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Editor's Note: I think we'd all agree that it's difficult to advance in a career if you can't find a job. On one of the electronic discussion groups I'm on, members have been expressing concerns about how to get a job when one is new to the profession. I also attended a workshop yesterday and spoke with a young man who is in this position. He said his school didn't do anything to prepare him, like mock interviews and resume reviews. I took a line from Tracie Hall, Director of the ALA Office for Diversity, and asked him what he could do, such as bring this to the attention of the library school's administration, find a willing expert and start a group to help his colleagues, go back to his undergraduate institution's career center, or join a group like Toastmasters to help with public speaking. We're reprinting this article by Elisa Topper about what you can do to help your chances at securing that first job.

Getting Employers to Go Out on a Limb and Hire a New Graduate

By **Elisa F. Topper**

This article originally appeared in American Libraries, January 2003, in her column "Working Knowledge: A Monthly Column about Life on the Job."

Q: I am often discouraged when looking at job advertisements because of their strict requirements for on-the-job experience, many specifying three to five years. I believe our future lies in passing the ideals of our profession on to future generations through mentoring and practical experience, not in belaboring how long a person has served at a reference desk. How do I get an employer to go out on a limb and take a chance on me?—*Katie Gohn, recent graduate, University of Tennessee, Knoxville*

A: Do not be discouraged, as you are definitely needed to join the profession and help alleviate the expected critical shortage of librarians. Keep in mind that the three to five years is a suggested criterion to screen out applicants, especially those with numerous years of experience. What such an ad implies is that they are looking for a candidate with *some* experience to join their team. You may be able to parlay some of your experience as a graduate student in order to sell yourself.

Some strategies students or recent graduates can use to build marketability to an employer:

- Know specifically what kind of job you are looking for—children's librarian, corporate librarian, Web designer, instruction librarian—and list relevant courses on your resume.
- Establish a work history with a part-time job at the university or local public library, or by working for a faculty member.
- Do an internship or practicum as your coursework to gain on-the-job experience—a way of putting your knowledge to work.
- Be active in your school's student association to build contacts with other students and their employers.
- Speak with members of your alumni association to find a mentor who can guide you through the job search process and provide additional networking contacts.
- Build a portfolio of your work, including course projects such as bibliographies and Web page designs.
- Work with your school's placement office to gain tips on job searching and to review materials you will send to employers.
- Volunteer at your local library if paid positions are not available.
- Rely on the graduate school faculty for contacts and advice—especially your faculty advisor.
- Notify the people you use as references and be sure they have an up-to-date copy of your resume.
- Be positive and opportunity will come your way. Good luck!

Strategies for a Successful Job Search

Start your search with a targeted approach in your areas of interest, not a mass mailing of resumes. Consider children's librarianship and cataloging positions, where there is a shortage of candidates.

Understand your strengths and weaknesses as a candidate and concentrate on what makes you stand out from the crowd.

Consider taking a course in Web design, user instruction, knowledge management, or children's literature to make yourself more marketable.

Constant updating of computer technology skills should be built into your professional development plan; contact your local community colleges and school districts for low-cost classes.

Emphasize what you can do for the employer, not what the employer can do for you. Make "employer benefit" your mantra when interviewing for positions.

Social skills in a job search situation should not be forgotten. Be sure to say "please" and "thank you," and avoid using slang in conversations with potential employers.

Send a thank-you letter to every interviewer to underscore your enthusiasm for the position, emphasizing a key point about the job.

Flexibility and willingness to be a team player are qualities employers seek in future employees.

Use your network of colleagues within the profession to find information about jobs that may not be advertised or to learn why a position is vacant—"hidden job market information." Don't forget to tap into your network of library school faculty and alums.

Luck and happenstance often do come into play in the job search—being in the right place at the right time—but you can make your own luck with a targeted approach, networking, and support from your colleagues.

For more information, see Priscilla Shontz, *The Librarian's Career Guidebook* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 2004); \$40.

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