Job Search Strategies

An effective job search in today’s job market takes time and a proactive approach. Students need to go beyond traditional job hunting techniques of sending out resumes in response to advertised listings. More research, innovation and energy committed to the process will result in more and better matches of job opportunities for the job seeker.

BEFORE THE JOB SEARCH

1) **Conduct a self-assessment.**
   You must know yourself very well to be able to effectively convey to employers why you should be hired. Develop a foundation of knowledge about yourself: skills, abilities, motivations, interests, values, experiences and accomplishments.

2) **Learn about the jobs and employers out there.**
   Gather information about types of jobs and employer descriptions through reading job announcements, exploring websites and talking to people in the field. Then narrow your specific job objectives to convey to employers a focus or direction toward a goal.

3) **Develop the two basic job search skills:**
   - a great resume
   - interviewing skills

CONDUCTING THE JOB SEARCH

1) **Identify potential employers.**
   Do not wait for job announcements from employers. The advertised job market may only account for a small portion of job openings. In addition, these announcements may attract the most competition or may be filled already “behind the scenes”. Instead there is a “hidden job market”, i.e., announcements not generally known to the public at large due to internal advertisement, word of mouth or a potential need as yet unmet. Your goal is to tap into this “hidden market”.

   First, research written and people resources to identify who is doing what in your field that matches your interests. Valuable resources can include: directories of employers, websites, job advertisements (current and past), company/organization literature, professional associations (such as APHA), telephone directories, newspaper classified ads, and state or local chambers of commerce for particular cities of interest. Also, talk to a variety of people for their suggestions and knowledge of the field. In this way, you can build your list of potential employers in which you would be interested.

   Repeatedly, statistics report that 75% of jobs are found as a result of networking. Thus, it is the most important job search strategy you will use. Networking involves purposefully connecting with others by exchanging information and acquiring advice. Why does it work? The more people you talk to and interact with, the greater your odds of being in the right place at the right time to uncover promising job leads. Learning to network effectively is the creative job hunting technique that allows you to tap into the “hidden market”.

   2) **Devise a networking plan to proactively go after the employers you identified.**
   Repeatedly, statistics report that 75% of jobs are found as a result of networking. Thus, it is the most important job search strategy you will use. Networking involves purposefully connecting with others by exchanging information and acquiring advice. Why does it work? The more people you talk to and interact with, the greater your odds of being in the right place at the right time to uncover promising job leads. Learning to network effectively is the creative job hunting technique that allows you to tap into the “hidden market”.

Tulane University
School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine
Kathy Ball
The Information Interview:
A key method used to network is the information interview. The purpose is to gather information and advice about career fields, jobs, and employers by talking to people in the field or who work for the employers you identified. LinkedIn, the professional networking website, can be a useful tool to help search for these people. You can also call the employer directly even if you have no specific contact. Here is how to proceed through an information interview:

- Call the general phone number of the employer and ask the receptionist to identify who is in charge of the department, project or research in which you are interested. Ask for the name, title, business address and phone number. This is business information that should be readily offered without need for explanation.
- Prepare, in advance, 2 - 3 questions about the organization, project, research or field and have them written down in front of you.
- Prepare, in advance, a 15 second introduction of yourself saying your name and school name and that you are exploring the field and gathering information. Do not ask specifically if they have a job! The purpose of the call is information. If they initiate a discussion of specific jobs, then you can follow their lead.
- When ready, call the contact person directly, state your introduction and ask if you could have 5 minutes of his/her time to information interview or ask questions. Offer to call back for a phone appointment in case he/she is busy. Many people are willing right then to talk if they answered the phone and are happy to provide information.
- Ask your prepared questions. Then ask for any advice on entering the field. Ask for other people they might know with whom it would be interesting for you to talk. This may give you further referrals or leads to explore.
- At the end, thank them for their time and information.
- Always be prepared to be interviewed, in case the contact person turns the conversation around to ask you questions. If not, continue to focus on his/her knowledge, not you.
- When you hang up, send a thank you note to the person. You may introduce your resume attached at the end, saying, “...your organization seems exciting and a match to my interests. I would appreciate hearing if any opportunities arise and am enclosing my resume for that purpose.”
- Having already had voice-to-voice interaction with you, the chance is greater that the contact person will keep your attached resume for future positions or submit it for current consideration.

Sample Questions for the Information Interview:
1) What is a typical day or career path for this type of work?
2) What credentials are required?
3) What skills and abilities are valued most in this field?
4) What is the future outlook for this career/field?
5) How did you enter this career/job?
6) What kind of experience would be helpful?
7) What are the chances for advancement?
8) What do you find most/least rewarding about this field?
9) How would you recommend someone breaking into this field?
10) What advice would you give to someone considering this field?

***Remember to be professional, interested, and enthused. This is your chance to make a first impression without the intimidation of a real interview. You will appear serious about your career and show extra effort and initiative. You will be building relationships, gathering important information and impressing people in the process, all which lead to increasing opportunity!
Informational Interviews

Informational interviewing is a valuable source of occupational information, as well as a highly effective networking tool. According to Richard Bolles, the author of *What Color is Your Parachute?*, it is a “fancy name for informal research”.

