


# Winning Job Interviews



- ▶ *Reduce Interview Anxiety*
- ▶ *Outprepare the Other Candidates*
- ▶ *Land the Job You Love*

**DR. PAUL POWERS**

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# Winning Job Interviews

Reduce Interview Anxiety; Outprepare the Other  
Candidates; Land the Job You Love

By  
Dr. Paul Powers

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“Chock-full of practical, battle-tested, easy-to-implement advice that really works! If you want to ace your job interview, this is the book for you.”

—Paul D. Tieger, best-selling coauthor of *Do What You Are: Discover the Perfect Career for You Through the Secrets of Personality Type*

“*Winning Job Interviews* is the job seeker's new best friend! In this no excuses, no-holds-barred text, Dr. Paul Powers provides the solid 'how-tos' that every job seeker needs to get *the* job, not just another job. You can actually feel Powers's energy, enthusiasm, expert advice, and humor come off each and every page. If you want to succeed in your next job search, forget your parachute and instead grab a copy of *Winning Job Interviews* by Paul Powers.”

—Elaine Varelas, Managing Partner,  
Business Development, Keystone Partners;  
Chairman of the Board, Career Partners International

“Whether you're fresh from the classroom or 'you're fired' from the boardroom, this insightful guide empowers the job hunter to ace the interview and land the job. It's an easy read, blending strategic preparation with humor. A great tune-up for the interview!”

—Ken Burnham,

Director of Career Services,  
University of Massachusetts at Amherst

“Dr. Paul Powers is the mentor we all wish we had when embarking on our first job search. He has assembled a wealth of practical advice on how to find a job and get hired and delivers it in plain English sprinkled with his usual off-beat humor.”

—Pat Hyland, Executive Director,  
Northeast Public Power Association

“This book will be useful for everyone from the recent graduate to the seasoned executive. If you are looking for the job that is right for you, this is the book to read. Powers prepares you for all facets of the job hunt from determining who is hiring in your area to closing the interview the right way.”

—P. Scott Flagg, Vice President, Human Resources  
Manager, Boston Federal Savings Bank

“A clear, positive, and realistic guide for making magic, again and again, in your career.”

—Cliff Hakim,  
Career Consultant and best-selling author of *We  
Are All  
Self-Employed: How to Take Control of Your Career*

“Everything there is to know about job interviewing can be found in *Winning Job Interviews*. There is nothing left out, there is nothing further that needs to be said or written. I recommend this book to CEOs, first-time job seekers, or individuals changing careers.”

—Les B. Strauss, retired CFO, PictureTel Corp

“Finally, an interview book that truly connects with the *person* who is going through the job-search process. Dr. Paul's practical and inspirational guidance turns anxieties into opportunities. Read it and tell all of your friends about this book.”

—John Sullivan, Director, Sales Training, Acushnet Company

“In *Winning Job Interviews* Dr. Powers reveals the secrets you need to succeed in today's rigorous job market. Read it and you'll come out a winner.”

—Pat Sanders, Vice President, Human Resources, Andover Controls Corp.

“A practical, hands-on 'how-to' on one of the most important subjects in anyone's professional life. Paul has captured the essence of practical and successful job campaigns. One of the best I've read in my 25 years in the recruiting business.”

—Charley Polachi, Managing Partner,  
Polachi & Company, Inc.

“*Winning Job Interviews* provides insight, motivation, a strong dose of reality (and some well-needed humor) for professionals in today's tough job market. I wish every job candidate crossing my path would read and learn from this book.”

—Scott S. Rassouljian, Vice President, Radant MEMS,  
Inc.

“Dr. Paul has written a great book filled with information that is paramount to acing the interview process. His solid advice and wry humor is a formula for success.”

—Salvatore Calvino, President, Quantem Aviation  
Services, Inc.

# Dedication

For Dr. Norma Jean Anderson, former dean and professor emerita, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, whose belief in a world of endless possibilities continues to be a source of motivation and inspiration.

For Dr. E.M. Beekman, Dr. O.C. Bobby Daniels, Dr. Edward Deevy, Dr. Ted Slovin, and Dr. Donald White: mentors, colleagues, and friends from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, each of whom challenged me to question old assumptions and to trust the authority of my own experience.

For the unsung heroes who make any great university work—such as my friends at the University of Massachusetts who staff the Career Services, Veterans Services, Alumni Affairs, and Development offices.

# Acknowledgements

I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge some folks whose support has been critical to this project. Ron Fry, Michael Lewis, Kirsten Beucler, Michael Pye, Linda Rienecker, Kristen Parkes, and everyone at Career Press helped bring this book to life in just the way I had hoped. I owe my agent, John Willig of Literary Services, Inc., many thanks for his counsel and good humor as he helps guide my writing career around the rocks and shoals of today's publishing world. Deborah Russell, my great pal and *Love Your Job!* coauthor, contributed improvements to *every* page. My wonderful wife, Linda Powers, makes all things possible with her unreserved support, sustaining confidence, and abundant love.

