



How to survive rejection in the job hunt

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For most of us, finding a job is a necessity, not a nice-to-have. Without a job we have no income, and without an income we have no food, no shelter, no means of transportation – we don't have much of a life. One of the most important actions you will take (unless you are independently wealthy or have a business to work in) will be to find a job. Unfortunately, with the unemployment rate what it is right now, that is not an easy task. Typically, in South Africa, it is long, time-consuming, and fraught with rejection.

There are plenty of articles (and I have written many) on how to prepare your CV, how to find jobs to apply for, and how to stand out as a candidate. There are not too many on how to handle the constant rejection when looking for a job. And for most people there will be a lot of rejection a lot of the time. It takes much longer than it used to, ten years ago, to find a job. It is not unusual for even well-qualified individuals to take up to one year to get hired. The hiring processes are also more extensive. Several interviews, tests, case studies, and presentations are often part of the process these days to decide on a suitable candidate.

Our brains are not wired for such a long process. We need a job to survive. So, we start to panic and get anxious and fearful and start wondering if we will ever find employment. We also are not wired for rejection. Our brains need acceptance from other people in order to feel that we are safe and that we belong. Many years ago in the stone ages, if your tribe kicked you out, you would quite likely die. You needed acceptance to stay alive. Our brains have not quite forgotten this, although we do live in different times, and you can stay alive with rejection. As human beings we still battle to deal with rejection though. It hurts.

If you are going to survive the job hunt, and keep going, with confidence and enthusiasm, you will need to watch your self-talk and how you interpret what happens around and to you, in order to not lose motivation and give up. It is very easy for our thinking to tend towards doomsday thinking. As we get either no feedback or rejection, we start doubting our employability and worth. When no offers are forthcoming, we start panicking about how we will survive. All of these just make the job hunt harder and we self-sabotage ourselves. When you are applying for a job you need confidence and self-belief.

So, what are some of the ways in which we can keep ourselves thinking positively and not give up.

1. **Don't take anything personally.** If you don't get any feedback from an application, you are like most people who find their CV disappears into a black hole. Follow up once or twice and then leave it. There are hundreds of CV's for most positions and in the majority of cases there

is no feedback. You may think this is rude, and they may believe they simply do not have the time to respond to everyone who applied. But it is not about you or your worth. There are many reasons why your CV doesn't get responded to:

- a. It got lost somewhere in the process. It does happen.
 - b. The company has a policy of not replying to everyone who applies. Some actually state this as their policy.
 - c. The job may have been withdrawn – often due to restructuring in the company.
 - d. The job may have been combined with another one.
 - e. No one saw your CV because it did not make it through the computer searches. Often the first view of your CV is an Automatic Tracking System (ATS) which searches your CV for keywords from the job description/job advert. If you don't have enough then it will kick your CV out.
 - f. There were many, many people, who had all the skills and you did not stand out enough. This point and the one above indicate that you need to make sure you write a good CV. Get professional advice if necessary. So, you may be rejected, not because you are not a good candidate, but because the information you presented was not suitable or presented in a way to showcase your fit for the job.
 - g. Human beings make mistakes – at some stage a human will shortlist people for interviews. Selection decisions are not perfect. You can see this in sports. Even in the professional sports sector, selectors get it wrong.
 - h. The recruiters don't know you. Your CV only shows a portion of what you can do and what you have done. And that depends on how well you put it together. If they say no, then it may be about them and what they are looking for, not what you offer. If someone doesn't know you well, and they reject you, then it's not about you, it's about them. Your CV and application form only show a small part of who you are as a human being.
 - i. No matter what happens, people have good days and bad days, people make good and bad decisions. If you are rejected it simply means that this is not your job. It means not right now and not for this job, at this time. It doesn't mean you are a worthless human being, and no one will want you, which is what some people seem to tell themselves. Don't make it personal because it is not.
2. There is a Japanese proverb which says, **"Fall down seven times, get up eight"**. Anybody who has accomplished any success has also encountered a lot of failure. We don't like this as human beings. We seem to dread and sometimes be extremely fearful of failure. If you can learn to like failure and see it as part of success, rather than the opposite of success, you will handle setbacks and remain motivated a lot longer than others. And that means you will persevere which makes it more likely you will achieve success. One way of looking at this is, when you get a "no", celebrate. It means you are one step closer to success. Each rejection is a step closer to hearing a "yes".
 3. A third method which may also help you keep going is to **talk to other people looking for jobs**. If we are the only person in our circle looking for a job it is easy to think that others had it easier. This is how it works when starting a business. If you only read news headlines you think it is fairly easy to start a business. Which it isn't. It is unbelievably tough. When you start talking to people who started a business, and realise how long it took them to make their first sale, you realise it's not you. That is just how long it takes. It is the way things are likely to work out. There is nothing defective or off about you. Many things – actually make that most things – take longer to achieve than we expect.

So, realise that, no matter how valuable your skills might be, and how beneficial you can be to an organisation, the job hunt could take long. That is just the way it is. It is not about you. (If you think your CV or your interviewing skills need improvement then work on those.) Realise that you will hear “no” a lot. And don’t let it keep you down and out. You can be upset for a day but then motivate yourself again and keep on going. Some of these tips mentioned can apply in life in general, not just if you are looking for a job. Don’t take things personally. Nothing people do is because of you, it is because of who they are. To be successful you have to fail. Failure is not the opposite of success, it is part of success. And if you want to be successful talk to others who have done what you want to do. They will have a much more realistic perspective on what it takes to achieve what you want.