

The Successful Job Search



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THE SUCCESSFUL JOB SEARCH

What are your abilities? Your strengths? What type of work are you interested in? What type of organization(s) do you want to work for? Before beginning your job search, you should be able to answer these questions. You can find answers by taking a close look at yourself and the world of work beyond The Catholic University of America.

SOME FACTS

Nearly 80% of available jobs are not advertised, creating a "hidden job market."
Most people locate job openings through personal contacts -- networking.
A well-organized, strategic job search can take several months.
Your ability to market yourself is key to an effective job search.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS

I. Self-Assessment

Before you begin the actual job search process, it is important to think about your goals, abilities, interests and values. This will help you market yourself more effectively and demonstrate why you should be hired.

Take some time to ask yourself a few questions: Which courses have you found most challenging? Which courses have you found least interesting? What skills have you developed through your education, work experience or activities? What type of work/activities have you found do not appeal to you? What interests do you pursue during your leisure time? What motivates you to perform to the best of your ability? What are your career goals?

Once you have answered these questions, your job search will be easier and ultimately more satisfying. You will be able to identify those factors which are important to you in a job and in the work environment; you will know what you can offer employers; and, you will be prepared to communicate this in an effective and enthusiastic manner.

Thorough self-assessment requires time and effort. Staff members in the Career Services Office are available to assist you with this process.

II. Career Exploration

The number of occupations available to you can be counted in the hundreds. Determine which fields best match your abilities and interests by using information learned through self-assessment. Resource books in Career Services are an excellent means of beginning your career exploration. Within a given career field, available materials will provide information on entry-level opportunities, possible work settings, salary, job outlook, and related occupations. Additional information can be obtained through:

Professionals in the field
C.U.A. Alumni Career Network - lists hundreds of alumni who are willing to assist you in your exploration process (<http://alumnicareernetwork.cua.edu>)
Internet (including annual reports)
Employer Directories (e.g., Washington Job Bank – see Career Services)
Weekly News Magazines/Investment Reports/Business Publications/Washington Business Journal/The Business Review
Faculty

It is highly unlikely that all of your abilities and interests can be combined in a single career, so consider which of them are most important to you. You can always cultivate other interests and talents in activities outside of the work environment.

III. Job Search Tools

Thorough self-assessment and exploration will help you to focus your job search on a specific area. Once you have accomplished this, you are ready to develop your major job search tools -- a resume and a cover letter. Other tools you might use in your job search are references, writing samples and/or a portfolio.

Your resume and cover letter introduce you and your qualifications to employers. When prepared properly, they can convince the employer to offer you an interview. Resume critiques as well as guides to writing resumes and cover letters are available in Career Services.

IV. Planning Your Strategy

A job search may be conducted in a variety of ways: mailing resumes to companies, searching through advertisements in the newspaper, networking, attending job fairs, exploring the Internet, contacting employment agencies or participating in an on-campus recruiting program. The most effective way is to use a combination of these strategies simultaneously.

PURSUING ADVERTISED JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The most common, yet not always effective, method of identifying opportunities is looking for advertised openings. Such vacancies may be found by investigating the following:

Association Conferences - Annual conferences are held by many associations. One function of such a conference is to allow organizations the opportunity to advertise and interview candidates for available positions. Check departmental bulletin boards and Career Services for announcements regarding such conferences or call the association directly. Phone numbers and contact names can be found in the several Career Services directories.

Association Newsletters - Most associations publish electronic and hard copy newsletters that contain information on trends in the field and advertise job opportunities. Some associations may also provide a service through which job listings are sent on a regular basis, for a minimal fee, to subscribers. Contact associations directly for information.

Career Services Office - Career Services receives hundreds of full-time job listings which are posted to

Cardinal Connection. Career Services also operates Cardinal Job Alert, through which graduating students are notified electronically when positions matching their online profile are received. This also features a resume book service.

Internet - There are many sites on the World Wide Web where you can find position listings. Some are general in nature, others are for specific fields. An excellent starting point is at Career Services web site, <http://careers.cua.edu>.

Departmental Bulletin Boards - Organizations may send job announcements to specific academic departments in an attempt to notify students of existing opportunities.

Government Employment Agencies - Federal Job Information Centers are located in major cities across the U.S. Information may be obtained on federal employment opportunities and application procedures. Employment Resource Centers exist at the state, city and county levels. These government agencies are listed in the phone book under U.S., State, City and Town Government sections, respectively.

Job Fairs - These are sponsored by business, professional and government organizations. They provide the opportunity to speak with professionals, learn about existing vacancies, drop off resumes and obtain application materials. Such fairs may be announced through Career Services, campus and local newspapers.

