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Searching for an Engineering Job: Plan Your Job-Search Strategy Carefully

[By Surajit Sen Sharma]

Engineers who end up in the wrong jobs may be treating their engineering job searches too casually.

Traditionally, engineering job seekers have been used to receiving greater numbers of job offers than job seekers in most other fields. However, the relative ease with which engineers find engineering jobs undermines the importance of their job-search strategies. An engineering job search that is efficient is quite different from one that is both efficient and effective.

Any job search will quickly yield numerous engineering job offers, which, in all probability, neither you nor anybody you know will be ready to take. However, an effective job search will turn up only those jobs that are best aligned with your career goals and objectives as an engineer.

To some, the simple circumstance of receiving multiple job offers connotes job-search success. Such people confine themselves to readily available options and fail to make any extra effort to consider the engineering jobs that may be invisible to them. Inevitably, the result of remaining consciously blind to opportunities takes a toll on their engineering careers. Research shows that job-search strategies can have a greater impact on your life and career than you might be ready to believe.

Very little research has been conducted regarding the relationship between white-collar employees' job-search strategies and their career success. One study conducted in 1991 by Catherine L. Smith and Barry Gerhart of Cornell University titled "Job Search Strategies and Labor Market Success" investigated the issue and came up with these startling findings:

- Your objective quality as an applicant has little to do with your starting salary.
- Your job-search strategy has a direct impact on your starting salary.
- Having more outside interviews (outside your readily visible range of opportunities) contributes to ending up with a higher starting salary.
- Rejecting your first job offer can lead to a higher starting salary.
- Your job-search strategy has a greater effect on non-salary components of your job than it does on salary components of your job.
- The number of job offers you receive is directly related to your objective quality as an applicant. (Your objective quality as an applicant is based on elements such as your years of experience, your degree, your grades, etc., whereas your subjective quality is based on qualities like honesty, integrity, etc.)
- Your job-search strategy mediates the effect of your quality on job offers.
- Your job-search strategy influences your number of received job offers more than it influences your starting salary.
- The later an applicant starts his or her job search, the lower his or her starting salary.

If we transpose these findings (which were based on the experiences of MBA graduates) and apply them to your engineering job search, then it can be said:

- Just being a good engineer doesn't ensure you will get a good job.



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- Rushing to grab the first job that seems good can adversely affect your career.
- The earlier you start your job search, the better your chances of career success.
- Your job-search strategy determines your starting salary, number of job offers, and work-life balance (non-salary components).

Research demonstrates that conducting your engineering job search casually and neglecting opportunities that may arise beyond the first engineering job offers that come your way can ruin your career. In short, it's time to engineer your job-search strategy to meet your career goals and objectives so that it leads you to the engineering jobs that will maximize your career potential.

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Job Search Strategies and Labor Market Success
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