The purpose of an informational interview is to gather information and advice about a job, career field, industry or company. Even when your ultimate goal is to get a job, an informational interview is not a job interview. In fact, it is considered bad form to ask for a job during the informational interview. Usually the person you are talking to doesn’t have one to offer anyway, but the process may lead to a job opportunity or a contact with someone who is in a position to offer a job.

There are plenty of other sources of information on occupations, companies and industries. With informational interviewing you are really looking for the person’s perspective. What is their job like? What do they love about it? What are the frustrations or challenges? What are the growth opportunities? What is it like to work at their company? What kind of advice do they have for entering the field?

You may feel as if you are asking for a big favor, but most people are happy to help. They enjoy talking about themselves and their experiences, and they may appreciate having the opportunity to reflect on their own job and career. They may even enjoy the prospect of advising or mentoring.

With informational interviews you can learn about company cultures, industry trends, management styles, and other information that isn’t readily available anywhere else. It’s also great practice for the “real deal”—an employment interview.

The following are general guidelines for informational interviewing:

- Select individuals who are working in or knowledgeable about your field of interest and/or target companies. LinkedIn, a professional networking website, can be a useful tool to assist finding these people.
- Be clear in your initial call about why you’re asking to meet and how much time you’re asking for. For example, introduce yourself and ask if you could have about 5-10 minutes of their time. Sometimes your interview can be by phone.
- If someone referred you to the person, tell them the person’s name. Having a common connection usually opens the door for your conversation.
- Be as specific as possible about what you are looking for. You may be exploring a particular function or industry, making new connections, or seeking advice and feedback on your qualifications.
- During the informational interview, keep the focus on the person with whom you are talking rather than on yourself. You can then relate their experience to your own situation.
- Treat the interview as a business meeting. Be professional, be prepared, and be organized. It’s okay to bring a short outline and ask the person if they mind your taking a few notes, but you want this to be a conversation.
- Be mindful of the time. If the interview seems likely to go overtime, check in as to whether that’s okay or whether you need to wrap it up. Frequently the person will be willing to give you more time, but make sure it’s a mutual agreement.
- Toward the end of the meeting, ask if there is anyone else you could talk to that they know of in the field. Get the proper spelling of names, contact information, and permission to use the person’s name.
- Always follow up with a thank you email, then keep the person informed with occasional notes or emails. Follow up by sending any information, links, articles, studies, or other material that was discussed. If the work interests you, you can attach a resume and say you would appreciate hearing if they learn of any opportunities.
- Take time in between informational interviews to step back and reflect where you are based on the new information you have gathered. Your direction may change as you go. Be intentional.
The Internet is an excellent resource for public health professionals interested in jobs, fellowships, internships and other career related information. Following are the main sites that may be useful for that purpose:

1) **Tulane School of Public Health Career Services Center webpage – Public Health Career Resources on the Internet**
   [http://www.sph.tulane.edu/publichealth/students/career_services.cfm](http://www.sph.tulane.edu/publichealth/students/career_services.cfm)
   An index of 1200+ Internet links for sites that list public health opportunities. This list includes employers, both international and national, that seek professionals in various public health disciplines. Opportunities may include internships, fellowships or jobs. New links are being added continually.

2) **PublicHealthJobs.net**
   [www.publichealthjobs.net/](http://www.publichealthjobs.net/)
   This site was created by the ASPH (Association of the Schools of Public Health) Career Services Council as the central site for posting public health opportunities on the web. Employers may post their jobs, internships and fellowships here free of charge and public health professionals may search for those free of charge. These postings may be viewed chronologically, by location, by industry or by job type. Searchers may register to keep track of their searches as well as receive listings of interest via email.

3) **APHA CareerMart**
   [http://www.apha.org/about/careers/careermart/](http://www.apha.org/about/careers/careermart/)
   The Public Health CareerMart is a year-round public health career resource service offering a full database of job listings, resume critiques, cover letter writing and career coaching. Job applicants and employers can submit their resumes and vacancy announcements and view the database on line.

4) **Public Health Employment Connection**
   [http://cfusion.sph.emory.edu/PHEC/phec.cfm](http://cfusion.sph.emory.edu/PHEC/phec.cfm)
   PHEC is a FREE job posting area from Emory School of Public Health, serving public health professionals and employers by providing a central place to post available public health jobs. Postings may be viewed chronologically, by location, by industry or by job type.

5) **General Job Search Sites**
   [http://www.sph.tulane.edu/publichealth/students/career-generalsearch.cfm](http://www.sph.tulane.edu/publichealth/students/career-generalsearch.cfm)
   There are many general Internet job sites but they do not tend to be very helpful specifically for public health. They may provide some extra assistance in certain public health fields, though, such as nutrition or environmental positions. A few of the better ones have been selected to include on the Tulane Career Services webpage under Public Health Career Resources on the Internet.
CAREER PLANNING TIPS

1. **The Early Bird Gets the Job.**
   College recruiters say it takes about 9 months for students to find a job. However, many students don’t start searching until a few months before graduation. Start your plan of attack early. You need time to research the job market, prepare your resume, and interview.

