

Uncover Your Expertise

Breaking into any job market can be difficult, and all job markets present different challenges to the jobseeker. However the process for succeeding in any job market is fundamentally the same. Finding the right job is a sales process. In any sales process you need a product, a buyer and a seller. The product in the case of a job search is you... that is, the individual strengths, skills and attitude you offer. As the old marketing saying goes, you don't sell a drill, you sell the hole that the drill creates. That is, you must market yourself (the product) as the person who can best create the end result that the buyer (the employer) seeks.

Any sales process involves the same basic elements: you must completely understand the product and what it is capable of, you must completely understand the buyer and his needs, and you must be able to negotiate an acceptable agreement for the sale.

Until you find the right role for you, your job is to be a salesperson. Your job is to sell yourself. To do this you must understand what you offer, find opportunities to present that offer, and when you do find an opportunity, you must be in a position to present the offer in the most persuasive way.

This is the secret: as a jobseeker you must not think of yourself as unemployed, as 'on the shelf'. As a jobseeker you are actively

participating in the job market as a salesperson of your own skills, experience and attitude.

This guide will lead you through this process to ensure that you are putting your best foot forward at all times.

Identify Your Experience: What Product are you selling?

The first step in the process of selling yourself into the job market is to understand what you offer. You need to understand your key selling points, and also your limitations. What you offer includes your skills, attitude, experience and training. Your limitations might include the geographical area beyond which you are not willing to work, the salary that you expect, and the types of jobs that you are willing to perform.

Bear in mind that each job that you work in will influence the type of jobs you will be qualified to apply for in the future. Annette Miller, Career Development Consultant recommends that you should be realistic about your expectations – a small salary now while building your reputation for being honest and efficient is better than no salary while you sit around doing nothing, waiting on a better salary offer.

Take some time to sit down and think about these questions. Write down every role you have fulfilled in your life and what you learned in that role, and also what you naturally brought to that role. For example, when you were a pupil at school, what subjects did you study – what did you excel in, what did you discover was definitely not for you. Perhaps you were

excellent at maths, but found that languages were boring for you. What about in terms of your relations with other pupils, teachers and the school in general? Did you play lots of sports? Did you take on extra responsibilities? Were you reliable? An excellent time-keeper? There are no right or wrong answers here, the key thing is to get a good picture of what you did well and what you did not enjoy. Repeat this exercise for each life and job role (home, studies, jobs, community roles, voluntary roles etc.) that you have fulfilled. The key questions are:

- What skills did you learn?
- What skills did you practice regularly in this role?
- What did you enjoy about the role?
- Which parts of the role did you not enjoy?
- In what ways did you succeed in this role? For example, as a mother, did you raise your children on a tight budget while ensuring that your children always had everything they needed? As a sales assistant did you always reach your daily / weekly sales budget?
- Within this role, how did you relate with other relevant people such as superiors, colleagues and juniors?

This is just an information gathering exercise. You want to get as clear a picture as possible of what you can and can't do, what you enjoy doing and what you do not enjoy. This is essential information, as every single HR professional interviewed for this series noted the importance of being

able to meaningfully match your skills, experience and preferences to the specific requirements of the job description. You cannot perform this exercise unless you have a clear idea of what your skills, experiences and preferences are. This matching exercise is key to all other elements of the job seeking process, from preparing your resume and cover letter, creating your online jobseeker profiles and succeeding in interviews.

It can be a good idea to take an MBTI or other personality / career test online. This will arm you with further information about your personality and the kinds of roles that your personality 'type' tends to perform well in.

The aim of this process is to create an 'information dump', that is, a broad, messy picture that points you in the general direction of what you are and what you are not, what you like and what you don't like. This is the first step toward defining what product it is that you offer onto the job market.

Desk Research Part II: MBTI Testing

The MBTI is a test based on the personality 'type'. It states that there are several ways in which an individual can interact with and experience the world. These ways of interacting are presented as four pairs of opposites: Introversion / Extraversion (Introversion means a preference for looking

inward and is associated with being reserved, quiet, thoughtful, while extraversion means a preference for looking outward and is associated with being outgoing and chatty); Sensing / Intuition; Thinking / Feeling; Judging / Perceiving. The test was first used to assist women joining the industrial work force for the first time during WW2. The idea behind the test is that people have innate preferences regarding how they interact with the world and they find it easier and more pleasurable to interact with the world when using their preferred style. So, if according to the MBTI test you have a clear preference for introversion, the MBTI theory would suggest that a good job / career for you will be that career which allows you interact with it taking into account your psychological preferences.

MBTI testing is not intended to be restrictive, or persuade you that because of your personality type you would not be suitable for a job. However, it can indicate to you working conditions that you will take to more naturally, and working conditions that you will find stressful. This is useful both when choosing a job or career, and when arranging your work place and your work duties in such a way as to maximise your performance at work. Note that the MBTI only assesses preferences, it has nothing to say about how well or to what extent you implement these preferences. So, if you have a preference for extraversion that does not mean that you in fact behave in a more extraverted manner.

