INTRODUCTION

Technological progress has merely provided us with more efficient means for going backwards.
—ALDOUS HUXLEY

I’ve heard numerous theories for why the job search is so difficult these days: a bad economy, bad luck, outsourcing, cronyism, poor work ethic, too much reality TV. During my six years as a senior career consultant at Duke University’s Fuqua School of Business, I’ve helped people of all interests and ages through the job search process, and I attribute its difficulty to something else entirely—technology.

Technology has made our lives easier in so many ways, but it has only complicated the modern-day job search. Before Internet job postings grew in popularity in the late 1990s, the job search was a simple (though tedious) process:

**STEP 1 (OPTIONAL).** Find classified ads in newspaper.

**STEP 2.** Mail resume and cover letter to potential employers.

**STEP 3.** Wait for invitations to interview.

That doesn’t sound so bad, right? Ship out resumes and cover letters, and whoever is interested writes you back. Very straightforward. Of course, those with contacts at the potential employer still fared best, not having to rely on a piece of paper to make their first impression for them. But cold calls by phone or mail were often all it would take to get an interview.
Fast-forward a decade. The Internet’s in full swing, websites will find relevant job postings for you, and resumes can be submitted online at any hour of the day. Although it’s easier than ever before to find jobs, why does it now seem so much harder to actually get one? In short, technology made applying for jobs so efficient that hiring became inefficient.

Throw in a global recession, and suddenly you’ve got a perfect storm. However, even if the economy were to fully recover tomorrow, the job search still wouldn’t go back to how it was.

Technology has effectively ruined the “mail and wait” job search strategy because it is now far more difficult for employers to pick out the few interesting applicants from the massive new influx of casual applicants.

Applying for jobs used to require a significant amount of time. Time to search classified ads in your local paper, type and print your resume and cover letter on nice paper, and package them up in an envelope for mailing. Not everyone had that kind of time, and applying to any job required at least a minimal amount of research—heading to the library to find what address to mail your resume to, for example.

With the Internet, applying for a job can take less than a minute. Google a possible employer’s name, click on the Careers section of their website, and submit your resume. Done. When it’s that easy, anyone can do it (and everyone does). Thus, recruiters who before Internet job postings used to get a dozen or so applications from mostly local candidates in several weeks for a job now get hundreds or thousands from across the country within hours.

Who has time to read hundreds of resumes? Recruiters today read resumes the way most of us read websites—ignoring a majority of what’s on the page and just skimming the headlines—in the case of resumes, usually looking at only schools attended and previous employers, if that.

That’s assuming hiring managers actually look at resumes received online. My students commonly describe online job postings as “black holes” for resumes, and I agree. Because there is no way for a hiring
manager to read all of those applications, the only fair thing to do is not read any of them, so online applications may be avoided entirely. (That this attitude saves a hiring manager many hours of additional work is hardly coincidental!) Employers these days rely instead on internal referrals to decide whom to interview. Getting internal referrals efficiently is the core challenge of the modern job search, in fact—and we’ll return to that topic shortly.

Online job postings are not inherently evil, nor was Becca being lazy by applying for so many jobs online—quite the opposite, actually. She was simply following the same old “mail and wait” paradigm that many of her peers were doing. In early March, she had assumed that she would find a job while still on campus—she’d been at the top of her class her whole life, after all. But she hadn’t found it, having underestimated the number and caliber of her competitors. She was so anxious that she canceled her spring break trip with a group of her classmates in order to focus on her job search. (Months later, she would call these spring break efforts a “garbage in, garbage out” job search.)

Becca spent her week off scanning job posting websites: Monster, CareerBuilder, Indeed.com, TheLadders, and so on, hoping to find the perfect job. She was frustrated by the fact that all of the marketing positions she found required candidates to have several years of previous marketing experience (which she lacked), but she hoped the strength of her resume—built around her experience at a major accounting firm—would convince potential employers to give her a chance. In one last gasp on her last night of break, she spent eight consecutive hours surfing job postings and submitting resumes to dozens of employers.

