



Contents

Making Career Changes

Jim Hughes

DifficultSeasons.com

March 2009

Copyright 2009

1. Introduction
2. Why People Change Careers
3. When Your Career Leaves You
4. Your Local Librarian is Your Career Change Friend
5. Career Change is a Spiritual Journey
6. Faith and Job Loss
7. How Easy Will Your Career Change Be?
8. Internet: Friend and Foe in Your Career Change
9. The Employer's Perspective: Minimize Risk in Hiring
10. Resumes, Mail Order Degrees, and Integrity
11. First Impression Do's and Don'ts
12. Career Changes to Something That Makes a Difference
13. A 1000% Better Chance of Finding a Job
14. Dealing with Job Loss
15. What About Assessments?
16. HR – Friend or Foe?
17. Copyright Notice: How You May Use This Material

1. Introduction

It's not news that we are once again in one of those times when increasing numbers of folks are losing their jobs and being forced to make career changes.

Recently I've had way too many conversations with friends who are finding themselves in that position. And unfortunately, I'm expecting that there will be more before this current economic situation is resolved.

Earlier this week, I received an email from a pastor asking permission to use a blog post I had written several years ago on Faith and Job Loss in a seminar series he was planning. That galvanized me into going back and reviewing this material and compiling it into an e book so that it would be more readily available.

There are a couple of things you should know by way of introduction.

- I am a huge fan of Richard Bolles' book, *What Color is Your Parachute?* There's good reason that this has been the best selling job search manual for over 40 years. Updated every year, the book tells you the best strategies for finding a job, and gives you step by step instructions. Either pick up a copy or dust yours off, read it, and do what it says. It simply works.
- This e book is not a how-to manual. It's just a series of reflections on various subjects having to do with career change, things I learned as I led a support

group for folks that were between jobs and as I did career change coaching. For the most part, you'll find that the articles are for helping people understand the process of career change.

I hope you find some things that are helpful, whether you're in the midst of a career change or you're someone who is sojourning with folks making career change.

Jim Hughes

March 2009

2. Why People Change Careers

Changing careers is a major step, so most people won't change unless there is something really pushing them to do so. Here are the major reasons people make a career change:

- **They are fired from their current job.** There can be all kinds of reasons for the firing, from poor performance to personality clashes.
- **They are laid off in a reduction in force.** Their job has gone away. This is actually the most common reason I have seen in the last few years. Layoffs are common. A person who is laid off may be able to find a similar position with another company, or they may have to make a significant career change to be employable. That job with that company may have gone away, or most jobs of that type have gone away.
- **They have been pushed into retirement.** The average first retirement age in America is around 57, due to companies favoring offering early retirement as a way of reducing payroll. Many, maybe even most, are not ready not to work. They may be able to find a similar position in another company, may decide to consult, or may make a significant career change to do something they've always really wanted to do, even start their own business.
- **They dislike their job** and decide to change careers to find increased job satisfaction, more income, better life balance, or any number of other goals.
- **They choose to retire to have a more balanced life,** but want to work because they enjoy work and it's important to them.
- **They want to do something that makes a difference.** It's not that they don't like their current career, but it's no longer focused on what's really important to them. Increasingly, we see people choosing this option and entering the nonprofit world, or becoming a teacher, or becoming a minister.

3. When Your Career Leaves You

There are times when people are required to make career changes because their career leaves them.

Traditionally, we think of manufacturing jobs going away. We've seen entire manufacturing industries go away. Textiles was an early example. Steel is another good example. More recently it's been computer manufacturing.

As we began to understand that in the U.S. we had moved from a manufacturing economy to a knowledge economy, guess what? We learned that knowledge careers and jobs can go away as well. A lot of these jobs that have disappeared have been IT jobs, outsourced overseas. But others have just disappeared.

Your knowledge economy career leaving you may be the most difficult career change of all to navigate. These career positions typically have paid well with good benefits and have provided a degree of status. People have been recognized for their expertise and rewarded for it as well. When the need for that expertise goes away, it's really hard to chart a path forward.

