

DEALING WITH REJECTION

Looking for work is exciting. If you've acquired the skills and experiences employers seek, and you've worked hard on your application materials, hopefully you'll land a position that brings you satisfaction and success! That's the feel-good stuff. What people don't tell you is that for each job offer you receive from an employer, you're likely to receive several rejection notices from other employers. Nobody is selected for every single job to which they apply. Rejection is a normal part of the job search. Nonetheless, it can sting! This handout, co-written by the Career Center and Counseling Center, will provide you with guidance for coping with rejection when applying for jobs and internships, as well as scholarships, majors, and graduate programs.

Adjust your Expectations

- Expect rejection...and expect rejection to hurt
- Review the myths on the back page and modify your thinking as necessary

Follow up

- After submitting an application or participating in an interview, contact the employer to check on the status of your application (unless explicitly instructed not to do so)
- If you are not selected for a position, ask the employer for feedback (without sounding bitter or defensive) about how you can make yourself a stronger candidate in the future

Take a Step Back and Reflect

- Try to analyze your job search efforts and figure out what might be going awry
- Be willing to adjust your approach, revise your materials, or try new strategies
- Be honest with yourself about your competencies and marketability for certain jobs
- Consider being either more selective or less selective in terms of the jobs you're willing to pursue
- Use Career Center resources to help enhance your resume, cover letter, and interviewing skills

Find a Way to Stay Positive

- Use positive self-talk and affirmations to remember your worth as an individual
- Try to stay optimistic so your mood doesn't spiral downward
- Celebrate the "almosts" – after all, making it to the final pool of candidates is quite a feat!
- Find a mantra or cliché that gives you strength

Take Care of Yourself

- Make sure you eat a healthy diet, get adequate sleep, exercise, and get fresh air
- Talk to friends and family, visit with a counselor, write in a journal or blog – get your feelings out!
- Engage in enjoyable activities that build your confidence
- Minimize alcohol consumption, because alcohol is a depressant and will likely make you feel worse

Take a Break

- If you get tired of job searching, allow yourself to take a break from it – even if it's just a day
- When the break is over, keep trying. Persistence is important to job search success.

Uncovering the Myths that May Underlie Your Reactions to Rejection

Here are six myths that may be influencing your thoughts and feelings, whether you are consciously aware of it or not. See if you hold to any of them and if you do, work with yourself or someone else to fully explore them and to see if you can change your perspective:

1. "I'm as good (or better) than anybody else"

This may be true regarding your approach to life in general, but it may not be true about your qualifications for the job for which you are applying. In today's economy, there will be many, many people who apply to the same job openings as you. Be prepared to compete with many talented, experienced people. Use this awareness of the competition to highlight what makes you an asset to an employer.

2. "I have control over my life"

Those who believe that they control their own lives have probably not experienced anything that would contradict this, and they are indeed rare. Being rejected can be painful, but it is also a great learning experience. One of the bright spots in being rejected is that we learn (hopefully) to be more humble, and that there are only so many things that we can really control.

3. "Life is fair"

Have you ever been disappointed? Have you ever experienced circumstances that humbled you beyond your expectations? Have you ever visited a third-world country where the average life expectancy is 35 years? If you have, you might not hold this belief. But we often forget about the things that contradict our awareness and it is easy to slip into believing that "life is fair" when we are in the comforts of our own surroundings.

4. "The world owes me"

This isn't an easy one to admit to, but there are people who believe it and who expect life to happen according to their plan. If you truly believe the world owes you anything, then being rejected by an employer can really, really sting. There's no remedy for this, other than to correct your thinking by perhaps visiting someone who is less fortunate than you.

5. "I deserve to get everything I want"

If this is the basis for your negative feelings arising from a job rejection, you have probably lived a very privileged life. Americans have been marketed to so much that we can begin to believe some of the media messages that we see and hear 24/7. It might help to get some perspective by seeking experiences that are out of your comfort zone, such as volunteering at your local food bank, immigration center, hospital, or homeless shelter.

6. "I need for my job to make me happy"

A job can be a very rewarding part of life, but happiness is an inside job. Just as you wouldn't want to saddle your partner with the job of making you happy, neither should you expect that of your job. If you're not a happy person by nature, check out the book *No Reason to be Happy*, by Marci Shimoff, for help in turning a negative attitude into a positive one.

Our thoughts can determine our feelings. If you are feeling depressed, angry or sad that you did not receive the job offer you had been hoping for—and these feelings persist beyond a day or so or cause you to be debilitated— then you may wish to seek professional help in getting more balance to your emotional life.