

Remaining Relevant and Employable
By Rob Lambert

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About The Author

My name is Rob Lambert.

My main passion is helping people remain relevant and employable in our fast changing world, through improved communication skills, learning and networking.

I also help companies build productive, happy, creative and awesome teams capable of delivering a wow service.

I'm an advocate for many important social causes, am obsessed with technology in society and have written a number of books and articles on the subjects of service quality, customer excellence and community building.

It's my mission to inspire people to achieve great things in their careers and to take control of their own learning and self development.

<http://www.cultivatedmanagement.com>

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my beloved wife Dawn, who over the years has had to put up with my blogging and writing obsession, as well as my frequent conference trips and late night community building activities.

This book is also dedicated to my amazing sons who provide me with a never-ending supply of inspiration and giggles.

Introduction

"I can't find any good jobs," someone said to me at a conference recently.

"I can't find good people," a hiring manager said to me at the very same conference.

So what's the problem?

Is it because the hiring manager and candidate don't know each other exist?
Partly.

Is it because the expectations of the hiring managers are too high, weird, or abstract?
Maybe.

Is it because the candidates simply aren't good enough?
In many cases the answer is yes, but it's not always the case.

Or is it because many candidates don't know how to get themselves in front of hiring managers, show the best side of themselves and then get hired?

In my experience, this is the most common answer.

The world of employment is changing, and changing fast.

Getting a job (and keeping a job) in this fast changing world requires hard work and a commitment to remaining relevant to the needs of the company you work for and the changing demands of your industry.

Sometimes this commitment is a commitment too far for some people.

For others it's a commitment they didn't know they needed to make.

The job market is swamped with average people creating a sea of conformity and standardization.

In this sea how will you stand out? How will you get your next great job? How will you differentiate yourself from the next candidate? How will you add value to a business? Why should someone pick you?

The Internet, improved communication channels, cheap global travel and the ability for people to relocate easily (or work from home) has meant that you're no longer competing against people in your local area; you're sometimes competing against people from all over the world.

It's not all bad though.

I believe that there are people standing out from the crowd and filling the void that many hiring managers talk about.

Some already have the skills and ability but lack the tools to communicate effectively, promote themselves and interview well. Others need to learn lots and commit to self-improvement.

That's why I wrote this book.

I wrote this book for those people who want to forge a good career but feel stuck in a dead end job.

I wrote this book for those people who don't want the next standardized job where they are simply treated as a resource. They want more.

I wrote this book for those people who want to up-skill but lack the insights, structure and drive to do so.

I wrote this book for those great people out there who aren't projecting themselves well and creating compelling reasons to get hired.

I wrote this book with the hope that many hiring managers may also read it - after all they are often the ones creating the demand for standardised people.

But mostly I wrote this book to help people, whether employed or not, remain relevant in a changing world by giving them the tools, approach and skills to wow hiring managers.

I sincerely hope this book will help to provide some enthusiasm, inspiration and ideas to help you remain relevant and employed in a fast changing world.

Rob Lambert.

Winchester. January 2015.

Stock CVs, awards and certifications

After sifting through hundreds of CVs and interviewing many candidates, I realised a few things about recruitment.

Firstly, my interview process was being restricted by what I thought I needed to do. I was sticking to the conventions I'd seen in the mainstream industry and as such, I was bound by them. I needed to break this. I needed to make my own rules. I needed to interview in a way that was conducive to my own thinking and that of the team and the business. Most hiring managers never stumble upon this insight, so they will be stuck in old ways of hiring.

Secondly, I needed to re-evaluate the type of people I thought I needed to hire. The industry norms had suggested I needed to recruit against the standards defined by the certification and awards boards of each industry and simply do what everyone else was doing. Recruitment is a local and contextual challenge; as such it requires a different set of thinking. Hiring standard people for standard roles is a sure fire way of creating a standard team that is ineffective.

Thirdly, I was shocked by just how little effort many people put into their job searching and applications. Many CVs were poorly created and irrelevant for the role I was recruiting for. Some CVs were a good fit but didn't scream, "interview me". Some of those with impressive CVs would fail during the phone interview. Some of those who passed the phone interview would fail during the assessment or interview. Very few people "wowed" at all stages.

Fourthly, most of the CVs I have seen over the last 10+ years have promoted the fact that the candidate has a certificate, award or other standardised element as a their main selling point. I get the impression that the certification is the USP - the unique selling point. The problem is that almost everyone has a certification or industry standard award- so how can that be a USP?

The candidates however, often neglect to mention anything else about why they are valuable, what they bring to a business and how they are controlling and organising their career. It often feels like people are relying on their certifications and awards to land them a job. This might work in some heavily regulated industries, but in my experience, the good jobs are the ones that need skills, aptitude, initiative, good communication skills and an attitude focused on learning - not just a certification or award.

This book isn't about bashing the certification and awards schemes. This book is about providing you with techniques and ideas on how to remain relevant and employable.

How to get started

So how do you get started in finding a job?

Get serious

The first thing to do when job hunting is to treat it with the seriousness it deserves.

This is your career and livelihood on the line and job hunting should be treated as a serious project.

Without focus and attention you'll be struggling to get traction and stay motivated.

Get serious by understanding your motivations for finding another job.

Go ahead; write down your reasons for searching for a new job.

Are you unemployed and needing work?

Are you bored?

Are you tired of ticking boxes and want another challenge?

Do you want to specialise?

Do you want to move locations, or industries?

Do you want to work for a smaller company, a larger company or for yourself?

By writing down why you want a job, you'll ideally get serious about it.

Each person will have his or her reasons for looking for a job. You may have many reasons, or just one reason, but without a reason for looking you will struggle to stay motivated.

No matter what your reason are for job hunting, be sure you've clearly articulated to yourself why you need to move on, what time scale you'll be working to and what criteria the new job will need to have. Only by doing this will you have a realistic picture of your job hunt.

Get serious about it.

Be prepared

You should always keep your CV up-to-date and be prepared to start your job-hunting at a moment's notice.

You might not have the luxury of time or money if you were to lose your job, so always be prepared to start your job-hunting quickly.

Being prepared for this situation before it happens is the best way to deal with it.

Planning, practice and a sense of realism about the fragility of the job market will give you the outlook and tools needed to approach this problem if it happens.

Too much worrying about being laid off though can lead you to be a nervous wreck.

As with most things it's about a balance. Be prepared, but don't panic.

Start planning. And plan like a pro.

Treating your job search like a work project means that you'll need to start preparing some plans, activities and deadlines. This is good. You should do this.

How you do this will be a very personal decision.

Some people need hard deadlines otherwise they will just tumble along getting nowhere. Others will have enough enthusiasm that they'll just get stuff done.

Only you know your personal motivation and your own personality - make sure your plans are aligned with your own style of working.

It is worth considering the lead times of various tasks, the urgency with which you need an income, the time needed to create a cracking application and the time needed to attend interviews and secure yourself a job.

Sometimes there will be a job waiting for you round a corner. Sometimes there won't be. It's a numbers game and your number might not always come up.

This book will give you hints and tips on how to make it more likely you'll get a job but the reality is it can still take time. Make sure you plan this in to your project.

Ship stuff

One trick that I've seen work many times is to create a habit of "shipping" stuff.

This means ensuring that each and every day you are shipping something that pushes you towards the end goal.

I use the word "shipping" to refer to the completion and release of something.

For example, when job-hunting there are several items you should be looking to ship during this process:

Your stock CV ready and posted to job sites for recruiters to drool over

Your LinkedIn profile and other social channels updated accordingly

Relevant training courses completed

A list of companies you want to work for listed along with relevant contacts at these companies

Your business cards and other collateral created and looking great
Your own personal website with supporting information
Your interview outfit cleaned and ready to impress

These are all things that can be shipped, completed or marked as done, but they are also things that are not just five-minute jobs. They require daily persistent action to achieve the end results. Forming a habit of action or shipping will help you to get things done.

If you're not shipping something each day, what are you doing to get your next job?

How are you getting on?

I encourage people when job hunting to conduct a personal retrospective each week. I would suggest a Sunday evening but choose whichever day works best for you.

In the retrospective, look back on the last 7 days and make a note of what you need to keep doing, what you need to stop doing and what you need to start doing.

Act on the outcomes from your personal retrospective.

I've seen too many people squander good job opportunities because they've spent too long doing things that don't work and nowhere near enough time on the things that do work.

Is there really a career in this industry?

In my experience there are typically two major barriers that many people face when thinking about their career.

1. They don't believe that there is such a thing as a career in their chosen industry, just jobs.
2. They don't know whether to specialise or generalise.

Those who have found their career path, or have at least plotted some direction and are on the journey, have made many decisions over the years about their careers.

Some of these career decisions will have been forced like relocation, job loss or departmental job moves for example. Some of these decisions will have been made consciously or sub-consciously, like choosing to specialise in certain niches or simply making the most of what they currently have.

Many years back I was stuck in a role I didn't enjoy and was looking to leave the industry. I was bored of the role and fed up of being treated like a "resource". I hated it.

I thought there were no careers to be made in my field of work, just jobs to be had. And each one of these jobs was pretty much the same. Same people, same skills, same job.

I made a conscious decision to try one last job move. I made the decision to seek out a small company who had "learning" at the heart of their ethos. I got offered the job and never looked back. I found a path that I enjoyed. I found an environment that suited me.

I know people whose path is leading them down specialisms, whilst others are becoming generalists, capable of working in a great number of environments. Others still are becoming T-shaped and blending their core skills with other roles and disciplines.

The key point is that in any industry there will be jobs and there will be careers. At some point you will need to make a big decision about where you want to head, otherwise you may find yourself heading down a path that limits your growth and happiness; a path created by someone else; or a path that leads to just a job but not a career.

Without a rough idea of what you want to achieve you may find yourself left behind by an industry that is changing fast.

If you don't know what you want, it will be harder to convince a good hiring manager (with an interesting job) to employ you.

How will you clearly articulate what you want if you don't even know yourself?

If the decision is to stick it out where you currently work but grow your skills in X, then that's great. If your decision is to move to a giant corporate then that's great too. Once you've made a decision, big or small, you can start to head down this path.

You might find that your chosen career path is easier to describe than other people. Or you may find your path is not so easily defined at all. Either way it will be ok, just be aware that the path is yours to choose and you can do things to control your career. Don't let others choose this path for you.

There are always positive and negative aspects of choosing paths and no one can predict the future. Knowing roughly where you are going and what you want to do can help you make decisions that lead you towards the destination.

What would you do for free?

A good way to find your passion in life (and hence your career path) is to ask yourself what you would do for free.

Many people I do this with find that this leads them to careers and vocations outside of their current industry and career. This is fine. This might be your calling in life.

For others this leads them to mention working for certain brands or working with certain people.

Others see themselves in certain industries or working with certain tools.

To see where your thinking leads spend some time writing on a sheet of paper some of the work you would do for free.

Time-box this activity to around 30 minutes and just jot down anything that comes to mind. Try not to edit what you are writing. Just get a bunch of ideas together on paper.

After you're done writing spend some time asking yourself questions about each job or activity you listed.

Does it have anything at all to do with your current industry?

If yes, how can you get yourself nearer to this ideal role or set of responsibilities?

If no, do you need to make plans to move industries and jobs?

Are your careers realistic?

Could you really sustain a career doing it?

Could you do part of that in your current job?

What steps could you do right now to start on this journey?

There are always lots of questions to ask and decisions to make after doing this exercise. After a short time of asking yourself these questions you might find yourself with many clues about how to move forward.

I did this exercise with someone who jotted down many items related to helping companies secure their systems. He also jotted down consultancy, travelling around the world, working with people, doing sales and marketing, blogging and python scripting. It became clear to him quickly that he needed to learn security and penetration testing skills so he could set up his consultancy company specialising in helping companies secure their internal products. He's now travelling the world selling his security consultancy to many appreciative companies. He's a happy bunny.

What would you do if you got paid loads of money?

Another spin on the above and to tie it directly to your industry is to think about the following.

You run a consultancy company in your chosen industry and one of your all time favourite companies calls you. They offer you a stupid amount of money and say they desperately need your skills.

What are your skills?

What would you do?

What would your skills be?

What value could you add to this company?

What value are they paying you stupidly large amounts of money for?

Why you?

I would encourage you to think deeply about these questions and write down the things that come to mind.

When I do this activity I always see people defining a strong vision of their own skills and career paths.

They often get that "ah ha" moment where they see clearly what interests them and what makes them get up and go to work. It's a very powerful way of thinking about what value you add.

Is your path realistic?

Having decided on a path (either loosely defined, or set down in concrete) take a step backward and ask yourself a fundamental question.

Is this path realistic?

Spend a decent amount of time answering this question. Only you will know if the path is realistic. Only you will know what else you have going on in your life,

whether you really have the energy for it all and whether or not you've realistically got the skills.

Are you realistically going to have the time to learning a programming language given that you work 10 hours a day, have a two hour commute and three kids at home? Maybe? Maybe not?

When considering the answer to the question "Is this path realistic?" it pays to think about the following:

- The timescales involved. (Can it be achieved in a week, or many years?)
- Your skills and abilities. (Do you have the skills now? Could you realistically learn them?)
- Do you have the energy and commitment?
- Do you have supportive people around you to help in this quest, or will they hinder your goals?

I would suggest you spend a lot of time thinking about your career path and the realistic chances of achieving it. I've seen many people ruined by trying to take on too much. I've also known people's marriages and health to be ruined by striving too hard or getting their priorities in life mixed up.

If you're not having fun with it, be done with it

If you detest your job as much as some people I've met do, then re-assess your situation.

- Why are you doing your job?
- What can you change to make it better for you?
- Is it the job that you hate, the company, the product or the industry?
- What is in your control and what isn't?
- Are there any options in another job industry?

If you can't do anything about this situation (which I suspect is not true) then it's worth accepting it and trying to make the most of what you have. There's nothing worse than complaining about something and doing nothing to change it.

If you can do something about your situation but can't be bothered to change then don't be surprised if the job market isn't friendly to you and your skills.

If there is something that you can do to change it then DO IT.

Life's too short to hate what you do.

Make the changes you need to and grab hold of your career and put it to work on your terms.

What skills do I need?

To know what skills to focus on learning, you need to know what skills you need for your chosen career and compare this to what skills you currently have. The difference between the two is where you should focus your learning.

As simple as that sounds, it's very rare that people act upon it and hence they have skills gaps which need filling. Once you know what the gap difference is you can start to put plans in place and a schedule of learning.

The earlier become aware of the skills you need, the more chance you have of obtaining these skills ready for the time you are job hunting.

So start now. You never know when you might be on the open market looking for a role. If you can hit that market with supreme skills and experience then you will stand a good chance of getting the job you want.

Be realistic though; the chances of becoming a guru in any field in two weeks is slim, but at least you can start to explore what's involved and put the wheels in motion.

What sort of context do you want to work in?

The sheer diversity of jobs within the most industries clearly shows that there are a number of different contexts that you could find yourself working in.

You will feel more comfortable with some contexts than with others.

You will want to work in some rather than others.

I prefer start-ups and rapid environments; some people prefer slow moving environments that are risk averse. There is an industry and type of company for everyone.

However, I would suggest that you build a variety of skills that could be utilised in a number of different environments; you never know where the next job may come from.

The more industries you can work in, the more jobs you will have available to you.

You will need to learn

You may find yourself having to apply for a role in a context that does not come naturally to you. If this is the case, you need to ensure you have the skills and mindset to get the job.

Learning and building your skills should be a core fundamental aspect to remaining relevant.

Learning about your core career skills (like accountancy, technology, law, etc.) people skills, communication skills and general industry trends will set you apart from the norm.

Going to work, doing the minimum and playing video games all evening will not set you apart...unless of course you want a job playing video games.

Having the ability to learn will help you to stand out from the crowd. Your ability to learn will mean you can diversify, specialise or take on almost any challenge thrown at you. This is the type of person who will thrive; the person who can change.

What skills do you currently have?

It always pays to do an audit of your skills and abilities.

Spend some time listing out your abilities (the things that seem to come naturally to you), your skills (the techniques and approaches that you have learned) and your industry knowledge (the information and knowledge you have about the domain you work in).

Having your abilities, skills and knowledge (ASK) listed will give you a good idea about what else you might need to learn, but it will also give you a good reference point to refer to when applying for roles.

A good way to work out what value you can add to a team is to keep a notebook handy with you throughout the day and record all of the times you demonstrate your ASK.

