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Chapter 4:

Post-JET Employment

Outrunning the Lion

Contributed by Jeremy Sanderson
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Outrunning the Lion

A wildlife film unit lay in the long grass at the edges of a nature reserve in Africa filming a pride of lions tucking into the warm flesh of their latest kill. Taking great care not to disturb the animals, they lay downwind with their powerful zoom lens and rifle microphone trained on the scene. As the cameraman shifted to focus his equipment a beam of sunlight reflected off his lens, momentarily giving away their position to the largest of the lions. It turned its great head slowly to look in the direction of the intruders, and as it made eye contact, stopped eating and eased into a supine crouch. The film crew, as one felt a chill off fear run down their spines. The cameraman felt a rustle in the grass behind him, and turned to see the sound technician had laid down his microphone, pulled a pair of Nike trainers from his bag and was busily lacing them up. Incredulous, the cameraman said “Don’t be stupid, you’ll never run faster than that lion!” To which the sound technician replied “I don’t need to run faster than the lion, I just need to run faster than you.....!”

I served as a CIR in Saitama from 1998 to 2000, leaving JET at the age of 37 with no money, no business experience and no qualifications other than my university degree. By any reckoning the future did not look particularly rosy, and until a few weeks before the end of my time on JET I had no idea what I was going to do for a living, or indeed who would want to hire someone with such an unimpressive resume. Today I manage and own substantial shares in several companies in Japan: My main career since JET has been in the recruitment business. I am currently an owning partner and CEO of Icon Partners KK, a recruitment firm based in Tokyo. Additionally I am Chairman of Compass Offices Japan KK, a serviced-office business headquartered in Hong Kong, and Owner of Sanderson Icon Ltd. an importer and retailer of American motorcycle accessories. I am currently incorporating a fourth company, Encore Japan KK., a BPO (business process outsourcing) company. My income is comfortable, by anyone’s standards, and I have a great degree of control over how I spend my time, both in and out of work. In short, despite the very unpromising beginnings of my life post-JET, I have been extremely fortunate, and yes, financially successful.

I mention the above not from any sense of self congratulation whatsoever, but purely in order to illustrate that however inauspicious the starting point of your career, certain learnable attributes and attitudes will help you outrun the other guy, and avoid ending up as lion food! After many years experience of both coaching candidates through the interview process with hiring companies, and training my own staff, I can say with confidence that there are never enough talented and motivated people to go around! It becomes clear then, that hiring staff is not usually a case of finding the “perfect” candidate, but more a case of finding the one who can put some significant distance between him or herself and the others in the race. In marketing terms this is called a “brand difference”. This article is about helping you to build your brand difference, and become more competitive in the workplace. Your future as a professional, regardless of where and how you chose to deploy your talents, will be determined less by what job you start off in, and more by what you do once you’ve started working.

I would like to pretend that financial or career success is down to some kind of innate genius, but in my case at least, the evidence (and my family and friends) would argue otherwise! The following is a breakdown of some of my personal policies that have made a difference in my life, and if you chose to employ them, or at least give them house room, I believe they will make a positive difference in yours too. The following are things I have learned not just from being an employee, but more from being an employer, trainer and mentor to many ex JETs and other

young adults over the years. Some of my ideas may sound counterintuitive, but they work, so bear with me and read on....

Embrace Your Insecurities

Students of 8th and 9th century European history will recall how the Viking invaders burned their ships on the beaches when they first arrived on a mission of conquest, so that they would have no avenue of retreat, and must therefore conquer or die. Insecurity about the consequences of failure can be a powerful motivator. It is for precisely this reason that immigrants survive and prosper the world over, where the locals drift through life often unable to compete. I am an immigrant to Japan, and from day one I was willing to sleep in a park or under a railway arch rather than admit defeat and go back to the UK. I have always worked with the sense that I had to do more than the locals, and do it better if I was going to be competitive. If asked to do something outside of my comfort zone, the answer is always “yes, I can do it”. Then I go and buy a bunch of books and figure out how to do it! I have taught myself everything from sales, marketing, business finance and web programming to carpentry, gas welding and motorcycle mechanics in this way.

