

## **The Importance of Strategizing**

Graduating students enter their last year with many expectations. Some are excited by the prospect of what lies ahead; others are a little fearful of the decisions they know they must make. Some are looking forward to entering the job market while others are planning to enter graduate school and are looking forward to 2 or more years of additional classes, papers, and tests. Only 40% of adults surveyed in a national poll said they had planned their career path. However, those who planned their career path reported greater job satisfaction than those who did not. A well-thought out strategy can help you achieve your goals. Any job search is a complex, multi-faceted program. Essentially it should be a successfully executed marketing campaign, and this handout is designed to help you take the mystery and fear out of this challenging process.

If you are like most workers, you probably will be changing jobs 12-15 times in the course of your life. At least one of those job changes will be "involuntary," and you will probably make at least 3 major career changes. Remember, 20-25% of the workforce changes jobs annually. Finding your first job is important, but it is probably more important in the long-term that you learn the skills to find a new job whenever the need arises. It may be useful to think of the job search in terms of self-assessment, career exploration, and then job search implementation. Below is a 6 step approach for an effective job search.

## **Step #1: Conducting Self-Assessment**

This is the key to success in the rest of the job search, yet many students resist taking the time to figure out what they are really looking for in a job and what they actually have to offer an employer. Many students forget about considering whether a job is right for them in the rush to find employment. The temptation might be for you to say to yourself "I don't need to go through all these steps, I just need a job." Unless you do the necessary assessment, your search will lack the focus required for success. Don't be easily seduced by the promise of status, glamour, prestige, or money. If you hate your work, those elements won't necessarily make your job more enjoyable. Instead, try to find a career that fulfills you.

Ask yourself these questions: What would you like to do (skills, motivation)? What are your strengths and weaknesses? What are your accomplishments? What is important to you in your work (values)? What are the possibilities (options)? What are your career goals? If you are bumbling along without much thought for choices and consequences, you may never achieve your goals. When you have begun your self-assessment, you will be able to move forward with the career development process. If you need help with self-assessment, set up an appointment with one of the Career Counselors to discuss various options and tools. Also, a well-organized resume can help you assess your education and experience. See the Career Services handout on "Resume Writing" and stop in to have it critiqued by a Peer Advisor.

## **Step #2: Exploring Careers**

This takes place after self-assessment and is the process of narrowing choices down to your 2-3 potential career fields and determining which organizations in those fields might have jobs that would allow you the opportunity to achieve your goals and those of the organization. Focus your career interests on 2-3 potential career fields and then begin to learn more about those specific career fields. Our office has many resources to assist you in exploring career fields (books, videos, magazines, computer programs, directories, etc.)

### ***A. Selecting 2-3 Tentative Career Fields***

After selecting 2-3 career fields, begin using them to expand the number of job targets you can reasonably expect to explore during 1 year. Remember: you have no commitment to these fields other than to research and talk to people about them.

### ***B. Testing Career Goals Realistically***

Some students find that several possible job titles and occupational fields of interest surface fairly quickly in the career exploration process. You will not want to lose sight of your ideal job. However, before making the commitment to actively pursue those job targets, you will want to spend some time "reality testing." This involves two steps: doing more detailed occupational research AND conducting informational interviews (see our related handout). Staying organized will be critical. Most students find they need at least 3 levels of organization: 1) A good weekly calendar; 2) A card file for business cards and addresses; 3) Some sort of notebook or folder for letters, handouts and employer materials.

Students often ask how much research is enough. There is obviously no concrete answer to this question. However, in general your research should allow you to answer the following questions:

- What are the most common entry level jobs in this field?
- What are the top 10 most common tasks of someone in those jobs?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of working in this job and career field?
- What does the typical organizational chart look like in this field, and how do people advance in this field?
- What are the 20 largest or most successful organizations in this field?

### **Step #3: Considering Your Strategy**

Establishing a search strategy involves looking at your career objective and job targets in the context of larger market trends and then laying parameters of the search. There are 5 basic parameters you may want to consider.

