

Here Are 15 Possible Reasons You're Not Getting Hired—and How to Fix Them

by [Lily Zhang](#). Updated 10/29/2021



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Whether you're not hearing anything, getting rejected after the phone screen, or making it to the last round, here's where you might be going wrong and how to fix it.

Job searching is a grind. And the longer you're at it, the worse it seems to get. It can be so discouraging to put yourself out there and get rejected over and over again or be met with radio silence.

But rather than keeping your head down and sending out another flurry of applications, you may benefit from taking a step back and considering why you're not getting the results you want. What's the real issue keeping you from landing your next gig? Accurately diagnosing the problem now will save you time in the long run.

Here are 15 reasons you might not be getting hired and how you can fix them—broken down by when in the job search you're running into trouble.

Your Resume and/or Cover Letter Isn't Tailored to the Job

If you've submitted a whole slew of applications and haven't heard back from more than a handful, a likely culprit could be that you're sending out the same generic resume and cover letter each time without changing how you present your experience to match the job.

Employers are looking for someone who matches their job description—and since they're probably getting hundreds of applicants for each open job, they're not going

to do the extra work to figure out how you measure up. You have to be sure to tell anyone reading your application how you're suited for the role by tailoring your resume and cover letter. That means figuring out what skills and experience they want and then highlighting them in the form of accomplishments in your materials. You don't necessarily have to do this for every single role. But at the very least you should tailor your application for every *type* of role—for example, you might have a software engineering resume and cover letter and a different product management resume and cover letter—as well as individual roles you're especially interested in.

Your Resume Isn't Formatted Correctly for an ATS

Maybe you're doing plenty to tailor your resume and still hearing crickets. Your application could be getting trapped in applicant tracking system (ATS) limbo and never actually getting read by a human being. If you're applying for jobs through online applications, your resume is probably being sent through an ATS—a computer program that scans applications, tracks applicants, and generally helps recruiters and hiring managers manage the search on their side. Hiring professionals can also use ATSs to search for resumes that contain keywords that are relevant to a given job.

To make sure your resume is being read correctly by the ATS:

- **Don't try to get too fancy with your formatting:** Avoid tables, graphics, and columns.
- **Include keywords in the right context:** Recruiters and managers are likely to use terms directly from the job description to search for relevant applicants, so scan the job description for the skills and experiences they're looking for, then pick out the ones that you have and include them in your resume—using the same language.
- **Use standard section headings:** Go with headings like “Experience” and “Education.”

You're Applying to the Wrong Jobs

Look at the job description and honestly ask yourself if you have the skills you'll need to do the job—or get up to speed quickly—to ensure you're not underqualified for the roles you're targeting.

That being said, job seekers usually do a fairly good job of making sure they're qualified before applying to a role. One thing they are less great at is being honest about whether they are in fact *over*qualified. Hiring managers obviously won't hire someone who doesn't have the skills or experience to do the job, but they're also hesitant to hire someone who has gobs of experience for an entry-level role. How

will they keep you interested and challenged? Won't you just leave once something more suitable comes along? The last thing a company wants is to have to fill the role again after you've gotten bored and quit. Make sure you're targeting the right jobs for your background. (And if you genuinely do want that job that might seem too junior for you on paper, follow [this advice](#).)

You're Not Applying to Enough Jobs

As a career coach, I'll occasionally work with a client who only applies to dream jobs or dream companies, and then gets frustrated when their search drags. It's fine to be extra picky about what roles you're considering, but if you're only applying to a job here and there, then understand that your job hunt will absolutely take longer.

If your situation doesn't allow for that, then you may need to be more open to "stepping stone" roles—jobs that are not exactly what you're looking for, but could get you there someday. For example, you might apply for jobs that will help you gain the skills you'll need to be a more attractive applicant for your dream role.

You're Not Telling People about Your Job Search

You probably already know you're supposed to be networking when you're job searching. Some of what networking entails might be obvious. For example, if you know someone at a company that you'd like to work for, try to apply with a referral or at least use any additional insight you may have gleaned from your conversations in your application.

What's less obvious is that you should really be broadcasting your search as widely as possible, even to people who have no obvious way of helping you. Talk about your job hunt at non-work events or make a post about it on a *private* non-LinkedIn social media account. You probably don't know everyone another person knows. First-degree networking—a.k.a., getting help from those you know directly—is great, but second-degree networking can be really powerful too! A fellow career coach once witnessed a student who groused loudly about her job search in class and found out that the classmate next to her had a close relative who could help. Networking!

You're Not Fully Prepared for Phone Screens

Phone screens can feel pretty informal. Some recruiters even tell you they just want to schedule a "quick chat," but don't be fooled. A phone screen is an interview and you need to be preparing like you would for a formal phone interview. Even though phone screens can be quite short and cover just the basics, do your homework. Research the company. Prepare your pitch. Know how much you want to get paid. Be as ready as possible. I say "as possible" because sometimes

recruiters don't even bother to schedule phone screens ahead of time. They just call. In this case, at least having your pitch and salary expectations ready to go at all times will get you most of the way.

You Don't Know Enough About the Company

You might dismiss the common advice to research a company before an interview, because really why would a recruiter care if you know who their CEO is if you can do the job? Well, one thing employers evaluate before they extend an offer is your likelihood of accepting it. And a good way to show that you're likely to accept is to show interest in the company. How do you show interest beyond simply saying you're excited about the opportunity? By knowing a lot about them.