Here are some of the obstacles that people whose careers have left them often encounter:

1. Your identity is heavily invested in the career niche you have been well rewarded for. That's who you are. Turning

loose of that identity is extremely difficult for any of us. Because you have a hard time letting go, here's what usually happens:

- You continue looking for a position just like the one you had, even though the evidence all tells us that there aren't any.
- You slowly become convinced that you're unemployable. No one wants someone like you to do what you know how to do. Other factors such as age may creep into the equation.
- When you can't be who you are (because you've allowed yourself to be defined by what you do), your self esteem takes a huge blow. The grief cycle, which all of us who lose jobs go through naturally because we have lost something, becomes prolonged and often more severe, particularly the anger and depression stages.
- You reach a point where moving forward seems impossible.

Individuals in this situation also seem to generally choose job search strategies that statistically have low success rates.

- Internet job sites (Monster, Career Builder, etc.)
- Reading and responding to want ads in newspapers and professional journals.

- Mailing out resumes (or submitting resumes on line) in a random fashion.
- Using headhunters (retained search firms).

These are all low success-rate strategies. We generally choose these strategies because they are something we can do that doesn't carry much personal risk of rejection. We can just toss information out there and maybe something good will happen. When these strategies don't result in a job, it just adds to our feelings of helplessness.

If this is your situation, there is hope, and there is a way out.

First, you have to recognize that your career has left you. It's not your fault. But it's happened. To move forward, you have to accept the facts.

Second, you need to recognize that you have skills, knowledge, and experience that is transferable to another career area. We all do. Sometimes our employment systems themselves help convince us this is not true. But you do have abilities that can lead you to a new career.

If this is a position you find yourself in now, here are a couple of suggestions to help you get moving forward:

- Read, and more importantly, do what the book *What Color is Your Parachute?* says. There's a reason it's the bestselling book on getting a job ever written. Pay particular attention to the "Flower Exercise."

- Go to your local unemployment agency and do some testing to better understand your potential career options. Many of these are also available on the Internet, if you would prefer that option, and most colleges and universities also offer this type of testing.

4. Your Local Librarian is Your Career Change Friend

In working with folks who are between jobs, and particularly that facing career change, I find that they often are unaware of what a great resource their local librarian can be in their job search. In an age of tons of bookstores and the ease of ordering both new and used books on line, many of us have forgotten the benefits of public libraries.

First of all, most of the books that you will find helpful are on the shelves of your local library. All you have to do is walk in (you'll have to sign up to check them out unless you already have a card) and start browsing. And you'll find that it's a lot cheaper than picking up a handful at your local bookseller or on line.

More importantly, your local library has librarians -- people who are trained in doing research to help you find information you need. Here are a few things they can help you get that you might have a hard time obtaining on your own:

- Information on the fastest growing businesses in your area.
- Contact information (names, phone numbers, addresses, titles, etc.) of leaders and decision makers in local companies. This information allows you to target decision makers (rather than HR departments) with your information.

- Local organizations that decision makers in companies that you are interested in are members of. This is valuable if you want to attend meetings or functions of those organizations in order to meet these people.
- Career information that is in subscription-only databases.

One of the first steps in your job search or career change journey should be your local library.

And you'll make a great friend of a librarian when you enlist their help in doing some research -- that's what they love to do.

5. Career Change is a Spiritual Journey

Major transitions in our lives, especially those that involve loss, tend to be spiritual journeys.

In our culture, career provides a big part of the fuel for our identity, for who we are.

Our first question when meeting someone new is almost always, "So, what do you do?" It's like we think that if we can get that answer, then we can understand who they are and neatly file them away in a category.

This is an ingrained part of our culture. We tend to value people by what they do -- by what their career is. And we tend to value ourselves in the same way. If we can put a label on what someone pays us to do, we tend to feel better about ourselves. It becomes a big part of who we are.

When we suffer loss in the career aspect of our lives through job loss -- from being fired, being laid off in a downsizing or reorganization, or being early retired -- we are suddenly faced with having to rethink the question, "Who am I?"

Maybe for the first time we dread having to answer the question, "What do you do?" Having to answer, "Well, I was a _____, but now I'm between jobs" can be a dreaded moment. A major basis for our self esteem has been lost.

We come to some conclusions that we might not have faced without job loss.

- We recognize that we are not really in control of our own destinies. Even though we've done the best we could and done everything we knew how to do, we've ended up losing our jobs.
- We understand how important career success has become to our feeling of self worth, to our identity as a person. We know that this should not be what governs our self worth, and begin to re-evaluate.
- We feel a deep need to connect to a God who loves us no matter what, and who will provide us guidance and meet our needs during this time of loss and crisis.

