

Is Your Job Search Taking Forever? This Could Be Why

If you've been looking for a new job for a while and getting nowhere, cheer up. You're not alone. The average search now takes five months, according to a new survey by recruiters Randstad USA of 2,000 people across the U.S. who have recently changed jobs. That's about the same length of time as before the unemployment rate fell to its current 49-year low of 3.7%.

Not only that, but it's still not at all unusual to apply for a role you'd be perfect for and then hear...nothing. Says Ariel Schur, CEO of Manhattan-based recruiters ABS Staffing Solutions, "We're seeing lots of candidates lately who are frustrated by not even getting interviews, let alone offers."

The U.S. economy created 250,000 new jobs in October, well above the 195,000 or so forecast by most economists, for a total of well over 7 million job openings. So, why is snagging one of them still such a struggle?

There are at least two big reasons, one of which is demographic. As jobs increase, so does the number of people who had stopped looking for work, but who now feel encouraged to get back in the race. The labor force has been growing by about 70,000 people per month in every month of 2018—many more potential new hires than employers can absorb. "There are more jobs, yes," notes Schur. "But this is still an intensely competitive job market."

It seems that not everyone who's hankering after greener pastures has taken that into account. We conducted an informal poll of headhunters in major cities and discovered that a certain complacency, not to say cockiness, has set in. "The fact that the job market is so strong can actually work against you," said one. "We're seeing more people holding out for the 'perfect' job, with the idea that there are so many choices, they don't have to 'settle' until they find it." But perfection, alas, is every bit as elusive as it ever was, and being excessively picky can lead to overlooking some pretty great opportunities.

A second way the robust job market can slow down a search: You may be tempted to look around for a better situation after a long spell of working for the same company, where everyone already knows you and your wonderful accomplishments. Nothing wrong with that, but recruiters point out that the basic skills involved in wowing a whole new audience tend to rust up over time, while certain crucial niceties get forgotten altogether.

The technology employers use to screen out candidates has changed in recent years, too. The last time you sent out resumes "cold", for instance, may have been before applicant tracking software (ATS) became as ubiquitous as it is now. So the particular keywords in each different job description may not have mattered much. Now they do. Unless you write a different CV for each job, with the precisely right keywords repeated several times throughout, your resume will probably never be seen by a human being. There goes your interview.

Beyond that, whether from overconfidence, lack of practice, or for some other reason, Randstad's survey suggests that many people now are making many of the same old job-hunting mistakes as ever. For instance, nearly half (49%) said they'd applied for jobs they knew they weren't qualified for, and about 40% didn't bother to follow up after job interviews.

Then there's that old standby, trying to wing it in an interview and falling flat on one's face. Once you get past the ATS gauntlet and someone calls you in for a chat, it's just common sense to do some

homework first—read the company’s website, think up a few intelligent questions, have a ready reply to standard questions like “What’s your greatest weakness?”, and so on.

Yet, about half of the folks in the survey admitted they’d gone in “completely unprepared” to at least one meeting with a prospective employer. Even in this job market, that’s guaranteed to make a long search longer.

Credit: <http://fortune.com>