She never heard back from a single one.
her parents did, except electronically rather than with stamps and envelopes. It felt like progress—the websites would say something like “Your application has been successfully submitted,” each time (the closest thing she ever got to positive reinforcement in her search), and conventional wisdom said “you reap what you sow” and “hard work pays off.” This strategy is also known as “satisficing.” “Satisfice” is a hybrid word formed from “satisfy” and “suffice.” Coined by Nobel prize–winning social scientist Herbert Simon in 1956, the term describes a person’s tendency to select the first available solution that meets a given need, rather than an optimal solution.

Believe it or not, satisficing is actually a good strategy in a majority of cases—it’s what prevents us from spending hours deciding which of the dozens of hands soaps to buy at the grocery store. The alternative to satisficing is “maximizing.” Maximizing means finding the best possible choice, regardless of the amount of time or effort it takes. For major purchases like a home, erring on the side of maximizing rather than satisficing makes good sense, but in most cases satisficing, well, satisfices.

Hiring managers are classic satisficers, which makes total sense. Their ability to make outstanding hiring decisions rarely if ever factors into how big their raise is at the end of the year—therefore, they’ll want to spend as little time making hiring decisions as possible. For them, finding a “good enough” candidate quickly is better than finding a “perfect” candidate slowly—so their hiring decision is very unlikely to involve reviewing hundreds of resumes!

The fundamental flaw in Becca’s satisficing strategy was that she equated the feeling of making progress with actually making progress. No matter how diligently or efficiently Becca applied conventional wisdom’s best practice of pushing resumes and cover letters out to employers through online job postings, she was unlikely to succeed.

Technology in this case had, as Aldous Huxley said, only given job seekers a more efficient means for going backward. It simplified the application process to the point of ruin—the point where its accessibility caused it to no longer help employers efficiently identify
qualified candidates. “Mail and wait” simply wasn’t designed for the explosion in competition for jobs facilitated by the Internet age.

Technology also gave job search books a more efficient means for going backward. It was obvious that technology was changing the job search, so most legacy job search texts introduced “Internet Editions” and “Recession Editions,” bolting on more and more advice about incorporating the latest technology fads into the job search without fundamentally revising their “mail and wait” approach. One very well-regarded book even says that networking is the most effective way to find jobs, and resumes are the least effective, but it still spends twice as many pages discussing resumes as it devotes to networking! Inevitably, this has happened:

But that was just job search books! Job search websites also got into the act, providing article after article revealing the “Top Seven Secrets of the Job Search” or “Ten Quick Ways to Ruin an Interview.” In other words, job search advice exploded, and in many cases
its goal was to be sensational enough to warrant a click-through, earning attention and/or ad revenue, rather than to actually help people find jobs. Advice was now just as free to publish online as resumes were to distribute, so armchair job search quarterbacks abounded.

Other websites had even less admirable motives—some offered access to “exclusive” job postings if you purchased an upgraded “Gold” membership for a monthly fee, sometimes as much as thirty dollars a month! Every new market offering (even the free ones) had a cost: energy.

In his book *The Paradox of Choice*, psychologist Barry Schwartz discusses a study in which participants were allowed to select a free Godiva chocolate—some were allowed to choose from a box of six, and the others from a box of thirty. The surprising finding was that those who chose from the box of six actually were happier with their decision than those who had more to choose from. This can be attributed to a concept called decision anxiety.

When picking from a box of six chocolates, making the right choice is relatively easy—you either like nuts or you don’t, you prefer dark chocolate to milk or white, and so on. However, in a box of thirty, you have only one-in-thirty odds of making the optimal choice. You may be tempted to examine each chocolate before making your choice, losing time as well. You may even feel stressed after eating your chocolate, when you wonder whether you should have chosen differently. (Meanwhile, our caveman brain is simply thinking, “Chocolate taste GOOD!”)

Similarly, a job seeker has to take time—sometimes just seconds, and other times minutes or hours—to decide which articles to read and which websites to subscribe to. This taxes both our speed and our willpower. A growing body of evidence supports the fact that focus (or more precisely “executive function”) is a finite resource that is drained every time we are tempted—even in an entirely unrelated venture. A 1998 Case Western Reserve University study found that test subjects who were told to eat only from a bowl of turnips despite the presence of a nearby plate of warm chocolate-chip cookies gave up on a subsequent challenging task more quickly.
than those who were told they could eat both the turnips and the cookies.¹

Welcome to the modern job search.