So, how can you use this information in preparing for a job or planning for a career? Well, say you show a preference for introversion. In the language of the MBTI test introversion means 'inward-turning'. This means that you will prefer to turn inward for resources and motivation, rather than seeking resources and motivation externally. This would suggest that you have the capacity to be self-reliant, the capacity to work with minimal supervision. On the other hand, if you have a preference for outward-turning, this would suggest that you might enjoy making connections with people. As you can see these are both essential activities in a working environment. Being able to separate those activities which you can likely do without them costing you too much energy, i.e. those activities which align with your psychological preferences, will put you at an advantage over your competitors who are not armed with this information.

You can take the MBTI test online and there are many websites that will explain in detail what careers are ideal for your personality type. Once you have started a job or are working to develop your career you can further use this information about your personality type to help you manage your workload, your working relationships and your career progression.

Your personality type is only one thing to bear in mind when choosing a job or a career. Of course you need to also think about what you enjoy, what you are passionate about and what type of lifestyle you want to

have. Having all of this information at your fingertips will make you better prepared to choose the jobs that are right for you, better prepared to excel during the recruitment process and better prepared to perform well in any role that you eventually find yourself in.

In order to find your perfect job you must uncover your expertise, and in order to uncover your expertise you must fully understand yourself. An MBTI test is a great stepping stone to improve the job seeking process.

Field Research

So now you have one view of your product: your own. Going out into the job market with just one point of view on your offering will leave you only partially prepared. You need to get as many views of what you offer as possible. This part of the research is about getting out there and finding out about yourself. Ask people who know you what they think you are good at, what you have succeeded at in the past, what they admire about you, what roles you seemed happiest fulfilling and what roles seemed to make you miserable. Ask your family, friends, previous employers, people who have trained you, community leaders and so on.

Explain to these people that you are trying to present yourself in the best possible light for finding meaningful and fulfilling work and that you need their input. Most people will be more than happy to facilitate. This is also a great time to work out who to approach for references when you are putting your resume together.

This exercise can be revealing and surprising. Your friends, family and colleagues might highlight things that you didn't even consider to be important. Perhaps your husband will remind you how much you enjoyed looking after your nieces and nephews and how naturally you took to that role, which in turn might encourage you to consider a role in child care which is a complete departure from your previous skill sets. Perhaps an old boss will remind you how you naturally took the lead in a project you were tasked with, feedback that perhaps you have never heard before today.

Understanding how people see you is just as important as understanding how you see yourself and your preferences. If, for example, you dream of being a leader but your friends, family and co-workers all identify that you come across as shy, reserved, and not willing to take the lead, you will know that you will need some leadership training and experience if you are to be taken seriously as a leader. Alternatively you might realise that while you like the idea of being a leader, you are actually much happier doing quiet, detail oriented work such as research.

By this stage you should have two information dumps: your internal, personal perception of yourself, your history and what you want, and the external perception of how other people see you. Comparing the two information sets you should be able to see clear areas where your internal perception and external perception match up and also areas where there is conflict between your beliefs about yourself and other's beliefs about

you. This is powerful information. The areas where there is agreement between yourself and others are those areas that you can rely upon to present well in interviews. Any areas where there are differences of opinion need to be carefully considered – why aren't you coming across as you believe? Do you need more training? More experience? Are you simply following a path that isn't for you?

The information gathered so far will give you strong leads about what you want / need from a job. You are now ready to consider what jobs are out there that match up with these needs.

Your Product in the Market

No product exists in a vacuum. All products exist to solve a problem. In the employment context, your skills and experience are only relevant to an employer insofar as they can be used by that employer to achieve business goals. Now that you have all the 'technical information' about your product to hand, i.e. what you are good at, it is time to look at what business goals you can meet and exceed on behalf of a prospective employer.

Do this by looking at what jobs are being advertised and reading about the status of the job market at present. What industries exist in the

areas that you would be happy to work and what specific job roles do these industries employ. Finally, locate the industries and roles that your 'information dumps' suggest you would be a good fit for. Annette Miller, Career Development Consultant, notes that the job market is 'crying out' for good technicians. She asserts that interesting roles still exist in hospitality, tourism, sales, financial management and risk management. She also notes that there is an ageing teaching population which will have to be addressed. Finally, she points out that you don't have to wait for a job to come up, instead look out for gaps that you could fill. Ms Miller cites the example of industrious and innovative people in townships who are making their living by picking up prescriptions for housebound patients for a fee. Are there any needs like this in your community that you could fill with the skills, equipment and expertise that you possess?

