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”. You first need to 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 brochures or 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. Build your list of potential employers.

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. Networking involves purposefully developing relations with others by exchanging information, acquiring advice and getting referrals. This is the most important job search strategy you will use. 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”.

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The Information Interview:
A key method used to network is the 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, school name and that you are exploring the field and gathering information. *Do not ask specifically about jobs!* The purpose of the call is information. Remember, you gain far more by establishing the contact person as a potential information source and aide than by putting him/her on the defensive and in an uncomfortable position by inquiring specifically if there are any jobs available.
- 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. Most people are willing right then to be interviewed if they are on the phone and are happy or flattered to help.
- 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 career path, day or week in this job?
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!