I have a constantly lingering sense of insecurity that makes me an avid collector of skills, so that I can survive and prosper in almost any situation. Most businessmen and entrepreneurs are the same. The constant knowledge that our competitors are snapping at our heels keeps us running forward. Insecurity is something that has been a great friend to me over the years as it keeps me from ever becoming complacent. I’m not suggesting you need be neurotic about life to the point of paralysis. Quite the opposite. Another way to express this is a “sense of urgency”. This is something that all good sales people are familiar with. It means the need to drive forward, hit targets, deliver results and move on to the next deal. A sense of urgency will set you apart from the crowd in any field of endeavor. If you, like me end up living in a foreign country this will come fairly naturally (at least at first). If you can sustain this drive it will give you a serious competitive advantage. If you plan to return to your own country, then take this skill back with you as one of the things you learnt from your JET experience. Even in your own country it will help you outrun the other natives! People who work with a sense of urgency achieve more, are less wasteful of their time, and that of others, and are a dream to manage. If you allow a natural sense of insecurity to drive self betterment and achievement without allowing it to diminish your ambition you will have a powerful formula for success at your command.

Lose Your Sense of Entitlement

Without doubt one of the most insidious and self destructive traits I come across when interviewing, hiring and training people is a sense of entitlement. Most people are careful to hide this form of petty mentality in interviews, but unless they have erased it from their souls it quickly surfaces once they get into the workplace. “The world owes me something”, or “I’m only being paid this much so I’m only going to work this much” type attitudes are typical examples. Comparing your self to others and feeling bitter because they derived some benefit that you didn’t, is another example. If you can get it into your head that the other guy’s gain does not mean it’s your loss you will have taken a huge step in liberating yourself from a lot of destructive anguish and heartache. If someone else gains a benefit that you don’t, your position actually remains totally unchanged. If you congratulate them on their good fortune rather than getting all bent up about it though, your standing in their eyes will go up and you’ll save yourself some stress too. Net effect: Simply by choosing not to be small minded you derive an indirect benefit too from their good fortune. This is the kind of positive thinking that will earn you appreciation from your boss and colleagues, and improve your chances of advancement.

I’ll give you an example: Recently a former business partner of mine pulled off a magnificent coup by selling his company for a huge amount. I had worked for him in the early years of the company, and done a lot to help him scale it up and grow it into a saleable asset, but we parted company after a management fall out, meaning I never reaped the financial rewards I had worked for at the time. A lot of people later asked me if I was bitter that he made millions out of the deal and I made nothing out of it. To me the question of envy or bitterness never arose. He worked very hard to make his company a success, and whilst I worked with him I learnt the skills that have led to success in my current business ventures. I didn’t make millions off the sale of his business like he did, but he helped me gain the skills to go on to do it for myself. His gain was not my loss. To the contrary, I put it all down to ‘tuition fees’. If you can free yourself from the

strangling effects of a sense of entitlement you will work more diligently and with greater passion, creativity and originality. As a manager and employer I am so excited when I observe these traits in my staff, and if your future bosses and employers are warm and breathing they will feel the same too. As an employer I am always on the lookout for people who I can mentor up through the ranks and promote to positions of responsibility. The lack of a sense of entitlement is pretty high on the list of requirements for future leaders!

Dream (really) Big, and set Goals

In 1988 Paddy Ashdown (now Lord Ashdown), an ex Royal Marine and military intelligence officer, became leader of the Liberal Democrat Party in the UK. At the time he was unknown outside party circles and his sudden rise to prominence caused a great stir in the British press. He remained in the post until 1999. I remember watching him being interviewed years later by a reporter who alluded to his audacity running for the job. When asked “where did you find the courage to take on such an important job with so little experience?” he replied “That’s simple, I was too naïve to know that I couldn’t do it!” (meaning of course that fear of failure wasn’t even a factor in his decision). I’m sure the same sense of “naivety” played some part in President Kennedy’s challenge to the American people to put a man on the moon. The point is, neither of these men stopped to think about and agonize over all the things that could go wrong, or stop them from achieving their goals. They both put doubt aside and committed to what Jim Collins in his book ‘Good to Great’ calls a BHAG: A Big Hairy Audacious Goal. I thoroughly recommend that you start considering your own BHAG.

