

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I've been out of work for about two months and have been applying for jobs listed in the want ads since the very day I was laid off. I've had no luck. In fact, I've only had a few employers call me in for an interview. I'm getting discouraged. Any suggestions?

-- Kevin

Dear Kevin,

I understand that you are feeling frustrated and discouraged but buck up, Kevin. You've got to put your best foot forward in today's competitive job market.

First of all, don't use the want ads as the primary way to find a job. Apply for jobs that you are qualified for, of course, but don't rely on this method exclusively. You may not know it, but statistics suggest that less than 10% of people looking for a job find them through classified ads, and the chances of doing so decrease dramatically as the job level or pay scale gets higher.

Think about it. By the time a job is listed in the newspaper (or online job search website), hundreds – maybe even thousands – of other people are shooting their resumes through the U.S. Post Office or by email. Sadly, your resume is just one in a great big pile. This is especially true right now when unemployment is high (6.1% or about 9 million), downsizing is rampant, and highly skilled professionals have been laid off and are willing to take a big cut in pay just to bring home a little bacon.

Still, if you want to include answering want ads as part of your job-hunting strategy, then make sure you respond immediately once you see an ad, tailor your resume and cover letter to the job requirements, and pay attention to deadlines. In addition to your local newspaper, keep an eye on jobs listed on Internet job placement sites such as www.monster.com and www.hotjobs.com, among many others. Also note that these ads give you a clue as to which companies are in a hiring mode. Even if a posted ad doesn't match your skills or interests, that company may have other positions that you would fit.

- Develop a plan and a strategy. Make a list of your skills and capabilities. Think outside the box. Don't lie to yourself, but really stretch your creative thinking about the kinds of work you are qualified for, and could do well. Then create a timeline for your job search. Remember that you will hear a lot of "no's" before a single "yes." How many resumes will you send out this week? How many "cold calls" will you make to prospective employers? How many people will you ask to have a cup of coffee with you, to brainstorm job possibilities that they may know about? (I suggest switching to decaf if this number is high. You're already under enough stress.)
- Make sure your resume and cover letter are impressive, impeccable, and perfect. Don't allow a single typo or bad grammar. Spring for decent bond paper and envelopes, but don't go overboard and use flaming pink stock just to get attention. Make it businesslike. A number of the job search engines have excellent

examples of resumes and cover letters. Take a look at those and see how yours stacks up.

- Make a list of contacts – network. Sit down and write a list of everyone you know. Think about people you went to school with, neighbors, members of your church or civic group. Talk with them. Let them know you are looking for work, and what you are qualified to do. It has been estimated that between 70 and 80% of all jobs are filled by people who first heard about them by word of mouth. Keep copies of your resume in your briefcase and car so you can give them to folks you run into.
- Make a list of targeted companies. This may include some of the companies that have posted a want ad in the newspaper or online. Identify a particular person in a department that suits your skills, and call them. Ask for fifteen minutes of their time, so that you can learn from them how best to position yourself for a career in their company. Even busy people will often give an ambitious person a few minutes of time when asked nicely. Also, before meeting with this individual, learn everything you can about the company so you can ask informed questions. Dress professionally and arrive on time for the meeting. Remember, you're only getting a few minutes of Mr./Ms. Manager's time. Being ten minutes late for a fifteen minute meeting is bad form. Follow up with a thank you letter. This will make an excellent impression and it is simply good manners. And who knows? There may be a job opening on the horizon. You want to make sure that they will remember you with positive feelings.

Finding the right job takes persistence. Persevere. The Buddhist tradition reminds us that a “jug fills up drop by drop.” And, in the words of Winston Churchill, “Never, never, never, never give up.” Good luck, Kevin.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2003 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.