It is also a good idea to do this outside of work too as you may find you have a transferable ASK from your home life in to your work life.

I tend to keep a journal most days and jot down my own observations, thoughts and ideas. I can then refer back to this over time. Not only is it a good reference point but it is also a good way of clearing my head of thoughts about the day.

You could do this journaling technique each day for a week, or just pick one or two days a week over a period of time. Whatever you choose the important thing is to identify the value you have which would be an asset to others. That is not the sole reason for journaling but for this exercise it is the main focus.

- Did you solve a tricky technical problem?
- Did you facilitate a great meeting?
- Did you stop an argument from exploding into a fight?
- Did you stop a fight from exploding into a riot?
- Did you find a significant process improvement by using a new tool or approach?
- Did you build a good working relationship with someone at work?
- Did you listen well?
- Did you make a significant number of sales by trying something new?

- Did you help a colleague understand something?
- Did you introduce a new technology?

There are loads of ways in which we all exhibit both positive and negative behaviour whilst at work. Document as many of these as you can. They are all deep insights and learning points. Don't just focus on your skills, look at the bigger picture.

The goal is to find out what value you have, what aspects of yourself you need to improve and what things you need to stop doing.

When you do this activity you begin to discover your real skills, abilities and the environments that may support your success. This will then lead you to the types of skills and thinking you will need for these environments.

Find a job spec

The best way to see what skills are needed in your industry is to find current job specs. They don't have to be in your location, but they should be as recent as possible.

Find as many as possible and seek out the independent job adverts that don't get posted to the major job websites.

Contact the recruiter to find out more

If you are unsure as to what skills are required for a role, then get in touch with some recruiters and dig for more information. Make sure you get a good recruiter though – they will help greatly.

However, in most industries, there are often very few recruiters who are familiar with the domain you work in. They specialise in recruitment, not working in your world.

This is slowly changing as recruiters immerse themselves in the industry and domain so they understand the market, can network more effectively and can also show thought leadership in the recruitment of people.

Many though will not have a clue what you are asking about and will essentially act as the middle person between you and the hiring manager for the roles they are recruiting for. If at all possible try to avoid this "middle-person" situation for a number of reasons:

Firstly, there will be an inevitable breakdown in communications as the message is diluted, lost, changed or re-spun during this process.

Secondly, you will lose out on building a relationship with the hiring manager. Having already spoken to a hiring manager before an interview can be a very positive point indeed, especially if you make that first interaction a good one.

Some recruitment consultants will give you a direct line to their clients, many will not.

Contact the hiring manager directly

If the recruiter is blocking you, not responding to you or is otherwise not forthcoming in providing further details about the role, then seek out the hiring manager at the company advertising the role.

Some might think this is sneaky, but believe me, in my mind it shows great initiative.

Recruitment consultants often phone me to win business. We try to block them as much as possible as we get so many of them but they have cunning ways to get past our filters.

Some pretend to be delivery drivers, others pretend to be relatives. In one case we had a consultant pretending to be the father of an employee and claiming they had just had an accident. All of this just to get those brief few seconds to try and pitch for business.

So if consultants will try that then believe me a phone call from a prospective candidate who wants to find out more would be welcome.

Some recruiters are excellent and will be more than happy to act as the go-between on getting you more information. If you get a good recruitment consultant, go back to them time and time again. Keep giving them business. Keep using them to get jobs. Tell all your colleagues and peers about them. The chances are they have good jobs from good clients who trust them. It is a winning situation for all.

As a hiring manager I'm always impressed with the candidates who phone up for an informal chat about the role. This shows initiative, but it also shows they are keen to understand what is required of them in the role.

Always be sure to go back to the consultant though to follow the proper procedure for them claiming their finder's fees. The law is sketchy around all of this so it is best to only circumvent the consultants if you are being actively blocked. Any good recruiter worth their wage should have no worries at all about you speaking to the actual hiring manager.

Do also consider though, that not all hiring managers may want to speak to their prospective hires, and not all hiring managers are actually the people who are

hiring for the role (i.e. HR, Admin). After all, this is often why they use recruitment consultants in the first place.

Follow the industry trends

To find out what skills are needed right now, follow news and people in your industry. If you want to work with startups then follow some startups, follow some people who are working for startups and seek out what kind of people work there. Find blogs, news feeds and social feeds to follow.

Attending meet-ups, gatherings and conferences is a good way to find out what is happening in your industry and a great opportunity for networking. They give you a good opportunity to meet people, connect with others and find out what is trending.

Be sure to seek out diversity though. All gatherings are tailored in some way to a certain audience. Be sure to attend many different types of gatherings in your industry to get a balanced view.

Find people you admire

The web has made finding people a lot easier. By joining a community, following people in the industry on social channels and attending gatherings you will start to identify people you really admire, and those who are well connected. These people will give you a wealth of information. They will often share their experience with you. They will often mentor you too if you ask. They will often write about your industry. They will give you lots of advice and guidance, often for free.

Slow down

You may have identified many different things you need to learn to get a good job. Your challenge now is putting a plan in place to embark on this learning.

Not everything will be simple and straightforward to learn. Some things will take a considerable amount of time and effort.

Once you've listed out what you need to learn you'll have an idea of what it's going to take to learn it. It's at this point that many people give.

What will separate you from the crowd is if you pick up the challenge and crack on with it.

Be realistic with your learning plan. Don't try and learn everything at once, you will burn out. Everyone learns at a different rate so find the rate that fits your lifestyle and learning approach. You'll need to experiment to work out what works best for you.

I would recommend that as a minimum, you do no less than one hour of learning per day, ideally two.

I find it more useful to do a short amount of learning each day than large sessions just once a week.

Each of us is different though. Experiment with your learning and seek out what works for you. The important thing though, is to start now.

The next chapter has some hints and tips on how to learn.

Learning

When I do talks on learning I hear a variety of reasons and excuses why people believe they cannot learn new things.

I once did a session on learning for a group of graduates and one person stated that he was unemployable due to a lack of relevant skills.

When I asked him what he was doing during his unemployed time to advance his skills he replied "playing Xbox". Oh how the group laughed. Joking aside, is there any wonder why he wasn't getting any job offers?

This is the same for many people.

Replace "playing Xbox" with anything that is stopping you from shipping stuff or learning such as "watching TV", "surfing the web" or "chatting on Facebook".

The following are some of the excuses and reasons I've heard from people over the years:

- I don't have the money
- I don't have the time
- I don't have the skills
- I don't need to
- I rely on certifications for all of my training

The above are by far and away the most popular I have heard but of course there are many more. Let's explore each one of the above in turn.

I don't have the money

I'm assuming when I address this point that people have enough money for a basic Internet connection or access to a library with Internet facilities.

This may be an assumption too far, but it's an assumption I am applying to this part of the book. There are many schemes available in the UK to help you with access to the Internet. I would advise starting at your local council for further information on local Internet availability schemes.

I was at a conference once talking about learning and someone said they didn't have enough money to buy most of the courses, books and training needed in their industry. This person had a freshly brewed coffee with him. After a little digging it turned out he bought a fresh coffee each day from a well know high street chain. That's about £2 per weekday in good old English money. That's £10 over a 5 day working week.

Over a year, with holidays and other days off, he was probably spending about £450 per year just on coffee. Imagine the amount of learning he could buy for that money.

Most excuses against learning new things aren't really serious blockers, but they are examples of where priorities are not in tune with career plans. In the example above this person placed greater priority on buying coffee over buying learning.

The ironic part though is that many learning resources are actually free.

What follows are some of these free learning sources.

Wikipedia

Despite some inconsistencies and inaccuracies, Wikipedia [6] still offers a wealth of articles on almost anything you care to consider.

When reading the article be sure to follow links to external blogs, other Wikipedia pages, external articles and anything else that takes your fancy; there will always be something to learn.

Why not visit a random Wikipedia page each day and read it?

Coursera

You've not signed up for Coursera[7] yet? Really?

Coursera is a series of learning courses from top learning institutes delivered for free, over the web, in video lecture style - and did I mention it was free?

There are lots of topics such as computing, social sciences, research, design, programming, social network analysis, finances, accounting, communication and architecture.

It's an amazing source of information and genuinely easy to access and use.

Udemy[8] is similar and there are some great courses on there also.

Twitter

Even if you never tweet anything it's worth tracking the people in your industry and hashtags associated with your work. For example, if you work in the customer service industry you will find the hashtag of #custsrv is useful for you. You'd be amazed at the sheer volume of useful resources being shared.

Be careful though, there are loads of companies and people pushing Best Practices and magic solutions via Twitter[9] so apply critical thinking to some of what you see there. Your role as a modern job seeker is to work out what is good and what is bad and filter accordingly.

eBooks

There are many free eBooks flying around the web that would be useful for your learning. The trick is finding them.

Places like Amazon Kindle[10], Lulu[11] and Smashwords[12] are good sources. A lot of people will give eBooks away for free. Apple books[13], Google Play books[14] and Guttenberg[15] are great sources of free books, eBooks and other reading sources.

The library

Your local library, if you have one, probably stocks a number of modern books that might not be directly related to your industry, but will give an open mind a rich source of learning material.

Read anything and everything. You would be amazed at where ideas and lessons can come from.

I tend to visit the library and wander around the social science section grabbing random books. Some are great, some are good and some I struggle with, but the randomness of it all can bring about a great degree of learning. You could do the same for any industry you're working in, or looking to work in.

Podcasts

Podcasts are a great way of learning about a new topic. They are the ultimate portable learning resource. You can listen when walking, when commuting to and from work. There are podcasts on practically anything you are interested in.

There are many systems and applications that will download and sync the latest podcasts with your device. Make use of them to ensure you always have something new to listen to.

Blogs

There are literally millions of blogs on almost any topic you wish to learn about. Some are good, some are not so good. Subscribe to some of these blogs and read a post each day. Use an RSS reader to make subscription and updates easier.

You can get RSS feeds on most mobile devices too so you can read them on the go. You could also use a service like Flipboard[16] or Feedly[17] to find and curate good content. I use Feedly to manage my RSS subscriptions and find new content.

Vary your feeds so you don't become too focused on just one niche. Let your mind expand by reading things that make you uncomfortable, challenge your thinking or downright disagree with your views. Some of this content will provide you with nothing but rage, some will set a spark in your mind and you'll merge ideas together to come up with new insights, or they might just entirely change your mind on a subject.

Blogs are my number one source of reading and they are free.

I don't have the time

Time, or lack of it, is a common argument against learning. The problem is that many people who say this have very little idea of exactly where their time does go.

If you make a note of all of the things you do each day you will start to spot patterns and opportunities to sneak in some learning.

It's entirely possible to learn something in just a few minutes each day. It's going to take a long time, but if all you have is those tiny few minutes then make use of them.

I personally recommend at least one to two hours of learning each day. I do mine in two 30-minute chunks and one 60-minute chunk. I have a 30-minute commute morning and evening and one hour for lunch.

Learning on a constrained schedule will require you to become organised and efficient so that you can use the few minutes to learn, not to find the learning source, open it, use it, close it etc.

Make use of the technology available to many of us now to make learning easier. Technology such as mp3 players, RSS feeds, social streams, audio books, text to speech, mobile phones and tablet devices. Or simply always have your book with you for when you get a few minutes.

Do you watch 2 hours of TV each evening? Why not spend 30 minutes learning and still watch some TV?

Do you go for a run or walk in the evening? Try listening to a podcast as you work out.

Practice time

For those skills that need practice time, such as learning to code or learning to draw for example, snaffle a 20 minute period each day and complete a chapter or section of a course.

Code Academy[18] is an excellent place to learn some coding in small manageable chunks.

Coursera has loads of good courses too with some practical activities to do between lessons.

The trick with any learning is to just start it and keep doing it. It's better to do something each day than nothing for months. Keep it fresh, get organised and make use of those minutes and hours you previously thought weren't available.

I don't have the skills

Nonsense. Ok, maybe there are some things that you'll never be able to do, but unless you have a go you'll never know.

I hear too many people say that they can't do something before they have even attempted it. Why not have a go and see and then make that statement?

Keep trying. Don't give up at the first hurdle.

Learn what you can and keep practicing. There will be loads of opportunities to put your learning to use. For example, if you are learning to code, then why not create your own website or automate a tedious task you do each day?

If it's leadership and management skill you are after, then start running some meetings at work or try organizing events outside of work. Work on becoming better and more effective during meetings and start asking for more responsibility at work. There are hundreds of resources online to help you become better at organising and chairing meetings.

Keep a journal of your progress and see how you have developed over time.

If you try, and try, and try and still can't cut it then maybe your chosen learning isn't for you. Everyone has limits. We can't all be excellent at everything. That doesn't mean you should stop when you reach your limit, but be aware of when you might be pushing yourself too far.

I don't need to learn

Nonsense, there's always more stuff to learn.

If you think you don't need to learn then you'll be surprised and amazed when you find yourself on the job market with very few options open to you. Very few jobs are for life and the market moves fast.

Graduates and school leavers will possess more "in-demand" skills than you (maybe not tempered with experience but sometimes hiring managers won't care).

It's a reality people in every industry face. Some school leavers have already built a very impressive portfolio of work. Times are indeed changing.

You need to rely on **yourself** to keep yourself employable. No one else will do keep you relevant and employable without you taking control. They may give you opportunities but it's what you make of those opportunities that count.

It isn't the company you work for who are in charge of your career. It's you.

If you don't learn anything new, or apply the learning you get every day, then you'll disappear further and deeper in to the sea of conformity.

Why would someone pluck you from this sea if you are not prepared to take control and ownership of your own career?

There are simply not enough jobs for everyone. In a sea of conformity you need to stand out. Learning is one way to do this. It's not the only way, but it's a very important way.

I rely on certifications for all of my training

Most industries have certification schemes. They allow companies to skip important recruitment steps by giving them a 'confidence' level. For example, if Bob has a certificate in X then he is a better employee than Janet who does not have the certification. The truth is that Janet may be 100 times better than Bob but she may not even get a seat at an interview.

Certifications are a standard filter process in many industries.

Certifications also give candidates a sense of confidence. For example, if Bob sits the certification then he doesn't have to learn or improve in anything else; the certification scheme takes care of that. This may also be a problem. What you may find is that Bob is not very good at all and that Janet is outstanding.

I always advise hiring managers to drop this reliance on certification as the only mechanism for assessing a candidate and instead invest in the recruitment process. Some jobs will always require study achievements and certifications, but to rely solely on these pieces of paper is a mistake.

Let's say both Bob and Janet both have a certification but Bob is also active in the industry community running local meetups and an online community. Bob is helping to define the industry. Janet on the other hand spends her evening watching TV and never improving her supporting skills. Which candidate now seems more likely to excel?

My advice would be to drop this reliance on certifications immediately. Don't rely on certifications as the only source of learning. Broaden your awareness.

Relying on one single source for your learning is to become influenced by one single point of view.

Certifications may be useful for you, but so too are many millions of other sources of learning. Many of these other sources will help to widen your awareness, understanding and appreciation of your industry in a wider context.

Most jobs are no longer about conforming to standards. They are about helping to deliver great products and services. They involve working with other people,

communicating clearly, understanding market conditions, embracing technology, understanding your customers' needs and a whole lot more besides.

Is it possible to get all of this from certifications? No.

Certifications could be just one part of your learning portfolio.

What else are you learning or doing to supplement, counter or complement the certifications?

When everyone on the market has a certificate the value of that certificate is diminished. You are at the mercy of certification inflation; where last year the practitioner was the "best", now you need a practitioner guru level A++ Super Hero Star Award just to get a job.

And who's benefiting from this business model? You?

There are new certifications every year, each one promising further "qualifications" and better standards. Mostly they are a very successful business model for those that run them.

They are not a single source of learning; you need more than a certification.

Organising your learning

Each person will work in different ways but each of us will have a preferred learning system of some sort. It's my belief that the more organised you are the better this system will be.

If you only have a few minutes each day to do some learning then it's important to use those minutes wisely.

I've spent the last 20 or so years hacking around with my learning system and each time I think I have it nailed, my context changes and I have to evolve. I used to fight this and stick rigidly with one set way, but technology, time, age and feedback has opened up new ways of working each week. I've stopped resisting and gone with what feels right.

What you are learning, your own style of learning, the resources available to you and the time you have for study will all impact your system.

Experiment with lots of different ways and find what works for you.