Again and again as I've worked with people who have suffered job loss, I've seen evidence of spiritual growth.

- Prayer lives become stronger.
- Reliance on God's provision, rather than on effectiveness of their own efforts, grows.
- Time spent in Bible study and meditation increases.
- Knowledge that their true worth comes from being God's child rises to preeminence in establishing their self-worth.

Suffering job loss is difficult at best. Having it result in spiritual growth is such a good thing.

6. Faith and Job Loss

When our career or job leaves us, we think something went wrong with our faith. We ask questions like,

- "Why has God allowed this to happen to me when I'm one of the good ones -- one of his followers who is active in serving him and his church?"
- "Why haven't my prayers for daily provision, stability in my life, and protection from job loss been answered?"
- "What's wrong with me that God has sent this time of struggle?"

We're like the people who asked Jesus, "Is this man's blindness because of sins of his parents or because of his sins?" We seek direct cause and effect for losses we suffer in life. We want to think that when something bad happens to us that it's because God is angry with us -- because that's the way humans behave.

In fact, we've constructed a reverse theology that's built on this very logic. It's basic tenet is that God won't allow bad things to happen to his followers if they are faithful in obeying him and if they are faithful in praying for his protection and provision. That's a comfortable theology to live with, but it's false. It's simply not in agreement with what the Bible relates to us about God.

The Bible is full of accounts of good people suffering loss. Rather than a book about people who love God never

having problems -- never suffering losses of health, loved ones, home, and livelihood -- the Bible gives us example after example of people who have suffered terrible loss and hardship persevering and overcoming through God's power and accomplishment and provision.

We are amazed at their continuing trust in God after what has happened to them. Job is a perfect example. Job is described as a man who loved God and was a great example of someone who followed God. Yet God allowed Job to lose his means of livelihood, his family, and even his health. How did Job respond? He continued to trust God. In fact, the Bible says Job maintained his integrity. And when all was said and done, God blessed Job many fold, restoring what had been lost and more.

Life according to the Bible is not about never suffering loss and having to endure hardship. It is about maintaining absolute trust in God *when* you suffer loss and difficulty in life, and that God will get you through it, not by your own power, but through his power and accomplishment.

That's the true faith perspective to have when your job or career leaves you. So you need a new set of questions:

- "What is God going to teach me about trusting him through this loss?"

- "What can I learn about worshiping him and serving him when things are not going the way I want them to?"
- "Where is God leading me through this experience?"
- "How will God's power and accomplishments be shown through my difficulties?"

We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. (2 Corinthians 4:8-10 NLT)

7. How easy will your career change be?

If you're among those considering making career changes, it's important to understand the basic dynamics behind the relative ease or difficulty of the type of career change you are considering.

Here's the hierarchy of ease of making a career change (from *What Color is Your Parachute?*):

1. The easiest career change to accomplish is one where your career change is to the **same job title in the same industry**.
2. More difficult to accomplish is a career change to a **different job title in the same industry** or to the **same job title in a different industry**.
3. Significantly more difficult is making a career change to a **different job title in a different industry**.

Understanding why this hierarchy is true comes from understanding that the hiring process is driven by avoidance of risk.

The least risk to an employer is hiring someone who has demonstrated that they can do the job by having done the job in the same industry. That provides the most proof that

the person being considered can do the job. That's why most position descriptions include a requirement that applicants have some number of years of experience doing the same type of work in the same industry.

A notch higher on the risk profile for the employer is hiring someone who has done the same job in another industry or who has done a different job in the same industry. Either introduces a whole new concept of uncertainty about whether the person can satisfactorily do the job and the chance that a hiring mistake will be made.

From the employer's perspective, that risk rises to almost impossible to overcome levels when they consider someone who wants to change to a new job title in a new industry. The employer has a difficult time finding the level of proof that the individual can do the job that they need to be comfortable with the hiring decision.

Strategies for Career Changes to a Different Job Title and/or Industry

1. If you want to make a career change to a position having a different job title in a different industry, consider doing so in two steps, rather than one. First obtain a position and experience with either the desired different job title or desired different industry, because that is much easier to

accomplish. Later, take the next step to achieve the other change.