Newspapers - Positions are listed in the classified sections of daily newspapers. In addition to informing you of available positions, these notices will familiarize you with the types of opportunities available in the job market.

Human Resources Offices - Within any particular organization, job listings and applications are available from the personnel department. Information may be obtained either by calling or visiting this office. Some offices maintain telephone job lines.

Private Employment Agencies - Those which employ staff to advise job seekers. While people do find challenging jobs through these agencies, finding you a position for which you are looking can be less important to them than placing you in one already listed with the service. A WORD OF CAUTION: Prior to entering an agreement, find out if you or your new employer will be responsible for paying a placement fee once you begin working.

Professional Publications - Professional journals have sections designated for advertising job openings. Consider reviewing those publications which are pertinent to your field of interest. Such journals can be found in most libraries.

CONTACTING EMPLOYERS

Regardless of the strategy you implement, contacting employers will be a critical factor in determining the success for your job search. It is essential that your initial contact with an employer, whether in writing or over the phone, be a positive one. Some approaches include:

Letters of Inquiry. Write a letter of inquiry as a means of introducing yourself to employers. Explain who you are, your reason for writing, and expand on your interest in the particular organization. These letters

should be addressed to a specific person. Contact names can be obtained by calling the organization or by using resources found in Career Services. (Refer to the "Writing Letters to Employers" handout for additional information on format and content.) If you decide to include this approach in your job search, consider following your letter with a phone call. This will emphasize your interest in the organization, and also provide you the opportunity to arrange a meeting with the employer.

Phone Calls. Contact employers directly to request an appointment to discuss opportunities within their organization. If you do not already know, you should first call and find out who can give you the information you need. For example:

"Hi! My name is ___ and I'm a senior at The Catholic University of America. I would like know the name of the person I can talk to regarding professional employment opportunities within the ___ corporation."

An initial conversation with a particular employer may then take place as follows:

"Hi! My name is ___ and I'm a senior ___ major at The Catholic University of America. I am interested in learning about employment opportunities with your organization. I will be in the Philadelphia area in two weeks and was wondering if it would be possible to arrange a meeting with you to discuss openings you have or anticipate."

What if the employer is not hiring? Express an interest in meeting, at a time convenient to him/her to discuss opportunities within the organization. Take advantage of the chance to introduce yourself. When positions do become available, they will be more likely to remember you as a potential candidate. If they ask you to send a resume, always call within a few days to confirm it has been received.

Dropping In. If you are considering going to work for a small organization (e.g., lobbying firm, trade association, specialty shop, etc.) a personal visit can be effective. Visit the office(s) in which you are interested, explain that you are seeking employment, and leave your resume with the appropriate person(s). While a position may not be available at that time, when an opening does occur, they may remember you as a potential candidate. One pointer: dress up as if you were there for an interview.

Mass Mailings. Some job seekers will send out resumes and cover letters to numerous organizations at one time. While they may feel productive by doing so, **this method tends to be much less effective than others**. You are most likely to receive more positive responses from employers if you carefully select organizations in which you are interested, tailor your resume and cover letter to their needs, and address your correspondence to a particular individual.

LONG DISTANCE JOB SEARCH

If you are conducting a long-distance job search, try to visit the area in which you hope to be working and living. Holidays and spring breaks can be ideal times to do some investigating.

Prior to your visit, use your available resources and contacts to determine which employers interest you. Call or send letters to these employers. Inform them that you will be in the area and ask to schedule a time to meet to discuss employment opportunities. Between meetings, allow yourself some time to explore the area. You might find other organizations that interest you and should take advantage of the opportunity to

drop off resumes with the appropriate people.

If you are unable to visit the area to which you are relocating, it is still a good idea to research and contact employers before you move. When you finally reach your destination, despite the anxieties and frustration of moving, you will be prepared to begin your search without hesitation.

PURSUING UNADVERTISED OPENINGS - NETWORKING INTO THE HIDDEN JOB MARKET

While it is important for you to be aware of advertised positions, they actually represent only a small percentage of the opportunities available to you. According to Harvard Business Review, nearly 80% of available jobs are never advertised. These positions, otherwise not advertised, comprise the **hidden job market**, and are found through **networking**. This is the process of developing and using personal contacts to exchange information and ideas on job search strategies and career opportunities. Your goal is to introduce yourself to potential employers so that you are a viable candidate even before positions become available.

To establish your own network, consider the following:

1. **Identify individuals who can assist you in your job search**

- Is there someone in your family who is employed in your field of interest? Does s/he know someone who is?
- Does one of your friends or neighbors work in the field? Does someone in his/her family?
- Is there a faculty member in your academic department with whom you can discuss employment opportunities? Where do his/her former advisees now work?
- Can a former employer provide you with information on opportunities in the field? How about his/her friends or relatives?
- Is there someone you have met through extracurricular activities (church, clubs, community service) employed in your field of interest? Does s/he know someone who is?

