

Job Search Triumph in a Tough Economy

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For many of you, graduation is looming, and with it comes the daunting prospect of finding a good job that can become a great career. But how do you launch your job search when you're one of hundreds of job seekers vying for the same spot?

As recruiters, we are on the front lines of the job search. We see the trends, hear the stories and talk to the experts. And we learn the tricks of savvy job seekers who know how to use their entry-level rank as a benefit instead of a burden.

Here are a few tips that can help you on your quest for success.

BUILD YOUR JOB SEARCH

Start simple- get on the web. Searching sites like Monster.com and CareerBuilder.com is a quick and easy way to find job openings in your community. But keep in mind that since companies have to pay money to post their jobs, these sites don't represent all the openings out there. Try Indeed.com or SimplyHired.com. These websites compile information from the big job boards, company websites, newspaper postings and other sources.

If the company doesn't have a website, think "old school". Pick up the phone! Give the company a call and ask to speak to Human Resources. Tell them what you're looking for and ask how to find out about career opportunities. Ask whether you can email them your resume directly, or even swing by their office to drop it off. Sometimes a little personal contact can go a long way.

And take advantage of career events in your community. Keep an eye out for local career fairs you can attend. Show up dressed for success and armed with a stack of simple, professional looking résumés. If a company you like is attending, make it a point to speak to them even if they don't have open positions that fit your interests. Remember: the representatives you speak to may not hire for the job you want, but chances are they know who does.

FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU REALLY WANT

One mistake that young candidates often make is limiting themselves to particular positions.

Let's say you're graduating with an associate's degree from a graphic arts program. Considering the state of things right now, you might have a tough time finding a good job in your local market.

But if you have a love for the industry, you might be able to put other skills to use. For instance, if you've been working part-time in customer service at a retail store, look into a customer service job at a local newspaper. It may not be a graphics job, but since it's in the right industry you'll still gain great experience (and stand a better chance of moving into your dream job when it finally opens up.)

Keep an open mind, and you might be opening doors for yourself too.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR NETWORK

Lowe's spends millions each year to ensure that we're marketing our products to the types of people who are going to shop in our stores. In today's economy, it's more important than ever to connect with the right people. The same is true when it comes to looking for a career, and the best way to get your name out there is to build your network.

Your network is already bigger than you might think. Classmates, coworkers, friends at the gym... Anyone can potentially help get your name in the right hands. If you meet someone at church who works for the company you're interested in, introduce yourself. If your neighbor works for the vendor who supplies parts to the machine shop you're interested in, ask them for a contact name.

As long as you're being polite and professional, don't be shy about asking friends, family and acquaintances to connect you with someone who can help you get noticed. After all, you may be returning the favor for them one day.

MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

If you ask a recruiter for their number one piece of advice for young people taking their first leap into the working world, most will tell you the same thing... don't expect to become CEO overnight.

Unless you have two or three years of highly responsible experience, you'll probably begin your career in an entry-level job. But it's important to realize that starting small puts you in a great position.

For one thing, jobs are so hard to come by right now that any opportunity is a step in the right direction. Plus, starting in an entry-level job gives you the chance to learn the company and work your way into a job that's a perfect fit instead of jumping in to something that may not be right for you.

Think about it like this... If you don't know much about baseball and someone threw you into a baseball game, how well would you do as an outfielder if you'd only stepped foot on a field a couple of times? Wouldn't you be more successful working with a coach for a few days, weeks or months first?

If you're willing to be patient, learn everything you can and work your way up, opportunities will knock. So don't be afraid to go for that unglamorous hourly job at your dream company. If you can get your foot in the door, you may be one step ahead of everybody else.

ABOUT LOWE'S

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