

# *Looking for Work, Can We Lend a Hand?*

By Dr. Stephen A. Laser

## **Stephen A. Laser Associates**

**200 South Wacker Drive,  
Suite 3400  
Chicago, Illinois 60606**

**Phone: 312-382-8200**

**Fax: 312-382-8286**

### **For more information visit:**

[www.laserassociates.net](http://www.laserassociates.net)

### **Key Points:**

- Job seekers can take a few simple steps to improve odds for regaining employment
- Differentiate from the average candidate by emphasizing ways to help the bottom-line either by generating additional revenue or saving on expenses
- Do use metrics to quantify and qualify accomplishments
- Do respond to all questions directly and honestly
- Do not use the interviewer's time for psychotherapy
- Do utilize critical feedback offered by others to gain insight into weaknesses and determine steps to improve

## **Looking for Work, Can We Lend a Hand?**

As the recession deepens to a level not seen since World War II, more and more people are out of work. The reasons are many with everything from too much accumulation of personal, mortgage, and business debt to too much spare capacity in the economy from automobile inventories to overbuilt office complexes and shopping centers. For people who are out of work, however, these explanations ring hollow. They want to return to the ranks of the employed. While it is not our practice to serve as career counselors or business coaches, a process we have called into question in the past, we would like to weigh in on the topic of job searches, if for no other reason than to help those who are so desperately looking for work to help feed their families and maintain their sense of self-worth.

It is also not our intention to instruct people on how to game the system, but at the same time, there are some simple steps any job seeker can take that will help him or her enhance their chances of regaining employment. Before presenting our list of “do’s” and “don’ts,” let’s start with a few premises about today’s employment situation. First, many people are having to rethink their priorities. What was once considered a job beneath a person in terms of status or salary-level might now become a more attractive alternative as the need to gain employment increases. In addition, people might have to consider different industries or change occupations entirely. Second, jobs are getting harder and harder to find, and employers are cautious about hiring, especially if they can’t get a feel for which direction the economy is heading in the next couple of quarters, much less the next couple of years.

Thus far, even with jobs being hard to find, employers still need to hire, and yet more importantly, if you have something valuable to offer an employer that will help an organization’s bottom-line by either generating additional revenue or saving on expenses, your stock will be higher than that of the average applicant. As a result, you have to be able to demonstrate your worth to an employer and set yourself apart from the rest of the pack. Too many times job applicants can’t even get their foot in the door. They send out a blizzard of resumes with the touch of a keystroke and nothing,

# *Looking for Work, Can We Lend a Hand?*

By Dr. Stephen A. Laser

## **Looking for Work, Can We Lend a Hand?**

absolutely nothing, comes back in return. Let us make a suggestion. Too many of the resumes we see sent by our client organizations read like a list of duties and tasks that can be found on any standard job description. Who cares? Really, after reading one after another of these canned set of credentials, they all run together. Is it any wonder that getting a response from any prospective employer is like winning the lottery? Instead, we suggest ***using metrics pertaining to well-defined and specific accomplishments for each and every job*** on the resume. Bullet-pointed achievements in stated plain dollar-and-sense terms will do a lot more to catch an employer's eye than a bland list of duties and responsibilities. Remember employers want to know what you can do for them (not what they can do for you). Even in a bad economy, companies might be willing to take a chance on a candidate who can help them achieve their business objectives in tough times when their survival is at stake.

Should you be lucky enough to get an interview, as either an initial phone screening or face-to-face, we would now like to suggest a few things that greatly increase your chances of turning your interview opportunity into a paying job. First, when asked a direct question, ***answer it directly***. For example, when asked how many years you have been in sales, simply state the number of years. Don't use the question as a segue to give your life's history beginning with your first sales job at the mall in high school to some 30 years later in your last position before being let go. The failure to be direct costs time, especially with interviewers who are under pressure to speak with as many applicants as possible. Giving long-winded and lengthy answers to simple questions also draws unwanted conclusions about a candidate's ability to manage time properly or to achieve results in an effective and efficient fashion.

Another suggestion, ***don't use the interviewer's time for your psychotherapy session***. Employers are not interested in hearing how wronged you've been or how rotten your last boss was. Furthermore, they really don't care to hear about how poorly run your company was and the lousy state of the organization's management, its lack of new products in the pipeline, or its stifling culture – whatever that means. In short, your problems should not be your new employer's problems. If you absolutely must vent, find a qualified professional or seek assistance from your parish priest, your minister, or your rabbi.

One question I'm frequently asked in seminars to job seekers at various networking sessions is what to do when the question arises about strengths and weaknesses, especially the latter inquiry about potential shortcomings? Our advice: ***answer the question honestly***. Avoiding the truth fools no one in either the long run or the short run. Nevertheless, there are ways to address this issue

# Looking for Work, Can We Lend a Hand?

By Dr. Stephen A. Laser

## Stephen A. Laser Associates

200 South Wacker Drive,  
Suite 3400  
Chicago, Illinois 60606

Phone: 312-382-8200

Fax: 312-382-8286

For more information visit:

[www.laserassociates.net](http://www.laserassociates.net)

### Key Points:

- Job seekers can take a few simple steps to improve odds for regaining employment
- Differentiate from the average candidate by emphasizing ways to help the bottom-line either by generating additional revenue or saving on expenses
- Do use metrics to quantify and qualify accomplishments
- Do respond to all questions directly and honestly
- Do not use the interviewer's time for psychotherapy
- Do utilize critical feedback offered by others to gain insight into weaknesses and determine steps to improve

## Looking for Work, Can We Lend a Hand?

without talking yourself out of a job. Let's start with one's strengths. Vague generalities like, "I'm a nice guy" or "I'm easy to work with" do little to impress people. For example, who wouldn't refer to herself or himself as a "hard worker"? Instead, provide specifics or examples about your strengths, such as "I'm always available to work overtime or cover a shift for someone calling in sick" or "I've made last minute deliveries to a customer, even if it's on my own time after hours or on a weekend."

Too often the response to the question about weaknesses is benign, or worse, ridiculous. We've heard candidates refer to their bad spelling (ever heard about spell-check) or there are the candidates who claim to "work too hard." Preposterous! Who wouldn't want an employee who worked too hard? From our perspective, applicants who can't think of anything to say regarding weaknesses are either trying to manage their impression in an overly favorable light or are likely to be defensive in the face of critical feedback. Additionally, neither situation reflects well on a person. Instead, we suggest **stating clearly the areas where others have offered you critical feedback**. If you've been able to address the situation, explain the circumstances. For example, if you are too easily annoyed with people, you might have asked for feedback from your fellow employees when they've observed you behaving impatiently. In other instances, you may find that your greatest strength is likely to be your biggest weakness as well. For example, the person who is an excellent listener is likely to take their skill to the extreme and be more willing to sit back and let the conversation flow rather than interject a much-needed idea or helpful comment. In other instances, the highly straightforward and honest individual can be guilty on occasion of being too direct, or occasionally just plain blunt.

In keeping with our promise to make our newsletters short and hold your attention for a brief period of time, we will stop here. Hopefully, this gives you a little more insight into the job search process from the perspective of the interviewer. Again, as always, we invite your comments (and criticisms), and where appropriate, we will share it with our growing number of readers and subscribers.