# Introduction

*Winning Job Interviews* is a book with attitude. The job-hunting process, in general, and job interviewing, in particular, require focus, energy, optimism, and a sense of humor. In the pages of this book you will find liberal doses of each. You won't find a lot of extraneous material to distract you from what you *really* need to know about job hunting and interviewing success. You *will* find a no-nonsense toolkit that will help you hit the ground running—if only you invest the energy required. I have poured my natural optimism and my years of hands-on professional experience onto every page, and they give me 100 percent confidence that you can become a winning job interviewer.

When I was in graduate school, back in the mid- to late 1970s, I had the wonderful opportunity to work with Vietnam era veterans, like me, on a host of issues that included career assessment, educational planning, and career counseling. With my new doctorate in hand, I joined the noted Dr. Alan Sostek in a management consulting practice that included The Career Center in downtown Boston. To get a more in-depth understanding of modern career development practices, I later became vice president of a well-known outplacement consulting firm and then joined a prestigious executive search firm. Ultimately, 15 years ago, I established my own broad-based

practice in management psychology, working with employees from the loading dock to the executive suite and in a vast array of industries—from hospitals to high-tech, from high-end financial services to not-for-profits, from gritty manufacturing floors to polished think-tank conference rooms. I have seen, inside and out, every element of the career process—recruiting new talent, selecting and training managers, coaching and counseling employees of all levels, relocating executives and their families, planning and implementing layoffs and RIFs (reductions in force), dealing with workplace violence, outplacement counseling, and retirement planning.

In workshops and seminars, at conferences and conventions, in one-on-one counseling or coaching sessions, or just hanging out in the lunchroom (or now, huddled outdoors in the rain and wind with the smokers), untold numbers of people have honored me with the stories of their work lives—their hopes, their dreams, their fears, their failures. As I approach the 30-year mark in my profession, I believe, now more fervently than ever before, that every individual must learn the skills to manage his or her own career and that you, truly, must be the captain of your own fate.

Career management, job hunting, making a living, and job interviewing are all serious issues. Serious? Yes. Solemn? No. None of us get out of this life alive,

my friend, and I've learned that a good laugh can help us endure and succeed in even the most difficult circumstances. (Or, as a friend of mine once said, "I might as well laugh at myself; everyone else is!") Thus, throughout this book, my little quips and humorous asides are meant to help you keep this whole process in its proper perspective. If you want a career book that will put you to sleep (and there are plenty of them out there), you'll have to look elsewhere. I'd never write a book I wouldn't read myself.

As you read *Winning Job Interviews* you will bump into the occasional paragraph labeled **Soapbox Interlude**. I'm a pretty opinionated guy, and because I wrote this book as if I were coaching and advising my closest pal, a few strong opinions naturally popped out. Agree, disagree, let me know what you think at [drpaul@gis.net](mailto:drpaul@gis.net). Also, let me know about any funny, offbeat, or weird interviewing situations you run into.

A word about syntax. (No, that's not the tax on alcohol and cigarettes.) Any text reads more smoothly if only one personal pronoun is used. It's usually male: he, him, his. But writing as if half of the working world is invisible makes no sense to me. To be even-handed and yet still readable, I use male pronouns in one chapter, switch to female pronouns in the next, and then alternate throughout the rest of the chapters. If somebody has a better way of dealing with this, please

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let me know. Just don't whine about the good old days.

## Chapter 1

# Why Job Hunting Sucks (and What to Do About It)

If I were writing this book for other psychologists, career coaches, or outplacement experts, I would have called this chapter “Identifying and Resolving the Negative Psychosocial Consequences Perceived by Individuals in the Employment Transition Process.” Not a bad title for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation. But I'm writing this book for you, the job hunter, who needs solid input that is market-proven, quickly usable, and with no punches pulled—so let's call a spade a spade.

I don't need to convince you that job hunting sucks, because you already know it. If you don't know it for sure, you probably have a strong sense that it does. And you wouldn't be too far from wrong. Although the job interview is the single most important element of the job-changing process, it is critical for you to remember that it is only one part—paramount though it may be—of an entire *process*. And for you to succeed, to win, in these critical interview situations, you must have a firm, realistic understanding of the entire job-hunting process. Armed with the knowledge in this book, you will be able to control the process,

not be controlled by it; you will be able to drive the process rather than be driven crazy by it.

People who have recently completed the job-hunting process will tell you that it is one of the hardest things they have ever had to do. Sure, there is the occasional lucky person who has a new job fall in his lap—sports stars, former politicians, media figures. Good for them, but it has never happened to me and I'll bet it has never happened to you. For the rest of us ordinary schnooks, job hunting is hard work. But now, finally, some good news—the hard work that you invest in your job hunt will pay off in positive ways like almost nothing else.

