PENNSTATE
Career Services
CAREER PLANNING FOR LIFE

JOB SEARCH TIPS FOR A TOUGH ECONOMY

SELLING YOUR SKILLS/EXPERIENCE

Emphasize content-specific knowledge AND transferable skills – employers are looking for people who can make an immediate contribution; skills such as communication, problem-solving and analysis are always in demand but your knowledge-based skills might distinguish you from other candidates and be interpreted as a way to make an immediate contribution.

It is critical that your resume and interview preparation are stellar and highlight your strengths, results and accomplishments. Use the online tools and in-person services provided by the Career Center.

Focus on building your skills and experience, remembering that your first or second job will more than likely not be in the industry you settle into long-term.

When applying for jobs, be prepared to talk about a school project, internship or volunteer experience in which you put forth tremendous effort and succeeded in accomplishing the task. Grades aren't everything, but if you have a good GPA, be sure to market it too.

Be prepared to tell stories which focus on specific examples of you performing a skill/personal strength or an accomplishment.

Hone your professional job search skills – dining etiquette, thank you notes for all who have helped you, respect and kindness for people at all levels of an organization and display interest and enthusiasm for opportunities.

Be clear about what you are offering an employer. Not just the skills you have but how those skills can be adapted to fit positions that may be on the periphery of the area you are searching. Try not to limit yourself to only searching for the ideal job but keep in mind that everyone starts somewhere and builds from there!

It is more important than ever to focus on your strengths, not just what's available in the job market. Look for opportunities to leverage your skills.

NETWORKING

Register and participate in the online tool, **LinkedIn.** It is a very productive way to identify employers, alumni groups, industry affinity groups, etc. You can use it to identify potential contacts for a job search, even create a job search group of your own. Just as with your resume, you should spend some time creating a very well-written LinkedIn profile and include links to an on-line versions of your resume, your own blogs if appropriate (professional), examples of work, etc.

Network for information, not just job leads - information might include trends, skills, names of other contacts, etc. Spend the majority of your time here. The most effective strategy for landing a job is networking (78%) and employee referrals (65%); a direct result of networking.

Let everyone know in your ever-growing network that you are looking for a job and be specific about what assets you can offer and what you are interested in.

Build connections to employers, and be as direct and personal as possible. Do not just apply through the computer.

Put yourself out there to meet people and build your network.

Networking is still a critical part of how most graduates find their first full-time job after graduation, and in a tight market it becomes particularly important. Take advantage of every opportunity to meet and interact with professionals in your fields of interest, extend your knowledge of preferred career fields, find out who is hiring and get personal referrals to hiring managers.

Focus energy on companies which have strong relationships with the Career Center or have dedicated College Relations programs. Often Career Counselors will be willing to provide a positive referral – to an employer, if they know that a student's interest level and priority is focused on a specific company or two. College Relations programs will always want to maintain a pipeline of new talent – even when they "aren't hiring".

Get over your reluctance to ask people for help who you don't know. Alumni from your school are often more than willing to help even though they don't know you (LinkedIn is a terrific resource).

Learn how to work career fairs – have your elevator pitch and your resume ready to go.

Networking is the key to finding a job in today's marketplace. Someone has to take an interest in you and you need to create that interest.

Press the flesh with real live people. Attend professional association chapter meetings and rub elbows with professionals in your field of interest at these networking events.

Use your contacts. Contacts are anyone you know - ANYONE. When first creating your list, do not choose to leave someone off that list because they aren't working in your field of interest or because you think they may not know anyone of interest to you. You don't know their network! Let your contacts know what you would like to pursue and ask if they know of anyone you might talk with related to your interests.

CONSIDER ALL OPTIONS

Consider alternative work sectors and organizations that could relate to your career goals. For example, a finance major may want to research and apply to government or health care organizations rather than financial services.

Consider geographical relocation....be willing, for awhile, to relocate to gain experience with a longer-term goal of working in your first preference area.

Keep focused on what is in your control versus forces beyond your control.

Keep an open mind about options and employers and cast a wide-net.

In order to earn a living, you may need to temporarily consider jobs that underutilize your college education – we recommend trying to find evening or weekend jobs to make money or pay off loans, then volunteering during the daytime hours for organizations where you can enhance your job-related skills. For example, community service agencies often need volunteers who have communications (written and/or verbal), marketing, computer, event planning, or research skills. Also, leaving weekdays open for other, full-time job interviews will be helpful, especially as the economy begins to improve.

Attending a graduate or professional school is certainly an option for some, but not for everyone – several key things to remember: (1) because more people are considering this option, the competition for admissions is likely to increase (and possibly at a time when graduate school programs are neither growing nor have funds to support graduate students); (2) historically, the number of employment vacancies requiring bachelor's degrees is greater than the number of employment vacancies requiring graduate degrees (i.e., having a graduate degree may not make someone more competitive); and, (3) much of the decision in choosing a graduate program should be based on the successful employment track record of previous students of the program (i.e., ask for information to see where graduates found jobs and general salary ranges).

Pay attention! Read (and act on) the email notification you receive from the Career Center. Utilize all Career Center resources.

Research, research, research. Are there cities where the job market is not feeling the effects of the recession as drastically as others? Are there cities that have employment opportunities in your specific career field? Use the Internet to research job opportunities, industries and livability of different locations. Be sure to keep in mind cost-of-living adjustments.