For example, say tourism is a huge market where you live. Your research on yourself suggests that you aren't perceived as a great 'people person', but you are an excellent cook and you love to cook. Perhaps you could look into working in the kitchens of the restaurants for tourists? When putting together possible industries and roles that you might like to apply for, bear in mind what type of lifestyle the role will provide in terms of working hours, commuting and salary both now and in the future. For example, if a particular career will eventually demand that you have to move to a different location, ask yourself whether or not you will be prepared to do that when it comes down to it.

Also, there may be careers that look ideal to you but you don't quite have the entry requirements just yet. Don't write these jobs off. Have a serious look at how you could get the necessary training or experience. Could you work and study at the same time? Could you reduce your monthly outgoings in order that you could afford to undertake a course of study? Are there any jobs that offer on-the-job training? Or could you offer to do work experience or an internship? These options might mean a little bit of hardship in the short or medium term, but may be worth it if in the long term you find for yourself a career that is a good match to your skills, experience, preferences and life style expectations.

At this stage of your research you should have accumulated a wealth of information about yourself (the product) and the market (the buyer of your product). You should be able to whittle the market down to around 10 careers / jobs that are a good match for and you should be able to understand what those jobs involve and what kind of lifestyle they will ultimately provide.

The next stage of your research then is to research the major recruiters for each of the roles. That is, who are the companies that you hope to work for? What is the corporate culture like? What are the company values? What opportunities for career development does the company offer? In short, which companies align with your personal goals and ambitions? Which companies can you really see yourself working for?

Now find out where these companies recruit and who does the recruiting? Do they have an in-house recruiter or do they use a recruitment company? What newspapers or websites do they recruit in? Do you know anybody who already works there who you could approach for information about upcoming jobs?

Completing all this research will put you a head and shoulders above the competition when applying for jobs. No longer will you be desperately throwing CVs into the abyss. You will be secure and confident in the knowledge that you know what you offer, who you are offering it to, and what they are looking for. Rejections will still happen. Sometimes you will still get zero response from your efforts, but rejections and non-responses will no longer be frustrating. They will be a learning experience, they will hone the information you have about the industry, the job role and the company. Annette Miller suggests that when you receive a rejection you try and work out why you were rejected. Ask the HR person to whom you sent your CV or who interviewed you for feedback. As an employed person in the community to look over your resume and give you some pointers. All information is good information.

Putting it all together: Your Sales pitch

You are now in a strong position. You have collected huge amounts of information about yourself and the market that you hope to enter. Before

you even start to apply for actual jobs, you need to collate all of this information into a strong, persuasive, personal sales pitch. You need to make employing you a 'no-brainer' for recruiters.

So just write it down! You should be able to write a one to two sentence answer to each of the following questions that tells the recruiter exactly why you are the best person for the job. Your sales pitch should include the following:

1. What problem will you solve for the company? For example, the problem the company has is that it is looking for a sales assistant. You can solve this problem because you have experience as a sales assistant, it suits your personality, you are prepared to work in the cited location and for the cited pay.
2. Why will the manner in which you solve the company add value to the company? Continuing with the example above, you know that you are always well-presented so you can guarantee to the company that you will always present a fresh, clean image to customers. Perhaps you are naturally neat and tidy so you can guarantee to the company that as you work you will keep the store looking lovely at all times. If the job is in a clothes store perhaps you can demonstrate that you are passionate about fashion and have a real eye for what types of clothing will suit different body shapes. Perhaps you can show that you are very reliable, always on

time, always present as expected. Apart from the specific problems that a job role fulfils, see if there are any other problems that you can fill in addition. If you are applying for a high level managerial role, can you bring new customers, new trade knowledge or new suppliers with you?

3. What do you expect in return? You might not necessarily advertise this part to recruiters unless asked, but you should have a clear idea of the working conditions you expect from any job. You should also know what you expect to get out of the job in the long run. How will this job help you get the next job that you want? Do you expect to get training? Do you expect to move up within the company? Recruitment is a two-way street – you should pitch yourself for jobs that will add some value to you as well, over and above your salary.

These are the key elements of your personal sales pitch that you should have straight in your head before you even begin applying for jobs: what problem will you solve for the company? What added value will you bring? What do you expect in return? This message will form the basis of your resume, cover letter, and performance in your interview. Even after you have found employment, you should keep adding to and developing your personal employment sales pitch – it will keep your work relevant, inform you as to when you should move on or ask for a pay raise, and remind you how valuable you are to your employer at all times.

Present Your Experience

Your Online Presence

You have to be visible online, in the right places and presenting the right message in order for prospective employers to find you online and to be inspired to contact you. Aisling Fowley, HR Business Manager at C&C Gleeson, says that the key places to be visible online are LinkedIn and on jobseeking websites.