The rewards for fully engaging yourself in this demanding job-hunting process are many. You can find a team of people with whom you enjoy working, you can find a boss you respect, you can add to your social circle, you can find colleagues or mentors from whom you can learn, you may actually make more money, and, best of all, you can discover work that has personal meaning for you beyond a mere paycheck. You will feel more professionally accomplished and more personally competent. You will have more energy and vitality that you can share with those closest to you, and, thus, you will receive more from them in return. You will be building a continuously reinforcing cycle of achievement and success in multiple areas of your life.

This all sounds terrific, but if this process can bring such wonderful rewards, why do the vast majority of job hunters hate it so much? The answer is that there is a predictable series of psychological stumbling blocks—I call them the **deadly dozen**—that can trip up even the most determined job hunter.

## The Deadly Dozen Roadblocks of Job Hunting

From more than 20 years of working in different areas of the career field, I have identified a dozen major psychological roadblocks that can sidetrack, confuse, and discourage even the most dedicated job hunter. These roadblocks are both powerful and insidious; they are at work even when you can't see them. They are among the strongest reasons that many people stay in dead-end jobs or try to avoid the job-hunting process at all costs—to the detriment of their careers and the overall quality of their lives.

If you are going to be a successful job hunter (and this, in no small part means becoming a winning job interviewee), you will need to recognize, face up to, and overcome each of these factors. By getting these roadblocks out in the open and learning how to get around them, you will automatically put yourself in the top tier of smart job hunters. With my help you can do it, so let's get started.

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

Some job hunters start the process by making a few phone calls looking for leads or scanning the help-wanted ads in their local newspaper for “something interesting” or “a place where I can use my people skills.” When this initial effort fails (as often it does) to turn up something wonderful in a relatively short period of time, the typical job hunter starts to get discouraged. You hear them say, “We're in a bad job market these days,” or, “There's nothing much available in my field right now,” or, “This isn't a good time of the year to be looking,” etc.

He then begins to put in even less effort and, predictably, gets even fewer, if any, positive results. Soon this becomes a self-reinforcing cycle of defeat. It overwhelms the job hunter and convinces him that maybe he'd better just hang onto the mediocre job he has now or settle for something that's easy to find or that may be beneath what he's capable of. This is Roadblock #1 at its worst.

Although it's not very politically correct to talk about much these days, I want you to think for a moment about an actual hunter. One out in the woods. If it makes you feel more comfortable, set him back in time before food for the family table was found shrink-wrapped in plastic, injected with preservatives,

and stacked like cordwood in your local Mega-Mart. If this hunter wants his family to eat tonight, he has to know exactly what he's hunting for, he has to be able to recognize it when he sees it, he will have a detailed knowledge of the terrain, and he will have practiced his hunting skills until they are nearly flawless. Otherwise his family goes hungry. It is easy to see the clear parallels here to the job-hunting process.

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

You must be ready to clearly state what type of position you are looking for, in what type of organization, and in what geographic area, and you must be able to make a persuasive case based upon your knowledge, your experience, and your personal characteristics as to why someone should hire you to do this job for a reasonable salary. If you are not armed with this information, you are going to waste a lot of time and energy spinning your wheels, getting lost, and pursuing targets that are inappropriate or not worth your effort.

You must overcome this roadblock before you attempt to move your job search into high gear. If you know

exactly what you're looking for, know where to look for it, and know how best to find it—great! But if you are not sure you're fully ready to conduct a professional, fine-tuned, multi-front job campaign, turn to Chapter 9, which is the Winning Job Interview Toolkit, and get to work on Tool #1, Am I Ready to Job Hunt?

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

Job hunting is such an unpleasant task that most folks wait until something beyond their control forces them to make a move. Maybe it's an RIF, a layoff, a plant closing, a merger, a product recall, a boss bringing in his own team, or jobs being sent overseas that provides the motivation. Maybe you saw the writing on the wall but didn't have time to jump instead of being pushed. If this hasn't yet happened to you in your career, stay tuned, because one day it surely will. The reality is that very few of us take the bull by the horns and get an aggressive, professional job search underway before we are told that we have to.

Despite the initial discomfort that comes with any one of these scenarios, it's actually one of those “good news/bad news” things. The bad news is obvious. The vast majority of job hunters are thrown into a process that makes great demands on them for energy, creativity, and productivity—all while playing *Beat the Clock* with their income, severance pay, or unemploy-

ment compensation and (God willing) their savings on the one hand, and their outgoing cash flow and bills on the other. It's no small wonder that many job hunters get down in the dumps.