Don't be bound by that single way though, as soon as you feel you're no longer enjoying learning, or it's not working for you, change it up a little.

Learning is fun. If you're not enjoying your learning, the chances are you're not going to stick with it.

Two main styles of learning

The domain of learning is vast and flooded with studies, research and ideas abound. Do we learn by doing? Are we born learners? Can we learn to learn?

The subject is really interesting and there are divides and differences in opinions about some core ideas around how people learn.

In my experience I've tended to simplify my own learning into two distinct categories.

Firstly, there is learning from actually doing something, (such as actually doing the work, building things and taking things apart)

Secondly, there is learning from actually sitting down and taking part in the act of learning, such as reading a book or sitting a course.

There are scientific terms for both of these sorts of learning. Learning by doing stuff is often referred to as task-conscious or acquisition learning because you are not explicitly doing something to learn, but you are aware of the tasks you are doing. These tasks when performed, especially when performed often, are forms of learning.

Learning by actually sitting down and studying something is referred to as learning-conscious or formalised learning because the task you are doing is primarily concerned or entails learning something.

In my experience good training courses and mentoring sessions will have both elements.

I like to draw a distinction between the two because it helps me absorb what I am learning. For example, I will read a book on a topic that suggests trying X technique.

Reading it alone does not bring about real learning merely awareness of another way of doing something. I may be able to recite this new technique to others (and believe me, lots of consultants are good at this) but being able to explain how it works, why it works, what problems there are with the technique and how I've made it work is not possible if I've never tried it.

So after reading something I put it in to practice. That way I can be sure that any advice I give to others, or any self reflections I do on my own behaviour, is driven from my own experience and not just from something I have read in a book.

This act of actually putting what has been read (or studied) in to action is what I see missing most from many people I interview. They have often read the theory and can hold a decent conversation about it, but when asked to reflect on why it works (or doesn't work), what problems there are with this approach/technique and what they would change, they often flounder. This is because theory and practice are not in alignment.

Try to be aware of this when you are spouting theory with no practice to support it. A good interviewer will catch this.

What we learn changes how we learn it

What we are learning plays a big part in the approach to how we learn it. If we are learning facts and figures then being able to recite them is probably going to be good enough to say we've learned something.

However, often we need to show and prove that we can actually do this job. A good hiring manager will interview to see if you can actually do the job, and not just talk about it.

Your job in an interview is to convince a good hiring manager you have X skill. You'll need to do this by being able to demonstrate it or talk around the "why", "who", "when", "where" and "what" types of questions.

I would always advise you only claim competency in things you can demonstrate.

Hack your own learning system

We are all different and what works for me won't work for everyone.

It's always best to trial new ways of learning. Once you have something that works then I'd suggest sharing it with others. The more we share our approaches to learning, the more I think we could all learn.

In the next chapter I'll share with you my current approach to learning. It might give you some ideas. It's worth searching the web for how other people learn, as it will help to give you ideas to try.

Communicating your passions and values

In previous chapters, we've talked a lot about finding your passion, setting yourself learning goals and building learning into your life.

Having the right skills to get (and hold down) a job are very important.

When you have the skills, or are learning the skills, it's also very important to be communicating this to potential employers.

In a sense it's the basics of marketing and advertising. There is no point in having an amazing product if no one knows about it. You may be an awesome employee but if no one knows who you are, what you can do and that you're even looking for a job then they won't offer you a job.

You are creating an image of yourself

When you communicate about yourself you are creating an image about yourself, and what it would be like for people to work with you. You are also setting expectations about your skills and the value you bring. Be sure you can deliver on this value.

This image is set by the crafted messages you communicate, your work and your kudos in the community, your clothes, your speech and everything else that communicates something about you; ensure that these messages are consistent.

A consistent set of messages leads to a consistent set of expectations and more importantly, an accurate one.

Understand your audience

All communication has an audience (listener). There is a common phrase "communication happens in the listener". The person receiving the message will hear it, interpret it and then react to it. It's your job to make sure they get the right message, interpret it in the right way and respond appropriately. This is a lot harder than many people imagine.

To stand a chance of getting this right you need to understand whom your audiences are and gather feedback on the effectiveness of your communication.

When you are job-hunting there are many different types of companies and hiring managers (i.e. audiences) seeking a variety of different candidates.

- Some companies want people who can do X, but who also look good in a sombrero.
- Others want people who can follow rote instructions and not question what they do.
- Others only want people who have a certain set of certificates.
- Others are after people who can bring real presence to the business.
- Others just want a resource.

It therefore pays to understand where you want to work and what the hiring culture is like. Understanding this leads you to understanding the audience you are communicating to, and hence, the suitable message you need to convey.

Tailoring your message to the right audience is crucial for success.

Depending on where I work I adopt a different strategy and message when recruiting. I typically look for similar skills and mindset, but I might be looking for different personalities and team fit to compliment the team I have.

Understanding my audience as a hiring manager is just as important as a candidate understanding their audience; it helps to find common ground and enables effective communication.

If I were applying to a hiring manager from a bank then I would typically tailor my message to suit their context and their environment (assuming I knew it). If I were talking to a hiring manager from a "go break stuff" startup I would tailor my message to suit their context.

It's not lying.

It's about presenting yourself in the most effective way to ensure your message is understood and acknowledged. It's about ensuring you stand the best chance possible of getting to an interview.

Understanding your audience means you can tailor the message to highlight your personality and the skills that you have in the best possible light.

It's not just the message (i.e. what you can do described in words) but the tone, language, style, medium and timing that can affect how a message might be received.

Make the message clear

The important thing is that you have a clear message in your mind. If it's not clear in your own mind what you can and cannot do, what problems you can solve and what experience you have, then how will you communicate it effectively to others?

Fine tune your core message and make sure you have a number of different variants for different uses.

Elevator pitch

An elevator pitch message is a short and sharp message about you and your skills.

The name Elevator Pitch comes from the idea that you are in an elevator with someone and you have about 10-20 seconds to make a pitch. Let's say you have a

chance encounter in an elevator with a hiring manager working for your favourite company in the world.

The hiring manager asks you what you do.

You've got 20 seconds max, what do you say?

You need something succinct and descriptive. Something short, but interesting enough that the hiring manager wants to find out more.

Don't waffle, don't over complicate. Keep it short and sweet.

This short message is one of the hardest to create but ask any of the thought leaders what value they add (with the 20 second time constraint) and they will no doubt have a message, whether consciously created or not.

Once you have a message written down then practice it. And practice it some more. And then practice it again. The more you practice the more natural it will sound and the more you will fine tune it and improve it.

You never know when you might get 20 seconds to sell your skills and ability.

Short memo message

The short memo message is a shortened summary of your CV. This should be no more than a few hundred words. It should include more detail than the elevator pitch but not as much as your CV.

I use my LinkedIn profile as my short memo message. This shortened summary can be sent to prospective employers as an introduction to me and the value I can bring.

Your CV

Your CV is a good place to list out your key achievements and skills. We'll talk more about CVs in the next chapter, but always aim for the CV to be "just enough" to generate interest.

The message in your CV should be consistent throughout the whole CV, but also consistent with your elevator and short memo messages. Good hiring managers will tease out all of the different messages you have communicated and will easily spot inconsistencies or lies.

Your CV should also contain your value proposition. Everyone a company hires must add value in some way to the company's goals, visions and bottom line. What value do you add?

It's often no longer a differentiator to pitch "I am certified or qualified in X". Loads of people are.

What's unique about you? Why should someone hire you? Why would they not hire someone else? What can you do that none of your competition can do? How will you fit with the team?

Answering these questions and putting this in to a consistent message in your CV takes time. Like a good marketing message though it should draw people in to find out more.

Creating your CV

Most CVs are really poorly written and constructed. Most CVs are generic and contain nothing but buzzwords or long lists of generic tasks completed at each previous employment. This is understandable - we very rarely get taught either in formal education, or in business, how to create a compelling CV.

What follows are some guidelines, ideas and hints on how to stop this trend of awful CVs.

Make it succinct

Long and drawn out CVs are boring to read. Stick to two pages. I know someone who bins CVs that are longer than two pages so keep it short and to the point.

It makes you think long and hard about what to include and what to leave out when you apply a constraint of page limit. This is a good constraint, your CV will be better for it.

Making a CV succinct also makes it easier and more fun to read.

Always think about your audience. Your audience is a hiring manager, HR or recruiter who probably sifts through many CVs. They may apply arbitrary rejection filters such as:

- "Any CV that doesn't mention X Qualification will go in the bin"
- "Any CV that has the logo of a certification board on it will go in the bin"
- "Any CV that is longer than 2 pages will go in the bin"
- "Any CV with stupid fonts will go in the bin"
- "Any CV with a spelling mistake will go in the bin"

You will not know what filters they have in place, so the best thing to do is to make your skills, experience and personality come alive in the CV and be as engaging as possible, whilst ensuring you cover everything you think the hiring manager wanted from the advert or job description.

If you have worked at a lot of companies, like many contractors have, then think about supplementing the CV with a link to a website, blog or LinkedIn where you can include the complete list. Pick out highlights and lowlights and maybe include one sentence about each role you have held in the CV but explain that others can be found online.

Don't include pages of companies you've worked at; it often adds little value and makes your CV bigger than it needs to be.

Make it match the job description

Many job descriptions are incomplete, vague and generic but they do hint at what someone is wanting from you.

It would therefore be a mistake to ignore everything on the job advert and go off-piste with your application. It might work, but it's a risky strategy I wouldn't recommend unless you're pretty sure you can risk losing out on the role.

You should always start from a stock CV that includes your basics like name, address, online links and basic values and achievements. This stock CV should NEVER be sent for a specific job where you have details of what the hiring manager is asking for. Never.

Many people do send their stock CV and it creates a really bad impression. Stock CVs are obvious and they are often way off the mark in terms of relevance, or they are so generic and vague that they give little insight to your skills and experience.

Modify the stock CV to match the requirements. Don't lie though; just accentuate the skills that are relevant for the role. If the hiring manager is asking for X skills then make sure you articulate on your CV your expertise in these skills and how they are useful and valuable. If the hiring manager wants someone who understands a certain technology then articulate your skills and experience in this technology.

Check the spelling and grammar

A simple spelling and grammar check using one of the automated checkers in your writing software will stop mistakes from creeping into your CV.

If you are applying in a language that is not your first language then think about asking for help from an online community you belong to or friends and family. There are always people willing to review your CV.

If you did receive help with applying in a language that is not native to you then explain this in the CV or letter. Consistency and truth are important.

Print the CV out on paper and proof read it. Sometimes it's easier to spot mistakes on paper than on screen. The reality is that spelling and grammar mistakes do creep in. It's not the end of the world if one gets through; just make sure there aren't hundreds of them.

Check formatting

Check the formatting and ensure it works when printed to screen, PDF and paper.

It creates a really bad first impression if the hiring manager has to reformat your CV to read it or print it out.

Many recruiters will cut and paste the content out to their own systems so make it easy for them to do this also.

Remove lists

Giant lists of technologies, approaches and techniques are not a good way to articulate your skills. It's fine to include some lists but think about what the hiring manager is thinking when they read a list:

- How experienced are they in this?
- What problems did having this skill or tool help them solve?
- How did they use X technology, and why?
- How many years did they use it for?
- Under what context was this approach useful?

There are lots more questions running through my mind when I see a giant list.

Most of these questions go unanswered after reading the CV. Don't be one of the hundreds of people with a CV that simply lists buzzwords. Be the person whose CV stands out and articulates why tools, approaches and tech are useful (or not) and what you learned.

Focus on outcomes

Some people describe what they did at a company and what approach they took. Very few people focus on the outcomes of what they actually achieved. The outcomes and the approach are equally as important.

Saying that you adopted a new tool is useful. Saying that you adopted a new tool and it saved 100 hours a week of repetitive tasks is much better.

An example:

"I lead the scalability team who worked closely with the programming team in a RUP methodology. We increased the number of supported customers from 3 million to 25 million in just 6 months. This released sales worth in the region of £40 million."

Versus.

"I lead the scalability team. We worked in a RUP methodology. We delivered on time and to budget. We worked well with the programmers. "

The output from your work is just as important as the journey you went on to get there. Even if you failed in your challenge you still learned something.

Hiring managers like to hear about the value that you will add, so make sure you can articulate this value clearly and succinctly.

Don't use jargon

If you listened to yourself during the day you would notice that you use a lot of jargon. Jargon is the use of words or language specific to a social group. Outside

of that group the words and language may be meaningless or difficult to understand.

The words you use may not seem like jargon whilst at work, but take those words out of the work context and they will likely be jargon to other people.

Jargon is useful in environments where there is a shared common understanding of the language being used. Be cautious of using jargon when applying for jobs. Not all companies in the same industry may use the same language when talking about their work. You may also be moving industries in which case the chance of jargon being understood by others is less.

COIK - Clear Only If Known

When communicating think of the acronym COIK.

COIK stands for Clear Only If Known. This means that someone who shares your knowledge will understand your communication. Your message will not be clear to a reader who doesn't have this knowledge.

Search the web, social channels and industry communities to see what terms and phrases other people use. Always think about whether or not your audience is truly going to understand what you're talking about.

If there's any doubt then simplify the language, or provide supporting explanations of what the abbreviation, acronym or term is meant to describe.

I once had a CV application where I didn't understand any of the acronyms, abbreviations and terminology used. How can I realistically assess an application when I don't understand it?

Describe your learning

As we progress through our lives and careers we will learn a significant amount. This learning makes us who we are and allows us to add value to the businesses we work with.

The trick is to understand and record what you are learning so you can build up a picture of how you're developing. Once you have this you can then articulate this to hiring managers who will hopefully be impressed by you and your career growth.

Start now by keeping a journal of what went well, what didn't and what you learn each day. There are lessons in our everyday world. Keep an eye out for them and note them down. Many of these learning points should form the basis of your CV.

If you're already applying for jobs then look back at certain highlight moments, conversations or decisions from the past few months in work and describe what you learned.

Whenever you make a decision you choose a path to embark on. Was it the right path, the wrong path, an OK path and what could you have done differently and what did you learn?

This is all good stuff for your CV. A good hiring manager will want to see how you learn, what mistakes you make (we all make mistakes) and what learning (positive or negative) you have had from your previous roles.

Include your social profile

You should always include your public social media profiles in a CV.

In fact, I would go so far as to put your social profiles in the most prominent position you can. They should be the best source of information about you and your skills. They should be relevant, up to date and consistent with your core message.

You should be proud of them and you should encourage recruiters and hirers to engage with you via these social channels and to read through the content you are posting.

Most hirers will do a search for you on a number of channels anyway so it makes sense to give them the correct profiles to look at. If they search and find the wrong you with an altogether less desirable profile you could find your application (and reputation) tarnished.

Make your CV look appealing

I like CVs to look clean and simple. I think they should be eye catching and draw attention to the highlights.

Many hiring managers scan CVs quickly and pick out relevant points before diving in to the detail.

I like to think that someone has put a lot of effort into the content and presentation of their CV. It shows that they've thought about how they communicate their value. Too much style though can detract from the message. Simple is best, but elegance will help.

Don't create your CV on bright backgrounds or with ridiculous fonts. Use a white background and an easy to read font. Also use a reasonably large font. Sticking to two pages but using a font size of 5 is not going to create a good impression.

Include lots of space and make sure it flows well.

Leave references until later

There is no need to include references on a CV. Simply add a line that says something like “References will be supplied upon successful offer”.

They take up room and aren’t needed for someone to make a decision to interview you or not. They are only typically needed when an offer has been made and accepted. As such, they are administrative rather than informative. Leave them off and fill the space with something more interesting.

Support your CV online

I for one would welcome a CV that had supporting information online. If you wish to include white papers, further details or a full and complete list of work experience then a website would be a good idea.

It’s best to ensure it is in support of a CV, not a replacement for it, otherwise you risk pushing the hiring manager to read the same information twice, or totally missing the information in the first place.

Think of the supporting information as collateral that might support your application further. It’s also important to check that if a hiring manager doesn’t read this supporting information they still have the required information to process your application further.

This online source could be LinkedIn, a blog or Twitter for example. It could be an about.me page, a personal website or just a single web page explaining your experiences.

Don’t appear desperate

I can appreciate that many people are desperately seeking a new role, but try not to let this come across in your application. If a hiring manager picks up on this desperation I believe it has a number of effects.

Firstly, it can make the hiring manager feel uncomfortable as they may feel emotionally forced into a decision.