It is key that your online presence delivers a coherent and persuasive message. Using the research that you have completed in the previous section you should know the type of jobs you are looking for, the companies that you would like to work for and the skills, experience and training that you want to highlight. Now is the time to make this research work for you and help you put your best foot forward. First you are going to want to craft an eye-catching headline that incorporates your sales pitch in a few words. For example, if you are looking for a job as a data centre manager you might write Data Centre Manager | Managing Infrastructure Securely and Efficiently. If you were looking for a job as an

actress you might say Actress | Europe | Open to all opportunities. The point is, say exactly what you want so that recruiters can find you, contact you and ultimately choose you.

Fowley also comments that online profiles should give an overview of the candidate which should match the candidates CV. It should showcase key skills ideally with endorsements for those skills. Ms Fowley also checks to see who the candidate is following and who they are linked to. This gives an impression of the kind of companies and the kind of work you are interested in. In this regard you should make sure that your LinkedIn profile reflects your main professional interest and does not reflect a desperate search for any kind of work. Recruiters want to see that you are genuinely interested in the job that they have to offer and that you are not so desperate that you would take any post. For the younger jobseeker, Annette Miller, Career Development Consultant, recommends that you seek out employed community members to endorse you on your LinkedIn page. Try offering to perform some voluntary work for these people and then, if it goes well, asking for a LinkedIn endorsement. Having a network of well-regarded contacts and supporters reflects well on you as a jobseeker.

Carol Macartney, HR Director, AIM Group, cautions that occasionally she would perform a general google or Facebook search as part of the recruitment process. It is important therefore to ensure that you don't

maintain other profiles that would detract from the professional image that you hope to present through your professional pages.

Aine Black, Employee Relations Manager at Kepak, recommends that jobseekers make full use of LinkedIn as a networking tool. To do this she recommends that you join relevant groups on LinkedIn and try to grow your professional network as much as possible. However, she notes that Twitter and Facebook also provide professional development and networking opportunities which are occasionally overlooked. You should follow the companies you are interested in working for on both of these forums – get involved in discussions and keep a note of key players, this can provide a stream of information, professional development opportunities and information about specific jobs. Twitter in particular is a great way to connect with industry players and gives you a simple, informal 'way in' to introduce yourself, comment on what's happening and get your name out there.

Don't forget about your online profile on jobseeking sites. This is an important way to let recruiters know you are actively seeking work and should contain links to your LinkedIn profile and your Twitter feed.

Acting in concert, these separate online profiles can be a powerful way to make yourself known within a market and to stay up to date with the latest industry news. Make sure you are using a professional photograph, that your message is consistent across all platforms, and that you get as many endorsements for the skills you wish to feature as possible.

Your Resume

The purpose of your resume is to get you an interview. That is, your resume must inspire the recruiter to pick you out of the group of other candidates. Your resume must contain all the relevant information to allow the recruiter to make this decision (content) and present this information in such a way as to make it easy for the recruiter to understand (technical requirements).

Technical Requirements

Carol Macartney, HR Director AIM Group, explains that the ideal resume should be neither too short nor too long, approximately two to three pages is ideal. It should be clear and easy to read. Malcolm Thornton, Human Resources Manager, notes that your resume / CV should be written in the third person and contain perfect grammar and spelling throughout. Aine Black, HR Manager, notes that you should keep the content short and to the point, avoid waffling. Many jobseekers find the process of applying for jobs expensive, with the need to pay for postage, certification and stationary. Annette Miller advises that no amount of coloured paper will make good a CV that contains poor spelling or punctuation. She also recommends that you get your certifying done in bulk to save on transport costs.

Content

All HR professionals interviewed for this guide book note that the most important element of any resume is that it is tailored to the requirements of the job advertisement that you are responding to. There is no need to include every single detail of your working life. Keep it simple, direct and to the point.

Open your resume with a short paragraph that addresses your key skills. Remember, the key skills that you wish to highlight should be those which you have discovered are both in demand in the industry and also those that you can demonstrate that you possess. Aisling Fowley, HR Business Manager at C&C Gleeson states that it is important that any claims you make about the skills or experience that you possess should be backed up with facts. For example, if you state on your resume that you have strong negotiation skills, you should be able to support this statement with details of when you demonstrated these negotiation skills, the impact that they had and the benefit that accrued to the company through your use of these skills. This information should be contained in the section of your CV that deals with your past roles and your responsibilities and duties when fulfilling that role. For example, a HR professional stating that they have strong negotiation skills might use the following evidence to support this statement when describing their most recent role: 'In this role I

negotiated the introduction of a 12 hour shift' or 'In this role I successfully introduced a contentious rate agreement for a site that was heavily unionised.'

Aine Black, Employee Relations Manager at Kepak Group recommends that you ensure that your CV contains adequate proof that you possess all the skills and experience sought in the advertisement for the job. She further recommends that your 'story', that is, the story of your working life and the process through which you acquired your working skills, is easy to follow.

