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Graduating With A Plan of Action

By Ann Baehr

Many people struggle with career choices before making that important life-changing decision that will define who they are for years to come. It is hard to imagine that a new graduate would still struggle with what they want to do with their new college degree. Even if they know, they might not know the next step to take. This article will give a few pointers on how to get started with a plan of action.

Congratulations, you've just graduated with a degree in your chosen field.

So what's your next step going to be to launch your long-anticipated career?

Like a young racehorse at the starting gate, you have tons of energy and determination, and are anxious to get out there and seize new career opportunities. But are you ready? Do you know what you need to do? Do you have a plan of action to turn those opportunities into a reality? If you don't, you will need to get one.

I'm sure you've heard the old adage that the quickest route from point A to point B is a straight line. Well, launching your career is no different in terms of setting your job search goals and carrying them out diligently and methodically. You might have a few corners to navigate, but you should do your best to avoid deviating from your goal as much as possible.

One of the first things you need to decide is what type of job interests you the most. Depending on what your degree is, there might be many positions in your field to consider. For example, if you are a graduate nurse you can work in a hospital, clinic, nursing home, childcare center, school, private practice, or field setting. Then, within those settings you can work within various units such as medical-surgical, pediatrics, and maternity. Then there are transitional opportunities.

Let's say you tried your hand at nursing and realized it was not what you expected. You can always consider pharmaceutical sales as a new career. Some fields, such as business management, are even more flexible. The key is to decide which direction you are headed towards and learn as much about that field as you possible can.

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Okay, you hate to admit it, but you spent all of that time and money, but you're still not sure what you want to do. You have an idea about what you might want to do, but it's just not clear yet. None of the possibilities you've explored get you excited. In fact, you're feeling downright frustrated and depressed. Don't worry. It really isn't that bad. Keep in mind that you don't have to start at the top, and don't have to commit yourself to an employer. So don't put so much pressure on yourself. Maybe you just need to get your foot in the door somewhere to test the waters before you decide to go full steam ahead. You might even want to spend the first year to discover what it is that you really want to do. That way your mind will be open to possibilities and you will have a positive attitude. Just don't waste time. Set weekly goals. Use that year to WORK at finding out what you want to do. Then prepare to do it - and do it well.

If you want to explore your career without the assistance of a job coach or career counselor, a good way to start is to conduct some independent research. Let's assume your degree in is law enforcement or criminal justice. You will need to decide if you want to work in corporate security or private

investigation. But how do you decide? Well, if your college's career center cannot provide you with specific information, visit Occupational Outlook Handbook online (

<http://www.bls.gov/oco/>

) to get an

overview of various positions in your field. Join industry specific chat rooms to see what everyone is talking about. Go to the websites of various companies. Get involved in conversations. Ask lots of questions. Get advice from friends, family members, and neighbors. Ask them what they do and how they got started.

If you are not sure if a particular area of your industry is right for you, call or write professionals already in positions of interest to request an information interview. An information interview will allow you the opportunity to question a professional about the nature and requirements of a position. Some people will not be available, whereas other people will welcome the opportunity to give you fifteen minutes of their time. If someone avoids you, don't take it personally. Just move on to the next possible contact. Once you make a connection, you will need to be polite, organized, and demonstrate exceptional professionalism and communication skills. During your information interview, remember to take detailed notes. When you are done, thank them wholeheartedly for their time. Be sure to get their full name and contact information so you can send them a follow-up thank you letter. They might even have an opening, so be sure to make a good impression.

Once you have narrowed it down, have your resume developed professionally and post it on major job boards, such as monster.com, careerbuilder.com, and hotjobs.com to see what contacts can be made. While you are there, search job openings to glean what the job descriptions are so you can see what will be expected of you. Your resume writer will probably want you to do that anyway so they can get a good idea of the jobs you are interested in to ensure your resume is very targeted. Be proactive and tell your resume writer that you have done that and would like to share that information with them.

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Okay, so now you know what you want to do and you have a great resume and cover letter. Now what? You've probably heard how important networking is - that it's not what you know but who you know. Well, that's not always the case; but knowing the right person sure can't hurt. With that in mind, let everyone you come in contact with know you are looking for a job. Be sure to keep your resume updated and in your car (protected from spills and creasing) so you can hand them out at a moment's notice. Join an organization to become acquainted with people in your industry, attend career fairs, become affiliated with recruiters, and research companies online (post your resume at their websites), at the library, and even in the yellow pages to get leads to mail your resume and cover letter. This last approach is a great strategy. Let's say you recently graduated with your Masters in Social Work. You can open your yellow pages to Adoption Agencies to acquire the mailing addresses of several social service agencies. Be sure to call the receptionist first to request the proper name, title, and department of the contact to send your resume and cover letter. Other strategies include creating a web resume so people can view your formatted, interactive resume online. If you don't know how to do this, research how or hire someone to do it for you. Be sure to have business cards made and add your web resume address to it!

