



How to Conduct an Effective Job Search

How prepared are you for planning and conducting an effective job search? Successful job seekers must have both good information and well-developed job hunting skills. Three important factors for a successful job search are an awareness of your goals and skills, an understanding of the labour market, and a well planned job search campaign.

Experts recommend that you begin an active job search six to nine months in advance of your target or desired employment date.

The following six steps are used to conduct an effective job search.

STEP 1. Begin with Self-Assessment

The job search process begins with an identification of your values, interests, skills, accomplishments, experience, and goals. How can you seek a position if you don't know what you want from a job and what you have to offer prospective employers? Self-assessment, though a time-consuming process, provides invaluable information to facilitate career decisions and to prepare you to market your background effectively.

Values

An awareness of what you value (qualities that are important and desirable) in a career will aid you in exploring career goals and attaining greater satisfaction in your work.

Review the following list of values and check those most important to you. Then rank your top five values in order of priority.

- Job security
- Working as part of a team
- Working independently with little supervision
- Making a contribution
- Professional status
- Mental challenge
- Pleasant surroundings
- Challenging, stimulating co-workers
- Different tasks to accomplish daily
- Financial rewards
- Creating something
- Ability to advance
- Interests

Interests (areas that arouse your attention or enthusiasm) are closely related to values and frequently trigger skill development. You can identify interests by looking at enduring themes in your life-activities that persist over time, consistent choices, recurring dreams, or the way you spend your time. Try keeping a time-log or examining your most enjoyable times in-depth. If after doing so, you are still not clear about your interests or cannot rank them, consider meeting with one of our Consultants.

Skills

A skill refers to something you do well, including handling problems or tasks. The key to your successful job search is recognizing these skills and communicating their usefulness verbally and in writing to a prospective employer. Use accomplishment statements to do so. They should:



Describe your skills in concise, unambiguous terms.

Refer to actual experiences to demonstrate your skill level.

Connect your skills concisely to the needs of a prospective employer.

Some of the most marketable skills are those which are useful in a wide variety of work environments. These are known as transferable skills. For example, the ability to write effectively, communicate verbally, and use word processing or database software are valued skills in the private as well as public sectors.

STEP 2. Research and Explore Career Options

The next step in the job search process is to explore the "matches" between your identified skills, interests, and values and the demands of career fields and organizations. Check with our Consultants for resource material.

Perhaps the best way to explore career options is to seek out volunteer opportunities. This will give you the "real time" experience and allow you to decide whether that particular occupation is suited to you.

STEP 3. Choose a Career Field, then Target Employers

After thoroughly researching possible careers/jobs, several field options will emerge as most realistic and attractive. These options should become your career or job search goals. It is probable that no single career will have the potential to utilize all your skills, allow you to develop all your interests, and incorporate a value system completely compatible with yours. Therefore, try to target a career field that will satisfy some of your high-priority needs. Other needs of less importance can perhaps be satisfied in your leisure time activities.

At this point, it is useful to get realistic feedback from knowledgeable Consultants in the field to determine if your assessment is realistic. A meeting or two with a Consultant is strongly encouraged to discuss your analysis and decisions. During this or any other part of your job search, expect to use the resources of the Resource Centre frequently.

Good research on employers will not only give you the competitive edge, but also help you decide which employers you want to reach and which strategies you will use to contact them.

STEP 4. Prepare Job Search Materials and Develop Job Search Skills

Once your job goals have been targeted, resumes and application letters can be tailored to reflect your qualifications as they relate to the interests of prospective employers. While most job applicants are well aware of the need for well prepared resumes and cover letters, many do not realize the need to spend an equal amount of time mastering job search skills necessary to be effective in today's market. Learning which job search strategies are productive, how to interview effectively, how to market yourself well, and how to handle salary issues once an offer is made may be the subjects of regularly scheduled workshops offered by the Employment Services Centre. Call for more information.

