

Free e-book Edition

Job Search Secrets

What you need to know about
job hunting in today's job market

By Charles van Heerden




WorkLifeGroup
www.worklifegroup.com

Introduction

How to Approach Job Search

Job search does not have to be a difficult experience. Fundamentally, it is all about how we approach it. It can be a rewarding experience, landing us that great next job, or it can be a protracted and demotivating process with a big file of regret emails in your mailbox.

This guide is intended to short-circuit the arduous process of job hunting. I have lived in Africa and participated in hunts (to photograph animals), and I can honestly tell you that it can be very frustrating following a leopard for hours only to see it disappear in the bush.

I like to use analogies, as I believe they help to create a picture in your mind of what I am suggesting as the best and fastest way for you to get your next role. As we are not talking face-to-face, I will do my best to get straight to the point.

Your starting point

If you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there. (Lewis Carroll – Alice's Adventures in Wonderland).

As I don't know your background, skills or expectations, it is really up to you to take as much as you can out from this guide. You may just be starting your search, being frustrated in your current job, or on the other hand, you could be desperate to find your next role, having tried everything. It doesn't really matter, as you need to follow all these steps to get to your destination.

Good luck with your journey.

Index **Page**

How to approach a job search	2
Your starting point	2
Hunting the leopard	4
The landscape for jobs	5
Looking for a job is a full-time job	5
Three reasons why the landscape is different now	5
Having a roadmap	6
Seven steps to finding your next job	
Step 1. Know your destination	7
Step 2. Know who you are	9
Step 3. Prepare for your trip	11
Step 4. Consider alternative roles	13
Step 5. Talk to the locals	15
Step 6. Track your progress	17
Step 7. Enjoy your trip	19
What's Next?	21
About the Author	21

Hunting the leopard

Most people on a wildlife safari strive to take pictures of the Big Five (elephant, rhino, lion, buffalo, and leopard). Finding these five animals on an African safari is no mean feat.



Acknowledgement: bigfivechallenge.co.uk

Step 1: Using a similar process as for job search, my destination was a perfect picture of a leopard, sitting in a tree.

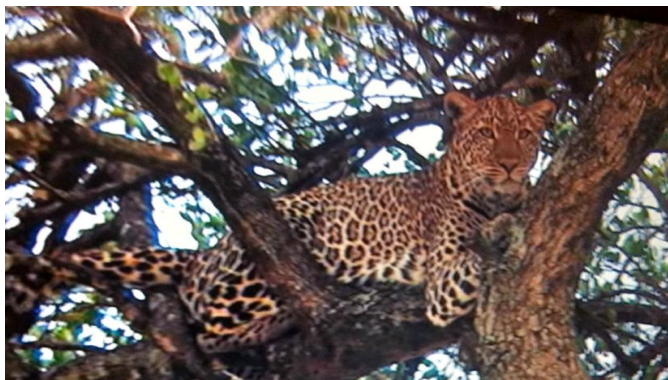
Step 2: It was important that I know more about the habits of a leopard. Now a leopard is very cunning, adaptable and stealthy. It is also nocturnal and spends most of the day resting in trees.

Step 3: Before I could proceed with my trip, I had to ensure that I had the right camera, with a good lens, as I was not sure how close I could get to the leopard.

Step 4: Though my heart was set on getting a leopard picture, I knew that there were four other animals as part of the big five. An African lion was my alternative, as the king of the jungle, though much easier to locate and photograph.

Step 5: As I arrived at the game park, I talked not only to the friendly rangers, but also to other guests to find out if they had seen any leopards. It quickly became clear that it was not going to be easy as I thought.

Step 6: After a first unsuccessful day, I had to review my progress and change my approach. Instead of going on a bush drive, I decided to go out with a tracker and a game ranger, determined to find a leopard.



Step 7: It was a joyous moment late in the afternoon just before twilight when we saw the leopard resting in the big tree. All my planning and preparation paid off as I took my perfect picture. Finally, I could look back on my trip, satisfied and just savouring the special moment.

The landscape for jobs

The evidence from applicants and recruiters is overwhelming; we are in an extremely difficult job market.

It is much harder now than in the good times to find that 'great job'. The rules of supply and demand can't be ignored; there are fewer jobs and more job seekers. You need new solutions in the current job landscape.

Looking for a job is a full-time job

Looking for your next job is full time work, requiring just as much effort as paid employment. You need to apply discipline, time, and the right strategy to find a great job in this difficult job market.

Ever heard of working smarter, not harder?

