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JOB SEARCHING IN A SLOW ECONOMY

Getting a job in a tough market is no easy task, so planning and strategizing are crucial

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THE JOB MARKET FOR CHEMISTRY professionals continues to be a difficult one, and anyone who has conducted a job search recently is familiar with the emotional roller-coaster that accompanies it. The still-tight job market comes with just one guarantee: It will take many interviews to land a new job.

E-mail and the Internet were expected to transform the job-search process. Instead of using paper and a stamp to respond to job ads, job seekers could e-mail their résumés directly to a recruiter or scan job ads online and apply through an online job board. The experience has been great in theory but not so great in practice. The frustrations of searching for a job in a slow economy remain but now are simply happening at “warp speed”:

- The ease with which candidates can create and send résumés online means that employers trying to fill a post are deluged with responses. Résumé-blasting services also contribute to this situation.

- In addition to the giant job boards, such as Monster.com, niche sites catering to specific professions have sprung up. And as the number of job boards has grown sig-

nificantly, so has the competition for applicants' résumés as well as the competition among applicants using these boards.

- Job seekers have become disenchanted with the big online job sites because of out-of-date job listings, unacknowledged inquiries, and the discovery that job hunts conducted solely online rarely produced jobs.

With that context in mind, what follows is some advice for job searching in a slow economy, which is the same advice for job searching in a good economy.

In 1997, management guru Tom Peters introduced the concept of “Brand You,” an innovative notion that challenged people to think of themselves as the chief executive officer of Me Inc. Just as companies understand the importance of branding, Peters wrote, to survive and prosper in the new world of work, “our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You.” It may have been novel then; it's a necessity now.

“The reality of presenting and marketing yourself is not automatic. Many people

resist the idea,” Jamie Fabian, career coach at employment website JobCircle.com, says. “Branding and being able to identify and market what sets you apart is table stakes. You need to get yourself into the game and do a good job of it.”

You can't get into the game, though, without a game plan. There is no one right way to land a job, but to increase your chances you need to use a variety of strategies and resources. To begin, you need to conduct a self-assessment to identify your skills, abilities, values, and needs, and you need to identify organizations that will make the best use of your talents. Because most of our waking hours are spent at work, it is important to invest some time in conducting a personal assessment.

Ask yourself: What is important to you personally and professionally? Do you mind a long workweek? Is relocation an option? What about travel as part of the job? Are you seeking advancement? Are you looking for a challenge in your next situation? Or are you perhaps looking for more balance between your personal and professional lives?

Then think about the accomplishments you have achieved and the underlying skills you possess. A skill list is important to your job search because you can use it to more easily identify areas where you excel, identify which skills match an employer's needs, target your skills to specific jobs, answer questions during an interview, and assess whether a particular job is a good fit for you.

The results of your self-assessment can then be applied to writing your résumé as well as evaluating possible job and career options that interest you.

YOUR RÉSUMÉ is your biography—your life on paper. Because of the competition for jobs, your résumé is competing for attention along with hundreds of other résumés. “In the heyday of the early 2000s, people could get hired on the basis of their résumé,” Jan Cannon, career adviser and author of “Finding a Job in a Slow Economy,” says. “That doesn't work anymore.” Now, an excellent résumé is only one piece of what's required.

Your objective is to showcase your skills to convince a prospective employer to interview you. “A good résumé is like a popular song,” Fabian says. “It has to have a hook. So a job seeker needs to figure out what the hook is in the résumé. It's not the employer's job to figure it out; you have to tell them. Once you tell them, you have to do



it in such a way that makes them want to know more.”

Ideally, each résumé should be customized to the job you're applying for. Think about how you read a newspaper: You probably skim the headlines, then read the articles that catch your interest. It's the same with your résumé; it needs to catch the recruiter's interest to convince him or her to read the rest. With hundreds of résumés to review, a recruiter will likely skim the introduction to your résumé then move on to the next if it doesn't catch his or her attention.

