

STOP MAKING EXCUSES FOR YOURSELF AND START YOUR JOB SEARCH



Summary: *This article lists some of the most common excuses people make when hesitating on beginning their job search and the answers they need to hear.*

Like the child who can think of a thousand reasons for going outside, or ten thousand reasons for not doing his homework, many people have bottomless wells of excuses for their fear of getting involved in the business of searching for better work. It often requires only one of the following to arrest any work-seeking behavior, and chances are you can lay claim to several.

I'm Too Old

A person my age doesn't do all that running around looking for a different job. It takes too much foolish energy that I must be careful to conserve. Furthermore, I think it's a little undignified to admit I made a mistake in the past and go around confessing it to everyone.

Answer: Older folks look for new challenges because they have already licked several tough problems and want new ones. Changing work is not the confession of a sinner, but the spirit of a missionary who has something good to offer and wants to pass the wealth around.

I Can't Do Anything Else

I must admit, if you press me, that I am afraid there's nothing else I can do as well as what I am currently doing.

I'm afraid of getting caught in the middle, losing my present work, and being unable to make the grade elsewhere. I was lucky to get my present work and am not so sure I'd be that lucky again.

Answer: The major currency in your work experience is transferrable skills, which are abilities that can be marketed in numerous contexts. For example, if you have been an effective organizer in your present office, church, or community, chances are you can carry these abilities to a different work setting and put them to use without starting all over again.

I'd Better Hang on to What I've Got

There is no sense in building a record of good work and then throwing it away by looking for something new. Maybe my work isn't the greatest, but I should capitalize on the progress I have made, and not dismiss it for some uncertain future. I can't afford to surrender the experience I've accumulated.

Answer: No one is asking you to start over at the bottom. When you find a setting where your skills are transferable, you can reasonably request an appropriate level. If you are bored with your current situation, you cannot afford not to look for something more stimulating.

My Job Takes All My Time

My work doesn't give me time to think about doing anything else. I would have to take three weeks off just to explore this subject and would undermine my present responsibilities in the process. It's too large a price to pay for just shopping around in the dark.

Answer: Take a close look at the people you encounter routinely in your work and ask yourself how they might lead you to others. Whom do they know in other fields of work? Don't be so busy painting yourself into a corner that you fail to look for a way out.

I Don't Like Rejection

I would rather not put myself in situations where I am probably going to be turned away. No one likes that kind of treatment, and I am no exception. Why walk into a buzz saw when you know it's there? That sort of experience will only tend to reduce my confidence.

Answer: When you set about the job search, it is you who are doing the choosing, not the other way around. There is no risk of failure when you are the customer rather than the salesperson. Go through the job search as a data gatherer and let the job offers take care of themselves.

Let Fate Take Over

I would prefer to trust that the unseen hand, the mysterious flow of events that has been my life so far, will continue to shape the story of my career. I like surprises and have faith that good things will happen, that whatever comes my way, I can handle it and adjust to it. Going out to make my own changes is too much like tampering with a higher-order process. To my vocation I will be called. I believe opportunities will cross my path and I will be wise enough to know which ones are marked for me.

Answer: If you are so closely in touch with divine powers that you prefer not to develop an organizer strategy, then play it your way. However, allow me to suggest it is not fate that guides you, but your sensitivity to yourself and your willingness to trust your instincts.

I Am Just a Complainer

I am really a chronic malcontent. It's just a life-style with me. I really don't want to change, but would simply rather complain, moan, attract sympathy, and just stay put where I am.

Answer: There are better ways to entertain yourself than crying wolf. I believe people who grouse about their work are in need of help, but don't know how to ask for it. If you are sinking in vocational quicksand, please call for a rope and pull yourself out.

The Alternative Might Be Worse

What I like about the miserable work I've got is that at least I know what sort of misery to expect each day. Whatever job I might get in exchange could be worse, even more debilitating. I am comfortable in a perverse sort of way with my present situation.

Answer: Risk is the tariff for leaving the Land of Predictable Misery. Secure a temporary visa—give yourself permission to roam the countryside and look at what other people are doing. If the alternatives demand too high a price in uncertainty, you can still come home again if you insist on it.

It Doesn't Hurt Enough Yet

I really cannot change because my present work is tolerable. I have nothing much to look forward to, but I can keep the pain to a minimum by dodging around, doing a little something different, and fantasizing that it will get better. I'm sure other people have it much worse, so why shouldn't I put up with my share of discomfort?

Answer: Is the pain really tolerable or is your head just numb from repeated encounters with the wall? When will it hurt enough—when your children talk about what a kind, calm, and likable person you used to be?

I Don't want to Shake Things Up

Life is comfortable and predictable, even if it is not exciting and filled with challenges. If I look around for a change now, I will have to unsettle myself, my entire family, and everything that is orderly in my life. That's an awful price to pay in search of a rainbow that might not be there. I will not take chances with my family's security.

Answer: The emotional health of you and your family may be more important than a certain amount of financial sacrifice. Ask your family members first before you make assumptions about how they would regard a shakeup. Perhaps they have been waiting for you to give the word.

Nothing May Turn Up

Then what? Suppose I pour myself into a search for something better and then discover, after all that turmoil, that nothing is available, that I must stay where I am after all? Wouldn't that be a terrible waste of effort? Why even expose myself to that possibility? At least when I go to a store, I know I will usually find merchandise. Job hunting is shaky business. I don't like the odds.

Answer: Sure, and there may be no trout in the stream or no friends at the golf course, but you still go there hoping something lucky will occur. Charles Kettering's well-known saying about luck is especially apt here: "No one ever stumbled across anything sitting down."

No One Encourages Me

I am not being cheered on by those around me. My family and friends really don't know how I feel about my present work, so they see no great urgency for me to change. Besides, it is more comfortable for those close to me if I stay put. They won't have to adjust to my new ways or ideas.

Answer: You probably have not allowed them into your secret chambers. Any person with whom you share your struggle will cheer you on, because he or she wants the same attention when getting up the courage to move in a new direction. Don't suffer in silence; you will become your own worst critic.

Of course, you have looked for work before. You probably did so, however, as an adolescent might seek to break into a strange social group. Job hunting has much the flavor of a ritual dance in which the initiate must perform in certain prescribed ways. The dance is a passionless affair because the individual does as told—send your forms here, sit there, talk now, go have this or that examined, cross your fingers, breathe deeply, wait . . . and wait some more. Ritual dances, with employers calling the tunes and job seekers dancing to them, will remain the dominant rites until job seekers learn to orchestrate their own methods.

You cannot depend entirely on college degrees, reference letters, other people, good fortune, or paper qualifications to get the job that is best for you. You must exert more active control over the process and take initiatives as often as possible.

Your success will depend heavily on your ability to use many skills of the job search process. Without these skills, you are at the mercy of other people's arbitrary judgments and whims.

No doubt you already apply many of the career skills naturally in your normal life routine. Other skills probably represent areas of serious deficiency for you. Learning how to acquire the skills you need most will help you greatly in your job search.

Career skills are lifetime skills. They can be used repeatedly in a person's life and work history. By possessing these skills you can reduce your fear of the job search because you can take better control of the search process.