#### ***A. Geographic Considerations***

In what geographic regions, states, or cities am I going to conduct my job search? If I am looking at more than one city, will I conduct my search sequentially or simultaneously? Some students avoid this consideration by saying "I'll go anywhere" for the right job, but the facts suggest that this strategy won't generate many possibilities. Remember somewhere between 90-95% of all jobs are filled from within commuting distance. Long distance job searching is not easy, but there are some steps you can take to ease the process. First, carefully decide what can be done locally, and what you need to do physically on-site. Conduct as much employer research and information gathering as possible through sources locally. Then, arrange to make a reconnaissance run, if at all possible, for as long a time as you can stay.

#### ***B. Financial Considerations***

How will I pay the cost of my job search? What type of job will provide me with the salary range I need/seek? Depending on market forces and one's time commitment, it is not uncommon for someone to spend between 3-9 months on a job search.

#### ***C. Methodological Considerations***

What combination of methods am I going to use to contact employers? Later on in this handout we will provide you with some methods that students have used as well as their relative effectiveness in landing a position. Keep in mind that the person who gets the job is not necessarily the person who is most qualified. The person who gets hired will be the person who makes the most of the career development process. However, if you incorporate the techniques in this handout and invest the necessary time, your job hunting will be fruitful. Do not feel locked into any one method.

#### ***D. Time Considerations***

When am I going to start my search? How does my search fit into my current academic, extracurricular and social commitments? Time and timing are often two of the biggest problems students have with their job searches. The most accurate analogy is to think of your job search as taking on another course. No one can tell you how much time you should spend on your search, just as no one can tell you how much time you should be studying for a particular class. The time you invest and commit depends on your goals, aspirations, experience and aptitudes and on an array of other factors outside of your control that affect the labor market such as general economic conditions. Balancing your job search with your other interests is important. Try to do 3-5 things per week for your job search. While in school consider your search like a part-time job; upon graduation consider it a full-time job. Do take time off occasionally - preferably on weekends to reassess your strategy and to get rejuvenated.

Most seniors experiencing the job search process would advise others to spend at least 2 or more hours per week on their job search. The best advice we can offer is to start the process as early as possible. It pays to begin your research in the fall with the hopes of offers in the spring or summer. For some career fields, October is not too early for June graduates to be sending out resumes. We suggest you start your job search 6-9 months before graduation. If you are seeking a position in a tight job market, the average time may be longer.

#### ***E. Job Search Action Plan Considerations***

Establishing a general search strategy can be a very important step in making sense out of a chaotic, random, and unfair job market. Thinking about a plan is important, but in committing yourself to writing, your plans become concrete, visible, measurable, and comparable. A written Job Search Action Plan should contain the following elements:

- Break your job search into major tasks and sub tasks and allow time for periodic review.
- Identify sources of help, possible problems and obstacles.
- Maintain accurate record keeping on letters mailed and deadlines for follow-up phone calls.
- Conduct more research at the Career Services office and Penfield Library.
- Include the names of the persons with whom you would like to speak.
- Check out the Career Services Homepage for researching employers and job listings.
- Develop a resume and sample cover letter and have them critiqued during our operational hours.
- Obtain 3-5 key professional and/or academic references who can comment favorably on your abilities.
- Develop specific "backup plans" where necessary and discuss progress with a Peer Advisor at the Career Services Office.

#### **Step #4: Developing and Expanding Your Prospect List**

Prospect lists take many forms: computer databases, index cards, sheets of legal pad, notebooks or manila folders. Whatever form, they contain the name, title, address, phone and fax number of employers that meet the criteria you established in the self-assessment phase. While there are no absolutes in the job search process, we suggest that your list contain 20-25 employers for each of your fields. If you are exploring 4 or 5 career fields, the math works out to 80-125 prospects, which may be more than anyone can manage in the school year. Rank your prospects by hiring potential. Develop your list using the Career Service's "Internet Research and Job Searching" handout.

