

Top Twenty Job Search Tips from the PA SSHE Career Services Association

Graduating in 2009 and concerned about finding employment? With the current challenges in the U.S. and global economy, it will be more difficult for many Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education graduates to find a job this year. However, don't despair! The professionals in the 14 PASSHE career centers recommend that you develop your own economic stimulus package to increase your chances of job search success.

- 1. Be patient, but have a plan.** In a good economy, the average entry-level job search can take from three to six months. In a poor economy, it takes even longer. There may be fewer opportunities available, and even if they have opportunities, employers may be cautious about filling them because of budget concerns. In addition, the hiring process can be lengthy because there are so many steps involved (the application process...the first interview...several follow-up interviews...a background or reference check...the offer...the acceptance). Start early during your final year to develop your resume, gather supporting application materials, practice interviewing, and explore opportunities, and begin to apply for jobs three to four months before graduation.
- 2. Take at least one step daily.** It's easy to kick back after graduation and hope a job will come to you. However, unless your parent owns a company, that tactic rarely works. Be proactive! Use the tips in this publication to develop a list of job search goals. Get a calendar and write one task for each day of the business week, Monday through Friday. Include time to refine your resume, write application letters, attend professional meetings, meet with people, and follow up with employers.
- 3. Identify your unique qualifications.** Put yourself in the employer's shoes. He or she has a position to fill and is looking for a particular set of skills and/or experience. Take the time to research the position and organization, identify what sets you apart from other candidates, and include the information on your resume. Make certain the employer can see how your skills match the job requirements. If an employer can quickly scan your resume and determine if you're a fit for the position, the document has done its job.
- 4. Get out there.** Pointing and clicking at your computer isn't going to get you a job in this economy. Get out from behind your desk and connect with employers in person. Take advantage of every available opportunity, such as job fairs, campus interviews, and other networking events. A resume can't tell your whole story to an employer so an in-person meeting (no matter how brief) gives you an opportunity to provide details about your skills and experience. Show that you're a professional (in attitude, appearance, and behavior), and let your personality shine. Employers tell us that face-to-face situations help them to confirm if a candidate will be a good fit for the job and organization.
- 5. Be persistent.** "Help Wanted" signs may be few and far between, but there are jobs out there for students who are prepared. Be persistent, follow up with employers that interest you, and be professional. During this economic crisis, you may need to apply for a broader variety of jobs, including jobs for which you may feel under-qualified or over-qualified. The more jobs to which you apply, the better your chances of getting interviews, and ultimately, getting a job. The key is to get your foot in the door, build your skills, network, and be ready for the economic upswing.

- 6. Network, network, network.** Since many jobs are never advertised, networking is one of the best ways to find employment. Of course, building a network means that you have to talk with people, whether you know them or not. Start with family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and professors until you begin to feel more comfortable. Then attend professional organization meetings in your field and get involved so you can expand your network. Share your career interests, geographic preferences, and other pertinent information. Ask, “Who do you know that would know about finding a job in [list your field of interest]?” Eventually, one contact will lead to another, and another, and so on, until you get a referral that is successful. You never know where your next job lead may come from.
- 7. Look for “hidden” jobs.** The majority of opportunities are filled before they are announced publicly. Your challenge is to find out where those jobs exist. Use your network to inquire about opportunities and get some leads. Then target an organization and a department where you are interested in working. Research it through publications and people connected with the organization, such as vendors, customers, and employees. Identify the person (usually a manager) who makes hiring decisions for the department. Get yourself introduced, or make contact through email, a phone call, or a personalized letter. Inquire about current or upcoming opportunities. If you learn about a position, ask how to formally apply for it. In addition to the formal application, send a thank-you letter to the manager and include your resume. Follow up each application with a telephone call to the recipient to make sure your application was received.
- 8. Consider an internship.** Talk with your academic department or campus internship coordinator. Ask about internships that remain unfilled for the summer by talking with faculty and others who coordinate internships on your campus. Make contact with a recruiter to determine if the organization would consider a spring graduate for the position. An internship may not offer benefits, but you have an opportunity to gain experience, network, and get your foot in the door while the employer gains a good worker at less cost than a full-time employee.
- 9. Volunteer your time and skills.** Even if you’re not working full-time, you can continue to hone your skills and gain experience by volunteering. If you are actively engaged in community service or volunteer work, keep it up! If you aren’t, now is the time to get involved. In addition to contributing your time and talents to a worthy cause, you will meet people who may be good sources of job information. Most nonprofit organizations have a board of directors and volunteers that are accomplished and successful in their own careers. Tap into this network of individuals to obtain job search advice and identify possible opportunities.
- 10. Consider temporary work.** The role of an employment agency is to help employers successfully fill open positions by assessing and submitting the best candidates. In addition, the employment agency serves as an advocate for the candidates with whom they work. An agency recruiter works with you to review your resume, assess how professional and marketable you are, determine the level of your interviewing skills, and help you to represent yourself well in an interview. You shouldn’t have to pay a fee for this service; work only with employment agencies that charge a fee to employers, not job candidates. Ask other individuals to recommend reputable employment agencies that work with employers in your field of interest. Meet with a representative to ask questions that will help you determine if the agency can provide the quality services that you need.

