



public **IN** review

Hitting the Ground Running

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Abstract: *On average seventy to eighty percent of employment is found through networking and of those positions only twenty percent are advertised publicly. With a national recession, most college graduates or professionals experiencing a career change are facing increasingly stiff competition. It is important to find a way to make yourself stand out in the pack. This article addresses a few simple, non-traditional techniques to securing the job you want. By taking a closer look at your individual motivation for the position and examining what employers value over experience and knowledge, this article gives some suggestions to help modify your job search.*

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Hitting the Ground Running

Today, jobs are rarely filled like they were 10 years ago—or for that matter, 5 years ago. As a recent graduate, I found this out rather quickly. After leaving Indiana University I thought I would have employers flocking to hire me since I had my degree. It seems like everyone has some sort of degree these days, so how do you make yourself stand out? Submitting your resume online and waiting for an interview is not an effective method anymore. So what do you do to increase your odds in the job market?

I have been very fortunate in my career thus far. I started in a fairly corporate, post-secondary school setting. I quickly realized corporations and schools do not mix very well, and I did not see a long term future there. I started to work on my social circle and, before I knew it, I had an interview with Mayor Ballard's re-election campaign. I had no intention of working in politics—nor did I think I was qualified—but the right people saw something in me I did not yet see in myself and I began working the campaign trail. With a team of highly educated and devoted people, we were successful. The next part was turning the team's success into a job. Now, I am the Assistant Public Information Officer for the Department of Public Works and I genuinely like what I do. I get to work with great, experienced people and am challenged to grow professionally on a daily basis. There are several ways to go about finding your dream job, but for me a few things have made the difference and hopefully these things can help you hit the ground running after college or in pursuit of a new career.

Networking

Some seventy to eighty percent of jobs are filled by networking or referrals and of those only twenty percent of the positions were advertised publicly (Ferriss, 2011). This means that to find a job today you must network. I know we have all heard it before but when I say networking I do not mean calling everyone you know and asking if they know of any available jobs. I think the most effective networking is done when you are having fun and doing things you are passionate about. Educating the future leaders of our society is something I am very passionate about. I found a mentoring program focused on reading with children who were behind their peers I could volunteer for. With this one volunteer position, I was helping a child learn to read so they could learn for themselves, getting a great resume bullet, and meeting other people who are passionate about the same issue. There are several young professional groups to get involved with like IndyHub, which focuses on social networking; in my line of work there are a lot of political gatherings and meetings to attend. I tried to make sure that I introduced myself to one new person each time. It is easy to get comfortable with your "circle" but you never know when the friend of a friend might have a valuable connection for you professionally. Make sure when you go to these events, socials, volunteer opportunities, etc., that you have your contact information handy and be ready to accept others' contact information. Living in the technology age gives us the advantage of having access to our email immediately or send a text

message with our contact card. Use what assets you have available to make yourself more marketable.

Eye Contact

I know this may seem a bit out of place since we are not specifically discussing interview techniques, but maintaining eye contact in your day to day activities can go a long way. I have found people find you more approachable and easier to talk to if you look them in the eye. As a younger professional it can be difficult to get associates to take you and your ideas seriously, this is where eye contact can be useful. If you are looking them in the eye, it shows a high level of confidence and helps negate the "you are too young to be qualified" mentality you might be facing. It is a lot harder to discredit someone or something when it is staring you in the face. When I meet new people I tend to hold eye contact as well as say their name immediately after they introduce themselves, obviously not cutting them off or appearing awkward, but to make sure I remember them and they know that I genuinely care to know their name. We have all gotten used to being in our own world with all the technology advances around, but the next time you are walking to lunch, or just on a busy street, look up and say hello or nod to some of the people passing you by. Surprisingly, it will make you feel better, even if that person gives you an odd look. You never know when they will pop up in your life again and remember you said, "Hello."

Live Outside the Box

People always say think outside the box—and I appreciate that phrase—but I think it is more important to live outside the box. I have found that professionally I have benefited the most when I pushed myself to do something I thought I might never do or was not qualified to do. Not to compromise your ethics or advocate applying for jobs you have no interest pursuing long term, but to prove to yourself that anything you put your mind to you are capable of doing. I never would have imagined I would work for a political campaign, but I did and it has been the best career move to date. It took a lot of hard work and a great team, but I proved to myself that I was capable and qualified. I learned a lot about city government, met an innumerable amount of people, and found out I possess other skills I would have never known to list on a resume. I never imagined I would work in communications and public relations, and have found it is something I have a passion for and enjoy tremendously. As a new graduate, or any professional for that matter, we get too caught up in the idea of the "career path" and what our diploma says we should do. With the economy and the job market transforming every day, we have to prepare our minds to adapt. I do not want to get to corny, but a lot of opportunities have arisen in my career just because I said yes instead of no. We can always think of reasons not to do something but are they really valid reasons or just excuses not to challenge ourselves and rise to the occasion.

Ask...

The most important thing I have learned is: you never know unless you ask. You can ask anyone around me and they will verify I am not afraid to ask for what I want. This does not always come naturally to people, but in the professional world it really cannot hurt to just ASK! Let me be a little more specific so I do not get responses from people who asked for a million dollars and never got a call back interview. When I say just ask I mean if you met someone once but know they have a connection to a position you are looking at, just ask if the person knows a contact you could use to get more information. If you want more responsibility at a job but do not want to step on toes, just ask what else you can do to help. Most importantly, if you do not know how to do something and need help, just ask! You have to use the resources you have and the worst thing people can say is, "No." We have all heard "no" before and we will all hear it again. You will not be able to fail, or more importantly succeed, if you never ask for the opportunity.

I hope this gives a different outlook on facing the job market and inspires some of you to focus more on the kind of person you want to be. If you take control of your job search and let your focus be about being the best you that you can be, the people around you will see that and employers are sure to follow.

References

Ferriss, T. (2011, September 29). *The Blog of Tim Ferriss: Experiments in Lifestyle Design*. Retrieved 2012, from FourHourWorkweek.com: <http://www.fourhourworkweek.com/blog/2011/09/29/8-steps-to-getting-what-you-want-without-formal-credentials/>