

Coral Springs Forum Article

How to Approach a Job Search Without a College Degree

With more than 6 million people unemployed since December, 2007, the job search process continues to be tedious, challenging and frustrating to say the least. Jobless claims have leveled off, and some have suggested, we may have reached a peak. If that's true, we can certainly use any bit of positive news!

But back to reality and why I share my view: To provide insight enabling you to be more competitive for the few jobs which may be available.

A question repeatedly asked of me is compelling:

Q- How can I compete for jobs where a college degree is preferred and I don't have one? Many with degrees are applying for these same jobs. Claudia, Coral Springs

A- My first observation is that many people are using this time to go back to school to perhaps finish the degree they started. Since that may not be a full time option for many due to stockpiling bills, I'll provide an additional view.

The best way to begin to answer this question is to provide insight into a hiring manager's mindset and perceptions. They have the tedious task of sifting through perhaps, hundreds of resumes, many of whom may have a degree, to uncover the one ideal person for their team.

Although many will say a college degree is just a "piece of paper", most hiring managers believe it's more than that. Many believe completing a degree illustrates a person's desire to complete goals, respect authority, be accountable, structured thought processes and that the coursework creates a strong foundational knowledge base in which to build upon. I believe that many of these perceptions have merit, but there are always exceptions. There are very qualified people out there without degrees, and many employers, may be missing out on them due to these perceptions.

By understanding the thought processes of most hiring managers, you can now begin to understand the challenge at hand and devise a plan to offset them.

Capturing interviews without a degree (where one is preferred) requires reaching out and leveraging personal contacts and utilizing their contacts (networking). Personal recommendations are one of the few ways in which to truly "separate" you from the masses. Create a list of companies you'd like to work for and request that your existing and newly introduced contacts arrange for you to meet or speak with a decision-maker "informally". When two professionals meet "informally", there is no pressure and positive things can develop if there is good chemistry, things/people in common, etc.

Also:

- Customize resume and cover letter with the most relevant experience and responsibilities as it relates to the needs of the position.
- “Sprinkle” relevant keywords into the text of the resume so it will can be retrieved easier from job boards and internal databases.
- If you’ve worked for a competitor of the hiring company, broadcast it! This indicates you understand their product or service, would require less training and perhaps could share some “trade secrets”.

Once an “informal” meeting or conversation is arranged (half of the challenge is already met), understanding the potential need of the manager is essential to enable you to demonstrate, **with specific examples**, why you would be a good fit for the company/position. Many candidates provide too much irrelevant information, which may appear to be a “smoke screen”, to the original question, thus, creating doubt.

Don’t go into an interview on the “defensive” because of a lack of degree. You already have the meeting, so answering questions from the “offensive” view will be received as genuine and confident. Allowing your true personality to emerge will give the interviewer a much more realistic, accurate and whole view of you, in addition to your qualifications.

This combination of techniques should allow the “playing field” to become more level and hopefully increase the probability of success! Good Luck!

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