

# SUMMARY

BY ALYSSA BURNETTE

## What Color is Your Parachute?

By Richard N. Bolles



# **Summary of What Color is Your Parachute? by Richard N. Bolles**

**Written by Alyssa Burnette**

Learn how to land your dream job.

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# Introduction

“What color is your parachute?” sounds like a pretty wacky title for a self-help book about employment! It’s especially strange because this book has nothing to do with parachutes at all. In fact, you won’t even find a single parachuting metaphor in its pages! So, why that title? Well, for one thing, it sticks in your head! It’s such a bizarre title that it makes you want to know what happens within the pages of this book. But the author also explains that the title was inspired by a conversation he had at a business meeting in 1968. When some colleagues told him that they were “bailing out” of a company that was going under, the tone of the comment gave the author food for thought. He remembers thinking that the term “bailing out” sounded a bit like you were literally jumping out of a plane that was about to crash and burn. It sounded risky and concerning, like the kind of activity that would necessitate a parachute, so he joked, “Oh yeah? What color is your parachute?”

His quip provided a good laugh for the author and his colleagues but it also got him thinking. He realized that drastic career changes are a bit like jumping out of a plane. He also realized that, if you’re doing something risky, it’s important to have the right safety equipment (like a parachute). But most of all, it’s important to know who you are, what you’re doing, and what you want out of this experience. Answering those questions can keep you safe and give you purpose and those are two things you need when you’re making a big life decision! And having the right safety equipment can help you land the job you want. So, over the course of this summary, you’ll learn about the tools you need to successfully land your perfect job.



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# Job Hunting is a Lot Like Dating

Have you ever thought about how looking for a job is a lot like dating? On the surface, it might seem like nothing could be further from the truth; dating is an attempt to meet a romantic partner and finding a job is about securing a meaningful form of employment. When you're dating, you're looking for love, a personal connection, and a sense of compatibility with another person. And when you're looking for a job, you're seeking an income that will help you pay the bills, a career that utilizes your skills, and a sense of purpose and accomplishment. In these respects, it certainly seems like dating and job hunting are completely opposite pursuits. But have you ever noticed that the interview process is very similar to the dating process?

The author observes that there are actually a striking amount of similarities and that being mindful of this can have a positive impact on your approach to the interview process. For example, when you're preparing for a job interview, you're probably focused on two things: you want to make a good impression on the interviewer and you want a sense of compatibility with the company. In other words, you want the interviewer to come away from the meeting thinking, "Wow, she's a great fit for that job!" As you can see, this is very similar to the goals you have in mind when you're approaching a prospective partner. In short, at the end of the day, both a job interview and a date end with one key question: "Are we a good fit for each other?"

So, if you thought about a job interview that way, how would it change your approach? Would it change the way you present yourself? Would it change the way you present your skills? It might! That's because, when we're on a date, we make a conscious effort to put our best foot forward. We don't show up in our stained sweatshirt and pajama pants. When asked, "What do you like to do for fun?" we probably don't say something like, "Lay on the couch all day and eat potato chips!" Instead, we try to present the best and most successful version of ourselves in order to impress the other person. We try to be funny and charming and kind. We make an effort to listen to the other

person, to make them feel important, and to show that we're interested in what they have to say.

In fact, most of us do this instinctively when we're on a date. So, why wouldn't we do the same thing when we're interviewing for a job? The author advocates putting these principles into practice and presenting a carefully curated version of yourself in an interview. Put your best foot forward by presenting yourself as someone who is pleasant, funny, professional, and polite. Make an effort to showcase your skills and talents that are relevant to the job. But if you're feeling insecure about your qualifications, the author has some good news! While it's definitely important to have the right tools and education for the job, nailing the interview usually depends more on the interviewer's impression of you than on your qualifications. So, if you really want to be successful in an interview and get the job you want, it's important to make the interviewer like you. And doing that requires you to learn about likability. So, what makes a person likable? And how do you make a good first impression?

The author observes that positive body language is key to giving someone a positive first impression of you. If you haven't thought about positive body language before, we'll break it down by considering the difference between "open" and "closed" body language. You might not be familiar with the names of these categories, but you definitely know them when you see them! For example, let's say you're confronting your teenage son about the amount of time he wastes in his room playing video games. If he stands with his arms folded across his chest and rolls his eyes at everything you say, you get the message loud and clear: he's closing himself off from you and putting emotional distance between the two of you.

