

Chapter 12: Coping With Problems

Introduction

This section is designed to help you to deal with common problems that come up for people involved in a job search. We will teach you specific techniques that have been developed through many years of research and that have helped people to deal with issues such as procrastination, anxiety, and depression. We will then discuss assertiveness and give you some rules to use when asking for what you want. If you continue to have difficulties in spite of these techniques, we advise you to contact a licensed therapist. We will be happy to refer you to one.

Adaptive versus Maladaptive Ways of Coping with Stress

The career transition process is inherently stressful. Having to make decisions, meet new people, and create networks are all activities that may cause stress. Of course over a lifetime everyone develops ways of handling stress; however sometimes these can be maladaptive and can have serious adverse consequences to health, relationships, and overall well being.



the “something” is a loved one or a job. The normal mourning process involves working through the sadness and grief engendered by the loss and finally regaining a sense of equilibrium and well being. Depression differs from mourning in that it tends to last longer and is characterized by a sense of hopelessness, as well as feelings of unworthiness, inferiority, and guilt.

Excitement vs. Anxiety

It is normal to feel a sense of excitement at the prospect of changing careers; the possibility of new opportunities and making positive changes in your life. However it is also common to feel anxiety which is characterized by a sense of dread, nervousness, or tenseness. There may also be difficulty concentrating, fears of going crazy, and fears about looking foolish or inadequate in front of others.

Cognitive Therapy: The Influence of Thought on Mood

The techniques in this section come from a revolutionary new branch of psychology called cognitive therapy. Cognitive therapy is based on the premise that your thoughts, not external events, cause your moods. You have to interpret a situation and give it a meaning before you can feel anxious or depressed about it. This idea has tremendous practical importance, because if you follow the logic of the theory, by changing the way you think

Mourning vs. Depression

As discussed in the Transition section, it is normal to feel a sense of loss and grief when you have lost something; whether

you can change the way you feel. You can overcome fear, worry, anxiety, depression, and other emotions that may interfere with a productive job search.

You may have noticed that when you feel depressed or anxious you are thinking about yourself and your life in a pessimistic, self-critical way. You may wake up feeling discouraged and tell yourself, "Ugh! What's the point of getting out of bed? I'll never find a job!" You may feel anxious and inferior at a networking function because you tell yourself, "I don't have anything interesting to say; all of these people are professionals and I'm unemployed." Cognitive therapists believe that these negative thinking patterns actually *cause* you to feel depressed and anxious. When you think about your problems in a more positive and realistic way, you will experience greater self-esteem and productivity in your job search.

Cognitive Distortions

One of the most important premises of cognitive therapy is that there is a process of *distortion* of thought that goes on when you develop a negative or anxious mood state. Your thoughts are distorted in the sense that they are not based on any clear evidence available from the environment. Believing these distorted thoughts is the equivalent of basing your idea of your physical appearance on the image you see in a funhouse mirror!

One of the difficult things about these distorted thoughts is that many times you may not even be aware that you are

thinking them! The unconscious and automatic nature of the thoughts make them that much more insidious and dangerous. The goal of cognitive therapy is to help you to become aware of the distortions and counteract them with rational, undistorted responses.

There are 10 different types of cognitive distortions that have been identified. These distortions are listed in **Appendix 12a**.



Dealing with a Bad Mood

The following is a quick sketch of a technique to help you to deal with a bad mood.

Step One: Describe the upsetting event.

In **Appendix 12b** we have provided a form which you can use to work through the steps.



For example; the upsetting event could be a rejection letter, or a difficult interview.

Step Two: Record Your Negative Feelings.

These feelings include being depressed, angry, discouraged, or fearful.

Step Three: Write Down Your Automatic Thoughts.

It may take some practice to begin to identify what you are thinking. It will get easier as you do this more often. Be sure to actually write the thoughts down on a piece of paper. For example the thought might be: "I'll never find a job" or "This person is too busy to talk to me"

Step Four: Identify the Cognitive Distortions.

