

15 Indispensable Career and Job-Search Books

by Katharine Hansen, PhD

What if you were limited to just over a dozen books about career and job search to guide you? Which ones are the most crucial? This limitation really exists for lots of people. Books aren't cheap, and they take up space. Even in an age when reading and book-buying habits are changing drastically with the availability of downloadable ebooks and Kindle/Nook versions, it's worthwhile to consider which career and job-search books should form your core library. Whether you buy hard copies, check them out from the library, or read them on a Kindle-like device, you may want to zero in on the 15 books that we determined to be the must-haves for job search and career.

A word on how we chose these books ... We asked for nominations from career experts, primarily from the group [Career Thought Leaders](#), and received a staggering 90+ nominations. We then requested from publishers review copies of most of those books so we could vet them for ourselves. Generally, we excluded books that are out of print or very old, books that are too new to have established a track record, and books self-nominated by their authors. A book could not be among the top 15 if its publisher did not supply a review copy, but we did include most of these unvetted books in our "Best of the Rest" list based on expert nominations of them. We then developed 15 categories, chose a "winner" in each category, along with runners-up. Some experts recommended the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, which we didn't include since it's available [online](#).

Here are Quintessential Careers' picks for the 15 most indispensable career and job-search books:

1. **In a class by itself:** [What Color Is Your Parachute? 2012: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers](#) by Richard N. Bolles. This classic is the bestselling career book in the world, with 10 million copies sold, and has been listed on TIME magazine's [All-TIME 100 Nonfiction Books](#). One of the most distinctive features of *Parachute* is that it is updated annually; the 2012 edition marks its 40th anniversary. The indispensable book covers the job-search process and devotes a significant chunk to helping readers figure out what they want to do in their careers. Bolles adapts the book to recessionary times by including material on survival skills and having the right attitude.
2. **Comprehensive job search:** [Guerrilla Marketing for Job Hunters 3.0: How to Stand Out from the Crowd and Tap Into the Hidden Job Market using Social Media and 999 other Tactics Today](#) by Jay Conrad Levinson and David E. Perry. We've always been a bit skeptical about books that purport to cover the entire job search; every aspect of the hunt -- resumes, cover letters, interviewing, networking, and so on -- is such a big subject in itself that it's hard to imagine that a single book can do justice to the entirety of job search. But *Guerrilla Marketing for Job Hunters 3.0* does. This oft-nominated volume is a comprehensive job-search guide on steroids. The authors offer cutting-edge ideas (example: reverse-engineering the kind of Boolean searches recruiters conduct for candidates) that leave many other comprehensive job-search books in the dust. The book, which gets periodically updated, includes extras like QR codes that enable readers to access additional content using their cell phones and an eLearning Library of online goodies. Overall, *Guerrilla Marketing for Job Hunters 3.0* spells out exactly what all job-seekers should be doing *right now* to succeed, with information they won't find elsewhere.

Runner-up:

- [Job Search Magic: Insider Secrets from America's Career and Life Coach](#) by Susan Britton Whitcomb.

3. **Career choice:** The books of Barbara Sher, including [*Refuse to Choose!: A Revolutionary Program for Doing Everything That You Love*](#), [*Wishcraft: How to Get What You Really Want*](#) (co-authored with Annie Gottlieb), and [*I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was: How to Discover What You Really Want and How to Get It*](#) (co-authored with Barbara Smith). Sher's books were, by far, the most popular nominees in the career-choice category. Nominator opinions, along with appreciative comments from readers on the bulletin boards at Sher's Website, affirm the site's description of her books' content as offering "a down-to-earth, nuts-and-bolts method for uncovering natural talent, pinpointing goals and turning dreams into reality."

Runners-up:

- [*Work with Passion: How to Do What You Love for a Living*](#) by Nancy Anderson
- [*Zen and the Art of Making a Living: A Practical Guide to Creative Career Design*](#) by Laurence G. Boldt
- [*48 Days to the Work You Love: Preparing for the New Normal*](#) by Dan Miller
- [*Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*](#) by Parker J. Palmer
- [*Do What You Are: Discover the Perfect Career for You Through the Secrets of Personality Type*](#) by Paul D. Tieger and Barbara Barron-Tieger

4. **Personal/career branding:** [*Career Distinction: Stand Out by Building Your Brand*](#) by William Arruda and Kirsten Dixon. Several experts nominated *Career Distinction*, a step-by-step guide to career and personal brand management that advises readers on how to brand themselves for career success, determine how others perceive them, develop a unique value proposition, define a target audience, tell a brand story, express themselves clearly and consistently, build and manage an online identity, stay consistently on-message and on-brand, and increase "career karma."

Runner-up:

- [*Me 2.0, Revised and Updated Edition: 4 Steps to Building Your Future*](#) by Dan Schawbel.