“You have to position yourself as the solution to the employer's problem,” Fabian says. “What does the employer need, and how can you position yourself as the solution? It's harder to recognize when you may not be the right fit for a particular employer. Most people find conducting a job search so distasteful that they want to get it over with quickly so they don't have to do it again. The downside is they don't consider their own best interests.”

Many companies are using databases to store résumés for searching by keywords. Think about how a human or a computer will scan your résumé. What search terms are they going to use to find someone like you? Bear in mind that search terms are used to narrow the field of potential applicants. A keyword summary is therefore an essential component of your résumé, either at the beginning or throughout the document, using the common buzzwords in your field, along with your degree, specialization, and other unique details. Examining the job ads in C&EN will give you some idea of the terminology being used, including those technical buzzwords.

Whether scanned by a machine or read by a human, a well-written, error-free résumé is one of the best job-search tools you can have.

“Send a hard copy of your résumé for each one you send by e-mail,” Cannon advises, and there are good reasons for doing so. First, your résumé will be seen twice because the two versions will arrive at different times. Second, the formatting styles of a paper résumé and an electronic résumé are different; the formatting of a paper résumé is removed from the electronic version. Third, a résumé sent by e-mail could be caught by a company's spam filter and never reach its intended recipient.

Getting your résumé in front of the hiring manager is key. Make sure your résumé highlights any transferable skills. Do what you can to tailor your résumé to the position and detail why your skills could be an

asset. Your cover letter should try to convince a hiring manager that you're a good fit for the job, even though you may not necessarily meet all the qualifications. Explain what skills you have, and write enthusiastically why you want to do the job and how excited you are about it.

“Never send a résumé without a cover letter,” Cannon says. A cover letter for your résumé should be addressed to a specific person, whenever possible. More important, she says, you can demonstrate that

you've done your homework by learning about the company. “It's an opportunity to highlight the parts of your career that distinguish you from the competition and what makes you qualified for the job,” she says.

RESEARCH IS one of the most important tasks in your job search. The skills you developed in searching the scientific literature can also be applied to locating industries, companies, and career paths. Let your interests lead you. For example, conduct a

SOCIETY SERVICES

How ACS Assists Job Seekers

American Chemical Society members can take advantage of the many career resources available from the society's Department of Career Services and the ACS Division of Education.

The Department of Career Services can help new graduates and experienced chemists reach their professional goals. The department provides such services as résumé reviews and career consulting year-round. Members can contact the department directly at (800) 227-5558 or online through <http://chemistry.org/careers>.

Career Services also maintains an extensive career library of books, videos, and publications. Publications are free to members, and most can be downloaded directly from the department's website: “Interviewing Skills for Chemical Professionals,” “Résumé Preparation—Tips for Chemical Professionals,” “Job Search Strategies for Chemical Professionals,” and “Employment Guide for Foreign-Born Chemical Professionals.” Members can also obtain information about salaries and employment by signing up for monthly updates on current data, reports, articles, and news related to the chemical workforce.

At ACS national and regional meetings, members can take advantage of services such as mock interviews, which are videotaped and evaluated, and résumé reviews by career consultants. Members also have on-site opportunities at national and regional meetings to interview with employer representatives for available positions. In addition, Career Services offers workshops and presentations on managing an effective job search and career transitioning. Complete information about the products and services offered by Career Services is available at <http://chemistry.org/careers>.

How can you join the world's largest scientific society for just \$20? If you are an undergraduate majoring or interested in chemistry, you are eligible to become an ACS student affiliate. The Student Affiliates program promotes professional development, mentoring, and peer support for those majoring in chemistry. Student affiliates receive *in Chemistry*, the undergraduate career magazine; get discounts on ACS journals; and have access to *Chemical & Engineering News*, in print and online, and to career and employment services. You can even apply online; go to <http://chemistry.org/education/saprogram.html>.

