

# 48 Lessons Learned in Job Search: How to Find a Job and Yourself along the way



By James Warda

## Ok, so who am I and why did I write this?

Most important, I'm a former job seeker. So, believe me, I *get* it. I understand what you're probably feeling because I've felt it. I know that daily battle between panic and patience, between knowing I had valuable experience to wondering if I would ever get an interview again. But I made it through. And so will you.

After my job search, my job networking group leader asked me to write a one-page "lessons learned" document about what worked and didn't work for me in the job search. He asked that of everyone from the group who "landed" (got a new job). Little did he know, though, *who* he was asking.

See, I'm a writer. And a speaker. And a bit of a ham. Which means I often have a *lot* to say. And that's how one page turned into what is now 25.

Of course, these are *my* lessons learned. You'll obviously have your own. Some may be the same, but many will likely be different. The reason I'm sharing mine here is because the job search is hard, one of the hardest things many of us will experience because it gets right at our sense of worth, identity and belonging. And, because it's that hard, we all need to help each other through it – even when we're back working, as I am now.

So, with that, I wish you the strength, peace and courage we all need along the way.

Let's get started.

### At First

1. *Take a breath.* When you're first out of your job, especially if it was involuntary, take a breath and take at least a week, if not a bit longer, to process what happened. Some people dive right in to updating resumes and LinkedIn profiles, while getting hit by a "firehose" of well-meaning advice and instruction. But it's important to take care of our mental health throughout the job search, be in the present moment as much as possible, acknowledge the emotional side of the "journey," especially on the most difficult days, and refresh and reset as needed.

*(Special Note: The job search holds gifts. Ok, I know that's almost crazy to say when you're in a job search, especially on the darkest days when college loans need to be paid and severance is running low, but believe me, it does. You won't likely see these gifts until you're back working but, once you are, I'm guessing you'll agree with me. More on this later in the "After You Land" section.)*

2. *Passion and purpose.* While you're taking that breath, think about what you most want to do. You don't often get the chance to do that. In fact, you probably haven't since you

were younger. So, take full advantage. We do well what we do out of passion.

3. *Dumbledore knew.* Don't be afraid to take some chances throughout the job search. Experiment. Reinvent yourself. Wear a new hat or hairdo. Start wearing a monocle and bowtie. As Albus Dumbledore said to Harry Potter in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*: "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities." Choose often and choose well. And, if you don't choose well, guess what? You'll soon have the chance to choose again.
4. *So, what do you do?* Many of us identify ourselves very strongly with our jobs. We see them as a way to be employed (used) for a purpose – to the point where they become part of the fabric of who we are. Don't believe me? Well, when you go to a party and meet someone new, what's typically the first question they ask you after they ask for your name? And how do you feel answering that question when you're not working? If you're like I was, it's probably a mixture of embarrassment and confusion. To counteract that feeling, especially of not being prepared for the question, prepare a brief answer ahead of time that feels natural for you. And, in that answer, with people you know well, don't hesitate to build in a "Call to Action," asking them to keep their eye out for opportunities. If you're talking to a relatively new acquaintance, you'll probably want to keep it to a more generic, "I'm looking for my next role," or whatever feels right and comfortable for you.
5. *Campfires aren't the only good place for stories.* Learn how to tell your story well. Over time, as you continue to update your SARS (Situation-Action-Results) statements on your resume, to network and to do interviews, etc., you're going to get crisper and crisper in your story. The easier and more naturally you can tell it, the more likely the person you're talking to will get it. And a cool thing will happen as you continue to tweak your story. You'll begin to realize just how much you've done and can do, and how cool you really are.
6. *20 People, 20 Suggestions.* As mentioned above, in your job search, a *lot* of people are going to be coming to you with a *lot* of advice. For example, if you give your resume to 20 people, you're going to get 20 different perspectives – with some having more expertise in resumes, interviews and LinkedIn profiles than others. So, take in the advice you want, understand the background and expertise level of those giving the advice, process it, apply the general themes from the feedback you've heard, and then don't forget to give it that all-important "gut check." Because, after all, it's *your* job search. You're now a company of one, needing to make the final decisions on your branding, values, strategies, priorities, measurements and, most important, how you'll use your most valuable resource: time.

## Getting Going

7. *Don't isolate.* Find networking and accountability groups in your area and go to them! Also go to job fairs. Go on informational interviews. Find your nearest career center and meeting (often in community centers, religious organizations), etc. Remember, if you're sitting home on your computer, you likely aren't going to find a job that way, you won't be meeting as many new people as you could, and your body may be screaming for sunlight and exercise. Now, granted, you might be able to catch up on your daytime TV, but that's not always a good thing, *SpongeBob SquarePants* notwithstanding.
8. *Finding a job shouldn't cost an arm, let alone a leg.* Be mindful of what you pay for in the job search, besides the necessary stuff (e.g., business cards, online portfolio, interview clothes, etc.). With most of the things you need (e.g., resume and LinkedIn profile reviews, mock interviewing, coaching), you'll likely be able to find them for free through kind and generous volunteers in your local job/career center or networking meeting. This is especially important at a time when funds are likely limited.
9. *Well worth it.* With that said, there *are* some career coaches and others who are worth the money, if you're comfortable with the price *and* you know they are good at what they do. Obviously, just be careful and get references and look for testimonials. I've personally met several coaches, both in-person and on LinkedIn, who were very helpful to my getting back to work.
10. *Watch out for scams.* Job seekers can be a particularly vulnerable group whose information is often very visible, and who are known to need a job. They may also be feeling a little desperate, as I was the longer my search continued. So, if you ever have a gut feeling about a company or person, just put their name in Google, along with the keywords "scam," "fraud" and "complaint," and see what comes up. This also works well when people you don't know send you emails with subject lines like, "Hey, we've got a job for you!" Of course, this isn't a full-proof method but it's a good place to start and can help you not waste time, while protecting yourself and your information.  
  
This approach won't obviously guard you against flurries of emails from more legitimate companies that always seem to be looking for someone to put up their own cash to start an insurance agency or retail franchise. But, again, it will help rule out the impostors.
11. *Give your handbill an extreme makeover.* One of the main marketing tools that many career centers/coaches recommend that job seekers create is a handbill. A handbill summarizes your background in a way that provides different context than a resume. It typically includes a summary of your background, your main areas of experience, your target titles and companies, your education, etc.