5. **Networking:** [*Make Your Contacts Count: Networking Know-how for Business and Career Success*](#) by Anne Baber and Lynne Waymon. This volume is a comprehensive guide to networking. Though not specifically focused on job search, the book is rich with advice and tips on how to network effectively, including instructions on drafting a networking plan, as well as information on cultivating current contacts, making the most of memberships, effectively exchanging business cards, avoiding the top 10 networking turn-offs, sharing anecdotes that convey character and competence, and transforming one's career with a networking makeover.

Runners-up:

- [*The 11 Laws of Likability: Relationship Networking . . . Because People Do Business with People They Like*](#) by Michelle Tillis Lederman
- [*How to Talk to Anyone: 92 Little Tricks for Big Success in Relationships*](#) by Leil Lowndes

6. **Resumes and cover letters:** [*Resume Magic: Trade Secrets of a Professional Resume Writer*](#) by Susan Britton Whitcomb. At 608 pages, Whitcomb's behemoth of a book is the definitive guide to crafting a resume. *Resume Magic* is a complete compendium that covers every resume (and cover-letter) contingency. Full of user-friendly samples and tips, the book is truly the gold standard for resume books.

Runners-up:

- [*The Overnight Resume: The Fastest Way to Your Next Job*](#) by Donald Asher
- [*Cover Letter Magic: Trade Secrets of Professional Resume Writers*](#) by Wendy S. Enelow and Louise M. Kursmark
- [*The "Expert Resumes" series*](#) by Wendy S. Enelow and Louise M. Kursmark
- [*Step-by-Step Resumes*](#) by Evelyn U. Salvador
- [*Federal Resume Guidebook: Strategies for Writing a Winning Federal Resume*](#) by Kathryn Kraemer Troutman
- [*Resumes for the Rest of Us: Secrets from the Pros for Job Seekers with Unconventional Career Paths*](#) by Arnold Boldt
- [*No-Nonsense Resumes: How to Impress Prospective Employers and Ace Any Interview*](#) by Wendy S. Enelow and Arnold Boldt

7. **Interviewing:** [*Interview Magic: Job Interview Secrets from America's Career and Life Coach*](#) by Susan Britton Whitcomb. Like *Resume Magic*, Whitcomb's interviewing compendium is a rich guide on its topic. A few highlights of the 500-page book include instructions on creating "SMART stories" about accomplishments for use in interviews, advice on integrating one's personal brand into the interview, tips on maintaining the right mindset for interviewing, a complete directory of types of interviews, extensive material on preparing for specific interview questions, and much more.

Runners-up:

- [*Mastering the Job Interview and Winning the Money Game \(Five O'Clock Club\)*](#) by Kate Wendleton
- [*Competency-Based Interviews: Master the Tough New Interview Style And Give Them the Answers That Will Win You the Job*](#) by Robin Kessler
- [*Sell Yourself in Any Interview: Use Proven Sales Techniques to Land Your Dream Job*](#) by Oscar Adler
- [*Boost Your Interview IQ*](#) by Carole Martin

8. **Salary negotiation:** [*Negotiating Your Salary: How To Make \\$1000 a Minute*](#) by Jack Chapman. Chapman's slim, regularly updated volume (now in its seventh edition) has sold more than 250,000 copies because it is *the* guide to salary negotiation, offering "tried and true techniques give job-seekers a completely fair advantage over the employer, a way to increase your salary by thousands, even tens of thousands of dollars in cash and/or benefits."
9. **Social-media job search:** [*Find a Job Through Social Networking: Use LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Blogs and More to Advance Your Career*](#) by Diane Crompton and Ellen Sauter. This is a tricky category in which being the most up-to-date means everything -- because change happens so rapidly on the Internet. *Find a Job Through Social Networking* is comparable to one of our runners-up, *Social Networking for Career Success*. Both were published in the same year, but we gave the edge to *Find a Job Through Social Networking* because it is in its second edition and therefore has established more of a track record. The book covers use of LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and other forms of social media to propel one's career. It also delves into identity-management sites, discussion groups, and online publishing/public speaking.

Runners-up:

- [*Social Networking for Career Success: Using Online Tools to Create a Personal Brand*](#) by Miriam Salpeter
- [*The Web 2.0 Job Finder: Winning Social Media Strategies to Get the Job You Want From Fortune 500 Hiring Pros*](#) by Brenda Greene and Coleen Byrne
- [*The Twitter Job Search Guide: Find a Job and Advance Your Career in Just 15 Minutes a Day*](#) by Susan Britton Whitcomb, Chandlee Bryan, and Deb Dib
- [*I'm on LinkedIn--Now What???: A Guide to Getting the Most Out of LinkedIn*](#) by Jason Alba

10. **Recessionary job search:** [*101 Best Ways to Land a Job in Troubled Times*](#) by Jay A. Block. This frequently nominated guide addresses the emotional fallout of job loss and unemployment while also suggesting dozens of action steps, some of them quite innovative. Each chapter ending summarizes a subset of the 100 best ways to which the title refers.