If you have had any gaps in your career you should note these in your resume and explain why you had a period of unemployment and what you were doing during this time. Recruiters understand that life happens, that the economy has been difficult for the last few years and that people take time out of work to have a family, to pursue further study or to travel. Make these breaks in employment a positive thing and be sure to note down the skills that you learned in these periods. Recruiters will have much more respect for your honesty than they will for any attempt to cover up or lie about periods of unemployment.

Finally, you should list two or three relevant references on your resume. You should have a good idea from your research as to who will be willing and able to verify that you have the skills which you profess to.

Cover Letter

Your cover letter is the letter which accompanies your curriculum vitae. Interestingly, both Malcolm Thornton and Aine Black admit to rarely if ever reading cover letters, though Annette Miller states that they are essential. Carol Macartney and Aisling Fowley also think that cover letters are an important document in the recruitment process. In this regard you cannot afford to take any chances by skimming on the content of your cover letter.

That said, the cover letter should be short. It should be a tasty taster of what is to come in your CV. Aisling Fowley recommends that the cover letter should be brief and personal – she recommends that you do your research, find the name of the recruiter and use it. Look at the job description again and include the top three to five pieces of information that demonstrate what a good fit you are for the job. Annette Miller reiterates that your cover letter should be tailored to the position that you seek and be brief, accurate and inspire the recruiter to look at your CV for more information.

Your cover letter should also deal with any administrative matters. Carol Macartney suggests that the cover letter is an introduction, or a calling card. It should tell the recruiter when and how you can be contacted, when you are available for interview, and whether you are currently employed. Depending on the type of job you are applying for you might want to highlight what hours you are available for work (if part time for

example), which location you are applying for (if there are jobs at multiple sites), how much notice you would have to give in your present job if relevant and so on.

As with your resume the cover letter should display perfect grammar and spelling and be professionally and neatly laid out.

While many people do choose to dispense with the formality of a cover letter, on balance, a short, friendly cover letter will allow you to cater for those HR professionals who do still appreciate one. If a recruiter places any weight on the existence and content of a cover letter it will always work against you if you submit a resume in application for a post without one. Once you have completed your research and created a CV based on your research, creating a meaningful cover letter is a very short job and it could make the difference between getting to your interview and not.

Preparing for your Interview

Great news! You have been selected for interview! Now what?

The period between being selected for interview and arriving at the interview is absolutely critical. The work that you do in this period will make the difference between getting the job and not getting the job. If you do this work well, even if you don't get the job in the end of the day, you will still build your confidence, gain interview experience, have an

excellent learning experience and make an impression on the interviewer who may bear you in mind for future roles.

There are a few things that you need to get right during your interview preparation. You need to know who the company is and what its culture, value and goals are. You need to know exactly what they want for the role that they have advertised. You need to know exactly what you offer and how you can add extra value to the job ask. Finally, you need to dress appropriately, turn up on time with all relevant documents, breathe, stay calm and answer all the questions put to you confidently.

The key to successful interview preparation is research, research, research. This is where your online presence really comes into its own. Follow the company – what has it been tweeting about and posting about? Google the company – is there any recent news about the company? What about the founder? Who is he or she? What is his or her personal vision and mission? Have you thoroughly read through the company's website and do you fully understand the company's product or service offering(s)? Can you envisage the relative importance of the job you are applying for in the context of the company's overall offering?

Given the role that you will be interviewing for and its context in the company and business sector that that company works in, brainstorm the types of questions that they might ask you. Based on your CV and your research, come up with the key facts about yourself that you would like to cover in response to each of these questions. Give yourself the best

opportunity to let the recruiter know how you solve their problem and what added value you will bring. Aisling Fowley, HR Business Manager at C&C Gleeson, recommends that you role play the interview with a friend or family member. She suggests that you find out from the company what the format of the interview will be (e.g. panel interview, group interview, presentation etc) and then recreate this environment as best as you can in your preparations. Practice the tough questions (like what are your weaknesses), and practice the easy questions. Be prepared to answer detailed questions about your last job, your role and responsibilities and your day to day tasks. Be prepared to explain any gaps in your resume, and also to discuss why you left your last job.

You should know your CV inside out. Remember, you are driving the focussed message that you have crafted through your research and presented through your CV. This message is what the recruiter is now expecting to walk into the room. You need to shine in all the places that your CV says you are going to shine.

Make sure you know your salary expectation and be prepared to discuss this if it comes up, but only discuss salary if asked (if you are not asked about salary expectations as interview stage you will have your opportunity to make these enquiries at the offer stage).

Finally, make sure that you have relevant, insightful questions ready for the recruiter. Remember the third part of your sales pitch is what you expect in return. While you shouldn't ask about your salary you should

ask about opportunities for advancement, training provided and the future ambitions of the company in general.

