

Smoothing out that move from student to employee

You are about to graduate. You have a degree. You are ready to take your knowledge and skills into the job world, and you have no idea how to do that.

You are not alone. A significant percentage of graduating college seniors are not sure of the next steps after obtaining a degree. This is a scary transition — going from the 16-plus years of student to employee. This transition, though daunting, does not have to be overwhelming. The job-search process can be an exciting and rewarding adventure if you follow some guidelines.

What are your skills?

You have them. There are several good skills-assessment tools you can purchase or find online that will help you determine your skill — Google “skills assessments,” for one.

But it’s really a matter of answering some simple questions: What do you like to do? Do you like working with people more than computers? Do you like talking on the phone? What motivates you? Are you a good writer? This is more about your skills and less about what you majored in.

Read and research

Read your local papers. Not only are there job listings, but there are articles on a variety of businesses and industries. Look at industries that might be of interest — technology, advertising, marketing, sales — and research companies within those industries. You can do this via the Internet and access business directories all over the country. Hoovers.com or business.com is a good place to start. In addition, the Boulder County Business Report’s “Book of Lists” is an excellent local resource.

Networking

Networking is the key to getting a job. Talk to anyone and everyone you know who has a job or career, and ask them not only about their career, but who they know. Ask people to make introductory calls for you to set up informational interviews.

Informational interviews

Informational interviews help gather insight into the industry and the types of jobs offered. Be prepared. Take a copy or two of your resume. When you set up the informational interview, approach it like a real job interview.

Have questions prepared, and ask if there are any openings. Questions to ask include: How did you get started? What does a company like yours look for in a recent graduate?

Also ask for a referral to someone else to speak with. Follow up with a thank-you note, which is preferred, or an e-mail.

Resume

Ask 100 people what your resume should look like, and you’ll get 100 different answers. The bottom line is the shorter the better. Because you probably don’t have a lot of job history, don’t try to make it look like you do. Focus on your skills and what you can bring to the job — not a list of papers you wrote in college. Include an objective

for a specific job in a specific industry. For example, “Objective: To obtain a job in the marketing and communications industry.” If your objective is just to get a job, don’t list an objective.

Treat your job search like a job

Make a to-do list each day and follow up. Set time to research, network and follow through. Keep a list of who you talked to, who you sent a resume to and when you need to follow up.

Be patient and realistic

The job-search process is another transition in your life. It takes time and commitment, just like school. Don’t expect to come in at the very top level, regardless of your GPA or the prestige of your college education. You’ll get the job based on what the employer sees as potential, energy and commitment. And when you follow some simple steps, you will be hired.

Alice Swanson is an independent consultant who offers individual coaching and group workshops for graduating seniors on the job-search process. For more information contact alice@aliceswanson.com.



GUEST OPINION

Alice Swanson