting rejected a lot, then either they aren't job hunting hard enough or they aren't searching for a job that represents a step up for them.

Roadblock #5: It's unpredictable

The job-hunting process is totally unpredictable except for one thing: If you work hard at it, you will eventually get a job. And this one certainty is something that you will have to take from me on faith. And, although you may believe this intellectually, there will be discouraging days during your job hunt when it will feel as if you'll never get a job.

Roadblock #6: It lacks structure

The job hunt, for the unemployed person especially, does not provide any kind of structure. The amount of time you spend on any particular job-hunting technique is up to you. The sequence in which you tackle tasks is up to you. The amount of energy and drive you put into your search is up to you. The time of day you start and the time of day you stop working is up to you. Who you will see and who you will not see is up to you. You are now running a completely independent operation.

Roadblock #7: It requires asking for help

Both men and women stumble over this roadblock, though I have observed a much higher percentage of men struggling with this one. Whatever the reason, it is counterproductive to your job-hunting success, and it will make the process both longer and more difficult. This is not a weakness; it is part and parcel of the job-hunting game. Whenever you are tempted to tough it out alone, remember; humility means putting your pride in your pocket. And by doing that, I guarantee, a paycheck will soon follow.

Roadblock #8: It requires blowing one's own horn

Many people (and here I find a much higher percentage are women) have a hard time selling themselves. Many of us were taught that it is not polite or seemly to talk about ourselves, all the wonderful things we have accomplished or the kudos we've received, or all the insightful thoughts we have or the many terrific personal characteristics we have developed.

To overcome this hesitancy to sell yourself, you will need practice, coaching, and feedback. No prospective employer looks at the hiring process as a detective job or a hidden treasure hunt. They will learn only as much about you as you are willing to share. The more data you put on the table about yourself, as it relates to this employment opportunity, the better chance you stand of getting the job offer you want. It's that simple.

Roadblock #9: It's lonely and isolating

If you are looking for a job while unemployed, there are a number of ways to connect with other job hunters who can keep you from becoming lonely and isolated. If you have outplacement assistance, be sure to avail yourself of the group meetings and networking forums the outplacement firm provides. Most state unemployment or employment and training offices offer networking support groups. Many community and church groups now either sponsor job-search networking groups or let such groups use their facilities.

If you are looking for a job while employed and don't want to join a public networking group, you will have to construct one of your own. By talking with your associates at work, your friends, family, and a large range of contacts, you can probably identify four to six people who are looking for a new job at any one time. Try to organize regular group meetings. Or, if that is impossible, try discussing your job search with each one individually and encourage them to discuss their job search with you.

Roadblock #10: Self-doubt, defensiveness, and the myth of the perfect job candidate

Every human being has a weak spot. It may be real or imagined; it may be in your education, your work history, your appearance,

your skills, or your background. Maybe you are aware of your weak spot, and maybe you aren't.

A supportive friend or colleague can help you with this. But, whatever you do, you will need to have as clear and objective a picture of who you are and what it is that you have to offer a hiring organization as possible. If you do not do this, you will have planted a booby trap for yourself that will go off when you least want it to during your job search.

Roadblock #11: Your baggage

What I call your baggage is an assortment of the unresolved, negative emotions you have collected during your life. They can originate from any area of your life: your family, your personal life, your education and training, or your work. They may have been communicated to you by parents, teachers, friends, enemies, spouses, bosses, peers, idiots, or geniuses.

Roadblock #12: The psychology of entitlement

No matter what type of superior background you feel you have, no matter what credentials you've earned, no matter what prestigious educational pedigree you hold, no matter how wonderful some people say you are, no one is going to come knocking on your door with a basketful of wonderful and exciting career opportunities just because you feel that you are entitled to them. The psychology of entitlement — whether in your career, your family, or your community — is a roadblock to your success and satisfaction in any area of your life.

Blogging is one way to build your profile

As I've mentioned before, blogging about technology can help raise your profile in the eyes of potential employers. In fact, you may be able to blog for TechRepublic. If you're an IT pro who would like to try your hand at writing about network administration or any other area of IT, send me an email at toni.bowers@techrepublic.com.

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Toni Bowers is the Head Blogs Editor of TechRepublic. She has been in the publishing industry for 20 years, with concentration in IT-related topics. She has edited newsletters, books, and web sites pertaining to software, IT career, and IT management issues.

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