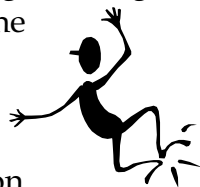
Refer to the list of cognitive distortions included in **Appendix 12a**. For example "This person is too busy to talk to me" is a clear example of *jumping to conclusions* or specifically, *fortune telling*.

Step Five: Substitute Rational Responses. Write them down and practice them.

For example: "I don't know that this person is too busy to talk to me; if they are, I can still ask and they are always free to say 'no'."

How to Counteract Depression: Turning Failure into Success

To put it bluntly, the job search is a process of getting rejected over and over again. This can be very depressing if you don't learn how to frame the continued rejection in a positive light. A more positive way to look at it is that you must get through all of those "no's" to get to the one "yes"; so the more rejections you get, the quicker you'll find a job! How you deal with a rejection will influence your motivation and



attitude so that you can move on to your next interview with enthusiasm and positivity.

Whenever you go on an interview, it is inevitable that some people will like you and some people won't. Sometimes you'll do well, and sometimes you won't. You can turn your failures into successes if you keep several ideas in mind:

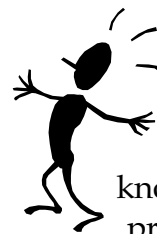
- ✓ Don't put all your eggs in one basket. You may need to go out on many interviews before you find the right job. Pinning all your hopes on one job is foolish. You'll pressure yourself too much, and it will feel like a catastrophe if you don't get the job.
- ✓ Don't base your self-esteem on how well you do. Job interviewing, like golf or cooking, is a skill you can develop- you can get better and better at it over a period of time. Your success at it has nothing to do with what kind of a person you are. People who do well on interviews are often poised and skillful, but they're not more worthwhile human beings.
- ✓ Don't blame yourself for a rejection. You may be tempted to tell yourself that you're no good, and you may feel as if you'll never get a job. Instead of putting yourself down like this, try to learn from the situation. What are the specific reasons you didn't get the job? Sometimes the person who interviewed you will give you some feedback if you ask in

a friendly way. Maybe you were inexperienced; maybe you had good qualifications but they had to pick from many qualified people; maybe you didn't interview well; maybe your skills didn't match their needs. If you can find out why you didn't get the job, it usually takes the sting out of it because you won't feel so worthless and defeated. If there's a specific reason, make a plan for what to do next instead of giving up.

- ✓ Don't blame someone else for a rejection. Instead of blaming themselves, many people go to the opposite extreme. They insist that life is unfair and blame the world. It may be helpful to make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of doing this. One of the main disadvantages is that blaming others tends to hurt you more than the person who you are blaming. If you can develop a problem-solving attitude towards a rejection this will be the most productive.
- ✓ Think about rejections as opportunities. When someone turns you down, don't get defensive or annoyed. Instead, thank them for their time and ask them to keep you in mind if something more suitable comes up in the future. Most successful people have learned that rejections will often turn into successes later on. It's not wise to burn bridges or to view rejections as "the end." Often a rejection is just the first awkward step in what later turns into a productive, successful relationship.

- ✓ Put yourself in the driver's seat. It is important to keep in mind that deciding whether you are going to work for an employer is a mutual decision. You are in charge of interviewing and evaluating them in order to see if they match your expectations. This idea will give you more of a feeling of control and confidence than if you approach each interview as another possibility for rejection.

Networking and Interviewing Anxiety



Unless you are an extreme extrovert, the idea of networking and meeting people who you don't know and need to impress can produce a certain degree of anxiety. You are not alone; most people feel some sort of social anxiety.

The following are some things to keep in mind when you are networking; whether at a public function or in their office:



- **You don't have to be the "Life of the Party."** It is never necessary for you to laugh a lot, tell jokes, or otherwise entertain people. If you are quiet but attentive and interested in people, this will be enough to involve them and keep the conversation moving.
- **Bring Along a Scrap of Information.** An easy way to stimulate conversation is to scrounge a morsel of information about your target person or

company, offer it, and let the conversation carry itself from there.

