



FINDING A JOB IN A TOUGH ECONOMY

A Guide for College Students & Recent Graduates

Joe Mayne

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By Joe Mayne

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INTRO_{DUCTION}

SET THE RIGHT **EXPECTATIONS**

WORK YOUR **NETWORK**

KNOW YOUR **ECONOMICS**

BE **INFORMED** AND **PREPARED**

BE THE **RIGHT PERSON** FOR THE JOB

BE **FLEXIBLE**

KEEP **YOUR HEAD UP**

INTRODUCTION

Should you be worried about finding a job in this economy? Well, the facts don't lie. The past couple of years have seen record numbers of companies downsizing, posting major losses, and even closing their doors altogether. In this environment, even experienced workers are having a hard time staying employed, so what chance does a new graduate have of finding an open position with a good company?

Actually, it's better than you think. That's because, despite all the bad publicity the job market has gotten lately, there are still thousands of opportunities out there. Bad news might be all over the front pages, but most businesses around the country just keep on doing what they've been doing for years – even if the profits aren't quite what they have been.

And as these companies keep trudging along, so do their employees. They might be worried about their incomes, or the stability of their retirement accounts, but

for the most part they just keep living their lives. That means some of them will get promoted, move, retire, have kids, go back to school, or do one of the many dozens of other things that cause them to leave their current jobs. So, as bleak as things may seem, new jobs are still opening up every day.

Even better, as a student or recent graduate, you're well-positioned to take their place. Most businesses, no matter what size they are or where in the country they're located, are still looking to grow. They need new people to do that, and who better to hire than a fresh, enthusiastic, low cost option - someone who has just finished their higher education?

The opportunities are out there. I'm not going to promise you that it's going to be easy, or that you're going to get your dream job right away. But if you can keep focused and follow the advice in this short e-book, you can take the first step toward building your career - even in a tough economy.

SET THE RIGHT **EXPECTATIONS**

Today's new graduates are savvier than ever. Perhaps because they've grown-up with access to all kinds of media and information, or maybe because they've learned from the careers of their parents and grandparents, they have a much clearer picture of what they're looking for when they enter the job market. Not only do they know they don't want to work for peanuts, but they also know better than to slave away at a job they hate just for a bigger paycheck.

Sometimes, though, these ideas can take them too far. I see more and more young people graduating from college and expecting to find a job that pays well, challenges them intellectually, makes a difference in the world, and allows for all kinds of vacation time right at the outset. In other words, they think they're going to find their dream job right away.

Sadly, this is rarely the case – especially in a tight economy. While there are great jobs to be had, most new graduates are going to find positions at or near what

recruiters call “entry-level.” These jobs are opportunities to learn and show what you can do, all while drawing a salary, but little else. The bad news is that they aren’t going to pay a lot, and most days are going to feel like a lot of work. They can be boring, frustrating, and everything else that you don’t want in your career. The good news is that they are only a first step. Show you can perform and you’ll be on your way to something bigger and brighter in no time.

Very, very few people find their dream job (or anything close to it) shortly after they graduate. Expect that you’re going to have to pay your dues to work your way towards the top. That doesn’t mean that you’re never going to get there, or even that it has to take a long time. Just realize that everyone has to start somewhere, and concentrate on the opportunities that a job can bring you for the future – not whether you’ll be doing what you love on a day-to-day basis right now.

WORK YOUR **NETWORK**

It's ironic that the very best job seeking resource for new graduates is the one they take advantage of the least: the people they know. Make no mistake: your friends, relatives, and professional acquaintances represent the absolute easiest possible way for you to hear about an open position.

For one thing, their reach extends much farther than yours, even if you're using every newspaper, Internet site, and public channel you can think of. That's because every person you know knows hundreds of other people, who in turn each know hundreds, and so on. It's the classic "six degrees of separation" rule. The best way to get an opening with recruiters is through an introduction, so make sure you're asking for them.

Besides coming across warmer job leads, you might even find out about openings that aren't advertised. A large number of jobs become available and are filled before they are ever even advertised. That means you can't get them by surfing Monster.com or Careerbuilder;

you have to continually let people know that you're out there and available.

