

GAINING A COMPETITIVE EDGE

A well-planned and well-executed job search will give you a substantial advantage over those who take a more haphazard approach to this process. Competition for the most attractive positions is keen. Thus, we continue to believe in the adage that “it isn’t necessarily the best qualified candidate who gets the job, but rather the individual *who knows the most about how to get hired.*” It is with this principle in mind that Career Services offers the following guidance in gaining a competitive edge in today’s job market.

Have a plan.

In a competitive job market, it is imperative that you do the right things, in the right way, at the right time. Taking the time to approach the job-search process in a rational, logical manner will prevent you from wasting time on ineffective strategies. You don’t have the time to waste. You may find our booklet on *Job-Search Strategies* and our job-search timetable particularly useful.

Get started now!

It is easy to become overwhelmed with the amount of work involved in conducting a job search and, with other priorities demanding your time, it is easy to put off the job search entirely. There are at least two pitfalls in delaying your job search, however. First, other students may lock up available positions before you even get started. Second, the longer you wait, the less time you’ll have to take advantage of our services. Of course, it is important to realize that some types of organizations are unable to predict their openings far in advance. These would include employers such as public relations firms, advertising agencies, small businesses, and nonprofits. In any case, you will want to lay the necessary groundwork by having your resume and basic cover letter prepared in order to act on opportunities when they do arise.

Develop a resume that presents you effectively.

Looking good on paper is always important, but even more so when there aren’t enough jobs to go around. If you have a strong GPA, indicate it. If you have related experience, highlight it. If you have foreign language skills, be certain to include them. And don’t forget to list your computer skills. For additional help with preparing your resume, refer to our *Resume Preparation* booklet, and the books *High Impact Resumes and Letters*, and *Resume Magic*. These and other resources are available in our Career Resource Center in Hoyt Hall. You may also use OptimalResume, a web-based tool for students to create, present, and manage their resumes. It is available through our Web site (www.muohio.edu/careers/students).

Do not limit yourself to “name brand” companies when interviewing on campus.

Investigate opportunities with lesser-known organizations that will be recruiting on campus as well. Take advantage of on-campus interviews now while you have such convenient access to such a large variety of prospective employers.

Use all of our services—not just on-campus interviews.

Take advantage of our career advising services, workshops, special programs, and career resource materials. Additional information can be found in our services brochure and via our Web site.

Pick up a copy of our “Job Vacancy Listings” handout.

These job vacancy listings can be of great use in conducting your search for employers who may not recruit on campus. Become familiar with the job vacancy listings that may be of greatest use to you and review them periodically for job leads. Even if a job is available now and you are not, go ahead and send a resume and cover letter expressing an interest in the position and keep in contact with the employer to identify possible future opportunities.

Focus, but have a back-up plan.

Generally speaking, the better focused you are in your job search, the more successful your job search will be. Be aware of becoming so focused that you ignore allied fields that may also be open to you. Don’t think in terms of just trying to get a bull’s eye; consider some of the other rings on the target as well.

Contact as many potential employers as possible.

For many students, the job-search process becomes a numbers game: The more employers you contact, and the better you follow up on your initial contacts, the more interviews you will get. The more interviews you get, the more job offers you will receive. The more offers you receive, the better! We are not recommending that you mail out hundreds of resumes indiscriminately, but it is important that you avoid too narrow a search.

Tap into the “hidden job market.”

The majority of jobs are in the “hidden job market.” Contrary to widely held opinion, most jobs are never advertised or posted with college career services offices or online. Networking is the best way to tap into this vast source of employment opportunities. The more people who know you are in the market and what your career interests and qualifications are, the more doors will open for you. Don’t just ask people you know for help. Ask them to recommend some of the people they know who may be able to help you. Then, make contact with those to whom you have been referred, and mention the name of the individual who made the referral. Include previous employers and faculty members as part of your network to uncover additional job leads. For more tips, pick up our blue handout on networking.

Use the Internet.

A vast storehouse of information on careers, jobs, and prospective employers can be found on the World Wide Web. You will find the Internet a valuable supplement to your other job-search efforts. To get started using the Internet, visit our Web site at www.muohio.edu/careers/.

Conduct informational interviews.

Informational interviewing is a helpful technique for making meaningful contact with people who can assist you. School breaks are a prime time for making these contacts and should be used to their greatest advantage. For more information, please refer to our *Job-Search Strategies* Career Development Series guide.

Seek information from the Chamber of Commerce in the geographical area where you would like to work.

Information maintained by Chambers of Commerce can be extremely helpful in identifying employers in a given geographical area. Some are more willing to provide this information than others, but at least ask for it. Also, take advantage of the job fairs that some Chambers sponsor.

Seek out smaller companies.

Smaller companies may be harder to find, but they can be rich sources of jobs for those who take the time to identify and investigate them. If you have a good idea of the type of work you would like to do, you may find small companies receptive to hearing from you. Directories of small businesses are easily accessible at most major libraries and college career services offices. In addition, consider using the online database, CareerSearch, which is accessible through our Web site.

Don't overlook nonprofit organizations.

Nonprofit agencies are an increasingly viable alternative to corporate employment. If there is a social cause you are particularly committed to, you might wish to explore the possibility of obtaining a position with an agency that is engaged in your area of interest. Such resources as *Public Interest Group Profiles*, and the *National Directory of Private Social Agencies* are available in our Career Resource Center.

Sharpen your interviewing skills.

It is your ability to interview well that will ultimately get you the job. We can help. Pick up a copy of our *Interviewing* guide, and better yet, schedule an appointment for a digitally recorded mock interview at our office. There is no better way to learn how to interview than by interviewing with an experienced tutor. Know the employing organization thoroughly. And, of course, be able to relate your qualifications to the position you are seeking. For liberal arts majors in particular, it is imperative for you to be able to articulate the skills you have developed not only through your academic preparation, but also through extracurricular activities and previous employment. For specific tips, refer to our special career guide for liberal arts students.

Learn how to "close" the interview.

At the end of your interview, "close" your presentation by enthusiastically reiterating your interest in the organization and asking about when the next step in the selection process will take place. If you want the job, be sure you state this directly before you leave! Closing the interview in this manner will greatly increase your chances of being further considered.

Develop momentum.

Try to avoid approaching your job search in starts and stops. Do something connected with your job search at least weekly, if not daily. Read a trade or professional journal to uncover potential sources of information in your chosen field, prepare some cover letters to prospective employers, make a networking contact, check the Internet, follow up on a previous contact . . . keep the process rolling. If you develop and maintain momentum, chances are you will be successful.