- **Use Your Observational Powers.** What kinds of material are displayed on the work desk? Trophies, plaques for some kind of service, diplomas, copies of new books you can ask about? What pictures are there on the wall? What do they represent to this person? How is the office decorated? Who decorated it?
- **Use thought records to confront your cognitive distortions that are causing fear.** For example “He wouldn’t want to hear my silly questions” “I’m not interesting enough for anyone to talk with.” I bet he gets bothered all the time by people like me.” Rather than assuming the worst, let the other people decide. Don’t decide for them whether a conversation should take place; they have a right to make that decision without your assistance. Remember, you don’t have to be interesting, the target people are interested enough in themselves. You don’t have to provide the entertainment, just be prepared to listen.



Tip: It is helpful when dealing with anxiety to ask yourself: “What’s the worst thing that could happen if..(I asked them that question, I called them, etc.)? Many times you may find that the answer to this question is just that they that they could say “no” or be unfriendly.

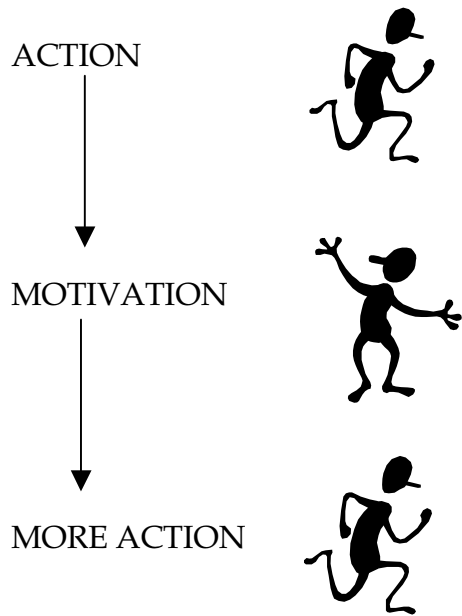
Procrastination

“Procrastination is making me wait...”
(modification of a Carly Simon song)

Procrastination is one of the most common hurdles in the job search process. One of the most prevalent beliefs that people who procrastinate have is that they must feel motivated before taking action. Procrastinators tell themselves, “I don’t feel like it. I’ll wait until I’m in the mood.” The problem is that for most people the job search process involves many activities that they do not consider exactly pleasurable; including things like calling unknown people, writing letters, resumes, and doing research. Thus, if you wait until you’re “in the mood”, you may be waiting forever! And then when you find out that you missed out on a hot opportunity, you will feel guilty as hell. Or at least, our president always does!



Have you ever had the experience of genuinely dreading an activity and then when you finally sit down to do it, you become involved with it and find that you are much more motivated? This is called the “Action First” Principle (or “Priming the Pump.”) This principle states that it is action that leads to motivation (not the other way around) which then leads to more action. This principle is illustrated in the following diagram:



When you find yourself telling yourself that you are just “not in the mood”, it may help to remind yourself of this principle and then **take action!**

A Prescription for Procrastinators

When you find yourself procrastinating, the following list may give you some ideas about overcoming it.



1. **Make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of procrastinating.** It may not be obvious that there are advantages to putting things off. e.g. “I don’t have to face failure, I don’t have to...”
2. **Make the job easy by breaking it down into small parts.** For example if the idea of contacting 50 employers is daunting; break it into steps. The first step might be to go to a directory, make a list of employers, and write them down. Another way to break a job up is to only work at a difficult aspect for a brief period of time. For example you could call

people who you don’t know for 15 or 30 minutes and then reward yourself with a more enjoyable task.

