

# Essential job searching tools

Paul H. Brisk



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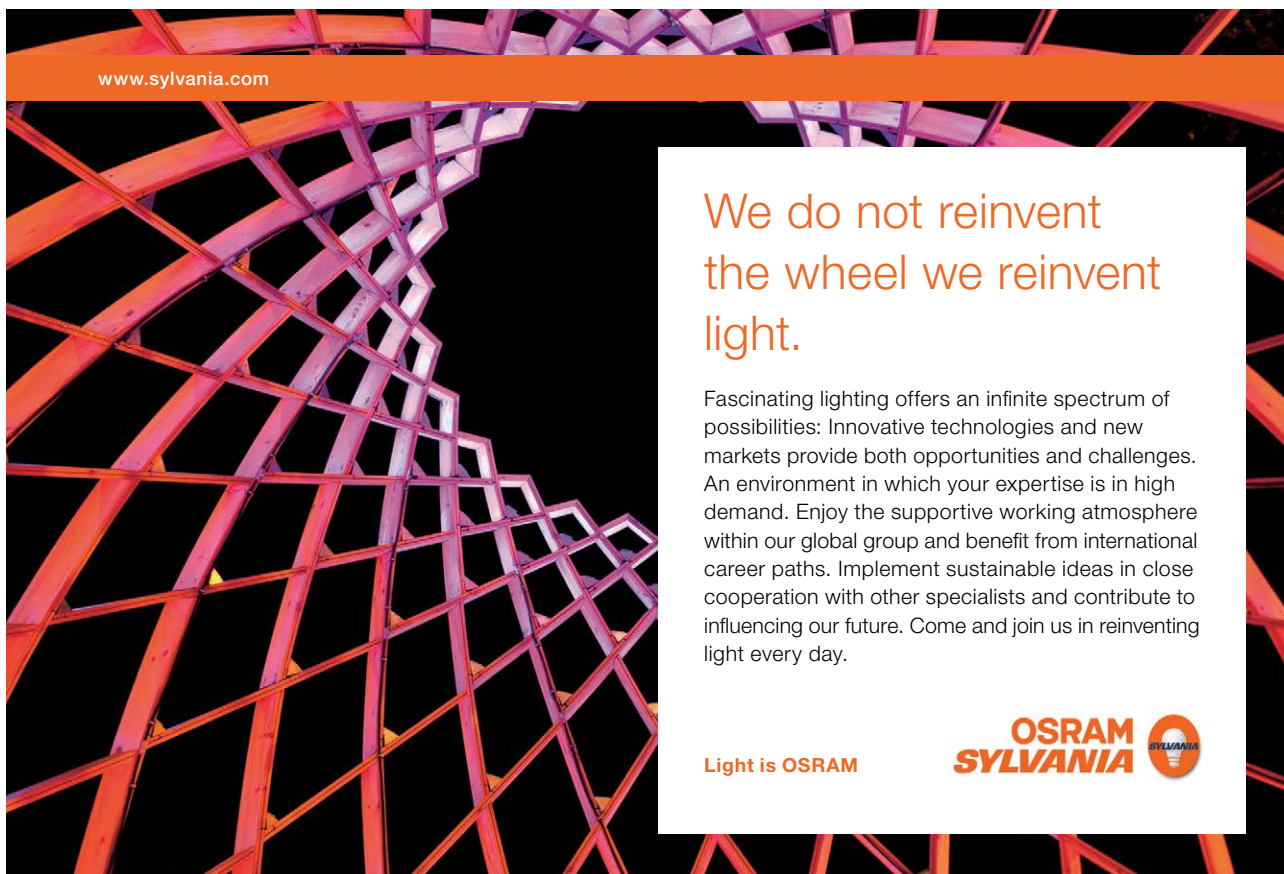
Essential job searching tools

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# About the Author

Paul H Brisk started his career in December 1969 in Leeds, as a junior clerk for the Halifax Building Society in the United Kingdom, this was the biggest Society in the world and remained so until it changed its mutual status to Halifax plc in 1997.

In a career of 31 years he undertook various positions, securing his first step in management by 1976. Promotions at that time took him to a number of different locations throughout the country, where he held Managerial positions in the retail arm of the business, together with a period of time specialising in the area Lending Operations and headed up a unit in the disposing of repossession properties in the North of England and Scotland.

Paul's last role at the Halifax saw him returning to his home town of Leeds to take up a role as a member of the Senior Management Team in a pioneering Business Centre using the latest workflow and imaging technology. He remained there until September 2000.

After a long and established career, he took some time off to take stock of his life and decide on the future. An opportunity arose the following year to join a leading Solicitor's practice as their Customer Relations Manager which included a wide range of responsibilities including the day to day running of a Call Centre.

In early 2003, Paul took the bold step of leaving the practice and travelled to Vancouver Island in Canada to stay with close friends and to research and then formulate plans to set up a career consultancy business to support and guide others in the area of job searching.

In January 2004, Peak Career Consulting was launched and is now run as a family business with his wife Kathy.

Peak Career Consulting offers a full range of services to individuals of all ages and industrial backgrounds maximising the job searching techniques of today, playing a key role in showing clients how to market themselves in a professional manner.

The unique feature of the business is that work with individuals is carried out in their own home, on any day and any time to suit their needs. The benefits from feedback received are that they feel more comfortable in their own environment, which in overall terms provides a more relaxed atmosphere and allows fruitful discussion to take place.