2. Provide as much proof as you can to demonstrate that you can perform well in the new job title or new industry. You will need to translate your past experience and expertise to the new title or industry so that the potential employer can readily see it as proof. Don't expect them to do it. Your resume should be specifically tailored to provide this proof. Also, you will need to develop stories you can tell about times when you demonstrated these abilities.

3. Generally, you will need to go around HR departments to be considered. HR has a responsibility to protect the company from making hiring mistakes, and part of that is to prevent unqualified applicants from getting in the door. To help in this duty, they put up "qualifications" like specific experience that will be used to screen you out. You will need to get your information in front of decision makers in a way that they can see your qualifications and over-ride the process set up to protect them.

8. Internet: Friend AND Foe of Job Seekers

The Internet has made major changes to job seeking during the last decade. Some of these changes are good, and some of them bad. Some uses of the Internet for job seeking, whether just changing jobs or changing careers, are effective. Some are disappointingly ineffective. Some are effective uses of your time and energy. Some are distractions at best, and harmful to successful completion of your job search at worst.

First, let's deal with what **doesn't** work well.

1. Internet sites that promise to match job seekers with employers don't work well. In fact, for people who rely on these sites as their only strategy to find a job, about 5 people in 100 actually find a job. If you're in IT, finance, or medical fields, the success rate is higher, around 10%. If you're in any other field, the success rate is generally less than 1 in 100. (Source: 2005 edition of *What Color is Your Parachute*)

- These sites do list real jobs, and that information is valuable in itself. But these sites also receive an incredible number of resumes and responses. While the logic behind these sites seems to have so much promise, they often simply fail to make the promised matches.

- Nearly everyone I have worked with who has posted to these sites hears from people wanting to talk to them about jobs not related to the positions they apply for -- what I call positions with low barriers to entry. These are generally sales positions of one type or another where the company will provide you training while you allow your trainer to work all of your friends and family to sell them their product. These operations use the Internet sites as an ongoing source of lead generation disguised as jobs.
- **Only 15-25% of all open positions are ever advertised anywhere.** If you rely on positions listed on the Internet, you are restricting yourself to only a small portion of available positions!

These sites are good places for research. They provide information on positions that are being listed and companies that are hiring. They also have abundant information on writing resumes and other job searching skills. Use them primarily as research sites.

2. Electronic submission of resumes has become almost standard operating procedure for employers of any size, but also is very inefficient.

- This practice started with the promise that software could help scan resumes and pick out the most promising candidates for human review. The fact is, the software doesn't work very well, especially if

you don't very carefully tailor your resume for what the software is looking for.

- Further, the databases that handle the resumes continue to get larger and larger as the number of resumes build. It's estimated that there are now millions, maybe hundreds of millions, of resumes in these databases. Finding anything meaningful is suspect.
- Additionally, it is intimidating for humans on the hiring end to sift through all the data these systems spit out, so if other options for finding people to fill the positions appear, they take them.

You may have to submit your resume to a company using an on line system, but if so follow up by sending a physical resume by mail and by email -- or even better, have a contact inside the company hand it to the hiring manager (not HR).

Now let's cover what is good about using the Internet for job searching.

1. The Internet is an amazing tool for doing research on companies and positions.

- Most organizations of any size provide information on open positions within their organization on their web sites. You can find out a lot about what types of needs a company has just by studying their web site.

- You can often find out who the decision makers who will decide who gets interviews and ultimately the job by doing some Internet research. Many job postings will provide the title of the person the position will report to, or the name of the organization within the company. You can then do a Google search and often find the name and even the contact information you need to present yourself to the decision maker. This is extremely valuable information. (If this doesn't work for a given situation, go to your local library and enlist the help of a librarian -- they have access to subscription sources that may provide the information. Alternatively, put out the word in your network that you need a contact inside that company.)
- You can learn a lot about the company and whether that is an organization you would fit into and like to work for. Start with a Google search, and don't forget to do a Technorati search -- no telling what is out there on blogs of people who work for that company.

2. The Internet is a valuable source of advice and tips and techniques for job seekers and those interested in making career changes.

- Monster, Career Builder, and other matching sites all have abundant and helpful information of this type.

- Many universities and state and federal sites are good sources of employment information, including interest and career testing.
- Many career coaches and career counselors post good information on career selection and career change.

