

Stress Inoculation: Looking for Jobs

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October 17, 2009

Looking for a work is stressful, if not downright overwhelming at times. For the most part, we look for jobs in very conventional ways-- online job boards, job postings on company websites, recruiters, etc. Why do we typically limit ourselves to these approaches? Although it's understandable that we expect to find jobs in those places, we are all aware that people mostly find out about jobs through personal contacts. I've heard many career coaches state that most jobs are never even listed in help wanted ads, at least not until the successful candidate has been chosen and the company is posting the position publicly solely for legal reasons. Personally, I have no idea what percentage of jobs are unadvertised, but I do know that the more jobs you learn of and apply for, the better your chances of landing a job.

So, why do we spend so much time looking at online job postings and so little time asking others for job leads? The obvious answer is that searching online is far easier and less stressful than approaching live persons. In fact, I believe that the number one reason why job seekers seldom ask others directly for job leads is because they are afraid to ask. Job seekers are afraid of how the person they ask might react, or might think about the job seeker. In this bad economy especially, the fact that you are looking for a job says nothing about you; yet, we still cling to the belief that holding a job equates with worthiness. Our society has traditionally criticized people who are unemployed and, consequently, when we approach others to look for a job and thereby admit to being unemployed, we are reminded that others may look at us as if we are less valued members of society. In short, we feel ashamed and embarrassed, despite the fact that many of our friends and family members are themselves unemployed or underemployed because of the economy. Even though we are keenly aware of how irrational our belief is, it's still with us. As a result, we are afraid to ask others for job leads. And therefore, we don't get them. And therefore, we remain unemployed.

As a therapist and life coach, I've seen people repeatedly lock themselves into bad situations solely because they are too afraid to ask for what they want. I teach people techniques to become more assertive and to cope better with problems. One method I use is called, Stress Inoculation. The Stress Inoculation technique was actually created many years ago, and it has been used to train numerous people how to cope with a wide variety of stressful situations. It's remarkably simple, yet highly effective. You can use this technique in your daily life, especially when looking for a job. In this article, I shall discuss how you can use it to overcome your reluctance to asking others for jobs.

The basic premise of Stress Inoculation is that you must imagine stressful, challenging situations and create possible solutions for them before they occur. Stress Inoculation is merely a deliberate method for preparing yourself for the worst. For example, suppose you are worried about going to a part of town that you are unfamiliar with in order to apply for a job. You might worry about getting lost, or perhaps for your safety. What might you do about these concerns? Most people would look at a

map, including of the surrounding areas. Others might do a trial run in advance. These are ways to address your concerns. When you do so, you feel better about the situation and reduce your level of stress. By taking active steps to cope with these potential problems, you feel more control over the situation and therefore less stress. You enter a situation armed with the knowledge that you are prepared should troubles arise. This feeling of preparedness gives you more confidence and reduces stress. This is the core concept of Stress Inoculation.

The steps to "inoculate" yourself from stress are simple. First, consider all of the possible negative outcomes; that is, all of the possibilities which make you nervous or worried. You may wish to write down your thoughts because they may well become complicated shortly. For each concern you have, create at least one solution, if not more. For example, if you're concerned about getting lost, what solutions can you think of? As suggested above, one would be to look at a map in advance of going. Another would be to bring a map with you. A third response would be to bring the phone number of the place you are going to, just in case you get lost. A fourth is to ask someone for directions in advance. The number and types of possible solutions depend on how creative and resourceful you are willing to be.

For each solution, consider possible negative outcomes. For example, suppose you ask a friend for directions, and your friend turns out to be wrong. Now, what do you do? In other words, prepare a "back up" plan. In fact, contemplate how each back up plan might fail as well, and devise solutions for those, if possible. How far should you take it? As far as you need to in order to feel prepared. Of course, no one can anticipate every possible problem, nor am I suggesting you obsess over preparation. The goal of Stress Inoculation is simply to consider as many potential challenges and solutions as you need to in order to feel confident enough to move forward and enter the situation. When you feel prepared, you're done.

As you can see by considering the possibilities, the set of responses can become somewhat complicated very quickly. It's as though you're creating a large flow chart of possible disasters and potential disaster responses. In reality, however, there are usually a relatively small number of potentially serious problems that might arise, and consequently you will have to create and remember only a small number of solutions.

Let's apply Stress Inoculation to looking for jobs. Do you know who might have a good job lead for you? If the answer is yes, you should start by asking that person. If not, you should consider asking many, if not most, of the people you know or meet. Next, consider what might go wrong. What is the worst thing that could happen if you ask someone for a job lead? Of course, the answer is that the person will tell you that she/he does not have any leads. What are the negative outcomes of this response? Generally, there are two. First, you still don't have any job leads. Second, you may feel rejected, embarrassed, or even humiliated, depending on the tone of voice and body language used by the other person. The next step in Stress Inoculation is to figure out ways to deal with these negative outcomes.

If you get no leads, what can you do? There are at least two possibilities. You can ask whether the person knows of others whom you can ask for job leads. Another possibility would be to ask for job

search advice. Again, the Stress Inoculation technique instructs you to consider what might go wrong and what you can do. If the person does not refer you to anyone else and offers no advice, what can you do? In that case, I submit that you have accomplished as much as you can with that person and that you find another person to ask. You are as well prepared for that outcome as you can be.

What do you do if you feel rejected or embarrassed? You must deal with your feelings. I'm going to be blunt: if you can't deal with your feelings of rejection, your chances of succeeding in life are greatly diminished. If you let your fear of rejection stop you from asking others about potential jobs, then you will be far less likely to find available jobs. Thus, excessively avoiding possible rejection will leave you unemployed.

What can you do about your fear of rejection? First, find a way to deal with the pain of rejection for now. Perhaps you can talk about it with your partner or best friend. Perhaps you can cope by taking a long walk, riding your bike, exercising, watching an old movie, or eating chocolate (a small piece of chocolate, that is). Two highly inspirational films are "The Miracle Worker" and "The Fastest Indian," both of which deal with ordinary people overcoming great odds. Another movie that teaches the value of persistence is "Stand and Deliver." By the way, did I mention that all of these movies are based on true stories? Check these films out, and recharge your courage batteries.

In the long term, you can eliminate your fear of rejection completely. That's right, you can eliminate it completely, simply by learning my Better Communication Technique, which I explain in a free tutorial on my website. I also explain how communicating effectively will greatly improve your life in my book, "The Fine Print of Happiness: What they never told you about improving relationships, boosting self esteem, and achieving lasting happiness," which is available through my website and Amazon.com. I also offer personal life coaching, workshops, and business consulting to teach people these skills.