If you are resentful that you have to job hunt at a time not of your own choosing, you must address this issue and get it out of the way. Seek your employee assistance program, outplacement consultant, or career or unemployment counselor for advice. Locate and join a job-search networking/support group. If you are finding it impossible to concentrate on your job hunt because you are constantly obsessing or worried about money, sharpen your pencil and work out a realistic budget for a job hunt with a realistic timeline.

Don't try to ignore this feeling, because it will surface when you want it least. Some anxiety is normal and predictable in any job search. But if it escalates into panic, it can affect your behavior as well as your attitude. You may expect things to happen too quickly, and not reaching these unrealistic goals will create more anxiety. It will push you to look and sound desperate, and this attitude is the very death of winning job interviews. It will impair your vision so that you may see the first job that pops up, perhaps one that's only so-so, as a good job that you should take.

You're probably asking, "Okay, Paul, so what's the good news already?" Well, the good news is that you are completely free to actively and professionally pursue the job of your dreams on a full-time basis. You are not limited to job hunting on your lunch hour or when the boss isn't around. You no longer have to sneak off to interviews during phony dentist appointments. You don't have to worry about having someone overhear you on the phone or look over your shoulder while you're on your computer. You can freely ask your current colleagues for their input, advice, and networking contacts. You can ask your human resources person for referrals to employment agencies. All of these actions will help you succeed in your job hunt—and more quickly than if you had to do it on an on-the-sly, part-time basis.

In no way am I suggesting that you ignore the fact that your financial situation may be somewhat precarious and demand more thought, a tighter budget, or perhaps some alternative arrangements (that is, temping, part-time work, consulting, etc.). I merely want to reinforce for you that thousands and thousands of job hunters have somehow scraped by financially *and* found great jobs at a time not of their choosing. You can, too.

## *Roadblock #3: Nobody likes being a rookie*

One of the hardest days at any job is your first day. Even if it is a lot like a job that you have held previously, you still have to find out how this organization does things and who the right people are to ask for help, and you have to learn all the ins and outs of the informal organization. It's no fun being the rookie. It's like being the new kid at school.

When you are suddenly back in the job market, you are beginning a difficult and demanding task that you may not have done many times before, and maybe you didn't do so well at it last time. Let's face it. We all like to do things either that we are good at or that we enjoy. Although we will be called upon many more times than our parents ever were during their careers to go out job hunting, most of us never will go job hunting enough times to get very good at it. And even fewer of us ever learn to enjoy the process.

Maybe you didn't keep very good notes or records during your last job hunt so you're feeling as if you're starting from scratch. (This won't happen to you again because Tool #16 in the Toolkit is a Job Search Wrap-up Tool.) Maybe you realize that job interviewing is a skill that improves dramatically with practice—and realize you're out of practice.

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

Be sure to pick positive-thinking, motivated people to help you overcome this common roadblock.

### ***Roadblock #4: It's all about rejection***

There are very few people in life who thrive on rejection. Salespeople have learned how to do this, and the most successful salespeople I've ever met seem to be built in a psychologically different way from the rest of us. Saying *no* to a good salesperson is not like saying *no* to the rest of us. To them, a *no* means *not yet* or *you haven't told me enough* or *maybe later* or *we need to negotiate about price or timing or something else*. A successful salesperson doesn't take the first, second, or even third *no* as a bona-fide rejection. (By the way, this is one of the reasons that salespeople make such effective job hunters.)

But how many of the rest of us really thrive on rejection? I don't—do you? The job-hunting process is nothing but a series of rejections with an occasional piece of good news thrown in just to keep you from sticking your head in the oven. Let's think about this for a minute.

The typical job hunt goes like this: Time after time you go through the process of uncovering a job lead through whatever method you used that day, chasing this lead with a resume, following up with a letter and a series of phone calls, working your way through a series of interviews, sending out the thank-you letters, getting your hopes up, and this is all for the net result of probably not getting the job. Sounds fun, eh?

Being realistic, you will probably go through this process a number of times before the job you really want comes through. Another unfortunate reality—but a reality that must be faced nonetheless—is that the job-hunting process contains a whole lot more rejection than acceptance.

The biggest key to overcoming this roadblock is understanding that this is the essential nature of the process. Getting rejected doesn't mean you're doing it wrong; it means you're doing it right! In fact, I tell job hunters that if they aren't getting rejected a lot, then either they aren't job hunting hard enough or

they aren't searching for a job that represents a step up for them.

Another way to overcome this sense of rejection is to realize that the employer didn't make a decision *not to hire* you. They made a decision *to hire* somebody else. Obviously, that person made a better case, or looked like a better fit, than you did. Try to come up with some ideas as to how you could have presented yourself in a stronger light and try those techniques during your next interview. Put this hard-won information to work for you by including it in your post-interview notes. (To help you do this, use Tool #13, the Post-Interview Evaluation and Improvement Tool, in the Toolkit.) Remember, this is a learning process. You'll get better at it over time.

