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your dream, your plan, your future



Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Creating a Career Portfolio 2

Career Goals and Career Plan 3

Writing or Updating Your Résumé..... 4

Steps for the Job Search 6

Writing a Cover Letter 8

Interviewing..... 10

Networking..... 12

Conclusion 14



For additional information and resources on Career Planning, visit our Web site at www.navigatingyourfuture.org

Introduction

Getting a degree, certificate, or taking some courses after high school will not only build your knowledge, but also give you stronger skills for your future career. Getting an education is the biggest step on the path to achieving the career and salary you’ve always wanted.

The information in this booklet is designed to give you tips and ideas for planning your career and maintaining an active career growth strategy so that when you complete school you are ready to find the right career for you!

Creating a Career Portfolio

Before you start your career search, it's best to organize everything you will need into a career portfolio. A portfolio is traditionally thought of as an organized set of examples, which might include written documents, visual elements, recommendations, or work assessments that demonstrate your character, skills, and abilities to a prospective employer. However, a career portfolio is comprised of the records you keep for yourself. These could include:

- Career plan
- Work experience (including dates, supervisors, contact information, salaries, job duties, and job descriptions for the positions you held)
- Previous job reviews
- School history
- Record of community involvement
- Professional contacts and references
- Job applications
- Résumés
- Cover letters
- Salary history
- Papers, Reports, Web sites, Publications (or any other graphical or written documents you created for jobs, school, or other organizations that demonstrate your abilities)

Some of the information in your personal career portfolio is confidential and should not be shared with future employers. One of the greatest benefits to having all this information organized and contained in one place is that it can make applying for jobs a smooth, hassle-free experience.

Career Goals and Career Plan

Your career goal helps you decide what you want to do with your future. It will help you focus your interests and talents and figure out what you want to do for a living. A career goal can be as specific as a position in a particular company you admire or as general as a field of interest. In most cases, a career goal is based on your skills, interests, availability, and mobility. Career mobility is the potential for growth and advancement within a particular career or field.

Example Career Goal

“Become a sixth-grade teacher in a public school within six months after graduating with a degree in education.” This position will require student-teaching training, certification, and an available opportunity in a school district.

Your career plan helps you gain focus and clarity and will give you confidence when you begin writing your résumé.

In your career plan you might want to include the following information:

- Requirements
- Your current skills and interests
- Steps toward reaching your career goal (for example: Bachelor's degree, job experience, and networking). You could detail each point of the career plan including dates, times, and how you will accomplish each step.

Writing or Updating Your Résumé

The purpose of a résumé is straightforward: to tell a prospective employer what they need to know about a prospective job applicant. Your résumé identifies your individual strengths and how those strengths will contribute to the organization or the company. Your résumé should be an organized presentation of information about you and your accomplishments, specifically targeted toward your career objective. Your résumé should be an overview. It should not tell everything about your life and it should not be a laundry list of jobs and duties. Instead you should use bulleted statements to create short, concise examples of work experiences and the scope of your involvement.

Résumé Elements

- In a résumé the elements to be included are:
- Career or work objectives
- Work experience
- Education
- Summary of accomplishments based on both work and education experience
- Contact information
- Other relevant experience such as volunteering, leadership roles, and student government

Writing or Updating Your Résumé

Résumé Language

Keywords and “action words” in your résumé are crucial. Today, many companies use scanners that read the first line of the résumé and sort applications online. If the scanner does not detect those keywords, your résumé may not be tagged for further review. These words can vary by industry. Following are examples of “action words.”

- accomplish
- achieve
- leadership qualities
- build
- delegate
- investigate
- initiate
- collaborate
- work together
- share ideas

Résumé Formats

The three most traditionally accepted résumé formats are:

- Chronological Style
- Functional Style
- Imaginative and Creative Style

Examples of these formats can be found at www.navigatingyourfuture.org.

Steps for the Job Search

Finding a job or starting a career can seem overwhelming. When you begin your job search, follow these basic steps for a manageable, organized process. Remember that you won't find a job overnight; in fact, the average job search for a full-time career position takes between three and six months of active searching.

- Know yourself and identify your interests, skills, values, and work preferences. Make sure you have identified what is important.
- Perfect all your related job search materials, including your Résumé and Cover Letter, and practice your interviewing skills.
- Identify sources for job openings. Use an internal "Career Services Center" for online access to job openings that are published at your school.
- Use professional association Web sites. If you want to relocate, pick a city or region and check newspapers and classified ads, contact chambers of commerce, and locate listings of organizations that hire professionals in your field.
- Set weekly goals for yourself in the job search process.
 - Create a list of contacts in areas where you wish to relocate.
 - Send "cold letters" and résumés to companies and organizations of interest to you.
 - Check all related Web sites once a week for new listings.
 - Spend time each weekend responding to new position openings. When responding to an electronic posting, it is suggested that you follow up with a hard copy letter and résumé to ensure it has been received.

Steps for the Job Search

- Follow up with a phone call. Managers and HR staff receive many résumés both in the mail and electronically. A phone call may set you apart.
- Attend job fairs offered by your Career Services Center or local community job fairs.
- Research the job market and develop a list of companies based on your work preferences, values, skills, interests, and contributions you can make to that organization.
- Read job ads in local newspapers and those found through job search engines.
- Review trade magazines and Web sites for job openings.
- Network to help identify possible job openings.



