

# Reflecting on one's values increases success in job search, says study

October 3 2023, by Christoph Elhardt

---



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Researchers show in a new study that a short reflection exercise to boost self confidence increases job search success. This holds true even for the long-term unemployed and people over 50.

For many people, losing their job is not only a financial burden but also

a psychological one. They are stressed, worry about their social status and begin to doubt themselves. This makes searching for a job more difficult, because those who question their value have less confidence in themselves and generally apply for positions less often and less effectively.

This was the starting point of a new study that involved researchers from ETH Zurich. It shows that just a 15-minute reflection exercise to strengthen job seekers' belief in themselves increases their chances of landing a new job. The paper is published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

"People who ascertain that they know who they are and what they stand for find it easier to market themselves convincingly to potential employers. This increases their chances of finding a job," says Gudela Grote in explaining the study findings. Grote is Professor of Work and Organizational Psychology at ETH Zurich and initiated the study together with her former doctoral student Julian Pfrombeck, who is now an assistant professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

## **Reflecting on values for 15 minutes**

The researchers conducted two experiments with a total of 866 unemployed individuals, one-third of whom were older than 50. Of the total, 532 were registered as unemployed with the regional employment center (RAV) of the City of Zurich, and 45.9% of them had completed a university degree. The remaining 334 participants, who were recruited online, were job seekers living in the U.S. or Europe. Of this group, 37.4% had a university degree.

In both experiments, participants were randomly divided into two groups. Each received a list of 13 values, such as health, sports and fitness, nature, belonging to [social groups](#), and the joy of learning. "We

deliberately chose very general values because we didn't want to remind job seekers that they might be lacking certain skills," Grote says.

One group then was asked to spend 10 to 15 minutes to write a text on two or three of the values, explaining why they were important to them personally and how those values have been reflected in their lives. During the same time, the control group also wrote a short text about two or three values, only they were asked to focus on the values they considered least important. They did, however, have to explain why these values might be important to other people.

## **Everyone benefits, even job seekers over 50**

The clear results surprised even the study authors: people who spend 15 minutes thinking about themselves and their own values not only have a better chance of finding a job, but they do so more quickly and receive more job offers. What particularly surprised the researchers was that people over 50 as well as the long-term unemployed benefited just as much from the reflection exercise. These two groups often have greater difficulty finding a new job.

For those participating in the online experiment, the chances of finding a job doubled after four weeks: 13.7% of those who did the reflection exercise were successful. In the control group, the figure was only 6.2%. The chances of success even tripled for job seekers at the Zurich RAV: just under 11% of the job seekers who outlined what they stood for in a short text found a new job after four weeks. In the control group, it was 3.4%.

After eight weeks, however, the effect waned and was no longer statistically significant. "This could be because the self-reflection exercise provided a motivational boost, the effect of which wore off after some time," explains Pfrombeck, the study's lead author. The

researchers were also able to rule out the possibility that the study participants were more likely to take jobs that paid less and were less suited to their needs compared to the control group.

## **Shorter period of unemployment, more job offers**

Job seekers from Zurich who practiced this self-affirmation were registered with the RAV for an average of 2.56 days less than people in the [control group](#). "This difference may seem small, but based on the average daily allowance in Zurich, self-affirmation could save around 500 Swiss francs per person," Pfrombeck points out.

The study also showed that the participants received more job offers within four weeks after the reflection exercise: in both the online group and among job seekers at the Zurich RAV, about one in five people who completed the exercise received an additional job offer. Again, the effect decreased after eight weeks.

## **Managing the application process better**

"Encouraging job seekers to think about important personal values is a way to boost their self-confidence. They're then more likely to see themselves as valuable individuals who have something to contribute at work and in society," says Grote about the results.

The researchers believe that getting [job seekers](#) to reflect on their values helps them better cope with the application process, which can be rife with disappointments. They are more able to recognize their own strengths and values and to communicate these to potential employers.

**More information:** Julian Pfrombeck et al, Self-affirmation increases reemployment success for the unemployed, *Proceedings of the National*

*Academy of Sciences* (2023). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.2301532120](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2301532120)

Provided by ETH Zurich

Citation: Reflecting on one's values increases success in job search, says study (2023, October 3)  
retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-10-values-success-job.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.