One thing that all the successful people I know have in common is an entirely improbable and unrealistic sense of what is achievable, but they usually achieve it! My wife laughed at me when I started my first sales job in 2000, indeed this was the first time I had ever dipped my toe into the world of business at all, because I bought and read a book called “How to Become CEO”. I was the most junior guy in the company yet I was already eyeing the top job. She thought I was mad. 5 years later I was a CEO. I was too naïve to know I couldn’t do it, but I was also willing to ignore all the naysayers and negative people I met along the way, and stay focused on achieving my BHAG. To be blunt, most people in life who try to give you advice are people who have never achieved much or taken any risks themselves. If you want advice about how to succeed don’t seek it from those who haven’t. Instead, read the biographies of those who have, like Richard Branson, Alan Sugar, Jack Welch, Robert T. Kiyosaki and so forth. They all had massive audacious goals based on nothing more than their capacity to dream really big and a willingness to live with the inherent risks.

While we’re on this subject I really have to recommend the idea of taking a systematic approach to personal goal setting. A good starting point is to sit and think of what, specifically, you want to achieve in one, three and five years time. A nice car? Your own house? Your own business? Your goals may be less earthly and more altruistic of course, such as helping your parents pay off their mortgage, or building a school in a developing country. The goal itself is not important as long as it’s something that matters to you. Once you have decided what you want to achieve, create an image in your mind that you can associate with the goal, and mentally put detail on the image. (I even set pictures associated with my goals as the desktop wallpaper on my computers). Constantly revisiting these images has the effect of driving your goals down into your subconscious, which works away in the background on your behalf to help bring about the achievement of these goals.

To take this a step further, the use of “verbal affirmations” is also very effective. A verbal affirmation is a phrase linked to your goal that you repeat to yourself regularly, e.g. “In five years from now I’ll be drinking gin and tonic with my wife on the deck of our yacht in the Bahamas”. This one is a bit tongue in cheek (I prefer Hawaii) but I’m sure you get the point. The dirty little secret of many successful people is that they’ve been talking to themselves like this for years! In the past it has been called “Imagineering”, “dream crafting” or “image training” depending on which books you read, but today the technique is better known as NLP, or Neuro-Linguistic Programming. So now it has a scientific sounding name you can do it without feeling like some sad old hippie! All I can say is, I’ve tried it and it works, so put it in your tool bag.

Read ‘till Your Eyes Bleed

Lifelong learning is a mantra I’ve been preaching to my staff (and anyone else who will listen) for years, yet it never ceases to amaze me how few people read books and educate themselves about the fields in which they work. Many see reading a book about their job as some kind of extra unpaid work. How shortsighted! It’s an investment in one’s own future. I recently hired four people, two of whom asked if they could borrow books about the job, or purchased books themselves, to prepare for the job before starting. Of the two who didn’t, I quickly had to fire one and the other is struggling. The two book readers are soaking up information and doing great. Go figure! Remember, a dwarf sitting on the shoulders of a giant sees the farther of the two. The answers to nearly all of life’s problems and the ‘secrets’ of success are all there in print, laid out for your benefit by those giants of our societies who have gone before and made the mistakes for you. Do yourself a favor and try sitting on their shoulders, you’ll be amazed at how your vision changes.

Not only does reading give you ideas and stimulate creative thought, it also improves your vocabulary and overall ability to communicate. Unless you are planning on a career as an ascetic monk, your verbal and written communication skills will be one of the greatest determinants of your future success (or failure). Just about every resume I see has something in it alluding to the candidate’s “outstanding communication skills”. The only “outstanding” thing is how few can back this claim up with real skills. There are of course many cases of successful people who have hopeless communication skills, but unless you can box like Mike Tyson or have a daddy who owns oil wells and was the former President of the USA you’re going to need every advantage you can get!

