



[DR. SHIRLEY'S CAREER CORNER]

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Thriving in the current job market

Understanding how to conduct a successful job search in the current financially depressed economic climate is a skill that no candidate can afford to be without. Competition is tough, and employers are vigorously looking for potential employees who are the best fit for the job.

Guidelines are quite different from those of just a few years ago. Job security is a thing of the past. Expertise, experience and accomplishments, as well as flexibility and a willingness to change, are more important than ever before.

Restructuring of businesses and the continued downsizing within so many companies have driven workers of all ages, occupations and income levels into a highly competitive job market. Individuals who once thought they'd never have to look for another position in life are, in fact, finding themselves in the job market.

Employers who are hiring are looking for solid marketing materials — strong cover letters and succinct résumés. These documents go a long way in forming your image; they are, indeed, you on paper. They should show your key responsibilities and a broad range of skills and accomplishments and illustrate how you have benefited your company. Be sure to provide any numbers, dollar amounts or percentages that back up your claims. Think like a salesperson — you are the product with much to offer. Your job is to develop a targeted marketing campaign that promotes your talents and effectively markets your background to potential employers.

Where do you begin? Begin with the résumé, one that is concise, visually appealing and designed to stimulate interest. It should ignite the curiosity of the reader without providing all the answers. A good résumé can certainly increase your chances of landing an interview. And, if you've been using the same résumé for a while, perhaps it's time to consider a makeover.

Preparing your résumé is only the beginning. A well-written cover letter is your chance to convince the prospective employer to interview you. Letters can be powerful, persuasive, useful tools in your job search. They are a must with each résumé you mail or fax. Use an abbreviated form of the letter as the transmittal message when e-mailing your résumé. For best results, three or four paragraphs that get right to the point should be adequate. The effectiveness of a cover letter can also be greatly enhanced with a telephone or e-mail follow-up within a week after the letter is sent. This allows you to create a positive impression and perhaps get an interview before the letter is lost in the pile and forgotten.

Now that your résumé and cover letter have been successful, you get the call for an interview. The interviewing process is one of the more important milestones in your job search. For many professionals, it's also one of the most unnerving. However, it need not be unbearable.

Keep in mind that the objective of the interview is the exchange of information. So, be prepared, confident and truthful, and you will find

that your interviews go much better. The more prepared you are, the less anxious and more able you will be to present yourself in a positive and professional manner. During the interview, continually emphasize your background, key qualifications and accomplishments as they relate to the needs of the position and the organization.

Look upon each job interview as a positive adventure. Keep your objective in mind as well as the fact that research indicates it takes an average of eight interviews to land one job offer.

After the interview, it is advisable to send a brief, well-worded, hand-written or e-mailed thank-you note for the courtesy extended to you during your interview. This simple act, believe it or not, can be a deciding factor in the final hiring decision. It puts your name back in front of the interviewer in a positive way. Make sure you mail or e-mail your note, ideally, within 24 hours, but no later than 48 hours after the interview.

Finally, keep in mind that those who are hired are not always the most qualified. They are those who *are* qualified as well as skilled in the art of the job search. Being successful takes an extra measure of self-esteem, motivation, initiative, resourcefulness, preparedness and persistence.

Best wishes to you in all of your future career endeavors!

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