

# College Careering

*Are you getting As in post-college planning: Angst, Alienation and Anxiety?*

*by Sheryl Spanier*

You may have discovered, as many college students and graduates do, that there is much more involved in investigating and securing career opportunities than you were prepared for.

The transition from college student to employed graduate requires an examination of your assumptions and expectations about how to be successful. As a student, you thrive by following directions, taking prescribed courses of study and learning to adhere to academic rules and expectations. You anticipate specific outcomes from your efforts. In business, the relationship between study, effort and success is not so apparent. And, in the job search, you will not always see a direct favorable result from doing "everything right."

Getting a job after college is really a matter of luck. Luck, as Winston Churchill noted, is when opportunity meets preparation. You have prepared well; now create your opportunities. To increase your luck, you must follow every path to gain visibility in the marketplace.

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## Access Routes

Placement and Career Services offices have become excellent sources of job information on most college campuses. Visit your placement office early to take best advantage of the services. Many college placement offices also offer services for alumni. The staff of trained career counselors can introduce you to assessment batteries, career information libraries, resume development, part-time jobs, internships, workshops, and on-campus recruiting.

One big challenge for recent graduates is to identify suitable and realistic entry-level positions. Most college grads get discouraged when they look at the campus recruiting

schedule or want-ads or when they apply to agencies. Only about 10 to 15 percent of potential jobs are represented in ads. campus recruiting and employment agencies combined. Agencies are not always helpful to recent college graduates, not because college graduates are not hireable, but because companies do not see any reason to pay an agency fee to hire inexperienced entry-level staff. Newspaper ads are useful, but are a limited source of job information.

Remember that the entire career universe is not represented by the companies which recruit on campus. Many small- and medium-sized companies, as well as entrepreneurial, nonprofit or emerging organizations, cannot afford to visit colleges. Even large companies limit the kinds and numbers of institutions at which they conduct on-campus recruiting.

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To increase your sources, ask your placement or alumni office to provide you with the names of alumni whom you can contact directly for an information interview. Richard Reitnicht (Vassar '87), a liberal arts graduate, now an institutional salesman at a small Wall Street research house, found contacts to be very important to his information gathering and job search efforts. Contacting an alumnus, neighbor or family friend in a company prior to an interview, developing a company coach, and getting industry and career advice from alumni, gives you "an extra edge," he advises. "Everybody remembers what it feels like to look for a job and most people

enjoy giving a younger person advice and guidance."

Ms. Athena Constantine, Director of Career Services at Columbia University.

Emphasizes the importance of gaining a realistic view of the work world prior to conducting a job campaign. "Students who meet with people in a variety of fields of potential interest, and those individuals who explore career ideas through information meetings, work-study, internships and summer jobs, have an opportunity to test out their thinking. A person without this experience, who approaches the job market for the first time, might have an inflated sense of what is out there. Someone who has had some work exposure realizes that even the most glamorous of industries has its mundane side."

While the variety of entry-level jobs available is often disappointing to new college graduates, it is important to view the situation from the employers' perspective. Despite common assumptions, a college degree will not automatically lead you to a senior management position. At best, you can anticipate being accepted into a prestigious training program. Many companies prefer to hire recent graduates for entry-level positions which are mainly clerical, computer related sales or financial. Employers have discovered that employees who start out this way become better candidates for advancement within the organization, thus reducing attrition.

According to Dr. Francine Riley, Director of College Relations and Associate Development Programs at GTE Corporation. "What companies need in the future is smart people who know how to get along not in a narrow function, but across departments. In the future, the finance specialist who knows something about marketing and training will be the most valuable to the organization."

For this reason, companies will hire recent graduates for positions which

appear to be less challenging or professional than someone with a Bachelor's degree might expect. Graduates must often "pay their dues" through rotations and "grunt work."

Jeff Bogart, a Public Relations Consultant in New York City, advises that someone starting out from college be concerned mainly with "getting on"-meaning getting on the payroll. "The most important thing," he advises, is "to learn about business, the business environment, develop a record of experience, reliability and some achievements. Once you get that job, don't get discouraged, antsy or frustrated by routine tasks and taking orders. Wait at least a year before you try to run the business."

