Improve Your Job Search

1. Prepare for the Job Search

- **Identify Employment Target:** In order to find work most effectively, you must first identify what type of jobs you want and are qualified for. Stating that you want “a job that you will enjoy and will pay the bills” is too vague to help you focus your efforts; yet, focusing on a specific job title may cause you to overlook some excellent opportunities. To help you define an effective employment target, answer the following questions:
  - What skills would you like to use the most in your next job?
  - What areas of interest would you like to be part of your next job?
  - What are the three most important things that you need to have in your next job?
  - What would be the least pay you would be willing to accept? What is the upper end of pay you could accept, given your credentials?
  - What are some essential criteria for a comfortable workplace where you can be most effective? What are some characteristics of the individuals you enjoy working with?
  - What are your qualifications based on your past work, volunteer, or education experience? Which of these would you like to utilize most in your next job?

An example of a clear employment target is: “I want a position where I can use my communications and organization skills. I am interested in writing, organizing events, and helping others. It is important for me to contribute to the community and to feel financially stable. I want a job with a regular schedule in an office setting. I have experience and enjoy working with children and new Canadians.”

- **Prepare Job Search Tools:**
  - **Resumes and Cover Letters:** If you have never created a resume or cover letter, you can refer to the *Advanced Techniques for Work Search* workbook online to get started. Current students or alumni of up to two years can have their resumes and cover letters reviewed by a career development advisor in an appointment or during drop-in hours. Check MacEwanLife for more information.
  - **Business Cards:** These are excellent introduction tools, especially at networking events. By exchanging business cards, you not only promote yourself in a professional manner but also gain a potential employer’s contact information. You can use a template to create your card and print them at home or utilize a professional design and print service. You can include some or all of the following on your business card:
    - name and contact information
    - program name and major/minor/specialization
    - expected date of graduation
    - areas of career interests
    - personalized slogan or branding statement
    - summary statement of your past experience
    - significant experience or skills
  - **LinkedIn:** Online social networking has become popular with recruiters and human resources professionals. Not sure what LinkedIn is or how to get started? Check out the tip sheet on LinkedIn in MacEwanLife under Career Resources or book an appointment with a career development advisor on MacEwanLife for feedback on your profile!
• **Present Your Best Self:** As a job seeker, it is crucial to think about the impression that you are giving through the way you dress and act.
  
  o **Dress:** Always dress professionally when you meet with potential employers or professionals working in the field of interest. This not only helps set the right tone for your meeting but also demonstrates your interest and respect for the other person. If you are unsure whether an outfit is appropriate or not, err on the conservative side. It is better to overdress than to underdress.
    
    ▪ For males, try a pressed shirt with a tie and dress pants.
    ▪ For females, try a blouse with a blazer and a skirt.
    ▪ Keep your makeup, accessories, and cologne or perfume to the minimum.
  
  o **Conduct:** Before going to a meeting, networking event, or an interview, research the organization or the occupation, field, and industry of interest. Prepare a list of questions or specific information that you hope to find out from this meeting. Networking events can be intimidating but small preparations can help ease the process.
    
    ▪ Prepare a brief self-introduction that includes your name and a relevant fact about you (e.g., your career aspirations, your academic interests, and a significant past work or volunteer experience). The research or questions that you have prepared beforehand can also provide some helpful points to start.
    ▪ During the event, take note of any information presented.
    ▪ When meeting someone for the first time, shake their hand firmly and exchange business cards if you have one.
    ▪ Do not forget to be yourself. After all, the people at these events are there to get to know students or candidates like you.

2. **Find Job Opportunities**
Finding work can be an overwhelming process, especially when you don’t know when, where, or how to look for opportunities. These tips and resources will help make your search for meaningful employment a lot more effective.

• **Be Strategic:** Spend your energy and resources wisely. Defining an employment target helps you focus your effort on finding jobs that fit your aptitude, interests, and qualifications. Because you are more likely to be the right candidate for these positions, your chance of success will improve. From the employer’s perspective, it is a lot more time and cost-effective to fill an opening through internal recruitment and referrals. In addition, when a position is publicly advertised, competition will naturally increase. Therefore, focus your energy on finding opportunities before they become public knowledge. In other words, you need to tap into the “hidden job market” and the best way to do this is through networking.

• **Develop and Use Your Network:**
  
  o First, start with your existing network:
    
    ▪ Your parents, relatives, friends and their families.
    ▪ Your instructors, program advisors, program chairs, fellow students.
    ▪ People you know through work, volunteer, activities, clubs or hobbies.
  
  o There are various ways to build and expand your network:
    
    ▪ Ask someone in your existing network to refer you to someone they know.
    ▪ Attend career fairs, conferences, presentations, mixers, etc.
    ▪ Join student clubs and professional associations.
- Talk to the people in your network to:
  - Identify the top employers in the field or industry of your interest.
  - Learn about employment trends/practices of different organizations/industries.
  - Learn about possible job openings before they become public knowledge.
  - Connect with people with hiring power.