It’s OK if this is all stuff you are hearing for the first time. Historically, career centers have always taken a “maximizing” approach toward career education—teaching students everything they should theoretically do during a job search, regardless of the time each step requires. Career centers have never really taught the job search in terms of energy preservation, which is more important now in this age of information overload than it ever was before.

I myself was blindsided by how poorly equipped I was for the modern job search. A few months into my post-MBA marketing job I’d spent my whole life targeting, my boss pulled me aside and pre-sciently told me, “Steve, this may not be the right career for you.” I was reeling.

After the shock and denial wore off, I saw she was spot-on in her assessment. The job routinely minimized my strengths and accentuated my weaknesses, frustrating me so thoroughly that I dreaded the sound of my own alarm clock every morning. So I decided to look online for a process on how to get organized for conducting my very first post-graduation “off-campus” job search. However, click after click, all I could find were laundry lists of general advice, rather than a coherent process. Even worse, the laundry lists tended to be long, and their advice tended to be terrible. Here are some of my favorites:

• “Have a powerful resume.”
  Thanks, coach.
• “Go to local career fairs.”
  Really?
• “Use your contacts.”
  You’re not helping.
• “Start a blog.”
  Right after I finish making that video resume . . .
“Take people’s job search suggestions with a grain of salt. Be selective and apply the advice that works best for you.”

So few words, so much irony.

The reason I hated such careless advice then (and now) is because—although it was delivered in optimistic and inspirational tones—it gave no consideration whatsoever to the limited amount of spare time I actually had. As Barry Schwartz himself said in *The Paradox of Choice*, when we are given too many choices, “Choice no longer liberates. It debilitating. It might even be said to tyrannize.” Even while unemployed I wouldn’t have the time to trial-and-error my way through all of that advice, and even if *somehow* I did, following tips like “Wear a T-shirt that says ‘Please Hire Me’ into an interview” (true story) would save me the worry of ever being employed again.

That said, there is no way around the fact that the only way to get internal referrals is through networking. That doesn’t mean you have to *like* networking to get a job. Liking it is totally optional, but it *is* necessary. Personally, I hate networking. I am terrible with names and worse with faces, and I had no idea how to leave a good impression with new people I met. You know how some people bring the party with them? Well, I bring the awkward with me. However, I simply had to find a way to compensate for this limitation. I wanted instructions for doing that, not advice—I couldn’t find it, however. Therefore, that is what I will bring to you in this book.

For the lucky minority out there who feel no anxiety at all when someone mentions networking, if you’re thinking that makes this entire book irrelevant, please think again. In today’s job search, networking without an underlying strategy is just as ineffective as mailing-and-waiting.

Vivek (see sidebar, page 9) was correct in identifying the importance of creating personal relationships with recruiters, but he didn’t use the technology available to him to diversify his efforts or manage his follow-up effectively, smothering those he sought to impress. Technologies like job search engines and social networking websites have unlocked a totally new, highly efficient way to job search, but
Another student I worked with, whom I will call Vivek, had (unfortunately) come to my attention before we had even met—he had made waves among both his classmates and his recruiters for his pushiness. Vivek wanted to become a strategy consultant with (and only with) an elite firm, and he was incredibly focused in his efforts. He would attend every event this handful of firms sponsored, meet every representative the companies sent, and unfailingly send them thank-you notes the next day. So far, so good. Regrettably, although his networking skills in the moment were (mostly) correct, his overall strategy was not. Vivek was so desperate to leave a positive impression that he ended up talking more than he listened, veering away from genuine relationship building and toward a transparently transactional and quantity-based networking approach—a common mistake among those who focus on too small a universe of firms.

One of my MBA classmates—now a recruiter for one of those elite firms—called me a couple of weeks after one of their events to catch up, and before hanging up he gingerly asked me, “By the way, do you know Vivek?” Uh-oh.

Apparently, my former classmate had remembered Vivek monopolizing his time at their event, and he winced when he saw an informational interview request from him less than a week later. (For the uninitiated, informational interviews are conversations that sympathetic contacts will grant to answer job seekers’ questions and/or prescreen them for an actual interview.)