Three reasons why the landscape is different now

The key factors that will impact on your job search process:

1. Many companies have implemented a recruitment freeze. Although there are vacancies, these roles will only be available in a few months' time.
2. Particularly when there is an oversupply of applicants, you need to differentiate yourself from the rest of the pack. In some ways, with the right help, it is actually easier to do this when there is a bigger pack.
3. There will always be jobs, but it is all about finding the right job for you, to improve on your last job.

Having a roadmap

The GPS systems we have today help us avoid the frustration of being lost. You also need a map when searching for that elusive next-job in today's difficult job market. The right map will help you navigate the obstacles and pathways that you meet along the way.

Here are 7 steps to help you find your ideal role in a difficult job market:

Step 1. Know your destination.

Step 2. Know who you are.

Step 3. Prepare for your trip.

Step 4. Consider alternative roles.

Step 5. Talk to the locals.

Step 6. Track your progress.

Step 7. Enjoy your trip.

Step 1. Know your destination

You need a clear picture of your ideal next role.

Defining your next role

There is an opportunity to change your next role by stepping up into a more senior role, or perhaps to change to a “hot” industry or to work for a leading company.

Most applicants attempt to cover the market too widely, using a wide lens telescopic approach, rather than the highly targeted approach of a professional photographer, capturing a close-up shot in perfect focus.



Acknowledgement: www.HP.com

Why a close-up?

Close-ups are used in movies to show a character's emotions and to distinguish the main characters. Similarly, it is important to clearly differentiate your ideal role from all the other potential roles you may consider.

The better understanding you have of your ideal role, the easier it will be to plan your search campaign.

How (not) to describe your ideal role

Recently a job board site asked active job seekers the hard question: “What’s your ideal role in an organization?”

By far the majority of responses (more than 8,000) were general and vague. Answers ranged from “administrator” to “be a positive team player” to “jack of all trades” to “middle management”. Based on these responses, it is clear that many job seekers are not sure of their next role, or how to get there.

Defining your ideal role – 5 things to do

1. An effective way of defining your ideal role is to start with your current role. Write down the key elements of your role - position title, industry, size of the business, and key responsibilities.
2. List all of the aspects that you really like and what you would also want in your next role.
3. Think about any aspects of your role that you don’t like.
4. Look at recent job ads that attracted your attention and write down the key words that captivated your interest.
5. Lastly, write a clear statement of your ideal role, keeping in mind this is the role you are targeting, which will affect your job search strategy.

Secret tip: Identify your ideal role, then calibrate your focus and define your realistic role, which would meet most of your criteria.

Think about a role that you would accept as a last resort, which is your back-up role.

This will also help you to review and analyse any job offers.

TOOLKIT

[Career Development Tools](#) (Ctrl + Click to follow this link)

A powerful toolkit has been developed to help you to determine your ‘*Ideal Role*’. You are guided through the steps of bringing your ‘*Career choices*’ into focus.

Then use the ‘*CV Manager*’ to build a tailored CV for each role!

Step 2. Know who you are

Understand your personal strengths and what you bring to your next employer.

Why focus on strengths?

Far too many candidates attempt to improve their weaknesses, also known as areas for improvement.

Each and every one of us has a unique set of strengths, which is what makes us stand out from other candidates.

By focusing on our strengths, we can further develop and improve certain abilities and skills.



Acknowledgement: www.essentialtennis.com

How not to describe your strengths

Most candidates I have interviewed would tell me that they are good communicators. It is interesting that when they are asked why they are good communicators, they often find it difficult to provide clear examples of their specific strengths.

Discover your strengths - 3 things to do

1. Think about what you are good at, and what you enjoy doing. Make a long list of potential strengths.
2. The next step is to narrow these down to between three and five. It is important to be as specific as possible.
3. Validate your strengths by using clear examples of how you have developed each strength.

Asking for feedback

Other people in our lives, such as friends, colleagues, and family often see us in situations where our strengths will stand out.

When you ask for feedback, you can use the blank sheet approach and ask them to indicate their perception of your strengths, as well as their reasons. This is useful especially when they know you very well.

For others, you may list your identified strengths and ask to rate them from highest to lowest. Again it is useful to ask for their reasons.

Feedback is important, but keep in mind that their feedback is always situational, and that ultimately you are the best person to assess your own strengths.

Leveraging your strengths

It is not enough just to identify your strengths, you also have to maximise your strengths. Rather than spending a lot of effort on reinventing yourself, you can optimise your job search by improving your strengths. It is important that you can clearly demonstrate to your potential employer how your strengths have contributed to your achievements.

