

THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR AND  
BESTSELLING CAREER HANDBOOK



# WHAT COLOR IS YOUR PARACHUTE?

YOUR GUIDE TO A LIFETIME OF  
MEANINGFUL WORK AND CAREER SUCCESS

**2022**

**RICHARD N. BOLLES**  
WITH KATHARINE BROOKS

ONE OF THE ALL-TIME 100 BEST NONFICTION BOOKS —*TIME*



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"I DON'T HAVE A PARACHUTE  
OF ANY COLOR."

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MEANINGFUL WORK AND CAREER SUCCESS

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# Introduction to the 2022 Edition

## Why are you reading this book?

Maybe someone recommended it to you. Lots of people do. While working on this latest edition, I lost count of the number of people who told me “my mother bought it for me” or “a friend used that book—and it worked!”

Maybe you’re hoping to change your career, or you’re seeking your first job, or you’re returning to the workplace after some time away. Maybe recent changes in the economy have forced you to seek a new job—or even a new career field. Whatever your job or career challenge, the highly successful system in *What Color Is Your Parachute?* is your solution. And this new edition has much to offer:

- Updated career advice and information
- Specific guidance on changing careers, no matter your age
- Techniques for winning the mind game of the job search
- Employer-based advice for all aspects of the job search
- Advice for dealing with challenges you fear are holding you back
- Suggestions on how to connect with advocacy groups and others who can support you
- Special tips for job seekers who are introverts
- Updated social media advice, especially for job-search powerhouse LinkedIn



- Helpful rubrics to quickly analyze and improve your resume, cover letter, and LinkedIn profile
- Tips for creating powerful interview stories
- Internet-based job-search techniques and resources that actually work
- Salary and benefits negotiation guidance
- And, of course, the highly popular, successful, and classic Flower Exercise, which has been revised and updated

When *What Color Is Your Parachute?* was first published in 1970, it revolutionized the concept of job hunting. Unlike traditional guides to the job market, it helped job seekers understand themselves first, then find the jobs that fit, using a mix of good-humored advice and practical strategy. Richard N. Bolles also went against conventional wisdom to update the book annually, keeping it constantly relevant to new generations of job hunters facing changing times. By the time Richard passed away, it had become the bestselling job-hunting book in the world, with numerous awards and more than ten million copies published in twenty-two languages.

I have used his books throughout my own career; whether working in human resources at a department store, studying for my master's degree in rehabilitation counseling (where this book was required reading), or providing career counseling and coaching to a broad range of individuals through good and bad economic times. It is an honor to be asked to work on this edition and continue the important tradition of yearly revision.

Much of *What Color Is Your Parachute?* is written in the first person, so throughout this book you will see the word "I." Sometimes it will refer to Richard Bolles; sometimes to me. Most of the time it doesn't matter. Where the ownership of the statement is significant, you'll see (RB) after

statements attributable to Richard Bolles and (KB) after statements attributable to Katharine Brooks.

What I love about the Parachute Approach is the level playing field it provides for all job seekers in every employment sector. In Richard's writings, you see his timeless advice and wisdom in action. His compassion and respect for all workers. His emphasis on the importance of choosing your career and not letting the job market choose it for you. His encouragement to take the time to do a thorough self-evaluation before hitting the job market. And his belief in the importance of all careers, from pipe fitters to harp builders to doctors. With his usual aplomb, he deconstructed the holy grail of every job seeker: a job that fits your passions and fulfills your life mission. And he was quite transparent, practical, and honest in his approach to that search.

On the top of my computer, I have a sticker that reads "This Isn't Career Development. This Is Rocket Fuel." Well, Richard and I don't have a rocket, but we do have a parachute to offer you. A way to land efficiently and happily in this crazy, messy landscape we call the job market. Safe and fulfilling journeys to you all.

