

This handout is designed specifically for students and alumni who are looking for that first significant job. What follows are the basics to consider as you begin the job search process. These suggestions do work, and our experience has proven that those who use them are far more likely to be successful than those who do not.

### **AN UNCERTAIN WORLD OF WORK**

There is probably no need to dwell on the fact that the employment climate in our country is characterized by shifts and changes. Studies show that you may very well have six to ten different jobs and two to three careers in your lifetime. All of this makes it that much more important to understand how to effectively seek and find employment, a skill you will put to use many times in your life.

### **ATTITUDE AND PERSPECTIVE**

The first task is to look at your attitude toward yourself. Very often graduates of liberal arts programs begin with the premise that they have little of value to offer an employer in terms of their abilities and skills.

There is no question that it is a challenge for liberal arts graduates to find their way in the job market, but the fact is that the skills and characteristics you have developed in college and through your life experiences, are just the ones employers are looking for. In a recent survey of hiring managers, the top qualities they sought were:

- Communication skills (verbal and written)
- Honesty/integrity
- Teamwork skills (working well with others)
- Interpersonal skills (relating well to others)
- Strong work ethic

Some of you have doubts about your abilities because you simply don't know yourself, or how to describe and characterize what you have to offer. We can help you through a process of determining your work-related skills, values, interests and personality characteristics. If you don't know how to describe the "product" (you), it is difficult to convincingly "sell" it to anyone else.

You have a great deal to offer, but you need to know what those qualities and skills are, *and* be able to articulately communicate them to others.

The flip side of all this -- and a common complaint employers have about recent college graduates -- is an over-inflated view of your value. Most graduates entering the job market start at the bottom, and depending on the industry, the bottom may look very low. But don't assume that where you start is where you will be for very long. It is important for you to do your homework and find out what typical salaries are for entry level positions in the field you are pursuing. Don't embarrass and frustrate yourself by having unrealistic and poorly informed expectations.

## **KNOWING WHAT YOU WANT**

Probably the most fundamental reason why new graduates have trouble finding a meaningful job is that they have not narrowed down what they are after. With vague goals and unclear focus, they are trying to hit a target they cannot see. **The more focused you can be, the more likely it is you will find a good job.**

## **IMPORTANT TOOLS AND RESOURCES**

The job search process should be an "attack" on every front possible. Check the newspapers, the state department of employment, contact employment agencies, check company websites, use social media, access listings on the internet, consider a resume "blitz" to every company or organization that could possibly be a lead, etc. It is important to remember that the highest percentage of jobs (up to 85%) are found through **direct, personal contact**. To put it bluntly, the old saying about the importance of "who you know" versus "what you know" is more true than not.

Find the person who has the power to hire you, and show them you have the skills they are looking for. The best way to do that is by locating as many contacts as you can. Here are some of the ways:

### **1. Use Westmont's resources:**

- **The Alumni directory**
- **Professors and fellow students** likely have connections that will be of great help. Your teachers often know people in fields that interest you.
- **Handshake**, Westmont's own online job resource system where you can access 1000's of jobs- locally and national. Go to [www.westmont.edu/findajob](http://www.westmont.edu/findajob) to register.

2. **Tell everyone you know**, family, friends, friends of friends, friends of your parents, etc. that you are looking.

3. **Informational Interview** (see appendix) allows you to talk with people you would not normally be able to access, gives an inside look at a field and it can help you make an informed decision as to whether the area you are exploring is one you want to pursue. *It is not, in and of itself, a job search tool (in fact you must make it plain when you set one up that you are not looking for a job),* but it may provide invaluable contacts.

4. **Church and parachurch** contacts, and especially **pastors**, are a great resource. Those in ministry usually know lots of people, and they are the kind of people who can help you most.

4. **Create a LinkedIn** account to develop an online professional presence and find, be introduced to, and collaborate with, qualified professionals.

5. **Explore Employment/Temp Agencies**, The use of employment agencies can be an excellent way to find meaningful short and long-term employment.