The Bottom Line

- **Use the Internet for research** on positions, companies, to get contact information, and to get career advice, tips, etc.
- **Minimize reliance on Internet sites for finding you a job.** One professional recruiter suggests that you spend no more than 5% of your time and energy on the Internet for your job search.

9. The Employer's Perspective: Minimize Risk

It's important to understand the employers' perspective while you're doing your job search or making your career change.

While ultimately the employer's goal is to fill the position, their decision making is all about minimizing risk. A whole system and set of practices has grown up around risk avoidance in making employment decisions. Understanding this can give you a significant advantage in finding the job you want.

Simply stated, the major risk is that the employer will hire someone who can't or won't do the job in a satisfactory way, and then the employer will be in a position of having to either live with an unsatisfactory employee or go through the pain of having to fire the new employee. No hiring manager wants to be in the position of having made the decision to hire someone that turns out to be a major mistake for the company.

There are several ways that employers try to avoid this risk. Employers follow a hierarchy that looks something like this:

1. They look to hire someone they know. Employers always prefer to fill positions from within because they know the person and they know something about the person's performance. In the minds of employers, this has the least risk because there is proof concerning the person's character and ability.
2. If they can't hire someone they know, they look to hire a person that someone they know and trust knows. This has the next least risk, because there is trusted testimony about the person's character and ability.
3. If neither of these avenues fill the need, then employers look to hire someone that can present proof of their character and ability. This proof generally takes the form of a proven track record. The potential employees have completed the educational and training programs that have been shown to produce people with the right abilities, they have a number of years of satisfactory performance in a similar position with another company that offers proof that they can do the job, and they can give specific examples of times they have effectively done the tasks that the position requires. The hiring process that most employers follow is designed to gather this proof -- and to quickly eliminate any applicant whose information suggests that they might not meet one or more of the criteria.

Understanding the employer perspective makes understanding why some job search strategies are effective and why other strategies are not straightforward.

1. Strategies that rely on submitting resumes through Internet search engines and matching services, responses to want ads and professional journal ads, mailing resumes at random, and using employment and search firms are statistically the least effective ways to find a job. They all present the most risk to the employer, and entail the most work for the employer in trying to develop some level of proof that the applicant will be a satisfactory employee. These are the strategies for which employers have set up an intricate set of screening stages which are all aimed at determining why an applicant is NOT qualified for a position. Experienced resume screeners spend less than 15 SECONDS looking at a resume before making a decision -- and that decision is made with a bias of eliminating the applicant from consideration.
2. Strategies that include the testimony of someone who the employer knows and trusts produce much higher success. This is why networking is so valuable. Just having someone inside the company hand your resume to the hiring manager makes all the difference in the world, even if they don't have first hand knowledge of your work.

3. Strategies in which you make personal contact with the employer at your initiative are even more successful -- because then the employer has a level of first-hand knowledge about you. (It's interesting that the employer's feeling of risk goes down as your perceived level of personal risk increases! It feels personally less risky to toss resumes over the wall than to have to risk rejection by making calls and personal visits.)

Summary? Effective job search strategies require personal interaction with the employer and the presentation of proof that you can do the job.

10. Resumes, Mail Order Degrees, and Integrity

I once had a boss who suspected everyone of cheating on expense accounts. This was back in the day before everyone issued corporate credit cards, and anyone making a trip would receive a cash advance from the company to finance the trip. Most folks would take the check to the bank to cash it and then buy travelers' checks. My boss, though, was not a travelers' check guy, and thought that anyone that put the fee for travelers' checks (a couple of dollars at most) on their expense account had to be cheating.

Someone said in response to those charges, "**My integrity is worth too much to me to trade it for a few dollars I might get for cheating on an expense account.**" I think this sentiment also applies to ways one might lie to get a job.

We're all familiar with high profile cases of people who have lied on their resumes or bought mail order diplomas in order to look better when applying for jobs. These are blatant cases of individuals trading their integrity in hopes of gaining financial reward. The only explanation for their behavior is that they must not value their integrity very highly.

So how much do you value your integrity?

- Would you trade it for a few dollars on an expense account?
- How about for a few hundred dollars on your tax return?
- How about trading your integrity for a promotion or a new job?