**“Go and get your things,” he said.  
“Dreams mean work.”**

—PAULO COELHO

# WELCOME TO THE EVER- CHANGING WORLD OF THE JOB SEARCH

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*If you are trying to better understand yourself, and what you have to offer to the world, this book is for you.*

*If the recent turmoil created by the COVID-19 virus has impacted your work situation, this book is for you.*

*If you are out of work and want practical help, this book is for you.*

*If you are trying to understand how the world, and particularly the world of work, really works these days, this book is for you.*

*If you've been out of work a long time, and you think you're now permanently unemployable, this book is for you.*

*If you're on the edge of poverty these days, this book is for you.*

*If you're dealing with a disability, this book is for you.*

*If you're trying to figure out a new career or your first career, this book is for you.*

*If you are trying to figure out what you want to do next with your life, this book is for you.*

*If you're trying to find a better work/life balance, this book is for you.*

*If you're stuck in your role and need a way out, this book is for you.*

*If you're just graduating from college and have to live with your parents because you can't find any work, this book is for you.*

*If you're trying to start your own business, this book is for you.*

*If you're a returning vet, this book is for you.*

*If you're facing retirement and want to know what to do to support yourself, this book is for you.*

## **A Quick Crash Course on the World of Work**

Job markets are fickle. For some people, a lot of people, the past few years have been a great economic period with lots of opportunities. But recent developments related to COVID-19 changed the employment landscape for many industries. Even without the health-related impact, industries and jobs are changing rapidly. Depending on your career field, you may find lots of opportunities or very few. The process of finding a job seems overwhelming. Many a job seeker says, *“Out of work. Made up a resume. Sent it to all the places I’m supposed to. Went to all the internet ‘job boards’ and looked for vacancies in my field. Day after day. Week after week. Month after month. All of this worked the last time I went job hunting. But now? Strikeout! Nothing!”*

That’s because writing a resume and using job boards isn’t enough. Job-hunting methods change depending on what you’re seeking, and the whole system has become more sophisticated. You need to look at the process through the eyes of the employer and adjust your strategy. While the general process of getting a job hasn’t changed that much, the methods for searching have.

The good news is, no matter what the job market is doing, you are in charge. This is your search, and you get to control how it goes. Not everything, of course. But more than you think. That’s what this book is all about. Here’s what you need to keep in mind as you begin your search.

## **There Are Jobs Out There**

Let's start with some good news: on average over the past few years, there have been between six and nine million vacancies available each month.<sup>1</sup> If you're currently out of work and looking for a job, this may seem unbelievable. You may feel you are up against overwhelming forces, that the situation you face is rather hopeless. Certainly the effect of COVID-19 has thrown any previous statistics about job vacancies out the window. The job market is likely to be volatile until the health crisis is resolved. You may have struck out, again and again. Or you may be seeking a different opportunity. It may feel like the opportunities aren't out there, but they are. You just need a better strategy for finding them.

How do we even know what the job market is doing? Basically, there are two government reports that tell us (and the media) how the job market looks. The Employment Situation Summary published by the Bureau of Labor Standards ([www.bls.gov/cps](http://www.bls.gov/cps)) tells us the unemployment rate. This report, issued monthly, also tells you what the unemployment rate is in different sectors of the economy. A second government report, the Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS; [www.bls.gov/jlt](http://www.bls.gov/jlt)), tells you how many jobs are open in any given month. You can always use these website addresses to find the latest numbers.

Of course, the question for us when we're out of work is, "If there are jobs available each month, why can't I get one of them?" That's the subject of the rest of this book.

## **Many Jobs Are Being Reimagined**

Have you heard the term "disruption"? It's everywhere, thanks to the internet and the technology boom of robotics, artificial intelligence (AI), issues related to the pandemic, and so on. Virtually no workplace has been

unaffected by changes wrought by technology and current events, which have positive but also negative effects on the job seeker. The long-term effects of COVID-19 on the workplace remain to be seen, but the increase in working-from-home opportunities may signal a greater increase in virtual workplaces. There are also cultural changes brought on by the increasing diversity of the workplace, and economic changes from the increased emphasis on the bottom line and profit, even in nonprofit areas. Many doctors, lawyers, and even college professors lament that their professions are more like businesses these days. With the rise in artificial intelligence and computers that can perform jobs previously held by humans, we each need to look at our own industry and position to determine how at risk we are for a “disruption.”