Immediately below is an example of the first handbill I created.

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<p><b>Director of Communications – Business Alignment – Change Management</b>  <i>Building Content that Connects</i></p> <p>As a communication leader with global experience across multiple companies and industries, I partner with leaders, direct cross-functional initiatives, build enduring relationships, develop teams, and lead large-scale change projects. My ability to create a connection with audiences through internal, external, marketing, crisis and M&amp;A communications leads to greater trust and results.</p>	
<p><b>What I do...</b>          I drive engagement and performance for companies through my communications expertise and leadership. My experience spans a range of industries and channels, including marketing, publications, digital platforms (apps, intranets, social media), event management, video, and Media Relations integration, with added focus on crisis and M&amp;A. In addition, I'm an author, speaker and adjunct professor for Loyola University Chicago's School of Communications and Quinlan School of Business.</p> <p><b>How I add value...</b>          I apply my experience and abilities through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Strategically planning and executing</b> communications that are clear, concise and caring to drive trust and behavior change.</li> <li>▪ <b>Driving cross-functional collaboration</b> by connecting groups to increase alignment and build enduring partnerships.</li> <li>▪ <b>Applying change management principles while encouraging innovation.</b> <i>"If we're doing the same thing the same way at the same time next year, we're doing something wrong."</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Focusing on people</b> by hiring, training, coaching, <a href="#">mentoring</a>, and managing – while developing high performers at all levels.</li> </ul> <p><b>Employment History</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>James Warda Communications, Senior Consultant: (2018 -)</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Loyola University Chicago, School of Communications: (2018 -)</b> Adjunct Professor (Part-time)</li> <li>▪ <b>Walgreens Boots Alliance: (2012 - 2018)</b> Director of Integrated Communications, Team Lead</li> <li>▪ <b>Boeing: (2009 - 2012)</b> Senior Communications Manager, Team Lead</li> <li>▪ <b>Schneider Electric/Square D and JWCComms: (2006 - 2009)</b> Communications Manager, Team Lead, and Senior Consultant</li> <li>▪ <b>Allstate: (1996 - 2006)</b> Special Projects Manager, Instructional Designer</li> </ul> <p><b>Education:</b> Loyola University Chicago, English Studies</p>	 <p><b>Target Companies</b>          Abbott, AbbVie, Astellas, Baxter, CVS Health, Discover, Gallagher, Motorola Solutions, NorthShore</p> <p><b>Target Positions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Vice President of Communications</li> <li>▪ Head of Communications</li> <li>▪ Senior Director of Communications</li> <li>▪ Director of Communications</li> <li>▪ Assistant Director of Communications</li> <li>▪ Strategy and Content Director</li> <li>▪ Employee Engagement Director</li> <li>▪ Digital Content Director</li> </ul> <p><b>Target Industries</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consulting</li> <li>▪ Healthcare</li> <li>▪ Financial Services</li> <li>▪ Technology</li> </ul> <p><b>Areas of Expertise</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client Management</li> <li>▪ Strategic Content Planning</li> <li>▪ Executive, Employee, HR and Marketing Communications</li> <li>▪ M&amp;A Communications</li> <li>▪ Public Relations/Media Relations</li> <li>▪ Crisis Communications</li> <li>▪ Digital (app, intranet and social)</li> <li>▪ Broadcast, webcast, podcast, video and photo production</li> <li>▪ Event Management</li> <li>▪ Instructional Design</li> <li>▪ Brand and Corporate Identity</li> <li>▪ Team and Project Leadership</li> <li>▪ Change Management</li> <li>▪ Continuous Improvement</li> <li>▪ Metrics</li> </ul>

The issue was that, as a job seeker, I'd go to networking meetings, and *everyone* would be sharing them. So, I'd take about 10-20 home but, with everything else on my plate, I very rarely had the time or energy to review them. That was mostly because there were a *lot* of handbills and a *lot* of information on each. This also made me realize that others were likely having the same issue with mine.

So, I created a new handbill (see immediately below) that only included what I thought was the most critical information needed for others to help me: my name and contact info, a photo (photos are critical so that other job seekers can quickly put a face with a name at a networking meeting), a summary, 2-3 job titles I was interested in, 3-5 current target companies, a few target locations and my main previous companies.

Why is it important to have a condensed handbill? If you've ever seen someone's handbill, where they have a ton of information and over 30 target companies listed, you'll quickly understand. If you still need convincing, look at my two handbills and choose which one was easier to read and reference.

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**Summary**  
*"I drive content that connects"*  
 As a communication leader with global experience across multiple Fortune 100 companies and industries, I partner with leaders, direct cross-functional initiatives, build enduring relationships, develop teams, and lead large-scale change projects. My ability to create a connection with audiences through internal, external, marketing, crisis and M&A communications leads to greater trust and results. In addition, I'm an author, speaker and adjunct professor at Loyola University Chicago.

**Target Titles**

- Vice President of Communications
- Senior Director of Communications
- Director of Communications

**Current Target Companies**

- CVS Health
- Discover
- Gallagher

**Target Locations**

- Greater Chicago Area
- Southeastern Wisconsin, including Milwaukee

**Previous Companies**

- Walgreens Boots Alliance
- Boeing
- Schneider Electric
- Allstate
- Baxter

12. *Convey confidence throughout your search when you're in an interview or other external-facing job search activity.* No matter how much churn is going on inside, work to be clear, concise and compelling in asking for referrals, in your answers to interview questions and so forth. So, for example, if an interviewer asks about your most recent job and your position was eliminated, explain it briefly and move on ("My position was eliminated as part of a restructuring. So, I'm now looking for my next position and that's why I'm so interested in your company and this role"). Belaboring the point may make you sound defensive and unsure.

Now, that *doesn't* mean you shouldn't share your more negative feelings about the job search. It's a *hard* process and we all need to share, vent, etc. But I'd recommend sharing those feelings with other job seekers either in-person or in LinkedIn Groups like the [Career Inspo Forum](#), your family, friends, a coach, etc., as you see appropriate – not with recruiters, interviewers and so forth, as that could affect how you're perceived.

