

## THE SEARCH

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# How to Turn Downtime Into Job Offers

**I**f there is one thing that most unemployed job seekers have in abundance, it is time. And yet many of them misuse it.

This is understandable. Someone who has just lost a job may be accustomed to a workplace with its schedules and deadlines, and its expectant bosses and co-workers. If you fail to finish an important assignment, you'll hear about it.

Compare that with post-layoff life. You can assign yourself tasks, but no one will come after you if you don't finish them. When you get up in the morning, it can seem as if a long clean carpet of time is ahead of you, but then you may decide to go to the gym, have a leisurely lunch, take a nap, check out "Dr. Phil" on TV followed by "Judge Judy," and then you're ready to make dinner.

Or, you may engage in a whirlwind of sending e-mail messages, Googling, calling and appointment-making, only to realize that very little of it got you closer to finding a job.

"Having no structure is the biggest enemy to being organized and being focused," said Julie Morgenstern, a productivity consultant in New York and author of "Time Management From the Inside Out."

Job seekers should create specific work hours and a time map along with mini-deadlines, she said. Like many other experts, she recommends treating job hunting like a full-time job.

Looking for a job involves so many steps that trying to define and prioritize them can be overwhelming, said Kimberly Bishop, chief executive of a career management and leadership services firm in New York.

"I don't think that there's ever a time that the job search process is easy," Ms. Bishop said. Because it is not something people tend to do on a regular basis, few are truly skilled at it, she said, but "being prepared and having a plan and a process brings confidence."

To begin, Ms. Bishop said, set aside a physical space for job hunting and de-

vote from several days to a week solely to laying the groundwork for your search, she said. Too often, Ms. Bishop said, people fling themselves into making appointments and arranging interviews before they even have their résumés updated or know what kind of jobs they should realistically seek.

Prepare résumés, write sample cover letters, assemble your references, and put together samples of your work, she said. Compile an inventory of your skills, accomplishments and honors — Ms. Bishop calls this a "success folder" — ready to be shown or recounted during interviews.

"Once the job hunt gets started, it's so easy to become overwhelmed with just the management and organization of the paperwork," Ms. Bishop said. So create files, either paper or computer ones, to keep track of where you have applied and where you have had interviewed, she said.

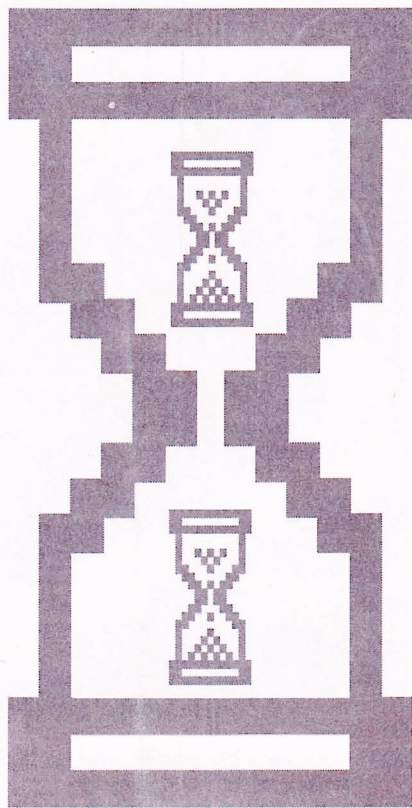
You don't want to have a recruiter or a human resources manager call you and find yourself saying: "Who did you say you were again? You say I applied there?"

After this initial preparation it's time to get started in earnest. Ms. Morgenstern suggests dividing the day into three compartments: preparation and research, meetings, and follow-up.

"Mixing it up" this way can stop you from obsessing about things and from being paralyzed by perfectionism, she said. It is energizing and keeps you balanced, she added.

Ms. Bishop echoed this sentiment, saying it is dangerous to spend too much time on any one thing. Some people spend all their time in front of the computer sending unproductive e-mail messages and applying for jobs for which they aren't qualified, she said (and that wastes the hiring manager's time, too). Other people spend all day at networking meetings and informational interviews without doing the concrete work that leads to an actual application or an interview, she said.

Of course be flexible (don't turn down a job interview to do research!), but Ms.



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**Experts advise treating the hunt as a job and dividing the day into manageable tasks.**

Morgenstern put forth this sample day of varied activities: From 9 to 11, do background research on companies that you will be applying to or interviewing with. Research unconventional industries that may fit with your skills. Take an online career assessment test. Generate a list of contacts for networking purposes. Look up networking organizations.

Try to schedule a meeting every day, or five meetings a week, Ms. Morgenstern said. "These benchmarks keep you from becoming complacent or depressed" and keep you connected with the outside world, she said. Between 11 and 2 or 3, you might meet with a friend or former colleagues or a career counselor for lunch or coffee.

Then go home and do follow-up work, Ms. Morgenstern said. Send a thank-you e-mail message to the person you had lunch or coffee with and forward any articles or leads that you may have mentioned. Send your thank-you notes that day, she said. Do not put that off.

End every day by planning the next one, plus the two days after that, she said. This "three-day arc" puts your job search in context and enables you to pace yourself, she said.

"People are energized by getting things done," she said. "Energy then begets more energy and more productivity." That begets confidence.

Then, when you're calling people on the phone or meeting with them, you radiate confidence and increase your chances of being hired, she said. □