Secret tip: Identify which strengths you want to further develop.

Clearly articulate how and what you are planning to further develop your strengths.

When you are asked to refer to any areas for development, use this to demonstrate how you plan to deliver more value in your ideal role.

TOOLKIT

[Career Development Tools](#) (Ctrl + Click to follow this link)

The Career Development Toolkit includes '[Know Yourself](#)' to help you to identify your key strengths, skills, knowledge and competencies.

Use the '[STAR Achievements](#)' to show how you have applied your strengths.

Step 3. Prepare for your trip

Ensure your CV clearly highlights your achievements, your experience, and your skills.

What is the purpose of a CV?

In previous years, companies were using application forms which applicants had to complete. Some job boards, as a way of screening applicants, are still using this format. It is likely that this method will be refined as companies are being overwhelmed by applications.

The purpose of a CV is for a prospective employer to gain an insight into your achievements, experience and skills. It covers a key part of the recruitment process, which is about what you have done, as past experience is a good indicator of future performance.

Your selling tool

Your CV is your key to being invited for an interview. It needs to show at first glance that you are a good fit for the role. In these difficult times, you need to clearly demonstrate the value that you will bring to your new employer.

Developing an effective CV

1. An effective CV is a true reflection of your experience and skills. The best CV writer is you. Get feedback from others but retain ownership of your personal brand.
2. Make a good impression at first glance. The first page is vital and should encourage the recruiter to read the rest. You only have 20 seconds to create a positive impression.
3. The content must fit the role. Ensure the achievements are aligned with the requirements of the advertised role.

What (not) to include in your CV

More than 80% of people believe lying on CV's is commonplace. Recent research would indicate that 30% of all CV's contain at least one significant lie. It can seriously harm your chances if you are caught out "tweaking" your CV. It is better to leave irrelevant information out.

Experienced recruiters will check your CV for the following:

- Enhancing position titles
- Adding educational qualifications
- Expanding employment dates
- Embellishing achievements
- Exaggerating skills



Can you get away with it?

Recently I was involved in an interview panel. During the interview, the preferred candidate was impressive and close to being offered the position. On his CV he had indicated completion of an MBA. A question was asked on his qualifications and it emerged he had enrolled but had never finished his first year. Though the qualification was not critical for the role, it created a serious credibility issue and he was not appointed.

Ensure your CV does not create any question marks in the mind of the hirer, as any perceived issue can negatively impact your chances for an interview.

Secret tip: Review your CV from the recruiter's perspective.

Keep in mind that recruiters use a screening process to select candidates for an interview, but that the majority of CV's are screened out.

Ensure you stand out against other applicants, by analysing the job ad and including key words in your CV.

Ensure that your CV addresses all the "essential" competencies and requirements sought.

TOOLKIT

[Career Development Tools](#) (Ctrl + Click to follow this link)

The '[CV Manager](#)' helps you create tailored CVs to stand out. Manage your '[CV Library](#)', '[Cover Letters](#)', '[Documents](#)', '[Job Links](#)' and more, to ensure you put your best foot forward for every application.

Step 4. Consider alternative role

There is often more than one road to your destination.

Getting a roadmap

Defining your ideal role involves a process of clearly identifying the industries, companies and roles that you want to explore as part of your review process.

This process is no different from planning a road trip, deciding which sights you want to explore, where you will stop for a break, which roads you will take.

Taking the motorway

As with roads in a city, it can be easy to get stuck in traffic, with lots of traffic lights and detours. Applying for a role is often no different, as your application may get stuck together with those of a lot of other applicants. It is not unheard of for a recruiter to receive in excess of 100 applications per role.



To ensure that traffic can move quickly from one part of the city to another, a bypass is often built. But in order to use this motorway, it is important to know where to get on and off as you get to your destination. By knowing your destination and who you are, you are well prepared for your trip.

Thinking about alternatives

There are many stops and your journey may be slow as you go from one interview to another with recruitment consultants. Timing is everything and you may find that certain roles are highly contested, or that certain industries may offer more opportunities. In difficult times, such as a recession, there may be more roles in construction or in public service, due to investment by governments to enhance employment opportunities and to boost the economy.

Alternative roles

The best way of defining alternative roles is to identify at least the following:

- Position Title
- Industry
- Size of Companies
- Scope of Role

This is an important but very different process from the Ideal, Realistic and Fall-back roles we covered in Step 1.

