

Additional Considerations



**Hunting for a job where a
bicycle is your primary
transportation**

by Brian Bigelow

~ Introduction ~

This book will be a bit different than most of the job hunting books that are available. It has been written by someone that doesn't have a drivers license and understands that it changes a few things when someone is seeking employment. In 2005 I lost my driving privileges as a result of being caught driving without insurance. This has made my job hunts much more difficult than they would have been otherwise if I had been able to drive a car. Of course the downturn of the economy in 2007-2008 didn't help me at all either, it made it even harder to be successful at finding employment. When you rely on a bicycle as transportation it definitely doesn't mean that you can't or won't be able to find a job, it just means you have to effectively pre-plan how you are getting to an interview on time. You'll also have to prepare yourself for how you will be answering specific questions when they come up as they invariably do.

At the end of the book I've included a copy of my actual resume which I will be referring to elsewhere. As you will be able to see I've had to hunt for a job many times in the last few years and I've never let it get me down. I've had to become much more determined and work much harder than most people to be successful at finding a job. While this book is mostly directed at someone that uses a bicycle as a primary form of transportation there are quite a few tips that will help anyone to become more effective. My desire is to help as many people as I possibly can to get the jobs that they want in any job market.

~ Your Bicycle ~

My primary transportation happens to be a bicycle (the picture on the cover is of my present bicycle) which can cause some problems in and of itself. Among the things that can be problems for you are snow, slush, puddles and rain. A blazing hot summer sun can be an issue also as the last thing you want to have happen when showing up to an interview is being extremely sweaty and breathing really hard because the road to the interview happens to mostly be uphill. It also takes longer to get around than it would take in a car, sometimes quite a bit longer.

It is because of my showing up to an interview for an appointment setter position just after a snowstorm occurred is why I put fenders on my bicycle very shortly after. When I got to the interview I was wet up to my chest and my shoes were covered with slush. As I remember it took about two days for my shoes to completely dry out. Oh, I did get the job which I didn't do very well at as it turns out that I'm really not a very good appointment setter. My belief is that he hired me because I really showed I wanted the job by getting soaked and not rescheduling the meeting.

For me, because of this episode I consider fenders to be an absolute necessity when using a bicycle as a primary means of transportation. This is especially true when you are using your bicycle to get to an interview. You need to keep your clothes as clean as possible so that you will be as presentable when you meet an interviewer. More than once I made sure that I didn't let an interviewer see my

back because of a splash from having hit a puddle on my way to an interview. Also I consider headlights and taillights to be necessary as they will help keep you safe when riding at night. The last thing you want is to be hit by a car on the way to an interview because they couldn't see you riding down the road.

I've also used a flashlight in one of the holders that are designed to attach to the handlebars. Flashlights are not as a rule very bright so I recommend this only if you cannot afford a bicycle headlight. As a rule, most headlights work very well on rechargeable batteries which I highly recommend as they will save you a lot of money, when I used alkaline batteries in a headlight I went through about one set per week. Helmets are also a good idea but since they can mess up your hair pretty severely you need to bring a comb with you.

I'll also state that having a rear rack is also a great idea, I have a Axiom which happens to be an extremely heavy duty rack that will support about 130 pounds (about 60 kg). It will hold everything I could possibly need for an interview including my blazer and a resume portfolio. If at all possible do not scrimp on the rack that you purchase, the cheap ones will break at a bad time I have found as a rule. Another thing I did a couple of years ago is buy and install solid inner tubes which have a blessing. They are kind of expensive until you realize you never have to buy inner tubes again. While on your way to the interview site you will probably want to attach your blazer to the rack as it can get hot riding. Make sure you bring a couple of store bags so that you can protect your blazer and your resume portfolio.

~ Learning Your Focus ~

This job market is definitely different than the way it used to be. It used to be one where you could be a jack of all trades and a master of none. That has changed and now to some extent you now have to be at least somewhat specialized. When you are setting up or editing your online profiles, resumes, cover letters with a definite target in mind. I remember starting my 2008 job hunt with submittals for every opening I could find. It wasn't successful because I wasn't focused on a primary job that I wanted to get. Also it wasn't focused on filling specific employer needs. After about a month I realized the mistake that I was making and readjusted my search accordingly so that I would be filling a need.

My Grandfather had a statement that he would make: "Find a need and fill it." This definitely applies now in this job market and was his answer on what you needed to do to ensure you could find a job. Where this applied I felt in 1983 when I first hit the job market was to simply try to look at what an employer needed and do my best to match that. It has been pretty successful I'll admit. One day I decided to become a house framer and bought all of the tools which I brought when asking for the job. After a little research I found out that having tools was a big plus. Taking up house framing was over all good, it's made it much easier for me to remodel my house now. It's saved me a lot of money in fact.

