

THE WAY TO GET A QUALITY JOB IS BASICALLY THE SAME FOR EVERYONE: FOCUS, ATTITUDE, PREPARATION, STRATEGY, AND FOLLOW THROUGH.

So you need a job. A good job. Maybe you're graduating soon and have already become tired of hearing your parents and friends ask, "Do you have a job yet?" Maybe you're temping or being under-utilized in your current job and you long for new challenges. Or, perhaps you've been working for a while in a career-oriented job, but are ready for a change to something that pays more or just suits you better.

Regardless of the situation, the way to get a quality job is basically the same for everyone. You need to focus, have the right attitude, prepare thoroughly, devise a smart strategy and follow through. Read over each of these five keys to success to see what you're doing right and what you need to improve on.

1. Focus

To get what you want, you have to know what you want. Employers are turned off by job seekers that seem unfocused, vague and scattered. You don't have to zero in on one overly narrow job target, but you do need to have a clearly defined picture of what you're looking for.

Let's say you'd like to break into advertising and you send a cover letter and resume to an ad agency you've researched. In your letter you say that you are basically interested in any entry-level position that might be available. Where's that letter going to end up? In the proverbial circular file.

You see, advertising, like many industries, is made up of hundreds of different jobs that require various skills, talents, interests, experience, and personality types. If you sound like you're willing to take any of those jobs, you will sound desperate and employers will think you haven't done your homework and don't know what you're getting into.

Instead of having a variety of unrelated career goals, take some time to assess who you are and what you want. Define some basic criteria you're looking for in a job, such as the skills you'd like to use or develop and the type of work environment you want. When you know what you're aiming for, you'll come across as a more impressive candidate and will find that your search is easier because you can focus on specific types of jobs.

2. Attitude

Looking for a job can be frustrating. You have to expend a considerable amount of energy and effort and learn how to deal with rejection and uncertainty. The right mindset can make or break your search. Make sure you are:

- Realistic about your qualifications and expectations
- Confident in yourself and your experience
- Willing to take a proactive approach to your search instead of passively expecting a job to land in your lap
- Keeping it all in perspective and not taking rejection personally

3. Preparation

When you get into the thick of a job search, it's too late to be tweaking your resume and discovering typos in your cover letters. You also don't want to find yourself the night before an interview madly searching for information about the prospective employer or learning how to interview. Most people dive into a search with little preparation and find themselves playing catch-up from that point on. Before you begin a heavy networking or direct mail campaign, and before you start sending out resumes in response to job listings, make sure your cover letters are top notch and your resume is highly polished. Also, do what you need to do to learn effective interviewing techniques, whether it's reading books like *The Unofficial Guide to Acing the Interview*, getting coaching from a career counsellor, or practicing in mock interviews.

You need to be highly organized. One way to do this is by setting up a "Job Search Command Centre" both on your computer and in some physical space in your home or office. You need to have a place for:

- Office supplies
- A log of job-hunting activities
- A to-do list that keeps you on track for things like following up with employers
- Files for research you conduct on prospective employers
- Files for correspondence with prospective employers and network contacts and any other materials related to your search

Create a place for these things and keep everything in order. A job search is trying enough without having to sort through piles of paper or disorganized computer files when you're in a hurry to write a cover letter or rush off to an interview.

4. Strategy

The methods you use to find a job need to be appropriate for the type and level of job you're seeking. If you've done some research on the career field you want to enter by reading about it and talking to people in it—or if you already work in the field in which you're job hunting—then you should know which methods work best for the job you want.

The job-hunting methods you have to choose from include:

- Online job boards and corporate web sites
- Direct mail (apply directly to organizations you've researched by calling, emailing or mailing a cover letter and resume—then following up)
- Newspapers (classified and help wanted ads)
- Employment agencies
- Networking and job fairs

The best approach is usually to use a combination of all of these methods so that your strategy is well rounded, but to focus on the one or two methods that are most likely to pay off given the type of job you're seeking.

5. Follow Through

The way you follow up on resumes you send out, calls you make and interviews you go on can make or break your search. Job offers often go to applicants who take the initiative to make just one more phone call to express interest in the position and to reiterate their qualifications. You see, offers don't always go to the person who is most qualified, but to the person who is on the other end of the phone line or at the top of the email list. Some employers tend to have a sort of "bird-in-the-hand" mentality.

So, the main rule of following through is to keep at it. Persistence is key. Follow through with courtesy—it never pays to harass people. You don't need to call every day, but maybe you could call once a week. You don't need to fax 10 resumes, but you could resend your resume a week after you sent the first one. There are no hard and fast rules about exactly when to call after you've sent a resume or how many times to call when you're waiting to hear the results of an interview. If you tend to be a bit timid, err on the side of being more aggressive than usual. If you are inclined to be quite aggressive, tone it down a bit but still do some follow-up. And if you feel unsure during a part of your job search don't be afraid to rely on your support network.