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# You've Just Graduated & the Economy's Tanked; Now What?

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While the debate continues about whether or not we're headed for a recession, there are plenty of signs that the economy is weak. Gas prices continue to soar to dizzying heights, foreclosures are still on the rise, the stock market seems to be on a rollercoaster ride, and the U.S. Department of Labor says the unemployment rate of 5.5 percent is on a rapid incline. This is frightening if you're fresh out of a cap and gown and ready to enter the work force.

Surprisingly, opportunities exist, even in this market, because companies are hiring to replace retiring baby boomers.

"During a recent roundtable discussion, [the employers] said with the advent of all these people retiring, it was opening up more opportunities than they originally anticipated," says Laura Newbury, a career adviser at the University of Connecticut.

Companies increasingly are recruiting workers who reflect their communities so they can relate to customers and clients. With that in mind, diversity can be an added plus in getting that interview or getting that job. So how do you get the point across?

"If you're specifically trying to stand out by ethnicity, the best route is to get involved in student organizations such as NSBE [National Society of Black Engineers] or SHPE [Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers]," says Daniel Guerrero, a client manager at INROADS. "The key focus for a lot of employers is what you did while you were a part of that organization and how you can carry those transferable skills into an employer's organization and environment."

Bernie Milano, president of The PhD Project and the KPMG Foundation, agrees. "I don't think you can stick to a paragraph like, 'Hey, hire me because I happen to be African American,'" he says. "That's just not going to go anywhere. People don't hire on that basis; they hire on what value [the applicant] can bring to the company."

Internships are another way to gain experience and skills that will set you apart in your chosen field. But a challenge that recent grads from lower-income households face is whether they can afford to take an unpaid internship if they can't land a job in their field.

Dwanye Ashley, CEO and president of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund advises students not to

rule out valuable experience in the form of an unpaid internship, even if money is tight.

"Are you buying designer jeans or getting your nails done every week? If yes, you can stand to cut some of your expenses back, which would allow you to take an [unpaid] internship that may not be full time and ... you could do some part-time work to supplement that," says Ashley.

"In an economy like this, one of the things you have to think about is that we are becoming very globalized. You have to start thinking outside of the U.S.," says Isaac Ortega, associate professor and president of [ALFAS](#), the Association for Latino Faculty and Staff at the University of Connecticut. "One of the things that I tell a lot of students is that there are two possibilities to think about. One is to consider going back to school for a master's degree or higher. The other possibility is to go and join the Peace Corp. where you're going to get a second language and [they] offer the possibility of getting a master's degree along the way."

Whatever your individual situation is, Milano suggests keeping this formula in mind: "Ability plus attitude equals success."

Along with the right attitude and ability, here are ten tips that will help you gain the edge in a tight job market.

### 1. **Have a Superstar Résumé**

A superstar résumé is more important than ever to get you noticed. Take a résumé-writing workshop or browse the web for examples that suit your experience. Make sure your résumé highlights your accomplishments and skills.

"As this market has become more competitive, you've really got to demonstrate your skill set and the talents you bring to that company that's really going to add to their bottom line," Ashley adds.

For more advice on résumés, take a look at [Top Résumé Blunders and How You Can Avoid Them](#).

### 2. **Invest in a Good Suit**

Dressing the part is just as important as playing the role of a true professional. "Invest in a good suit, something that's going to fit you appropriately, something that's going to have a conservative look to it," says Guerrero. "The investment in that will not only allow you to truly look professional but feel professional. That goes a long way in being able to share your competencies."

For more tips on appropriate interview wear, read [What Not to Wear to an Interview: Leave the Tux, Cologne and Bluetooth Behind](#).

### 3. **Strengthen Your Networking Circle**

The more people you enlist in your search for work, the more likely you'll land the job you want. Everyone you know is a potential resource. Get in touch with professors, advisers and other contacts you've made during college as well as friends and family. The knowledge and contacts they have may help you get your foot in a door that has otherwise been closed to you.

"[You've] really got to be out there looking at everybody that you could network with that's going to give you that edge when you're going in for that job opportunity," Ashley advises.

For more tips on how to network, check out [The Ins & Outs of Networking](#).