If I made such a career change these day it would be much more difficult (and I made a lot of career jumps in the past). Employers can and frequently do searches on

the backgrounds of prospective employees. What are they going to find? Are they going to find what pertains to the job that you are applying for? This is why you need to go through everything for your last two or three jobs. You need to be able to explain differences and in particular what applies to the position you are applying for. No matter what your primary optimal career choice is you need to focus on what an employer is looking for. To tell you the truth any employer is looking for what they need specifically, not everything that you could possibly offer. So because of this you need to set up your online profiles, resumes and cover letters with that thought in mind. By its very nature the job market has changed to a more specialized one. It's definitely become harder to change careers. You really have to think a bit more about because of the internet.

~What to offer ~

You need to take some time, go through everything that you've in previous positions and write down the various tasks you've done. Part of what you write down becomes the basis for your present or future job hunts. Also of course you need to research the various prospective employers. What are they looking for? Where does your list match up? This is what you now offer future employers. Where all of this really came together for me was in the 2008 job hunt. While I had been doing it partially for several years, it didn't really click in my head. Making a spreadsheet to help define my job hunt success is what kicked it into high gear. It's what caused me to change my direction. Looking over my previous experience one job stood out over any other. For three years I had worked at a truck stop, from November 2002 to November 2005. When I started I was basically a janitor, later on I took on inventory duties and even later I was promoted to cashier. To this day I'm the only janitorial employee that was ever promoted to cashier. Being promoted to cashier was a real feather in my cap and frankly looks great on a resume or an application. This is one of the bullet points on my resume presently.

Note: Promotions make great bullet points on your job entries. They are accomplishments that should be noted.

Beyond my promotion I took a closer look at the truck stop job. My list was a bit like this:

1. Talking to customers
2. Cash handling
3. Paperwork

4. Store cleaning
5. Stock
6. etc.

Next, I went through quite a few help wanted ads. I wanted to know where the most available jobs were at the time. It didn't take long to begin noticing the various customer service positions available. Reading through the job descriptions I kept looking at my list. It didn't take long for #1. Talking to customers to stand out from the others. Taking a look at the rest of my list most of it didn't apply to most jobs. At least it wasn't anything that normally applies to customer service positions. Long story short it lead me further into customer service as a career choice. I was able to focus on those positions whenever I came across them on the various job boards. Also I was able to focus on what an employer is looking for during the application process. I didn't quite have it all together though as I was still not getting a job. I still had a ways to go as every interview I was either getting turned down, or worse not hearing anything. During a job hunt not hearing anything really doesn't make you feel good I can state from personal experience.

~ Body Language ~

One morning I was watching one of morning TV shows and they happened to have body language as one of the subjects of the show. Since I had an interview later that day and one the day before it really resonated with me. They were talking in particular about how you appear when you are sitting in a chair. Well, this really sunk in as I thought about the previous days interview. I sat down on a chair in our bedroom in front of the mirror and observed myself. It took about two seconds for me to realize that I had been slouching slightly. This was making for a bad image in the interviewers mind regarding me. This is something that I had to immediately change for me to be successful at getting a job. How you walk into a room, how you sit on the offered chair will greatly affect whether you get the job or not. Also, where do you place your hands? Are they on your knees during an interview?

Your hands need to be where they are seen, preferably on your knees though you can hold a copy of your resume in them. They also need to be held still, this used to be a real problem for me. I've normally been very nervous and I constantly moved my hands as I've also had a tendency to keep bouncing my knee. Letting your knee bounce, your hands move during an interview will detract otherwise. My understanding is that it is perceived on a subconscious level that you aren't paying attention. It just about drove me nuts at first but I finally did learn to hold my hands and knees steady at least during an interview. This increased my interview success rate by about half in and of itself. My earlier discovery

about my customer service career helped me to prepare much better which also increased my success rate and definitely helped me to get interviews to begin with. Another thing that really helped me out was interviewing myself in front of a mirror. I was able to see myself from the point of view of an interviewer. This even included how my body language appeared. As I recall I even made some voice recordings of myself so that I could actually hear myself from the interviewers point of view.