- **It is Not Always About ‘Finding a Job’:** Although securing satisfying employment is your ultimate goal, it should not be the goal of every interaction you have with the people in your network. When you put in the effort to build long, lasting relationships with people, they will become more invested in your success. Be courteous, respectful and sincere in your communications. Keep your network up to date with your progress. Your relationships with them do not stop the moment you secure employment. Keep in touch and whenever possible, return the favor. It can be simply passing on an article that you think they might be interested in or referring them to another great candidate for their organization!

### 3. Get the Job

- **Ace the Interviews:** If you have an interview coming up, follow these preparatory steps to improve your chance of success:
  - **Research the organization and their industry/sector:**
    - What services or products do they offer?
    - What is their philosophy, value or mission statement?
    - What are some of their significant past or present projects?
    - What significant trends, issues or opportunities exist within the industry?
    To find the information, study the organization’s website, and note the organizations or associations that they are affiliated with. You can also talk to anyone in your network that has a connection with the organization. Note any questions that might come up when you do your research so you can ask the employer during the interview. The employer may ask you to state your salary expectations in the interview. To avoid being caught off guard, do your research ahead of time and decide on an appropriate range that suits your qualifications, geographic location and industry. You can consult the following sources during your research:
      - **WAGEINFO:** Enter the occupation title in the search box to find wage/salaries information for Alberta region.
      - **PAYSCALE:** Enter the information about the position for a salary report.
  - **Be prepared to talk about yourself:** Review the job posting and note how you meet the specific qualifications. Prepare a few specific examples that will help illustrate your qualifications. You might find it helpful to do an inventory of your training, significant experiences, and your strengths as well as your weaknesses. If you have limited experience, book a mock interview on MacEwanLife with a career development advisor in Career Development and Experiential Learning to practice and build your confidence.
  - **Put your best feet forward:** Refer to the Present Your Best Self section to make sure you dress appropriately for the occasion. If you are unfamiliar with the location of the interview, do a rehearsed run the day before. Aim to arrive at least 10 minutes early on the day of the interview. Always allow time for traffic and any parking difficulties. Bring an extra copy of your resume, your references, and your portfolio if applicable. Have a pen and piece of paper handy so you can make notes if necessary.
• **Consider the Offer:** Congratulations! You have been offered an employment opportunity. Before you rush to say yes in excitement, make sure you consider all the necessary details:
  o Reiterate your interest in the position to the employer and ask for 24 to 48 hours to consider the offer carefully. Get the details about the compensation package from the employer and consider the whole package instead of just the salary figure. The research you did about the occupation or industry may inform you about the standard compensation for your location and length of experience.
  o Also, keep in mind the criteria you set as your employment target. Does the job fit with your interests and the skills that you hope to utilize or develop? Will you enjoy the working environment and the people you work with? If possible, ask the employer if you can have a tour of the facility so you can get a better feel for the environment.
  o If you have more than one potential employment opportunity to evaluate, try to be as honest and upfront as possible with all parties involved. Be aware of each organization’s needs and deadlines for a decision from you. Regardless of which offer you choose, always be polite and grateful in all of your communications with the employers.
  o When you are ready to accept or reject the offer, make sure you do it in writing. Any changes to the offer that you have negotiated should be recorded in writing as well.

• **Deal with Rejection:** Unfortunately, at some point along your job search process, you may have to face rejection. You may send out hundreds of applications without a single call back or you may not be the successful candidate after the interview round. Rejections can put a lot of stress on you if you do not keep things in perspective and learn from each experience.
  o **Don't take it personally:** Do not use the success rate of your job search as a measure of your professional or self-worth. Hiring decisions are not made solely based on the candidate’s qualifications. Other factors like personality, fit, the organization’s growth and direction play an important role as well and they have nothing to do with how qualified and talented you are. You were just not the right match for that organization in that specific role at this specific point in time.
  o **Accept reality:** Rejections are a part of everyone’s job search. Accept it and learn to deal with the negative emotions that it might stir up. Take care of yourself and do not give up because of a few rejections.
  o **Learn from the experience:** The best thing you can do for yourself is to learn from each rejection. If you consistently do not get a call back after many applications, perhaps your resume and cover letter could use some help. Book an appointment on MacEwanLife to get your resume reviewed by a career advisor in Career Development and Experiential Learning if this is the case. Or, if you attend many interviews and do not get an offer, book a mock interview appointment. You can also contact the organization(s) that you applied to and ask for feedback on your application so that you can improve for future opportunities.
  o **Recognize your strengths:** It is easy to focus on what you are not good at or not doing right when facing rejection. Keep things in perspective by reminding yourself of your strengths and what you are doing right. Recognize and celebrate those positive points while continuing to work on areas of improvement to help stay persistent and positive.