In addition to working with individual clients, Peak has also undertaken work with employability projects where groups of individuals have attended a job searching workshop. They have also provided support in the Education Arena on a local level. Key clients have included both the University of Leeds and the University of Bradford.

In early 2012, Paul was delighted when bookboon published his first book entitled "Creating your CV as a self marketing tool". Download this book to enable you to have a key tool to maximise your job searching.

More details of Peak, can be found on their website at [www.peakcareerconsulting.co.uk](http://www.peakcareerconsulting.co.uk)

# Introduction

Before we explore the outline of this book and its objectives we need to take stock of exactly what is taking place in the employment market now and attempt to project this forward over say the next 5 years difficult as it may be due to an ever increasing amount of uncertainty.

The present global economic climate is not good, with lack of confidence from businesses resulting in caution being exercised on expansion and the recruitment of staff, together with the many restrictions that Banks have and are still imposing on lending and supporting businesses.

Against all this doom and gloom though positive steps are being taken by some businesses of all sizes and industries to move forward, coming up with innovative solutions to complex issues, diversifying and becoming more competitive. The end result is encouraging with the outcome that to carry out the initiatives they all need one thing and that is people!

If we take a step back in time as a comparison, jobs in the main were relatively easy to find and secure and the methods used were straight forward and consisted of looking in the local newspaper and applying with quite a reasonable chance of becoming employed fairly quickly.

Travel forward again to the present, the scene of previous times gone by are so removed from what the job seeker is faced with today, it's almost like been on a different planet!

So let's make a start of how we are going to address the many obstacles placed before us here in 2012, in order to give ourselves as many opportunities as possible in creating that vital window of employment.

The one thing for certain is that jobs will no longer be placed at our feet as such. We will need to work hard to create opportunities, think more widely than ever before and be fully prepared to take the rough times with the smooth and very importantly learn how to overcome disappointment which we will, I guarantee, come across during the journey.

With all this in mind the one driving force which we must accept, is that we need to have a positive attitude and a **focus** on what we are doing. Taking this word seriously will give us the following:

- F - First and foremost we must set out our objectives
- O - Only you can make this happen!
- C - Clearly establish what you are looking for and be able to present yourself with maximum impact
- U - Understand your values and be able to learn how to compromise
- S - Structure your time to the best of your ability and create a simple but effective strategy

The Author has a saying "To find a job is a full time job and once you have found a job is it the right job?"

This book will cover this phrase and give you as the reader the "Essential job searching tools"

We will concentrate on using 6 tools which will cover the recommendations of how to go about the process of establishing your values, possessing a professional CV, how to maximise your CV, the interview(s), the job offer, securing the position and what follows next.

A brief overview of these areas is shown below:

## 1 Establishing your personal values

Prior to starting your job search it is vital that you understand what your personal values are as these will build the foundations of what you are looking for and will play a major part in the decisions to be made throughout the journey. We will tackle this area through a very constructive self analysis exercise.

## 2 A Professional CV

Covered in the last paragraph, in the opening section of About the Author, is a strong suggestion that his book “Creating your CV a self marketing tool” published by bookboon is downloaded in conjunction with this book, as a professional CV is a must have tool in seeking employment as it will create many opportunities.

We will look at the key components of the CV covering both the features and benefits of this document.

## 3 How to maximise your CV

We will take a comprehensive look at where the CV can be aimed at and how to carry out a number initiatives including networking, speculative mail shots, covering letters and also looking at the part the internet plays together with the role of recruitment agencies. In addition we will see how the CV can help you in completing formal application papers.

## 4 Interview(s)

This section will cover typical interviews and structures. We will look at a range of commonly used questions, how to handle both the more straight forward ones and the ones which are difficult to answer. Also included will be a range of hints and tips about carrying out research including what to wear for the interview and the important role of body language. A post self analysis of how did it go will be introduced too.

## 5 The job offer

Once it is made what do you do? We will go through a process of making the decision based on the facts and returning to our values, looking at compromising and negotiating.

## 6 Job secured – what follows next?

Our final tool covers having secured the position, the do(s) and don't(s) of the first 3 to 6 months of starting the role. This will cover what normally will be the probationary period adopted by the majority of employers.

## Essentials of job searching tools

We can compare job searching tools with a tradesman's tool collection, in that within his box he can not carry out his job with just a hammer or a spanner, as he needs a range of tools to work with for any given situation.

In the same way when job searching takes place, just looking at advertisements in newspapers or uploading your CV via the internet does not cover all that you need to do in looking for employment.

This book will overcome the issue by bringing a number of benefits including:

- Providing you with a range of tools to use to become more competitive
- Becoming more focused
- Developing your skills and abilities
- Increasing your confidence and self esteem
- Having a strategy and a structured approach
- Being better prepared and increasing your opportunities on the journey



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# 1 Establishing your personal values

All of us possess values both in our personal and working lives, but if anyone stopped to ask you what they are would you know and do you understand the importance of how these impact on each other?

As our first essential tool this chapter covers how to capture this information from a self analysis exercise and maybe for once will stop us in our tracks for a moment to take stock of our lives and what we feel is important to us.

It may well come as a surprise to you that following the exercise, what you think are your important values can be sometimes be quite different e.g. you may feel that money is high on your list of priorities, but what may be more important is the location of your place of employment in relation to your home and the impact this has with quality time spent with your family.