## **JOB SEARCH AND NETWORKING STRATEGIES**

1. **Think small.** Small businesses are increasingly where the "action" and should not be overlooked. They often don't have personnel departments so that the direct form of job searching is all the more important
2. **Be willing to relocate.** The simple fact is that those who are willing to move are more likely to find work.
3. **Develop your networking skills.** Take part in events held or promoted by the COVE Career Center throughout the year. Check Handshake for information about recruiters, local job fairs and more.
4. **Consider an Internship-** Interning at a company is a great way to potentially transition to a full time opportunity. Talk with as many people at the company as possible.
5. **Join Associations and Conferences-** Further increase your business connections by attending professional conferences on related topics, searching associations for job opportunities and keeping up on current trends.
6. **Develop your Story Statement** (see appendices) Be able to identify who you are and what you are looking for and your experience in 30 seconds or less. Be thorough and succinct to demonstrate your excellent communication skills.
7. **See your first job as the beginning of a process, not the end.** Statistics show that one year out of college, 50% of recent graduates have changed jobs. You may have several jobs before you settle into a long-term commitment. Don't pass on an opportunity that could be a significant stepping-stone, because "I can't imagine doing that for the rest of my life." That is exactly the wrong approach to take. Your first job is not even close to being "for life."
8. **Don't let a job description intimidate you.** When companies and organizations put job descriptions together, they are thinking of that ideal candidate that may or may not exist. If you feel you meet many of the qualifications, but not all, don't let that stop you from applying.
9. **Develop computer skills.** Since liberal arts students can go through four years of college with limited exposure to computers, many end up with limited skills. That's not really an option any more. No matter what the job, computers will enter in somewhere, and the more you know the better.
10. **Don't short change interview preparation.** Many students will spend hours over their resume, and spend little or no time preparing for the interview, which is the most critical part of the job search process. You can get a very good job without a resume, but rarely without an effective interview.
11. **Do your homework.** One of the biggest turn-offs to employers is job seekers who show they really don't know anything about the company or organization. Virtually every company or organization has a web site, so start there.
12. **Don't find yourself passively waiting for a call.** Your job is to use your time tracking down leads and meeting people. Waiting for a call is almost guaranteed to lead to discouragement. Job searching is real work and requires a substantial commitment of time to be successful. It rarely comes easily, or quickly.

## APPENDIX: INTERVIEWING FOR INFORMATION

An **Information Interview** is a meeting you request with a professional who has a job or works for a company that interests you. You want to find out what that person does on the job and to gather information for further exploration of that career. It is not a job interview, but puts you in touch with a role model who can provide you with significant information.

Informational interviewing is an invaluable tool that students rarely take full advantage of. It may be an intimidating experience at first, but it is well worth the effort. Most of us do not know what people actually do day-to-day, though we may think we do. This simple activity will clarify your perceptions, give you a "feel" for an occupation, and provide you with important networking contacts for the future.

Some guidelines:

1. Avoid a phone interview if at all possible; there is no substitute for face-to-face contact.
2. If you ask for a half-hour, keep on schedule unless it is clear the individual wants to go longer.
3. Don't put the person on the spot by asking for a job; that shows a lack of integrity.
4. Dress and present yourself as if you were going to a job interview; though that is not the goal, it may end up being just that.
5. Be sure and send a thank-you note the day after the interview.

### INFORMATION INTERVIEWING: QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. How did you decide to enter this field and what steps did you take?
2. What are your activities and responsibilities? What is a typical day like?
3. What do you like best about your job?
4. What is challenging about your job or industry?
5. How and by whom are work decisions made that affect you?
6. How much influence do you have over decisions affecting you?
7. If you could try any other job for a day what would it be?
8. Is there any specific advice you would give to someone entering this field?
9. Are there academic programs you would recommend that would be good preparation for entering this field?
10. Can you suggest the names of other people I might speak with?