## Collaborating – We're all in this together

13. *Don't ramble on.* When you go to a networking meeting, be prepared to share your elevator speech (no more than 30 to 60 seconds: your name, the one or two job titles

you're looking for, a quick summary of your background (for example, "I have experience in all areas of communications at several Fortune 500 companies and speak 4 languages") and then the 3-5 specific companies you need connections in.

If you ramble, people will start looking at their phones. If you keep rambling, you will have lost them, and they won't be able to help you once they've left the meeting. Because, remember, most everyone there is also looking for a job, and has a thousand things running through their minds. So, be clear, concise and memorable. If you are those things, then when they're back home on their computers and see a job title or company you mentioned come across their screen, they'll more likely remember you and forward it.

How to be memorable? I've seen people do it in many ways. One called himself a "Supply Chain Maestro." One was an industrial engineer, so he brought in a food mixer he designed for a modern-day "Show and Tell" that made his skills and experience come to life. But, no matter what you do, do something that's right for you (but hopefully not gimmicky or cheesy, otherwise *that* could become your brand).

14. *Find Nearby*. One of the most important features on LinkedIn for a job seeker is called "Find Nearby." It's basically a toggle switch you can turn on when you're at a networking meeting or other event. Then, if others toggle on their "Find Nearby" switch at the same time, a small summary of each person's LinkedIn profile will show up on each other's screen, with a button to send an invitation to the other. So, for example, if you're in a networking meeting of twenty people, and everyone toggles the "Find Nearby" feature on, you can all quickly connect with each other.

In all, remember, you should never leave a networking meeting without more LinkedIn connections and at least a few actual connections for jobs you're looking at. That's *exactly* what networking meetings are for. That, and building relationships, of course.

Here are LinkedIn's [instructions](#) on using "Find Nearby." But, please note, I have seen "Find Nearby" move several times, and sometimes, it just disappears when I am using the app. So, if you can't find it, do a quick search on LinkedIn, or just look around – most likely behind the My Network icon (the image of two people, from the shoulders up, next to each other).

15. *Everyone but me*. When you're in job networking meetings or scrolling through job groups online, you're going to hear about other people landing new jobs. Of course, you'll be happy for them. But, it's only human to feel envious, and possibly more frustrated about your own search. The lesson I learned on this one was to not beat myself up for feeling that way. It didn't make me a bad person. It simply meant I wanted

to get back to work, too, and that it seemed like I couldn't figure out how to do it like *everyone* else was.

First, of all, not *everyone* was landing a job; it just felt that way. And, second, there are many factors that go into getting a job, including many we have no control over and many more we don't even know are happening behind the scenes.

So, as much as you can, try to be happy for others and realize they could now be another ally you have in getting back to work (see #19 below).

16. *It's a great job market.* When you're in those same networking meetings or online groups, depending on how the economy is, etc., you might hear how it's a "great job market," how there are so few people looking for jobs, and so on. And, meanwhile, you're going into the eleventh month of your job search.

That's why it's important to listen with a filter. There is a lot that goes into those reports and numbers (e.g., it might not say what kinds of jobs those are, etc.) and really, if it's not affecting your life directly, then take it with a grain of salt, or a sprig of whatever spice you prefer.

Because the worst thing that can happen when you hear that there are a lot of jobs out there, and you're not getting one, is to think that something's wrong with you. It's a natural thought. In fact, I thought it many times while in my search.

But there is nothing wrong with you. Or me. Never was. Never will be.

17. *Buddy up – TWO important lessons.*

During my first job search over ten years ago, I wrote a Letter to the Editor to the *Chicago Tribune* about the experience. Someone saw that letter and contacted me, letting me know it meant something to him. We got to know each other through the search, but when we both started working again, we lost touch – as often happens. But, when it happened again, over ten years later, he reconnected with me.

We then became good friends and job search "buddies," meaning we'd talk every day, to keep each other accountable, to vent and to help each other through the tough times. Fortunately, when one of us was down, the other was up, so we kept each other motivated.

To that end, I'd recommend you also find a job search buddy, whether it's through a networking meeting or in your neighborhood or community organization. And, in my

eyes, even though I landed a job, until my friend was back to work, I wasn't fully back. All in this together.

Now, a second lesson related to buddying up.

I made a very important discovery by accident (hello, lightbulb and penicillin!). That is, I learned that I got a much better response when I referred someone else than when I was asking for help on a job for myself.

I don't know why it happens. Maybe it's a psychological effect where, instead of coming to someone in what they might have perceived as a subservient way asking for help for me, I was coming to them as more of an equal, asking for help for someone else. In fact, I saw this play out several times. For example, there was one company I tried to get a response from for over six months. I went to my connections there and asked for help repeatedly. But I never heard back.

Then, after landing my current position, I went back to the same connections asking for help for one of my colleagues. And I heard back in a matter of *hours*! So, my advice, find a buddy, and refer each other for jobs. Then see what kind of uptake you get. And, please let me know at [jwarda7@comcast.net](mailto:jwarda7@comcast.net) how it works out. I want to see if my hypothesis is correct. And, if you happen to be a professional in psychology, the workings of the brain, etc., I'd love to hear your thoughts on this hypothesis, too.

18. *Connect, connect, connect.* There's an oft-quoted statistic that people only get about 10%-15% of jobs by applying online. With that statistic in mind, I got to the point where I would not apply to a job unless I had a connection in or to the company. Now, it didn't have to be a direct connection, but with any new job ad, I'd go to LinkedIn, click on the job, then click on the company. When the company's page would come up, it would tell me:

- 1) If I had any connections there
- 2) If anyone at the company worked at any of the companies I worked at previously
- 3) If anyone at the company had gone to my college
- 4) If we shared a lot of mutual connections.

I would typically find one of the four, at least.

After I did, if the person I'd found wasn't a direct contact, I'd send a personal invite that

mentioned how we were connected (e.g., former employer, school, mutual connections). If it was a job that I was interested in immediately, I'd mention in the invite that I was interested in a job at their company and would ask if they were willing to connect. That way, once they connected, I could then send a message with the job link, and they wouldn't feel like they'd been ambushed. If I was simply interested in the company, but didn't have an immediate job in mind, if they accepted, I would just watch for their posts and like/comment on them to start to build a relationship.