The author recalls a situation when supporting a client who was a solicitor. The gentleman had been working for a very large conveyancing firm quite some distance from his home and had a very young family. He was spending an incredible amount of time travelling by car each day, having to set off early to miss the traffic in the morning and then leaving work late for the same reason. Whilst he put up with this due to his overall remuneration package he did not see his daughter for very long at either side of the day, except for weekends.

The situation changed, when unfortunately the firm closed and he then found himself redundant. During the period which followed he began to realise how much he treasured the time spent with his daughter and without diminishing his career as a professional he took the opportunity to reassess his values.

The end result was very interesting indeed. He secured a position in his profession with a small, but well known local firm of solicitors, which was only 2 miles away from home. The salary and other benefits were certainly not as attractive as before but he immediately began to have a significant amount of time now to see his daughter and also support his wife and realised what he had been missing. In addition from a financial perspective money was saved as petrol costs and ongoing car maintenance were greatly reduced.

A further positive point about this client was the fact that he was, without knowing, being more valued in a smaller practice and had more freedom to work and put forward suggestions and recommendations of how the firm could be more competitive.

Values played a major role here but from the outset were very clouded and it has to be said nothing may well have changed if he had not been put in that particular situation.

With this in mind it makes it even more important to establish our values at the start of our job search. This should be repeated from time to time even if we are in employment as our priorities change as we become more mature and have experience of life.

Let's now move forward to start the process of establishing your values. Please complete the exercise below, taking time to think about your answers. The analysis is straight forward to complete and there are no right or wrong answers as every individual is different and will have a different set of values.

### EXERCISE TO ESTABLISHING YOUR PERSONAL VALUES

This self analysis exercise will bring to the forefront a way of identifying your values and to find out if these are met from a work and personal life view point.

It will touch on those things you really care about and will reflect on what is important to you. It is not that unusual to find out that what you think is important and what actually is, can be two very different things.

Values change from time to time as our priorities change, so we should stop and take a breath occasionally to review them

Complete the questionnaire below by rating your answers between the range of 5 to 1, where 5 reflects an high value and 1 is a low priority value.

<b>Value</b>	<b>Value Description</b>	<b>Rating</b>
Achievement	To accomplish a range of important objectives and tasks	
Advancement/ Progression	To climb up the career ladder and reach the highest level possible	
Adventure/Excitement	To find excitement, take risks and discover new and fresh things to carry out	
Association	To enjoy working with others, being liked and accepted for who you are	
Arts and Music	To gain motivation, enjoyment and inspiration from these	
Freedom/Self governing	To have the freedom to carry out work within own schedule and not to be tied down with compliance and organisational rules	
Challenge	To look for continuing challenges and additional responsibilities to test skills and abilities to the limit	
Community	To take part in the local community, giving up personal time to support and improve the area you live in	
Creativity	To express yourself in a creative way, and enjoy coming up with new and fresh ideas to address problems	
Expertise/Competence	To be recognised as an expert in the field and being respected to be excellent at what you do by others	

Family	To have quality time with your family, forming strong relationships and supporting/guiding the development of younger children within it	
Friendships	To have a circle of friends, enjoy the time you spend together and to be there for them in both good and bad times	
Relationships	To form and have meaningful relationships with others of all ages	
Fun/Enjoyment	To live life to the full through enjoying yourself in both your private and work environments	
Growth	To take personal development seriously and grow to your full potential both personally and professionally	
Happiness	To make others happy and be personally happy	
Health	To be physically and psychologically healthy and being able to do what you want	
Home	To be proud of your home, being contented and comfortable	
Integrity	To be honest and stand up for what you believe in	
Leadership	To communicate clearly and concisely when leading others so that they able to implement your ideas and visions	
Learning/Personal Development	To have the capacity to learn and want to know more through self development	
Location	To live where you want to live	
Creating impact and making a difference	To create a real impact on others and make a difference in the world in what you do	
Money/Wealth	To be financially successful and self sufficient	
Passion/Drive	To be passionate in everything you do through pure drive and determination	
Recognition/Status	To be recognised by others, earning respect from status	
Recreation	To have a work/life balance in order to carry out hobbies and interests	
Security	To ensure that a stable work environment exists and establishing a sound financial foundation	
Self-expression	To have a positive attitude, acting the true and honest person you are and being consistent in your day to day life without restriction	
Service	To support and help others, taking the opportunity to contribute to their well being and improving society	

Spirituality	To live by your individual beliefs, being content and at peace with yourself	
Structure	To live a well balanced and orderly life	

**UNDERSTANDING THE EVALUATION**

Once you have completed this, you need to copy the values as being of high importance in the first column i.e. those with ratings of 5 or 4 ( **maximum of 10 please**) then rank these again from 1 to 10 in the second column.

In column three, indicate the degree to which that value is being satisfied in your work and then in column four how that value reflects in your personal life. For the purpose of this scoring use 5 to reflect very well, 3 to reflect moderately and 1 to reflect not at all.

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<b>Your Priority Values (Scored 5/4)  (Maximum of 10)</b>	<b>Rank your values in order of importance  (1to10)</b>	<b>Do I meet these at work?  (Score 5/3/1)</b>	<b>Do I meet these in my personal life?  (Score 5/3/1)</b>

Once you have completed the above, the next step is to capture a summary of the outcome.

The following will help you in carrying this out. It clearly identifies a range of vital information about your current values and the start process of listing those values which you currently don't achieve in both your private and working life. This particular aspect is very important, but will take time to address, as this is not a quick fix but a longer initiative to think long and hard about and take forward, when the time is considered appropriate.