Position Title - Often we get caught up in titles. A job ad title is indicative only and may not reflect the true title. Some titles may be quite confusing due to company specific terminology. A role as head of marketing at a small company is not the same as marketing manager with a well-known brand.

Industry - It may be that at this stage it could be opportune to return to a previous industry you worked in many years ago. In one of my roles I worked in the dairy industry more than 15 years ago, but it was the point of difference with other candidates on the short-list.

Size of Companies – The natural tendency is for candidates to target the big companies, thus creating the risk of getting stuck on the busy road. There is a strong international trend for MBA's to join smaller companies, which offer candidates more opportunity for understanding the whole business.

Scope of the role – Review your previous responsibilities and identify other functions that are adjacent to your core responsibilities. By combining certain functions, or by focusing on a specialist role, you can increase your options.

Secret tip: Identify an alternative role and apply the same steps to this role, but do not get it mixed up with your other role.

It is better to develop a separate strategy and talk to different recruiters and network contacts.

By crossing lines on a busy road, you run the risk of an accident.

TOOLKIT

[Career Development Tools](#) (Ctrl + Click to follow this link)

Use the flexible WorkLife tools to tailor a CV for your alternative role. You can develop and manage your targeted CV for each campaign. '[Career Choices](#)' helps you develop '[Career Plans](#)' for your alternative roles.

Step 5. Talk to the locals

You'll miss some great roles unless you network with the right people.

The hidden job market

Close to 80% of vacant roles are never advertised. Most companies have a policy of promoting from within. This means that vacancies are advertised internally. By connecting with contacts within that company, you have the best opportunity to introduce yourself around a specific role.

Also, companies find it expensive to use recruiters for all vacancies, which means corporate recruiters often prefer to consider good candidates who approach them directly.

Developing a network list

The best starting point is to meet with your existing contacts, which may include previous colleagues, friends, suppliers, customers. Cluster these contacts together on a spreadsheet or some sort of contact management system. Keep track of each contact you meet so you can follow up with them.

Getting Introduced

Though you can use email and the phone to introduce yourself to new contacts, by far the most effective method is to be introduced by someone. The gold standard is if this is done in person, either at a function, or over a coffee.

Another effective way is to ask your referral contact if you can use their name in a phone call or email, which opens the door much wider than a cold call.

The purpose of networking

Every network meeting should have a clear purpose. In every meeting you are selling yourself, so it is important that your contact has a clear picture of your ideal role. By discussing a specific industry or company, you should always strive to get at least one, but ideally two or three other contacts or leads, which will help you to meet a target number of contacts.

Analysing your contacts

As you progress through your search, you will find that certain contacts are more effective. The following rating system will help you to assess the quality of your interactions:

- Face-to-face = 5 points
- Phone = 3 points
- Email = 1 point

This approach will assist you to analyse and assess the quality of your networking. It may often take two or three interactions with a contact. There is no real relationship after a one-night stand. This will also assist you in maintaining a momentum by using a “multiple wave” approach.

Pay it forward

During your job search you may meet other candidates who are also looking for new job opportunities. This is an opportunity for you to repay the favour of others who were generous with their time in meeting with you. Take the time to meet with others and to exchange contacts with them. There is another benefit in meeting with other job seekers, as the process often creates camaraderie by sharing experiences.

Secret tip: Always stay in touch with your existing contacts and keep them posted on your interactions with their referrals. Use different contact methods such as email, phone and follow-up meetings. Often they will refer you to new contacts or can advise you on certain companies or industries.

TOOLKIT

[Career Development Tools](#) (Ctrl + Click to follow this link)

Tailor your communications and develop networking conversation strategies. The '[STAR Achievement](#)' tool helps you to inject your achievements into career conversations and interviews.

Step 6. Track your progress

It's important to stop from time to time to check whether you are still travelling in the right direction.

How are you travelling?

It's important to stop from time to time to check whether you are still travelling in the right direction.

Recruiters often meet up to ten applicants per day, so it is very easy for you to disappear off the radar screen.

A simple formula

A powerful but simple formula for checking your progress is to apply the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Activity} \times \text{Consistency} \times \text{Destination}}{\text{Excellence}} = \text{Success}$$



Let's review each of these key drivers for job search success.

Activity

A key part of any job search is activity. It is no different to running a marathon. You need to ensure you are an active participant in the process. This includes the usual activities such as job applications, company research, network meetings, and interviews. Set yourself some targets. Making phone calls, networking and meetings are all an essential part of the process. Tracking your activity on a weekly basis is important, to ensure you have sufficient and regular activity. It is not just about activity, but without solid activity it is difficult to be successful.