Yes, some people won't accept a personal invite like I one I sent. But there are also some who will. And, remember, in the job search, success comes from a mixture of hard work, good luck, and simply playing the "numbers game." The greater the amount and variety of things you have moving all at once, the more those things will hopefully build up momentum, start to "pinball" against each other, and give you the fuel you need to escape the gravitational pull of job search (and, yes, I know that was a labored analogy, but I've found it to be true).

19. *A recent job seeker can be a job seeker's best friend.* There is often no better resource for helping you get a job than a job seeker who has recently gone back to work. Because, they get it. Or, at least, they hopefully do. Of course, there are some job seekers who go back to work and promptly seem to forget that they were recently looking for jobs – and disappear. I'm not sure why that happens, though it might be that they simply want to forget one of the hardest periods in their life. But, please, oh please, oh please, when you get back to work, reach back and help others onto dry land, too. And, as added incentive, remember that karma's got a keen sense of sight and hearing. It knows how you treat others, and it can easily buy a return ticket.
20. *No coffee breaks.* Contrary to popular networking guidance, during my job search, I didn't ask employed people to "have coffee." That's because I remembered that, when I was working before my job search, I was always busy with meetings and multiple priorities. So, it was often next to impossible to get away offsite for a "coffee." (Plus, some people may be concerned about meeting strangers in person.)

So, my advice is to ask employed people if they have time for a 15-minute phone conversation instead. That reduces the time pressure on the person being asked. They'll also appreciate that you are taking the realities of their day into consideration and possibly see you as more professional because of it.

If they agree, next ask them if they're open to your sending an Outlook or Google meeting notice to hold the time on their calendar – that should keep you firmly in their upcoming things to think about. Then, once you do have the phone conversation, there's no harm, depending on how it's going, in asking if they'd be open to a follow-up

conversation in person. Sometimes, if it's going very well, they may even suggest it. *That* is when you know you've got real engagement.

21. *No Coke (or coffee), Pepsi.* While I'm on the "coffee" topic, can we please stop discriminating against those of who don't drink coffee? Yes, I know that admitting that fact may mean you're going to look at me suspiciously or that Starbucks may not be pleased. But there are those of us who don't. No, I'm a loyal Pepsi drinker. Of course, saying "Would you like to meet for Pepsi Max?" might get an odd response or maybe just silence.

Especially from a Coke drinker.

### Asking for Connections, Introductions and Referrals – and Getting Feedback

22. *It's all in the ask.* If you're asking someone to refer you to someone else or make an introduction, make it as easy on them as possible to improve your chance of success. What does that look like? It means sending them a concise note asking for the introduction and/or asking them to forward your information to the recruiter and hiring manager. If they agree, then send them a concise message with the link to the job you're interested in and a brief summary of your background that they can use in introducing you to someone else. Then, if you do get connected to someone through your referral, remember that your professionalism in responding and following up will reflect on that original referral source.

23. *Leaders are just a personal invite away.* On a daily basis, search for senior leaders and others with significant titles in your career areas or companies of interest on LinkedIn and invite them to connect through a personal invite. Of course, always add a note, letting them know why you're interested in connecting, mentioning if you have many mutual connections, went to the same school, worked at the same previous company, etc.

If they do accept, don't try to immediately get them to help you, etc. Instead, build up the relationship over time by liking and/or commenting on their posts, sharing articles with them that you think they might find interesting, and seeing if you can help them in some way with your own network. LinkedIn works best when it works reciprocally.

And, again, some leaders won't accept, but others will, depending on how relevant and sincere your note is. If they do accept, and if you build up a relationship, having a leader in your corner when applying at their company or to introduce you to others can be invaluable.

I tried to send five invites a day like this. Over time, that really “snowballed” well.

24. *Feedback.* *If one person says it, it’s an opinion. But if several people say it, it could be true.* Listen carefully to the feedback you get in networking meetings, from recruiters, from interviewers, etc., about your resume, LinkedIn profile and other job search-related items and approaches.

As you receive it, identify the common themes that you hear most often and/or the feedback that, though limited, has the biggest implications for your search. Then, where you think it makes sense, make changes in your approach, your documents, how you interview, and so forth. Because feedback is only a gift if we open and use it.

The other benefit, of course, is that making needed changes over time will help you re-energize your job search, which translates into how you’ll come across in interviews and other key conversations.

### Smack Dab in the Middle of the Search

25. *Keep your pipeline full.* This means that, every week, in addition to your networking meetings, try to have at least 3-5 major items moving. This includes doing phone interviews, taking online assessments for a job, doing in-person interviews, having informational interviews, attending job fairs, approaching senior leaders, etc. The true power is in building momentum, having multiple things all going at once that all begin to work together.

Why does this work? Because, for some reason, all the items you have moving tend to give each other a synergistic boost of energy, which then also gives you one. To paraphrase Sir Isaac Newton’s First Law of Motion, “an object at rest tends to stay at rest and an object in motion tends to stay in motion.”

One of the true enemies in the job search is lulls, or breaks, in activity. When you have lulls, that’s when it can get tough mentally, especially if you get a rejection on a job you really wanted, etc. Of course, it’s ok, even necessary, to get away at times, take vacation, and so forth, but having lulls when you’re trying to make things happen can be like that “object at rest” wanting to just “chill” for the day.

26. *Quick research.* Only have 30 minutes to research a company? (Well, ok, you’ll likely not often be in that predicament, but it helps me make the point here.)

Here’s what I recommend:

1) Go to the company website and give it a quick going-over. What's their vision, mission and values? How long have they been around? What's their history? Who is on their senior leadership team? What are their main products and services? How do they help the community?

2) If they're a public company, read the executive letter in their most recent annual report that typically summarizes their results, strategy, main projects and challenges, community support, any mergers and acquisitions activity, etc. If they're a private company, you can still Google to find that type of information. And, if they're a non-profit, go to [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org) to learn more about them.

3) Do a specific Google search for news about them. To do so, put in the name of the company and click the "News" tab. That will give you recent information about any new products, acquisitions, executive changes, issues, etc. If you view their older news stories, too, that will help you see how they've grown and changed over time.

4) Do a quick, general Google search on the company, like checking out who their main competitors are. This is also where things you didn't think about researching might come up.

27. *To take notes in the interview or not to take notes?* That is the question. For me, the answer is "Yes." Now, as a communicator, I take notes regularly as part of my job. But I do believe it's accepted practice now to bring notes to, and take notes in, an interview.