Be an Optimist and Take Risks

It has often been said that “fortune favors the bold”. History and evolution provide ample evidence of this. Those who are willing to put themselves outside of their comfort zone, take audacious risks and take the path less traveled by frequently fall flat on their faces and mess up of course, but the point is that they learn by doing so and improve their skills. As anyone who has ever taught knows, making mistakes is part of any learning process. One of the toughest risks I ever took was to give up a secure, well paid job as a Police Officer in London to become a self employed registered bilingual tour guide. I had a big mortgage and many responsibilities at the time, and others in the tourist business told me I was crazy. As a Police Officer I made 26,000 pounds a year and I was told that as a tour guide I would struggle to bring in 10,000 pounds in my first year. I quit the Police Force in May 1993. Over the following year I earned nearly 40,000 pounds and became one of the top five earning guides in London (out of over 1000 registered guides). Remember, when someone tells you something you want to do is “impossible” or “too tough”, they are invariably judging the situation relative to their abilities, not yours. Only you should determine what you are capable of.

Sometimes you just have to believe in yourself and take a leap in the dark. I have repeated this pattern many times since, and continue to live on a knife edge, but life is always interesting and rewarding this way. Taking risks is certainly scary but whiling away your life in a job you hate while others are promoted over your head is a far more terrifying prospect. You only have one life (unless you’re a cat or a Bhuddist) so live it with passion, determination, optimism and courage and you will vastly enhance your chances of success. Every really successful person I know is a great optimist. They radiate positive energy and people are naturally drawn to them. To achieve anything substantial in life you need to be able to attract good people and get them to cooperate with you to get things done. Nobody wants to hitch their wagon to a negative loser with no ambition. Positive energy in the face of challenges or adversity is one thing that really differentiates leaders from followers, and is indeed a very attractive quality in anybody, leader or otherwise.

Coming back to the point I made at the start of this article. To do well in any job, or indeed to get the job in the first place, you don’t need to spring perfect and fully formed from the head of Zeus, most of the time you just need to be better than the competition. Follow my advice and you will be!

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Post-JET Employment

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For many of you, finding a job back home, rather than going back to school, is what's on your mind at the moment. How will you move to the next level of your career? How will you move to the next stage of your life? You have learned a lot. Through JET you have tangible international experience. But what does this mean?

Putting your skills into action

As more and more businesses expand across borders they will increasingly look to hire people with proven international skills. You have learned how to respect, observe and learn from cultural differences. The world is your classroom. These are critical skills in a world looking for economic prosperity and peace.

By having lived in Japan, you have been exposed to a culture different than your own. Not just “a culture”, but people, friends that you have come to think of as family. Hopefully this has given you not only insights on Japan; but a new way to look at yourself. That ability to step outside your own set of “norms” will be a key asset as you shape a career and a life for yourself. You are unique – in your families, in your community and, most importantly, in the job market.

Facing unknown situations, you have had to learn to think quickly on your feet as well as to take initiative and troubleshoot – that you can do these things in an “alien” environment makes you all the more valuable to expanding business in a variety of industries. You can also help train others who aren't used to dealing with cultural difference.

While you were in Japan, you had to adjust in many subtle and not-so-subtle ways: from the pace and volume of your speech to your feelings about communal bathing. Depending on your personality and where you are from these and dozens of other adjustments were either easy or challenging. The point is that when necessary, you met that challenge.

A global skill mindset that is with you

Being bilingual or multi-lingual is also valuable. Even if you did not fully master Japanese or if your future does not require that particular language, having studied Japanese will make you more expressive and more sensitive to the way other people express themselves.

Having a global mindset means the ability to scan the world from a broader perspective. It means looking for unexpected trends that may provide the opportunity to achieve personal, professional or organisational goals.

Today, companies *and* individuals from different corners of the planet are more integrated than at any other time in human history. And, we live in a world where all the major business functions in the value chain are highly global and deeply integrated. According to McKinsey and Company, 80 percent of the world's GDP will be sold across international borders by 2027, compared to about 20 percent in 2001. Multinational business activity will grow from approximately \$5 trillion to \$70 trillion by 2027. You are well positioned to grow with it.

Here are some of the skills you take with you:

Independence

You had to learn to fend for yourself in a foreign culture and adapt to a new way of doing things.

Awareness of international issues

You have stepped outside the protective comfort of home to see that people in the world have

many concerns that folks at home are not at all aware of. You may be better at determining the completeness and objectivity of news reports, which are often steeped in cultural bias.

Sensitivity to differences among people

Having immersed yourself in life in Japan, you have seen that there are many different ways of interacting, thinking, and communicating. You understand that values and customs that are different from yours are not any less valid or "normal" than yours.