A couple of thoughts if you're sometimes tempted to embellish your resume or add a mail order degree:

1. Your integrity is much more valuable than any job you might get by doing so. **Your integrity defines who you are.**
2. Your chances of getting caught are actually pretty high. Then you'll either not get the job, or if you get it, you'll be fired. You offer resumes and diplomas as proof of your qualifications. Employers nearly always take steps to verify that these are true and accurate. False information provided in the employment application process is always grounds for dismissal. No one wants to have someone work for them whose integrity has been demonstrated to be flawed.

So, when preparing your resume, tailor it to highlight your strengths and experience that offer proof that you can do the job that the employer needs done. Don't, however, succumb to the temptation to shade the truth or outright lie in an attempt to make yourself look more attractive to an employer. Your integrity is worth too much to trade for anything, even a job.

11. First Impression Do's and Don'ts

We've all grown up on "dress for success," and certainly, how we dress during our employment application process is a significant piece of how people judge us. First impressions are huge factors. Making a good first impression goes a long way, and making a poor first impression is hard to overcome.

That's why you should pay careful attention to other things that give first impressions:

- Your email address
- Your phone greeting
- Your business card
- Your resume
- Your cell phone ring tone.

Do use an email address that looks professional, preferably one with yourname@somedomain. DON'T use one that is cute and designed for your intimate friends (partyguy, dogsbestfriend, etc.)

Do use a phone greeting that identifies you by name, and make it very business like. You don't want to leave a perspective employer guessing if they got the right number. Don't use some cute greeting or one your 4-year old has recorded that's really nice for the grandparents but hard for others to understand.

Do have personal business cards. They can be ones you print yourself on the computer or free ones such as from [VistaPrint](#) or ones you have printed at your local printer or office supply store. Do keep them simple and businesslike. Don't get cutesy.

Do print your resume on good paper using a standard font and a simple, readable layout. A good white ink-jet or laser paper is fine. A serified font such as New Times Roman is a good choice because it says "business." Don't use colored paper (buff or light gray if you must) to try to attract attention or use a font like Comic Sans or add decorations.

Do keep your cell phone either turned off or on vibrate while meeting with potential employers. DON'T EVER let it ring with your favorite rap or rock cell tone.

The opportunity to make a good first impression is priceless. Don't blow it by being cute.

12. Making Career Changes to Something That Makes a Difference

A growing trend in our generation is to make a career change that results in order to do something that makes a difference. An article from the Times On line a few years ago stated that nearly three-fourths of recent graduates in the UK plan a career change before age 35, and that for many, it will be to do something that makes a difference such as teaching. My wife, who's an education professor here in Houston, has many students who are leaving corporate positions to become teachers, so this is certainly not limited to the UK.

Bob Buford, founder of the Halftime movement, coined a phrase that describes this well, "moving from success to significance." Bob talks about having success in career, but having a growing feeling that there must be more that one could achieve than serving themselves and their company. That more is serving others -- doing something significant, not merely successful.

What is it that your skills, ability, and experiences could enable you to do that would make a difference in the lives of other people -- that would add significance to your life in place of mere success?

13. Career Changes: A 1000% Better Chance of Finding a Job

Want to increase your chances of finding a job by at least 1000%?

When you're seeking a job, how you communicate makes a big difference. This is not rocket science, so down deep you probably already know this. The hierarchy of effectiveness of communication modes is the same as for everything else:

1. Face to face communication.
2. Telephone conversations where you actually talk to a live person.
3. Physical mail.
4. E-mail, voice mail, or fax.

Face-to-face conversation most effectively establishes trust between two people so that what is said is heard. It also is the best way to capture another's attention. Attention may be the most precious commodity in America, and especially when you're seeking employment. Nothing substitutes for an in-person conversation. Statistics on job search strategies continue to show that those which rely on face-to-face approaches greatly outperform those who rely on virtual approaches.

Having a telephone conversation, if you absolutely can't get face-to-face, can also be effective. You can develop a level of trust and gain a level of attention with a phone conversation, but it is a magnitude less effective than an in-

person conversation. That's because communication is highly visual -- body language is extremely important in establishing trust. We're more likely to be understood and believed when people can see us as opposed to just hearing us.

Physical mail is a big step down from even a telephone conversation. But it does have the physicality of paper and ink that makes it more real and that captures more attention than email, voice mail, or fax. It's a one way communication, which you should attempt to avoid if at all possible. But in those situations where you absolutely can't make your approach in person or by phone, this is next best. It's most effective when sent to a decision maker by name, rather than something general or something sent to H.R. And for sure use physical mail for thank you notes.