For each interview, ahead of time, I'd start on the left-hand side of a blank spread in my notebook, and write down high-level notes from my research (e.g., info about the company, summarize the job description, a few bullets detailing my main background stories that I'd be pulling from during the interview – a few to show business results and a few to show how I worked with others, etc.).

Yes, these notes were a "cheat sheet," of sorts, but I didn't and don't consider it cheating. After all, in my eyes, interviews shouldn't be a test of memorization. Instead, I consider them to be replicating what a business meeting would be like – where I would likely be referring to notes.

Then, still ahead of the interview, on the right-hand side of the notebook spread, I'd write down 5-10 questions to ask.

During the interview, I'd take notes on the right-hand side of that same spread, under my pre-planned questions, and in the following pages. These notes were invaluable in

two ways. They'd give me "jumping-off points" for asking questions in the interview (which would often take priority over the pre-planned ones) and they'd give me content to include in my customized "Thank you" emails afterwards, especially to help me keep track of which interviewer said what.

For the customized "Thank you" emails, I'd have a core message that would stay the same across all of them and then include 1-2 sentences in each according to what that person had mentioned in the interview. This also saved valuable time if I needed to send multiple "Thank you" emails during several levels of interviews.

Before the interview ended, I also made sure that I wrote down the interviewers' email addresses, if I hadn't been handed their business cards already. Again, these email addresses are obviously critical for those follow-up notes, and it avoided me having to contact the recruiter afterwards and ask for them, which wouldn't look professional.

Now, if taking notes into and/or during, an interview makes you uncomfortable, of course, don't do it. Or, you can ask at the beginning of the interview, "I was going to take a few notes. Does that work for you?" Again, whatever works best for you and doesn't add to the stress of an already stressful situation. Will you come across a few people who don't like that you're taking notes? Yes, possibly. Would you want to work for them? Well, that's your call, of course.

For me, not so much.

28. Their *Big 3 in the interview*. I heard a great summary of what interviewers are looking for in an interview: 1) Can you do the job? 2) Do you want the job?, and 3) Will you fit in?
29. Your *Big 3 in the interview*. As the interviewee, I see having three major questions, too: 1) Can I do the job?, 2) Do I want the job?, and 3) Do I want to work for *this* person, on *this* team, and in *this* organization?
30. *Don't wait on anything!* You just had a final interview. They flew you out to the headquarters. Wined and dined you. All signs point to your getting the job. In fact, they just asked to do a reference check, too. So, what do you do? Should you sit back, relax, cancel the other interviews you have coming up, and put on a rerun of *The Office*? Of course not. Because, until you have the offer, you don't.

No, just like a long-distance runner, when you get close to the finish line, the key is to speed up. Sprint across that line. Keep everything else moving, keep searching for jobs, networking, taking part in interviews, etc. After all, the universe seems to know when

we job seekers let our foot off the gas and put all our eggs in one basket. If we do, we often end up out of gas, stranded on the side of the road and cleaning up a lot of yoke from the floorboards.

31. *Try not to label.* Remember that everyone on every side of the job search, e.g., job seekers, recruiters, coaches, etc., is a real, live human being deserving respect. So, even if you're rejected, ghosted, etc., don't paint with a broad brush, thinking that everyone will act that way. It will be very hard at times not to launch right into a "Can you believe *these* recruiters?!" but try.

And, with apologies to Yoda, trying is often half the battle.

### After You "Land" (Get, Obtain, etc.) a New Position

32. *Make networking a way of life.* Once you land your new position, continue to keep a "networking" mindset, to help with your new job but also to build the walls up around your employment harbor to protect it from future job loss storms (yes, I know that was a particularly cheesy and ineffective analogy but it's all I've got right now).

Also keep your resume and LinkedIn profile updated regularly, document your ongoing accomplishments, continue to interact on LinkedIn, volunteer to help other job seekers, etc. And, even approach relationships with people you're working with differently, like agencies and vendors, knowing that you're building relationships that should stand the test of time and future job searches.

Remember, "networking" = "building enduring relationships."

33. *Give recommendations on LinkedIn when they're deserved.* Don't be a miser. Give them. They're worth their weight in gold. And don't forget to still ask for them. I've personally had recruiters tell me that they looked at those recommendations like a preliminary reference check.
34. *Transferable skills do indeed transfer.* When you get back to work, you're going to realize that you've learned critical new skills and/or better realized the importance of existing skills?

For example, when you're employed, you understand that it's important to document your accomplishments, prioritize well, and build relationships, but when you're actually looking for a job, you realize just how vitally important these skills are.

In fact, as mentioned above, one of the most important skills you'll take back into the "world of work" with you will be knowing how to really network – and to not be afraid of contacting anyone, no matter what their level or position. That skill, in and of itself, will be valuable as you work to get things done in your new role. And I guarantee you that you'll think twice about burning any bridges with people, since you may need their help down the road, and because you're just a nice person.

Long story short, you are going to get a heaping helping of transferable skills from the job search (including things like better project management and communication skills), and you'll be coming out of that job search battle-hardened and ready to "get at it."

I'll say it again. Give me a company made up of professionals who've been through a job search and I'll be able to take over my market, and then the world!

35. *The peace of presence.* As mentioned at the very beginning of this document, it's important to find a way to stay in the present moment as much as possible during the job search. After all, it's natural for the brain to think back on the rejection of the day before or worry about not receiving a timely request for a second interview on another job.

For me, staying centered and present during my job search included talking with several different types of kind and caring coaches. And, if you want to learn more about the ones I talked with, feel free to contact me at [jwarda7@comcast.net](mailto:jwarda7@comcast.net) – and, no, don't worry, there are no financial connections between me and them. 😊

It also included continuing my long-time practice of meditation. Now, hopefully by this point, most realize that meditating doesn't mean you have to wear a robe, light candles and chant. Of course, for some, it does. But, for me, it simply means taking time for focused breathing or using guided meditations each day.

To help me, I use the free version of the app available through [www.insighttimer.com](http://www.insighttimer.com) (you can upgrade to some pretty cool features, as desired). The free version has great basic features, like a simple timer with bells, thousands of guided meditations (where someone talks you through the session), and an online global community where you can share your stories and experiences. If you do go in that global community, you'll realize how very similar we all are, no matter where we live – while Walt Disney's "It's a Small World" plays in the background of your mind for emphasis.