Excellence

To achieve the best results, your activity needs to be consistent and part of a process that enhances your reputation. Every step of the process needs to be of high quality. Every cover letter should be customized; every CV calibrated for a specific role; preparation for each interview or network meeting.

Your success is determined by having excellent and consistent activity. To complete your marathon, you need to ensure you don't become dehydrated, by stopping at water points. However, there is one last and important driver.

Consistency

To maintain momentum, it is important to ensure a consistency during your job search. To run a marathon too fast in the beginning may be fatal and result in a poor finish. Pacing yourself is important, which means you need to evaluate your progress and focus your effort in each of the key areas. Spending too much time on research may not yield the best results, as you could meet with network contacts sharing company information; and thereby build your profile at the same time. This applies to resisting the temptation to apply for any and all jobs; to ensure a balanced approach to your search.

Destination

To achieve the best results, your activity needs to be consistent, and needs to be targeted to reach your destination. Your job search needs to be with the right recruiters, for the right roles, with the right companies, within the right industry. We covered this in step one – Knowing your destination. It is no good to make excellent progress only to end up in the wrong destination. Taking the first job offer may quickly end your search, but seriously harm your career prospects in the long run.

Secret tip: Use the success formula to track and improve your progress.

Enough Activity?

Is that Activity of the right Consistency?

Are you excellent in your Activity?

Are you doing it with the right Destination in mind?

TOOLKIT

[Career Development Tools](#) (Ctrl + Click to follow this link)

For a excellence and consistency, stay focused on your '[Career Objective](#)'.

Step 7. Enjoy your trip

Like any road trip you will have great stories to tell in the end if you enjoy the ride.

How are you feeling?

It would be unrealistic to expect yourself to be fully energised every single day of your job search. There will be times when you are bursting with energy, ready to conquer the world. These are the times to make your phone calls and engage actively with your network.

Just like the waves of the sea, there are also times when the water is like a mirror. These are the times when you need to take time out, to reflect and to prepare yourself for the next wave.

It is not natural or possible to be feeling on top of the world every single day. In the beginning, there may be thoughts of anger about your need to embark on a job search, either as result of being retrenched or having to move on from a frustrating job.

Knowing you are not alone

Though it may sometimes feel that you will never get a job again, or that you have been dealt a road full of hills, it is important to realize that after every hill comes a downhill.

My most enjoyable runs have been with a group of other runners. Just the fact that you know you are not alone, makes it so much easier to deal with the challenges and roadblocks ahead.



Roadblocks

A roadblock is a temporary setback that may impact on your progress to reach your destination.

The causes could be not being invited for an interview, or not getting a job offer after being interviewed.

In most circumstances the way you react to a roadblock is within your control. You can determine your personal reaction.

Imagine you are stuck in traffic on a busy motorway. You have three choices:

- Switch on your radio or listen to some music, using the time creatively to recharge (positive); or
- Simply accept the fact that traffic is heavy and that you will just have to crawl for a while until the traffic starts flowing again (neutral); or
- Become extremely frustrated and display signs of road rage by driving aggressively and becoming angry at others (negative).

By being aware of your own emotions, and by understanding the internal and external sources of frustration, you will be better able to cope with any disappointments.

Sharing your story

Each person has a unique story to share with others. By talking to friends, your network contacts, recruiters and others, you have an opportunity to reflect on your personal journey and your experiences during your job search.

Secret tip: The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeing new landscapes, but in having new eyes. (Proust).

TOOLKIT

[Career Development Tools](#) (Ctrl + Click to follow this link)

Enjoy your job search journey. Use the Career Development Toolkit and all the other information resources available to you from WorkLifeGroup.

What's Next?

Grow a rich and rewarding career :



Career development tools and information resources.

In Closing

I have travelled this road before and am pleased to share tips with you to make your job search more successful.

Sharing with others

You are encouraged to share this e-book with others in your network to help them learn the secrets of job search success. You are also encouraged to view other articles and resources available on the WorkLifeGroup web site.

About the author: Charles van Heerden



Charles is a specialist HR consultant and careers expert with a strong focus on talent management. He has been an HR Director in three countries, a senior line manager and a consultant. Charles holds a degree in Psychology and has completed advanced studies in HR and change management. He enjoys blogging about job search, recruitment and managing change.

Contact info:

PROFILE

www.worklifegroup.com/CharlesVanHeerden/

ARTICLES

career.worklifegroup.com/CharlesVanHeerden/

BLOG

career.worklifegroup.com/CharlesVanHeerden/blog/