**SUMMARIZING YOUR PERSONAL VALUES**

**List below your most important values:**

Values that are currently being satisfied in my work:

.....

.....

.....

Values that are currently being satisfied in my personal life:

.....

.....

.....

Values that are not being satisfied at work:

.....  
.....  
.....

Values that are not being satisfied in my personal life:

.....  
.....  
.....

Start to think of ways I can better meet my values in my work (brainstorm):

.....  
.....  
.....

Start to think of ways I can better meet my values in my personal life (brainstorm):

.....  
.....  
.....

Having now reached the end of the exercise start to consider the following 3 statements when applying for positions. We will revisit these again later in the book covering interviews you attend and then again in considering a job offer:

1. Do you initially feel that at least 50% of your values can be achieved in making an application for the position?
2. Can you be happy to make compromises?
3. Do you feel that rush of excitement and challenge that it feels right? - If so then apply!!

**Essentials of establishing your personal values**

The importance of carrying through the exercise of establishing your values both in your private and working life can be a real eye opener. It is not a task that we may have ever completed and really thought about as we are all far too busy in our everyday lives to stop and think about those things which are close to our hearts and are part of our makeup as an individual. Remember that the things we initially thought were important to us may now not be the case!

Having completed the exercise it is essential that we do something with it. The fact that we can spend the majority of time at work we need to carefully consider if our key values can be met not from only a personal perspective but also from an employers. There is little doubt that a happy and contented employee will have much added value to bring to an organisation.

Like most things in life though everything is not perfect especially work, so be prepared to compromise at all times and look at how things could be improved with a little give and take.

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## 2 A Professional CV

The most important tool you will ever have when job searching is your CV.

Whilst this book is bringing together other essential tools you will need without a CV is like having a power drill without any electricity or battery. This vital document is the key tool in creating opportunities and provides a sound foundation from where all other tools can be used.

So as this is a must have it is strongly recommended that you download “Creating your CV as a self marketing tool” from bookboon. It can easily be found in both the Career & Job Search and Career menus from the Textbook and Business areas respectively.

As a taster prior to downloading the book a number of key features and benefits of a professional CV will be brought to your immediate attention in this chapter and extracts from the book to emphasise the part it plays.

### The Key Features of a CV

#### **The Personal Profile**

Whilst all the individual components of the CV are important, the Personal Profile must be considered to rank the highest for 3 main reasons.

1. It firmly takes its place on the front page of the document, directly under the personal details of the individual, i.e. Name, Address, Telephone Numbers (landline and mobile) and e-mail address.
2. It immediately creates that all important 1<sup>st</sup> impression and sets the scene for the document.
3. It can be compared with a newspaper front page headline so it has to capture the imagination of the reader and as with a newspaper the desired objective is to make the reader buy the paper in the first instance and then start to read it and get to the inside to find out more about a story. The exact same applies to the CV.

We need to ensure that the interest of a prospective employer starts right here and that the reader of the CV is keen to turn the pages over to see what the job seeker has to offer and that it is firmly placed on the pile of candidates to call forward for interview.

In reality the Personal Profile is your own headline advertisement and as such starts the process of selling your skills, abilities and achievements.

There is a word of warning on bringing the profile together, it is not the place to state your objectives of what you want to achieve in your career. It needs to flow smoothly and not be too lengthy in order to make that vital 1<sup>st</sup> impression. In addition it is suggested that a number of profiles are created, to provide alternatives and where necessary these can be tailored for a given position.



## **Skills and Abilities**

Skills and Abilities are part and parcel of the continuing process of selling yourself and they are the features of the selling proposition.

No matter who we are we have a range of skills, some of which we are good at and others where improvement could be made. There is also the possibility that we may not recognise that we actually have them.

Skills and Abilities must therefore be included in your CV to clearly show what you have to offer to an employer.

Trying to just put a list together in an attempt to identify them or second guessing what they may be is simply not the way forward.

We may have certain skills which we are good at but don't really relish putting these into our everyday life at work. A good example may be someone who has strength in carrying through research and analysis, but who would never go down the path of say being an Auditor as their enjoyment factor in carrying through this type of role has no interest to them at all.

Getting these down on paper in the correct manner is absolutely crucial and if you possess more than just soft skills, i.e. you also have technical skills, then these need to be captured too and in some instances may be a feature of the industry you are looking to be employed in.

## **Achievements**

Achievements are the Benefits of the selling proposition and generally speaking the majority of us don't always recognise personal achievements easily for a number of reasons. They include the embarrassment factor of telling others, they usually take place in our daily work and none work routine without us realising so we then accept them as a given factor, placing very little or no importance on them.

Achievements take different forms as they may be attributed to something we have personally brought about or they may have been accomplished as a member of a team initiative. Where possible, we should try to quantify them but it is recognised that not all achievements can be measured as we will see in this section of the book.

A variety of strong action words are an essential tool to have when constructing an achievement statement as each opening word needs to be different to make an immediate impact on the reader and to attract their interest to read on. There is nothing more off putting in reading the same words time and time again and creates a negative feeling to the CV almost to the point of being boring. That needs to be avoided at all cost!!

## **Educational Qualifications and Personal Development**

There is little doubt that qualifications are extremely important, especially more so in some industrial sectors e.g. The Teaching Profession, Information Technology and the Health Industry (including Dentistry and Opticians)

Personal Development has now become a key feature of the CV as it shows that a person is continually looking to improve themselves wherever possible; whether this is brushing up on their skills, looking for opportunities to becoming more qualified, gaining experience and knowledge and maybe building on a hobby or interest which has impact on others.