Least effective by a long shot are email, voice mail, and fax. They are too easy to ignore. You know that, because you do it all the time. Use these techniques only to provide additional information after you have established trust with your recipient through in-person or phone communications. That way they have a much better chance of getting attention.

Most job seekers use the communication hierarchy in reverse order. They'll use email, voice mail, or fax as a first step. Or they'll mail out resumes with cover letters. Few will begin with in-person approaches or telephone conversations. There are a couple of reasons for this ineffective behavior:

- We perceive that there's less risk of personal rejection from using email or a mailing. It's a one-way conversation, and we don't face the risk of the person on the other end rejecting our effort to our face and having to hear "I'm not interested." But in reality, we need to understand that we're unlikely to get even enough attention for the person to make such a decision by just emailing or mailing them something.
- It's easier to email, apply on line, or mail a resume than it is to make a phone call or get an appointment to see someone. We like taking the easy way out. But it's precisely because it's the easy way that it's so ineffective. Potential employers are looking for people who show an extra level of initiative, and nothing shows that more than approaching them in person, or as a fall back, on the phone. It's definitely worth the extra work.

If you're still questioning the validity of what I'm saying, just dig out your long lost copy of *What Color is My Parachute* and look at the statistics of the five best and five worst ways to find a job.

If you're relying on job sites and emails and mailing resumes to get you a job, you need to know that you have a 95% chance of not being successful. **Making the change to communicating in person will immediately increase your odds of success by at least 1000%.** What are you waiting for?

14. Career Changes: Dealing With Job Loss

What do you do if you've been working for the same company for 15 or 20 years and you suddenly find yourself laid off and forced to make a career change. In this article, I want to focus on the emotional and physical effects of having your job leave you. It may be a layoff, a reduction in force, a downsizing, an early retirement, or any other of the phrases we have attached to losing your job.

If you find yourself in this position, you've got a lot more questions than answers. You're likely in shock, you're probably feeling overwhelmed, and you're undoubtedly feeling stressed. Having worked with hundreds of folks in this situation, here are the principle points I cover with them during our initial conversation, even before we talk about specific career change strategies.

It's important to understand that during the coming months you will be experiencing the grief cycle. It generally begins with denial, moves to anger, then next to bargaining, followed by depression, and eventually to acceptance. These emotions may happen in this order, or in some other order. You may bounce back and forth, angry one day and in denial the next. You *will* go through this cycle, even if you have been expecting to be forced to make a career change and even if you have decided to make the leap yourself. Anytime we lose anything of significance, even if we didn't particularly like things about it, we'll go through grief. Just recognize that it's natural, and something that you will experience. Denying that you are experiencing any

of the effects of grief or stress – and I’ve had lots of folks do just that – simply is proof that you are in the first stage of the cycle, denial.

You must develop effective strategies for dealing with the grief cycle and the stress of job loss to be effective in developing and implementing strategies for making a successful career change. Failure to deal with grief and stress associated with job loss will sabotage your job search. Grief and stress have physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive effects.

Here are some of the important strategies for handling grief and stress that result from job loss.

- Develop a productive routine immediately. You have a new “job” while you’re making your career change. You’re working for yourself. Get up, get dressed, and keep “work” hours focusing on making your career change. Develop a plan for your week and for your day. Avoid the temptation to just lay back and react. Not only will your career change and job search move more quickly, but also you’ll feel better emotionally and physically.
- Take extremely good care of yourself. Increase (or start) a daily exercise program. This is one of the most effective ways you can release stress. Eating right is also very important. If, like many of us, you’re carrying around some extra pounds, this is a great time to make changes to a healthy diet that will produce weight control. Since you’re also more likely to suffer illness during times of high stress, be

aware of potential symptoms and consult your physician.

- Find or develop a support group, and increase your networking activities. There are lots of reasons for doing this. First, you need people that will provide support and accountability as you navigate your career change. Many churches have job ministries that help fill this need, or you can assemble your own support group from friends and family. You also need to replace the social aspect of work, so develop a core of people you can talk to during the week. You should also increase your participation in networking activities. Plan to attend several networking events weekly.
- Add or increase devotional time. Career changes and job searches are spiritual journeys. We’re naturally led to consider our purpose in life and the forces that affect our lives. It is a natural time to draw closer to God, both to seek understanding and to seek help and comfort. A regular quiet time daily, for reading, meditation, prayer, and worship will produce amazing results.

