

MANAGE

YOUR JOB SEARCH

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Johanna Rothman

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This book is for sale at <http://leanpub.com/manageyourjobsearch>

This version was published on 2014-03-04

ISBN 978-0-9854820-4-6



Practical ink

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Introduction

You're looking for a job. Maybe you've just graduated from college. Maybe you've been laid off. Or, maybe you've decided that it's time for a career change. Maybe you want a better job. You might even have a better or different reason than the ones I've listed here.

Congratulations!

It's exciting and scary and unpredictable and overwhelming. If you are anything like me, you can be optimistic one moment, pessimistic the next. You can think you have it "all set" and then your stack of company brochures slides off the table onto the floor and you think, "Oh boy, I do *not* have anything together."

And, because it's *all* of those things, and your emotions fly up and down, you just might need some help to find that emotional balance and intellectual focus to stay on track with your job search.

I've hired or consulted on hiring hundreds of people. I've trained thousands of people all over the world about how to hire. I've written two books about hiring. The most recent is *Hiring Geeks That Fit*. Many people think that finding a job is the inverse of hiring. It's not.

Finding a job is dependent on other people. It is an emergent project, where you cannot predict the end date. You create opportunities and take advantage of serendipity.

If you are looking for a job, this book will help you create your system for finding a job. Then, with your system in place, you can iterate on deciding what job to look for, what your résumé should look like, what companies to target, how to interview, and how to get feedback on everything.

This book will help you.

Your job: Find fulfilling work.

My job: Show you a system that works.

Part 1: Learn to Manage Your Job Search Project

Do you like looking for a job? Almost no one does. It's overwhelming. You already know you're going to get rejected from jobs that you are qualified for. If *only* you could get in the door...

But, managing the rejection in a job hunt is *part* of your job search project. And, sadly, that's the part of the project that most job seekers miss. If you create a project, or a system, you can *manage* your job search, and keep yourself moving, right onto the next potential opportunity. That's what this book is about.

Years ago, when everyone advertised in the Sunday paper, you had just *one* place to look for jobs. Now, there are industry-specific and general online job boards to find and peruse. You need to become a networker extraordinaire, online and in-person. You'll be making decision after decision, each of which will seem to affect your career.

When no one responds to your résumé, it feels like a direct punch to your self-esteem. Don't be surprised: we identify closely with our work. When no one responds to your résumé, you feel personally rejected. When someone asks you for a phone screen or an interview, you feel great! You add these emotional highs and lows to an already intricate, non-linear project with many interruptions and what do you get? A complex project where you can become easily overwhelmed and lose your focus.

How many times have you wished for “magic” in your job hunt? Or, maybe you’ve “hoped for the best”? Nope, you know that “magic” is not going to happen. And “hope” is not a strategy. How do you maintain your progress and your sanity?

You *can* succeed with an open-ended big project like this. The key is to break your job search into small chunks of work that you can accomplish. You also need to track those chunks of work.

We’ll use two project management tools to accomplish this: the “timebox” and the personal kanban board.

A **Timebox** is when you say, “I’m only going to allow this task to take this much time. Then I’m going to stop, no matter what.” You’ve boxed or limited the time for that work. Timeboxes are useful when the work can take forever and you want to stop for now, and assess where you are.

One-week timeboxes provide a cadence, a rhythm, for your work. That cadence helps you maintain your focus and overcome procrastination. The timebox also forces you to break your work into smaller pieces. That helps you complete specific tasks and feel a sense of accomplishment and progress. That feeling is invaluable in helping you focus, work on your next step, and feel good about your project and yourself—especially when your self-esteem is such a big part of the project.

The personal kanban board helps you determine how much work you can do right now. (Kanban is Japanese for “signboard.”) A kanban board is a place where you can see and classify cards in a special way. The personal kanban board helps you see pending and upcoming tasks—especially those that are dependent on something outside your personal control, such as waiting for a response from an email or phone call. It will also provide you with feedback about whether you have over-committed yourself or can take on a bit more. It will help you to not commit to more work than you can actually complete in a single week.

I have noticed that I need both the structure of the big one-week timebox to help me organize my time, and the visualization of the small tasks on the personal kanban board when I work on

large open-ended projects, such as a job search. Why? Because as my work moves, visually and physically, across the kanban board, I can see and celebrate what I have finished. That increases my motivation and maintains my focus.

