

# Maister's Laws of the Job Search

By David H. Maister

*This was written in 1982 for MBA students who came to me with questions about career choices. It has since been reproduced around the world in a variety of books, magazines and journals, including in a few editions of What Color Is Your Parachute? I used it as the basis for the chapter, "No Regrets," in True Professionalism (1997). This is the original version.*

1. You can't decide what you want from a job until you're clear on what you want from life.
2. Some people have been too busy "succeeding" to figure out what success means to them. Don't look for a job until you've thought it through.
3. First figure out what you want in life. Then go look for it.
4. It's easy to fool yourself as to what you really want from life.
5. There are a lot of people around you who will tell you what you should want from life: parents, teachers, friends. You don't have to accept their answers. Don't get stampeded.
6. Ban the word "should" from your job search.
7. We all want to impress people. The tough part is figuring out precisely who we want to impress and why.
8. You can't impress everyone simultaneously. Different people are impressed by different things: money, status, intellect, character, contribution to society and so on, forever. What do you want to be admired for? By whom?
9. We all want respect and prestige. But in whose eyes? It ain't necessarily those of other students (because six months from now you won't see most of them ever again).
10. The key to what you really want lies in something that you don't like to admit. "I don't like to admit it but I need to be the center of attention." OK; find a job that will let you show off. "I don't like to admit it but I really want to be rich." Fine; go out and get rich. "I don't like to admit it but I'm a snob." That's all right; go work with "upper class" people.
11. Play to your "evil secrets"; don't suppress them.
12. You are a lot less flexible than you think.

13. Some people are big-city types: others are happier in small towns. Which are you? It's more important than you think.
14. Changing jobs is easier than changing family, and a lot less painful.
15. Your happiness will be determined much more by what job you've got than by what company you're working for or what industry you're in. Most people choose an industry, then choose a company, then choose a job. It's the wrong order.
16. You can't figure out what you want in life by going to interviews.
17. The more interviews you attend, the more confusion you'll feel.
18. The more confusion you feel, the worse the decision you'll make.
19. The goal is to get the right job offer, not the most job offers.
20. There is nothing as pathetic as someone getting depressed about being turned down by a company they didn't want to go work for anyway.
21. Don't sell: buy! You can either buy yourself a job or be bought by one.
22. If your new job doesn't work out, the divorce will be a lot more painful for you than for your employer. So you should be a lot pickier than they are in deciding whether to "get married." Don't sell: buy!
23. Nothing impresses an interviewer more than someone who knows what they want and why. Don't sell: buy!
24. What do you really need to know about the job you'll be doing to be sure you'll be happy? Don't be afraid to ask. Check it out to be sure. Don't sell: buy!
25. You'll be happier if you like and respect the people you'll be working with: bosses, peers, subordinates, customers. Do you know who you like and respect? Is it these people? Don't sell: buy!
26. People don't care about how much you know until they know how much you care. Enthusiasm and the hard work it inspires counts for more than an extra piece of ability.
27. Don't worry about whether you'll be good at it: If it turns you on, you'll be good enough. If it doesn't, you won't.
28. Your "strengths" are irrelevant; what you like is critical.
29. Don't plan too far ahead. In five to ten years, you'll be a different person who will want different things from life.
30. Do it because it will make you happy now, not because it will (if it works out) make you happy tomorrow.
31. Don't serve any pure apprenticeship, something that you'll hate and will do only because it will lead somewhere. If you hate it, you'll never get through it.

32. All job choices are risky, so think about how you'll feel if it doesn't work out. If you'll be able to say, "I'm glad I tried it anyway," then consider the job. If you can't imagine saying that, don't bother pursuing it any further.
33. Remember, the point of life is to be happy.
34. All other goals (money, fame, status, achievement, responsibility) are merely ways of making you happy and are worthless in themselves."



David Maister is the author of *Managing the Professional Service Firm* (1993), *True Professionalism* (1997), *The Trusted Advisor* (2000) (coauthor), *Practice What You Preach* (2001) and *First Among Equals* (2002) (coauthor.)

Prior to launching his (solo but global) consulting practice in 1985, he served as a professor at the Harvard Business School.

**TEL:** 1-617-262-5968  
**E-MAIL:** [david@davidmaister.com](mailto:david@davidmaister.com)  
**WEBSITE:** [www.davidmaister.com](http://www.davidmaister.com)

You can automatically receive David's future articles via e-mail (at no cost) by registering on his web site ([www.davidmaister.com](http://www.davidmaister.com)).