SPREAD THE WORD! Let people know you are starting your job search. This will help you to develop a strong network. If you find some of your initial contacts are employed in a field unrelated to the one in which you are interested., don't be discouraged. Remember that they may have contacts of their own to whom they can introduce you.

2. **Provide information about yourself**

- Establishing an effective network requires that you provide people with information about yourself. Tell them about your experiences, your achievements and the particular interests you have in the field.
- Initially you may feel uncomfortable speaking about your accomplishments. Remind yourself that you are not bragging, but rather providing information which is crucial to their ability to assist you in your job search.
- The people within your network may eventually recommend you to a colleague, or even hire you themselves!

3. **Gather Information**

- Use your network as a source of information.
- Request information on the field in general or about a particular organization.

- Ask for names of other individuals with whom they recommend you speak.
- Inquire about their impressions of your qualifications.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions! Most people will be more than willing to discuss information about their career field and offer you advice.

Note: For more information on how to make the most of these discussions, see Career Services' "Informational Interviewing" handout.

4. Follow-Up

- Send a letter thanking the person for his/her time.
- Periodically inform the individual of the progress you have made in your job search as a result of the information you were provided.
- Be sure to keep a copy of all correspondence for future reference.

A special strategy that some people employ is doing volunteer work for an organization in their chosen professional field. Although perhaps only a few hours a week, this is a way of getting professionally-related experience, while maintaining one's skills and knowledge. Your performance as a volunteer might give you an edge on outside competitors. Or, someone with whom you are working may become aware of opportunities in other organizations. In the least, this work will demonstrate to potential employers that you are truly committed to your field and are motivated to grow as a professional.

INTERVIEWING

The interview is an exchange of information between you and the employer. While every interview will be different, there are several factors essential to all effective interviews.

- Be prepared to talk about yourself - your education, experience, goals, values
- Know about the organization. Read annual reports, company literature, and be aware of news events in which the organization has been involved, if any.
- Organize appropriate material - bring a portfolio or writing sample if appropriate. Carry extra resumes with you.
- Appearance- Conservative or business-like attire is best - a suit for men and a tailored dress or suit for women.

THE JOB OFFER

Receiving Job Offers

Suppose you have just been offered a position in which you are interested. Before accepting the offer, review your situation carefully. Do you need further clarification about the position? Would you like a few more days to consider the offer? Discuss relevant issues with the employer and, if necessary, request additional time before accepting the offer.

No Response from the Employer?

If you do not hear from employers within the time period specified, it is appropriate for you to contact them. Call the employer, explain the situation, and ask about the status of your candidacy for the position.

Accepting the Job

Once you have accepted employment with a particular organization, it is appropriate to write a letter

acknowledging your acceptance of the position and your understanding of the terms of employment (starting date, salary, etc.) Also take time to notify other employers with whom you have interviewed of your decision. This is both professional and practical. You may find yourself in contact with these people in the future, whether through business or during a subsequent job search.

RE-ASSESSMENT

Once you have found a job, you certainly deserve congratulations! However, this is just the beginning. Within a few years, you might find yourself promoted within an organization, seeking employment in a related or unrelated field, or returning to school for a graduate degree. You will continue to assess and refine your goals, skills, knowledge and interests as you seek to establish yourself in the workplace.

PARTING WORDS

- **Be Organized** - Maintain a list of people with whom you have spoken and/or interviewed. Keep note of information they provide you and make copies of your correspondence. Such a system ensures that you have the necessary materials when you follow up with contacts and employers.
- **Manage Your Time Properly** - Consider when you would like to begin working and plan your strategy accordingly. Establish goals (daily, weekly, or monthly) for yourself. This will help you to keep the job search process in perspective. Although your job search is important, remember to allow yourself some leisure time too!
- **Be Positive** - No one ever said that a job search would be easy! If you receive rejections from employers, try to determine why you were not offered the position. Remember that rejections are often due to the fact that someone else was just a bit more qualified and/or his/her goals were more suited to the needs of the organization. Keep sight of your positive qualities! This is essential to your ability to convey a self-confident image to employers.
- **Plan for Your Support** - Consider both financial and emotional support which might be necessary. Avoid the tendency to distance yourself from your family and friends. They can be an excellent source of understanding, support and unending encouragement. They are the people who can best help you to maintain a positive outlook and self-image.
- **Be Persistent** - The job search process may take one month, six months, or even a year. Regardless of the time, a well-planned strategy will result in satisfaction with your job and employer.

GOOD LUCK! And don't forget to call upon the Career Services staff if you need assistance.