Many industries have already felt the impact of AI and robotics. Certain jobs—such as cashiers, bank tellers, telemarketers, receptionists, and assembly-line workers—have been replaced by machines, robots, and online technology. The transportation industry has been visibly disrupted, with commercial taxis and shuttles being replaced by Ubers and Lyfts. And there will likely be disruption for Uber and Lyft drivers, not to mention truck drivers, when driverless vehicles become commonplace.

At the same time, many aspects of the workplace will remain the same, and not every job will be replaced by robots and artificial intelligence. A Pew Research Center report on robotics offers hope in that technology often creates new jobs while reducing old jobs. And technology can reduce the drudgery of many jobs, opening the opportunity for more interesting and innovative jobs.<sup>2</sup>

Robots and related technology will not eliminate all jobs; rather, they will tackle certain tasks within jobs. This means that most jobs are going to become a partnership between people and machines. Large segments of the

world of work will not see or feel this reimagination until some years down the road; other parts are already seeing it, or will see it soon. We must begin—now—to reimagine our own lives in the world of work and get comfortable with the idea of future jobs as a partnership between people and machines.

### **It's Always Your Job Search**

You are not powerless during the job hunt, regardless of whether the job market is strong or weak. Of course, employers have significant power in the process. But that doesn't mean they hold all the power. You have the ability to compete in the job market and, armed with the techniques in this book, to approach the job search in a powerful and professional manner, no matter what occupational field you're in or what job you are seeking. You have control over the quality of your job-search materials, the research you conduct, the interviews and networking you do, and virtually every other step in the process. You also get to define what "success" is for you. For some people it's a title, prestige, or money. For others it's serving a purpose or finding meaning. Sometimes it's all of those factors. However you define career success (and we will examine that later), the good news is you control a lot of this process. Knowing that the employer has the ability to say yes or no can make you feel powerless, but that's all the more reason to take charge of your search.

A comprehensive research study<sup>3</sup> found that you can at least double your chances of success in your job search by doing six things:

- Mastering job-search skills
- Improving the way you present yourself in interviews and elsewhere
- Being more aware of and confident about your skills



- Taking action
- Setting goals
- Getting help when needed

In other words, the mere act of reading this book and completing the exercises has the potential to more than double your odds of success in the job search!

As you go along in this process, the key word you're looking for is employability. *Am I employable? And how can I make myself more employable?* That's the purpose of this book: to make yourself as strong—and employable—a candidate as possible for the industries you're interested in.

### **Employers and Job Hunters View the Job Search Differently**

So we know there are jobs out there, but here's where the challenge begins. Job hunters and employers don't approach the search in the same way. The rules of engagement for each side are different, and in some ways employers and job seekers speak different languages. We think we have contacted an employer correctly with an email and attached resume; what we didn't know was that employer accepts resumes only through a website and won't open emails. We "follow the rules": write resumes, create cover letters, use employment agencies, and/or respond to online job postings and websites.

But employers don't always reach for resumes first. They prefer to hire people they know or have a strong connection to, so when an opportunity opens up they are more likely to look within their company or seek a recommendation from someone within their company. An unsolicited resume from a stranger isn't going to be as appealing. The chart on [this page](#) provides a great summary of the difference between how employers prefer to seek new employees and how most job hunters look for jobs.

We also have different expectations of each other. Here are some ways that employers and job seekers differ:

- **You want the job market to be a hiring game, but the employer regards it as an elimination game—until the very last phase.** Larger companies or organizations are looking at that huge stack of resumes on their desk, with a view—first of all—to finding out who they can eliminate. On average, a job posting receives hundreds of responses or resumes. But employers want to interview only a few candidates. Getting that stack or inbox full of resumes down to a manageable number is the employer’s first preoccupation.
- **You want the employer to take the initiative to find you.** And when they are desperate they will (*especially if you have applied math and technical skills!*). Some HR departments will spend hours and days combing the internet looking for the right person. But generally speaking, the employer prefers that it be you who takes the initiative to find them.