Now, if you want to first start at the most fundamental place, you can do so by taking one good breath a day. What's that look like? It's taking a moment to relax wherever you are, noticing your thoughts but not attaching to them (as if they're just clouds

floating by), breathing in for a few seconds, holding it for a few longer, and then breathing out slowly for a slightly longer stretch, letting your lower jaw and shoulders drop down. If you want, you can then do two breaths in a row, etc. You'll be amazed at the effect. For more on this type of simple breathing, check out this [“Wellness Tips” article](#).

## All the Other Important Stuff

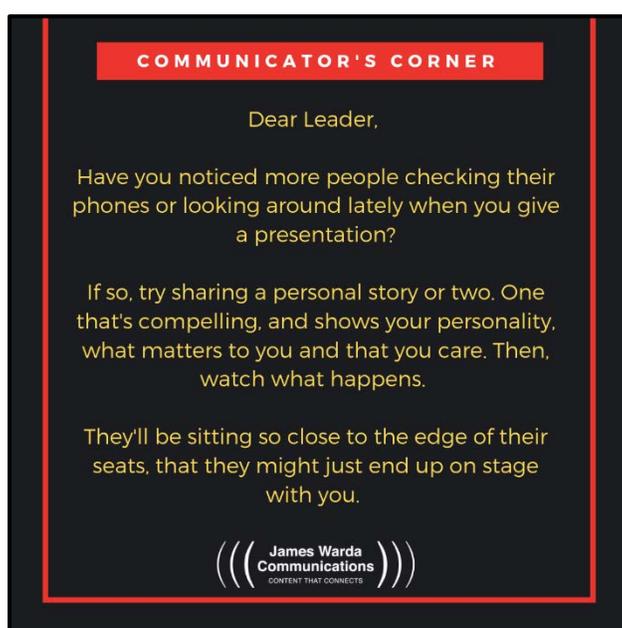
36. *Contract roles are jobs.* Explore contract roles of varying engagement lengths. Many companies are using contractors in longer-term positions now as part of their regular staffing models. In fact, some companies only fill certain positions by going through a contracting agency. The good news is that if you do contract, once you get into the role and start to shine and make their lives easier and yourself indispensable, the manager over that role may start to wonder how they ever got along without you. That's when they might start figuring out how to make a full-time hire happen.
37. *Think “gig economy.”* While you're waiting for that next full-time or contracting role to materialize (if that's what you're looking for), consider tutoring, taking a part-time job, etc. It will bring in money, get you out of the house, help build up your network, give you new content for your resume, and help you answer that interview question you just know is coming, “So, what *else* have you been doing while looking for a job?”
38. *Volunteering is valuable in so many ways.* Create a profile on the professional volunteer website, [www.catchafire.org](http://www.catchafire.org). You can do everything from a simple 1-hour call with an organization that needs help to doing longer engagements. It will help you stay “sharp” with your skills, learn new skills, fill up your resume with current activity and hopefully bring in more recommendations. And, you can help a *lot* of people along the way.
39. *Find reasons to smile and move.* During your job search, find something fun to do every now and then. It's important for your mental health. And, if you're sitting at home on the computer, try to get up and move around many times a day. That can mean taking a walk in the neighborhood, picking up a paintbrush or guitar, shooting baskets, baking something new, doing a chore or two, going to the library, etc. Anything to get you up and out of the chair and your head.

And, most important, spend time with those you love. Once you get back to work, you'll regret any extra time you could have spent with them – but didn't.

40. *YOU are the company.* Create an ongoing mini LinkedIn marketing campaign for your own brand. Go to a site like [www.canva.com](http://www.canva.com) (you can use the free version or upgrade for additional features), grab an image, put content on it, and then give yourself a

headline for an ongoing series you can do on LinkedIn. So that, every week, you're doing a few of them, which will position you as an expert, increase your visibility, get you out in front of more recruiters, etc.

You can also then put this image in the different LinkedIn groups you belong to related to your area of expertise. For example, I write, and still do, a LinkedIn series called "Communicator's Corner" (see immediately below). I put it in my main feed, and in the different professional groups I belong to, e.g., International Association of Business Communicators. Interestingly, when I interviewed for the job I ultimately got, one of the interviewers mentioned reading my series. And a recruiter prominent in my field separately told me that it increased my visibility with her.



41. *LinkedIn group engagement is low-hanging fruit.* Many of the larger groups on LinkedIn don't have much engagement (people liking and commenting on posts) for a variety of reasons. So, to take advantage of low-hanging fruit, go into these groups – especially ones related to your industry or desired field – and like and/or comment on the different posts. It will get you more visibility, especially with any recruiters who are in the groups, and also help increase the visibility of those who posted the content and often lead to those people reaching out to connect with you, since you engaged with their content. Plus, while you're there, you can post your mini marketing campaign images from #40 above.

## Bonus Lesson!

42. As a job seeker, you are going through one of the most challenging things anyone can go through, outside of the biggest ones (e.g., health concern, death of a loved one, divorce, etc.). So, *be easy on yourself*. It's very hard at times. In these times, reach out. Don't isolate. There are a ton of people around you who are going through the same thing, and who are there to listen.

Also, one other thing. Please remember that being a job seeker doesn't make you *less than*. You're still super cool and super smart and can offer a lot to a similarly smart company or client. And, from what I hear, you also have a devastatingly great sense of humor.

So, with that, I wish you the very best. Oh yeah, and I promise you something. When you've made it through your job search, and you will, you are going to come out stronger, wiser, believing in yourself more than ever, and hopefully ready and willing to help the next person.

Finally, if you've got this far in the document, thanks for reading. Also, don't forget to connect with me on LinkedIn. After all, that's the whole purpose of being here, to connect, isn't it?

Take care,

James Warda

## NEW – From the Other Side

I originally wrote this job search document in the Fall of 2019, soon after I started a new full-time position. After I took on that position, though, I realized that I was still learning lessons relevant to the job search – but this time, from the other side of the desk. Lessons that, as a job seeker, I would have found valuable.

At the same time, though, I was hesitant about sharing them, as I didn't want them in any way to come across as condescending, like "Well, now that I'm back employed, I can tell job seekers exactly how to do it." Instead, these lessons come from a place of caring about job seekers and wishing someone had reminded me of these things when I was going through my search.