Finally, don't be paranoid. No one has so little to do or so much time on their hands that they are out there interviewing people just to be able to sadistically reject them. It may feel that way, but it ain't true.

## *Roadblock #5: It's unpredictable*

By and large, human beings don't like surprises. I know that I don't. Okay, maybe I like that rare piece of unexpected good news or a letter from a friend or a thoughtful thank you. But I'm willing to bet that people in funny hats jumping out of dark closets are responsible for more heart attacks than expressions

of unbridled delight. When the doorbell rings late at night, I'm under no illusion that it's the Publisher's Clearing House Prize Patrol!

This, most likely, goes back to our caveman past when a big, exciting surprise was apt to be something like an 800-pound, snarling saber-toothed tiger about to rip the head from your shoulders. Surprises were usually bad news. (Think about this the next time you're crouching in the dark in somebody's front hall closet with their raincoats and umbrellas.) To heck with surprises, give me predictability.

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

Let's take a look at all the uncertainties of the job search. You don't know how long your job search will take. You don't know the name of the organization in which you will end up working. You don't know the specific job you will end up doing. You don't know who will be your boss. You don't know where this organization will be located. You don't know who your peers will be. You may not know the industry your

employer will be in. You don't know the details of your salary and benefits. With all these uncertainties, it is only natural to be apprehensive about the job-hunting process.

One caller to my *CareerTalk* radio show said it best: "Being a job hunter is worse than being a convict in prison. A convict at least knows when he is eligible for parole so he can make some plans for the future. But a job hunter is more like a hostage because there is no set date to pin one's hopes on. You just have to tough it out day by day and keep the faith that something good will eventually happen." This is a pretty stark analogy, but there is wisdom in it. If you work hard at your search *and* you keep the faith that something good will happen, it will. I just can't predict when. Sorry 'bout that.

## *Roadblock #6: It lacks structure*

In my previous book, *Love Your Job!*, I identify many of the benefits of having a great job. Heck, one of the benefits of even a so-so job is that it provides structure to your everyday life.

For most of us, structure is comfortable; it's knowing what time to get up in the morning, knowing the route or method of your commute, knowing who you will be working with, having a basic understanding of the types of challenges you will face during the day,

knowing (perhaps praying for) the time that you will be done for the day, and knowing what time you need to go to bed to get enough rest to do it all over again tomorrow.

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

To some folks, this independence is exhilarating. It's like running your own business just as you've always dreamed. To others, it feels like being cut adrift, alone in a small boat, with no idea which direction to row in order to get home. If you thrive on this degree of self-direction, you are fortunate. If you don't, don't beat yourself up over it. The majority of the world feels the way you do. Here's how you deal with it.

If you found yourself on a desert island with nothing to protect you from the wind and rain, what would you do? Think back to Tom Hanks in the movie *Castaway*. Obviously, you would build a shelter. It might not be perfect at first, but over time you would

improve this structure, making it stronger, more secure, and more comfortable. You wouldn't build more structure than you needed. Nor would you build one that wouldn't meet your needs. This is what you must do during your job search. Build a structure that meets your needs.

You must force yourself to answer such questions as these: What time will I start on my job search each morning? What are my weekly goals? What are my monthly goals? When do I predict I will be reemployed? When will I go to the library to do my research? How much time will I devote to networking? How many sources of published openings will I review weekly? How many employment agency/search firm contacts are enough? How much time should I spend on the telephone? You must recognize that you are now self-employed, and the only person who can answer these questions is you.

The only structure you will find in the job-hunting process is the one you provide for yourself. If you need it, it only makes sense to build it for yourself and come in out of the rain. (Tool #3 in the Toolkit, Job Hunt Goal-Setting and Monitoring, will help you set, customize, and reach your weekly and monthly job search goals.)

## *Roadblock #7: It requires asking for help*

Both men and women stumble over this roadblock, though I have observed a much higher percentage of men struggling with this one. Let's use an example most of us can relate to. Have you ever noticed a person continually driving around and around the same block, craning his neck looking for street numbers or landmarks, and swerving from one side of the road to the other while frantically glancing down at a scrap of paper held in one hand? What's going on here?

You guessed it. He's lost. Now while some of us would prefer to use such terms as "momentarily disoriented," "geographically impaired," or "temporarily uncertain as to *exact* position," this guy needs help. Why is it that some people would rather struggle along with a problem by themselves than to ask for help from others?

Some have suggested that men have this problem because of sex-role stereotyping. As in, "I'm a manly man. I don't *need* help, I *give* help!" This is probably true to some extent, but it doesn't explain why some women also labor needlessly in this regard. Perhaps it has less to do with gender (nature) and more to do with the degree of independence we were accustomed to in our environment as we grew

up (nurture). Whatever the reason, it is counterproductive to your job-hunting success, and it will make the process both longer and more difficult.