Advantages of doing this:

- ✓ You’ll break big jobs down into small parts that can be completed in short periods of time. This will make your task seem less overwhelming
- ✓ You can accomplish your goal of doing 15 minutes worth of work soon after you begin. The sense of accomplishment will often reduce the feelings of tension and motivate you to do more. You’ll begin to feel more relaxed and productive.
- ✓ You won’t be so tempted to procrastinate and put things off, because you’ll never be obligated to do more than 15 minutes worth of work at any one time. It’s really not so hard to sit down and work at an unpleasant task if you feel you have to stick with it for only a little while.
- ✓ Trying to cram everything in at once is usually not the best way to master a difficult assignment. You can often work more creatively and efficiently by doing things in short bursts.
- 3. **Develop a schedule and stick to it.** Schedule difficult tasks followed by rewards. Make sure that you leave time for leisure and fun activities.
- 4. **Use the daily mood logs in Appendix 12b to identify and contradict automatic negative thoughts.** You may be telling yourself: “I have to contact all those people, I can put it off until later when I’m more in the mood. I really should call them now, but I don’t feel like it. It’ll be so unpleasant. I

think I'll watch television for a while instead." To counteract this, you may remind yourself of the *action first principle* or decide to contact only a specified number of people and then reward yourself.

Tip: Reward yourself whenever possible for a difficult task accomplished. The saying; "a carrot is always better than a stick" applies extremely well to ending the procrastination cycle.



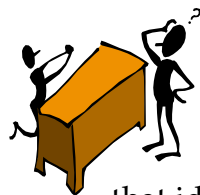
Once you've begun a job you've been avoiding, it's important to give yourself credit instead of discounting your efforts. It is very easy to say; "it's true I got some work done, but I should have started calling people a long time ago!" This kind of statement makes you feel worse and thus makes it less likely that you will continue to make an effort.

Tip: Instead of using the word "should" which generally produces a feeling of guilt and anxiety, practice substituting the phrase "it would benefit me if..."

Assertiveness

What is assertiveness? Assertiveness is probably one of the most important skills that a job seeker can possess.

Without it you are stuck waiting for things to happen, waiting for people to come knock on your door and offer you that ideal job. Not surprisingly, this strategy is not one of the most effective and productive ways of looking for a job! This could be defined as the passive approach to job search.

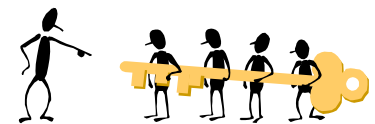


However, assertiveness is not *demanding* that someone help you, and if they refuse, throwing a fit and leaving. So how do we define assertiveness?

Assertiveness can be defined as the simple act of asking for what you want.

It is not a matter of beating, outwitting, controlling, or even manipulating your foe. The person from whom you seek assistance in your job search is not a foe at all, but a willing accomplice.

How would you steal a piano? By behaving as though you have every reason and right to be there in the first place. You walk right in the door, enter the appropriate room, set up your moving equipment, and remove the piano without hesitation. If you act with confidence and sureness, people are much less likely to question you and therefore you are much less likely to get 5 to 10 years in the slammer!



Although this is not a particularly ethical example, it is instructive because of the *attitude* that it demonstrates. This attitude as applied to the job search is one of confidence; that you have every right to explore, question, inquire, and be assertive in other ways to gain your vocational objective. You must cultivate this attitude in order to be an effective information gatherer or job seeker. When you *assume* that people will be glad to give you the time to answer your questions and you have the right to know the answers, then you are much

more likely to get a helpful and willing response. The piano is yours for the taking!

Rules of Assertiveness

State What You Want Without Hesitation

Example: *"I want to know what kinds of public relations work your firm does, how you go about completing your contacts, the methods you use, and the ways in which you are usually successful."*

Use Assertive Eye contact, Posture, and Tone of Voice

In speaking, face the other person with your body, so you are not turned away at an angle, and do not appear to be looking in another direction. Look at the person directly; your eye contact should be direct and steady but not so fixed

that you are staring; occasional glancing away is fine. Speak with a tone of voice and diction that are clear, and speak slowly enough to be understood but not so slowly that your listener becomes impatient.

State What You Do Not Want

Anticipate any misinterpretations that might stem from what you are saying.

Example: *"I am not interested in asking you to hire me, and I have no intention of trying to sell you anything."*



Be as Specific as Possible

Example: *"It would help me to know how you recruit your staff, what skills you believe are most important in effective work here, and what kinds of training and experiences are most beneficial."*