I can’t stress the importance of adopting these strategies enough. Once you do, then your specific career change and job search strategies will fall into place and be much more effective.

15. Career Change: What about Assessments?

I'm frequently asked, "What assessments would be helpful in guiding me in my career decisions?"

It sometimes seems like there are an infinite variety of career assessments available, and they all promise to give you some insight into what career would be right for you. And in truth, most assessments do provide information that can be useful. I have taken many of them myself over the years, and I've yet to find one that doesn't give me what I think is reliable information about myself. Actually, assessment is a big business. There are entire businesses built on providing assessments, and if you want, you can spend a lot of money in this way to learn more about yourself.

The problem that I continue to observe, however, is that few people who take these assessments learn enough from them to be able to do anything different -- or to make decisions about what careers they would do best in and be happiest in. The problem is not the assessments themselves. They are scientifically valid (at least most of them), and they are providing correct results.

The first problem is that taking a multiple choice test and then looking at printed results does not make you process the information and learn from it. They provide fast results with little effort. Unfortunately, like most endeavors, quick and dirty doesn't get the job done very well.

The second major problem is that most instruments provide a piece of the puzzle in clarifying what your ideal job would be. Because you only get a piece here and a piece there, it is often difficult to put all of that together into a coherent picture.

What will give you the information you need is the "Flower Exercise" from *What Color is Your Parachute*. Richard Bolles, who wrote the book, developed the exercise to help you define your ideal job. The exercise entails writing some short stories, doing some analysis, and doing some prioritizing. It takes more effort and time than doing some assessments, but that's where the value comes from. Going through the process produces real learning, and the exercise touches on each facet that goes into making up the ideal job, so when you get through, you have a clear, definitive description of your ideal job.

16. HR - Friend of Foe?

Some of my best friends are HR professionals. They're almost always very caring individuals who entered the field to help people. But then they learn that their real job is protecting the company by keeping the company from making employment mistakes. And standard HR practice puts in place all kinds of processes and procedures to try to make sure that mistakes don't happen.

If you're seeking a job, HR folks can be your friend -- or they can be your foe.

If you're looking for a job in which you have previous experience doing the same job in the same industry, HR can be your best friend. In America's extremely inefficient hiring process, that experience is valued as the highest proof that you can do the job. And it provides great cover for HR and the hiring manager if you fail.

But if you're making a career change -- same job/different industry; different job/same industry; or God forbid, different job/different industry -- HR's job is to screen you out. And if you by some means get past them, then their job is to strongly advise those with hiring authority that they are taking a big risk. In this case, you'll find HR to be your foe.

That's why if you're making a career change, you need to do two things to be successful:

1. Figure out how to make a direct approach to the person that has the authority to make the hiring decision, bypassing HR so that you can get your foot into the door.
2. Develop information and stories that illustrate that you can do the job -- proof that the hiring manager and HR can feel comfortable with when going against their established policies and procedures.

Understanding how the system works will help you immeasurably, and knowing how to make foes into friends is valuable!

17. Copyright Notice

The content in this e book is copyrighted in my name. I want to strike the appropriate balance between getting my content widely distributed while at the same time protecting my intellectual property rights. Thanks in advance for your cooperation.

You are free to do the following without my permission:

- Link to this e book on my site, <http://difficultseasons.com>.
- Extract and re-post less than 100 words on any other site, provided you link back to my original post or to the e book link on my site.
- Print this e book and photocopy up to 50 copies for internal distribution within your own organization.
- Print excerpts or articles from this e book in any non-commercial publication (e.g., company newsletter, church newsletter, class syllabus, etc.), provided you include this copyright notice: “©2009, James W. Hughes. All rights reserved. Originally published at <http://difficultseasons.com>.

You must have my express written consent to do any of the following:

- Re-post one or more of the articles in this e book in its entirety anywhere else on the Internet.
- Use this content for commercial purposes, including selling or licensing printed or digital versions of my content, or using the material in seminars for which a fee is charged.
- Alter, transform, or build upon this work.

If you have some use for my content that is not covered here, please contact me at <http://difficultseasons.com>.