## Many, If Not Most, Employers Hunt for Job Hunters in the Exact Opposite Way from How Most Job Hunters Hunt for Them

THE WAY A TYPICAL EMPLOYER  
PREFERS TO FILL A VACANCY

THE WAY A TYPICAL JOB HUNTER  
PREFERS TO FILL A VACANCY

## **From Within**

Promotion of a full-time employee, or promotion of a present part-time employee, or hiring a former consultant for in-house or contract work, or hiring a former “temp” full-time. Employer’s thoughts: “*I want to hire someone whose work I have already seen.*” (A low-risk strategy for the employer.)

**Implication for Job Hunters:** See if you can get hired as a temp, contract worker, or consultant at an organization you have chosen—aiming at a full-time position only later (or not at all).

## **2 5**

### **Using Proof**

Hiring an unknown job hunter who brings proof of what he or she can do in terms of the skills needed.

**Implication for Job Hunters:** If you are a programmer, bring a program you have done—with its code; if you are a photographer, bring photos; if you are a counselor, bring a case study with you; and so on.

## **3 4**

### **Using a Best Friend or Business Colleague**

Hiring someone whose work a trusted friend of yours has seen (perhaps they worked for him or her).

**Implication for Job Hunters:** Find someone who knows the person-who-has-the-power-to-hire at your target organization, who also knows your work and will introduce you two.

## **4 3**

### **Using an Agency They Trust**

This may be a recruiter or search firm the employer has hired or a private employment agency—both of which have checked you out, on behalf of the employer.

## **5 2**

### **Using an Ad They Have Placed**

Usually on an internet job board or on their website.

## **6 1**

### **Using a Resume**

Even if the resume was unsolicited (if the employer is desperate).

- **In being considered for a job, you want your solid past performance (summarized on your written resume) to be all that gets weighed.**

However, the employer weighs your whole presentation, including your social media profile(s) and what they assess from your interview or other interactions with you.

- **You want the employer to acknowledge receipt of your resume—particularly if you post it right on their website**—but employers generally are too swamped with other things to have time to do that, so very few do. Most employers, for legal and other reasons, do not. Now that you know this, don't take it personally.

Why are these strategies so contrary to each other? Values. Job hunters and employers have completely different values during their search.

Employers' main value/concern is **risk**.

Job hunters' main value/concern is **time**.

Let me explain.

We job hunters want strategies that will enable us to cover as much of the job market as possible, in the least amount of time. So our value is **time**. Our chosen vehicle is a resume. We want to write it, or have it written for us, then be able to spread it across a vast landscape, with a click of the mouse.

The employer's chief value, on the other hand, concerns **risk**. The employer wants to hire the person who is the lowest possible risk. I mean *the risk that this hire won't work out*. And hiring the wrong worker can be costly to an organization. The cost isn't only financial. A bad hire can hurt employee morale, threaten teamwork and productivity, and even damage an organization's reputation.<sup>4</sup>

This information should help you understand why it's imperative that you adjust your job-hunting technique to fit the employer's needs. Again,

this book will help you do just that.

### **It's Hard to Predict How Long the Job Hunt Will Take**

An old formula used to say that for every \$10,000 in salary, expect to spend one month looking for the position. This means if you hope to earn \$50,000 you can expect to take five months to find a job. This isn't accurate anymore, but there is an interesting correlation between time on the search and the compensation for the position. Many minimum-wage jobs can be found rather quickly, even in a poor economy. But the higher the compensation and the more competition comes into play, the longer the search will take. That is, unless the skill set needed for the position is rare.

You really have no idea what might be going on behind the scenes in an organization's selection process. Often searches take longer than the employer expects as well. Sometimes the funding for a position is withdrawn. Or there's a decision to postpone hiring due to internal issues. Vacations, holidays, and so on can play havoc with interview scheduling. The bottom line is that there are factors influencing the length of time for a job search—many of which you'll never know.

