Recruiting Trends Note 2010-11: 2.1

WHAT EMPLOYERS WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT WINNING IN YOUR JOB SEARCH

The labor market for new college graduates has been energized by an increase in hiring, especially at the bachelor degree level. The competition for available positions, however, remains intense as the supply of new grads out-paces available jobs.

When we asked over 2,300 employers how undergrads could better prepare for the job search, they gave us an earful. What follows is what they told us. Here are the major points we heard consistently from employers about competing for the job.

1. GAIN EXPERIENCE
   Having professional experience is critical to gaining the attention of an organization, before you even begin the interview process.

   While internships or co-ops are desired by employers, other building blocks provide opportunities to develop competencies. These include civic engagement, volunteer work, leadership, study abroad, or research with faculty.

   Prior experience gives you the ability to share the competencies and skills you have already demonstrated in some work capacity. This provides a competitive edge in the interview process.

   **What Employers Told Us:**
   - “If you’re not working, you should be volunteering somewhere. Get involved and get noticed.”
   - “Be involved on campus. A degree by itself even with a high GPA means very little. Community involvement, leadership, and past work experience are much more highly regarded when a recruiter reviews a resume.”

2. CREATE CONNECTIONS.
   It’s never too early to begin building your professional relationships.

   You should have at least one faculty member who knows who you are through your academic accomplishments, participation in the campus community, or involvement in civic activities.

   Establish a presence that can make you visible to employers through your professional network, parents, friends, and faculty. Do you have a mentor? At least one faculty member who will be your champions and a professional who can establish your work capabilities! If not, get to work!
College faculty and staff are often in the position to recommend capable students for interviews. Having good relationships with even a few key people can potentially open doors for you.

**What Employers Told Us:**

- “Visit the career services department at the beginning of your senior year and become their best friend. Hang out there and learn as much as you can.”
- “Market yourself through a strong network of peers and educators. The power of a strong network landed me a position after I tried to gain an interview for over a year.”

### 3. FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT

The first minute of the interview or the first greeting to potential co-workers can easily decide your fate. Make sure you are on-time, courteous, and personable.

Present yourself in a way that assures the employer you have the professionalism for the job. Be enthusiastic and at the same time, be realistic about how you can contribute to the company.

Employers are not just looking for knowledge; they are also looking for recruits who will play well on the team. A bad first impression in the interview process can hurt your chances to make the short list of candidates.

**What Employers Told Us:**

- “First impressions are everything.”
- “Don’t oversell yourself in an interview because if you under-deliver or misrepresent your strengths the company will find out quickly and you’ll look bad. Instead be honest about what you know you do well, based on experience and what you are looking forward to learning to do in the position you are interviewing for.”

> “Use of technology has taken away face-to-face interaction with others. It is clear that students don’t know how to approach someone without texting or calling. I can’t recruit a text message.”

### 4. BE A PROFESSIONAL

Have a sense of professionalism when you are interviewing for a job (and maintain it after you are given the job). Dress appropriately, communicate in a professional manner, and have a respectful demeanor for the interview. This shows an employer you understand what it takes to make the move from college to the workplace.

**What Employers Told Us:**
• “Act professionally. It seems like in this age of technology our candidates tend to forget that simple things go a long way. After an interview, send a thank you note to the interviewer for their time.”

5. **BE PREPARED**

You have to be prepared for every step of the interview process.

You have done research papers in your course work, so research the organization you are interviewing with. Before going into the interview you should know the organization’s mission and core values, the main services or products they provide, key initiatives underway, financial statements, and comments from current employees.

All this information is on an organization’s web site or can be found on other web sites that deal with organizational profiles. Practice interviewing before your real one so that you can answer tough questions like “Tell me a little about yourself.” Based on your research prepare questions to ask your interviewer.

Preparation is the best preventative measure you can take for interview anxiety! You’ll feel so much better for the effort you invest in preparing.

**What Employers Told Us:**

• “The number of applicants seeking a single job in our organization has tripled over the past year or so. Unfortunately, many prospective employees are ill prepared for the job interview. The thank-you note after the interview isn’t enough. The candidates must be better prepared for job interviews, showing knowledge of the prospective organization and what will be expected of them on the job. Many arrive without pen/paper or questions.”

• “Job searching is really competitive, be on top of your game. Know the organization that you’re applying at.”

6. **BE PERSISTENT!**

It’s a tough job market and you’ll need to compete hard for every opportunity. The worst thing you could do is give up.

Studies continue to show that the best course of action is to leverage all the tools available to find that first job. Don’t just rely on your career center or the internet. Talk to people, ask for introductions, and join networking groups. Most importantly, keep going!

**What Employers Told Us:**
“Keep knocking on the door until you hit it down. You may not be successful at first.”
“Nothing is a given. In this climate, you have to compete for everything.”

“Stay positive; maintain an upbeat attitude at every interview.”

7. BE OPEN-MINDED, FLEXIBLE AND REALISTIC (MOST IMPORTANT!)

The economy is challenging and soon to be graduates need to adapt to the realities around them. Employers say graduates are expecting too much in terms of salary and high ranking positions right out of college.

Remember in nearly all organizations you must work for your salary and prove you are worthy of a position with more responsibility. Jobs are, and will remain, hard to come by. Be receptive to any opportunity that opens the door and allows you to showcase your VALUE to an employer.

What Employers Told Us:

- “Be prepared to compete for jobs against more experienced and credentialed people willing to work for less money. Too many recent graduates are over-valuing their new degrees, so don’t pass up opportunities. Don’t go into a new job with the gen Y mentality, or the entitlement attitude. It’s too easy to be replaced without those qualities in the current climate.”
- “Try different things; just because something doesn’t exactly ‘fit’ your expectation doesn’t mean it will not benefit you or come to be something you fully enjoy.”
- “Be open-minded. The career you always dreamed of may not be hiring this year. Try to find a career that fits your lifestyle and will help you achieve your personal and professional goals. Interview with many different types of companies. There are many positions out there you may not be familiar with, but that could be a great fit for you.”

“Forget the career ladder. Be willing and eager to do ANYTHING and do it to the very best of your ability. The world has changed. It’s not fair, but it is reality. Be a person that is committed to excellence and continual improvement. There is your future.”