STEP 5. Plan and Conduct Job Search Campaign

Next, establish a target date for getting a job and decide how much time you can devote to your search. So get organized early by setting aside a certain amount of time each week to work on your search. Use a calendar and weekly planner and work backward from your target date.

The greater number of contacts and interviews a job seeker has, the greater the number of job offers. Therefore, it makes sense to use multiple strategies.



A. Pursue Advertised Vacancies

The most commonly used job search technique is to respond to advertised vacancies, both in print and electronically. Unfortunately, the most popular method for locating positions, responding to advertised vacancies, is not the most effective. According to an article in the Canadian Business Review, nearly 80% of the openings available at any one time are never advertised. Job-seekers should respond to employment ads, but the main thrust of your efforts should be toward establishing networks and identifying the hidden job market. To increase the odds of your success in responding to advertised vacancies, by telephone or letter, keep these tips in mind:

- Do not waste time responding to long shots.
- Use your cover letter to answer every requirement in the advertisement.
- Personalize your response as much as possible. Direct your materials to specific individuals, not "To Whom It May Concern," or "Dear Sir/Madam," unless the advertisements are blind newspaper ads (name of organization withheld). A quick phone call can provide appropriate names.
- In a blind ad, address your letter to a specific position title, (e.g., Dear "Marketing Manager"). Try to contact or write to the manager who will make the final hiring decision as well as the personnel representative named in the advertisements.

B. Develop a Contact Network

Once you have targeted a career or specific position, you should acquaint yourself with professionals in that field or organization. These professionals offer you an insider's view and can constitute your contact network, which can open doors that might otherwise remain closed. Your network can also consist of family members, friends, classmates, professors, and electronic discussion groups.

C. Contact Employers Directly

There are several methods and combinations of methods that can be utilized to contact employers directly.

Send a letter of application and your resume to the Human Resources department or specific managers. This direct contact method is most successful for candidates in high-demand fields (e.g., engineering and computer science). The success of this method is greatly increased when letters are followed up by phone calls, which may result in an invitation to visit the employer.

Contact managers in organizations by phone or letter to request an appointment to discuss the information you have obtained by reading annual reports, trade literature, etc. For example: "I understand XYZ is planning to expand its foreign market. I am completing an international business degree and am very interested in this expansion. It seems a very progressive move. May I have 20 minutes of your time to discuss it?" Indicate your desire to meet with them even if they have no positions currently available in their department. Some job seekers find it useful to state that they will be looking for jobs in the near future, but are now just gathering information about organizations. During your appointments with department managers, emphasize your knowledge and interest in their organizations.

Always follow up all interviews with thank-you letters, phone calls, and, when appropriate, resumes that have been revised based on information and suggestions provided by managers.

Even if managers have no positions available, once they have had a personal interaction with you, they may think of you the next time they have, or hear of, an appropriate opening. It is critical to stay in touch with these managers, at least on a bi-monthly basis.

Many job seekers have used informational interviewing to create new positions by identifying organizational needs (through the interview, research, etc.) and proposing these needs be filled with their own skills.



D. Follow-Up and Record Keeping

No matter what job search strategies you choose, follow-up and record keeping are important for success. Maintain a careful record of all interviews, thank-you notes sent, referrals made and follow-up actions. Job seekers who fail to maintain this information often lose valuable contacts as well as credibility with prospective employers. There are models for keeping such records in the various job search manuals and on the internet in the Resource Room.

E. Be Persistent

Job searching is hard work and there are times when you will get discouraged. But if you keep up with it, you can avoid feeling anxious and will actually have more energy. If your search is not producing the results that you would like, avoid blaming yourself and try a new strategy. Do not be reluctant to submit your credentials on more than one occasion to an organization for which you would like to work. This attitude demonstrates your enthusiasm and interest.

STEP 6. Obtain Offer and Continue to Develop Your Career Action Plan

Congratulations! Your job search campaign has been successful. You have been offered a position you wish to accept. Send a note to all the people who helped you relaying the good news. Remember to continue to use all six steps cyclically to assist you in your career progression or job change.