Finding the Right Job

Contributed by JETAA US13 – Northern California, JETAA US2 – New York

Basic Tips for Finding a Job: (courtesy of JETAA)

- Start early
- Consult newspaper classified ads, the internet and organisations such as chambers of commerce, alumni associations, etc
- Let people know what you are looking for
- Follow up leads with a cover letter and resume
- Informational Interviewing
- Reference Letters
- Update your resume

Informational Interviewing

What is informational interviewing?

Yes, you're back from Japan, a renowned expert on bowing to a 91.5 degree angle when meeting government officials, gracing the floors in slippers half your foot size and speaking in simple English at ten words per minute. You've been practicing the art of cultural exchange for at least a year now, so why not use informational interviewing to learn more about your home country's employment and educational cultures?

Many of us return from Japan knowing little about current job and academic opportunities at home. Informational interviewing allows you to gather information and obtain advice and insight on work/study that you are considering. The more resource information you have at your disposal, the better equipped you will be for taking the right steps toward your goal. People who do the work that you are considering can offer first-hand accounts of what it's really like out there. You can't get such a personal perspective with a resource publication from the library. Beware though! Informational interviewing is NOT asking for a job, but seeking advice and/or information from a player in the field. An important distinction to remember.

Establishing an informational interview

How do you go about establishing an informational interview? Start at the roots by contacting family and friends who may have knowledge of your fields of interest. You are not making a commitment to a path in life yet, so don't be afraid to explore the areas which appeal to you and have fun in the fact-finding process. Even if those initial contacts with family and friends don't prove enlightening, they may know of other people who may be able to answer some of your questions. They may offer to introduce you to others or you can simply ask for suggestions. The branches will begin to sprout.

Many JETs go to Japan directly after college graduation and may have forgotten that they hold the prestigious title of alumni/ae of their university. As an alum, you are able to use your university's career and educational resources. Most universities would be happy to provide you with names and addresses of alumni/ae who are involved in your fields of interest. First, ask a college career counsellor if these alumni/ae would mind being contacted by a fellow alum. Alumni are often extremely generous in offering advice related to their field, even if you have never met before. You both share at least one common experience of attending the same university which is an immediate connection. The informational interview can also be a great opportunity to talk about the good old college days.

Other ways of establishing informational interviews include contacting former employers and professors as well as chance meetings with people at recreational and social functions. A note on impromptu informational interviews - be polite and do not demand too much time running through 101 questions at a cocktail party. Test the air and first ask if that person wouldn't mind answering a few questions (after proper introductions, of course). If there is not enough time for all your queries, perhaps that person would be able to meet with you on another occasion. If not, at least you've learned a little more than you knew before and you have experienced how easy and natural an informational interview can be.

Some pointers for the actual interview:

- Dress appropriately – professional attire when meeting that person during office hours
- Actively listen to your interviewee. Your sincere interest or lack thereof will show in your body language
- Be prudent in keeping the length of time for the interview. If you have asked for 15 minutes of the interviewee's time, keep your promise. Your interviewee may be eager to add more information than the scheduled time allows, which is great. However, you should not pressure him/her to answer ALL of your questions.
- Ask for referrals of other people you may be able to contact. Again the branches should always extend outward in your research. Another person may have a deeper insight into the area of your interest.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- How did you get into this work?
- What is a typical day like?
- What are the frustrations?
- What are the rewards?
- What type of education is necessary for entry-level positions?
- How much flexibility do you have regarding dress, working hours, vacation time, place of residence?
- If you were starting again, would you do anything differently?
- To what professional organisations do you belong? Should I join now?
- What is the potential for the industry?
- Where do you see the most growth potential?
- What are the typical job titles in the field?
- Who hires people to do this kind of work?
- Would you recommend graduate or professional school training immediately after college/university?
- What are the opportunities for advancement?
- How would you advise I go about looking for an entry-level job?
- If you were to leave the work you are doing today, what other kind of work would attract you?
- If you were hiring someone at this time, what would be the most critical factors in determining your selection?
- What are entry-level salaries in this field?

You should thank the person at the end of the informational interview for sharing his/her precious time with you and always send a thank you letter or email as soon as possible.