Where to show this information on a CV has and will be debated for years to come, so it's one of those areas which become a personal decision. From experience of writing CVs as a profession the opinion of the author, is that this area is not shown immediately in the CV but is recorded towards the end of the document.

### Hobbies and Interests

This area gives you a great opportunity to put together those hobbies and interests which are personal to you and displays that you also have a life outside of the work environment.

Hobbies and Interests can often become part and parcel of an interviewer's strategy of questions as it can provide another perspective of an individual's character and their way of thinking.

Firstly think about the time you spend away from the work place and if you feel that there are achievements to capture arising from these times that is ideal but is not a concern either if this is not the case.

Again, as like the skills and achievements which we have covered, do not fall into the trap of assuming that your hobbies and interests seem an every day event in your life as to others they can really create a significant amount of interest and can also give you a slight competitive advantage over others.

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The author recalls a particular client who when asked about a hobby, said that they enjoyed walking, but when asked to expand on this replied “ I walked over the Sahara Desert in a Team challenge which raised £25,000 for a leading Cancer Charity within the UK” What a fantastic result arising from an interest in walking not only the donation to a very important cause but also the personal achievement of having taken part.

This kind of achievement is recognised to be special but gives us all room for thought on what takes place in our spare time.

### **Essential key benefits of a Professional CV**

These include:

- Displaying clearly who you are, through a meaningful and creative Profile Statement
- Marketing yourself with your own selling proposition by capturing your key features i.e. your skills and abilities and your personal benefits i.e. your achievements
- Increasing confidence and self esteem when you actually see yourself on paper
- Being in a position to maximise a variety of different ways of looking for a job
- A significant supporting document if faced with the completion of official application papers for a position
- Giving you a competitive advantage over others and creating the opportunities of interviews

# 3 How to maximise your CV

Once you have completed the construction of your CV you have without any doubt an extremely powerful job searching tool in your possession and it is vitally important that you remain focused on that particular fact no matter what happens through your attempts to secure employment.

Your CV should give you that all important sense of feeling good about yourself together with increasing your confidence and self esteem. You are now in pole position to start.

In today's employment market, which we are all aware of is difficult, old traditional techniques of finding a job have simply been blown out of the water. You need to be armed with a variety of strategies to take forward.

We will look at 6 ways in which the CV can be used to test the employment market, they include:-

- Networking
- Speculative mail shots
- The Internet
- Recruitment Agencies
- Responding to advertisements
- Completion of application papers

Before we look at these remember to have your key values firmly to hand throughout in order that you are crystal clear about the type of role you are looking for which will enable you to communicate this clearly to others.

Finally, be prepared to compromise if your values are not fully met within the strategy you adopt.

## **Networking**

Networking has fast become a key tool in itself in job searching and has been a well established way in which businesses have expanded and increased their customer base, bringing increased profits and adding share holder value.

In the same way, we will have a look at how the people you know can support you in your search for employment. Usually the majority of these acquaintances you will find will be delighted that you have asked them for their support as we all like that feeling of helping someone we know.

Firstly we have to ensure that before we approach this group of individuals we are crystal clear of the type of role we are looking for and its location. There is no point at all in asking if this is not sorted from the very beginning as it is not just any job you are looking for!

So what is the makeup of this group likely to be?

The answer is simple. You initially need to draw up a list of the following and then by taking each group at a time, spend just a few minutes in brainstorming who you know. List them down and then move onto the next group and follow the same process.

- Family members
- Friends
- Neighbours
- Social contacts – Golf clubs, Swimming clubs, Associations, Churches etc
- Professional contacts – People you have worked with – former Managers and Co-workers
- Educational contacts - Where appropriate, Former Teachers, Lecturers, Colleagues at School, University

Usually what takes place, and is always surprising, is just how many people we actually know. We will now look at the different ways in making contact:-

1. **Use of the telephone** – Make the initial step by ringing them to set up an informal discussion. This might be at their place of employment or over a drink in the evening. Take copies of your CV with you!
2. **E Mail\*** – attaching your CV with a short but concise note This has the immediate effect of asking for help and can be an excellent way of communicating where appropriate e.g. a busy known contact may have someone else opening post, so it may take a few days to hit their desk if this was a letter but e mail will of course avoid this.
3. **Writing\*** – Another avenue to explore if maybe you have not seen this contact for a while. Make it brief, explaining what you are looking for and attaching a copy of your CV, say that you will follow this up in a few days. By taking this action you are showing the initiative and driving the purpose of your letter forward.



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\*see examples of letters in the speculative mail shot section next.

### **Examples of Networking**

Having gone through the theory of Networking, here are 2 real life examples to prove that it actually works.

#### **Example (1)**

Our first example is a client who worked for an International Bank in Jersey and who had previously worked in the financial industry for a UK Building Society. A vast amount of knowledge and experience had been gained throughout her career but it was time to come back to the UK.

After engaging the author to create a CV, the next stage was making the decision of who to work for and where. The where was not an immediate issue but the who was and what the role might be.

With a little soul searching a decision was made that her career needed to change from the financial sector, but in some way needed to build on the experience and knowledge gained.

With the permission of the client, the author knew only too well that this client had an incredible career ahead of herself and through his own business contacts knew the sole proprietor of a recruitment firm who specialised in placing people in the legal and accountancy sectors. The firm were contacted and a full explanation given of the circumstances of the client.

