

'Give Me a Chance' Will Give You No Chance

Life is not divided into semesters. You don't get summers off, and very few employers are interested in helping you find yourself.

Bill Gates

In his book *Jobs That Don't Suck: What Nobody Else Will Tell You About Getting and Succeeding in the Job of Your Dreams* (Ballantine Books, 1998), author Charlie Drozdyk offers a blunt, yet eloquent reminder of how jobs come to be:

A job is a product of somebody's hard work and inability to do everything on their own. For example, say Jill and Jane start a design company out of their living room. They max out their credit cards and eat peanut butter sandwiches for two years before they start making money. Their hard work pays off, and now they have more clients and more work than they can handle on their own. They take a look at their books and decide they can **just** afford to hire somebody to take up the extra load of work. ... This is what a job is. ... They're dipping into **their** profits to give you a job.

Talk to practically any entrepreneur and you will soon see the Energizer Bunny emerge before you. Most people who start companies would *love* to do *everything* in those companies if they could. But at some point that becomes impossible; there is too much to be done and too few people to do it. So employees are hired. The company grows some more, and more employees are hired. Then the company grows even more, and so on and so on and so on.

When you are in college—or even further along in your professional life, for that matter—it is easy to fall into the trap of believing

that jobs simply *are*. You might think of the jobs of the world in much the same way you view candy bars at the convenience store: You go in, you proceed to the candy aisle, you look at the dozens or even hundreds of options that are just magically sitting there, you pick the one you want, you plunk your money on the counter, and you start munching away as you walk out to your car. But jobs *aren't* candy bars, or oranges, or options on the menu of a Chinese restaurant. In the mind of an employer, jobs are a necessary evil—the activities the founder of the company might well be handling herself if the idea was not so preposterous. And jobs are not handed out to just anyone who stops by with 69 cents in hand; jobs go to people who can earn their salaries back—and then some—for the organization.

One of the most frequent questions I get from college students and recent graduates goes something like this:

I feel I have a lot to offer an employer. But I don't have any experience. Employers expect you to have experience, but you need a job to get that experience! Why aren't any employers willing to *give me a chance*?

The answer—from the employer's standpoint, at least—is simple and straightforward: Employers are not in business to “give chances”; they are in business to be as successful as they possibly can, and the only way they can do that is to hire the best people they can find. Period.

A while back a colleague and I gave a job-search presentation to a group of people who had recently been laid off from their positions. As I talked about how employers think when it comes to jobs and filling those jobs, I got into a fairly intense exchange with one young audience member who brought up the “why won't employers give me a chance?” question for discussion. I asked her to put herself in an employer's shoes for a minute and to imagine herself trying to decide between two candidates for a job: one who was clearly *offering* something to her and her small

company and another who was subtly asking for “a chance.” The young woman surprised me by saying she would offer the job to the latter candidate—because she could relate to that candidate given her own precarious employment situation.

“But what if,” I countered, “this company was really *your* company? What if you’d mortgaged your own home to get it going and failure would mean losing everything you have? Would you still give the job to the candidate who wants ‘a chance?’”

“Yes,” she said firmly.

“I’m sorry,” I replied, “but, respectfully, I just don’t buy that. If your house was *really* on the line and you *really* could lose everything, you’d hire the best person for the job.”

The woman never did budge—despite the gentle but real scoffs she began to hear from others in the audience—but I didn’t either. Why? Because employers will not—and do not—hire people they perceive to be beggars or whiners or charity cases. They do not hire candidates who are *asking for* something; they hire candidates who are *offering* something.

So eliminate the “why won’t employers give me a chance?” attitude from your job search mind-set. It is perfectly fine—and understandable—to feel that type of frustration on your own time. But if it seeps into your interactions with employers, “give me a chance” will give you no chance of succeeding.

Highlight This: When given the choice, an employer will hire the candidate who is offering something over the candidate who wants something—every time.