Recent reports from the Department of Labor indicate that for about 21 percent of job seekers, the length of the job search is one to three months. For 16 percent of job seekers, it can take three to six months, and 43 percent indicated their search took over six months.<sup>5</sup>

Keep in mind when you see unemployment rates that not everyone taken into account wants to be in the labor force, for the time being. Some people are either discouraged about the job market (that's 631,000 people) or may be outside the labor force for other reasons (1,225,000 people), such as school or family responsibilities, ill health, the COVID-19 pandemic, or transportation problems.<sup>6</sup>

Long-term unemployment (more than one year) is a more complex situation. There are often other factors that go into someone's unemployment lasting over a year. Even if you've been out of work by choice, getting back into the workplace has its special challenges and can be discouraging unless you have honed your job-hunting skills. It's imperative to make sure your skills are current and appropriate for the economic times. If you've been job seeking for more than a year without success, that's a clear sign that whatever you are doing isn't working. It's time for a course correction. This book will help you correct your course and find new energy and hope.

### **You Will Likely Not Stay in One Job for a Long Time**

You may have parents or grandparents who stayed with one job or one company for many years. But the time spent in one job has been decreasing over the past few decades. Of jobs that workers found between ages eighteen and twenty-four, 69 percent lasted less than a year and 93 percent lasted less than five years. *Ah, youth*, we think to ourselves. No, it's not a matter of youth; even at jobs that workers found between the time they were thirty-five and forty-four, 36 percent lasted less than a year, and 75 percent lasted less than five years.<sup>7</sup>

Many factors go into the likelihood you'll stay with the same job for many years, from personal decisions (family to support or care for; children who don't want to move) to field of employment (tenure for teachers; union membership) to the monetary value and desirability of your skill set. Some fields require that you move around to move up or gain a better salary. When you change jobs by choice, you often can obtain a much higher salary than you would if you remained in the lockstep salary plans of your present employer.

A 2018 Pew Research analysis of census data found that more than a third of the workforce is now made up of millennials, and they are changing the career landscape.<sup>8</sup> As a group, they are much more likely to seek a better work culture, and they are willing to move to find that culture.

In general, full-time jobs (usually defined as working more than thirty-five hours a week) are getting harder and harder to find. This is frustrating for many workers who would like to work full-time. The number of people with part-time jobs who really want to work full-time currently numbers 4,837,000.<sup>9</sup>

As a result, a lot of job hunters have redefined what they're looking for. Some *seek* shorter-term jobs, often just for the length of a project, or whatever the parameter may be, to increase their flexibility.

The number of temp or part-time jobs continues to rise as more employers hire workers for short-term projects or specific tasks. An entire sector of the job market includes people who really only want short-term jobs, such as independent contractors, consultants, freelancers, and contract workers. This trend was first made famous by Daniel Pink in his 2001 book, *Free Agent Nation*.<sup>10</sup> Currently, part-time workers in the US total 25,130,000. By all accounts, the number and percentage of freelance workers is expected to grow every year. The increase in freelance work and work-from-home opportunities created by COVID-19 is likely to continue long beyond the pandemic, as employers and workers discover the advantages of working remotely.

The reason for this increase in temporary hiring, as you've probably guessed, is employers' desire to keep their costs down. In the face of the global economy and online competition, employers across the country (and, indeed, across the world) have developed a budget-friendly strategy, hiring only when they need help, and letting the employee go as soon as they don't

need that help.<sup>11</sup> Not to mention that part-timers don't have to be paid any benefits or granted paid vacation time. Indeed, 20 to 30 percent of those employed by the Fortune 100 now have short-term jobs, either as independent contractors or as temp workers, and this figure is predicted to rise to 50 percent during the next six years. Employers in the IT industry, in particular, are increasingly hiring someone for the time it takes to complete a project, rather than permanently hiring that person. Even in industries where people are hired allegedly for longer periods, employers are much more ready to cut the size of their workforce just as soon as things even begin to look bad. You thought you were being hired for a number of years—they said that, they meant that—but then fortunes change, and suddenly you're back out on the street, job hunting once again.