Just as my classmate feared he would, Vivek used that informational interview to ask tedious questions very similar to those he had asked in person just a week before. This oversight could have been forgivable had Vivek not requested similar conversations on the very same day with several other recruiters from that event as well.

As expected, Vivek did not get an offer from his handful of top-choice firms—they found him well qualified but overzealous, making them uncomfortable at the thought of putting him in front of clients. Vivek was devastated and spent. All of his job search efforts stopped for nearly a month as he mentally recovered from watching his entire strategy collapse.
it requires forgetting some of what you’ve learned before. “Mail and wait” as a strategy is obsolete, and a strategy that relies only on low-tech networking is equally off the mark.

The name of the game in today’s job search is a mix of high- and low-tech—specifically, using technology to locate a living, breathing advocate for you within your target employers as efficiently as possible. *That* is what this book will help you do. *Networking* is simply another way to say “acquire internal referrals”—and adding that little bit of specificity to a vague task makes it far easier to address systematically.

*The 2-Hour Job Search* works because it applies the Pareto principle to the job search, focusing on only what you need to know, rather than on all of the things you could possibly know. The Pareto principle, more commonly known as the 80-20 Rule, states that in most situations 80 percent of the results can be attributed to 20 percent of the actions taken. It is named for Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto, who noted in 1906 that 80 percent of Italy’s land was owned by 20 percent of its population (and that 80 percent of his own garden’s peas came from 20 percent of his peapod plants, though that may just be urban legend). Interesting, but how does that concept get put to practical use?

In the business world, it can be used to prioritize efforts. In 2002, Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer acknowledged that 80 percent of crashes in Windows and Office were due to only 20 percent of the programs’ bugs.2 The programmers could have spread their time equally among all known issues in a quest for perfection. Alternatively, they could have addressed the easiest errors first to show quick results. However, both of these strategies would have had less impact than their chosen path, which was to focus on the most disruptive 20 percent of issues first. Some of the less disruptive issues were likely never solved (surprising no Apple fans whatsoever), because new versions of each software package were soon released, rendering the remaining repairs unnecessary.

The job search is no different. There are immeasurable opportunities to be distracted by unnecessary details, and it takes discipline to stay focused. Most of my students are so busy that they have only
a couple of hours a week to devote to their search, so for them—as for anyone seeking a job while employed or a parent, for example—achieving a high degree of efficiency is essential. *The 2-Hour Job Search* provides that discipline by teaching readers a formal job search process that ensures they benefit from the 80-20 Rule at every step. It’s not only for new MBAs, either; it works just as well for younger job seekers like law school graduates and newly minted undergrads in humanities or engineering as it does for experienced professionals looking to change jobs mid-career.

What I propose in this book could not have been done even ten years ago—neither the technology nor the information was readily available, and what was available would have taken weeks or months to track down rather than just two hours. Older readers will remember hours spent in front of card catalogs and towering bookshelves at their local library to research a paper that today’s students can now research entirely from home (and at any hour!). Because technology now allows for better target identification and relationship building, it should certainly be used.

In its simplest form, the job search of today requires three distinct steps—Prioritize, Contact, and Recruit—and each step gets its own in-depth treatment in this book. Prioritization is essential before embarking on a job search; otherwise, the infinite information available online becomes overwhelming and impossible to navigate. Once targets have been identified, you need to initiate Contact before you can secure any advocacy. Once a sympathetic contact is listening, you can Recruit that individual to become your advocate.

The titular two hours refers to the amount of time it takes to achieve liftoff, which in this book means to complete the first two steps: Prioritize and Contact. After that, your job search effectively goes on autopilot during the Recruit step. Further effort will be required, but it will become nearly automatic in nature—you’ll know exactly what to do when.

Lastly, it’s important to note that this book is *not* a comprehensive job search guide. Such a book would be quite lengthy and mostly unnecessary—much like buying a travel guide to all of South
America when you plan to visit only Peru. Here’s a summary of the major steps of the job search process, and where this book fits in:

Choose what you want to do
Write a resume
Prioritize target employers
Contact target employers
Recruit advocates to provide internal referrals
Interview
Select an offer

There are several popular references readily available for tactical information on choosing a career, writing a resume, and honing your interviewing skills—frankly, these processes have not changed much for quite a while, so the need for a new approach there is not as urgent as one for landing that first interview. This book focuses only on the topics for which to date there has been no widely accepted process or set of best practices. In other words, *The 2-Hour Job Search* starts you at the point after you identify what you want to do, and it ends once you secure formal interviews with your target employers, at which point existing resources are once again helpful.