Secondly, it gives the impression that you are un-hirable and as such, not the best candidate available.

Thirdly, it also gives the impression that all you are seeking is a job, and not a career with the company hiring. Don’t get me wrong, there are a number of candidates who just need to get a job, but try to come across as someone who wants to work for the hiring company rather than someone who isn’t bothered where they end up. It will help to create a better impression.

Include personal details

Always include your name, location and contact details. I prefer full address details but I think rough locations are acceptable also. For example, instead of including my full home address I might just state I live in Winchester, Hampshire.

I'm not a fan of including personal hobbies in a CV. If you do want to include them don't list too many as they will take up valuable space.

Three different types of CV

There are many different types of CV but the three most common are the chronological, skills based or hybrid.

The chronological CV lists your career history in time order, typically starting with your most recent role. Within each role is a description of skills, experiences and achievements.

The skills based CV (often referred to as Functional CV) typically sections out particular skills and mentions where and how they were used. For example there might be a section each on IT Skills, Communication Skill and Management Experience.

The third type is a combination of the above two, often called a hybrid approach. This is the style I always adopt as I think it fits with what I am trying to say better than the other two.

The hybrid CV will typically start with an achievements and skill section followed by a shorter chronological career section. In this hybrid approach the main skills and experiences are presented first in the reading order followed by the finer details of company information and roles you've had. I like this "most important information" first approach.

Choose the CV format that you feel most comfortably represents your own experience and personality. There is no right or wrong approach and there are many other styles of CV becoming popular such as the Info-graphic and storyline styles.

These newer styles might work for some companies and are particularly suited to creative roles, but many hiring managers may struggle to see the value in these. Saying that though, if no one tries then we'll never know.

Make your CV available

You never know when you will need to use your CV. Let's say you're stuck in an elevator with Richard Branson and he liked your elevator pitch. Just as he walks off he turns and asks you to send your CV to his assistant. How fast can you create a tailored awesome CV?

If you get made redundant on the spot with 300 other people and a role pops up that afternoon, how are you going to ensure you're the first to get your awesome application in?

I update my CV each and every month. It's a good way of keeping it fresh and up to date with your current learning but it's also a good way of being able to move fast if needed.

If I attend trade shows or network events whilst job-hunting I take physical copies of my CV. I take a digital copy on a USB stick and I also have it synced in my Dropbox account so I can get to it quick from mobile devices.

I have a Microsoft Word version, a PDF version, and a HTML version.

This may seem overkill but the reality is that the job market is tough and the best candidate may often not be the most skilled or highly technical, but the best prepared and the most effective at communicating their value quickly.

Use a good email address

Whether applying for a job online, via email or via post you'll no doubt need to provide an email address on your CV or with your application. Make sure the email address is professional.

I believe it should at least contain your name, or your brand. Make sure it doesn't look like a spam email address and don't use offensive words or phrases in the address.

For example, a good email address would be something like
firstname.lastname@ISP.com

(i.e. robert.lambert@outlook.com)

Or
firstname.brand/web@ISP/Provider.com

Or
firstname@domain.com
(i.e. rob@parentbrain.com)

Be careful of using an email address like:

Tonybooyyyyyyyyyy233222
and
dgdtsksh222

What impressions do they create?

Creating an online presence

Standing out in a sea of conformity relies on strong skills, a good CV and, in my opinion; a really strong validated social presence.

When I refer to “validated” I mean an online presence that sees you endorsed, connected and in active networking with other people in the industry.

Some recruiters and hiring managers are turning to social media and personal recommendations as their primary source of recruitment so it pays to be present on the social channels, but to also spend time making sure it tells the correct story about you and your skills.

It doesn't mean you need to suddenly start tweeting and blogging, but I do believe that you should start exploring the many social channels and connecting with like-minded individuals.

I like the fact that potential employers (and employees) can find out lots about me from my online presence. It supplements (in fact it replaces) my CV and it helps people ascertain what I am doing and how much I am contributing to the industry.

A strong reputation and online presence can lead to connections and opportunities you would have simply missed otherwise. Blogging and speaking at conferences has led to a number of hiring managers coming directly to me. The same goes for recruiters, although the persistent badgering can become tiresome (tip - there are tools out there to help filter the bad people out).

Being present in the online community will also lead to new connections and the chance to be involved in the tribes of your choice.

If you don't want to take part in the social angle of social media (and there are plenty of reasons to avoid it) then simply sign up and watch the streams fill up with content and opportunities, but don't engage.

I know that creating a social presence isn't comfortable for many people; some people find it very tricky indeed. The reality is though that many recruiters and companies no longer look anywhere else but online.

I know of many recruiters who do 100% of their recruiting through LinkedIn. If you're not on LinkedIn (or other social networks) how are you going to find these jobs or be approached for your next role?

There are no hard and fast rules about what level of social networking you should engage in but my advice is always to ensure you have a LinkedIn profile that is up to date and a professional looking website or blog.

Start a blog

One of the most powerful ways to explore your own ideas, explain your thinking to others and add a social presence is to start blogging.

Don't just start blogging to merely add a social presence, blog because you have something to say. When starting out ignore everything about Search Engine Optimisation and web traffic analysis; just start saying something meaningful.

There are loads of blogs optimised for traffic whose authors have little of value to say, and plenty of blogs not optimised but getting massive amounts of traffic.

The best blogs in the community are from those who've just got something interesting they want to say. Most industry community members are excellent at circulating good stuff. People who write interesting posts will soon get picked up and shared with the wider community.

Don't write with the goal of generating traffic and money from your blog. The reality is that most people don't make any money from their blog. Those that do make money soon find it becomes a full time chore keeping it rolling. And when something becomes a chore it's no longer enjoyable.

Blog because you like talking and writing about your topic of choice. Only then will the real you shine through.

Blogs are an excellent way of tracking how you are learning and growing. When I look back to posts I put out three or four years ago I am horrified at how naive and immature some of my ideas were. I'll no doubt have the same horror in two or three more years. My blog has become a documentary on how my thinking has evolved.

Blogging is also an excellent way for hiring managers to find out more about you. They can work out whether they like you and your thoughts before burning time interviewing you. This obviously has positive and negative consequences. Be sure to think about some of these consequences when you write anything that goes public.

Connect on LinkedIn

As a minimum I would suggest creating a LinkedIn profile. Complete the profile as thoroughly as possible; this makes it easier for people to find you.

Seek out recommendations if you feel the need to. I believe recommendations are only valuable if they come from a trusted source. I've met people with dozens of recommendations who just don't cut it against the criteria I'm hiring against.

The most important aspect of LinkedIn is being honest and making it clear what skills you do have. Do not lie about your skills and achievements. At the end of the day you want people to connect to you and give you a job so put your best (and accurate) foot forward.

Here are some hints and tips on how to make your LinkedIn profile stand out:

- Use your full and real name
- List your achievements
- Add a decent portrait photo
- Fill in your education and employment history
- Connect with all of your work colleagues, past and present
- Add some information about yourself in the profile section
- Add any relevant social links like blogs and Twitter accounts
- Join industry specific groups and set these to show on your profile
- Feed your twitter stream through LinkedIn also (assuming you use Twitter for professional purposes)

Connect on Twitter

Twitter is, for me, the most powerful of all the social channels for connecting with people.

You don't have to join in on Twitter to hear the messages and conversations though, you can just consume if you'd prefer that.

You can use hashtags (#) to both target more specific audiences and also filter the noise.

You can also start to follow those people on Twitter who interest you.

So what is Twitter?

Twitter is a micro blogging platform where you have 144 characters to say or share something. It's for letting people know what's on your mind, sharing updates, sharing links and letting others know what you are doing.

Twitter is a web based service but there are also client-side applications for managing your Twitter feeds and accounts.

Why would I want to let people know what's on my mind?

Why not? It's a great way of letting people know what you are up to and what your thoughts are about your industry.

It's also a great way of sharing ideas, learning from others, keeping in touch, organising gatherings, finding trending news and connecting with people all over the world.

Isn't it all noise?

Twitter is indeed noisy.

But you can do something about this by using lists, tools and filters to find the good stuff. You can also stop following people who don't post anything of value.

Most Twitter clients and apps will allow clever separation of people in to lists and filters meaning you can quickly scan tweets from people of greater interest whilst remaining connected with a wider set of people.

Creating a Twitter account

To create an account log on to Twitter.com and follow the straight forward sign up process.

For security reasons I always advise having an email address specifically for online accounts and never use the same password across tools or sites.

I would also suggest creating a profile name that best represents you. That way people will know who you are and you stand more chance of making connections.

Try to avoid using a combination of upper and lower case letters as it looks odd and it also makes it harder to read. For example rob_lambert looks and reads better than RoB_LaMbErT.

If you are serious about networking and building a wide social network be sure to make it easy for people to add you. If your user name is spelled differently to how it sounds, or is complicated to explain, the chances are people adding you may find it tricky. Steeeeeeven1234 is not easy to explain to someone. I've found that Twitter is quickly becoming a modern day business card so try to make it easy for people to find you and connect.

I would also suggest you don't use a username that has your place of work included in it. Will you remain working for this company forever? Chances are that if you are reading this book you'll be moving on somewhere else. You'll want to take your Twitter account with you so make sure it will make sense in the future. For example Steven_CompanyName will be tricky to change should you move companies.

Make sure you don't create a really long twitter profile name like robthewritingpersondude as your username will take up valuable space in tweets and re-tweets. (There are some ways around this with some tools but for simplicity it pays to keep your username between 5 and 15 characters).

How to manage your feeds

There are a number of options for managing your twitter feeds:

- Your mobile phone via a web browser or app.
- Your tablet device via a web browser or app.
- Online through Twitter's own website, or via an online tool like HootSuite.
- On your laptop or computer through a browser or tool.

Each person will have a preference. I for one use an online tool, a mobile app and a tablet app to manage my feeds and lists. They are configured with lists in the following way:

- Mentions - mentions of me
- Direct Message - messages directed at me
- Inner Circle - those people I want to read tweets from every day
- UK people - those people in the UK who I would like to read tweets from but it doesn't matter if I miss something
- AllPeople - those people across the world who I would like to read tweets from but it doesn't matter if I miss something
- Interesting People - those people outside of my core industry who I will read tweets from every day
- ICT4D - a stream of technology people and organisations using tech for social change and social good

Some tools to look at:

- Hootsuite[24]
- TweetDeck[25]
- Metro Twit[26]

Who should I follow?

Start by following the people contributing to the industry you are working in.

You can search twitter for hashtags of interest such as #finance, #agile, #football, #fastcars etc.

When you find someone of interest then follow them and/or add them to a suitable list or filter.

Have a quick look at who they are following and follow some of those people too if they are interesting to you.

Be cautious though, if you follow too many people in a short space of time you might find your twitter account suspended. Twitter has some calculations behind the scenes to root out spammers and bots.

You will notice from your Twitter feed that people you are following will include @NAME in some of their messages. This is basically a reply or mention of a person. Clicking on the @NAME in anyone's message will take you to that person's profile (depending on the tool you use) where you can find out more about them and then decide whether you want to follow or un-follow them.

One way to engage on Twitter is to re-tweet other people's content. This is the sharing aspect of Twitter. If someone posts something of interest then re-tweet the message to your followers also.

You can also send Direct Messages to other people that are not visible to the whole world. You can only DM someone who is following you.

Do I really have to say something?

Not if you don't want to. If you have nothing to say then don't say anything. But don't let this stop you from signing up and following. You can always just use it for following what's happening

What's the value of Twitter?

In my opinion Twitter is great for the following:

1. Finding out trending news and releases
2. Finding out about jobs, opportunities and connecting to those hiring
3. Tuning in to what the experts/thought leaders/people you admire are saying
4. Building a wide network and resource centre to open up further channels of information and feedback
5. Sharing your thoughts and ideas about various topics
6. Auto-posting or sharing links to your blog posts and news (i.e. you can get most blog engines to autopost to Twitter)
6. For quick and concise real time communication. For example at conferences Twitter is used for organizing drinks and social meet-ups.
7. You can get real time information. A few years back I got stuck in Copenhagen due to heavy snow. I was able to use Twitter to see what flights were running and to get updates from people on planes, at airports and in weather stations. I was able to organise my travel by having access to live feeds from across the world.

There has to be a downside right?

Absolutely. There is a lot of information flowing at you on Twitter and if you don't put the correct filters in place it can become quite tiresome.

If you don't want people commenting on your thoughts and work then you might find Twitter frustrating; people on there will openly challenge you (more often than not in a constructive way, but there are plenty of haters out there.)

Flame wars do happen. It's sad but true.

Any loose comments or misplaced suggestions are immediately in the wild. Don't say anything you wouldn't be comfortable your employer, family and friends hearing about. It's easy to get carried away when on Twitter, just remember an online persona, no matter how well crafted and articulated, is still a representation of you.

You can also get addicted to checking it, hoping that someone else has tweet you, or liked what you've said. This is no different to other social channels. Have you ever observed how often you check your phone, or refresh your email, or check your social channels? You'll be surprised at the frequency.

There will be so much cool and interesting information coming at you that you could get lost in it. I use a simple technique. Each morning I clear each one of my columns of tweets except one or two very specific ones of my inner circles, my replies and direct messages. My theory is that really interesting tweets will be re-tweeted again, and again, and again. I will get it at some point.

No doubt there are plenty more reasons to not use Twitter but to be honest, if you are serious about finding new information, trending topics or are looking to widen your network (which you should be to get a job) then Twitter is invaluable.

A Glossary of Twitter terms

Tweet - A message sent out on Twitter. i.e. Whatever you post to twitter. It's an update. It's your message to the world.

Reply - This is the “[USERNAME]” command. You can have as many @NAME's as you like in the message. When you use the @[USERNAME] message then your message will show in that person's message feed and will show as a "reply" or “mention” for them.

Direct Message - This is signified by a "D [USERNAME]”. This is a private message to your intended recipient. The recipient has to be following you for you to send a Direct Message.

Hashtag - This is signified by a "#" in front of the word(s). For example #jobs is the jobs hashtag. In essence a hashtag is just a list that people can post/listen to. So if you are talking about supermarkets then it would be wise to include #supermarket, #shopping or #groceries in your tweet. You can use as many hashtags as you like in a message.

List - These are basically lists that people can create and add Twitter users to. These can be shared or they can be private. They are essentially a way of grouping people.

Follow - This is just the term used to describe the mechanism of "following" people on twitter

Un-follow - The mechanism of stopping following someone. The person you un-follow can find out that you un-followed them.

Re-tweet - This is the mechanism of re-posting a tweet by someone else. When you re-tweet you basically send that message to your followers. As the tweet will include the original sender's username, then your re-tweet will show in the original sender's replies list.

Join an online community

There are lots of great online communities for you to join. Seek out the ones that are in tune with your thinking and sign up. Join in the conversations and explore some of the content these communities provide.

Creating an online presence on some of the community sites can help to widen your network and also help you to understand what's happening in the industry.

Don't forget though, all communities have an agenda and a "tribe" they attract, so the views may not always be balanced. Seek out alternative communities to get a balance of ideas. True learning, opportunities and connections will come from mixing up your information feeds a little.

Communities don't just exist online. There are local meet-ups and gatherings in most cities across the world. If there isn't one near you then why not start one? These can be a great way of meeting new people and learning more, but also a great place to network and connect.

I employed one of my team after meeting him at a meet-up I organised. We'll talk more about getting yourself in front of hiring managers later in the book.

Be honest

It's important to remain honest through all of your networking. Social channels are simply communication channels. What you communicate is still the most important aspect.

If you blog about being an expert in a certain field but know nothing about it then you'll soon be rumbled. Your online reputation should be treated with the same respect as your offline one. Don't say things online you wouldn't say in person.

Don't criticize companies and people online either, you rarely know all of the facts about the contexts they operate in and you'll also never know where your next job offer may come from.

Networking and connecting

Having a CV ready to go and an online presence in progress will put you ahead of the masses, but not all jobs are advertised or socialised online. To get around this barrier you'll need to start networking. It's not as hard as it first sounds. It's also worth pointing out that you don't have to become a smarmy stereotypical sales person either. It's about being you and connecting with others.

Some people don't like networking because they feel it is "cheating" on their current employer. I can understand this. Why would you want to network and connect with the goal of getting a job when someone else is currently paying you?

Firstly, networking is not just about finding a job. It can be about opening sources of learning, finding a tribe to join and also a way of making friends.

