

10 Tips to Recession-Proof Your Job Search

By Lindsey Pollak. Author, *Getting from College to Career: 90 Things to Do Before You Join the Real World*

Job hunting during these difficult economic times is challenging, but we know you're up to the task. To help, we've put together a 10-point checklist of actions to take right now.

Define your personal brand

Your personal brand is what differentiates you and makes you stand out from the crowd. It's the reputation and image that you carry with you, and the unique edge that you'll need to compete for jobs in today's marketplace. Figure out your strengths and be prepared to play them up to potential employers. You need to think carefully about where and how you add value and what makes you stand out from others in your class. You should develop your unique brand with all of your contacts and within your network.

Cast a wider and wider net

If you are struggling to find a job in your chosen field, think creatively about the kind of industries and organizations where you might be able to apply your skills. Consider start-ups, nonprofits, government jobs, small companies, medium-sized companies, local businesses and organizations in different cities, states or even countries. Explore every industry or job function that appeals to you. The broader your search, the better your chances.

Network ... the right way

The Internet is great, but 70 to 80 percent of jobs are found through networking. The best place to start networking is with the people who know you best: your family, friends and other close contacts. Call, email and set up informal chats with everyone you know who might have some advice or job leads to offer — including your parents, grandparents and older siblings or cousins. The more people you talk to, the more eyes will be on the lookout for openings that fit your criteria. And you may just find out that your mom's college roommate's daughter is a VIP at the company of your dreams.

Become an industry insider

One of the biggest complaints from recruiters is that job candidates don't know enough about the companies to which they're applying. It's crucial to be extremely knowledgeable about any company you want to work for. This shows that you're genuinely interested in the organization and that you're ready to hit the ground running on day one. Set up news alerts (<http://alerts.google.com>) for any companies on your target list, read blogs by industry leaders, read or watch the national and business news every single day and follow influential people on Twitter.com

Be seen by the right people

Networking is not just about who you know, it's about who knows you. So, get out there and shake some hands (firmly, with strong eye contact, of course). If you're shy, invite a confident friend to be your wingman or wingwoman, then make your way to job fairs, professional industry association conferences (many offer discounts for new professionals), library lectures, graduate school information sessions, alumni mixers, Chamber of Commerce workshops and anywhere else professionals are gathering. Set a goal of following up with one or two people you meet at each event to make sure your network continues to expand.

Volunteer

During an economic downturn, there are many nonprofit, community and religious organizations that need volunteers. Giving back is rewarding in and of itself (which is great for morale), plus it has many tangible benefits for your job search: you'll meet new people who may be able to refer you to job opportunities; you'll build skills and experience that can enhance your resume; and you may come across paid openings at an organization where you're donating your time.

Follow up with everyone you meet

Often the job goes to the person who is in the right place at the right time. Stay on the radar screens of everyone you know and everyone you meet by regularly reminding them of your availability, your value and your willingness to support them if they need help. Some ideas: send someone an article he or she might enjoy, attend live events where you are likely to run into your contacts and comment on a person's status update on Facebook. Just be careful to remain polite and relevant: you want to persist and stand out, not pester and stalk!

Take advantage of everything Career Services offers

College Career Services offices provide excellent (and free) resources — exclusive job databases, resume critiquing, mock interviewing sessions, networking referrals, one-on-one career counseling, free workshops and more. Have you taken advantage of everything you can? Your college Career Services office is even available to you after you've graduated, so don't miss out.

Treat your resume as a work of art

Your resume is the written representation of you and the first impression of your "personal brand," so make sure it's as smart, savvy and polished as you are. Ask trusted professionals, especially those with experience in your target industries, to provide feedback and suggestions on your resume. Regularly assess that your resume clearly states your accomplishments, unique qualities and career objective. Save the abbreviations and slang for texting your friends, and have at least three people verify that your resume is 100 percent typo-free. If you're not confident in your writing skills, invest in a business writing class (in person or online) and strengthen your ability to be concise, persuasive and grammatically correct. This will not only help you get a job, but it will also help you succeed in that job once you get there.

Keep your spirits up

It's easy to become frustrated while job hunting in a tough economy, so look for inexpensive ways to have fun and stay relaxed. Get yourself to the gym or yoga class ... attend open mic comedy nights ... toss around a Frisbee in the park ... put together a pot luck dinner party ... spend quality time with the people you love. (Hmmm ... all of these are good networking opportunities as well.)

And finally, keep checking back here at pwc.tv for tips, suggestions, videos, Q&As and more. I promise we'll be here with lots of suggestions, ideas, strategies and opportunities to keep you motivated and help you find the job of your dreams.

Feed your future.