So, with that issue resolved, here are the new lessons – from the other side of the desk and the job search.

43. *I forgot what the pace was like.* When I got back to a full-time position, it immediately reminded me of how much there was to do each day. Of course, I was learning a new role and organization, and learning more about a complex industry at the same time. But even if I wasn't, it was easy to forget just how many emails, meetings, projects, standard reports and processes, and a thousand other things, there were to do in a typical week back at work.

So, my advice for job seekers would be to remember what that pace is like on the other side of the desk when you're expecting a reply to an email, asking to meet, waiting to hear back on a position, etc. Now, of course, sometimes people and organizations can be disrespectful and just not get back to you and that's not right. But, other times, it could also be that they're just plain busy or other things have leapfrogged you to the top of their "To Do" list.

Knowing this means you should simply give everything a little more time than you think it would take. If you think you should get a response in a week, don't be surprised if it takes two. If, after an interview, you don't hear anything right away, don't give up hope. Of course, you can decide when and how often you check back in, but if you do it in a way that acknowledges that pace, it will likely be more well-received.

At the same time, I know that job seekers are busy, too. In fact, often busier. I don't think I've ever worked harder for longer hours than when I was looking for a job, including early mornings, late nights, weekends, holidays, etc. But the obvious difference is that the job seeker's main priority is *getting* a job, whereas, the employed person's main priority is *keeping* the job they already have.

So, again, my suggestion is that a job seeker who wants a response and/or help will have better success getting those things if they continue to demonstrate they're aware of that pace on the other side of the desk and adjust accordingly – even though I know

how hard it is to be patient when the bills need to be paid and you're the only one not leaving for work in the morning.

44. Being back in a full-time position, which as we know, is always more than full-time, *I'm not on LinkedIn anywhere near as much* as I was as job seeker.

As a job seeker, LinkedIn was my main base of operations to do initial networking, look for jobs, post, etc. But, now, I'm typically only on the platform in the early morning and after work. And there are some days when I'm not on at all.

So, for job seekers, that means that a message you send on LinkedIn might not get seen right away. And, for other employed people, who might be on LinkedIn once a week or a few times a month, it can take much longer. I know some executives, in fact, who have LinkedIn profiles who haven't seemed to check their messages in months, if not longer. So, a job seeker might be thinking their message has been ignored when it's simply that it hasn't even been seen.

My suggestion – if you've tried to reach out through LinkedIn and haven't heard back, try another way. For those professionals who include their email address in their Contact info on their LinkedIn profile, that means it's appropriate to be able to send them an email. I wouldn't typically call them, though, unless there was some reason or context for that call. But, that's me. As with all things, everyone needs to make their own decision.

45. Job seekers likely have a much better chance of success if they can be *clear and concise* in talking about their background and what they're looking for. Again, I knew this as a job seeker but, being back in a full-time position, I was reminded of two things.

First, as we just said, people in full-time positions tend to be busy. So, the more a job seeker can be mindful of that, the better for both parties.

And the second thing is how I'm typically better able to help a job seeker if they can concisely tell me what role (e.g., no more than 1-2 job titles) and what geographical location (e.g., near the city, in the northwest suburbs) they're looking for. The more I know that, and the clearer it's presented to me, the more likely I'll remember it and, when I do see something come across my computer and desk, remember that seeker and send them a note.

46. *Don't leave a monkey on the back of the person you're asking for help.*

In a now-classic *Harvard Business Review* article from 1974, called [\*Management Time: Who's got the monkey?\*](#), readers learned that the most effective managers don't allow their team members to come into their office and leave them with their *monkey*, i.e., a problem. If they do, then the team member leaves without any accountability or

responsibility, and without the opportunity to grow as they work through a difficult situation. At the same time, the manager can become quickly overwhelmed as multiple monkeys cling to her or his back – which makes it hard to drive home, too, unless you have a seatbelt extender.

Well, I look at it the same way with the job search. To be most effective, I would advise that you be careful not to give the person you're seeking help from too much to do after the call or meeting. Yes, they will hopefully see if they can find a hiring manager or other connection to refer you to, will send you possible resources, etc., and that's important. But, being on this side of the desk now, I always have an immediate reaction when I'm talking to a job seeker and they want me to do the "heavy lifting" for them by gathering information they could gather themselves or by being the only one to leave that call with a "To Do."

When I was a job seeker, I tried to be mindful of not asking the other person to do too much because, again, they were busy and the more I asked them to do, the less likely they'd be to do it.

Being back at work now reminds me of why I acted that way then.

47. When I was in job search, I didn't typically have a target industry or companies. That's because, as a communicator/marketer, I had already been in a variety of industries and felt that the best approach in my profession was to be able to come up to speed quickly no matter the industry, product or service. I also enjoyed working in a variety of industries and learning as much as I could across them all. Of course, many job search experts will tell you how important it is to target companies. I'm not arguing with that – I'm just saying it wasn't my approach.

But, as the current **COVID-19 pandemic evolves**, if I were a job seeker, I would *very much be targeting companies and industries* that are best positioned for the current state and foreseeable future. So, that would mean possibly companies in healthcare and pharmaceuticals, technology and telecommunications, consumer products, etc.

It's basically thinking about how the world is working right now and will likely be working for a while and positioning yourself in that "sweet spot" of opportunity to help companies solve problems, create innovative approaches and so on.

In terms of companies that are solving problems, if you look at consumer products, just *try* to buy a webcam right now. They're hard to find because so many people are working from home and need them. And many will be working from home for quite a while – or possibly permanently. Or try to buy puzzles or yeast or crafts or anything else people are needing at home to pass the time. Or cleaning and disinfecting products. Well, you get the picture. And, knowing this, you can target the companies that offer these needed products and services.

You can also present yourself as an innovative solution to help companies re-position themselves for the new environment. Such as travel-related companies or any entertainment/sport where people must gather in large groups. How will they need to do things differently to survive, let alone grow? And, as I would always tell my teams at work, in every crisis, there is an opportunity to get better – whether it's get faster, be more accurate, be more cost-effective, be more effective in general, etc. So that, when the pandemic does resolve, no matter what the world looks like, that company will be stronger and more sustainable. And *you* will be a big part of the reason why.