Another valuable benefit of student affiliate membership is the “Directory of Experience Opportunities,” which lists co-ops, internships, fellowship opportunities, and summer jobs for undergraduate chemical science students. The database is also available online at <http://chemistry.org/education/epic> and can be searched by area of interest, geographic region, and type of experience.

Interested in academic careers? ACS has been participating in the Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) program to enhance the preparation of doctoral students for faculty careers. ACS received funding from the National Science Foundation in 1998 that led to the creation of PFF programs at five universities. The publication “And Gladly Teach: A Resource Book for Chemists Considering Academic Careers” discusses the decision to pursue and prepare for an academic career and is available from <http://chemistry.org/education/professional/pffweb.html>.

ACS also offers continuing education courses for experienced chemists to update their skills and knowledge. Short courses are one- to five-day seminars for chemical scientists and technicians. The courses are hosted at numerous locations and dates on a range of topics of interest to chemical professionals. Short courses are also available as live webcasts and self-paced modules. The complete list of continuing education opportunities is available online at <http://chemistry.org/education/professional/index.html>.

RESOURCES

Books And The Internet Can Inform A Job Search

Many books have been written about the job-search process. Although this is not a comprehensive list, these books can start you on your way.

"A Ph.D. Is Not Enough: A Guide to Survival in Science," by Peter J. Feibelman (Perseus Press, 1994) offers advice for selecting a thesis or postdoctoral adviser; choosing among research jobs in academia, government, and industry; preparing for an employment interview; and defining a research program.

"The Academic Job Search Handbook (Third Edition)," by Mary Morris Heiberger and Julia Miller Vick (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) takes job seekers step-by-step through the process and provides information about participating in conferences, using the Internet, handling telephone interviews, and cultivating contacts. Sample curricula vitae (CVs), cover letters, and abstracts are included.

"Alternative Careers in Science," by Cynthia Robbins-Roth (Academic Press, 1998) describes the various career tracks available to scientists using 23 case studies. Each chapter covers a different career track and includes the basic job description, qualifications, responsibilities, and what career opportunities stem from each position.

"Career Management for Chemists," by John Fetzer (Springer Verlag, 2004) provides commonsense guidance on key career topics such as résumés and CVs, net-

working, and maintaining technical knowledge. The book's origins lay in Fetzer's monthly column, "Building Professional Careers in Chemistry," which runs in the journal *Analytical & Bioanalytical Chemistry*.

"Guide to Nontraditional Careers in Science," by Karen Young Kreeger (Taylor & Francis, 1998) is a practical guide to evaluating and finding career opportunities in nonacademic research fields. It demonstrates the choices available in which people can use their scientific training for a satisfying professional life.

"Jobs in the Drug Industry: A Career Guide for Chemists," by Richard J. Friary (Academic Press, 2000) is a guide for newly graduated scientists at all degree levels to finding a job in the pharmaceutical industry. The book covers the fundamentals of getting an industrial job as a medicinal or process chemist and covers all aspects of a chemist's job within a pharmaceutical or biotechnology company. The book also has an index of more than 500 companies as well as information about company websites, internship opportunities, and job banks.

"Opportunities in Biotechnology Careers," by Sheldon S. Brown (McGraw-Hill, 2000) presents an overview of information about careers within the field, including training and education requirements, salary information, and nonscientific career options.

"Put Your Science to Work: The Take-Charge Career Guide for Scientists," by Peter S. Fiske and Aaron Louie (American Geophysical Union, 2001) is revised and updated from Fiske's "To Boldly Go: A Practical Career Guide for Scientists." The new edition offers practical advice and techniques for finding traditional and non-traditional science careers, including sample résumés and cover letters, and stories of scientists who have moved into second careers.

The Internet can't be the basis of your entire job search, but online job boards can expand your reach and your network. Although job seekers automatically think of the large job sites such as Monster.com and Hotjobs.com, scientists may be better served by going directly to niche websites that target this audience.