The first step taken by the recruitment firm was to circulate the client's CV to known contacts on a purely speculative basis to see if this attracted any interest. Interest was immediately shown by a leading lawyers practice who were looking to employ a Senior Manager to embed processes to prevent money laundering within the firm and to lead and manage teams.

With the background of this shown in her CV, they requested her to attend an informal interview and then after 2 further interviews, she was offered a role. Since 2005 her career has flourished and she now holds the position of Head of Business Acceptance.

This is a great example of extended Networking and also one of Industrial change where the benefits, achievements, skills and abilities of the individual were totally transferable.

#### **Example(2)**

Our second example is very close to home as it was the personal experience of the author himself. In the first chapter of this book "About the Author" you may well recall that after an established career in the financial world, he then took some time off to consider various options, before carrying out a role of a Customer Relations Manager for a well known Solicitors practice.

Securing the role was a direct result of Networking.

The last but one role he undertook was heading up a Unit disposing of repossessions properties covering the Northern England and Scotland. This particular role was very different in career terms, as the Unit was the customer of various professional services, one of which were a panel of solicitors who acted for the Bank as mortgagees in possession.

During this period of time, he formed extremely close working relationships with a number of practices, spending a considerable amount of time in refining procedures, carrying out Audits and ensuring that their role in the business was carried out as quick and efficiently as possible.

It was this very fact that once he decided to leave the Bank, he became fully aware of the external contacts he had developed externally. A simple action plan was put together as part of his Networking strategy to make contact with the Senior Management of these firms to explain his current situation and to explore if there were any opportunities to work for themselves in an Operational role.

He made contact with one particular firm who invited him along for an informal interview. Within a month he received a telephone call advising him that a position had come about and enquired whether he was interested.

3 interviews later he was offered the position as their Customer Relations Manager.

So, in this example the power of networking was again seen. There is an expression in the UK that it is not what you know but who you know. Whilst this cannot be taken literally there is some sense in the phrase.

In recapping then, you will know your contacts and can then decide which approach to make. You may decide to use a combination of all three.

Remember to keep track on who you have contacted and don't be afraid to follow up those of your contacts who have not responded. Just think that if you only know 20 contacts and they know 20 contacts of their own, you could have 400 potential people looking out for opportunities for you!

Finally don't underestimate Networking as it is recommended that you should spend at least 50% of your time using this initiative.

### **Speculative mail shots**

This particular way of seeking employment plays a major part in today's strategy as there are many positions, in particular Management roles which are never advertised so there are opportunities here to tap into these possibilities.

You may also find that if you hold a professional qualification the Body who represents your industry holds an incredible amount of experience and knowledge and often can provide you with quality information e.g. Names of companies in your area and if a newly qualified graduate, those companies who offer a graduate entry scheme as a way into their business.

A good example of this was a client who the author supported who held a Masters Degree in Chemical Engineering with Computer Science. As this was considered to be a specialist subject he was having difficulties of who to direct his speculative letters to. The problem was immediately overcome, by contacting the Professional Body concerned. They were only too pleased to help and provided him with an extensive list of companies throughout the North West of England where he lived, this enabled him to research the companies and then send his covering letter and CV.

### Knowing and Researching your Target Audience

Having determined the companies you are going to write to you need to find out a little more about them, from either local press, their internet website, a piece from a recent press release etc.

The format of the approach itself is not too onerous as you are not asking for a job but you are expressing an interest into future openings which may arise and displaying that you have the qualities through skills/knowledge/experience which could bring added value to their business.

One essential point to make is to ensure that you address your letter to the correct person. Writing just to the HR Manager of the Company can in many instances be the wrong person, so try to find out who is either the Managing Director or Operations Manager as these are the individuals within a business who may well have ideas on job demands due to company growth before they have even been communicated to their HR teams.

By spending time in finding out the correct contact will show that you know the people in the top positions, who influence the needs of their business.



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The approach to the company needs to be kept to three or four paragraphs as the CV is there to do the talking about yourself.

\*An example of such a letter could be:-

Dear (Name of MD/Operations Manager)

I have with interest been reviewing your Website (or have recently read a press cutting) and would like to enquire about any openings which may arise in the future in your business.

I am attaching my CV and I feel that I would bring added value to your company through my (choose as need be) skills/knowledge/experience/achievements

I am available for an informal interview, and look forward in having the opportunity of meeting you. (if confidence is high this last sentence could read.... I am available for an informal interview and I will ring you in the next few days to see if this is possible – this displays great initiative and confidence with this type of approach)

Yours sincerely

Now let's look at a real life example of a speculative letter which was created and where it was felt to give more information.

The client in this example held a Senior Management role within a Local Authority and was looking to move into the private sector.

### **Career opportunities**

Dear (name of person)

I am presently seeking ongoing personal development, together with a new challenge in my career and having read your company website, I am extremely interested in the area of work you are undertaking.

I am attaching my CV, where you will see that I have extensive management experience working for a local authority at a senior level and have acquired numerous key achievements through possessing a full range of skills and abilities which are clearly laid out within the document.

I have specialised in the high profile area of Corporate Fraud, bringing together a Fraud Investigation Team, a shared Financial Investigation Service and I have worked closely with neighbouring local authorities and the West Yorkshire Police in a number of initiatives to share best practice, maximise resources with the objective of reducing fraud and minimising potential losses.

The above in particular has been brought about by recognising common ground, thinking in a strategic manner and my strength and ability to bring different organisations together.