#### **Step #5: Implementing Job Search Techniques**

After you have done your employer research and information gathering, it is time to begin the process of contacting employers. This is the step where most students want to start - send out a few resumes, go on a few interviews, get a few offers and see where it leads. However, for most seniors the process is much more complicated, involving a confusing array of want ads, employment agencies, recruiting, resume referral myths and realities. Techniques that work perfectly for one student can fail totally for others. No one method is bad or good; all of them work for some people some of the time. The greater the number of methods used to contact employers, the greater the chance of success. Below are the most commonly used methods in order of their effectiveness.

##### ***A. Networking and Informational Interviewing (50% Effective)***

Networking is the most important technique in job searching. We have outlined successful strategies in more detail in our handout "Networking and Informational Interviewing." We strongly encourage you to read it carefully.

##### ***B. Targeted Direct Mail Campaign (25% Effective)***

When most students think of the job search, this seems to be the model that they have in mind. This can be a useful approach, yet there are some key factors to keep in mind when using the mail. When contacting Personnel or Human Resources Offices also contact managers and supervisors in the division in which you are interested. Use the power of referral whenever possible by having the name of someone they know who suggested you see them. Target key personnel officers and get to know them through informational interviewing and networking.

Employers often receive 10-300 resumes in the mail for a position. Mass mailings are only 1-3% effective. Employers have roughly 30 seconds to decide to follow up with a candidate while reading their resume. Consider targeted mailings to a selected 8-10 employers at a time so that you can follow up with phone calls. Oswego students are not immune to the common mistakes that keep many resumes from being read. See the Career Service's "Resume Writing" and "Cover Letter" handouts to avoid pitfalls.

Use the person's name and title when developing your cover letter. When a contact gives you permission to use that person's name, mention to your "target person" that your contact suggested you write to him/her in the first sentence of your letter.

When making phone calls, your first contact on the phone will probably be a secretary. When asking to speak to your "target person," ask for him/her by first name. Your target person's secretary may think that you know him/her and put the call through. If a secretary insists on asking "What is your call in reference to" tell the secretary that it is regarding correspondence that you had sent to your target person. When you do get through, then use the person's last name (e.g., Mr. Smith, Ms. Jones).

##### ***C. On and Off Campus Recruiting (20% Effective)***

This method is the most visible and easiest way job hunters make contact with employers during the school year and includes our annual fall Career/Internship Fair; Human Services Career Fair; Career Information Night; Senior Registration, and Resume Referrals in addition to on-campus recruiting. Please see our "Recruiting Procedures" handout in order to learn more about this program. However, recruiting is a mixed blessing because, while it exposes students to a number of employers, it also distorts the way some students view the world of work and their job searches. These companies tend to be large companies which only represent a small fraction of the available job market. Most job growth in the 1990s is taking place in companies that have less than 100 employees. Annually a small number of all seniors participate in recruiting, however only about 20% actually get an offer through this method. In using this program, also plan on incorporating other job search techniques into your overall strategy.

##### ***D. Classified Ads (5% Effective)***

Most studies of the job search have shown classified ads to be limited in terms of effectiveness. Most companies in the US never hire anyone from the classifieds. If you use this approach, Sunday editions of newspapers typically have the largest number of listings. Try to subscribe to newspapers of regions you are targeting in your job search. Be aware of submission deadlines. To be safe, submit your application materials within one week of the ad date. In addition, you can locate ads in professional, trade, or association journals, contact professionals in the field, Penfield library and the Career Services Office. Also, be mindful that want ads are read by many, so competition is keen. In most cases, spend no more than 10% of your job search time responding to want ads. See our Internet handout to identify newspapers with a presence on the Internet.

**\*\*Career Services Job Listings:** Job postings come to our office on a daily basis, which we compile and place in a binder in our office. We also place these vacancies on our homepage - updated every two weeks. Additionally, we have job links on our home page on the World Wide Web.