If you have an “I must do it on my own” attitude, you've got to overcome it. To help you do this, I have compiled Dr. Paul's Short Course on Humility. To complete this course, read the following statements and respond with True or False. (Table 1.1)

* I know exactly what types of jobs are available in my geographical area and occupational field.	True	False
* I know precisely the salary ranges and benefits that these jobs provide.	True	False
* I know every source of published openings and help-wanted ads for people in my field.	True	False
* I know of and can speak to all employment agencies and search firms that work in my field.	True	False
* I am confident that my resume and my letters are the best they can be.	True	False
* I am completely familiar with all the libraries, schools, colleges, and public offices that have relevant information I will need during my job search.	True	False
* Secretaries and administrative assistants swoon at the mere sound of my voice and always put my phone calls through on my first try.	True	False
* I have a personal network of between 100 and 200 people who will be willing to help me with my job search. And I know how to get them to help me.	True	False
* I love making telephone calls to people I don't know.	True	False
* When faced with rejection, I never get discouraged.	True	False

\* When faced with a difficult, frustrating task, I find that isolation and lack of brainstorming help me to become more creative. True False

Table 1.1

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If you answered false to *any* of the above items, you need help. This is not a weakness; it is part and parcel of the job-hunting game. Whenever you are tempted to tough it out alone, remember Dr. Paul's Short Course on Humility. Humility means putting your pride in your pocket. And by doing that, I guarantee that a paycheck will soon follow.

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

If it seems as if I've been picking on men, the tables are about to turn. Another reason job hunting seems so difficult is that you have to "blow your own horn." Many people (and here I find a much higher percentage are women) have a hard time selling themselves. Many of us were taught that it is not polite or seemly to talk about ourselves; all the wonderful things we have accomplished or the kudos we've received, or all the insightful thoughts we have or the many terrific personal characteristics that we have developed.

One frustrated job hunter once said to me, "I hate this. I'm a back-office type. If I wanted to be a salesperson, I would have *become one*." My response was, "You are a job hunter, which means you've just been transferred to the sales department. Welcome aboard!" (With his funky mood, I was lucky he didn't strangle me.)

To overcome this hesitancy to sell yourself, you will need practice, coaching, and feedback. By the way, this is how average salespeople become great salespeople. When you talk to a close contact about your job search, ask them if you came on too strong or if it would be better to come on a little stronger. When you meet recruiters, ask them for feedback about your personal presentation. If you discover important accomplishments that you've neglected to put on your resume, be sure to revise it to include them. If, after some of your preliminary interviews you feel comfortable with an interviewer, ask him for some feedback about your style.

No prospective employer looks at the hiring process as a detective job or a hidden treasure hunt. They will learn only as much about you as *you* are willing to share. The more data you put on the table about yourself, as it relates to this employment opportunity, the better chance you stand of getting the job offer you want. It's that simple. If you sit there waiting

and hoping to be discovered, like a starlet in some 1940s movie, you will fail.

## *Roadblock #9: It's lonely and isolating*

To the unemployed job hunter, it looks as if everybody else in the entire world has a job. People driving down your street during the morning commute seem clearly different from you. They have someplace they *have to be*, where there are people with whom they *have to meet*. You, on the other hand, are on your own to figure out for yourself what it is that you have to do. During off hours, many job hunters feel that their friends and family don't want to hear about their job search because, somehow, it reflects negatively on them that they are unemployed. And after all, who wants to be continually giving the bad news, "No, I haven't found a job yet."

If you are gainfully employed while looking for a job, it can be even lonelier because, realistically, there are very few people at work with whom you should risk discussing your job search. I have observed that the *best* bosses, those interested in their employees' growth and career development, are quite willing to have their employees know what their career options are in the open job market. However, not all bosses are that secure, and most folks have good reason to fear that their boss will hear through the grapevine

(as Marvin Gaye would say) that they are actively looking for a new job.

These and other factors combine to make the job-hunting process a lonely and isolating experience. The problem is that loneliness and isolation are the mortal enemies of high energy and a positive attitude, both of which you will need to succeed as a job hunter. The way to overcome this roadblock is to learn that you cannot succeed at this process by yourself; you will need other people.

If you are looking for a job while unemployed, there are a number of ways to connect with other job hunters who can keep you from becoming lonely and isolated. If you have outplacement assistance, be sure to avail yourself of the group meetings and networking forums that the outplacement firm provides. Most state unemployment or employment and training offices offer networking support groups. Many community and church groups now either sponsor job-search networking groups or let such groups use their facilities. For example, in Massachusetts alone, I have a list of 36 such groups. Get involved in these groups and you will be amazed at how useful they will be to help you generate leads, to help you keep focused, and to help keep you connected with other people.