Secondly, don't ever rely solely on your employer to look after you. Don't deny opportunities for yourself through a feeling of loyalty to your employer. As much as most managers would love to take care of their staff forever, the reality is that businesses change.

There comes a time when most businesses need to make a tough decision about the future of the business. No amount of loyalty on your part will matter if you're a headcount they can't afford to keep.

Be loyal to your employer and committed to the business, but there will come a time when you need to jump on an opportunity for a number of reasons. Networking is a way of ensuring that you get more of these opportunities and you have access to the jobs that can often be hard to find.

Connect in-person

Despite my promotion of online networking I still believe that face-to-face connections are preferable. In-person connections are not always possible and sometimes they happen before or after a connection online. The Internet has brought the world closer together so to speak, but it's yet to replace the nuances and pure enjoyment of face-to-face communications.

Connecting in person helps to solidify online relationships you already have, or kick start new relationships in-person that can continue online.

Connecting with people is what helps us to identify with whom and what we are. We are social creatures (on the whole) and like to hang around with like-minded people (mostly). As such it's important to build connections. Connections can help us belong, they can also open up great opportunities and they can also help us to feel better about ourselves.

Opportunities such as joining interesting discussions, being involved in creative work, being involved in planning and organizing events and being included in wider social circles of people are all benefits of networking.

I've found in-person connections to be stronger than purely online ones. Seek out as many opportunities as you can to connect to people in person.

Widen your network

Widening your network has both positive and negative effects.

The more connections you have, the weaker your real emotional connections may become. I have a very wide network but I try to keep my immediate network of close friends and people in the community small. This helps me to connect to a wide range of people but also maintain strong relationships with those around me.

The more connections you have the more opportunities you should encounter. A wider network may also help in times of trouble like when you need a job in a hurry.

Networks should not be abused though. If you treat your network as a ticket to bigger pay, more sales and more self-promotion then you'll start to lose the network you have.

If you strive for positive interactions, treat others with respect and help others out then your networks will help you when you need it.

Business cards

Despite the fact our interactions are moving online there is still a need for a decent business card. Business cards are a way of sharing contact details. They should also be a way of reminding those you meet of who you are and what you talked about. So make sure your business cards are memorable, simple and communicative.

You are always being interviewed

There are very few people in most industries that could literally walk from one job to another without some form of networking or introduction.

When you meet people in-person, either in your industry community, or from the wider public, you are always being interviewed.

You and the person you are speaking to might not always realise this, but you'll both potentially remember the interaction. The memory of this interaction could land you a job, or dismiss you from the process completely.

When you are networking at events you should be aware that anyone you speak to could be a potential employer, or have influence on those who make the decisions.

- Have you ever had a manager approach you and ask what you thought of X colleague you used to work with?
- Have you ever met someone you'd most likely never employ if you were hiring?
- Have you ever met someone you'd like to hire right on the spot if you were hiring?

We are always being interviewed. If you are a hiring manager you should always be interviewing.

Good companies to work for are few and far between. When you meet someone consider whether you may ever work with him or her, both now and in the future. If you are yourself, show passion for what you do, have confidence in your own personality and are pleasant and nice, then you'll most likely create a good impression.

I have hired people after meeting them online or at an event. Good hiring managers are always hiring. Good candidates know this.

Jump on opportunities

One of the most important things I hope you take from this book is the fact that you need to be ready to pounce when opportunities present themselves. These opportunities might not pop up when you're looking for a job, they may present themselves whilst you're gainfully employed. When you need them to show they might never appear.

If you were made redundant or let go for other reasons it's important that you pounce quickly on the available opportunities you are presented with. As well as hustling your own opportunities you need to jump on those presented to you. You can only do this if you're prepared and ready.

If you're building a social presence then be aware that this takes time. Don't start this when it's too late. It can take months and years to build a solid profile. It can take days to get your LinkedIn profile shiny and reflecting you in the right light. Keep your online presence up to date. Keep your CV up to date. Keep your skills up to date. Pounce on the right opportunities.

Some networking ideas

Meetups, events, geek nights and user groups
Use the Meetup[28] site to find local gatherings. Don't just stick to your own industry meet-ups, consider anything in your local area that sounds fun, interesting or has the potential to have hiring managers there.

Attending meet-ups will help you learn about how others are doing things, make friends and connections and allow you to share your contact details with others.

There are loads of events going on in your local area. You'll just have to find them.

Meeting people in the local area and building a network can help locate those jobs that might go unadvertised on the mainstream sites.

Recruitment events

Most industries have a recruitment event of some description. I've never found much value in the stands and activities at most expo events, but there can be some value in connecting with other companies and recruiters. After all, they often hold the keys to interesting jobs.

Start-up events

There are many events geared towards start-ups in almost every town and city. Start-ups might not require people with your skills right now but they may in the future.

Attending events aimed at start-ups helps you to build connections and grow your network.

Social networks

I've talked heavily about social networks but they really do help you to connect to people you previously may have never encountered.

Finding good jobs

The trick to enjoying your life in work is to find a good job.

Sadly I meet far too many people who hate their jobs. They hate the company they work for and they hate their chosen career. It's clear from speaking to people in the many industries that there are some good jobs and some terrible jobs and a whole load in between.

It's all very subjective though. Some people thrive in certain environments so it's too dismissive to state any particular set of jobs as being good or bad.

Some bad jobs are only bad because we make them that way. We often have the opportunity to change our work and our environments for the better, yet many people are happier simply complaining rather than taking action.

We can also learn to appreciate what we have and to make the most of it; that way we can turn a bad thing in to a good thing.

Tap your network

The best way to find out about jobs and to land a new role is to tap your network.

It's important that your networks aren't abused. You'll soon have no network to talk of if all you do spam and badger people for jobs.

Your network can be called on in times of trouble and times of needs, but be sure to give something back. I strive to do something good for my network each day. It can be as simple as re-tweeting something interesting, provide free advice, getting on a Skype call with someone for coaching, creating free content or just sharing my insights and knowledge.

Respect everyone in your network and they will respect you.

Build relationships

Building relationships is tied to tapping your network. Without good relationships no matter how big your network is you'll likely receive little help.

Making connections, respecting others and genuinely working hard to maintain these relationships will give you a strong foundation for a network.

Building strong working relationships with people online and offline will open doors you never knew existed; doors to collaboration, interesting content, and opportunities to learn and, of course, job opportunities.

If you provide value and help others you will enrich other people's lives. Don't do this just to get a job. Do it because you want to.

Ask around

We've talked about asking your network and peers but how about firing off applications directly to companies? I'm always amazed at how few people actually do this. I'll talk a little later about how to go about doing this.

I hired someone who sent in a speculative CV to our direct email address. Our company had been recommended to her through someone in the community I know. We hired her.

Many companies have a generic application email address for people to send their CVs to, so make use of it, even if they aren't actively advertising a role you require.

Start early

As soon as you feel you need or want a job then start looking. Don't put it off. Don't "hang tight" as you might miss opportunities.

Scour job boards

The web is now full of hundreds of jobs boards. Some of them are attached to communities, some are run as a business and some are part of social networks, like the LinkedIn job board.

They clearly serve a function; they advertise jobs. Job boards are a great way of finding open positions. The same position is often available with multiple recruiters and worded completely differently so be aware of this when applying.

Social channels

Follow twitter hashtags like #[Your Industry] #jobs #itjobs and any other hashtag that you find relating to your career and chosen field. See what hashtags other people are using in their tweets, you'll then find other filters that might lead you to the right networks.

Also seek out location-based hashtags on Twitter. I'm currently working in Basingstoke, Hampshire so I often include the hashtags #basingstoke and #hampshire to target my tweets. I would also add #southampton or #winchester too as both of these cities are commutable from Basingstoke.

Not all jobs are advertised on all channels, so seek some diversity and try as many as you can handle.

Understanding job adverts

When I am writing job adverts I try hard to make them appealing, descriptive and informative.

As a hiring manager I want to make sure I make it clear what type of person I want, what environment they will work in and what kind of product they will work on. I also try to make it clear about the attributes and expected behaviour of the person I am seeking.

However, many companies roll out standard job adverts, or their HR team re-formats jobs to fit with certain standards.

A typical job advert has some or all of the following included:

- About the company
- About the role
- Mandatory skills
- Desirable skills
- Contact details and information on how to apply

About the company

Many job adverts from agencies will not mention the name of the company advertising the job. Instead they will use descriptive words or phrases such as “industry leader in X” or “large retailer” or “small software house”. They are trying to encourage you to get in contact and sometimes the clients themselves may demand the business name is left out of the advert.

Whether the name is there or not though shouldn't detract you from applying. I heard someone once say that they would never apply for a role unless the advert mentioned the company that were hiring. This is crazy. Why wouldn't you invest a little time in finding out more? If you want a job and the rest of the advert sounds good, then it's worth investing time in finding out more.

Job-hunting is hard work and sometimes it's uncomfortable and it pushes you outside of your comfort zone. This is good. Embrace it. It's what's often involved in getting a good job.

You could expect to see the job location, rough company size (large, small, etc.) and some description of the industry. These will all help you decide whether this company and the industry they operate in is appealing to you.

About the role

This is typically a short sentence or two about what to expect from the role. Often this is poorly articulated and is often boiled down to something generic like “doing X”, “writing Y” and “drive sales levels up”.

Mostly this section is unhelpful but it can give you some clues as to how the person advertising the job perceives the role. Consider though that the person advertising the job may not always be the same person that is hiring for the job. Recruiters and HR departments often change job adverts to make them fit templates and to ensure they show up on searches.

Mandatory skills

In this section you'll typically get a bullet point list, or a paragraph of skills and experience listed out.

Expect to see things like:

- "Ten years experience in X"
- "Great communication skills"
- "Excellent understanding of Y and Z"

Mostly these are generic and borrowed from other job adverts. It takes a great deal of skill and time to craft a good job advert and the simple truth is most companies don't invest the time.

You may find that certain achievements and levels of education are needed for the role such as a degree or a certification.

You will also typically find details of specific tools or processes in this mandatory section.

As an applicant it always makes sense to check you meet the mandatory requirements. Don't always treat these mandatory requirements as absolute though. More often than not I believe many hiring managers don't know what they want so they go with the norm. You have a chance to shine, even if you're not meeting the minimum requirements.

Desirable skills

You'll often get a desirable skills section where the hiring manager adds in skills and experience that would be good to have but not essential.

It's an interesting section because in my experience when really digging down on these desirable skills I find the hiring manager is binary about them. They either do really want these skills but were afraid to put them as mandatory or they really don't care about them but felt it necessary to include this section because everyone else does.

Why job adverts are wrong

I've yet to meet a hiring manager who would stick to both the mandatory and desirable requirements if presented with awesome or poor candidates.

For example, it's possible for someone to have met the mandatory requirements and all the desirable but be a complete misfit and an undesirable person to work with.

A candidate could meet none of the criteria at all but be an excellent fit, have the potential to learn anything quickly and be a great team member.

That's why it's important to get face, or voice, time with the actual person hiring.

Why job adverts are useful

Job adverts can be useful though. They are the catalyst that gets you and the hiring manager (or recruitment consultant) talking to each other. It's not the only way to get these two parties talking to each other, we've already discussed social media and networking, but it is a standard mechanism most job seekers are familiar with.

Is the job a quality job?

One of the hardest tasks you'll face when finding jobs is working out whether or not the job meets your quality bar.

Each person's quality bar is set differently depending on circumstances. With bills to pay and mouths to feed it's understandable that we may feel more pressure to just get a job.

With time on our side we might hold tight for a role that better suits our needs and desires. If you can, spend a little time assessing whether the job, the people and the industry is really right for you.

Don't be too picky though, some of the best jobs I have held sounded a little risky initially.

Applying for jobs

There are many different ways to apply for a job. No matter what context you find yourself in (i.e. connecting directly with the hiring manager or going through a consultant) follow the rules and instructions outlined in the job advert.

You would be surprised with the number of applications I receive from people who have not followed one or two basic instructions.

You are always being interviewed and the application process is one of the first stages of this. Mess this up and you risk being tripped at the first hurdle.

Follow the instructions outlined, include the information you need to include and submit the application as requested.

Meeting the mandatory requirements

The basics of applying for any job is making sure you meet the mandatory requirements, or if you don't, working out a way to clearly explain why you are still a good fit for the role.

It's important though to realise that the job spec is just a guide. Most job specs are wrong, misleading and cobbled together to "get something out there", so don't treat them as absolute.

Often there are HR teams and recruiters whose job it is to stop you getting to the hiring manager to ease the burden. I've experienced some HR departments diluting the job requirements down to generic specifications to make mass recruiting easier and to aid in filtering based on easily quantifiable abilities, skills and knowledge.

These filters typically look for industry certifications, buzzwords and specific technology. I'll give you more hints and tips on how to bypass these filters in later chapters.

For now though it's important to understand what the job you want requires of you.

Nice to haves

Nice to have requirements for the role are an interesting concept. It basically means you'll have a higher chance of getting a job if you have them, than someone who doesn't have them. Or does it?

What happens if you have the nice to haves but not the mandatory?

What if you have all of the skills but a rotten attitude to work?

I would always pay attention to the nice to haves. In my experience the nice to haves are actually often mandatory (or sometimes not essential at all) but many

hiring managers feel the need to include a nice to have section. It's become an industry norm that many hiring managers won't break.

You need to face the reality that you'll probably be up against a candidate who has the mandatory and the nice to have; how are you going to convey your value in this circumstance?

Research stuff you don't know

Whilst writing this book I examined hundreds of job specs to look for patterns across them. One commonality between many job specs across industries seems to be the listing of specific tools in the mandatory requirements section of the job advert.

For example:

- "Knowledge of X Tool for doing Y is essential"
- "Must know how to run Z tool"

In many of these cases it is not the tool that should be of importance but the knowledge and skills of the person using that tool.

In many cases when specific tools are listed the person who wrote the job spec is confusing the use of a tool with the skills needed to understand why the tool is important, how it can be used and how best to use it.

So in these circumstances I would always ignore the mandatory requirements and make a good case in your CV and application why learning these tools will be no problem for you. After all, if you've got the skills you'll be able to learn the standard toolset and add value.

Of course, there will always be tools and toolsets that really are mandatory due to their nature and would be tough to learn. For example, operating systems, coding languages and specialist industry tools.

One way to circumvent the filters is to do some research on the tools being listed so that you know what they do. You should be able to discuss their pros and cons and have a genuine conversation about the tool (and the alternatives) even if you've never used it. Be honest that you've never used it but you have been researching it.

Therefore you can list the tools on your CV and application and make it clear you've researched them. This way you will get past any nasty auto-word search filters they have in place and you'll also be able to talk through these points in any interview.

It might not just be tools. It could be techniques, or processes or approaches to completing something. The point is that there will always be stuff you don't

know how to use or do – so go away and learn about what’s involved. This will give you something to talk about but also allow you to pass any keyword filters.

Always be honest about your skills and experience though, but always show initiative. Initiative alone, for a good hiring manager, will be a prized aptitude.

Create a great first impression

Ensure you create a really professional impression with your covering letter and application.

It’s the attention to detail that gives a good first impression and therefore a higher chance of getting an interview.

Your application, email or covering letter is often the first thing that a hiring manager reads so make sure it’s concise, simple and well written.

The goal of your covering letter and CV is simply to get you an interview. Don’t write too much, save that for the interview.

If you are applying in a language that is not your native language or you don’t feel confident in your grammar and spelling then ask someone to help you.

If you do have someone re-write it for you explain this in the letter/email. If there is a mismatch between your use of language in the application and your use of language in an interview then this will immediately raise alarm bells with the hiring manager.

Most roles will not require fluent language skills so it will not be detrimental to your application, but it’s best to be transparent and clear at all times.

I often find that a simple sentence like “A friend wrote this introduction as I am working on improving my written X” will help to provide transparency.

Although creating a good first impression is important it should not be at the expense of exaggerating your abilities. If the role requires good written Russian for example it would be a mistake to get help writing the cover letter and then passing it off as your own.

A good first impression matters, but so too does honesty and the ability to live up to that first impression.

Follow up your application

If you don’t receive any feedback from the application within 24 hours then seek out a telephone number or email address and follow up. Keep doing this. It is frustrating and it only adds to the flaws and impersonal feel of most recruitment processes but if you really want the job then it’s worth it.