### ***E. Employment Agencies (5% Effective)***

Employment agencies or "headhunters" act as intermediaries between employers and candidates and can be an alternative ingredient in your search. They might be useful to you in getting your first job, but there are some issues you should keep in mind. Read the fine print carefully before signing any contract with an employment agency. Ask to have a copy of the contract. When you are working with an employment agency, check who is paying the fees. More than 80% of all jobs currently filled by employment agencies are now "employer fee paid." In most cases an employment agency is working on a small number of open job orders, and they usually have a very large list of available candidates. Check to see what their success rate has been. An agency is only as good as your counselor. Keep in touch with him/her on a regular basis. Also, be mindful that they are paid (typically 10-15% of the job they fill) only when you accept a position; their interest is in placing you and not in counseling you. A poor agency may try to hustle you to accept a position that might not be right for you. A good agency will give you a realistic appraisal of the job market and the suitability of your occupational goal. Identify 1-3 employment agencies you would like to work with at first. After a few weeks, if you have had no response, you can expand to other agencies. Agencies are usually better able to help those who have some full-time employment experience (2+ years), rather than new college graduates. It is important that you not use these agencies as your sole job search method.

### ***F. Other Methods (5% Effective)***

What happens if you take these carefully thought out actions and you still don't find a job? It happens. One thing you can count on in any job search is some degree of rejection. Don't become discouraged! Many people don't find a job right away. There is a certain amount of luck or being in the right place at the right time that is involved with a successful job search. If your search does stall, you can consider a number of options to strengthen your candidacy. Some other strategies include: Internet Job Searching (see our hand-out), Temporary Employment Agencies, Internships, Self-Employment, Government Agencies like the Department of Labor, Computerized Clearinghouse Systems, Volunteering, Professional Association Conferences, Part-time Employment, Career Fairs, attending Job Search Clubs at your public library or local area, or a combination of these.

### **Step #6: Following Up**

When you send your resume and cover letter, indicate that you will follow up. Try calling within a week to ten days to see if your resume has been received and try to set up some type of interview or meeting. Rarely are people hired solely by their resume. A meeting will be required to see if you are a good fit for the organization.

#### ***A. Utilize Your Telephone Techniques***

It is hard to imagine conducting a job search without extensively using the phone. Arrange times for calling contacts when your energy is highest. Avoid Monday morning and Friday afternoons; employers usually have other things on their minds on these days. Tuesday is the most productive day of the work week. Above all, do not be abrasive or display any impatience with any employee in the organization - especially secretaries and receptionists. If treated with respect, they will be glad to help you out. If you don't already have one, purchase an answering machine and put a professional sounding message on it. A real turn off to employers is reaching a potential candidate only to listen to a goofy recording on their machine. Log or record your contacts and calls. Remember to follow up with employers after a reasonable amount of time and try to obtain an interview or some type of meeting. This is extremely important.

#### ***B. Interview Effectively***

Most candidates are eliminated in the first 2-5 minutes, because of lack of what employers term "presence." Before the actual interview you will want to practice marketing your skills. Prepare by reading the Career Service's handout "Effective Interviewing Strategies," and by setting up a Mock Interview with a Career Counselor.

#### ***C. Send Thank You Notes***

After the interview, immediately send a note. See the Career Services handout entitled "Thank You Notes" for specifics.

#### ***D. Negotiate Job Offers***

The Career Services Office can advise you on how to make careful decisions to either accept an offer, reject it or delay an offer decision.

### **Final Thoughts**

There is no magic wand that can instantly get you a job. Feel free to adapt these procedures to fit your needs. Whatever strategies you employ, please utilize the Career Services staff and resources for every aspect and step of your job search. Be persistent and determined.

### **Career Services Hours**

Monday - Friday 9:00 am - 4:30 pm

### **Q & A/Feedback**

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