If you are looking for a job while employed and don't want to join a public networking group, you will have to construct one of your own. By talking with your associates at work, with your friends, family, and a large range of contacts, you can probably identify four to six people who are looking for a new job at any one time. Try to organize regular group meetings. Or if that is impossible, try discussing your job search with each one individually and encourage them to discuss their job search with you. Reinforce the confidential nature of these conversations. Ask each of them if they know one or two other current job hunters you could include in a private and confidential job-search networking group. Take it upon yourself to organize this group. Set up a regular meeting time and organize an agenda. Attend the meeting of a public group to see how it's done.

So that you have both sides of the story—I have seen a few folks who toughed out a job search almost all entirely on their own. And, yes, they all ultimately landed jobs. But it was harder, it took longer, and it was tougher on them and those around them than it had to be. Finding (or building) and using a networking support group is easier, quicker, less stressful, and more fun. What's not to like?

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

Every human being has a weak spot. It may be real or imagined, it may be in your education, your work history, your appearance, your skills, or your background. Maybe you are aware of your weak spot, and maybe you aren't.

If you are in the dark about your weak spot, here's a quick way to uncover it. Complete the following sentence: *It would be a lot easier for me to get a job if only I....*

This is your job-hunting weak spot. (This is a good exercise to do every so often during your job hunt.) When someone else raises the issue that you already believe to be a weak spot, it is only natural for you to defend yourself. But, and you've seen this in others, defensiveness negatively affects the sound of your voice, closes up your body language, stunts your creativity, makes you less open in your responses, and generally makes you a less attractive person. These are the exact opposites of the things that you want happening to you during your job search, and especially during your interviews.

The way to overcome job-search defensiveness is to do a fair and honest self-assessment. You have to gain a balanced understanding of your relative strengths and weaknesses, and learn how to best present them to potential employers. Perhaps you have a career counselor, outplacement consultant, employment specialist, or organizational psychologist who can help you with this. You can find many helpful self-assessment exercises in my earlier book, *Love Your Job! Loving the Job You Have, Finding a Job You Love* (O'Reilly Media, 1993). A supportive friend or colleague can help you with this. But, whatever you do, you will need to have as clear and as objective as possible a picture of who you are and what it is that you have to offer a hiring organization. If you do not do this, you will have planted a booby trap for yourself that will go off when you least want it to during your job search.

What is it that determines who is hired for any particular job? Is it qualifications alone? No. Is it education alone? No. Is it work experience alone? No. Is it personality alone? No. Is it references alone? No. Is it a great resume alone? No. Is it contacts alone? No. Is it luck alone? No. Is it that you bought the right book? As much as I want to say yes, the answer is no! What determines if you are hired for a specific job is (a) a combination of *all of these factors*, plus (b) your ability to *communicate these factors*.

Even though you may have a great education, strong resume, super background, extensive work experience, and terrific personal characteristics, there actually may be someone applying for the same job as you that is *stronger* than you are in one of these categories. Does this mean that person will certainly be hired and you will not? No. The reason for this is that the other candidate is probably not as strong as you are in some other category. Every job candidate represents a unique mix of background, skills, education, knowledge, and personality—a specific equation of strengths and weaknesses.

Unfortunately, many job hunters labor under what I call *the myth of the perfect job candidate*. This myth is based on the fear that some god-like figure who is terrific in every way is applying for the same job that you are. It further suggests that because you are *not* terrific in every way, the interviewer will discover you for the imperfect, mere mortal that you are, and, thus, you will not get the job.

The way to overcome this self-doubt is to realize that there aren't very many (if any) perfect job candidates out there, and we don't live in a perfect meritocracy anyway. It is a fact that the best person for a job doesn't necessarily get hired. There will be times when this reality will work for you and there will be times when it will work against you. But that doesn't change the reality. What can help in this regard is for you to

memorize Dr. Paul's #1 Rule of Successful Job Hunting: *The most effective job hunter will get the most interviews, and the most effective interviewee will get the most and best job offers.*

Look, it's no secret to those who love you most in this world that you are nowhere close to perfect. But they still love you, right? So take a good look at your supposed weak spots, and with your hard work, sense of humor, and determination to succeed, I can help you to become an effective job hunter, a terrific interviewee, and a winning job candidate.

## ***Roadblock #11: The "uglies"***

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

Deep within each of us there is a place where we store good memories and bad, remembrances of achievements and failures, and hopes and fears for the future. Attached to each of these are emotions. When positive emotions (for example, love, happiness, acceptance, peacefulness, forgiveness) are touched upon by something happening in our daily lives, we

are affected in both conscious and subconscious ways. Similarly, when negative emotions (for example, fear, jealousy, dread, anger, resentment) are stirred up, we also respond in conscious and subconscious ways. Although misplaced love can have a negative effect and righteous anger can have a positive effect, we can generally say that positive emotions have a positive effect and that negative emotions have a negative effect on our daily lives. This is especially true during the job-hunting process.