Runners-up:

- [*The Job-Hunter's Survival Guide: How to Find a Rewarding Job Even When "There Are No Jobs"*](#) by Richard N. Bolles
- [*Eliminated! Now What?: Finding Your Way from Job-Loss Crisis to Career Resilience*](#) by Jean Baur
- [*Getting Back to Work: Everything You Need to Bounce Back and Get a Job After a Layoff*](#) by Linda K. Rolie
- [*Get The Job You Want, Even When No One's Hiring: Take Charge of Your Career, Find a Job You Love, and Earn What You Deserve*](#) by Ford R. Myers

11. **Career change:** [*The Career Coward's Guide to Changing Careers: Sensible Strategies for Overcoming Job Search Fears*](#) By Katy Piotrowski. This book covers the basic steps of transitioning from a current career to a new one by showing readers how to identify great-fit career options; make a confident choice about the best career; create a fun, doable career-change plan; and transition into a new career smoothly and successfully.

Runner-up:

- [*Working Identity: Unconventional Strategies for Reinventing Your Career*](#) by Herminia Ibarra

12. **Executive job search:** [*For Executives Only: Applying Business Techniques to Your Job Search*](#) by Bill Belknap and Helene Seiler. One of several books from the [*Five o'Clock Club*](#) nominated by experts, *For Executives Only* offers strategies you'll find nowhere else -- and strategies that work for a wide range of job-seekers, not just executives. It features case histories so readers can learn from others' successes as well as the pitfalls experienced by those who tried to tackle the job-search process on their own. The book covers every aspect of executive job search, as well as advice on managing a job-search campaign, staying organized, and dealing with the emotional roller coaster of the search.

13. **Entry-level job search:** [*Getting from College to Career: Your Essential Guide to Succeeding in the Real World*](#) by Lindsey Pollak. With a new edition releasing Jan. 31, 2012, *Getting from College to Career* offers both a track record and timeliness. The book equips new grads and other entry-level job-seekers to build the experience, skills, and confidence they need to start a major job search.

Runner-up:

- [*How to Get Any Job: Life Launch and Re-Launch for Everyone Under 30 \(or How to Avoid*](#)

[Living in Your Parents' Basement](#)), 2nd Edition by Donald Asher

14. **On the job/career sustainability and advancement:** [The New Leader's 100-Day Action Plan: How to Take Charge, Build Your Team, and Get Immediate Results](#) by George B. Bradt, Jayme A. Check, and Jorge E. Pedraza. This book is jam-packed with value-added downloadable tools that "leaders at every level" can use make the best of their first few months on the job. Readers will learn to assess the business context and internal political culture they'll be facing, understand team members' Behaviors, Relationships, Attitudes, Values, and Environment (the "BRAVE" approach to motivating teams), advise the boss for success, and use social media and other communication tools to reach and motivate stakeholders.

Runners-up:

- [The New Job Security, Revised: The 5 Best Strategies for Taking Control of Your Career](#) by Pam Lassiter
- [Who Gets Promoted, Who Doesn't, and Why: 10 Things You'd Better Do If You Want to Get Ahead](#) by Donald Asher
- [The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels](#) by Michael Watkins

15. **Self-employment:** [Making a Living Without a Job: Winning Ways for Creating Work That You Love](#) by Barbara Winter. This innovative book is all about how you can make a living by working when, where, and how you want. Highlights include instruction on how to find opportunity in a chaotic economy, why smart, "small and spunky" is the 21st Century business model, how to use the Internet to open the door to fresh opportunities, how to find the best resources to help create and grow a business, and how to leave "employee thinking" behind and build an "entrepreneur's mindset."

Runner-up:

- [Free Agent Nation: The Future of Working for Yourself](#) by Daniel Pink
- [The 9-to-5 Cure: Work on Your Own Terms and Reinvent Your Life](#) by Kristin Cardinale
- [Boomers into Business: How Anyone Over 50 Can Turn What They Know into Dough Before and After Retirement](#) by Lisa Orrell

Best of the rest: We were not able to vet the books on the list below; however, they were nominated as indispensable by career experts, coaches, and authors:

Comprehensive job search

- [How to Land Your Dream Job: No Resume! And Other Secrets to Get You in the Door](#) by Jeffrey J. Fox
- [Shortcut Your Job Search: The Best Ways to Get Meetings](#) by Kate Wendleton
- [The Unplanned Career: How to Turn Curiosity into Opportunity: A Guide and Workbook](#) by Kathleen Mitchell
- [The Unwritten Rules of the Highly Effective Job Search: The Proven Program Used by the World's Leading Career Services Company](#) by Orville Pierson
- [Job Search: The Total System](#) by Sheryl Dawson and Kenneth Dawson