The Interview

Hopefully when you arrive for interview you will have done your research, you will know your CV inside out, and you will be confident that you can answer any question that is put to you. All you need to do now is show your hard work to the interviewer through your demeanour and responses.

First Impressions

Dress in a manner that is appropriate to the role and company to which you have applied. Carol Macartney, HR Director AIM Group notes that personal appearance is incredibly important when interviewing. She suggests that you arrive neat, clean and tidy and cautions against wearing trainers, jeans or tracksuits. Ideal attire for an interview is a shirt or blouse with plain trousers or a plain skirt and sensible shoes. Malcolm Thornton advises that business attire should be worn by both sexes and anything loud, such as loud jewellery should be avoided. Aine Black advises that you check out the ethos of the company who you are

interviewing with, for example, if you were interviewing with Google the appropriate interview dress may be a little more casual than if you were interviewing at a bank. However, Annette Miller suggests that if in doubt err on the side of more formal rather than less formal. Finally, in addition to dress, Aisling Fowley HR Manager at C&C notes that your body language and posture is just as important. She cautions that your body language in terms of how you sit and stand should reflect your professional self and thus you should not slouch or sit inappropriately. Malcolm Thornton recommends that you make sure that you have a decent handshake, and that you practice this if necessary in advance. Make sure that you arrive a little early for the interview, Carol Macartney recommends around 10 minutes early. This allows you time to get settled in and complete any administrative formalities. Don't arrive too early though, as you can just end up getting in the way.

Sell, Sell, Sell!

The purpose of the interview is to get you this job, so the interview is not the time to be shy. No need to sing your praises from the rooftops, but make sure that you get all your key points heard. Listen carefully to the questions that the interviewer is asking so that you can be sure you are marrying your answers to what the recruiter really wants to know about you. It is important to bring a copy of your CV with you to refer to so you

can put your work experience into context and also as just in case you forget something due to nerves.

What is most important is to be open and honest. If you are asked awkward questions about, for example, a job you were fired from you should never lie. However, you should paint the experience in the best possible light. So rather than saying you were fired you could say that there was a restructuring program as a result of which your role was made redundant. As discussed above, recruiters know that life happens, if you are at the interview they have obviously got over any gaps in your CV so don't worry too much about it. Just be prepared to give an open, honest, positive response and don't let it faze you.

The interview is the culmination of all the work you have done so far. Make sure you deliver your message clearly, confidently and openly. You can do no more than that. Don't forget to ask your questions at the end of the interview.

Promoting Your Expertise

Networking Offline

Networking is an expression that strikes fear into even the most intrepid of jobseekers. There is no need to fear networking. Networking just means putting yourself in right places with the right message to meet useful contacts with whom you can share information about job opportunities, training opportunities, events and other information relevant to your job search.

You have an opportunity to network every day and with everyone you meet. As Annette Miller notes there is always someone who knows someone who knows someone. In fact, once you have your core sales pitch about who you are, what you offer and what you are looking for in place, you will find it difficult to *stop* networking, it will just come naturally. Opportunities to present your sales pitch will come up regularly. The benefit of more formal networking opportunities is that they bring together lots of useful contacts all at once.

Networking is important to get your name and your goal out there. To get the most out of your networking efforts, find out where key industry professionals are going to be. Specifically look into training days, open conferences and lectures, book signings. Join trade associations, read trade publications, make contacts with suppliers to your target industry, customers of your target industry, academics, commentators and influencers working in and around your target industry. You never know where you will bump into that all important lead. Don't put all your eggs

in one basket. Vary the type, time and location of networking events you go to.

To make the most of these networking opportunities come prepared. Make sure you have read up on the key happenings in the industry and be ready to ask questions, sell yourself and exchange business cards. Make friendly approaches to as many people as you can. Be frank about what you are seeking and what you can offer, but don't be aggressive or pushy (don't be a wallflower either!) Keep in mind your sales pitch. You are not at this event to beg or brag. You are there because you have something to offer, even if it is only your enthusiasm for the industry. Be yourself, but your professional self. This means dressing appropriately and adopting professional language and posture.

When chatting with other attendees see if you can seek out a middle ground. Is there anything you can help them out with? Do you have any information that may be useful to them? The best networking is a process of give and take. Don't be afraid to stray beyond conversations about the industry that you work in or hope to work in. You may have other things in common around which you could build an ongoing relationship. For example a mutual love of golf or opera. Remember, networking is about having fun and making connections. You should always have your sales pitch at the back of your mind and ready to go, but don't miss good opportunities to build plain old friendships. Having a genuine friend in the

industry that you are courting may open many, many doors. And to make friends you need only be honest, open, friendly and willing to chat.

After the networking event, make sure that you follow up with your new contacts. Connect with them on LinkedIn, follow them on Twitter, follow their blog, invite them to play golf or to the opera, whatever! Just make sure that you keep the relationship alive after your first meeting. When you are attending networking events it is imperative that the contacts you make with people after the event reflect the content of the discussions you have had with your new contact. This means that your online profiles should be up to date and cohesive.