If you feel that you are job hunting because you were unjustly fired from your last job, the anger you feel toward your former boss may display itself in various ways during the job search. If you are envious or jealous of the position held by your interviewer, you may communicate this in your responses, your attitude, or your body language. If you are stalled by the fear of rejection or the fear of failure during your job change, you will take fewer risks, and, ultimately, you may accept a job that is beneath your aspirations.

Take a good, hard look at yourself and your attitudes about job hunting. Talk them over with a close friend, confidant, mentor, or counselor. What negative emotions about this process are you carrying around? Where did they come from? What are they based upon? Can you see where they might hurt you? What can you do about it? Sometimes just talking these issues through can help you to put them aside. If that

is not the case, try to come up with some competing positive emotions to pair them with to dampen their negative effect. Try to take a healthful, forgiving, and humorous look at the situations that spawned these situations.

If these ideas do not work for you, try using the exercises for positive thinking and realistic optimism in *Love Your Job!* The “uglies” that are inside you are baggage that weigh you down, trip you up, siphon off your energy, and keep you from reaching your full potential. The job hunt can be a rugged and bumpy stretch on your personal road to success. But if you dump some of that extra baggage you've been dragging along with you, you can relax a little and, I hope, even enjoy the ride.

## *Roadblock #12: The psychology of entitlement*

A couple of years ago, a client company asked me to do some career coaching with one of their star managers. With a B.S. cum laude in psychology, Marilyn had gone into consumer sales with a prestigious consumer products company right out of college. After three and a half years, she was accepted into the Wharton School of Management. After receiving her MBA she was recruited into a well-known and widely respected mutual fund company in Boston as a marketing manager. Marilyn did well with this

company, but after almost five years, the company was going to relocate her department to the Midwest, and they wanted her to go with it.

This relocation was something that Marilyn didn't want to do and felt she didn't need to do. When she wasn't offered a comparable position within the company, she informed her boss that she would rather resign than move. Her manager asked me to talk to her because either (a) he wanted her to change her mind and relocate, or (b) if she did resign, he wanted her to avail herself of the outplacement assistance that had been offered her to which she had responded with something like a cross between disbelief and disdain.

I failed on both counts. (Hmm, maybe I should be telling one of my success stories.) Marilyn was dead set against relocating. Her view of the world was similar to that of the famous *New Yorker* magazine cover with Boston and New York on the far right, a frozen, nameless tundra on the top, California on the far left, and nothing in the middle.

Her attitude about outplacement was just as parochial and short-sighted—it was for losers, not high-flying winners such as herself. Marilyn's attitude was that with her educational credentials and her strong track record with great companies, she wouldn't need much help because people would be knocking down her

door looking for someone with her profile and background.

The next time I saw Marilyn was when she came up to speak to me after I had given a pro bono speech to a local networking/support group for the unemployed —*five months* after I had last seen her! Five months isn't a particularly long job search for some jobs in some job markets, but it had seemed like a geological era to Marilyn. She had sent out a few resumes, contacted a couple of headhunters, and then sat back to wait for the flood of wonderful offers. She was devastated that she received only a couple of courtesy phone calls in response. (I told her that with the miniscule amount of effort expended on her part, I was surprised that she received as much response as she had.) This networking meeting was the first active step she had taken in weeks, and that was only because a close friend had led her by the hand.

The moral of this story could be about willingness to relocate or about utilizing whatever assistance one is offered or even about humility, but it is not. The moral is that no matter what type of superior background you feel you have, no matter what credentials you've earned, no matter what prestigious educational pedigree you hold, no matter how wonderful some people have told you you are, no one is going to come knocking on your door with a basketful of wonderful and exciting career opportunities just

because you feel that you are entitled to them. The psychology of entitlement—whether in your career, your family, or your community—is a roadblock to your success and satisfaction in any area of your life.

If you feel entitled to have your company, your former employer, your outplacement firm, some employment agency, a search firm, your network, or anyone or any other organization go out and find you another job, I can guarantee that you will be spending a lot of time home alone watching daytime television.

Sure, job hunting sucks. But nobody else will do it for you. Nobody *can* do it for you. Nobody *should* do it for you. Heck, there isn't even anybody you can *pay* to do it for you.

In today's world of work there are no guarantees and there are no entitlements. To achieve, you must push yourself to perform. To grow, you must push yourself to learn. To advance, you must accept and adapt to change. The responsibility for driving and advancing your career is now, more than ever before, in your own hands. And that is as it should be.

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We've taken a hard look at the ways many people stumble during the job-hunting process. By examining the deadly dozen roadblocks of job hunting, I trust

you now see that each of them can be overcome with knowledge, spirit, energy, humor, and optimism. That's our theme in *Winning Job Interviews*, so now let's move on to the mechanics of the process in the next chapter, *How to Get More and Better Interviews*.