### 4. **Be Confident in Your Strengths**

Too often, people concentrate on their weaknesses and not enough on what they do well. "Résumés just open the door to an interview--they never get you a job," says Milano. "It's important to stress all the positives that you possibly can sift out of your background, out of your experiences."

While you may be asked about your shortcomings during an interview, make sure to promote your strengths. "Employers are telling us they want to see a student that can clearly communicate what transferable skills and strengths they would have that would be an asset and seize a future for themselves in the organization," says Newbury.

#### **5. Keep Voicemails and E-Mails Professional**

There is nothing professional about the latest hip-hop track playing on your voicemail or a funky e-mail address, especially if a prospective employer is reaching out to you.

"Have a separate e-mail address altogether specifically for your job search," Guerrero says. "And make sure that your voicemail message accurately reflects your professionalism. A lot of times, not just with recent grads but also undergraduate students looking for internships, [an employer] will call, but because the voicemail message was inappropriate or didn't identify them, they miss out on opportunities."

For more e-mail advice, check out [Could Your E-Mail Name Hurt Your Career?](#)

#### **6. Be Willing to Start at the Bottom**

"If the only thing that's available is something that is entry level, seemingly not career oriented, take it [and] do the best job that you can," says Milano. "Get in early, work hard, be diligent, offer to help others around you, [and] be a great team player, and people are going to notice and want you on their team."

Don't feel like you're too good to start at the bottom and work your way up.

"Learning from the grassroots up is always helpful," advises Newbury. "There's no harm in taking a very entry-level position within a company that you aspire to advance in."

Some of the most successful professionals started in the mailroom. "[If an employer asks] 'Please go Xerox this,' if you turn your nose up as if the job's beneath you, it gets picked up immediately," says Milano. "Take that thing and go make the best Xerox you've made in your life, and come back and say, 'Do you have any more?' It's all about attitude."

#### **7. Identify a Mentor**

Don't hesitate to approach someone and ask them to be your mentor. If you see strengths in a professional that you want to acquire, let them know that you want to learn from them. "Identify someone that can help you and work with you to get your foot in the door," says Ashley.

For more tips on mentoring, read [How to Build a Successful Mentorship](#).

#### **8. The Impact of a Thank-You Note**

"Only 20 percent of individuals that go through an interview remember to send some type of thank-you message, whether it's via handwritten card or typed letter or even an e-mail," says Guerrero.

He advises that, ideally, thank-you notes should be sent within the first 24 hours after the interview, and they should be kept brief: "You're not writing a thesis. It's just a short [note] adding a couple comments that you didn't get to make in the interview. It allows [the employer] to make that reconnection again between who you were and the fact that you were able to build on that

relationship."

### **9. NEVER Send Prospective Employers 'Friends Requests'**

In today's technological age, the Internet serves as global communication, and social-networking portals such as MySpace, Facebook, and LinkedIn, among others, bank on that. But while keeping in contact with friends via cyberspace is nothing short of cool, it is the total opposite when it comes to professionalism.

"This is kind of a new phenomenon but happened to me recently," Guerrero explains. "At least two or three times, after I've interviewed [a student], they send me a message via e-mail, saying, 'Thank you for the interview; I appreciate the opportunity.' And then 15 seconds later, I get a link, saying, 'Do you want to be my buddy?' on Facebook or MySpace ... That's certainly not appropriate."

In addition, some companies use these portals for recruitment, so Guerrero urges, "You want to be very cautious as to what you're putting out there for public consumption to begin with."

### **10. Consider Returning to School**

After earning a bachelor's degree, it may not seem appealing to return for yet another degree, but Ortega insists, "Nowadays, a bachelor's degree is equivalent to what used to be a high-school diploma. If you get a master's degree, the higher your chances are to increase your gain later on."

Don't let continuing education costs deter you from obtaining a higher or second degree. "There are opportunities for students to find grants and other opportunities, but you have to dig through them," advises Newbury. "Connect with a career officer to see if they're knowledgeable of different foundations or grant opportunities. And always stay focused on your goals."

### **Readers' Comments**

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This is a very interesting and helpful email. Goes straight into many guide-full tips and concerns students have these days.

Jessica Alvarado

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