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GUEST COMMENTARY

Job Hunting: One Experience

by

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National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* recently featured a piece by Annie Baxter called "[Fear Is The Biggest Hurdle For Some Job Seekers](#)" (February 16, 2012). This feature presented a hurdle that most people probably do not realize exists; namely, that for many long-term job-seekers, the fear of going back to work is quite real and intimidating. The person interviewed, Jillaine Smith, was keeping her LinkedIn resume up-to-date, but was not attending job fairs or actively involved in other networking activities. Jillaine had been out of work for three years and was starting to doubt that she had what it takes to make it in the workplace today, even though she had 25 years of professional experience. Baxter went on to explain that this fear can result in "self sabotage," which hinders the ability and desire to find employment, and that while most unemployed feel this fear, they are too embarrassed to talk about it. Those feelings are very closely related to how I felt after looking for a full-time job for four years after earning my MLIS.

After graduating from Kent State University in 2007, I was employed full time as an assistant to the chair of a department at The Ohio State University and as a part-time librarian at a community college in Columbus. I was working as an evening and weekend librarian to get actual experience in a library setting. I was "waiting my turn," so to speak; biding my time for three years while looking and hoping for a full-time library position. My only other prior library experience was a two year position as an office assistant in library administration at The Ohio State University. Frankly, I didn't have enough library experience to build my future career upon.

While working nights and weekends, I didn't have much occasion to do more than answer reference questions and occasionally work on special projects. It can be hard to keep current on library trends and technologies when you are not working with them every day. While working part-time, I became active in ALA and was also hired as an embedded librarian for a school in Arizona. My library experience was slowly starting to build.

Consequently, during the past two ALA annual conferences, I would stop by the JobLIST Placement Center, but all I saw were young librarians who I thought were probably more current in the latest trends than me. This added to my dread of ever finding a job.

When the opportunity became available to work at the community college's new campus for 30 hours a week (but with no benefits), I jumped at the opportunity. After moving to the new campus, I realized that to find a job I was going to have to look past Ohio. I began sending out applications again, but it soon became very disappointing when I discovered that younger people were being hired into the positions. I finally came to the realization that it was evident that I was older from my application—and that fact was not helping me secure a full-time job.

At the ripe-old-age of 36 and after four years of looking for a job, I was starting to doubt my capabilities

and marketability as a librarian. However, by this time, I knew my passions lay in the direction of working with Distance Education, or “transitioning” students.

Eventually, after five or more phone interviews, I was invited for an on-campus interview. Like the people that human resources manager Alice Ferdinand discussed in Baxter’s story, I think my fear and dread of ever finding a job was evident in my demeanor. I practically begged the search committee to take a chance on me. As one would imagine, I did not get the job. After a handful of telephone/web conference interviews and a stack of rejection letters after that on-campus interview, my confidence in my abilities as a librarian continued to plummet. It did not help that my ideas and work were being almost completely ignored by my employer. I was trying to use skills that I knew would get me a full-time job, but with no feedback. Without feedback, I didn’t know if my ideas were bad or good. This fueled even more doubt and fear.

I finally made a decision to be more selective about where I wanted to work. After a year of job searching outside of Ohio, I had several on-campus interviews. With each interview my confidence started to grow and I was able to decide that a couple of the places I visited would not be a good fit for me. Finally I was rewarded with a job offer. Just a few months ago, I found a great full-time position at a library where I knew I would love to work. I have been employed for three months and have been very busy using the skills and knowledge I feared I was lacking. The sometimes dreadful process of finding a full-time job was worth it as I grew with the experience in so many ways and ultimately found a position where I am very happy and feel appreciated.

Share your job hunting experience on the TLA Forum site <http://www.tnla.org/forum.cfm>