

MANAGE

YOUR JOB SEARCH

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Practical ink

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11 Avoid These Traps

Using timeboxes and personal kanban as a project management approach helps us avoid traps. Even so, it helps to articulate the traps, so we can see how to avoid them.

11.1 Be Kind to Yourself; Don't Beat Yourself Up

After you send an email or make a phone call or have an interview, you might replay your actions and say to yourself, "Oh, I could have written that cover email better, or answered that question better, or asked that question better, or done something different." Fine.

Can you do anything about this with this prospective employer now? If so, act. Can you do anything differently the rest of this week that will make a difference for your job search right now? Make a sticky and put it on your list of ToDos.

If your thoughts are not going to help you right now, this week, write yourself a card or a sticky and put it in your [Parking Lot](#) so you can evaluate everything in your Parking Lot during your retrospective. Now, forget about it until your retrospective.

Dwelling on it will not help your self-esteem and will prevent you from making progress. You have written it down, so you can address it. Now, forget it. Stressing about it further only reduces your self-esteem. That doesn't help you find a job.

11.2 Perfection Rules Trap Us Every Time

One of the common mistakes we all make is to seek perfection. One of the ways timeboxing can help you is to allow you to finish something good enough for now, and add a task to your ToDo list to make it better later.

Do not seek perfection in anything so that it paralyzes you. I met a colleague who did not have a photo on her LinkedIn profile. She's been out of work for several months. What's preventing her from adding her picture? She's a better photographer than her friends, but her hardware is not working. What will get her hardware working? A new disk drive. When will she get a new disk drive? In a few more weeks.

How long has she been missing a photo on her profile? The entire time she's been looking for a job. Instead of waiting for a perfect picture, she would be better off with a reasonable picture that shows her smiling face.

If you think you have a perfection rule, you can transform that rule into a guide this way:

1. State the rule precisely:
 - I *must* always do a perfect job.
2. Change *must* to *can*. Is it true?
 - I can *always* do a perfect job.
3. Change *always* to *sometimes*. Is it true?
 - I *can sometimes* do a perfect job.
4. Select three or more circumstances when you can follow the guide.
 - I can do a perfect job when:
 - I feel the job is important.
 - I have sufficient time.
 - The nature of the work permits it.

You can transform any rule into a guide. Perfection rules catch us all. Don't allow a perfection rule to prevent you from making progress on your job search.

11.3 Managing Impostor Syndrome

Sometimes, during a job search, you feel as if you're an impostor. Especially if it's been a while since you've had a job, you wonder if your past successes were real. Are you an impostor?

No, you are not an impostor.

You have had great experiences. If you feel you have not had enough experience, try an internship, an open-source project, or some other mechanism to obtain more experience.

Whatever you do, do *not* lie on your résumé. Do articulate your value for every position on your résumé. See the tips in [Write Your Résumé](#). Make sure you have references who can explain your value. And, ask for recommendations on LinkedIn. You might be pleasantly surprised by how other people see you.

11.4 I Can't Leave My Current Team

I talk to many team leaders and managers who—even though they are looking for a job—say a variant of, “I can't leave my current team right now; they depend on me.”

Maybe you hired them. Maybe you're leading them. Maybe you're working for a startup. Whatever the case, you have an emotional contract, a *social* contract with these people, and you don't want to let them down.

Let me remind you of a hard fact. The company does not love you. Your team may hold you in high esteem. The people may follow you from organization to organization. They may even love you. But the company does not love you.

Here's the tough question:

Whose career is this?

You know the answer to that question: it's your career.

You can make choices about when to leave. You should provide two weeks of notice. That's the professional way to leave an organization.

Act professionally while you're fulfilling your remaining obligations to your current employer. Make sure you transition your work to other people. Make sure you leave that last day, knowing you found a place for all of your knowledge, as best you could.

Not Really In a Bind

A colleague asked for coaching. He'd started to look for a job. But he was concerned about leaving his team. Why?

"My team needs me."

I continued the five whys: "Why do they need you?"

"Because they aren't seasoned enough and the testing on the product will suffer."

"Why is that a problem?"

"Because the customers will report bugs. The company will suffer decreased sales."

"Why is that a problem?"

"The testers might get laid off."

"Why?"

"Because the company won't make enough money to keep paying them."

"So, you think by staying there, in a situation that you don't like, you can protect these other people's salaries? Is that it?"

"Yes."

I tried another tack, to see if I understood the problem clearly.

"You said before the testers weren't seasoned enough, right?"

"Yes. I tried to bring in training several years ago."

"How many years ago?"

"Three years ago." He sighed. It was a very big sigh.

"And you never got the training?"

"No. That's why I'm looking for a new job. I got fed up."

I paused for a moment to let this sink in. He stared at me. His eyes welled up with tears.

“Staying isn’t going to change anything, is it?” he asked me.

“I don’t think so,” I replied. “Will you be able to hire these testers if they get laid off?”

“Oh yes!”

My colleague was concerned about the effect his departure would have on his team. But he hadn’t thought it through.

If you really have created a dependency on you, that’s not a healthy situation, and you should leave, as quickly as possible. Everyone will be better off.

Yes, you will miss the people with whom you have created great friendships and great working relationships. And, if you find an even better situation, maybe you can hire them—eventually.

You have to be selfish about your career. No one else is going to be selfish about it. This is *your* career.

11.5 Keep Going; Don’t Put Your Eggs All in One Basket

Until you have a written offer in your hand, keep going. The best place for a job hunter to be is to have offers coming in.

It’s fine to say to an HR person or a hiring manager, “I’m expecting another offer this afternoon,” or “I have to call back these other five people to tell them that I’m accepting your offer.” When you’re looking for a job, you never stop looking until you have a signed written offer.

You never stop looking even if you have a verbal offer. A verbal offer is not a real offer. A verbal offer is a promise. Promises can be broken. So it isn’t a real offer until you get a written offer. On paper, that is signed. So you have to be careful not to stop looking until you get a signed, written offer.

11.6 I'll Just Apply Everywhere



Don't use the "spray-and-pray" approach to sending your résumé. It doesn't work.

You are not perfect for every organization. Don't spray your résumé everywhere. Hiring managers can tell when you send a generic cover letter. They appreciate the candidate who makes the effort to send a letter highlighting why he or she is perfect for their open position. When you customize your cover letter, and make sure you send your résumé in the correct format, you pass the first hurdle.

You'll exhaust yourself if you apply everywhere. Use your judgment about where to apply. Use your non-application time to:

- Refine your résumé
- Update your target list of potential employers
- Update your target list of people you want to network with, so they can introduce you to people on your target list
- Update your LinkedIn profile (you do have a picture on your profile now, right?)
- Network with people online
- Network with people in person
- Write recommendations
- Ask for recommendations
- Ask for informational interviews
- Find a local networking group and start to attend meetings
- Know what your references are saying about you
- Get feedback and see if you are looking for a job that still exists

You have plenty to do other than spray your résumé everywhere.