If you still don't receive any feedback then search the web for the advert. Search the web for all of the text in the advert or just some part of it and see what results you get. You might find the same job advertised on another job board, on the recruiter's website or even on the hiring company's site. Apply through these other mechanisms.

This may sound like overkill and it may appear that you are doing someone else's job for them (hint - you are) but if you want the job then keep pursuing it.

I believe many hiring managers who use recruiters (either internal HR or external companies) don't know what is happening during the application process and they would be shocked to find out how unprofessional some of these processes (and the people behind them) are.

Don't burn too much time chasing a job though. It might not even exist which is why they didn't get back to you in the first place. But don't give up too soon. Job-hunting isn't easy.

Build a relationship with the Consultant

Assuming you got a response and are now in contact with a recruitment consultant then start to build the relationship with them. They will be crucial in landing you an interview, getting the best deal for you (after all this often results in more commission for them) and generally sorting out the deal between yourself and your potential future employer.

The best way to build a relationship is to ask questions. Ask them about themselves, their experience and their lives. Find out more about them and see if you have a connection there.

A good recruitment consultant is hard to find, so when you do find a good one then hold on to them. Give them all of your work and go to them every time you need to. Tell your friends and colleagues about them.

A good working relationship with your recruitment consultant will mean they will do a good job at selling you to the hiring manager to get an interview and they will work hard for both sides to broker a good deal.

If you are using an internal HR recruiter then the same relationship building process helps. The main difference is that they will clearly have their priorities aligned with the company doing the hiring and as such, you may have to work even harder to get the package you want.

Ask to speak to the hiring manager

If you are applying directly to a company then phone the company and ask to speak to the hiring manager. Do this either before or after you submit an application.

If you do it after applying make sure you mention that you have already applied and are following up to find out more about the role.

It's always good to speak to the hiring manager directly as it helps to build a relationship and it gives you a chance to find out about the job from the person most likely closest to it.

Go around recruitment consultants

If you are working with a recruitment consultant (or internal HR) and you are getting no feedback on your application then attempt to speak directly with the hiring manager. By this point you should know who the company is doing the recruitment. Once you have their name you can now start your own campaign of getting to speak to them.

First attempt should always be a direct phone call to the manager, department or HR department. You can normally find the phone numbers, the management/directors and other contact details on the company's website. Use this to your advantage and give them a call.

Be sure to articulate clearly why you felt the need to circumvent the recruitment consultant. In my experience most companies are appalled to hear about the way potential employees are often treated, after all the first impression you get of a company is through the recruiter.

If you don't know what company the role is for and the recruiter is not responding to requests then walk away (and search the web for the advert as described earlier in this chapter). There may not even be a role, or if there is, it might not be as described.

I've fallen in to this trap before by applying for what sounded like a good job only to find they were interviewing for a completely different role. It was a royal waste of everyone's time. The recruiter had created four different job specs from the original one to throw as many people (mostly unqualified or seeking something different) at the interview process.

Keep a record of all applications

I'm always surprised with how few candidates actually keep detailed information about each application. They simply sit there for a few hours and fire off as many applications as they can.

When they receive a callback about a role they often don't have a clue about it, or have to spend ages digging out email trails and auto-response emails.

If I get an application directly and the person I phone doesn't know or care about me or the company I represent, then they will have to work extra hard to turn my opinion of them around.

Keep a list of the names and the companies you have connected with. This is the same whether directly to a company or through a recruiter. Make sure that the first impression the hiring manager or recruiter has of you is a positive one.

Keep a copy of each CV you send to each different role so you don't end up talking about the wrong CV and application.

Follow up on all applications

If you get rejected from any application with little or no feedback, then ask for further clarification as to why you were not successful.

This feedback should be listened to and taken on board. You may not want to action anything based on the feedback as sometimes the feedback is generic or not constructive, but don't flatly discount it; feedback can be a useful way to improve yourself, your CV and your application process.

Speculative applications

Speculative applications are quite a scary prospect for many job seekers. Fears of rejection and of coming across as desperate are just two concerns job seekers express at the thought of speculative applications.

Some companies are often recruiting but are not openly advertising the fact.

Some companies are in a perpetual state of swallowing up any excellent candidate who wanders nearby, even if they may not always have a job opening available.

Some are recruiting openly but don't use typical job boards or channels of recruitment.

I know a Support Manager who used to be a Software Tester. He sent in a speculative application to a start-up tech company regarding any testing positions they may have. They declined on the testing front but suggested he might be very good at leading the support team. They weren't wrong; he took the role and did (and still does) an excellent job.

The trick to applying speculatively is to tailor your CV to highlight key achievements and your core skills, but also highlight the broad spectrum of skills that are transferable to other roles (assuming you would like to take your career in a slightly different direction).

The following few sections give you the basics for moving forward with your speculative job applications.

Identifying suitable companies

The first step to sending speculative applications is working out the constraints to your search. Everyone has constraints so you need to work out what yours are and narrow your search accordingly.

Here are some of the typical constraints:

- Location
- Domain or industry
- Technology ecosystem
- Company culture (i.e. corporate, formal, startup, company reputation)
- Company size
- Anticipated or expected salary (some companies pay a lot more than others)
- Business maturity
- Product / Service / Market maturity

There are many more besides but for most of us we have a constraint that will force us to narrow down our search.

For example, I would want:

- A small to medium company
- A company that is growing (i.e. a startup or growth stage company)
- A company with an interesting product that I can relate to (i.e. something I can understand, have an affinity towards and can see making a difference to people's lives)
- A company with a chilled-out culture where fun and learning are just as important as making money
- A company with an immature set of processes where I would be able to add value and improve things
- A company that is less than 1 hours' commute from my house (door to door)
- A company that allows working from home

This kind of information is often available on the company's website, but sometimes you might have to do some digging. It's always worth spending some time researching your potential future employer.

The fewer constraints you have the more choices you have available for you; however, for some people this is not always a good thing. Large amounts of choice can result in option paralysis where the choices are so overwhelming that you are unable to make a decision. Sometimes having two or three choices is easier and more palatable than having 200.

Sometimes you may not care about some of the above constraints as getting a form of income is more important. Even in this case you will have constraints such as distance and the type of work (i.e. whether you can do it).

Only you will know what constraints you have so spend some time thinking about this and jot them down if you need to. Just doing this exercise alone will give you the focus you need to get job searching.

List out the companies

The next step is to list out companies and organisations that fit within your constraints. I would advise listing them out in a forced rank order (i.e. - your favourite at the top, your least favourite at the bottom). You should therefore spend the most effort working on the top companies.

Keep this list up to date by adding contextual comments, removing companies you're no longer interested in or adding new ones in there.

If you don't keep track of where you are applying and how important this company is to you then you may get confused, frustrated or even lose sight of why you're doing this in the first place.

You may end up applying to the same company more than once, whilst not applying to the company you really want to work for. It can also get confusing about who you have, or have not, spoken to.

Organisation is the key to making the speculative application process as smooth as possible.

When contacting each company be sure to contact one at a time, starting with your preferred company. Don't blast out one email to everyone. Take care to ensure you have found the right email address, the right person, the right company and that you have sent them the information and application you intended to.

Research contacts and connections

At the same time as listing companies and contacts at the company it is worth researching your own networks on LinkedIn or other social channels. You may find that someone you once worked with now works at one of these companies and can direct you to the right person to send your application to. They may even put in a good word for you.

Be sure to use your own network if you can (or feel inclined to). It is much better for the hiring manager to have a personal recommendation about you than a cold call or speculative CV.

If you are on social channels and are following (or connected) to people at these companies you want to work for, then get in touch with them and find out as much as you can. You may also find that you have the chance to connect with the hiring manager directly in person or online. This will help your application if you create a good impression.

Send tailored applications

Don't send a stock CV.

Even if you keep the CV fairly generic be sure to tailor it to the domain or type of work the company does.

Highlight your transferable skills and abilities. Be sure to draw out any skills that are relevant to the company's domain.

If you have no domain specific experience for your CV then attempt to get some. Volunteer your time, start a local user group or join an online community working in that domain. Your experience may be light, but your enthusiasm and willingness to learn will shine through.

Tailor each email or application message that you send also. A well thought out application based on the context in which a hiring manager operates creates a potential WOW moment. A generic and neutral application is good, but it's unlikely to make the hiring manager giddy with excitement.

Cold calling

I'm not a big fan of cold calling to hiring managers to ask about roles, but I include it here because some people swear by it. I often find it puts the hiring managers on the spot and not all hiring managers will feel comfortable with this.

It also takes a certain sort of person to be able to make the call.

I would suggest you send an application and CV through first and follow up with a phone call the following day if you haven't heard anything back.

Always follow up applications with a call anyway, but only you will know whether a straight out cold call before sending your CV will suit your personality.

Speculative emails

The main communication channel for speculative applications is often email. Email is used by almost everyone. It is such a well-known way to communicate that I would suggest starting with an email to the company in question.

You can typically find the email address of the business on the website and sometimes they may even have a human resources email for speculative applications.

Attach your CV to the email or include a link to it and include a short summary of yourself including your skills and why you are applying to the company.

Why you are applying is often the most interesting part of any application, especially so if you manage to convey the passion you have for the company, brand or product.

Most people scan new emails from people they don't recognise with the intent of working out if it is spam or not. Try to avoid giving them reason to think yours is spam. This is harder than you think but here are a few guidelines that may help:

- Make sure your email address is professional and doesn't contain any words or phrases that might land you in the spam filter.
- Make your subject line descriptive and short so it quickly grabs attention and doesn't get deleted.
- Never start the email body with a web link or URL
- Don't use a URL shortener for links as these hide the site they are redirecting to
- Don't use swear words
- Don't use text speak (like txt, lol, wtf)
- Keep it short
- Include a signature with links to your web presence on LinkedIn (a trusted site)
- Thank them for their time
- Provide a clear telephone number (preferably a home number and a mobile number) and remember to enable voicemail on your phone. Set a clear answer message stating who you are and how quickly you will respond to the call.

- Attach your CV and make sure your CV is sensibly named. For example [Your Name] – CV – [Job Role]
- Spell-check your text.

The above will not guarantee your email gets through an electronic spam filter, or the human scan but it gives it a good chance. As mentioned, if you have not heard anything back after a day then follow up with a phone call.

Review often

Review your applications and their status often. I keep a spreadsheet of applications and states. This way I can see at a glance the state of each application.

- Was I rejected? If so, why?
- Did I receive acknowledgement of the application?
- Am I being added to a waiting list or candidate database?
- Is there a chance a follow up call might yield greater results?
- Who is hiring?
- Are there any open positions at all?
- When did I apply?
- What text did I send in the email?
- Which CV did I send?

Follow-up

Follow up with a phone call on all applications that you receive no feedback from. A phone call says to the hirer that you care about your application. It shows you are confident enough to phone up and chase the application. It also shows that you are after some feedback.

I tend to call anywhere between 2 to 6 days after the application. Earlier than 2 days shows that you might be impatient. Giving someone 2 days to think about an application is plenty of time for him or her to do anything about the application.

Any time after 6 days might just be too long for any meaningful context. Each of us is different though and each industry has norms around this so do what comes naturally to you.

Phone interviews

It's quite common to be faced with a phone interview with the hiring manager as the first part of a multi-part assessment. I'm a huge fan of phone interviews both as a hiring manager and as a candidate.

Phone interviews give both sides an opportunity to find out more about the role, the people and the company. I've been to too many interviews where I've had to walk out within the first ten minutes because it's not the right environment for me. This can often be avoided by having an initial interview via phone or other medium.

Let's face it, face-to-face interviews are time consuming and expensive so it makes a lot of sense to get the basics nailed in a phone interview.

Different mediums

When I talk about phone interviews I'm actually clearly communicating how old I am. It's a bit like when I still refer to renting a DVD (or watching a film on demand) as renting a video. I'm using the name of a technology to describe a process or action.

In the modern world you could replace the word phone with any term you wish to describe the process of cheaply and easily assessing the suitability of both the hiring company and the candidate prior to a face-to-face interview. I'm going to call them phone interviews throughout this chapter for consistency, but in reality these calls could be done via the web.

For example I've done video and voice interviews via Skype (or other tool) and even submitted a video job application before. They are all ways of pre-screening candidates so as to not waste time and effort in face-to-face interviews.

Be cautious of video resumes or video applications though as these are one-way mediums designed to make it easier for hirers to see and hear a candidate before an interview. I see these as purely a benefit for the hirer.

Be sure you're not investing lots of effort creating a video resume for a role you might not actually want; so make sure you do the research about the job in advance. Creating video resumes takes time and effort but can be very much worth it, especially so if you can reuse the video for future applications.

Skype[29] seems to be a popular medium for many companies to hold a phone interview. It's free, reliable and works on most platforms. I use the application Skype as an example, there are many more variants such as Google Hangouts[30] and Go-to-meeting[31].

How to rock a phone interview

The key to rocking a phone interview is to be sure that you are prepared and that you create a good first impression. In fact, it's the same for face-to-face interviews except the lack of visual feedback adds an extra element of trickiness.

Planning for the interview

Plan for the interview in the same way that you would a face-to-face interview. Make sure you are on time, make sure you know who you are speaking to and make sure you have the contact details should the call, or session, get interrupted.

Be sure to plan your location carefully. If you are currently employed it will probably make sense to distance yourself from the office. It creates a bad impression to be whispering down the phone and having to stop talking anytime someone walks past.

Make sure you pick somewhere quiet, with good phone reception (or internet connectivity) and be sure to think about your surroundings. Are there going to be family members coming and going? Are there going to be loud vehicles tumbling past every few minutes?

It's useful to plan where you will do the call in advance of the call. This way you can scope out the area and be sure you can provide the best environment to succeed.

I've always found that doing the interview in my car is the best for me. I always try to time the interviews to be around lunch meaning it isn't obvious that I am away from my desk for anywhere up to an hour.

Appearance matters

If you are doing a video chat then make sure you look respectable and make an effort with your appearance. Be sure to wear something smart and make yourself look respectable. Sitting there in your jogging outfit with messed up hair might not create the impression you want.

Be prepared when using chat tools that the interviewer may want to turn on the video. Don't assume that the interview format won't change. I know someone who had to bail on a Skype chat when the interviewer asked to switch on the video. He was only wearing his underwear!

Visual communication is lost

If you're doing an interview with no visuals then appreciate that much of the core message of your communication won't be communicated. Much of the meaning of our messages is conveyed using non-verbal communication such as gestures, expressions and posture. The interviewer won't see any of this so be sure to compensate by being as clear as possible with the words you use.

Be clear and succinct

It's important to be clear when talking on the phone.

Be sure to pronounce words with more clarity than usual and be sure to use language that feels comfortable. Don't try to use words you don't normally use.

I think it's worth printing out (or knowing) the NATO phonetic alphabet^[32] so you can clearly spell words should you need to.

Keep your answers short and succinct. This should be a general rule you apply to all interviews, including meetings and one to ones.

Don't eat, smoke or drink

There is nothing more off-putting than hearing somebody eating, smoking or drinking down the phone. It is easily detectable and very off-putting.

I think it's rude to be eating and smoking whilst doing a phone interview. I can understand someone having a drink but be sure to move the phone away whilst you gulp the drink.

Be polite

Be polite, just like you would in a face-to-face interview. If the hiring manager is calling you make sure you answer the phone politely and confidently.

Be sure to say your name when you answer such as "Hi, Rob Lambert speaking". I find it particularly bad to have to ask the candidate whether it is indeed X speaking. It gives the impression that they weren't really expecting my call.

Once the hiring manager has introduced themselves be polite and welcoming.

Think about how you sound. Many people appear to sound gruff and surly when in reality they accompany this surliness with a giant smile and welcoming non-verbal clues. Without visuals you will lose this so make sure you sound engaged and polite.

Give verbal or auditory feedback

Most feedback received when talking to someone is received via eye contacts or gestures such as head nods. Our posture can also give feedback such as the way we sit or stand.

None of this will work over the phone so be sure to give auditory signs of feedback such as "hmmm", "aha" and "ummm". Make it sound like you are listening and engaged.

Ending the call

Be sure to end the call on a positive note and be clear about what the next steps are.

Are they going to be back in touch?

What time scales will they be contacting you in?

Interviewing

Good stuff. You've got an interview. Awesome news.

Now you need to rock the interview.

Success in an interview can be practiced. Trust me.

With a few core skills you can improve your interview technique tenfold and hopefully land a winning job.

