

Are You Shooting Too Low in Your Job Search?

By Beth Braccio Hering, CareerBuilder Writer



Does your application secretly have the words "overqualified," "desperate" and "likely to be bored stiff within a month" written all over it? If you are aiming too low in your job search, chances are employers will read between the lines and notice -- and move on to someone else.

According to Duncan Mathison, co-author of "Unlock the Hidden Job Market: Six Steps to a Successful Search When Times Are Tough," there are two primary reasons why people aim low:

1. They want to increase the number of opportunities. (There are more lower-level positions available than higher-level ones.)
2. They think it will raise their odds of being hired. (They believe they will appear more qualified compared to other applicants.)

Lisa Quast, author of "Your Career, Your Way!" and founder of Career Woman Inc. (a Seattle-based career development consulting company), adds that workers who are laid off or fired may get in the mindset that they just need to find a new job as quickly as possible due to their economic situation. Beyond money matters, she notes that sometimes people "lack internal confidence about their skills and abilities" and "don't have a clearly defined strategic career plan," both of which can lead them to apply for lesser positions.

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The dangers

At first glance, it might seem that being overqualified would be a good thing. Wouldn't an employer like to get somebody who is even "better" than the job description?

Don't bank on it.

Overqualified candidates raise concerns in a hiring manager's mind. Will the person insist on doing things his own way? Can he accept instruction from somebody who is his superior at the firm but his equal (or less) on paper? Will the worker jump ship as soon as he finds a better job? Will he constantly be jockeying for more money and a higher position instead of focusing on the job for which he was hired? Will he get frustrated with this lower position and quit?

It's not just employers, though, who face risks; it's job seekers, too.

"The biggest danger is that you will not be hired if you shoot too low and then think to yourself, 'Good grief. I can't even land that crummy position. I must be a real loser!'" Mathison says.

According to Quast, other key dangers for the applicant include:

- Losing money. (Accepting a job that pays \$10,000 less per year than you're actually worth totals \$200,000 in lost wages over 20 years.)
- Stifling progress. (You'll be less likely to be doing work that will allow you to grow and develop in your field.)
- Boredom. (Frustration from job dissatisfaction can escalate stress and negatively impact health and overall well-being.)

Upgrading your job search

Instead of downgrading a job search in order to try to increase the likelihood of landing a position, Mathison suggests coming up with a more fruitful plan of attack.

"When the economy is tight, a lower percentage of open positions are actually advertised as employers rely on less expensive recruiting through referrals and informal word-of-mouth advertising," Mathison states. "This 'hidden' job market actually becomes a bigger share of open positions. This means that networking plays a bigger role in uncovering unadvertised leads."

To maximize potential opportunities, Mathison recommends job seekers spend more time researching employers and asking people in their network and at professional organizations for leads. "Directly approach people who could be your future manager and tell them of your availability. These are the people who care most about what you can do and how you can make them and their teams successful."

Quast suggests spending some time on self-examination.

"Clearly define your career aspirations. If you don't know where you want to go, how will you determine how to get there? Know your strengths and weaknesses when you search for a new position so you can avoid targeting jobs that are beneath your skills. Identify those things you do better than other people. These are the things you do that will set you apart from others and that make you special."

Above all, hang in there and exude confidence. After all, if you don't believe you're worthy of the job you really want, how will anybody else?

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