Also note that there is technology that I will not discuss in this book—for example, tracking RSS feeds in Google Reader. There is no shortage of interesting technology out there, but that doesn’t mean it’s all useful and/or necessary. This book wasn’t written to teach you about all of the many job search resources available to you. *The 2-Hour Job Search* strives more for “right-tech” than “high-tech”—truth be told, the latest isn’t always the greatest. This book’s mission isn’t to impress you with all that technology can do—its mission is to help you harness well-established (and free!) technology to make this process as pain-free, efficient, and effective as possible. In short, this book details the exact job search process I would follow myself, knowing what I know now.

I now teach this process to every new Duke MBA student during their first few weeks on campus. Although I enjoy helping students
improve their resumes and interviewing skills, I consider my work developing and sharing the 2-Hour Job Search to be a moral obligation. An on-campus job search is a luxury students enjoy only temporarily—the vast majority of one’s job searches are experienced as alumni, far away from a university’s friendly confines. Although this book is helpful for on-campus job searches, it is critical for post-campus ones.

After many iterations of teaching this material, I’ve found that my audiences frequently ask the same questions in a similar order each time. Therefore, I’ll follow a similarly ordered question-and-answer format to help you follow along and digest the material. At the end of each chapter, I’ll feature a Troubleshooting section covering a few of the most commonly encountered challenges, along with instructions for navigating each.

In terms of what you’ll need on your end to follow my process, please make sure you have access to the following:

- Spreadsheet software, like Microsoft Excel or iWork Numbers
- An email program with an integrated calendar, like Microsoft Outlook, Apple Mail, or Google’s free Gmail and Calendar applications
- A LinkedIn profile (see LinkedIn Start-Up sidebar, page 14)

I’m happy to say that both Becca and Vivek’s stories have happy endings. After working with me to learn and execute his own 2-Hour Job Search, Vivek secured an internship with a boutique consulting firm, and Becca received a full-time brand manager offer from a Midwestern food company. Becca’s story didn’t quite end there, however—through her 2-Hour Job Search investigations she came to realize that she found human resource management more appealing than pure marketing, so she declined her brand management offer. I asked her whether she wanted to meet me for help with restarting her search, and she told me, “Thank you, but I know what I’m doing now!” That comment made me smile for weeks.
LinkedIn Start-Up

LinkedIn is a (free) professional social networking site, and it proves very useful at various points in the 2-Hour Job Search. If you don’t already have a LinkedIn profile, create a basic one now by registering at LinkedIn.com and supplying basic information about your prior/current employers and education. You can do this in five to ten minutes—filling out your profile more completely with descriptions of each position held can take several hours, but that is not critical to this process and therefore you can skip it until after you’ve gotten underway with your search.

To fully benefit from LinkedIn’s capabilities, you must invite people to join your network. To get started, search for your favorite (and/or most popular) coworker, boss, friend, and family member, and invite each of them to connect to you. This will give LinkedIn’s technology an idea for who else is likely in your social network, and it will suggest people you may also want to connect to from there.

In addition, once your initial contacts accept, their networks will be notified that you’ve joined LinkedIn, so others will start reaching out to you. Thus, with no further effort of your own, your online network will build in the background. This won’t give you a complete online network immediately, but it will give you a great foundation for when we more actively engage LinkedIn in chapter 5.

In addition, LinkedIn allows users to join Groups, which also allow you access to larger networks of people. Some Groups allow you immediate membership; others will need to verify your status before allowing you to join, so it’s good to initiate those processes before you need them. Search Groups for previous schools and employers, and join any groups that apply to you.

Similarly, find relevant Groups related to general interests, like clean energy or the Atlanta metro area, for example. Sharing a group with a potential contact allows you greater visibility into his or her profile when a match is found, so this is another way to quickly expand your network on start-up.

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