Networking Online

The purpose of networking online is exactly the same as its offline counterpart: to be in the right places, with the right message so that you can meaningfully connect with useful contacts which will ensure that you have access to the most up to date industry news and opportunities. The differences between online networking and offline networking are that it is international and it is ongoing (in the sense that the networking is not limited to a discreet event, but connections can occur at any time).

Working life is truly global these days, and many opportunities exist to consult or to collaborate from an entirely different time zone. If you can show on your CV that you work internationally as well as locally, your

opportunities for employment soar. In this way, online and offline networking dovetail into one another and should be used together for maximum impact.

LinkedIn tends to be the go-to platform for online networking, so it is a good place to start and to use as the core of your online networking activities. Join relevant LinkedIn groups and contribute to their discussions. Start a relevant blog and put a link to your blog on your LinkedIn profile. Starting a relevant blog gives you the opportunity to interview industry experts. You are offering a valuable exchange – you are advertising their expertise through your blog while developing a relationship with a great contact.

Take relevant online courses, contribute to the discussions there, and make sure you update the qualifications section of your LinkedIn profile. Join expert forums, where you can either seek answers, or as you become more proficient in your field, give answers and become known as an expert within that online community.

Check out meetup.com to find out if there are any relevant meet ups in your area that you can attend. If there isn't one then start one! Noting on your CV that you are responsible for bringing together a community of individuals interested in a particular skill set or industry shows that you are keen, and that you have interpersonal skills and organisational skills.

Once you start to put yourself out there on the internet by interviewing experts, sharing relevant industry knowledge and contributing to online

debate and discussion, you will find that people start to share information with you without your asking. As your online presence gains traction you will become a recognised voice within the industry.

Other options for online networking include contributing articles to online industry publications or creating and sharing YouTube content.

Remember, selling yourself to the right company is your full time job as a jobseeker. An important part of selling anything is to make the buyer aware of the product. It has been shown that it is much easier and quicker to persuade a potential buyer to buy a product when they have already heard of that product as compared to a truly cold sale. In this regard then, it is not over the top to build a personal networking strategy that will make your name familiar to industry professionals. The effect of networking, both online and off, is to make your job in the interview easier and to put you at a strategic advantage as compared to other candidates.

On Spec Applications

Applying for a job 'on spec' is when a candidate applies for a job that is not advertised, or suggests that they might fill a role within the company that does not currently exist. Clearly, you stand a much better chance of obtaining employment when a need for a new employee has been

recognised within the company and has been advertised for - two out of seven of the HR professionals interviewed for this guide had never hired a candidate on spec. Despite this being the case, it can still be a profitable course of action if you can pitch your offer well and to the right person. Applying on spec, even if you don't ultimately get the job will demonstrate your interest in the company, it will get your name in the minds of the recruiter and the recruiter may bear you in mind, or invite you to apply should a similar role come up in the future. If, through your networking activities, you are already a known voice in the industry, and you demonstrate that you are interested in this particular company your spec application will likely get more serious attention.

Carol Macartney, HR Director, AIM Group, notes that while she accepts CVs on spec (which should be prepared and submitted in the usual way), she would generally not be pleased to meet a candidate who just turned up at the business premises on spec.

The best time to apply for roles on spec is when you can make an educated guess that a company will be hiring in the near future, for example if the business is expanding or introducing a new product. It follows then that to increase your chance of success when applying on spec, it helps to have as much information as possible. If you attend networking events and keep yourself up to date with local business news you will be best placed to hear and assess rumours about your target companies' future plans. If you do hear rumours that suggest that a

company will be hiring in the near future, make sure that you get your CV and cover letter in front of the right person. It is suggested that you send you documents both to the company recruiter *and* to the manager in charge of the business change. So for example if you wanted to apply for a role in a new branch of a retail store opening near you, you would write to the company's recruitment executive and also to the area manager of the chain.

When applying on spec it is essential that you provide a cover letter to give your application context. Your cover letter should say, for example, 'I heard that there may be a new branch of your retail stores opening in <insert location>. I am an experienced retail manager and I would be very interested in being considered for any managerial roles that might arise at this site.' You should follow up on your spec applications after a week or so. Try and speak directly to the recruiter and to the person directly responsible for the requirement for new hires. Introduce yourself and explain that you submitted a CV on spec a week ago and are just following up to ensure it has been received. You may be able to get useful information about when official hiring (if any) for this new role will begin. Calling and speaking to these people has the effect of making you familiar to them which, as we have seen, makes it easier for them to recruit you in the long run.

Training

Attending training courses is a no-brainer. Not only do you gain new skills and expertise to put on your resume, the trainers will either already work in industry, or they will have substantial industry contacts. You will also get to rub shoulders with your competition and get a firm understanding of your particular strengths and weaknesses in context.