### Mapping Your Approach

Create your own job search initiative by organizing a list of prospective companies. Target your search. You might wish to pick a business activity, which matches your strengths, or choose industries or services which interest you. Or, you can organize your search across industries or fields with preference for a geographic location.

Go directly to job resources-managers and personnel officers in organizations of interest. Ask your contacts, professors and alumnae for introductions. If you cannot meet people through others, write them a letter asking for an appointment to explore current and future career opportunities. Systematically, follow *your* letters up with phone calls. Do not expect busy executives to call you.

When Steve Gofman (Washington University '84 graduated with a business degree business degree he was; still uncertain y '84) as to a Career direction; He was job seeking a 9-t0-5 full-time job. "I-ried everything," he recalls. "I answered every ad, networked, conducted information meetings, visited our career placement office and did mass mailings." Frustrated after what seemed like a very long time because he kept encountering the familiar "no experience, no job" rejection, Steve remembered an important principle from his marketing courses. "I knew that I would be more valuable to a company where my skills and experience were specifically useful to

its select needs. I was interested in publishing, and figuring that trade magazines could be interested in my writing ability and business studies, I used *Standard Rate and Data* as a resource to uncover 30 business trade magazines. Then, I called up the editors of each, introduced myself and asked if they could use my skills. Several rejected me, several asked for a resume and writing sample, and a few met me.

"Undaunted, I kept at it. Finally, one editor greeted me with enthusiasm. He told me after I was hired that my call had occurred immediately after a meeting during which the company had decided to seek out recent graduates for a position which usually required a year's experience." Steve is currently an Associate Editor of *NYC Interior Design* trade magazine. "I once heard it said," remarks Steve, "that the harder you work, the luckier you get!"

Once you have made your way into a company interview you must demonstrate commitment, enthusiasm and knowledge about your skills, interests and goals. Your self-awareness, research, internships, summer jobs, campus activities, and college courses are all critical pieces for your interview agenda. Consider your general transferable strengths, as well as specific examples of accomplishments.

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Your interviews should be aimed at answering questions well and asking questions about the work you will do, career potential and the corporate goals. Demonstrate purpose, thought and initiative in your attitude and actions. Show how your training and skills are related to the company's needs.

Dennis Reigle, Firm-wide Partner in Charge, Recruiting, U.S., at Arthur Andersen, looks for graduates who are prepared to be themselves who understand who they are, and who are confident (but not over-prepared) in presenting themselves. He looks for honest sincere inquiries, a varied background and an interest (drawn from research) in the accounting profession in general, Arthur Andersen in particular. "If I hear very canned answers, it raises concern about the applicant's preparation and sincerity of interest," he states.

### Your Path to Career Potential

In taking your first job, remember that this is your career debut, not a final resting place. Studies of successful or satisfied professionals indicate that career choice and happiness is an ongoing process-one which is not always planned as a clear road, but a joining of many small steps-direct routes as well as detours. As a matter of fact, if you analyze the career paths of most people, you will find that they have changed occupations several times in their lives, and that what they initially planned to be is not what they are now. They may have derailed, changed direction or started over several times during their lives. What emerges from these studies of successful people is a pattern of challenge, commitment and satisfaction. "Uncover your sustaining interests. Find out what you're passionate about,"\_ says Riley. "Then make a plan to discover and implement ways that these passions apply to work."

The college experience provides the training and perspective necessary to embark on the journey; it does not automatically drive you to your destination. Take advantage of your student role-explorer and inquisitor to learn a great deal about yourself and occupations so that upon graduation you will find yourself on a path toward a goal you have investigated. Your head start while in college will allow you to hit the ground running, while the less prepared are still organizing their gear.

By the way, you might be interested in how Richard Reitnicht, our 1987 college grad got his job: "By accident," he comments. "I was between interviews and happened into a temp agency to see if they had anything I could interview for. They turned me away. Just as I was about to leave a recruiter asked to see my resume, and sent me to my current employer on a fluke. I was offered a job because they liked my background and self-presentation" His internships, preparation and information gathering had prepared him for that event.