Research a company's products and services. Prepare to talk about how you've used them or similar ones in the past. Read up on their values and check to see if you have any contacts at the company via LinkedIn. If you want to go above and beyond, schedule an informational interview with an employee at the organization to learn more about what it's like working there.

You Haven't Prepped Interview Answers to Common Interview Questions

Job searches tend to occupy a lot of head space—even more so after you get an interview invite. But be careful you're not spending all your time just *thinking* about the interview (or worrying about it!). You need to really prepare.

You should be looking at common interview questions and practicing how to answer them *out loud*. The aloud part kind of trips people up, but saying the actual words before the interview is essential and will improve your performance quickly and significantly. If you can find someone to do a mock interview with you and give you some feedback on where you could've been stronger or when they started losing interest in what you were saying, even better.

Don't try to memorize your answers—you don't want to sound robotic. Plus, your answers could change depending on the company and what they're looking for. So practice answering the questions out loud each time you're invited to interview with a new company. You need to prepare for *each* interview, not just interviews in general.

You've Focused Too Much on Prepping Interview Answers and Neglected Other Interview Skills

You don't want to be the person who doesn't greet the receptionist and only responds in single words to small talk with the recruiter. That person rarely gets hired. You need to think about interview skills like storytelling, active listening, eye contact and other body language, empathy, and small talk. Most of these abilities

can be improved by just being aware that you need to be mindful about them and practicing. So by reading this, you could already be halfway there.

You're Not Passing the Technical Screen

I'm using the term "technical screen" kind of loosely here. A technical screen could be a more formal technical interview, a copywriting test, or a coding question thrown in during a first-round interview—among other evaluations. In other words, anything that assesses your technical ability to do the job.

Failing the technical screen usually means an automatic rejection, so it's absolutely critical that you do well enough to move forward. Luckily a skills test typically doesn't require *flawless* execution, but if you're struggling with technical assessments every time you interview with a new company, then you probably need to spend some time buckling down. There's no shortcut here. Find a relevant book or course and get to studying. And be sure you're not making common mistakes you can easily fix—like not following directions.

If you're still falling short, then you may need to evaluate whether you're applying for the wrong jobs. Maybe you need to get more practical experience with these skills in a lower-level position first, for example.

You Have the Skills, But Not the Story

You have all the right skills, you're applying for the right jobs, you're passing the screens and early interviews—and yet, no offers. What's going on? You might not have the right story. The "right story" is kind of a fuzzy concept, but basically, you don't want the hiring manager to walk out of the interview thinking, "Yes, they can do the job, but why do they even want it?"

In interviews, you need to make the case for why a job makes sense as the next step in your career. Are you looking for a managerial role or are you hoping to be more in the weeds dealing with technical problems rather than people problems? In other words, how does this job fit into the *story* of your professional development? You can cover this straight on in your response to "Tell me about yourself" or "Why this role?" and weave it in throughout the interview.

You're Coming Off a Little... Strong

It's good to be excited about a job opportunity, but it's another thing to come off as *overly* excited. The latter can sometimes (unfairly) trigger red flags for interviewers.

So do show off your interest by having a lot of knowledge about the company and sharing it. Don't show up an hour early to the interview, wait awkwardly in the lobby, and make everyone feel bad that they're not ready for you yet. Do write a

thank you note to your interviewers and include details from the conversation. Don't call every day to see if there is an update on the role. Do check out your interviewers on LinkedIn to prepare for the interview. Don't friend them on Facebook or other social media. You get the idea.

You Don't Stand Out Enough

You don't want to be memorable for the wrong reasons, but you do want to be memorable. When the hiring committee meets to discuss candidates, it's not a good sign if no one really remembers much about you.

To stand out in the *right* way, be ready to show that you're passionate about something related to the job. You can also showcase an unrelated—but just kind of interesting—passion, like bread making or biking. Find things you can talk about with gusto and then do! For example, when you get a more open-ended question like, "What is the accomplishment you're most proud of?" answer with a work-appropriate response and then briefly add in your latest sourdough triumph at the end!

You Were Too Negative

In general, hiring managers favor candidates who are positive and don't always see the worst in everything—it's human nature to not want to work with someone who's overly negative.

So, for example, when you get to later interview rounds, you may get asked what kind of suggestions you have for the company to improve a product or make a team more efficient. In these instances, be careful how you word things. It's easy to accidentally get a little too negative and point out all the problems you see. You want to answer the question, but also be mindful that you're not offending anyone. Be solution-oriented instead of only focusing on the issues.

The no-negativity rule also applies to questions you may get about previous employers. No badmouthing former workplaces, managers, or colleagues. Even if their behavior was egregious, you won't look good if you speak poorly of them.

You Didn't Prep Your References

If your references are saying completely different things than what you said in the interview, that can be a huge red flag for hiring managers. To avoid having a reference accidentally contradict you, make sure you're giving them adequate heads up that a call may be coming. Ideally, you should also let them know what role you've applied for and why you think you're a good fit. Sending over your tailored resume and cover letter can be really helpful, too. In short, you want to make sure that their story and your story align.

All this being said, sometimes you really can be doing everything right in your job search and the reasons you haven't landed a position yet are entirely outside your control. Maybe you were competing with an internal candidate the hiring manager had in mind from the get-go or maybe they just defaulted to interviewing people with more years of experience to narrow down the applicants.

Focus on the aspects of your applications that you can control and keep moving forward. Job searches take time, and it will be worth the effort once you land the right job.



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