Training can, of course, be expensive which historically often put it beyond the reach of the unemployed. Nowadays however there is a huge amount of training available either free or at low cost that will look great on your CV. First, check out what governmental support and training exists for jobseekers. It is important to keep your positivity, motivation and drive up while job hunting and getting out of the house to meet with people with similar interests can be a much needed respite.

Another great option that has exploded over the last few years is MOOCs, or 'Massive Open Online Courses'. MOOCs are online courses that are run by some of the best universities and colleges in the world. These courses are generally delivered free of charge to the student. The student follows along with the course materials online and completes and submits assignments which are then peer-reviewed. All kinds of subjects from web development through to ancient history and everything in between are available to study online. Check out www.mooc-list.com for a directory of what courses are running at the moment.

It is also worth considering either work experience or internships. Often companies offer official internships through job boards and so on, but they will also very often consider taking on a motivated individual to do unofficial work experience on either a time-limited or ongoing basis. Also check out voluntary positions with on-the-job training. This is a great way to learn the day to day skills needed for any job, getting to know suppliers and customers, and also getting yourself a relevant industry reference in the meantime. Yes, it does mean that you will have to work for free (or ideally for your expenses) for a period, but this is an investment that you are making in your future career. It can feel like you are being taken for granted when you don't get paid for your work, but you are getting value in return for your labour, in particular you are getting your foot in the door which is the first step to building your career.

What about going back into full time study for a while? Full time study is obviously expensive and time consuming, but it is rewarding and it may be necessary for certain types of careers. Nowadays there are more bursaries, loans and other financial support to help you back into full time study than ever before. Most universities and colleges will have an admissions office who will be able to answer any questions you might have about applying for and financing your course. If you do need to undertake further study, you could always consider doing it part time.

Go back to your sales pitch. What problem can you solve, what extra value do you provide, what do you want in return? These questions will help you see what training adds to your sales pitch and what training would be nice, but is really unnecessary. You're looking for opportunities that not only increase your knowledge and skills base but will also bring you closer to finding a job.

Attitude

Remember, you are a salesperson. You are selling yourself as a product that will solve an employer's problem while creating added value. Attitude is all important. Both the attitude that you display to prospective employers and useful contacts, and the attitude that you adopt when it's just you, especially in the face of rejection letters and interviews that haven't gone as you would have hoped.

Positivity, grit, determination, enthusiasm and a can-do attitude will ease your path to employment. Anger, resentment, bitterness and frustration will impede your progress.

But how do you stay positive when you are still unemployed and running out of cash?

In the first instance you should focus on your sales pitch. You know what you are capable of, you know what you offer to the right employer, you

know that you are a worthwhile human being with something to give. Never forget this! Aine Black in her parting advice says 'Don't give up! There's a role out there for you.' You never know when you will come across the lead that will turn into a job for you. Remember, every proactive step you take to get your face out there and tell the world who you are and what you want brings you one step closer to your ideal job.

Secondly, adopt positive habits. Don't get too bogged down in your job search. Sometimes you will have bad days, but no bad day is the end of the world. Get out of the house, spend time with people that you love, spend time with interesting people and try new things. Once you are in full time work you won't have the time to just go for a walk in the sunshine on a Wednesday afternoon, so make the most of your free time now. Eat well, take some exercise and look after yourself. You must believe that you are a worthwhile human being in order for other people to be able to see this about you.

Thirdly, be enthusiastic. Ask questions. Read widely about your chosen career and industry. People love to give advice and to feel useful. Asking people for advice and guidance makes everyone feel great. Appreciate your mentors and show your gratefulness to them – you don't need to do anything huge – even a simple hand-written notes saying thank you can make someone's day. When someone feels truly appreciated they are more likely to remember you and put your name forward for any opportunities that come up.

If you feel yourself starting to get depressed or worn out by your job search, shake it off. Take some time out and do something completely different. It is much better to miss a day of job seeking than it is to show up at events or interviews with a negative attitude – you will be remembered for your negative attitude rather than for showing up. The bottom line is that life is difficult for everybody, no-one wants to hear you moan about your personal problems or how hard it is for you. Be a beacon of positivity and people will appreciate the break from the doom and gloom.

Finally, keep at it. You are not going to find a job overnight. Finding a job means hitting the pavement every day and getting your applications out there. Every day you need to be sending out your CVs, researching companies and opportunities, attending events, updating your skills. Find ways around your obstacles. Do you live in a disadvantaged community where jobs aren't well advertised? Hit the library where there are free newspapers and access to computers, or take a walk around your local mall keeping an eye out for 'staff needed' signs in the windows. Don't let any set back keep you from achieving your goal. If you take all the actions suggested in this guide, a great job will come to you eventually.

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