Conducting a job search can be a challenging and overwhelming process, especially in today’s tenuous job market. To land your ideal job, you’ll need to gain a competitive edge. How? Develop a game plan and take control of the process. Identify manageable steps that will move you forward and employ techniques to capture the hiring manager’s attention. Not sure where to begin? Here’s a job search checklist with ten tried-and-true strategies to help get you started:

1. **Clarify Your Goals**
   - Assess your abilities, interests, and values, and then align your career goals accordingly. Begin with self-reflection: What are your strengths? What do you like to do? Solicit feedback from trusted family and friends, utilize career assessment tools and seek career counseling if needed. Self-assessment will help you to clarify your aspirations, define your target career, and move ahead with purpose and passion.

2. **Customize Your Resume and Cover Letter**
   - Craft a polished resume and cover letter that are tailored to the job you are pursuing. Remember, generic is average, and will not help you to stand out. Be sure both your resume and cover letter are professional, concise, error free, and in a reader-friendly font. Accentuate your abilities, but never misrepresent your qualifications. Honesty is highly valued by employers.

3. **Research the Employer**
   - Identify potential employers that interest you. Leverage the Internet. Gather as much information as possible about the organizations and the industry. Research size, mission, history, location, products/services, etc. This will increase your overall knowledge of the field and help to prepare you for a job interview.

4. **Develop Your “Marketing Pitch”**
   - This is a succinct 30-second oral summary which illustrates who you are: your background, experience, and what you can offer to a potential employer. It should be brief, professional, and positive. This pitch is also known as an “elevator speech” as it should be short enough to be delivered in the time it would take to ride an elevator to the top floor with a prospective employer. If you had 30 seconds to compel this individual to hire you, what would you say? Perfect your pitch and practice until it is fluid. Be ready to use it when the opportunity presents itself.

5. **Join a Professional Organization**
   - Almost all occupations have corresponding professional associations which offer many benefits. They feature the latest news in the industry, publications, network contacts, job leads, conferences, and more. Membership in a career-related professional organization will afford you information to enhance your knowledge and maintain currency in your field. Most also offer reasonable student memberships. Find a professional association and join! (See Related Resources)
Networking is one of the most powerful job-hunting tools available. Develop and maintain an ongoing list of contacts. Brainstorm! Family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, former classmates, and professors are all potential leads to your next job. Tell them what type of job/career you are seeking and brief them on your qualifications. Remember that networking is a reciprocal relationship. Stay in touch with your contacts. Let them know your progress and be ready to help members of your network if they need your assistance as well.

**Use Social Media**

If you have not yet done so, it’s time to establish a professional online presence. Social networking has fast become another vital strategy for the job search. A few of the most popular options include LinkedIn, Twitter, and blogging. Facebook is another popular option, albeit primarily social. Still, it’s a good idea to update your education and work sections on Facebook periodically.

All of these venues are great places to highlight qualifications, market your brand, and network with contacts.

However, make sure that the information listed in each of your profiles is consistent, and that all content reinforces your resume and cover letter. Employers are increasingly researching the online presence of potential candidates, so be mindful of what you post. You also can use social networking to investigate employers’ profiles, increase your awareness of their products and services, or catch the latest posts or Tweets on current job opportunities. As powerful as social media can be, remember it is a supplement, not a substitute, for other traditional job hunting methods. Keep a well rounded approach.

**Sharpen Your Interview Skills**

Prepare for all types of interviews. In addition to the traditional in-person interview, you may also encounter those that include a panel, phone, Skype, or web cam. Practice your responses to typical questions; including possible behavioral interview questions. (See Related Resources) Conduct mock interviews or role-play with a friend. During the interview, be enthusiastic and knowledgeable. Use the information you gleaned from your research to ask intelligent questions and offer thoughtful comments. Employ all the interview basics: be on time, well groomed, use eye contact, and a strong handshake.

**Know Your Market Value**

Your skills and talents are valuable. Once you land the job, you’ll want a paycheck that represents a fair market value. Do your homework. Check online salary guides, research the job’s salary range, and determine typical salaries for people with similar experience and skills in your industry. Compare this by location. You’ll need this data when you enter the marketplace to determine what is reasonable and to substantiate your case for a desired salary. (See Related Resources)

**Be Organized**

Keep the job hunting process running smoothly. Create either an electronic or paper-based record keeping system for all your job search correspondence. This includes a listing of your network contacts, organizations contacted, research conducted, resumes submitted, responses received, emailed messages, and thank-you notes sent. Accurate and reliable records help maintain parameters for any follow-up that is needed, and allow easy retrieval of materials when you receive a call from a prospective employer.

**Keep Your Chin Up!**

With any job search it is important to remember the three P’s—Persistence, Patience, and Positivity. Finding the right match may take time and energy. Don’t get discouraged. Be confident, and keep a healthy and positive outlook. Use this job search checklist to focus your energy and formalize a plan to mobilize your job hunt. With perseverance, dedication, and the right tools, you will be on your way to your next rewarding position.

### Related Resources

- **Computerized Career Interest Profiler, ONET**
  [www.onetcenter.org/CIPHtml](http://www.onetcenter.org/CIPHtml)

- **Resume and Cover Letters, Jobstar Central**

- **Career Networking Tutorial for Job Seekers**
  [www.quintcareers.com/Internet_Networking](http://www.quintcareers.com/Internet_Networking)

- **Guide to Researching Companies and Industries, Quintcareers**
  [www.quintcareers.com/researching_companies.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/researching_companies.html)

- **WEDDLES Professional Association Directory**
  [www.weddles.com/associations/index.cfm](http://www.weddles.com/associations/index.cfm)

- **So Many Types of Interviews, M. Gunner Pulliam, Excelsior College**
  [www.excelsior.edu/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=e0672fc0-455e-4d3e-8340-facf032dd2b2&groupId=37019](http://www.excelsior.edu/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=e0672fc0-455e-4d3e-8340-facf032dd2b2&groupId=37019)

- **LinkedIn Learning Center**

- **Glassdoor—Inside Look at Jobs & Companies**
  [www.glassdoor.com/index.htm](http://www.glassdoor.com/index.htm)

- **The Elevator Speech…, Quintcareers**
  [www.quintcareers.com/job-search_elevator_speech.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/job-search_elevator_speech.html)

Access this article and many additional career-related links at the Excelsior College Career Center at [www.excelsior.edu/career](http://www.excelsior.edu/career).

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