Writing a Cover Letter

The key to a successful job search is to communicate with the person who has the ability to hire or pass your information along for the next step in the interview process. Therefore, your cover letter can be a determining factor in whether or not your résumé is selected to move forward in the interview process. Effective cover letters convey a sense of purpose, project enthusiasm for the position, and demonstrate your knowledge of the employer's goals and needs.

Many times students will spend hours writing a “perfect” résumé and very little time writing a quality cover letter. Remember, the cover letter should highlight your accomplishments and be attached to your résumé. A positive first impression requires that your cover letter be neat and concise, containing no errors in spelling or grammar. Each cover letter should be customized to fit the position for which you are applying.

Simple Guidelines for a Successful Cover Letter

First paragraph – State the purpose of the letter, catch the attention of the scanner or reader, indicate your interest in the position or company, and flatter your audience by using any researched facts about the company.

Second paragraph – Explain how your background makes you a qualified candidate. Give an example or talk about a specific project, accomplishment in school, or service you have provided.

Third paragraph – Refer the reader to your enclosures (résumé, references, or examples of work).

Writing a Cover Letter

Final paragraph – Indicate your intentions to follow up, and repeat a phone number or e-mail address where you can be reached.

Closing – Salutation and signature with personal information – address, phone number, and e-mail address, if not on the top of the letterhead.

(Example of a Cold Call Letter)

Barbara Boles
Post Office Box 1803
Project University
Tallahassee, FL 44444

March 29, 20XX

John Doe
Post Office Box 1111
ABC Corporation
Anytown, FL 45678

Dear Mr. Doe:

I am writing to inquire about the Assistant Manager position at ABC Corporation. This type of position appeals to me because of my strong interest in working with employees in the area of Human Resources. In addition, I believe my background and my leadership and organizational skills fit well with your company mission, which states as its goal: “to select and employ the most capable and satisfied employees.”

My experience at XYZ Company reflects five years of experience in a corporate setting. During these years, I strengthened my skills in working with diverse groups of people. I work well solving conflicts between employees, whether they are employer/supervisor conflicts or employee/employee conflicts. In addition, my strong organizational and leadership skills, which are constantly being challenged and developed, allow me to be a successful, contributing employee to any organization.

Enclosed is a current copy of my résumé and references. I will follow up with you in two weeks to determine if there is an opportunity to discuss how my skills and experiences can benefit ABC Corporation. If you have immediate questions, please contact me at (850) 555-5555, or I can be reached by e-mail at BarbaraBoles@e-mail.com. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Barbara Boles

Interviewing

After your cover letter and résumé get you in the door for an interview, the rest is up to you. Remember, you are trying to make a strong first impression with your prospective employer. That means wearing proper business attire during the interview process and sitting up straight. Make sure that you are clear about the skills and strengths that you have to offer, define a clear objective of what you want to do for that organization or company, and let them know that you have researched their organization.

Eight Things to Remember When Interviewing for a Position:

1. Maintain clear and focused objectives.
2. Do not avoid risks or challenging interview situations.
3. Consider your prospective employer's point of view.
4. Do not come across as too direct or blunt.
5. Be personable.
6. Present a focused résumé.
7. Tout personal strengths and skills.
8. Follow up with a telephone call, e-mail, or letter.

The biggest question an interviewer is asking himself or herself is “Why should I hire you?”

Interviewing

During the Interview

During an interview for an internship, your first job, or a career change, you can expect questions in two categories - the “getting to know you” questions and the “why do you want this job” questions. Even though companies and schools are looking for different qualities, most employers want employees who have:

- good communication skills
- flexibility/adaptability
- motivation
- excellent computer skills
- strong work ethic
- creativity
- good manners

Behavior Based Interviews are the newest and trendiest style of interviewing. The premise is that “past behavior” is an accurate predictor of future behavior. An interviewer may ask you to give an example of a situation or task you accomplished, explain the action you took, and the positive results that occurred. Examples of questions or statements related to work experience or environment might be:

“Tell me about the position that has given you the most satisfaction.”

“What have you learned from work/internship/co-op experiences?”

“How do you work under pressure?”

“Tell me about a time when you had a major problem and explain how you dealt with it.”

Networking

Like it or not, when it comes to a job search, networking is just as important as anything else. The two ways to begin your networking process are through warm and cold contacts. Warm Contacts are people you know. Examples of warm contacts include: parents, friends, teachers, service clubs, relatives, neighbors, present and former co-workers or supervisors, members of professional organizations, social groups, and religious connections. Cold Contacts are people you do not know. Good resources for cold contacts are the yellow pages, professional association directories, and your school alumni directory.

Identify your contacts and ask them about possible job opportunities they might be aware of in your field. You might want to arrange an informational interview to discuss their career experience and any recommendations for your career search. This will also be good practice for a job interview.

It is helpful to keep a record of all contacts and potential contacts. Information you will want to record includes the organization, contact person, phone number, source of the lead, and notes about your conversations and the dates you contacted the person. You can also create a reference sheet for yourself as you interview contacts. This could be included in your personal career portfolio.

Networking

Networking also includes a list of references. A reference sheet should include individuals who can provide information about your character, work ethic, and the job you did for them during the time you were employed. Professors, instructors, and past supervisors are excellent examples of individuals who can provide references. Consider the following guidelines when asking someone to be your reference. Make sure you give them advance notice. If your potential employer contacts them, you do not want them to be surprised or caught off guard. Make sure to give your reference a brief description of the position you seek.

It is important to be aware of various “Career Planning and Placement” services available at your local college. If you are not familiar with those services, check your local school directory and schedule a visit to find out what is available.



