

The Gladiator

Survival Tactics For Those In Job Or Career Transition

Boost Your Job Search with the Buddy System

by C.J. Hayden, MCC

Remember back in grade school when the teacher asked you to hold hands with a friend on field trips? The idea behind the buddy system is that it's much harder to get lost if there are two of you traveling together. When you get into trouble, your buddy can help you out, or find someone else who can.

Maybe you could use a buddy in your job search. The constant challenges you encounter while seeking out job opportunities and going on interviews make job-seeking a difficult road to travel all alone, and it's easy to get lost. Teaming up with a job search buddy can give you:

Perspective - A different point of view on your progress or challenges. Just hearing your problem restated by another person can give you new insight that will help you find a solution.

New Ideas - A partner for brainstorming and an extra pair of eyes and ears to spot opportunities. You can double the amount of knowledge and experience at your fingertips.

Accountability - Someone other than yourself to whom you are accountable -- who will ask you once a week what you have done so far, and what's next.

Support - Space to complain or celebrate out loud, with someone who cares about your progress. If you're facing a roadblock, grouching about it for a few minutes may be all you need to get back into action. And having someone to share your success with can make it much sweeter.

While you could use your spouse, best friend, or a co-worker to provide this extra help, the individuals closest to you may not be the best choice. The people in your personal life will not always be thrilled with how much time you're spending on looking for work, and your co-workers may tend to sidetrack you with day-to-day job issues. You may find it more helpful to find a buddy who can maintain some detachment, but who also understands the importance of your job search.

You and your buddy can assist each other in reaching your goals by setting up a regular check-in, where each of you reports on progress, announces successes, and describes challenges. The buddy's job is to listen, celebrate, commiserate, and be a brainstorming partner. Here's how to make the buddy system work for you in job-seeking:

1. *Set a fixed time to talk.* Whether you meet by phone or in person set a start and end time for your conversation. Half an hour is enough; an hour is plenty.
2. *Check in about goals and action steps.* Make a brief report about where you are with your job search and what steps you have taken

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since your last meeting. Keep your check-in brief and to the point, e. g., "I got one interview this week, and set up two appointments for networking lunches. I revised my resume to include more of my past accomplishments, and applied for three new job openings." Acknowledge your buddy's progress and celebrate his or her success.

3. *Help each other solve problems.* Ask your buddy to first just listen while you tell him or her what's going on and clear your emotional reaction to it. Your buddy can say things like, "Gee, that's tough," or "How awful!" but should not offer any advice until you are through. Talk about not only what is happening, but how it makes you feel. If it sounds like complaining, that probably means you're doing it right.

You might say something like this: "I've been trying for two weeks to finish my resume, and there's just been one emergency after another, and now my mother wants me to help sell her car, and I'm so frustrated! All the words I write down just come out wrong, and I don't think it'll ever come together, and I needed it yesterday, and I'm so worried that..." You get the idea.

Set a time limit of 5 minutes for reporting and clearing. At the end of that time, ask your buddy to summarize for you: "I hear how frustrated and worried you are. You seem to have two problems that need to be solved -- finding the time to work on the resume, and getting the words to come out right. Are you ready to look at some solutions?"

4. *Brainstorm possible solutions.* Your buddy's job is not necessarily to hand you the right answer -- his or her more important role is to help you expand your thinking to come up with some new ideas. Take your problems one at a time, and together with your buddy, make a list of possible solutions. Don't edit the list as you are brainstorming; include anything and everything that comes up. You are not allowed to say, "That won't work," or "I already tried that."

Here are the potential results of a brainstorm on getting the right words for a resume:

- o hire a resume writer
 - o plagiarize my friend's resume
 - o use the thesaurus
 - o ask my cousin the writer to help
 - o do a resume with only pictures
 - o don't use a resume at all
 - o look at sample resumes on the Internet
 - o take a class in how to write a resume
 - o use what I have and stop worrying
 - o have some colleagues review it
5. Decide on your next steps. If none of the brainstormed ideas seem right, look at each one to see if there's something useful in it. Maybe you can't afford a resume writer, but you know one you could ask for a word or two of free advice. Perhaps a class would take too long, but you could check out a book from the library. Find just one thing you can do that will get you moving toward a solution.

Regardless of any problems you try to solve during your session, always end by naming what steps you will take on your job search before your next meeting. Write these steps down — both yours and

your buddy's — so you can check in about them next time.

6. Keep the relationship reciprocal. Make sure each of you gets an equal amount of time at your meetings. If you end up spending the whole session on one person's problem, devote the next session to the other buddy. Keep your buddy in mind as you make new discoveries and meet new people, and share any opportunities you uncover. The buddy system works best when you do for your buddy what you would like your buddy to do for you.

About the author: [C.J. Hayden](#)

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