It's my belief that everyone can do well in an interview. Some people are naturally good in interviews; others need more practice.

There are some standard techniques you can learn.

There was a period in my life where I would attend many interviews seeking that right job. It paid off. I found the right job and learned a lot about interviewing.

My friends would joke that I enjoyed going for interviews. Truth be told; I did.

I now spend time coaching people from all walks of life on how to succeed in interviews and job applications.

What follows are some of the lessons I've learned from interviewing, being interviewed and coaching others.

The purpose of an interview

To succeed in an interview you need to understand why interviews exist, what the goal of them is and what role you play in that process.

Interviews are about exchanging information, often with the intent of making a decision or clarifying details.

You will be making a decision about whether you like the people interviewing you, the job and the environment. The interviewer will be making decisions about whether they like you, whether you have the skills and whether or not you're a good fit for the role amongst many other things.

No matter what format an interview takes you need to understand that an interview is a two way process. It's about the gathering and sharing of information, on both sides.

I'm personally not a fan of just voice-based interviews as a significant amount of information is communicated by non-verbal communication. Face to face interviews are still the best way to get this subjective information.

You will likely have little control over whether you have a face to face or a phone interview so be sure you're good at both.

Practice

The best way to succeed in an interview is to practice. Practice at home with your family, ask your friends to interview you, attend real interviews and read about how to succeed in interviews.

By practicing your interview technique you will feel more confident in the real thing. When you don't have to worry about the basics you can focus on creating WOW moments in the minds of those interviewing you.

Research

Find out as much as possible before the interview and go prepared. By spending some time researching beforehand you'll be more comfortable in the interview. You'll also earn brownie points by actually knowing something about the interviewer, the company and the role.

You'd be surprised how many people I've interviewed who didn't even visit the company website to find out what we do. This is a fundamental mistake to make.

It's a really poor impression to enter an interview having not even looked at what the company makes, builds or sells. Most of this information is available on the corporate website or blog, so read about it.

Find out who is interviewing you and connect with them on LinkedIn or other social channel. Find out more about them, their skills and background and what views they have on the job role or industry. This can give you loads of clues and topics to focus on.

Find out where the interview is and plan accordingly.

Find out how the interview will be run, who you will meet and when. How have the interviewers split up the sessions of the interview?

You've got to hope

Although you may practice and practice and get good at interviews you're still at the mercy of landing a bad interviewer. The best interviews are when both the interviewee and the interviewer are good at doing interviews.

All too often I have been for job interviews only to find I'm asked pre-defined questions like I'm taking part in a market research survey.

A good interviewer will make you feel welcome, remove barriers to communication, set out a good agenda, stick to the right time frames and ask good questions.

They will typically do a combination of structured, semi-structured and free form interview sections (i.e. some pre-defined questions, some reactive questioning to what you say and some open question time).

A bad interviewer will create an uncomfortable environment, typically ask you very structured questions from a checklist, not react to anything you say and leave no time for free form discussions.

Unfortunately you don't get to decide who interviews you.

I once went for an interview at a small software house. The interview room was freezing cold, I wasn't offered a drink, I wasn't introduced to anyone, I had 5 people sitting in front of me behind a massive table and a further two people sat behind me making notes. It was really uncomfortable. I asked for them to make it more comfortable. They refused. I made my excuses and walked out.

The interview structure

In my experience interviews follow a pretty standard structure. There are obviously exceptions but most interviews will run with a similar structure to what follows.

There will be an introduction session where the interviewer welcomes you and explains the session. They will essentially set the scene and let you know how things will proceed.

They will typically summarise the reasons for the interview by explaining the role, the reason why they are hiring and how the interview will work.

They will then start the interview process according to the agenda. The interview may have multiple people interviewing you about different topics. For example you might get to meet one of the Directors of the company, someone from the technical teams and one of the line managers. Someone from the HR team may also interview you. You may even have to do a presentation, or a technical challenge.

The interview typically ends with a brief discussion about the next step details.

Questions

All interviews revolve around some form of questioning. To become good at interviews it's worth spending some time learning about the different types of questions you will be asked so that you can spot them, respond appropriately and use these types of questions yourself.

Closed (or Binary) questions

The interview (or parts of it) may be heavily structured with formal closed questions, typically used to clarify facts from your CV.

These are often used to confirm facts about you and your experience. They often require a yes / no style answer so be sure to be succinct in answering these.

An example is:

"Did you manage a team of 10?"

A simple answer would be:

"Yes"

Open questions

You may be asked open questions where you have the chance to give a more detailed and thoughtful answer. An open question invites an answer that is more than merely a yes or a no answer.

Be sure to not go overboard though. Don't keep talking after you've answered the question.

Informal discussions

There may also be an informal non-structured session where you chat loosely about the role and the company and of course, yourself.

These are often a series of many different types of questions such as open or closed. New questions often lead on from the answers of other questions.

Leading questions

You may be asked leading questions[33] which are aimed at teasing out emotional or hypothetical answers.

Questions such as "Will you be able to cope with managing 20 people?" are aimed at teasing out how you would cope with great responsibility. In this example I would suspect the interviewer is expecting you to answer with a resounding "yes".

Loaded questions

The loaded question is where the interviewer is posing a controversial question designed to drive out your views on a topic.

For example "All people with degrees are better employees than those without. Wouldn't you agree?". The interviewer is aiming to find out how you feel about a contentious or controversial topic.

The paraphrase question

You may encounter a paraphrase or mirrored question where the interviewer is clarifying something you have said. They may take a response of yours and

repeat it back to you as a question. For example "So you agreed with my statement about X?".

I use the paraphrase question a lot. I like it because it adds clarity to an answer and also helps to tease out inconsistencies in answers and thinking.

Hypothetical questions

There are hypothetical questions designed to see how you might deal with someone or some situation. I use these to tease out how people think about situations they have never experienced before. It's good to get them thinking about working in new environments.

The above are just a few types of questions you might get asked. Once you learn to spot these types of questions you can start to become an expert at understanding more about your interviewer such as their motives, interview style and where they like to focus their attention.

Once you become aware of the different types of questions you can react and tailor your own responses appropriately to move the interview in a direction you feel happier with.

Appearance matters

It is true what they say - first impressions count.

The way you look and the way you carry yourself makes a big difference in the mind of others.

I don't believe that you should always wear a formal outfit, such as a suit, for an interview but you should dress appropriately. Make some effort and it will pay off. Turn up to an interview looking clean, tidy and well kept.

If in doubt about dress code then wear smart casual. Err on the side of smart. Even if you get the go ahead to dress casually I would still suggest you make an effort. Adopt smart casual rather than shorts and a t-shirt.

Stand tall. Standing tall will give you confidence and this confidence will come across in the interview. If you slouch normally then work extra hard on keeping your head held high and your back straight.

Smile lots, but not too much that you look creepy. A nice gentle smile on first meeting people can often make you feel relaxed, diffuses what is often a tense part of the interview and gives the impression that you are a happy and amiable individual.

First impressions really do count.

Tell a joke

I've always had this bizarre act of trying to make people laugh at the beginning on interviews and meetings. I do it still today and have done it in every interview I've been in. I like to start an interview (or meeting) with a smile and a giggle - I find it eases the tension.

I assumed I do it as a control mechanism for my nerves. Maybe I do.

Just be careful about what sort of joke you tell though. Not all jokes work on all people, and not all jokes cross cultural boundaries.

You also don't want to come across as a joker where nothing is serious to you. As with most things, a good balance should be sought.

Try it and see. If it doesn't suit your personality then stop that approach, if it makes you feel relaxed and confident then explore using humour at more points in the interview.

Time keeping

Be on time. In fact, turn up 5 or 10 minutes early.

Turning up any more than about 20 minutes early shows a lack of planning and can often be uncomfortable for the interviewer who may feel the need to start the interview early.

If you're really early then pitch up for a drink, a quick snooze (set your alarm) or last minute rehearsals, but don't rock up to the interview. You'll most likely find that you're sitting in the reception for ages, which can increase your nerves. Best to sit it out in a more relaxed environment like your car, a local coffee shop or just outside.

Only turn up to the reception or office about 10 minutes early at most. Spend the waiting time composing yourself, thinking about making a great first impression and reading any literature there might be in the waiting area.

If there are people working reception or other candidates waiting then take this opportunity to have an informal chat with them. It will ease your nerves and get your vocal chords exercised.

Be sure to have the contacts (hiring manager or recruiters) phone numbers stored in your phone but also written down and kept with you.

If you are using satellite navigation make sure you have printed directions as well. Sat Navs and phones are still at that stage where total reliance in important situations is not feasible (for me anyway). Batteries run out, signals are lost and things can just break.

Eye contact

On first meeting someone make good eye contact. Eye contact is important in forming a connection.

When you are speaking or listening during the interview maintain eye contact. Eye contact is an essential feedback mechanism. It shows the other person that you are engaged in the conversation.

Don't stare though. Don't make them feel uncomfortable. Sense when you've kept eye contact for too long. Look away briefly, blink or re-focus on their mouths for a short time before returning to regain eye contact.

Making eye contact is not an easy skill to master so spend some time experimenting and practicing before the interview. Do you make eye contact with friends and family? Or people working in shops? If not, try it.

Take the right things with you

Think ahead and make sure you take the right things with you.

- Make sure you have any medicine you require.
- Make sure you have a notebook and a pen.
- Take a few copies of the CV you submitted with you. Print them on decent paper.
- Take supporting material like designs, plans, doodles, sketches, etc.
- Maybe take a tablet device with you to show examples or other supporting work.
- Do you need a portfolio of work like examples of UX boards or other physical material?
- Prepare some questions and be sure to take them with you.

Turn your phone off

Turn your phone off, or leave it on but explain why you need it.

It is rude to have a phone ringing in an interview; it's even ruder to take a call or to text or to fiddle around with the phone. Leave it off or silence it unless you have a reason for it to be on.

If you need it on for emergency reasons then explain this and place the phone out of sight, or in the middle of the table out of reach.

It may seem petty to talk about this but it's not uncommon for people to subconsciously reach for their phone, even during an interview.

I once had an interview candidate take a phone call and chat through his plans for the evening with his friend during the interview. He was asked to leave.

Banish discomfort

If you are uncomfortable in the interview then speak up and ask for something to be changed.

You will not perform your best if you are uncomfortable. You're entitled to be comfortable and most hiring managers will go out of their way to see the best of you, so don't be afraid to ask.

If you need a drink then ask for it. If you feel hot or anxious feel free to ask for a quick break. If you need a toilet break then ask to be excused. We are all human.

If you feel you are not enjoying the questioning or are unhappy with where the interview is going then do something about it. Suggest that the interviewer change questioning, try to steer it down a different route or make your excuses and ask to leave. It's not rude to ask to leave an interview. Why waste any more time?

I know someone who was interviewed in a tiny office with a window that would not close. This wouldn't be so bad but it was blisteringly cold. When asked if they could move to another room the interviewers said "no" and they started to get a little annoyed with the request. He walked.

An interview is a two way process and you are an adult. If you are not happy then make yourself heard. See if you can change what's making you uncomfortable and if not then make a decision. It's not always possible to walk. Only you will know what is right for you but stand up for your own views, thoughts and feelings.

Ask questions

You should ask questions during the interview.

Not asking questions shows a lack of interest or enthusiasm in the business, the hiring manager and the role.

Surely you have something you want to find out that's not been covered already?

You may have a pre-defined "question" time or you may have a number of periods during the interview to ask questions. You may of course get no time at all to ask questions, this is especially true of very formal interviews where the interviewer is seeing the interview as a one-way process. Believe me, this is very common.

I would advocate asking questions when you feel you need to. I typically ask lots of questions in response to the discussions that arise. I also have a big list of questions that I take with me to ask during the allotted question time.

I wouldn't talk about salary, contract rates or other "package" information in the interview unless you absolutely must.

If you are applying through a recruitment agency then leave all salary details to them, even if you get asked in the interview. There are a number of reasons I suggest this.

Firstly, the recruitment consultant may have advertised the role at a much higher salary than is actually being offered. This is very common. So if you talk about this high salary in the interview you may discount yourself because you're too expensive. You may also create a very awkward atmosphere as both you and the interviewer realise you may have been potentially wasting each other's time.

Secondly, it can take time for the information you've gathered from the interview to sink in. On reflection of the interview you may realise you need to ask for more money, or would be willing to accept less because the opportunity would be amazing. Giving away your salary expectation before you digest new information may make it harder to readjust later.

Thirdly, unless you are a skilled negotiator you may find yourself out-classed in any discussions about the package. You may find yourself accepting sub-par deals because you've been out negotiated. This may leave you feeling bitter about the experience, which isn't good for either yourself or the company hiring you. I knew someone once who fell in to the same trap and ended up starting his job on a very sour note.

Fourthly, you're using a recruitment consultant for a reason (if indeed you are using one). They should be well versed in negotiating the right deal for you. Be warned though, there are consultants who don't appreciate the long-term benefits of being honest and transparent. They will look at the short term and often take the best deal for themselves, which might not be the best deal for you.

If you must talk about salary details in an interview then be prepared. Know what salary it is you want and know what the minimum is that you would accept. Always be confident in discussing salary and don't be afraid to ask for what you want.

It's worth reading up about the art of selling and negotiating as it's a useful skill to have in any context, especially so when you're negotiating on salary.

Take notes

An interview can be a stressful environment so the chances of you remembering everything from the interview are slim. It's therefore a good idea to take notes and jot down questions that pop in to your mind.

Notes will give you something to look back on and something to refer to both during and after the interview. Most interviewers will make notes so why shouldn't you?

Be careful though not to make notes at the expense of listening and contributing. It's rude to be writing everything down, but some amount of note taking is to be expected.

Write the note with enough detail that it will make sense to you in 60 days time. This will ensure the note is accurate, clear and understandable in the future.

Answer the questions well

You will no doubt get asked lots of questions. Your success partly lies in your ability to answer these questions well.

Don't answer open-ended questions with one word answers. An open question is your chance to explain in detail.

Don't answer closed questions with a diatribe. Succinct yes or no answers are fine for binary questions.

Answer the question fully but as simply as possible. Don't be afraid of leaving silence after you've answered. Don't be tempted to keep talking if you've finished answering the question. Silence is a cue for the interviewer to respond. Don't fill it with more talking.

Answer the question being asked. Far too many people wander for miles around the question to never answering the original question at all. Politicians are especially good at this. Politicians are infuriating to observe being questioned - do you want the interviewer to feel this same way when interviewing you?

Answer the questions honestly. Sometimes you will have to shine a light on your negative attributes. This is fine, but be sure to understand how you can make something positive from this.

For example, you may explain that your attention to detail doesn't sit well with the laid back work environment you've been working in. This is fine, but then explain that you're working hard on addressing this by consciously extracting your thinking to a higher level or showing more appreciation for the way other people work.

Everyone has weaknesses. Be honest about them, but be sure to articulate how that doesn't detract from you as a candidate.

Practice your answers to common interview questions such as "what are your strengths and weaknesses, what are you most proud of, what is your biggest mistake and where do you see yourself in 5 years from now". Practicing the answers to these means you can offer a slick answer. Don't be too quick to respond though, as you need to at least give them some clues that you're thinking about the answer.

You may get asked about your achievements and things you're most proud of. Make sure these tie in with your awesome CV. Make sure you're consistent in your answers.

You may get asked off the wall questions like "what one word describes you?" or "what sort of flower would you be?" Be prepared for these types of questions and plan suitable answers.

Work out what techniques you can use to stall whilst you think of answers to questions that truly stump you. Such as paraphrasing back the question and using fillers like "interesting question, I'll need a minute or two to think about that".

Work out how you will deal with the questions you simply cannot answer. Sometimes "I simply cannot answer that question" is better than a made up response that you don't believe in.

You may also get asked to demonstrate your skills or experience with no prior warning. If you're honest in your application, your CV and the interview then this shouldn't be a problem. Be prepared for this to happen and wow them with your skills and abilities.

Try to avoid jargon when answering questions. An ability to clearly explain your thinking is an ability rarely seen in many people. Practice it and you'll no doubt stand out from the crowd.

Answer the person asking questions

If there are multiple people in the interview then answer the person who asked the question. You can keep switching eye contact and focus between the interviewers but ensure it is clear whose question you are answering.

It's not very nice to ask someone a question and then have the answer directed at another interviewer. I know many people who have lost out on jobs because they practically ignored the person asking the question.