Reference Letters

Your next employer is likely to request a reference letter from you when you apply, so it is in your best interest to have a letter explaining your work in Japan and just how well you did it. Your supervisor or one of your English teachers are ideal candidates to draft that letter for you. But remember:

Ask the right person.

In Japan, often offices will think the title of the person who writes the letter is more important than

the capacity in which they knew the person. If your office tries to have your *Kacho* or *Kocho* write the letter even if you didn't ever really say more than hello to him or her, stand your ground. Explain that you'd like to have a letter that comes from someone who knows you well and can say meaningful things about your work.

Explain the focus of the letter.

Are you applying to graduate school? What programme? What kind of a job are you looking for? Are you continuing with your English teaching? It's important to give whoever is writing your letter as much information as possible on the focus.

Provide the person writing your letter with the format used to write such letters in your country.

He or she may not be aware that they should write the date at the top of the letter and so on. Provide them with the proper forms, envelopes, etc.

Explain what you want.

Japanese do not usually “brag” about merits and accomplishments like we do in western countries. You may want to point out that the letter should boast the skills, talents and characteristics that make you valuable. If possible, provide them with a sample reference letter so they will have a model to follow.

Offer your assistance in any way possible.

Maybe they'd like you to check the spelling or grammar. They are doing you a favour so make their task as easy as possible.

Provide your selling points.

The person writing your letter cannot possibly remember every event, activity accomplishment etc. It helps to sit down and list all of your duties and accomplishments in Japan. Be sure to list any successful ideas you implemented. Do it now before you have forgotten everything!

- Day-to-day school and office duties – elementary/nursery school visits, exam writing
- Extra-curricular Activities
- Study groups, adult English classes, speech contest coaching, etc
- Articles you've written for local papers
- Articles about you in local papers
- Participation in festivals and events
- Proofreading or translating
- Projects you've helped with or executed
- Your Japanese skills (proficiency exams)
- Participation in JET conferences as a speaker/moderator
- Your relationships with your colleagues or students
- PSG, AJET, Habitat for Humanity, or any other volunteer positions held

An example of a reference letter is provided on the following page. There is also an example in the Contracting Organisation Manual (*Ninyo Dantai-yo* Manual) which is given to all contracting organisations.

update your resume!

Besides all the wonderful things you have included in your reference letter, don't forget that you have also developed some important and impressive skills that are perfect for your resume. Simply having worked overseas says a lot about you, and your JET experience is going to look good, so don't forget to put it in your resume! When writing, think ACTION, think KEYWORDS! How about:

adaptability, flexibility, durability, patience, can work well as a team member, cultural sensitivity, diplomacy, persistence, independence, proficiency and the ability to rise to a challenge?

Example Reference Letter

Employer's Street Address
City, State, Zip code/ Postcode

Date

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN
Reference for XXXX

I am the Principal at XXXX Senior High School in XXXX Prefecture and have had a working relationship with XXXX in this capacity since he/she arrived here in August 20XX.

XXXX was placed as an Assistant Language Teacher as a participant of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, in the town of XXXX in XXXX Prefecture, where his/her **positive and bright attitude** helped him/her to both adapt himself/herself to the Japanese culture and fit in to his/her host-community with surprising speed.

XXXX met with a number of difficult hurdles during his/her year-long stay, but showed **great initiative** in dealing with them and overcame the vast majority of them with **maturity** and **good judgment**. He/She showed **open mindedness** in resolving cultural differences at his/her workplace and maintained very positive working relationships with his/her peers and fellow teachers throughout his/her stay.

XXXX threw himself/herself into his/her teaching role with great enthusiasm and **went beyond his/her designated responsibilities** to develop activities and events to make the learning experience more enjoyable for the junior high school children he/she was teaching. He/She also worked hard to **promote intercultural understanding** through building friendships with the Japanese people in various activities outside of his/her working hours. XXXX's natural **enthusiasm** carried across to the children he/she taught and the people he/she worked with and he/she has been extremely successful in his/her work as a **cultural ambassador** for his/her country.

It was a pleasure to work with XXXX during his/her stay and I have no hesitation in recommending him/her to anybody who is seeking the above-mentioned qualities.