CEN-chemjobs.org is a one-stop job site for chemists. The site combines both classified advertising from *Chemical & Engineering News* and online-only job ads with profiles of employer companies. The listings include industrial, academic, and government job openings. Job seekers may search or browse the job ads, post their résumés, and take advantage of the large collection of career resources for chemists. Additionally, job seekers will find links to C&EN articles about chemical employment as well as to offerings from the ACS Department of Career Services.

Google search on a particular topic to see what companies come up.

Most first-time job seekers look to the large chemical employers, for example, big companies, government labs, hospitals, and nonprofit organizations. Large companies are more visible and easier to research, and much is written about them in stock market analyses and news reports. Yet small companies—though they don't tend to be household names—produce more jobs. They advertise jobs locally, their businesses are quite specialized, and they may even outsource their human resources function.

An often-overlooked source of information is exhibits at American Chemical Society regional meetings, which are especially attractive to smaller companies because they save time and money. It's a bonus if they're able to do some informal recruiting at the same time.

Your best strategy is to figure out where jobs are likely to be advertised. Most of the

Fortune 500 companies are relying heavily on their websites or on employee referrals. If you stick to the big commercial job boards like Monster.com or HotJobs.com, you're bound to miss many openings that are posted only on corporate or association websites. Even smaller companies are likely to have employment information posted on their websites.

Don't waste time pointlessly sending your résumé around on the Internet. "There is a misconception that posting a résumé online will bring the jobs to you," Cannon says. "It's a weak strategy, because in a tight job market, human resources departments are inundated with résumés."

Mark Mehler and Gerry Crispin of CareerXroads, a recruiting-technology consulting company, found in a recent study that targeted use of the Internet and employee referrals accounted for 60% of external hires in 2003. By 2005, these sources are expected to account for three out of

four hires. By that time, they note, an emphasis on the quality of hire by source and how to differentiate it will be critical.

According to CareerXroads, employers reported that 68% of their Internet hires came from the company's website. Furthermore, niche job sites were a larger source of hires from the Internet in 2003 than the leading job boards combined. However, not every company tracks every source of hire, and many hires that could not be attributed to other sources were credited to the company website.

When you use the Internet to search for jobs and send your résumé, don't confuse activity with achievement. The Internet can bring you to the company's front door, whether you use a niche site or go directly to a company website, but you still have to rely on your interview skills to secure a job offer.

Networking is the most effective strategy in any job market. Networking can help

Chemsoc.org is the Royal Society of Chemistry's job site that features listings for chemistry-related positions in the U.K. and Europe. Chemsoc (<http://www.chemsoc.org/careers/careers.htm>) also offers employment news, career profiles, and links to other resources.

Naturejobs.com is run by the journal *Nature* for scientists in all fields. Naturejobs features an international job database and résumé storage space, as well as special features, general employment advice, and a calendar of events.

NewScientistJobs.com and ScienceJobs.com are produced by the publishers of *New Scientist* magazine and Cell Press journals. Users can focus their searches for chemistry or bioscience jobs by area of concentration and location. Job postings consist of both postdoctoral and full-time positions.

ScienceCareers.com is a comprehensive recruitment website published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science and *Science* magazine. It offers a job database, résumé and CV posting, career advice, and e-mail job notification services. A salary wizard and other salary information are also available.

SciJobs.com includes links to career news articles and compiles a weekly database that lists job openings posted on company websites for a variety of scientific positions.

A more comprehensive guide, "Resources for Career Management," is available from the American Chemical Society Department of Career Services website at <http://chemistry.org/careers>.

you obtain information about industry segments and the kinds of jobs available, give you ideas for brainstorming to develop effective job-search strategies, and yield introductions to new people who may provide even more information, ideas, and introductions. Networking is critical and when done well, yields dividends for your search.

NETWORKING doesn't mean asking people to find you a job; it means using your connections to find opportunities to identify and target an employer through personal connections and your résumé.