Building your network is easy. Make a list of all the people you are in regular contact with, and start by making a handful of phone calls. Let them know that you've graduated (or soon will) and are looking for work. Be sure to mention a specific location, job title, or company you have in mind, as this might spur them to remember a contact they might have forgotten otherwise. Once you've reached out to your family, friends, and professors, update your social networking profiles online. Make sure your Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn pages are current. You don't want to rely on them to find a job, but they can extend your network reach even farther.

From there, the next step is just follow-up! keep following up until something comes along. It only takes a minute to place a phone call, write a note, or send an e-mail, but the effort to keep hundreds of people talking and thinking about finding you a great job is worth it.

KNOW YOUR **ECONOMICS**

Why would a company hire you? If you answered that you're bright, hard-working, or technically qualified, then you're on the right track – but you're still wrong. The answer, in its most basic sense, is because they're in business to make money. By adding you to their staff, they have figured or estimated that they can profit above and beyond what they intend to pay. Put another way, no one in the business world is going to hire you for \$30,000 a year unless they're convinced that they can make more than that from the work you do.

Knowing this, it's important to ask yourself where you fit into an organization's revenue stream. What is it that you can do that will help them improve their bottom line? Would you bring in sales, help them to operate more efficiently, or save money in some area? The closer you can come to putting concrete answers – not to mention dollar amounts – on the ends of these questions, the easier time you're going to have finding jobs that you are a good fit for.

This is another one of those pieces of advice that really applies in any job market, but is especially relevant during a recession or downturn. If you can show a way that your prospective employer can improve profits while things are tough by bringing you into the team, then you're way ahead of the game.

In some professions, like sales, it's easy to figure out where you contribute. You bring in so many orders a month, which increase the company's revenue and profits. But even if you are in another field, like accounting, human resources, or product development, you can still find your place in the whole. Simply talk to your professors, or even someone working in the industry, to find out the financial impacts of people working in your field.

Remember, no one is going to hire you just because they like you. They bring you on board because they believe they can profit beyond your salary. Know just how to do that, and you'll be more prepared to explain why you're the right person for the job.

BE **INFORMED** AND **PREPARED**

Once you understand where you fit into a perspective employer's revenue stream, it's time to get more specific. For each interview that you agree to, do some research ahead of time. Apply what you already know about profit and loss from a company's point of view, to the position that you want to get.

For example, if you were interviewing for an entry-level engineering position with a manufacturing firm, it might be a good idea to talk with a few other engineers. Find out what you can expect to be paid, and how the company will recoup those costs. Whether it's going to be through improvements to products, decreasing costs for regulatory compliance, or simply figuring out where the payoff is in adding someone to the team.

A lot of this information you can gather from your perspective employer's website and marketing literature. You can also turn to your professors, business acquaintances, or even other people already working at the company. If you wanted to take things one step

further – and you should – you could even examine some data about their industry, competitors, and so on. The point is to gather as much knowledge as you possibly can so that you can see things from their perspective.

Doing so won't just make you stronger in the interview; it will allow you to roll out a clear case for why you should be hired. Armed with an idea of where you fit into the company's revenue stream, along with the information and explanations that show how you can make an impact right away, you've easily made yourself a hiring target. The recruiter will be impressed that you've done your homework, and that you understand what your place will be in the company.

The easiest way to get a job with any organization is to know exactly how they'll get ahead by hiring you and then to tell them all about it. Do a little bit of homework beforehand and this will be a lot easier than it may sound.

BE THE **RIGHT PERSON** FOR THE JOB

Advisors, parents, and other “experts” love to remind students about the importance of the items on their resume. Good grades, lots of activities, and a few awards will go a long way towards getting your job – or so the thinking goes. I’m not going to tell you that those things don’t help, or that they won’t matter, because they will. At the same time, though, the truth is that they aren’t the be-all and end-all of the hiring process. A strong resume makes it much easier for you to get an interview, but when it comes to the actual hiring, recruiters are more concerned about something else – getting the right person.

You see, no matter how wonderful a recent graduate’s resume is, that resume will never show up for training, work with the existing staff, or learn the job. The candidate has to do all of those things. So, once an interviewer has made the decision to see you, what they’re looking for isn’t necessarily another stack of achievements or qualifications; it’s the right personality and fit for their opening.