With both the timebox and personal kanban, I have positive feedback. “Oh, I did this. Good for me! I can do this much next week. Ah, I can celebrate my completed work, feel energized and ready for next week. Yay, me!” That is exactly how you should feel at the end of any given week.

By using these techniques, you’ll be able to take on small chunks of work and adjust your approach quickly if that approach isn’t working.

You may even discover that you like this way of working *so much* that you adopt and adapt it for all of your personal work. I have.

Okay, let’s start.

1 Become Your Own Project Manager

You want to optimize your job search, so you want to spend your time wisely. You know you'll have to repeat the send-a-résumé, wait-for-an-answer loop. You'll have to customize each cover letter for each new opportunity.

What if I told you that you could iterate on *everything* for your job search project—that you could iterate on how you decide where to look for a job, who to ask for a recommendation, how to network, where to network, absolutely everything for your job search project? And, what if I told you that your data collected from week to week could drive your decision-making?

Once you start networking, sending out resumes, and working your system, you could easily lose track of where you are: Who did you send *what* to? Who needs a callback? Who needs a customized résumé?

This is why you're using a one-week timebox and personal kanban. You don't plan too much ahead. You plan just enough work that enables you to see *all* of it. You maintain a rhythm that allows you to reflect.

1.1 Take Advantage of Feedback Opportunities

This is why *you* are your project manager. You don't drown yourself in paper. You keep one week's worth of data at a time, and maybe track some trends about *how* you work. That's it.

When you iterate, you can improve, bit by bit.

1.2 Work on One Action at a Time

One of the problems with iterating is that the realm of possible actions grows exponentially. You can't do everything all in one week. You need to decide how *much* you can accomplish in one week.

You create a rhythm for your work. You see what you can and cannot do in one week. You see your work in progress as you proceed, obtain feedback, and make changes as needed. You will do one small chunk of work at a time and finish it. Then you start something else.

Do *not* try to multitask. That is practically a guarantee your job search will be unsuccessful. Not only will you be less productive, you will make mistakes: call people by the wrong names, send your résumé with the wrong cover letter, sound like an idiot on a phone screen, all kinds of crazy mistakes.

Are you surprised by my insistence against multitasking? Multitasking decreases productivity. Don't believe me? Multitasking takes more time than focusing on one task at a time. It increases the number of errors we make, and it increases our agitation or stress. You can find some of the science here: [Multitasking and Task Switching](#), and [Multitasking: Switching costs](#).



Finish one thing. Then another. Take small steps and you will make progress. You'll feel energized as you tackle your job search.

By limiting the *amount* of work in progress, you can actually improve your completion rate, or *throughput*. You will not work on multiple tasks at once—no multitasking. One task at a time!

1.3 Why Finish Small Tasks in Timeboxes?

How will these small tasks inside of timeboxes help you? There is considerable research that confirms we humans like to make progress (AMA11). Our motivation and our self-esteem are high when we progress on work that is valuable to us. What could be more valuable than finding a new job?

Along with your accomplishments, you will gain a sense of order, a knowledge that you have your job search under control. You will know that you are working on the most important work at all times. You improve a little bit every week: one, two, or three things. You energize yourself in different arenas, week by week. This will all be helpful when you encounter rejection.

Because you improve your résumé, your networking, your LinkedIn connections, everything about your job search every single week—just a little bit—you improve your ability to show what you have to offer, and potential employers will see your worth.

1.4 What is Personal Kanban?

Kanban is a Japanese word that means “[signboard](#).” Kanban is a system of work that originated with Toyota in the 1980s. Taiichi Ohno wrote a book called *The Toyota Production System: Beyond Large-Scale Production* (OHN88) that described how Toyota was able to decrease its inventory and make cars with much less waste.

Kanban is a way of *pulling* work through the system, rather than *pushing* it through the system. Instead of *pushing* all the inventory, or all of the tasks, into production at once, in one big pile, the workers were able to work on a limited set of tasks, *pulling* new work forward as there was space and time.

Personal kanban is a way to schedule work as it flows through the system. When you can see it, you can manage it. This visibility will help you eliminate inefficiencies, offer feedback, and improve