

## Job Search Strategies

By Lynn Brown, CHRP

Today's recruitment process, highly influenced by technology, is fast and furious. Consequently, recruiting methods, especially those employed in the technical fields, are changing. With more and more candidates vying for prime jobs, the key is to distinguish yourself in a sea of candidates.

Your first introduction to a company is through your résumé. Certainly in scientific and engineering environments, your technical qualifications are very important. However, presentation is an equally important factor. Résumés that are difficult to read or where the information is hard to find will not get much consideration. In addition, typographical and grammatical errors can indicate to a prospective employer a lack of attention to detail.

From a visual perspective, the top third of the first page is usually where the recruiter's eyes hit first, so ensure that this is where your key selling points are. Rather than have an "objective," which states what you want, create a "summary." These are two or three sentences that sum up your experience and reflect what you have to offer a prospective company.

Alternatively, you may wish to list your specific skills in a "technical summary" at the beginning of your résumé. This is generally placed right after your name and contact information. A technical summary is beneficial if you have experience in a wide range of specific processes or equipment. The technical summary can capture it all and the recruiter won't have to search through your résumé to find your specific skills.

One of the ways in which recruiting is changing is the electronic submission of candidate information and résumés in searchable databases. Recruiters submit their criteria and the database software selects potential candidates that meet that basic criteria. This search process, unfortunately, won't capture the specifics in your résumé such as your key achievements. If you have the opportunity to attach or paste your résumé, remember to keep your "selling" points right at the top.

Although many companies now ask for résumés to be submitted electronically, that doesn't

mean that they have database recruitment software. This is a fairly expensive process and is more often used by larger organizations that receive a high volume of résumés. If you are submitting your résumé electronically as an attachment, keep the word processing software simple. There is no point in creating a fancy résumé full of graphics if the company can't open it, or worse, if the attachment is blocked at the firewall.

Another potential avenue to introduce yourself to different companies is through employment agencies. Often, if a particular position is in high demand or a company lacks internal resources to source and recruit for their needs, they will contract out some or all of the recruiting function.

In general, employment agencies are best for individuals who have some experience in their industries. Although you can seek out an employment agency for entry-level positions, it is not as likely that a company will utilize an agency for these types of positions as they most likely receive a number of unsolicited résumés for entry-level positions.

There are many reputable agencies that specialize in scientific and engineering placements. But do your homework. If the agency states, "we do everything," they may not have as broad a client base in your field and their recruiters may not have a good understanding of your particular industry. The recruiter should know the industry and be able to knowledgeably discuss your technical qualifications. If he or she is unable to do that, they may not be the best at representing you to prospective employers.

For people whose skills are in really high demand using an agency can help to present you to a wider market. It is also beneficial to those who are uncomfortable with the recruitment process. An agency can help to sell your skills to prospective companies and help coach you through the process.

Regardless of whether or not your introduction is through an agency, Human Resources may be involved in the recruitment process. The role of Human Resources could be anything from screening résumés, to conducting telephone screening, to face-to-face interviewing. The challenge with Human

Resources' involvement is that they will often be focusing more on fit within the company rather than the fit of your technical skills to the job.

In an interview with Human Resources, be prepared for typical questions such as "why do you think you would be a good candidate for this position" or behavioural-based questions such as "give me an example of a time when..." These questions are often asked to ascertain how well you work with others or how you handle specific situations.

Another way to be prepared is to research the company before the interview. You may be asked what you know about the company.

Have your own questions ready. If you are unsure if you will remember them, write them down and refer to them during the interview. In wrapping up the interview, always indicate if you are interested in the position.

Putting your effort up front—in your résumé and your preparation for the interview—will go a long way in setting yourself apart from other candidates in today's job market.

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