



Helping Organizations Define and Develop Top Talent

Career Planning in Today's Work Environment

By Jennifer C. Zamecki

What you were taught in school no longer applies to the job searching skills needed in today's market. The rules have changed...from the resume through the interview. Don't be caught with an "objective statement" on your resume, or asking the interviewer questions you should have researched on the web on your own. Here are some hot tips for being a savvy career planner:

(1) Identify your top skills, strengths, demonstration situations and high point stories – Different behaviors for different jobs are needed. Today there are sophisticated career planning assessments on the market to help you identify your ideal work environment. It is important for you to become very familiar with your strongest skills. Then, whether it is a resume, a job application, or a job interview, you'll be able to articulate them succinctly and professionally.

(2) Identify your competitive advantage – the single most important job search skill is your ability to communicate what you can do for a company! When the hiring manager believes that you can help solve the type of problems they face, you dramatically increase your chances of being offered the job. The fact is, companies will hire someone when they believe that the person will bring more value than they cost.

(3) Selling yourself using high point stories – Your accomplishments or achievements can be identified in your demonstration situations. Using accomplishments in your letters, resumes and interviews gives a convincing picture of you in action. Employers today want do-ers. Your high point story should illustrate a contribution that you made to something that had a positive outcome.

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Effective Resume Writing

Creating an effective resume is a crucial step in the career planning process. Most job seekers rush into creating a resume before they fully understand their product (themselves). A resume advertises you – it sells ability, experience, potential benefits and value. It stimulates the interest of prospective employers to find out more about you and invite you to an interview. A common myth is that a good resume will get you a job. The reality is, however, that a resume will at best interest the reader enough to want to meet you. Here are some helpful tips on writing an effective resume:

- Keep your resume brief – especially in describing responsibilities. Describe the key outcomes or accountabilities of the position, not the tasks!
- Eliminate any information which is extraneous or that could create a negative effect; for example, marital status, religious or political affiliations, sports or hobbies, salary and references.
- Make sure it is formatted neatly with a word processor and printed on a laser printer. Be sure it has plenty of white space and use a spell checker. Final copies should be printed on at least (20) pound bond paper in ivory or white.
- Check to make sure you use a consistent format throughout your resume. If you used bold headings, make sure all headings are bold. Also make sure your verb tense is correct.
- Have your resume reviewed before finalizing it. Typos and spelling errors are almost guaranteed to eliminate you from being considered.
- Do not underestimate the importance of using a cover letter in your job search! Cover letters reflect the time, care and preparation you have given to your search. They also demonstrate enthusiasm and confidence which can help you begin to develop a rapport with the reader.

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The Interview

The interview is an exchange of information between the candidate and the company for the purpose of determining if there is a fit for the open position. You have certain qualifications to offer and they have certain needs to fill. Your qualifications have already separated you from the pack and brought you to the final selection process. The following tips will provide you with some techniques and information to help you fine-tune your presentation:

Dress conservatively. Men: wear a suit and tie, dark colors. Women: wear a suit or a dress with a jacket, conservative colors, simple jewelry, little makeup and perfume. Neatness is critical!

- Arrive about 5-10 minutes early. Be nice to everyone you meet at the company.
- Sit up straight, leaning forward slightly; this helps to convey an attitude of high interest and energy.
- Be positive, friendly, enthusiastic and sincere. Practice will help you to relax and be yourself. Be positive about previous employers.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Rest hands comfortably in your lap; gesture appropriately as you speak.
- Speak at adequate levels and avoid monotone patterns; don't drift off at the end of sentences. Speak with assurance.
- Be an attentive listener; ask questions and clarify meanings; answer concisely and clearly, do not ramble.

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- Anticipate general questions and those related to your experience. Prepare answers ahead of time.
- Picture yourself answering these questions confidently.

Once you have won the job you want, it is important to maintain your competitive advantage. The world of employment is dynamic. Employees need to become just as competitive and strategic about their careers as their employers are. More significantly, employees need to take responsibility for their own careers. If you want to continually compete and win in today's job market, you must maintain a competitive edge in your job performance in order to do so. Just as everyone has strengths, everyone has weaknesses or hindrances to performance that they must manage and overcome in order to grow professionally.

If you would like more information on career planning and assessment tools, please feel free to contact us.

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