

Debunking Three Common Job Search Myths

As career coaches, there are certain questions and topics we find ourselves talking about a lot with job seekers. And in that discussion, we often find the same job search myths arise and create potential roadblocks in the job search. Let's dissect them:

Myth #1: No one reads cover letters anymore.

I'll begin exploring this with a simple adage: *Know Thy Audience*. The culture around reading cover letters and the weight that is put on them is often very industry specific. Fields known for sometimes putting less of an emphasis on cover letters or more commonly not asking for them in the application process are often fields like financial services. On the other hand, fields that are known for being primarily mission-driven that require their practitioners to frequently engage in dialogue about nuanced topics such as identity and equity, often do read cover letters and look for you to answer the question "Why do you want to do this work" in them. If a job application says that a cover letter is optional, if you are able to write one while still maintaining your own balance and wellness in the job search, I'd encourage you to do so. Employers only have so much to go on when first evaluating applicants, so giving yourself every opportunity to be highlighted in that process can help.

Myth #2: Only paid formal employment has a place on a resume.

Let's approach this by taking on the perspective of a hiring manager. You are looking for a great candidate to run a social marketing campaign. You receive a resume and read about a social marketing campaign a candidate led that resulted in increased health fair attendance and use of a college's wellness services. Would the first question you ask yourself be, I wonder how big this person's paycheck was that week? Probably not, right? Because this candidate applied relevant skills to complete a task successfully, which resulted in real outcomes. Therefore, this candidate has the skills you are seeking. The fact that they accomplished this by being part of a student wellness club on their college campus, or that they did it as part of a class project is somewhat besides the point. Volunteerism, community leadership, and academic projects all have value on a resume, especially for those that are just starting out or are earlier in their career and field. As time goes on and you gain more formal professional experience in your field, you may begin to de-emphasize or consolidate less formal activities if you have other

things to replace them with. But in the meantime, the focus should be on highlighting your most transferable experiences.

Myth #3: Applying for jobs online is my best strategy.

Applying for jobs online is a necessary component of the job search process and can lead to employment. And we all only have so much time in a week to dedicate towards a job search while still balancing our other responsibilities and wellness. So it's understandable to feel like applying to 10 jobs last week was super productive. However, how likely was it that you were able to create 10 quality applications in a week? (Hint: Not very!) As a career coach, I'd much rather see you apply to two jobs this week, and spend time really tailoring your resumes and cover letters to those roles and spend the rest of your job search time that week networking. This means reaching out to people using your professional network which includes friends, family, professors, fellow students, past employers, and LinkedIn to conduct informational interviews (aka: a 20 - 30 minute phone or video call to ask that person questions about their career path, current work and organization, and tips and advice for the job search) at your top three organizations of interest. Why is this a more productive way to spend your job search time each week? Because building real and lasting relationships over time gives you access to tips and advice that could guide your career journey and job search. It also gives you something concrete to write about in your cover letters when trying to answer the question "Why do you want to work for this employer specifically?". Over time, it could expand the number of people in your circle who let you know about opportunities directly, even positions that are not yet posted anywhere. One quick tip for being an effective networker - in informational interviews you should not be asking a person you just met to pass your materials along to human resources. Remember, this process is about building relationships, learning from another's experience, and getting information to guide your search. A direct referral is something a person may offer over time if they feel comfortable doing so, but should not be something you ask for as you are just getting to know someone. Networking is an investment over time, and if you begin investing now, it can lead to tips, knowledge of opportunities, and even referrals.



Interested in learning how to adapt your materials or job search strategy to engage in a more effective search?

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