Similarly, if you're meeting your best friend for lunch and she stands up to greet you with open arms and a big smile, you can tell that her response is open and warm. So, keep these principles in mind when you're meeting someone new for the first time! Don't be like your grouchy teenager; use your body to communicate openness. This might mean standing with your arms hanging loosely at your sides-- a position that suggests you're at ease with



yourself and others-- and with your body turned towards the other person in an open and inviting manner. By leaning towards the other person slightly, you indicate that you're interested in them and what they have to say. This creates a friendly atmosphere and invites the other person to feel at ease in your presence.

Maintaining direct eye contact is the next step. Obviously, you don't want to stare them down; too much unblinking eye contact and they may start to wonder if you have a creepy hidden dungeon in your basement. So, instead, initiate a few seconds of direct eye contact while smiling. This says simply that you see them and you're positive and willing to engage. And as an added bonus, this behavior will also help boost their impression of your IQ! We know that because in 2007, researchers at Loyola Marymount University conducted a study to measure the effect of eye contact on first impressions of intelligence. Nora A. Murphy, the lead researcher, described her findings as follows: "Looking while speaking was a key behavior. It significantly correlated with IQ, was successfully manipulated by impression-managing targets, and contributed to higher perceived intelligence ratings." Unsurprisingly, Murphy also found that wearing glasses enhanced a first impression of intelligence. So, while it's not necessary to wear glasses if you don't already need them, good eye contact is a must!

You may also find it helpful to remember that you would probably do all of these things on a date without any prompting. So, if you think about your job interview as being like a date and remember that establishing compatibility is the key focus of your interview, you might be able to eliminate the confusion and interview anxiety that follows most of us to job interviews. You may also find it helpful to remember that, just like when you're on a date, you have control over the type and amount of information you share about yourself. And, as we'll see in the next chapter, that last piece of advice is especially crucial when it comes to your online presence and social media.



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# Managing Your Digital Footprint

In an episode of the popular NBC comedy *Brooklyn Nine Nine*, police captain Raymond Holt is faced with a challenge when he attempts to run for election as commissioner of the NYPD. Being a straight-laced, no-nonsense man who believes in old-school values, Captain Holt is more than a little surprised when he learns that old-school methods for election campaigns have become obsolete in the modern age. But when his younger co-workers attempt to help him develop a social media presence, he resists, arguing, “If the mayor wants to make me the next NYPD commissioner, it’ll be because of my record and my qualifications, not my social media presence. This is a serious job.” But his co-workers astutely contradict his argument by responding that, “Social media-- and your race for commissioner-- is about being noticed. And right now, no one is noticing you.”

This example highlights an important message that is relevant even if you aren’t running for commissioner of the NYPD. However, when it comes to the relationship between social media and job applications, this example needs a little twist. In the case of most young candidates for employment, we cannot say, “No one is noticing you.” In fact, the reverse is true; sometimes people can notice you a little too much. And the amount of notice you attract can have a negative impact on your employment options. Here’s why: because our iPhones have become digital extensions of ourselves and our identities, how we represent ourselves online is just as important as cultivating a positive reputation in real life.

For example, in real life, you probably wouldn’t wear your sweat pants and bedroom slippers to a job interview where you wanted to be taken seriously. But for many people, their online presence is the digital equivalent of doing exactly that. If this describes you, you may be wondering, “What’s the big deal?” Social media is a more casual world, after all, populated by funny memes, cute kitten videos, and arguments with strangers on the internet. It’s not the same as real life at all... right? Actually, the author affirms that your

digital life can be more important and have more detrimental consequences than your flesh and blood existence.

Here's why: thanks to the evolution of technology and our overreliance on digital media, social networking has literally changed the way human beings relate to one another. It's changed the way we do business. It has necessitated updates to criminal law. And, in the United States, it has also changed national immigration policy. As of 2019, all visitors to the United States who are applying for any type of travel visa are required to list their social media handles. Similarly, across the United States and the United Kingdom, many employers and universities are requiring applicants to list their social media handles on college and job applications. The purpose of these policies is clear: institutions of employment, immigration, and higher learning want to vet your social media to determine your suitability for acceptance in their organization. As a result of these policies, we can infer only one thing: your online presence matters.