I would very much like to have the opportunity to discuss and explore with you any vacancies which may exist either now or potentially in the future, as I feel that I would be able to bring a significant amount of knowledge, experience and added value to your business operations.

I will call you in a few days to see if this is possible and in the meantime, thank you for taking the time to review my CV together with this letter.

Yours sincerely

\*Through Networking Contacts

Writing speculative letters to business contacts in particular can also be another area to explore.

The main difference here is that these people know you or have known you through someone else and quite often will be willing to help you in your job search. You may have recognised them as part of your target audience as well.

The approach to these contacts needs to take place with both your business head on and your knowledge of what their own roles are within their current business.

They may not be aware of your current situation with regards to prospecting for employment, so these are a couple of ways to tackle this.

The first is to make telephone contact with them to explain your position and to enquire if they will help you. It maybe that you are looking for a position within their company or to ask them who they know as a contact. The main purpose is to enable you to send your CV to them and obtain that informal interview.

The second approach may take place where a written communication is another option where either the post or e-mail could be used.

An example would be:-

Dear (Named person)

I am currently exploring the opportunities I have in changing my current employment and would like you to help me if at all possible.

I am particularly interested in (your chosen preference(s) and I take this opportunity to enclose my CV

I would welcome an informal interview with you so that I can discuss my situation in more depth and look forward to hearing from you. (or again as with the previous example be bold and say... I am available for an informal interview and I will ring you in the next few days to see if this is possible – this displays great initiative and confidence with this type of approach)

Yours sincerely,

Keep a track on who you are attempting to make contact with and remember to follow these up!

### The Internet

The internet is another key area for those job searching as it provides an ideal platform to carry through research and analysis of companies in an instant but equally as important the ideal opportunity to upload your CV to recruitment sites in a relatively short time period.

The key to receiving e-mails alerting you to potential jobs is the ultimate objective but unfortunately there is every likelihood that your e-mail inbox may well be flooded out with all kinds of roles which are totally unsuitable. The way to reduce this taking place is to ensure that you are very specific when you are registering your details and make sure that your CV has words within it which match both the industrial sector and the type of role you are looking for.

It would be unprofessional for the Author to recommend appropriate sites so it is suggested that searches are made via google and then choose both National & Local sites. Begin by registering with just a few to see what happens next and then expand the process as required.



"I studied English for 16 years but...  
...I finally learned to speak it in just six lessons"

Jane, Chinese architect

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The other area where the internet comes into its own is the availability to read newspapers online from all over the world in most cases for free, although some papers within the UK are now making a charge for this facility. In this instance there is an excellent site [www.thepaperboy.com](http://www.thepaperboy.com) You will see that newspapers have a direct link into the local job market so immediately it creates another potential avenue for you to distribute your CV.

### **Recruitment Agencies**

This section brings about an insight into Recruitment Agencies together with a number of hints and tips of how best to get them working alongside you in another avenue of the job search process.

Recruitment Agencies are dotted around most Cities and Towns and earn their living by introducing candidates to prospective employers who have taken them on board when searching for employees. Subject to the arrangements the agency has with the employer a fee will be paid by the employer to the agency for finding the suitable candidate for a given position.

In your job search process you should take on board between 10/15 agencies wherever possible, provided that you are clear when registering with them the following key facts:-

- The Industry and type of work you are looking for
- The benefits package, salary, holidays, training, hours per week, pension etc you are looking for
- The distance you are prepared to travel to work
- Your availability for interview, together with notice period of your existing employer where appropriate

When registering with them your CV will be the tool they will use, following a brief fact-finding interview.

There are a number of ways to register with them:

- By walking through their door to phoning beforehand.
- Sending in your CV by e-mail, fax or post first and then arranging an interview over the telephone. The big advantage here is that they will have had an opportunity to talk to you first and will have an idea of what you are looking for and more importantly have your CV to hand. In addition they will usually give you an indication if they can help. If they cannot, it may be due to them only specialising in certain industries.

Finding suitable agencies will take time, as some specialise in certain industries, whereas others may cover a wide area of the market.

You can use Yellow Pages, the internet and maybe a personal recommendation which will point you in the right direction.

So as already suggested take on board a minimum of 10 so that you can keep in regular contact with them and check the progress they are making.

Whilst agencies play their part in the job search process, research actually shows that only about 10% of people in new employment found their positions through an Agency so exercise care that you don't put all your energy into this area. Find a suitable balance alongside the other avenues you are exploring.

Don't forget to keep a record of who you are registered with and the name of the person you have established contact with!

### **Responding to an Advertisement**

In this section we will cover the procedures of how to reply to advertisements in the most positive way.

Advertised Positions will appear from a number of sources. The most common ones are newspapers, (both local and national) trade magazines and journals, internet and more increasingly local radio stations.

The advertisement can take different forms; for example it may request you to ring a number for an interview pack/job application form or it may give you an idea of the position and invite you to respond with your current CV. In some instances it may ask candidates to ring for a telephone interview, as part and parcel of their selection process, so have your CV to hand. (We cover these later on in the book under interviews).

The first step is to evaluate the advertisement once your interest has been captured. Usually it is very unlikely that you have all the skills, experience and knowledge they are looking for so by matching the ones you do possess to the advertisement and the job specification (if there is one available) you will see the areas easily which do. If you feel that you possess 75% of them, apply for the position.