Don't be afraid to use your network. The old saying, "It's not what you know, it's who you know," means more today than ever. Everyone has a network, and the foundation is everyone you know, plus everyone those people know. The people you know include colleagues you see regularly—supervisors, clients, professors, classmates,

vendors, neighbors, for example—and people you may see only occasionally, such as former classmates or colleagues, physicians, or dentists.

"People want to be helpful," Fabian says. "Talk to everyone you know and let them know what you are looking for. You have to be willing to ask for help, because this is where you can't do it all by yourself. What's more uncomfortable: talking to someone you don't know or not making a mortgage payment?"

Also, think about how you can contribute to your network, not just benefit from it. Information that you learn during your job search is something that you can share with people in your network.

One way to extend your network is to become active in professional associations. Identify one or more associations that mesh with your interests, such as the Pittsburgh Conference or the American Society for Mass Spectrometry. If you're not already active in your ACS local section or technical division, get going. Make a presentation, submit a poster at a regional or national meeting, or volunteer to serve on a committee. Doing what you can do to make yourself and your abilities visible is effective in building your network.

At meetings, talk to speakers after their presentations about their work. Don't forget to have business cards to hand out as you meet and talk to people. Prepare a 30-second pitch to tell people about your search and what you're looking for. If you don't advertise yourself, no one else will.

Cannon recommends working with other people who are also job seekers, although they don't necessarily have to be in the same field. "Two or more brains are better than one," she says. "There are organized groups like the Five O'Clock Club [a national career counseling network], and state-run employment centers also have group opportunities. The advantage is that you never know where a job lead will come from, so you need to be talking to as many people as possible because somebody might have a clever idea."

Here are three top rules that job seekers need to keep in mind for any networking scenario: Thank the person who provided an introduction for you, and update him or her on your progress. Be clear about exactly how contacts can help you and what a potential benefit could be for them. Avoid last-minute networking—build relationships before you need them.

The interview, when you land it, is another point where you can emphasize your strengths. You'll likely be asked how your skills are transferable to the job you're interviewing for, so it will be to your benefit

to work out in advance a point-by-point synopsis to address this question. Even if you don't get the job you applied for, if you adequately display your skills, a hiring manager may consider you for something else in the company.

Your résumé gets you the interview, but the interview gets you the job offer. The interview is all about three things: Can you do the job, will you do the job, and will you fit in with the organization? Your résumé can answer the first two questions, but the interview answers the last question.

THE MOST IMPORTANT interview questions are not "Why do you want this job?" or "What are your short-term and long-term goals?" Those questions are usually asked to gather some basic information from you. The really important interview questions don't have yes or no answers, but tell stories about you.

The preferred method of interviewing these days is the behavioral based interview. Interviewers ask such open-ended questions as, "Can you tell me about a time when you had to be creative to solve a problem at work?" These questions are designed to focus on the behaviors you have demonstrated in the past and to determine if those behaviors are appropriate for the position you seek. The information you provide tells the interviewer more about your ability to handle certain situations and how you might handle them if they come up again. To handle these questions effectively, you need to have a few good stories to tell about your work experience.

A good way to construct your answer is to "build a CAR": Context, Action, Result. First, describe the context of the situation. Then, describe the action you took, and discuss the results, quantifying them with examples, whenever possible. The quality of your response determines its effectiveness.

There will be lots of reasons why you might not get a job offer. It may be as simple as fit; it may be something more complex that you're not even aware of. Don't take it personally; rejection is part of the process. Regroup, keep on trying, and be tenacious. "People say no for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with you," Cannon says.

A successful search will include a self-assessment to review your skills, strengths, and interests and how they relate to your career objectives; identifying and exploring career options through research, networking, and information gathering; and developing your résumé, cover-letter-writing, and interviewing skills. With some planning and strategizing, your job search can have a successful ending. ■