~ Interview Clothing ~

So I could look my best in any interview I decided to improve my clothing for interviews. Knowing that I needed to set myself apart from the average job seeker I began to collect some suits, two of which are three piece. In most of my life I don't any need for a suit, in fact I didn't have any before 2007. I'll never forget having to look up on-line how to tie a tie since I didn't know how to (This is probably the best source for how to tie a tie: <http://www.tie-a-tie.net/>). Most of the jobs I've held you don't usually need a tie for are interviews for house framing, maintenance and moving furniture jobs. In fact those types of jobs you probably still want to show up to an interview in a t-shirt and blue jeans because you need to show you are ready to work immediately. On second thought with this job market it might be a good idea to show up with a button up shirt that doesn't necessarily have to be a dress shirt but should be rather nice.

What I will recommend is that you have in your closet available are at least a couple of ties, two or three blazers, two or three pairs of slacks and two or three dress shirts. From what I've read the dress shirts should be long sleeved but since I don't like the feel of them on my wrists mine are all short sleeved. The sleeves do extend precisely to my elbow. Of additional note the interview clothes do not need to be new, mine had came from Goodwill, Salvation Army, etc. If you do go to such stores make sure there are no stains, tears, etc. You'll also need to obtain an iron and learn how to use it effectively along with needing an ironing board. Also of note, do not wash the suits in your washing machine as it

will cause the seams to tear and the seams to shrink (this is a mistake I made on one blazer).

You'll also want a good pair of shoes that goes together with the suits, slacks and of course some dress socks. Also thinking about it I would recommend having a brief case or a nice bag for carrying your resumes, cover letters, additional pens, a pad of paper and assorted notes. I guess I would call mine a portfolio bag, it has a lot of pockets and built in dividers and was initially a give away from a drug company. Both, my portfolio bag and my brief case came from Goodwill or Salvation Army stores. In addition to the other items I also used to carry an interview questions book, that way I could quickly practice a couple of questions before I went in to a place for my interview. "Best Answers to the 201 Most Frequently Asked Interview Questions" by DeLuca is the one I've used and is getting a little dog eared. Of further note is making sure the interview questions book is not visible during the interview. Since I do not drive a car I ended up having to carry everything into the interview with me.

One very important consideration is getting your pants leg caught in the chain. This is because the fabric of dress pants is not quite the same as that in a pair of blue jeans. What I recommend is cheap bungee cords that are available from just about any dollar store. You simply hook one of the short bungees around your pants cuff so that it can't get caught in the chain. Having had issues with both pants legs you will probably want two bungee cords. When removing them from your pants leg they do hook to themselves over the handle bars very effectively.

~How you got to the interview ~

If you are like me and don't drive I recommend not mentioning it because it will cost you being successful in the interview. Simply state that you will make it on time if you are hired which is what I've done many a time. Not having a car or a drivers license is considered a big negative in this job market. While I realize that I am in the minority when it comes to not driving I haven't let it be a problem when I've had to hunt for a job. It just isn't a subject I've allowed or to really come up after it cost me the job a couple of times. I've usually made mention of the fact that I'm almost always on time.

Note: You should only let the issue that you are on bicycle come up after you've already received a job offer, if at all.

Beyond that I don't recommend stating that the bus was packed, that traffic was really bad or your vehicle has occasional issues. This could easily be taken as a negative statement by any interviewer. They will focus on that statement and your candidacy will not be considered any further, in fact that job probably won't contact you at all or even state that you didn't get the job. Personally I like knowing whether I'm still a candidate or not. For me knowing is so much better, it helps me to figure out how well I am doing at the job hunt. At least if they let me know that they are not considering me further I can now expend more effort elsewhere on another position at another company. Also by letting me know that I'm not longer being considered I then know that I was really close to what they are looking for. With the number of people applying for the same job most HR people won't

contact you if you aren't close to what they are looking for.

A great place for finding out how to get to an interview is at Google maps at <http://maps.google.com/> . On the left side of the page once you select "Get directions" you will have the option of selecting by bicycle which is done by a little bicycle picture button. As a rule it will mostly show routing by trail which sometimes is shorter. Of additional note is that you probably need to double the amount of time that the mapping will show as I based my time showing up to an interview site on the displayed time. I ended up getting to the interview a bit late a couple of times.

How your resume is written I consider an appearance item, you don't want it really wordy. I've included my own resume at present at the end of this book minus my contact information. Notice that I have gone for simplicity above all else. This took a long time in editing, re-editing and re-editing some more. In fact, about every three months regardless of having a job or not I re-edit my resume again. This is because of the call center positions that I have held over the years and having to look for work at least once per year. In most cases the call centers I worked for relocated elsewhere and weren't bringing anyone with them to the new call center. While I understand anyone being upset about this kind of event you can't let it show during an interview or in your resume.