### **You Are Always Job Hunting**

Given that jobs don't last as long as they used to, we may be job hunting again, sooner than we think. How often? In a study released August 24, 2017, by the US Department of Labor, it was revealed that the average person in the US born between 1957 and 1964 held 11.9 jobs between the ages of eighteen and fifty.<sup>12</sup> A blog post for the Muse indicated that 58 percent of its millennial user base planned to change jobs in 2019, and the job-changing effects of COVID-19 remain to be seen. Job seekers are increasingly willing to move to find better opportunities.<sup>13</sup> Job hunting is no longer an optional exercise. It is a survival skill. This means the one thing in our life that we must get really skilled at, and become masters of, is the *new* job hunt.





## **Job Hunting Is Increasingly Online (But You Still Need People Skills)**

As ever-larger portions of the job search can be done online, your computer is your best ally in the process, so take full advantage of its power. Whether you use a word processor to create a targeted resume and upload that resume to a job board or website, use email to communicate with potential employers or your network, or develop your social media profile on LinkedIn, your computer can help you every step of the way. As social media and other sites have become ingrained into our daily lives—LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, WhatsApp, Zoom, YouTube, and the like—job hunters and employers have figured out how to use them in the job hunt. In fact, you can use free project management software, such as Trello (<https://trello.com>), to organize and set up all the steps of your search. And, of course, you aren't limited to your computer. Your smartphone and “wearables” such as watches all can help you with

your search. Many employers now text job candidates instead of using email.

Some readers may not be all that comfortable with the latest online and smartphone technology. Consider asking (or hiring) a computer-savvy family member or friend to help. Your local library can be particularly helpful: most libraries have public computers you can use and often offer classes related to computers. Taking the time to learn about and be more comfortable with a wide range of computer skills can help immeasurably in your search and on the job.

The internet is an invaluable source of information for your job search. Job seekers often lament that they would like to do something else but don't know what's out there. Well, the internet pretty much answers that question. One of the best ways to determine what jobs are posted these days is to search the key job boards, websites, and social media sites. Many employers now post openings on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and elsewhere—or at least they post the announcement of the posting, which you can then find on their website. You may or may not end up applying for positions from these sites, but if nothing else they will help you learn more about job descriptions and better understand the type of work that might interest you. You will also quickly learn the language of that workplace: the terminology in the job listing will help you formulate a better application. So try it out. This topic will be covered in depth later, but for the moment, think about an industry of interest, a job title you're considering, or even a geographic area you'd like to move to. Search these sites and see what you learn:

- **Indeed.com** is a mega job board that finds thousands of openings in every field or industry across the country.

- **Proven.com**, a site for employers, provides a list of the best job boards for job seekers at this address: <https://blog.proven.com/100-best-job-boards-to-find-niche-talent>.
- **Niche job boards** can help you find job vacancies in particular fields or industries. For instance, if you're interested in media-related jobs, Mashable.com is worth a look (<https://jobs.mashable.com/>). For a listing of a variety of opportunities from health care to finance to bilingual, visit [www.good.co/blog/list-of-100-niche-job-boards](http://www.good.co/blog/list-of-100-niche-job-boards).
- **Company job boards** on their website can be a terrific resource, particularly if you know what companies you are interested in. Always wanted to work at Walt Disney World? Their casting center is almost always hiring (<https://parksjobs.disneycareers.com/walt-disney-world-resort>). Just go to any company's website and look for a link to "careers," "jobs," or "opportunities." If you can't find anything, look for their human resources page. Just know that what is posted might be the tip of the iceberg (more on that later).
- **Age-related job boards** are another option if you fall into a specific category such as teenager or over fifty. If you're a teenager, check out <http://readyjob.org/companies-hire-teens>. Or if you are an experienced worker over fifty: check out AARP's job board at <https://jobs.aarp.org/>.

One word of warning as you investigate job-search boards: don't get scammed. The job-search process is fraught with misstatements, lies, and outright fraud. Be especially careful of job opportunities advertised on general websites where anyone can place an ad, such as Craigslist or Reddit.