Tanaka Taro
English Teacher/ Principal
XXXX Senior High School

TEL:
FAX:

Your resume should be a portrait of yourself, highlighting your capabilities and accomplishments. Employers are looking for individuals that can handle written communication effectively and persuasively.

Your resume should be tailored towards the job you are applying for. Print out the job posting or advertisement and have it beside you when you are creating or editing your resume for the specific position. Pay attention to the required and preferred skills, and characteristics that the employer has determined are necessary for the successful candidate to have. Emphasise those skills and experiences in your resume.

Most authorities on resume writing recommend that your resume be limited to only one page. This is not only a test of your writing skills, but also a favour to employers who have to review

numerous resumes everyday. You will find, however, that careers asking for certain technical qualifications will require additional information and this will add a second page to your resume. Remember that your resume is a tool to get you in the door for the interview. Once you are sitting down with the interviewer, you can elaborate on how your background, experience, and qualifications make you the best fit for the position.

When writing your resume, take your time and be concise. Once your first draft is finished, put it away for a day or two. When you pick it up again you will be more objective about what you have written. Let your friends and family read your resume for clarity and purpose. Do not be afraid of constructive criticism!

Format

The two most common formats for resumes are the Chronological Resume and the Functional Resume. The main divisions of the two resumes are as follows:

Chronological Resume

This is more common for those who are just out of school or have less diverse work experience

Identification Items

- Name/Address/Telephone number

Career Objective

- Highlight the skills you have to offer and your immediate goals

Educational Background

- College/University education
- List high school only if it has a national reputation or a unique programme specific to your interests

Honours/Courses

- Merit scholarships, prizes

Employment Experience

- Reverse chronological order
- List title, name of company and the city and state of the company location
- Describe responsibilities using action words in the active past tense

Skills and Interests

- List only skills that add value to you in the workplace

Extracurricular Activities

- Student organisations, community associations, clubs, hobbies

Reference Statement/ Referees

- State: "References: Available upon request" OR
- List people who they can contact and their contact details

Functional Resume

The Functional Resume contains the same information as the Chronological Resume, but the order of items is different. In this resume you define your skills toward a specific area. This is more commonly used by those who have a more extensive and/or diverse work history.

Identification Items

- Name/Address/Telephone number

Career Objective

- Highlight the skills you have to offer and your immediate goals

Experience

- List your areas of competence and interest – management, finance, communications

Employers

- List only the name of the company and the city and state where it is located

Educational Background

- College/University education
- List high school only if it has a national reputation or a unique programme specific to your interests

Extracurricular Activities

- Student organisations, community associations, clubs, hobbies

Reference Statement/ Referees

- State: “References: Available upon request” OR
- List people who they can contact and their contact details

Layout

Clean, simple and consistent! Employers are not looking for a Hollywood production on paper. Use good quality stock paper and establish margins of 1” at the top and sides and 1½” at the bottom. The file should be 12 point sans serif font (i.e. Arial on white paper with little or no formatting). Also, consider that many companies will use various technologies to scan or search on resumes. What this means is that you should use key words for your area of interest or experience.

Note that when employers read resumes, they skim through them very fast. When designing the layout of your resume, look at what areas you want to emphasise. Use bold type for key information like the name of your university or a previous employer. Try different options and let your friends and family comment on the visual presentation.

Most authorities on resume writing recommend that your resume be limited to only one page. This is not only a test of your writing skills, but is also a favour to employers that have to review numerous resumes everyday. You will find, however, that careers asking for certain technical qualifications will require additional information and this will add a second page to your resume. Remember that your resume is a tool to get you in the door for the interview. Once you are sitting down with the interviewer, you can elaborate on how your background, experience, and qualifications make you the best fit for the position.

Resume Check – Things to Avoid!

- Spelling/grammatical errors – including inconsistent tenses
- Using “I” and “my”: use past-tense action verbs related to your target job to describe your job responsibilities
- Use of unusual colours/ fonts
- Use of pictures or drawings (unless you are an architect or artist)
- Use of a bad printer or an inferior copy
- Long lists of skills/attributes
- Unimportant information (such as listing every subject you studied at university) just for bulk
- Including your transcript in your resume
- Lying

A lot of information about resumes, including examples, is available online. Research this thoroughly so that you can be well prepared. A good place to start would be this site, specially created for JETs by CRJ presenter Vince Ricci: <http://jetresumes.blogspot.com/>

Interviews

The key to a successful interview is preparation. Just as you would prepare for a major college examination or a sporting event, you must start the process well before the actual event. The main purpose of an interview is to exchange information. The interviewer is interested in looking at the real person behind the paper resume in order to make recommendations for hiring.