Notice the summary section that is part of my qualifications section, I worked very hard to summarize the entire resume into one complete statement that includes a couple of bullet points. These bullet points are written to be very concise and they also have quite a few key words that are taken directly from help wanted ads. You can easily build your qualifications section with the addition of what used to be a summary statement. While I've read over and over that a summary statement isn't necessary anymore I'm not sure that it is the case. If you build it into your qualifications section you are further demonstrating the earlier part of that section.

Beyond what I've stated here I will recommend two books to read regarding resumes. "Resume Power" by Tom Washington and "Building A Great Resume" by Kate

Wendleton. Both of these books recommend keeping it short and sweet which is why I've built all of my resume entries like I have. I've read them both many times and the both have been proudly a part of my job hunt personal library. Most libraries have copies of these books so you don't necessarily need to buy them but I do recommend reading them. In fact any resume book can help, it's just that the two I've written about happens to be the two that helped me the most.

~ Cell phones ~

During a job hunt while a bicycle is your primary transportation method you really need a cell phone. A cell phone is not something that is optional, it is an absolute necessity to be reached. You need to be reachable whenever and wherever you are at any moment. Knowing that you can't hear it very well while riding along between places you'll probably be turning up the ringer volume all the way. This means that you'll need to pay attention to turning down the volume when you reach an interview site.

I recommend that you have a stereo hands free set available at all times but you need to take it off your phone and stick it in your pocket, portfolio bag or your briefcase when you get ready to see the interviewer. A stereo hands free set will allow you to hear someone when they call you. Cars passing you by on a busy street will drown out your call pretty effectively, I'll never forget trying to respond to a phone interview at a traffic light downtown. It just didn't work very well as the cars were surprisingly loud all around me with engine noises and honks nearby.

If you forget to turn off your ringer before the interview as I have done a few times and a call comes in you need to make sure you totally ignore it. This shows that you are paying attention to the interviewer primarily. It also shows that you can shut something out if needed and focus on what you need to do after you are hired. Remember, the entire reason you are at the interview is that they are wanting you to put the customer first and foremost.

Since you are more often having to ride your bicycle from place to place and it takes a longer time to get there I will also recommend that you have internet on your phone. This way you will be able to check your e-mail just about anywhere at just about anytime. There has been more than once that I've replied to a prospective employers email while in a park or next to a road. I've even went as far as respond to a few Craigslist ads with my phones email client. Having internet on your phone isn't necessarily all that expensive, most of the carriers charge in the neighborhood of around \$5-\$10 per month as a plan add-on. It can make you so much more efficient that makes it worth it's while in my opinion and I always have added to my phone plan ever since.

~ In Closing ~

During the last couple of years it has been much more difficult to find a job for anyone but job hunting doesn't have to be depressing or extremely stressful. This is especially true if you are prepared for effective job hunting.

~ My Resume ~

Qualifications: Seven years of customer service with three years of inbound call center experience and presently one year in retail sales.

Demonstrating these skills and abilities consistently:

- ⤴ Efficient multitasking ability
- ⤴ Excellent communication skills
- ⤴ Advanced customer service skills
- ⤴ Extensive computer skills

Experience:

4/10-present Pleasures Colorado Springs, CO
Retail Clerk – Maintaining excellent customer relations to develop increased customer loyalty. Conducting transactions accurately while using effective active-listening skills. Assisted in opening the new Platte Avenue location for the company. Performing accurate and thorough inventories during weekly store product deliveries.

8/09-2/10 AAA Member Services Colorado Springs, CO
Customer Support Professional – Accurately processed changes for Northern California members on existing auto policies. Effectively used active-listening skills to ensure accuracy on all changes.

12/08-6/09 Comcast Colorado Springs, CO
Customer Service Representative – Excelled at assisting customers in resolving issues with billing, internet and television services.

10/07-8/08 Hewlett Packard Colorado Springs, CO
Help Desk Agent – Supported U.S. Postal service employees with Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook and Windows XP issues in a call center environment.

- ⤴ Top Agent Award in May 2008
- ⤴ Sensitive Security Clearance

1/07-10/07 ICT Group Colorado Springs, CO
Customer Service Representative – Analyzed needs to help Virgin
Mobile customers find solutions to cell phone service and billing
issues.

- ▲ One of the few temporary employees to be hired
permanent

11/02-11/05 Tomahawk Truck Stop Fountain, CO
Janitor, Inventory, Cashier – Maintained store cleanliness when
originally hired then took on additional responsibilities with store
order deliveries and inventories. Performed transactions and cash
drawer balancing accurately and efficiently once promoted to
cashier.

- ▲ Only janitorial employee ever promoted to cashier

Education

12/05-6/06 Kaplan University online
20 credits, Paralegal President's List Honors