Another great way to get started is to temp for a while. If you do decide to temp, be selective. You should only work for the best companies in your field to get the very best experience possible. It is also a great way to prove yourself as a favorable candidate for a permanent position. Don't temp for too long because it might cause a potential employer to wonder why you haven't secured a permanent position for a certain length of time. If during an interview you are asked why you temped, confidently state that you chose to temp to gain well-rounded experience in your field. Don't apologize for anything!

No matter what your plan of action is, be sure to keep organized notes and track every move you make. Prepare a list of names, company names, addresses, telephone numbers, fax numbers, email addresses, and website addresses. Keep the list near the phone of every company you sent your resume and cover letter. That way you will know whom you are speaking with when they call to extend an initial or follow up interview. This is especially important if you are going on several interviews. If you are not organized, you will get confused and seem unprofessional. You will want to make a great first impression from the very beginning, starting with a great resume and cover letter. If you have your baby sister's cute little voice or a musical greeting on your answering machine, replace it with a professional message that says, " You have reached John Smith at 555-5555. I am not available at this time. Please leave your name and reason for calling. I will return your call as soon as possible. Have a great day!" If your email address is

bowlingkingpin@aol.com

, be sure to change it to

JSmith1234@aol.com

. If you are on the road all of the time, or if members of your family do not speak

English, get a cell phone so you can be reached anytime, anywhere. List that number as your only

number without the word "cell" listed on your resume. If you list both your home number and your cell number, then indicate which number is your home number and which number is your cell number. They will probably call your home number first. If you have a lot of friends who call you on your cell, be on guard to answer your cell phone professionally. If you are going on an interview, leave your cell phone in your glove compartment. You don't want your cell phone to ring in the middle of the interview.

Be prepared and on time for the interview, if not early. Make sure you have several outfits to wear to go on several interviews in a week's time so you don't stress. Make sure you dress appropriately for your interview. You can't go wrong if you are conservative. If it is a creative industry, you can dress with more flair or even casual, but don't dress too crazy. Have extra resumes handy (don't bring your cover letter) to give to the hiring manager so he/she can distribute them to other managers without having to make copies. Practice your interviewing technique. Ask a friend to role-play with you. Get a book with commonly asked interview questions. In addition to learning what to say, you need to learn what not to say and what not to do. Send out thank you letters within 24-hours that mention something important discussed in the interview keeping the position in mind at all times and reiterating your strengths.

Above all, be professional in behavior and appearance, knowledgeable, enthusiastic, organized, interested in the company and position (have about ten questions to ask them that have nothing to do with you), and try your best to be interesting when you talk about your experiences, regardless how limited they may be. If you are nervous, keep in mind that you are interviewing them, too. You don't want to work for just anyone, do you? Be sure to convey that. You don't have to be arrogant about it, but you should come across as a commodity, not as a desperate, nervous job seeker. If you think like that, your confidence will shine through naturally because you will feel good about yourself and will be ready for anything! Before long, you'll be launching your career.

Best of Success!

Ann Baehr is a CPRW and President of Best Resumes of New York. Notable credentials include her former role as Second Vice President of NRWA and contribution to 25+ resume and cover letter sample books. To learn more visit

<http://www.e-bestresumes.com>

Three Planning Myths

By Denise O'Berry

Are you — like 70% of business owners — working without a plan? Here are three myths that need to be dispelled about strategic planning for small business.

1. It has to be formal — Not so. The value of a strategic plan for your small business is in putting the ideas on paper, creating action steps that will get you where you want to go and implementing those action steps.

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2. I'm too small — Not so. Even a one-person business can benefit from a strategic plan. A strategic plan can help you make decisions about time management and budget. Use your strategic plan to help you determine whether to attend an event or advertise in a publication. It's a check and balance tool.

3. A strategic plan is like a ball and chain — Not so. It's your plan. Too many business owners feel like once it's on paper, it can't be changed. Wrong! It should be an active document that gets reviewed and updated at least monthly, if not weekly. You're the business owner, you wrote it, you know what's happening in your market — adjust as necessary.

Denise O'Berry helps small business owners take action to grow their business. Find out more at

<http://www.whatspossible.com>

Three Planning Myths

The Graduation Speech: Farewell And Hello

Are You "Set Up" For Success?

On Picking The Right Graduation Song

He Didn'T Plan To Fail – He Failed To Plan

How to become a Chef!

Disaster Preparedness and Crime Protection Manual

30-Day Low Carb Diet 'Ketosis Plan'

How To FINALLY Stop Smoking...Once and For All!

Monsters From Hell – Game



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