



College to Career—Making the Transition

BY SHELLY GOLDMAN

According to a survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, a research company in Bethlehem, PA, the hiring of new college graduates is expected to decline to 3.6 percent during the 2002-2003 school year.

While fields such as telecommunications, engineering, financial services, and state and local governments project hiring decreases, college graduates are likely to have the greatest employment opportunities in federal government, health care, insurance and securities, where jobs appear to be more abundant.

For the well-prepared candidate, a distinct advantage emerges over the many who are job seeking.

College graduates need to use all available resources and master successful networking techniques to capture the attention of prospective employers and win a job offer. The key to a successful job search is in preparation, messaging, strategy, research and delivery of information. Developing a strategic marketing plan and understanding how to emphasize the value you bring to an employer is essential.

RESUME AND PORTFOLIO

Design a powerful career portfolio that includes a resume communicating your value as a contributor to the employer's organization. An effectively written resume casts you in an appealing light and opens the door to interview opportunities. Work experience, internships, volunteer activities and organization affiliations are important and should be included in your resume.

Also include samples of any supporting information detailing your value to a particular company. Include reports, papers written, presentations and programs developed or designed. Certifications, awards, military and scholarship information, workshops, seminars and conferences attended are also important to include. Develop your reference/endorsement portfolio to include four to six letters from college administrators and professors, professional affiliations through internships, volunteer activities and professional organizations with whom you've developed relationships.

When forwarding resumes, always include a one-page cover letter addressed to a specific person and their title. A well-written cover letter can inspire interest in you as a candidate. Always state your intention of future action and that you will be contacting them to discuss the next step.

PERSONAL MARKETING PLAN

As expressed by W. Herbert Crowder III, Director of Alumni Career Services of Darden Graduate School of Business Administration, if there is a differentiator in those who will successfully find a job, it will be those who can execute their personal marketing plans. In this environment you must find the jobs that exist. They will not find you.

Develop innovative and aggressive networking strategies. Your job is securing employment. You are selling yourself—and you are the product. Devote yourself completely to the process. Know in advance there will be rejections along the road, and these should not be taken personally. Draw on these experiences as growth opportunities.

Alexander Graham Bell knew this well when he said, "When one door closes another door opens, but we so often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we don't see the ones which open for us."

Talk with everyone you know—friends, family, neighbors, colleagues and academic contacts and advisors—in your efforts to network. Review



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magazines, ads, industry trade journals and professional association publications. Contact county and community organizations, economic development councils and utilize the web, databases and yellow pages. Attend career fairs and special events. Work with headhunters, employment and temporary agencies and college career centers. Enlist the guidance and support from a hand-selected group of a “trusted few.” Invite them to participate as strategic advisors to your cause. When selecting your team, select those who are successful, imaginative and motivated to help you succeed.

A successful job search requires development of a list of target companies. Research these companies for useful information. Focus on companies with corporate cultures that value what is important to you. Review websites, speak with target company employees, contact stockbrokers, accountants and chambers of commerce who may have information about these companies.

THE INTERVIEW

When preparing for the interview, it’s important to know that conservative styles are back in favor. It’s important to look first class, making certain your appearance conveys reliability.

Arrive for your interview 10 minutes early and

use the time to compose yourself. Mentally review the ways you can clearly express the value you bring to that potential employer. Communicate the positive qualities and skills you bring to the position and the hiring company. Don't forget to have fun and enjoy yourself—a positive attitude is contagious.

Employers hire people they like. Connecting and communicating to develop rapport is a necessary art, and can be done effectively with practice. Speak with energy and conviction. Listen with awareness. Mention the name of your interviewer at different times during the interview and prepare to answer questions about your skills. Review possible interview questions in advance to include questions that may be problematic. Prepare, practice and rehearse, again and again.

Hiring companies expect candidates to ask meaningful questions about the company and position. Prepare for every interview with solid questions to ask based on the particular organization. You will be judged on these inquiries and this is another opportunity to rise above the competition.

FOLLOW UP AND NEGOTIATION

Follow up the interview with a professionally typed thank you letter within two days. Highlight what was discussed in your meeting, restate your interest in the position and how you can bring value to the employer by matching your qualifications to the company's needs.

Salary and compensation packages are best discussed after the offer and before the acceptance. This is the time you are in the strongest negotiating situation. Your negotiations will be handled with increased confidence and strength when you've done your research of compensation ranges for similar positions within your region.

Remember—your ultimate goal is to take control of your career strategy and your life.

Shelly Goldman has more than 20 years of national experience as a career coach and search consultant. Since founding The Goldman Group Advantage in 1989, she has established herself as a coach and recruitment specialist in the development of customized coaching and recruitment programs to fit individual client needs. For additional information, check www.TheGoldmanGroupAdvantage.com