Career choice

- [Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life](#) by Gregg Michael Levoy

- [*Creating Careers with Confidence*](#) by Edward Colozzi
- [*Passion at Work: How to Find Work You Love and Live the Time of Your Life*](#) by Lawler Kang and Mark Albion
- [*Targeting a Great Career*](#) by Kate Wendleton
- [*The Pathfinder: How to Choose or Change Your Career for a Lifetime of Satisfaction and Success*](#) by Nicholas Lore
- [*What Should I Do with My Life?: The True Story of People Who Answered the Ultimate Question*](#) by Po Bronson
- [*StrengthsFinder 2.0*](#) by Tom Rath
- [*The Passion Test: The Effortless Path to Discovering Your Life Purpose*](#) by Janet Attwood and Chris Attwood
- [*The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*](#) by Ken Robinson with Lou Aronica

Personal/career branding

- [*Branding Yourself: How to Use Social Media to Invent or Reinvent Yourself*](#) by Erik Deckers and Kyle Lacy

Networking

- [*Never Eat Alone: And Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time*](#) by Keith Ferrazzi and Tahl Raz
- [*Networking is a Contact Sport: How Staying Connected and Serving Others Will Help You Grow Your Business, Expand Your Influence -- or Even Land Your Next Job*](#) by Joe Sweeney with Mike Yorkey
- [*The Heart and Art of NetWeaving: Building Meaningful Relationships One Connection At a Time*](#) by Robert S. Littell
- [*Smart Networking: Attract a Following In Person and Online*](#) by Liz Lynch

Resumes and cover letters

- [*15-Minute Cover Letter*](#) by Louise Kursmark and Michael Farr
- [*The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Perfect Resume*](#) by Susan Ireland
- [*The Elements of Resume Style: Essential Rules and Eye-Opening Advice for Writing Resumes and Cover Letters that Work*](#) by Scott Bennett
- [*Knock 'em Dead Resumes: Standout Advice from America's Leading Job Search Authority*](#) by Martin Yate

Interviewing

- [*Mastering the Job Interview and Winning the Money Game*](#) by Kate Wendleton

Recessionary job search

- [*Ground of Your Own Choosing: Winning Strategies for Finding & Creating Work*](#) by Beverly Ryle
- [*Knock 'em Dead -- Secrets and Strategies for Success in an Uncertain World*](#) by Martin Yate
- [*The Quick 30/30 Job Solution: Smart Job Search Tips for Surviving Today's New Economy*](#) by Ronald Krannich and Neil P. McNulty

Career change

- [*The Professional Job Changing System - For Professionals Seeking \\$50,000 to \\$1,000,000*](#) by Robert J. Gerberg
- [*Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*](#) by William Bridges

Entry-level job search

- [*Hitting Stryde: A Gen Y Career Survival Guide*](#) by Daneal Charney and David James Singh

On the job/career sustainability and advancement

- [*The Secret Handshake: Mastering the Politics of the Business Inner Circle*](#) by Kathleen Kelly Reardon Ph.D.
- [*Hacking Work: Breaking Stupid Rules for Smart Results*](#) by Bill Jensen and Josh Klein

Uncategorized

- [*Ambition Is Not a Dirty Word: A Woman's Guide to Earning Her Worth and Achieving Her Dreams*](#) by Debra Condron
- [*If You Have to Cry, Go Outside: And Other Things Your Mother Never Told You*](#) by Kelly Cutrone and Meredith Bryan
- [*Luck is No Accident: Making the Most of Happenstance in Your Life and Career*](#) by John D. Krumholtz and Al S. Levin
- [*Overcoming Barriers to Employment: A Step-by-Step Guide to Career Success*](#) by Ron and Caryl Krannich
- [*The Career Clinic: Eight Simple Rules for Finding Work You Love*](#) by Maureen Anderson
- [*Radical Careering: 100 Truths to Jumpstart Your Job, Your Career, and Your Life*](#) by Sally Hogshead
- [*Brag!: The Art of Tooting Your Own Horn without Blowing It*](#) by Peggy Klaus
- [*And What Do You Do?: 10 Steps to Creating a Portfolio Career*](#) by Barrie Hopson and Katie Ledger
- [*Over 40 & You're Hired!: Secrets to Landing a Great Job*](#) by Robin Ryan
- [*One Small Step Can Change Your Life: The Kaizen Way*](#) by Robert Maurer
- [*Linchpin: Are You Indispensable?*](#) by Seth Godin

Final Thoughts

While it's nice to think of a library of 15 outstanding books that cover job search and career from soup to nuts, careerists are fortunate to have a list of 96 books recommended to them by top career experts.