Now, granted, I didn't have to really be back in a full-time position to learn this lesson, but being back has, for some reason, helped me see it clearly.

#### 48. *Mind the gaps.*

I knew this before I was back to work but, as a hiring manager again, I remembered how important it is to not have unexplained gaps in work experience years on your resume or LinkedIn profile. Remember that your LinkedIn profile and resume tell a story. And stories have chapters. If, on your profile and/or resume, there are missing years in your work experience with no explanation as to what was going on during those years, that might keep you from moving forward in the process.

Now, that *doesn't* mean you had to be working at that time, but the logical question a recruiter and hiring manager will ask is, "What were you doing during that time? School? Freelance? Volunteering? Raising a family? Running the PTA?" Again, the answer can be anything that is true. But the last thing you want to do is have someone reading your profile and/or resume and say to themselves, "Huh, I wonder *what* they were doing then?" If they do that, you may have just lost your ability to get that position since there's no one there to answer that question right then. If a tree falls in the forest...

In terms of the prevalent pandemic-related work experience gap, as of the writing of this lesson, the jobless rate was inching towards 20%. That means that a lot of people are going to have a gap on their resume related to COVID-19. Which also means that recruiters and hiring managers will likely be more understanding of that gap. But I would still recommend that, as possible, you fill that gap with freelancing, contracting, consulting, volunteering, part-time teaching, etc. (many or all of these likely remote until "reopening" has completed).

Also, think about the foreseeable future. What skills will be most valuable in a world still mainly working remotely? Knowing how to conduct a virtual meeting? How about knowing how to translate an in-person workshop or event into a virtual format? After all, creating engaging virtual experiences takes time, skill and experience. Learn how to do it and you've just made yourself that much more valuable to a company or client.

## NEW – Appendix: Other Voices

There are a lot of smart and caring people out there with valuable guidance to share about the search whether they're other job seekers, former job seekers, recruiters, career coaches, and so on. So, for this update, I asked several people who were important in my search to share a few of their lessons:

- **William Hickey** is a **Director of Talent Acquisition** based in Los Angeles, who's also a columnist and speaker (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/william-v-hickey/>). During my search, William and I collaborated on a LinkedIn article series, called *Two to Tango*, in which a talent management professional and job seeker discussed major job search topics. Here is his lesson learned:

- The recruiter is one of the most misunderstood positions in the job search process. Here are two items that will help you better understand the relationship between the job seeker and the recruiter.
  - *Recruiters Don't Find People Jobs.* There is a misconception among job seekers that says, "find a recruiter and they will find you a job." This is not the case. Recruiters don't comb through job boards and call other recruiters to see if they have something that will be a good fit for you. In truth, those duties are more in line with those of a job search coach.

Instead, recruiters – both internal and external – are assigned to fill a specific position for a specific company. Therefore, it is critical that job seekers understand the industries and roles that a recruiter is working on.

The key is to identify a specific need and offer a solution to the recruiter. In this case, the solution is you.

- *The Relationship between a Recruiter and a Job Seeker is a Partnership.* Now that we've established what a recruiter does, we can take steps to build a partnership. As a job seeker, closely examine your skills and experience and ask one question: *Can these help this recruiter?*

Recruiters aren't "one-size-fits-all" positions. With that said, they will be happy to let you know what roles they are searching for. The goal is to find a match between the recruiter's needs and the resources provided by the job seeker. That's why communication is key.

Like all good partnerships, this one relies on transparency, clear expectations, and understanding.

- You can find William Hickey's column here - <https://www.onlinechester.com/content/will-employment-success-summary>.
- **Jen Morris** is an **Executive Career Coach and Job Search Strategist**. She and I connected after I started a LinkedIn Group for job seekers called "You're Not in This Alone" (since closed). She also started one on LinkedIn called "[Career Inspo Forum](#)" that has grown quickly and offers a great place for people to access best practices and tips, ask questions, get real-world advice from Jen and others, and also share their thoughts and feelings about the search. What drew me to her work is that it was *good*, and Jen didn't have a price tag on everything she did. Yes, she offers valuable paid services, but she also offers free advice and resources. She also has been on many sides of the search, from recruitment to hiring to being a job seeker herself.

Jen had these two important lessons to share:

- *You don't have to reach out to your network in desperation mode:* Job search is all about who you know. In fact, 70% of executive jobs are landed through networking and referrals. When you reach out to the right people with the right information and a specific request, your network will step up and deliver for you. Asking for help can take on many different forms. Desperate pleading does not need to be one of them. Be specific and intentional in your job search.
- *You're not "entitled" to interviews:* For people to want to hire you, they need to know that you can help solve their problems, and that means you need to *tell* them that. If you want to land interviews, connect the dots for decision-makers. Make it your job, day in and day out, to discuss the value you provide.
- You can find Jen's website here: [www.careerinspo.com](http://www.careerinspo.com).
- **David Warden** is a **Sourcing and Procurement Consultant** based here near Chicago (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/davidwarden1/>). He became my "job search buddy" (see Lesson Learned #17) and we are now good friends. And, now that he's also back to work, he had two important lessons to share:
  - Make and follow a daily plan. Resist looking at the long-term. As Mark Watney, played by Matt Damon in the movie, *The Martian*, said: "You start by solving one problem. And then you solve the next problem. And then the next. And if you solve enough problems... you get to go home."

- Don't completely stop playing golf during your search and be surprised that you are in mortal pain when you start playing again. But maybe that one is for a different document!

## James Warda bio

James Warda is a keynote speaker and author of *Where Are We Going So Fast?: Finding the Sacred in Everyday Moments*.

He also writes the *Where Are We Going So Fast?* blog for ChicagoNow, a platform of the Chicago Tribune Media Group, and has written for the *Chicago Tribune*, Pioneer Press and Chicken Soup for the Soul Enterprises. In addition, he's an adjunct professor for the School of Communications at Loyola University Chicago and sits on their Communications Advisory Board.

James lives in a suburb north of Chicago and has a wife and three grown children. And, oh yes, a cat named "Marlin" who is working on his own "lessons learned" document that will be turned into a major motion picture later this year starring Brad Pitt.

### Contact info

If we're not already connected, feel free to send me an invitation on LinkedIn with "Lessons Learned" in the message: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jameswarda/>