And if you want to be taken seriously as a prospective employee, it matters even more! But how do we know what is and is not acceptable? And if your current behavior is unacceptable, what can you do to fix it? Of course, the first and most important rule of thumb is to be careful about what you post online. The author summarizes this by saying simply, "Post with purpose." Before you post anything, stop and ask yourself the question: what does this say about me? You should also consider whether certain posts are necessary and whether they might harm or help your reputation. So, for example, think about how you'd feel if your boss looked up your Instagram and noticed that your username is "butt smasher?" Likewise, if you're applying for a job or traveling to another country, you might want to avoid the type of usernames that people often put down as a joke. "Herpes\_free\_since\_03" might have sounded funny when you and your buddies were drunk and goofing off on social media, but you probably won't be laughing when you don't get the job you wanted and your Instagram handle is cited as the reason why!

So, instead of making rookie mistakes that will wreck your future and eliminate your opportunities, try to post with purpose instead. Choose a

simple and straightforward username. (Pro tip: the best way to do that is to use your own name!) Go for something that is clear, easy to read, and in one sentence, identifies you and what type of content people can probably expect from you. The author also observes that a good profile picture is crucial to making the right impression. For example, let's say I've set a good standard with my Instagram username but my profile picture is something stupid and unprofessional like a goofy meme or a blurry snap of me getting drunk. Neither of those set a good tone at all and it means you probably wouldn't feel inclined to look at my profile or connect with me on social media. But instead, let's imagine that my profile picture is a crisp, clean, well-taken shot that clearly shows my face. In the picture, I'm posing and smiling, and this tells you that I'm a real person who has taken the time to create an attractive and professional profile picture. So, that's our first lesson from this chapter: think carefully about how you're representing yourself online and post with purpose.

However, posting with purpose isn't enough, and that's especially true if you have previously posted the type of content we referenced earlier. If you have posted wildly unprofessional things in the past, your very first step should be to purge your online preference! Delete any posts, comments, or pictures that might contradict the positive message you're trying to convey. These types of posts could be anything from content that depicts you abusing alcohol and drugs to comments that are racist, sexist, or homophobic. (In fact, if you fall into any of these categories, it's probably a good idea to purge your heart and mind along with your social media!) Each type of objectionable content could cost you your dream job. The same goes for posts in which you complain about work, gossip about your former employer or colleagues, or brag about slacking off. After all, no one wants to hire someone like that!

Eliminating all of these elements from your social media is crucial if you want to establish a professional online presence because these types of content can undermine your credibility in a hurry. If you don't believe me, just imagine what might happen if a prospective employer compares your current, carefully curated posts with a 2015 photo of you passed out drunk in your friend's hot tub. The presence of these wildly contrasting images will invite

suspicion and scrutiny from prospective employers and make them wonder, “Who is that person really?” And if you think back to the previous chapter where we mentioned that you have control over the type of information you give an employer, this can help you to take your social media presence seriously. Because, at the end of the day, it doesn’t matter if you’ve constructed the perfect resume and filled it only with relevant details. Your Instagram can undermine all your hard work with one stupid photo and offensive caption.

And if you’ve reached the end of this chapter and you’re still thinking, “It’s probably not that big a deal!” just remember that a study found that over 90% of American employers check a candidate’s social media before inviting them for an interview. That same study also shows that over 70% of those employees will not be invited to interview based on the impression employers received from their social media.



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## Final Summary

Whether you're hoping to find your first job or change careers, you probably have a lot of questions about how to find the right job and how to nail the interview. And although innumerable self-help books have been written to answer these questions, the author believes that advice for job seekers is much simpler than it seems. At the end of the day, all you need to know is that interviews are about finding compatibility.

So, if you want to show an interviewer that you're right for the job, you need to think carefully about how you present yourself and what message you communicate with your social media. Understanding these two things can help you find any job in any field. Because this book can't tell you which job is right for you or what career you shouldn't choose. But it can tell you how to present yourself in a way that will make employers want to hire you.



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