

Job Search Madness: Avoid the madness and bounce back into the job search game

As college basketball players gear up for the big tournament this month, job seekers can follow suit by getting their own game plan together. Whether you are unemployed and need to bounce back into a new job or looking to advance your career with a new job opportunity, let Kforce coach you to a game-winning job search strategy.

Rebounding from Unemployment

We believe 2011 has great potential for job creation. Even if you have applied to a particular company in the past and haven't received a response back, there's a good chance that could change as more jobs open up.

However, before you go online and apply for every position in your industry, take some time out to review your past experiences and skills. The first step is to take a look at your current resume and identify ways you can improve.

Look for areas where you may need to advance your skills for what is currently in demand. If you have been out of work for a certain period of time you could be behind on the latest technologies. Don't let that keep you on the bench. Research software applications or programs that your industry is using or upgrading to, and then familiarize yourself with these tools. You can download the latest version of the software programs or review training materials so that you know the differences between what you have used in the past, and what you can prepare for if offered a position.

In addition to updating yourself on the latest trainings and technologies in your industry, you should also prepare ahead of time to answer questions about what you have been doing since you left your last job. Don't get a personal foul by only answering -- 'I've actively been searching for jobs'. Instead, include details about how you have been improving yourself as a professional in the meantime.

If you haven't already, start volunteering in your industry. We also suggest taking supplementary classes or attending industry-related seminars and conferences. Employers will take notice that you are staying up-to-date with your industry. These are also details you can highlight on your resume.

Make Your Resume a Slam Dunk

It doesn't matter if you have been in the same position for 20 years or two months, updating your resume is a must. Employers and recruiters always want to make sure they have the best candidate for the job. Those candidates will not only have the necessary skills but additional talents that could make them the most valuable player on the team.

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So how do you stand out when recruiters and employers have to go through thousands of job applications? First, start with a brief summary at the beginning of your resume. In a short paragraph, you can grab an employer or recruiter's attention from the very beginning by highlighting your top skills and why you would make the best candidate for a particular position.

Whether it is the entire resume or just the opening summary, the key is to keep it effective, but brief. Under each job description, don't just describe your responsibilities, but how successful you were in implementing those tasks. For example, instead of saying you 'developed successful sales strategies', you could state that you 'developed successful sales strategies, landing million-dollar clients.'

Just be sure to describe previous experiences honestly, so that when an employer asks, you are able to explain how you succeeded. The idea is to target your own unique skills and strengths. If you have a strong resume, you are more likely to intrigue an employer to discover more about you in your cover letter.

Steal an Employer Away with Your Cover Letter

While your resume highlights specific skills and qualifications, your cover letter should be the few paragraphs where you can show off who you really are as an employee. Similar to your resume, your cover letter should also be concise, but when describing your experience and qualifications you want to be direct, positive and professional.

Take this opportunity to highlight how and why your skills will benefit a specific employer. By searching the company's website or asking colleagues and friends in your network, you can get to know more about the employer. Try to find out what their strengths and values are. By identifying those key features, you can craft your cover letter message to describe how your talents would benefit the company.

This is also the place to describe in more detail how you have invested in your career. As previously mentioned, if you are attending industry-related seminars or volunteering for industry organizations – your cover letter is the place to highlight these activities.

Your cover letter should also discuss why you feel the position will help you get to the next step in your career. This can include an explanation on how the role will allow you to expand your responsibilities. Candidates who are interested and enthusiastic about growing their careers are more likely to score additional points with the employer.

Now that you have the advice to prepare your game plan, Kforce's next article in the Job Search Madness series will help you identify the best places to start searching for a new job.