As much as this is always the case, it's even more important in tough economic times. When things are tight, what recruiters really want is a person who is enthusiastic, cooperative, and gets things done. Being the brightest or most accomplished certainly gives you an advantage, but only if you seem like the kind of young man or woman who is going to come in and help out right away.

In a great economy when things are booming, employers can take chances on new hires with flashes of potential. But when things are tight, they want to find that one person who will come in, mesh with their team, and make an immediate impact. Make yourself easy to hire by becoming the right person for the job. Have the right attitude, let interviewers know that you're willing to do whatever is asked of you, and show a bit of flexibility. Because when it comes down to it, being the right person for the job is the easiest way to get hired.

BE **FLEXIBLE**

Using your network, conventional resources like employment websites, and your understanding of hiring economics, you should be well on your way to finding a great job. Still, in a tough economy there are no guarantees. Sometimes there just aren't many openings in your field, or maybe you just haven't been able to find the right fit yet. For that reason, my advice to new graduates is easy: be flexible.

I mentioned earlier that you shouldn't really be looking for your dream job right out of school. You'll most likely have to make sacrifices in terms of pay, location, and other details. But just how wide those parameters should stretch depends a lot on what your options are. If recruiters are beating down your door with prime offers, then by all means, stick to your guns. On the other hand, though, if the job market isn't looking as rosy as you'd hoped, then start to think about what you could live without.

A lot of students that I talk to, for example, have very definite ideas about where they'd like to live after they graduate. Many of them tell me that they'd like to work in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and so on. If they're able to find employment in those cities, great. But if not, I like to remind them that people need new employees in places like Omaha, Duluth, and Boise. In fact, these are often the areas that continue to grow while the economy drags down larger cities.

That's only one example, but the reality is that there are a lot of areas – like salary, the size of the company, or vacation time – where being flexible can increase the openings available to you. I even know of a few graduates who have offered to work part-time to get a start in their industry. While that might be a tougher road to go, I think they have the right idea. Being flexible allows you to get a foot in the door, in your industry and your company, so that you'll be ready to move on to bigger and better things when the economy picks up.

KEEP YOUR HEAD UP

Besides being flexible and open to any opportunities that come along, the best advice I have for a new graduate who's feeling discouraged by the current job market is to just keep at it. It's easy, when things are hard, to just sit back and give up. Go on two or three bad interviews, or fail to hear back from a handful of recruiters, and it can start to feel like no one is hiring. But they are; you just haven't found the right fit yet.

Always remember that job hunting is a process. That's true in any economy, and especially a slow one. Keeping the right perspective and continuing to look every day are the two keys to coming out ahead. If your job search is coming along slowly, don't get down about it. Use the time to improve your resume, work on your interviewing style, pick up a new job skill, or even make a little money at a part-time job. Sooner or later, if you're making yourself a stronger candidate every day, then someone is going to notice and snap you up.

Also, realize that a lot of the reasons that you're hired (or not) lay behind the scenes. Sometimes, it just happens that a candidate isn't quite the right fit for a team or opening. It also happens that managers end up bringing back old employees, hiring a relative, or eliminating the position altogether. These factors are all outside of your control, and in truth, you may never even know or hear about them.

Regardless of the reason for your struggle, though, the best thing to do is to just keep pushing forward and remembering that the door swings both ways. Just as you might have narrowly missed out on a job because the recruiter gave it to his nephew, it's just as likely that someone you know will have or hear of a new position. The harder you work, the more luck you create – so be sure you're giving your job search every ounce of energy and enthusiasm that you can.

ABOUT THE **AUTHOR**

Joe Mayne is a professional speaker and author from Minneapolis, Minnesota. For more than 15 years, he's been teaching college students from hundreds of campuses across North America how to stand out in the job search process.

From the beginning of his career, when he was hired by a Fortune 500 firm before he graduated college, Joe has been intrigued by the dynamics of the job hunting process. Later, in his work as a recruiter, manager, and consultant, he conducted thousands of interviews and learned how to evaluate candidates from an employer's perspective. He continues to gather and share those insights today through his books, articles, and keynote speeches.

Joe's articles and e-books have been featured nationally online and in the print media, and he continues to give dozens of presentations to colleges and universities each year.

You can find out more about him and his work at www.MayneSpeaker.com