Interviews come in all shapes and sizes, from the very formal to the informal gathering. In most cases you will encounter a formal situation where you will be required to wear appropriate business attire. Once you enter the interview room, the interviewer will generally shake your hand and ask you to have a seat. Just follow his or her lead and you will begin to feel more comfortable. The “ice-breaker” question usually follows and your interviewer will attempt to start some type of lively conversation to get you to relax and to establish some rapport.

From this point forward, the interview will become a question and answer session. You will find that most of the questions are designed to gain information that is not apparent from your resume. If you are well prepared, this will be a great opportunity to show your communication skills.

Once the interviewer has covered the basic qualifications, the questions will shift emphasis and focus on career goals and personal characteristics. Be prepared for and pre-think answers to the following common questions:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your goals?
- Why do you want to be a _____?
- What can you add to our organisation as an employee?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Additional questions to consider:

- Greatest success?
- Greatest failure?
- Why are you more qualified than my other candidates?
- Least favourite task in your last job?
- What is your current salary?
- What salary are you looking for?
- Do you require any special accommodation (ie physical/mental limitations) for employment?
- Why do you want to work for this company?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 to 10 years?

All of these questions will enable the interviewer to make judgment about you as a potential employee.

After all the questions, you will be given the opportunity to ask some of your own. During your preparation before the interview, you should think of questions that display your knowledge of the company. Some possible approaches include:

- What are the people who held this position previously doing now?
- How much responsibility is given a new employee in this department?
- What financial responsibility is accorded the holder of this position?
- Upon what criteria are employees in this department evaluated?
- With whom would I work closely in this job?
- What are the opportunities for advancement in this organisation?
- What is the company philosophy?
- What are the company and/or department goals for the next five years?
- What types of people succeed in this environment?
- Describe your training programme.

These additional questions from your side should give you a very clear picture of the company and your potential fit with the organisation.

Once you have completed the interview, it is a good idea to send a thank you/ follow-up letter or email. This should be directed to the interviewer and it should be brief and concise. You will want to thank the individual for the opportunity to interview and most importantly, emphasise your interest in the position(s) available.

Accepting a Job Offer

Congratulations! In today's difficult labour market, a job offer is something to celebrate. Though you have an offer of employment, there are a few items that need to be considered before your final decision is made:

- Job responsibilities
- Salary
- Advancement opportunities
- Job security
- Training
- Working conditions
- Employee benefits

The salary offer that usually comes with the job offer is a matter to be taken seriously. Entry-level positions that require training will generally leave very little room for negotiating. If you are in a more technical field, you may command some bargaining power, but remember the state of the economy and the job market. There are many qualified job seekers in the market today, so be careful when asking for more.

You will also want to ask about your fringe benefits. Often, these amount to 25% to 40% of the total salary package. What benefits are most important to you at this time in your career? What is the cost of living like in the city where you will be employed? These are some of the questions to consider when you respond to the job offer.

If not supplied, ask for the terms of employment in writing. This avoids any misunderstandings. Some companies routinely do this and most will comply when requested.

Most employers will give you a deadline when they will need to know your decision. If you do not respond by the deadline, the job will most likely be given to another individual. Always honour the dates the employer has set forth. If you should need an extension, some employers are known to give more time to decide. This will all depend upon your particular case.

International Volunteer Opportunities

These days, volunteer organisations are becoming pickier about whom they recruit and solid qualifications are a must. Your JET experience will work to your advantage. Most contract periods run anywhere from two months to two years, depending on the agency. Expect to fill out an extensive application form and go through several interviews just to volunteer! Moreover, application processing can take up to six months, so apply early. On the positive side, volunteer work is a great experience. Also, you are never too old to volunteer, so if you think you are getting up there, you will probably find yourself working alongside people of all ages. A number of international organisations that recruit volunteers are listed on the following page.