



How to Employ the Help of Family and Friends When Looking for a Job

Have you ever noticed that when you are looking for work, every one you know has some bit of advice to share about what you should do, who you should talk to, where you should look?

Most of the people who are making suggestions, giving advice, and pushing you along are doing so **because they care about you** and they just don't know what else to do. Do them, and yourself, a favor and tell them things they can say and do that will help you in the process.

So how can you harness the support of these well meaning people and involve them in the process so they don't have to helplessly stand by and watch?

■ **First, make sure they have a basic understanding of what you have to offer a prospective employer.** Not what you are looking for...but what you are offering. When you are in the market for a new job, initially you are not the buyer, you are the seller. This is an important distinction. If you are in the market for a new car, you are holding the cash and you can go to the dealer and tell them what you want.

If you are hoping to sell your used car, your job is to market the features and benefits of owning the car. If you want to solicit the help of your family and friends in selling that car, then you give them written specs that clearly outline the car's **features and the benefits** (and you certainly downplay the fact that it has 200,000 miles).

Next time someone indicates a desire to help you in the process of landing a job, give them your written specs, aka a **Professionally Designed Résumé**, highlighting your strongest skills and accomplishments. They may not understand it 100%, but if the résumé is written well, they should have a better idea of what a "QA Analyst for a pharmaceutical manufacturer" does.

The idea of giving them your résumé is not so they can pass it on to an employer for you. Give it to them so they know what you are "selling". Plain and simple.

■ **Second, ask your "helper" if he would sit down with you and look over your written job search marketing plan.** What? You don't have a plan? A Professional Résumé Writer or Career Coach can help you create a targeted Job Search Marketing Plan.

Keep these two basic things in mind:

1. **Most people** that are employed, ever were employed, or hope to be employed **have not had any formal instruction on how to look for work.** How would you feel the next time you board a United Airlines jet only to discover that the pilot never had any formal training on how to fly a plane? *"Yeah, but he read a good book about it and even found some information on the Internet".* That's nice, but you deserve better than that.
2. **The people who are trying to help probably are pretty uninformed about what you are "marketing".** You know lots of employed people. Ask yourself honestly, do you really know what they do, what skills they have to do it, and how well they do it? Unless they hold a fairly common job that we have had some exposure to in life (Kindergarten Teacher; Plumber; Bartender; Dentist, etc.) we are pretty well clueless. *"Hey, I'm a QA Analyst for a pharmaceutical manufacturer. How much clearer can I be?"*

Once you have covered these two things, talk to your "helper" about some specific things she can do. Draw on her strengths and the things she enjoys:

- **Do you know someone who likes to "surf the net"?** Give them names of some of the companies you are targeting on your marketing plan and ask them to do some online research for you. Ask them to research and print any information they can find. If they see a job posted, print that too, but don't make this the exclusive goal of going on line.
- **Is there an organizer in your life?** Get yourself a three-ring binder, some alphabetical notebook dividers and a hole-punch. Ask the "organizer" to create a notebook section for each of the employers on your target list (with room to add others as they come along) and put in all that great information your net-surfer came across, as well as copies of all those job leads you cut out of the paper and printed from online job postings.
- **Do you know someone whose word processing skills put your "manual-typewriter" skills to shame?** Ask them to word process your handwritten correspondence... or dictate to them if they are really good!
- **How about the family book worm or crossword puzzle junky?** These people tend to have a good command of the written word. Ask them if they would proofread your documents before you send them out. Typos, misspellings, and grammatical errors can be real turn-offs to employers.
- **Is there an actor/actress wanna-be in your life?** Ask them if they would be willing to role play an interview with you. Provide them with a "script" of possible interview questions (you can find great examples at www.job-interview.net) and tell them you will adlib your part. Then ask them for a verbal critique (Oscars and Emmys for your performance are optional.)

Besides the tangible things that others can do to help you, tell them about the intangibles.

Respect Your Feelings. When you are procrastinating, do you need a kick in the pants or a gentle nudge? When your spirits are down, do you need a shoulder to cry on or do you prefer to cry alone? If you are feeling grumpy, do you want to be cheered up or left alone to wallow in your misery until the mood passes? People, who want to help, tend to give what they would want to receive in similar circumstances. It could be they are doing what makes them feel good, but it may be killing you.

Respect Your Time. If you are currently unemployed, ask your family and friends to not take advantage of the fact that you are "not working." (*"Since you don't have to go to work today, can you pick up the dry cleaning; babysit my kids; join me for an afternoon matinee; take grandma to the*

doctors; paint the living room, etc.") Remind them that you may not be on someone's payroll right now, but you **definitely** have work to do.

This important fact can be better confirmed if: 1) you stick to what were your normal work hours and commit those same hours and days to the job search process, and 2) you have an "office" to go to.

Your office could be the career center that your kind employer contracted with an outplacement agency when they (unfortunately) had to lay you off. Your office could be the local Job Service or Workforce Investment Office. Your office could be a dedicated space in your home away from the daily activity (preferably with four walls and a door, a phone, computer with Internet access and a fax machine.) If none of this exists, then your office can be a state of mind with a visible clue for those who might want to bother you.

Once I worked in an office where we all had our own little cubicle. No door, no floor to ceiling walls and no protection from the "interrupters". A wise co-worker of mine, when she had lots of work to do and could not be interrupted, donned a purple hat with a sign pinned to it that read "I AM NOT HERE". When the hat was on, we left Beth alone. When she was ready for human contact again, she took it off. Find some way to communicate to your housemates that you are "at work now" and then ask them to respect it.

Other things to ask your housemates to respect:

If someone calls when you are not home, ask them to take a message. That means write it down, confirm the name and spelling of the name, and the number. And ask them to give you the message as soon as is humanly possible. I remember one night at dinner, after a particularly long spell of unemployment my son announcing "*Oh, Mom, some guy called a couple of days ago and wanted to talk to you about a job you applied for. I can't remember his name and I thought I wrote the number down, but I think I threw it away by mistake*". I had a melt-down.

If message-taking is not a housemate's strength, then I encourage you to call your local phone company and inquire about voice mail. You can set up separate mailboxes for everyone in the family, access messages when you are away from home and not have to worry that a power outage or full cassette that has temporarily disabled your answering machine.

The other advantage of voice mail is that if someone is trying to reach you when the phone is currently being used, they can leave a message that you can retrieve as soon as the phone is free. This is far better than call-waiting.

The bottom line is this...

Family and Friends **do want to help.**
Just let them know how!