2. **Know Yourself.**
   Before you set out on a job search, do some personal evaluation. Think about your goals and priorities. What is most important to you in a job? Where do you excel? Visit your career center for a self-assessment test to determine what careers may be best for you.

3. **Get Experience.**
   Internships offer excellent opportunities to gain experience in a particular career field. Employers often hire interns since they know an individual’s work ethic and skills. Nothing looks better on your resume than real world work experience.

4. **Give Your Time.**
   Career-related volunteering is a great way to build a resume. The experience will expand your knowledge and your network. It can also give you a sneak peek into the job world where you may meet potential mentors who could help your career going forward.

5. **Find a Hidden Job.**
   Many of the best jobs are not advertised. In fact, more than half of all jobs are found through networking contacts. Remember to use your circle of friends, family, associates, and coworkers (basically everyone you know) to find those hidden job opportunities.

6. **Sign Up.**
   Joining a professional organization can be a great way to network and learn more about a career. If you are a student, consider joining a student chapter of an organization that relates to your field. Membership perks can include newsletters, job listings, and contacts.

7. **Find a Mentor.**
   He or she can show you the ropes, and perhaps help you find a job. A mentor can be your most important contact. Many colleges have formal mentoring programs, or you can find someone you admire on your own through internships and summer jobs.

8. **Network Online.**
   Consider tapping into career communities on the internet. From alumni associations to professional discussion groups, the web is a hot spot for networking. You can learn about particular career fields and specific jobs directly from professionals who work in those jobs.

9. **Sell Yourself.**
   A resume is your calling card. Use it to highlight the skills you bring to a position. Make sure it includes all relevant work experience, community service work and extracurricular activities. The more experience you have that relates to a position, the better.

10. **Be Careful with Grammar.**
    Grammatical mistakes are the fastest way for your resume to end up in the trash. They are the most common mistakes made on resumes. Check your resume carefully. Be certain of spelling and grammar. Potential employers want to see that you pay attention to details.

11. **Tips on Design.**
    A resume should be clear and easy to read. Pick a simple font in a size that is easy to see. Be consistent with font styles throughout your resume. Don’t use graphics to spice it up. Keep your margins aligned, and make sure each category is easy to find.
12. **Cover it.**
Cover letters entice employers to read your resume. Make sure your letter is targeted to a specific person and geared toward a specific job. Introduce yourself, explain why you are interested in the position, highlight relevant experience, and include contact information.

13. **Call it Professional.**
Record a professional message on your voice mail, and check for messages regularly. Promptly return calls. You don't want potential employers to think you are job searching on the job so leave personal phone numbers.

14. **Phone Calls with Employers.**
When job hunting, answer your phone in a professional manner. If you have roommates, ask them to do the same. If an employer calls at a bad time, politely offer to call them back. Only answer if you are in a quiet spot. Never answer another call while talking to an employer.

15. **Email Update.**
Create a professional email address. Employers may not take you seriously if your contact information says "partygirl" or "studmeister." You can make a new email address with the click of a mouse. Using your name and a number is simple and professional.

16. **Dress Rehearsal.**
Consider scheduling an informational interview with someone in your field. It's a great way to learn about a potential career while also making important contacts. It's also a less stressful way to practice your interviewing skills.

17. **Practice, Practice, Practice.**
Preparation is the best way to become comfortable with interviewing. Consult career counselors or professionals in your field on what questions will likely be asked. Rehearse your answers and practice in mock interviews. The more you practice, the better you will be.

18. **Dress the Part.**
Make sure you are appropriately dressed for interviews. Appropriate clothing varies from career to career. Inquire with your career center or with a professional in the field. Create a professional image and choose a conservative well-groomed look.

19. **Time It Right.**
Show up for your job interview on time which means about 15 minutes early. Late equals unprofessional. Make sure that you know where you are going, how to get there, and where to park. Allow extra time in case your travel takes longer than expected.

20. **Ask Good Questions.**
Create a list of questions about the job and the company, before you go on an interview. Skip questions that are easily answered on the company website. Insightful questions impress employers and help you gain valuable information about the company and the job.

21. **Keep in Touch.**
Remember to follow up on your interviews. Within a day, send a note thanking the interviewer for his or her time. Your note will remind the potential employer that you are serious about landing the job. You can send a handwritten note or a professionally written email.

22. **Go to the Fair.**
Career fairs are a great way to meet company recruiters. Bring your resume and dress for an interview. Find out what companies will be there and research background information on the ones you are interested in. Prepare an introduction and market yourself.

23. **Why Isn't the Phone Ringing?**
If you are waiting for a call from a potential employer, time can pass slowly. Be proactive. Contact the employer by phone if possible or email and ask if you are still being considered for the job. Leave a message but don't keep calling. Continue your job search while you wait, seeking other opportunities.

24. **Search Like it's Your Job.**
If you are unemployed, think of job searching as a full-time job. Commit yourself to getting up early and working on your job search each day. If you are still in school, designate a part of each day to your job search. Set goals for yourself on a daily, weekly and monthly basis.