Make the job search your #1 priority. Make a plan, schedule your time.

Apply for positions that are listed as 'temporary'. Don't overlook them because you want something more permanent. Temporary jobs can be extended longer and can lead to other opportunities within and outside the organization.

If you want a job, you have to look for it. New openings are posted every day. Just do it!

Follow the money – the stimulus money, that is, because it will lead you to jobs over the next few years.

Check out temporary agencies as a gateway into organizations or fields of interest. It's a great way to get your foot in the door, network, and prove yourself.

Employers are increasingly using internships as a tool to hire graduates, so it is wise to incorporate one or more internships in your plan.

Part-time jobs, volunteering, job shadowing and short-term projects might be the best way to gain experience in the field and learn about the hidden job market.

Many state and federal agencies are losing "baby boomer" employees to retirement. Even with budget cuts, many of these positions need to be replaced.

FOLLOW THROUGH

Think outside the box! Cast a wider net! Get creative in how you think about your job search and expand your search outside of traditional settings for your field.

Start to apply early, at least a 6-9 months before you plan to graduate.

Do your research to find out what the entry-level positions and the hiring process and position are for the industry or organization for which you want to work.

Say – **and write** – "thank you" notes to those who do help you and keep them apprised of your progress. You will be remembered favorably for your courtesy.

Execute your search as you would do your job -- if you were working for yourself.

Inquire about each of your applications in the first two weeks with an email or phone call.

Prepare for competition: Put yourself in the employer's shoes—then ask what do you want to see, how do you want to be approached? Think like the employer and then evaluate yourself, your resume, your approach. How are you going to present yourself so you are the one they pick?

Dress to impress for all appointments or encounters with possible employers.

FLEXIBILITY/COMPROMISE

Be prepared to work hard and intentionally at securing employment rather than working casually and randomly. Finding a job is one of the hardest jobs you'll ever have.

Be willing to:

- Consider moving to and working in a different geographic location than you had planned
- Consider doing a different kind of work than you believe would be ideal
- Consider working in a different industry than you had originally planned
- Consider a lower starting salary than you had hoped.
- Accept a part-time job rather than a full-time one
- Adopt a life style different from that you had envisioned

Be optimistic and persistent. Employers still respond to job seekers who make the extra effort to write follow-up thank you notes, and continue to reconfirm interest – when the hiring process gets protracted. Position yourself as a candidate that "wants the job the most". Use the advice of career counselors in assessing how proactive you can get with an employer.

Be optimistic and have a good attitude.

THINGS TO AVOID

Don't let news of some companies rescinding accepted job offers dissuade you from engaging in a job search. Although the few companies that are rescinding offers are definitely a few too many, a significant majority of employers that hire college talent will not resort to this kind of action and there are still some great job opportunities available.

Don't give up on an entire industry because of bad news reported about a few high profile companies that represent that industry. Do your homework on specific employers of interest and you may surprised where the career opportunities will surface.

Do not let the economy dictate your job choice. The economy is most effectively used as a secondary factor in career planning and implementation. Decide first what you want to do. Assess as always your best decisions about focus and direction. Then work to evaluate how the economy will play a role and adjust. Too many new grads (and alumni) are going after jobs they think are attainable that they have no interest in doing. This approach guarantees you will be back on the market at least once before the economy turns positive again.

Do not OD on CNN, because the media often thrives on sensationalizing the negative even though positive things are still occurring every day.

Don't stay in your comfort zone. Even though it is tempting to return home and find a comfortable daily routine, which aids in the avoidance of the whole job search process, refrain from hiding under the covers and feeding your fears. Stay engaged in the process and position yourself; treat this as an intense time of career research by learning about and connecting with those top organizations you are interested in so when the market turns around, you will be in the right place at the right time.

ENCOURAGEMENT

This is a very strong country. When the rate of unemployment in the US is 9%, this means that 91% of the people in this country who want to work have a job.

Keep in mind that over the longer term, the demographics are on your side. There will be many more professionals retiring than there are next generation replacements, and employers will soon be aggressively seeking to hire energetic, well-prepared college graduates.

Understand that job searching and transitioning from college to work takes time and energy. Plan to work harder than you thought.

Excellence of preparation and performance, strength of network, passionate execution, and working with organizations that share your values are still the greatest predictors of success in a job search.

Identify one, two, or several people to be part of your support team. Their role is to be there for you through the ups and downs – to remind you that you are a good person who is talented, determined and will succeed. Talk with "potential candidates" and ask if they can and are willing to become a member of your team. Only select people who will truly be supportive!

Even in the good times, 90% of the positions were offered by the small and medium-sized organizations. Remember that what you hear in the media relates for the most part to the larger organizations, and some companies are still hiring.

Dream big and create back up plans.

Hiring decisions are based on your ability to do the job, how well you mesh with the team, how likable you are, and your interest in the organization, so put your best foot forward whenever you have a chance .

Bank of America Career Services Center offers many programs and resources to assist you with your job search. Stop by and meet with a career counselor during Drop-In Counseling, Monday through Friday, 8:30am - 5:00pm. Check our website at www.sa.psu.edu/career or call 814-865-2377 for more information.