Know what you wrote

At all times be in total control of your communications and messages. You should know fully what you wrote on your CV, cover letters, blogs and other social channels.

Good interviewers will have already done their research on you and will look to explore any inconsistencies they find across channels and communications.

I've interviewed people who didn't have a copy of their CV with them and couldn't remember a large amount of what they wrote -mostly because they made it up. Good interviewers will challenge you and see right through anything you've fabricated.

Don't be negative

When answering questions be sure to remain positive. Try to avoid being negative about people or work. Hiring managers want to be wowed, not depressed.

Try techniques to focus on the positive aspect. Even the direst experiences often have positive angles if you look hard enough. Be as positive as you can as it makes a much stronger first impression.

Smile and be polite

Always try to smile and always be polite. Be cautious about bad mouthing where you currently work or have worked.

Be cautious about swearing or using slang. Some interviewers may not mind swearing, slang or bad mouthing, but some will. You'll probably not know your interviewer's preferences so be diplomatic, polite and keep smiling. If in doubt be as polite as possible.

Draw to explain

If you feel more comfortable drawing out an idea to explain it then go for it (assuming you have the facilities to). When I have a candidate who uses visuals, or other techniques rather than verbal explanation, I'm deeply impressed.

I'm impressed because it shows they are able to walk through their thinking and explain it in ways that aren't typically associated with interviews. It shows courage to ask to draw, doodle or use other mediums. And isn't that weird that we should feel embarrassed to ask to deviate from a verbal answer?

Get a tour

I can't stress this enough; GET A TOUR OF THE WORKPLACE!

It's crucial. A tour of the work place reveals the real company, not the one the hiring manager told you about.

You'll hopefully get to see the people, the equipment and hardware they use, the breakout/lunch/chill-out rooms, the office space, the vibe, the buzz/hum of the office and the general look and feel.

Take the chance to speak to people whilst on the tour.

Say "Hi", ask questions and draw attention to things that interest you. Ask for someone to talk you through the business process and ask about who does what. Ask to meet some people from other departments too.

The tour is a chance to really explore whether this company is where you want to be. I appreciate not everyone will have the luxury of choosing whether a work

place is right for them, but if you do have that luxury then use the tour to help make up your mind.

I once took a job after being interviewed in a special meeting room located off the main reception area. It was nice, clean, simple, elegant and tidy. I was impressed.

I then started working there. On my first day I went through the big double doors to the real workplace and was shocked by what I saw. There were ceiling tiles hanging off, ancient computers, contractors sat around on fat cat wages playing Solitaire. There were holes in the floor, holes in the walls, and holes in the ceiling. There were broken coffee machines, broken computers and broken lights. I didn't even have a computer for the first two days. It took me a further two days just to get a login to the intranet. What a disaster. I left after just six days. Two days of which were spent trying to find someone to hand my notice in to. I learned a very valuable lesson from that job - always get a tour.

If they can't or won't do a tour think hard about whether this is the place for you - after all, what are they hiding?

The tour can give you insights, can help you relate to where you may be working and can help you to appreciate the context in which you will be expected to operate. Keep your eyes peeled for:

- Hardware and equipment.
- Proximity of employees to each other.
- Working environment (cleanliness, tidiness, etc).
- Facilities such as drinks areas and food.
- People's faces (happy, sad, stressed, bored)
- Volume (is it deathly quiet or loud and boisterous – which do you prefer?)
- Look and feel (new, old, well kept, invested in?)

I think most people will get a good or bad feel for a place immediately. It can be a real deal breaker.

Remember though that you've only seen a snapshot of a work place. A snapshot in time where people may be working to meet a tight deadline or simply having a bad day. What you see may not be the norm, but I suspect you'll get a gut feel about the place that should inform your decision.

Close the interview like a pro

At the end of the interview, either before or after the tour make sure you close the interview well.

Start by saying thank you. Then say something positive about the company, the role or the hiring manager; but only if you believe it. Then summarise the next step. Then smile and shake hands. Then leave.

By saying "thank you" you are showing that you appreciate the opportunity of the interview and the chance to meet to align expectations.

By saying something positive such as "I've really enjoyed meeting you and seeing how a vibrant, productive and high performing company operate", you are communicating to the hiring manager that you are positive about the role. Don't say this unless you mean it.

By summarising the next steps you're clarifying what is happening next. You might say something like "I look forward to recruiter X getting in touch with me after you give them your feedback". You are ensuring you're aligned with the hiring manager on what's happening.

By smiling and shaking hands you are saying goodbye and communicating the close of the interview.

By leaving immediately you are signaling that you're happy you've covered everything and are ready for the next steps in the process.

Try and avoid awkward and stilted conversations at the end of the interview, it can leave a bad memory in your interviewers mind. Also avoid walking away not knowing what's happening next in terms of the process. Be sure you leave knowing what is happening and that you ended the interview well.

Reflect

After an interview it's a good idea to find somewhere quiet and start jotting down your thoughts. This allows you to capture your feelings and thoughts in close proximity to the event. Things will be fresher in your mind.

Write down what you liked, what you didn't like and any other thoughts about the people, the company, the environment and the expected role.

These notes will form the basis of any decision you make about the job. The ideas you write down will also help form the basis of where to direct your future job applications and enquiries. You will learn what your preferences are and what types of environments you will most likely flourish in.

Speak to the recruitment consultant

Ensure you speak to the recruitment consultant (or HR representative) as close to the end of the interview as you can. This will ensure the interview is fresh in your mind and you can have an honest conversation with them.

I would advocate doing the reflection activity before speaking to them though as it gives you time to sort out your own thinking before committing to anything or giving feedback that isn't accurate.

Accepting a job offer

Yay. Fingers crossed you got a job you want and you got the package you wanted. Now you need to accept.

Or maybe you got an offer but it's not quite right. Or maybe you didn't get an offer at all.

Negotiating

Sometimes you get a job offer that is pretty good but not quite right. The salary may be too low or the overall package is just not right. This is when you need to bust out your negotiation skills and get dealing.

Getting the absolute "spot on" package is rare, even after discussions, so work out what's important to you and barter. Trust me, there is often a lot more room for discussions than you might think.

Try to do these negotiations through a recruitment consultant only if you trust them. If you don't you'll have to find a way of getting to speak to the hiring manager directly.

Many recruiters are paid on the final agreed salary, not the overall package. They may have a bias that pushes them down the route of getting a bigger salary at the expense of say, more holiday or flexible working patterns. You may not necessarily want that.

If you find you are not getting anywhere with the recruiters acting as middle-people then bypass them. Speak directly with the hiring manager. You'll be surprised at how little a hiring manager often knows about the negotiations that have taken place.

Negotiating does not suit everyone and some people will want to haggle more than others. But if it's a deal which needs to be worked then work it. Don't resign yourself to an offer you are not happy with without negotiating.

Buy a book on how to negotiate. The book alone will be worth the expense if you secure an extra 10% on your salary. It is a skill that can be learned. The more you know about negotiating the more confident you will become and confidence alone can bring its own rewards.

Rejecting

Sometimes you just need to reject a job offer. You may have spent some time negotiating or are simply no longer interested. This is fine and many hiring managers will expect a number of candidates to reject offers.

If you are lucky enough to have many offers then choose wisely.

When rejecting an offer remain polite, be confident in your decision and give clear and honest feedback about why you are rejecting it. Being honest will mean that the hiring manager will have constructive feedback to use for future hiring.

Counteroffer

In my experience, rejecting a job offer often leads to a counteroffer. Sometimes this can be an appealing offer with a good increase in salary and package.

You may feel that the counteroffer is what you need to accept the job. However, you need to remain true to your initial reasons for rejecting the offer in the first place. The counteroffer could be what you are after or it might just be a wise move on the part of the hiring manager.

Only you will know whether a counteroffer is acceptable. If the counteroffer is a much better increase on the original offer (after negotiation) then I am always skeptical about why a really good offer was not made in the first place. This is my skeptical mind working though - you might not feel the same. Trust your instinct.

Handing in your notice

Don't hand your notice in until you've signed a contract for your new job.

I've seen people become jobless after accepting a role but not signing a contract, handing in their notice and then the new job being changed or pulled from underneath them. You need to look after your own interests by ensuring you have maximum legal protection at all times.

Read the contract and offer letter a couple of times. Get someone else to read it. Check the details and don't be afraid to suggest changes to the contract if you are not happy with it.

Be pragmatic though - not all companies will be able to change contract details and not all companies will welcome changes. To get the right people most companies are flexible though.

For example, many people in today's market have portfolios of income. They may make money outside of their employment by doing freelance work in the evenings, or consulting gigs at the weekend. They may write books, do presentations or be partners in a business outside of work. Many standard contracts forbid these activities or give the hiring company Intellectual Property rights for everything you create. Get the contract checked and then changed if it makes sense to do so, but appreciate what the view looks like for your employer; some outside of work activities may appear to conflict with the interests of the business you are joining.

If you speak at conferences you should also negotiate a certain number of conference days in to the package. These might not be mentioned in the contract so get it changed, or get a letter stating the additional deal.

Be careful about accepting a job with a company who are unwilling to make changes or exceptions. You will be on rocky legal grounds if you have no mention of any caveats or exceptions agreed upon but not written down anywhere.

For example, if you have an informal agreement (but nothing in a contract) that you can take 10 days out to speak at conferences then you are at the mercy of the company. What if the company is taken over and the new management no longer wants you to attend conferences? How will you address this? You'll have no legal ground and may be forced to forfeit the conference days.

Many people are stuck in a mindset of believing the company they work for will do the "right" thing by them and look after them at all times. The reality is that most companies will do the "right" thing for their own business - and that might not be the "right" thing for you.

A well-managed company will do what is right to make that company a success. When faced with tough decisions about growth, staff retention, debt, operating costs and any other factor affecting a business the management will have to make tough decisions. Decisions that may not be aligned with your own expectations.

This doesn't mean that you have to become selfish and only consider your own interests at the cost of others, but what I am saying is to be careful not to swing too far one way. Pouring your life in to a company is admirable, but not at the expense of your own health, security, career and family life.

Leave on good terms

Try to leave your current job in the best possible spirit. You never know when you might want to work with them again.

Venting your frustration and burning bridges may have far reaching implications. LinkedIn and the prevalence of social connections means your ex-colleagues are often never more than a few connections away. A bad word from your ex-boss could scupper your chances of that dream job in the future.

If all goes to plan you'll be starting a new job. Great stuff. Job done.

Dealing with rejection

Sometimes you'll get a rejection for a job.

It's going to happen. You'll unlikely get every job you go for.

How you deal with rejection will show your true spirit.

Moving on

It can suck to be rejected, especially so if you really loved the company and wanted the role. It's even worse when you think the interview went well and you still didn't get the job. The truth is there will always be people and companies that aren't right for you, and you not right for them.

There will always be better candidates out there. Better technically, better experienced or simply a better fit for the role.

Once you accept that you were rejected you can move on and focus on the next job.

I'm not a fan of challenging a rejection decision. I've never experienced anyone being able to turn a rejection decision around.

Accept the decision, pick yourself up and move on. But before you do...

Ask for feedback

If you didn't get any feedback with your rejection then seek it out.

If you get standard boiler-plate feedback - which is typical with many large organisations - then ask for further details. If you still get no further then it's worth writing it off and moving on.

Most hiring managers will give you feedback on why they didn't hire you. Sometimes this is pitched in the "old-school" Good News - Bad News - Good News sandwich, other times it's vague and woolly. Sometimes, if a hiring manager is good, it will be constructive.

All feedback should be read and digested. How much weighting you put on it is a very personal thing, but don't simply ignore it.

If you keep getting feedback that you don't have the right skills in using a particular type of approach, then you have concrete ideas on where to focus your learning. If you get feedback that you didn't explain things clearly then practice explaining your ideas clearly.

Feedback can help you improve, but only if you seek it out, digest it and assimilate it in to your new approach.

Keep going

Don't let rejection stop you in your tracks. All interviews are an experience to learn from. The more interviews you go to, the better you will become (assuming you learn from the feedback).

You'll soon be relishing interviews.

The most important thing is that you just keep going.

Keep trying, keep pushing and keep persevering - it will pay off in the end.

Patience is a virtue

Job-hunting takes time. The entire process of a job being advertised to it being filled with a suitable candidate is complicated and often full of waste, but it's a process that for many is a necessary evil.

If you try to rush this process you will end up frustrated and annoyed.

Focus on three things

When job-hunting it's important that you split your time across three core activities. I always advocate a similar amount of time for each one, but experiment with your own balance. The important thing is that you do spend some time doing each one.

The three main activities that you should be doing to get a job are: Building Your Network, Job Hunting and Learning. We've talked about these three in previous chapters but it pays to revisit them here.

Building your network

Your network will lead to new connections and more opportunities. A wider network can lead to greater diversity of opportunities.

Job hunting

To get a job you'll need to track one down so spend a significant amount of your time scouring job sites, planning your speculative applications, applying for jobs and updating your CV.

Learning

There will always be a job that requires some skill or experience you don't have. Sit a Coursera course, connect with thought leaders or volunteer your time to an Open Source project - these are all things you can do right now and they'll give you more skills, experience and learning.

If you focus your energies on the three activities (Building Your Network, Job Hunting and Learning) you'll increase your chance of getting a job and of you being the right fit for it.

Set realistic time frames

It's important to set realistic time frames when applying for jobs. We become impatient when we expect something to happen more quickly than it does. Job searching often takes longer than expected.

Set realistic time frames and work within these. You'll get a more realistic time frame the more you apply for jobs.

Some companies will naturally work faster than other.

Use a calendar to set yourself deadlines and targets to achieve.

Track the average application cycle time (how long it takes between applying for a job and getting an interview). This will give you some evidence to start predicting how long future applications may take.

The more data you have the more realistic your time frame should become.

Be flexible

There are always constraints around job-hunting such as salary, market conditions, your skills, location, etc. Define these and see which ones are flexible. For example, if you need a job in the next two weeks to make a rent payment, could you take a job further afield? Or maybe take a lower salary? Or a temp or part time role?

In my experience, holding out for the near perfect role, is a sure fire way of not getting a job.

Try not to become frustrated with the process. I know this is easier said than done but job hunting is stressful enough without the adding stress of expecting it done quicker.

Never give up

I've met too many bitter and twisted people who have become this way by sticking in jobs they don't enjoy.

They work for companies who are sucking the life out of them. They have come to expect all jobs in their industry to be this way. They have come to hate their industry because of this.

The reality is that there are many companies in every industry doing a great job at creating great environments to work in.

Not everyone will be able to walk from one job to another and find the perfect role, but with some focus on building a network and up-skilling I believe every single person out there has the potential to find the right job for them.

I hope this book inspires you to reach your potential and to remain relevant in today's fast changing markets.

But remember. Getting the good jobs isn't just about being good at what you do. It's about being good at what you do, being connected and being able to articulate why you are the right candidate for the job.

Thank you for reading this book. I do hope I've helped you remain relevant in some way.

Rob

Checklists

Here is a checklist to get you thinking about the different stages of applying for a job.

Application checklist

- Do I have a good email address for job hunting?
- Do I have a phone number available with appropriate voicemail?
- Is my stock CV up to date?
- Do I have a copy of the job spec for reference? (Ensure you have the job ID if there is one.)
- Do I have the name of the contact? (For example, the name of the recruiter or manager.)
- Have I created a tailored CV for the application, and kept a copy for my reference?
- Do I need a cover letter, and do I have a copy for my reference?
- Is there anything else the job application has asked for?
- Is there a phone number for follow up?
- What was the date and time of my application submission?
- Where was the job advertised?
- Where did I apply for the role (online, email) and did I take a screenshot or copy of the page (and a copy of your email)?
- Do I need a calendar reminder to follow up this application?
- Did it send ok? (i.e., is there a confirmation code or email?)
- How many applications do I have in progress right now?

Here is a checklist to help you plan for an interview

Interview planning checklist

- Is my smart outfit ready and clean?
- Do I know where I am going and do I have a paper copy of directions?
- Is my sat nav preset and have I scoped out where the interview is being held on a map?
- Do I have the contact's name and phone number?
- Have I got the recruiter's name and phone number?
- Do I have a notepad and pen/pencil?
- Is my phone on silent, or turned off (prior to going in to the interview)?
- Do I need to take a portfolio of my work?
- Did they request anything else from me? (Passport, references)

References and Further Reading

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