- 11. Expand your search geographically.** It may be scary moving to another location; however, the more willing you are to expand your search geographically, the more likely you are to increase the number of opportunities in your field. Some areas of the country have been hit less hard than others. Subscribe to the Sunday edition of a city's newspaper or locate the online version to learn about advertised jobs, housing costs, and other information that will help you to determine the local job market. Access the chamber of commerce's Website to become familiar with businesses and other organizations in the area that may be hiring. Contact real estate agencies to obtain information on the hiring climate and economy as well as get help in finding a new place to live.
- 12. Consider recession-proof industries.** While some industries in the private sector are tightening their belts, others continue to remain stable. According to the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, industries such as health care, government, education, and information technology continue to provide strong prospects. Research these industries to determine which positions will allow you to apply your skills and experiences.
- 13. Log on.** Networking sites have become a valuable tool for learning about job opportunities. Professional or business networking sites, such as LinkedIn or MyWorkster can be great ways to "meet" alumni, connect with people in your profession, and learn about trends and opportunities in the field. In addition, social networking sites, such as Facebook or MySpace, can provide access to information about organizations that are hiring as more employers create their own accounts on these pages as a way to recruit candidates. You can meet and be in contact with large numbers of people while determining how engaged you want to be, from just listening to the discussions to posting to the conversations. However, a few words of caution. Don't post your social security number, home address, or phone numbers, or those of your references; they'll be available to the public. Get a gmail or hotmail account with a professional email address and use it on the site.
- 14. Clean up your profile.** Your online image is just as important as your face-to-face image. When you invite people into your MySpace or Facebook network, you are linking to their networks, the people they have in their networks, and so on. You never know what employers are checking the sites for information on you as a potential candidate so professionalism is critical. In addition, you should be selective about the people you invite into your network because what they say about you could impact whether you get a job or not.
- 15. Use your best job search manners.** A little appreciation goes a long way. Send thank-you notes to individuals who help in any way with your job search, from writing a reference to providing a job lead. Thank-you letters sent after an interview are also important. Don't think that it can make a difference? Here's a real-life example: One of our colleagues reported that an employer was having a difficult time deciding between two equally qualified candidates. Who got the job? The candidate that wrote a thank-you letter after the interview was offered the position.
- 16. Divide and conquer.** Form a job search group with two or three friends to provide emotional support to each other, practice interviewing, share information about events where employers are hiring, and swap job leads. Work together to build a network of alumni and professional contacts for informational interviewing or networking. Ask group members that have had interviews to share information about their job search experiences. If you feel that you'll be competing for jobs, form a group with friends who have different career goals than you.

17. Keep a record. Since job hunting can take weeks or months, it is helpful to maintain a record. Keep track of the contact information for individuals in your network and prospective employers. Include deadlines, actions taken, and results. In addition, keep copies of job descriptions, applications submitted, and correspondence sent. Use a notebook, database, and/or calendar so your job search is organized and efficient. Review the information daily to determine if there are steps that need to be taken and to see how much you have accomplished.

18. Don't hide out in grad school. When the economy goes south, some graduates decide to continue their education, thinking that adding another degree will buy some time and make them more marketable in the future. However, there are some issues to consider before spending a lot of time and expense on graduate school. Be sure your career interest area requires that you have an advanced degree or more specialization in an area of study. If you are still unsure of what you want to do, make an appointment with a career counselor instead of accumulating more debt and an extra degree.

19. Talk with faculty and alumni. Take time to talk with faculty and remind them of your career interest areas. They often know where the academic department's alumni are working or can share information about employers who have opportunities. In addition, get involved in your alumni association which is a large group of people that shares one common element—your university. Participate in chapter meetings and other networking events to meet other graduates.

20. Use your career services office. The career services professionals of the 14 PASSHE universities continue to work diligently to help connect students with employers and opportunities. We encourage you to take advantage of the many services offered. Specifically, we recommend the following steps:

- Make an appointment to discuss your career goals and get advice on steps to take, events to attend, or resources to use. Most career centers offer one-on-one assistance with the professional staff.
- Learn how to build the skills needed for a successful job search, such as resume preparation, cover letter writing, and interviewing. Visit your career services office or check its Website for handouts and information about related services, such as resume review appointments or a mock interview program.
- Stop by your career center or check its Website for organizations planning a campus visit date. Even though campus recruiting is down, some employers are still visiting campus. Check the campus recruiting schedule on a regular basis for additions throughout the semester.
- Register and post your resume on College Central Network (CCN). The PA State System of Higher Education has partnered with College Central Network to provide an online career management system for State System students and alumni.
- Read your campus email and check your career center's Website for information about campus and regional career events and job fairs that your career center hosts or co-sponsors.
- For additional information about services, programs, and events offered through your career center, visit or contact them at:

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