As we are looking here at instances where CVs have been requested it is advisable to ensure that your CV remains viable for the position you are applying for and it may need to be tweaked here and there. Remember from earlier on in the book that your CV is not written in stone so there may be some achievements from past roles which may need to be introduced and others which may need to be taken out. Take the time out and review your CV.

Having now reached this stage the letter or e-mail responding to the advertisement needs to be attractive, short and to the point, with a very positive message to seek that all important interview.

Here is an example – keep this to three paragraphs if possible

(Where seen)

Dear (Named person)

Following your advertisement in (Newspaper/any other source) on (date) I am enclosing my current CV as requested.

(Expressing the interest)

I am very interested in this position and feel that I have the skills, knowledge and experience you are looking for.

(Asking for the interview)

I look forward to having the opportunity to attend an interview to discuss the position in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Whilst it is recommended that the covering letter is kept to the point with only a few paragraphs, it may well be that the advertisement is looking for slightly more information from you.

Shown below are a couple of a real life examples of advertisements where a covering letter and an e-mail were required as part of the application procedure. It illustrates the point where additional information was requested.

Excellent Economics and Business programmes at:



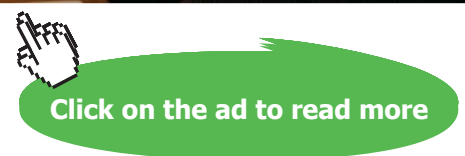
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 and academically the University  
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[www.rug.nl/feb/education](http://www.rug.nl/feb/education)



**Example (1)****The advertisement.....**

First Floor is West Yorkshire Playhouse's place for young people. Opened in January 2009, it is a permanent, designated venue adjacent to the theatre and in the heart of Leeds' Cultural Quarter. Facilities include Visual and Performing Arts studios, Green Room, Silver standard accessible WC, office and kitchen area. At First Floor we seek to engage young people, particularly vulnerable young people, through the arts and help them find positive pathways forward in life.

In December 2010 we were awarded a grant by the Big Lottery Fund for a major 4-year programme. The programme sets out to engage young people (14-25yrs) with learning disabilities through the arts at First Floor. We seek to directly address their specific (and varied) needs, working in consultation with them and their families to develop workshops and longer projects, models of delivery and support mechanisms which will enable them to take full advantage of the resources and facilities available there.

By the end of the project we aim to have regular music, drama and art activities for young people with learning disabilities embedded into our 'core offer' at First Floor and to have young people with learning disabilities playing a full and active role in life at First Floor.

A significant number of young people with learning disabilities already regularly attend First Floor activities; this served as an initial pointer to the need for this programme. Consultation with these and other young people, review of independent research and the popularity of existing WYP projects such as Dandy Lion Club, Beautiful Octopus Club and, more recently, the Relaxed Performances all strengthened our resolve.

This programme provides a unique opportunity for young people in the region, for West Yorkshire Playhouse and for the city.

The Learning Disability Co-ordinator will be employed on a 4 year fixed term contract, to work initially 3 days per week, increasing to 4 days in years 3 and 4. S/he will be responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the programme, working with young people, their families, carers and other workers, appropriate agencies and groups to develop and co-ordinate appropriate regular, structured creative activities.

West Yorkshire Playhouse is operated by Leeds Theatre Trust Ltd. The First Floor Learning Disability Co-ordinator is employed by Leeds Theatre Trust Ltd and is responsible to the Director of Arts Development.

**DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES**

Specific tasks will include:

- consulting with young people, families, carers and other workers or agencies to develop appropriate programmes/projects for them
- recruiting young people to the programme, including via outreach work
- with the marketing team developing appropriate print and other marketing techniques
- with the First Floor team, recruiting and managing artists, support workers and volunteers

- with the First Floor team and partner organisations, setting up projects, overseeing their delivery and evaluating them
- with the Community Development Officer embedding existing learning disability projects such as the Dandy Lion Club, Beautiful Octopus Club and Relaxed Performances into the new programme
- ascertaining training and CPD needs of core staff and project workers in relation to the programme, and co-ordinating appropriate training
- supporting young people to play an active role on the First Floor Friendly Faces steering group and to act as advocates on other panels, youth groups etc within the city
- signposting young people to further opportunities e.g. arts activity, training or volunteering
- with the Project Development Officer completing monitoring and evaluating reports for the Big Lottery Fund and fulfilling other funding requirements
- sourcing items of capital equipment necessary for the project and co-ordinating their installation

The Learning Disability Co-ordinator will be an integral member of the First Floor team and as such will be expected to attend team meetings and Arts Development department meetings, and support staff in the day to day operation of First Floor and from time to time other areas of the department's work.

## **PERSON SPECIFICATION**

### **Essential requirements**

- A minimum of 3 years experience working in the disability youth arts/youth work sector
- A minimum of 3 years experience of managing projects
- Ability to work confidently with young people aged 14yrs + of all abilities and from all backgrounds
- Ability to work confidently with families, carers, other youth workers, young people's agencies and artists
- Excellent communication and people skills
- Excellent organisational skills
- Ability to develop and adhere strictly to policies and procedures
- Experience of supervising volunteers
- Computer literacy
- An interest in the arts

### **Desirable skills**

- Knowledge of local learning disability network
- Knowledge of arts education activity, Arts Awards and apprenticeships
- Arts Award Advisor training
- Experience of evaluation and monitoring of projects
- Experience of recruiting volunteers and placements
- Fundraising experience.
- Knowledge of the successful operation of a centre or facility
- Experience of writing policies and procedures
- Experience of careers or welfare guidance



### Qualities and abilities

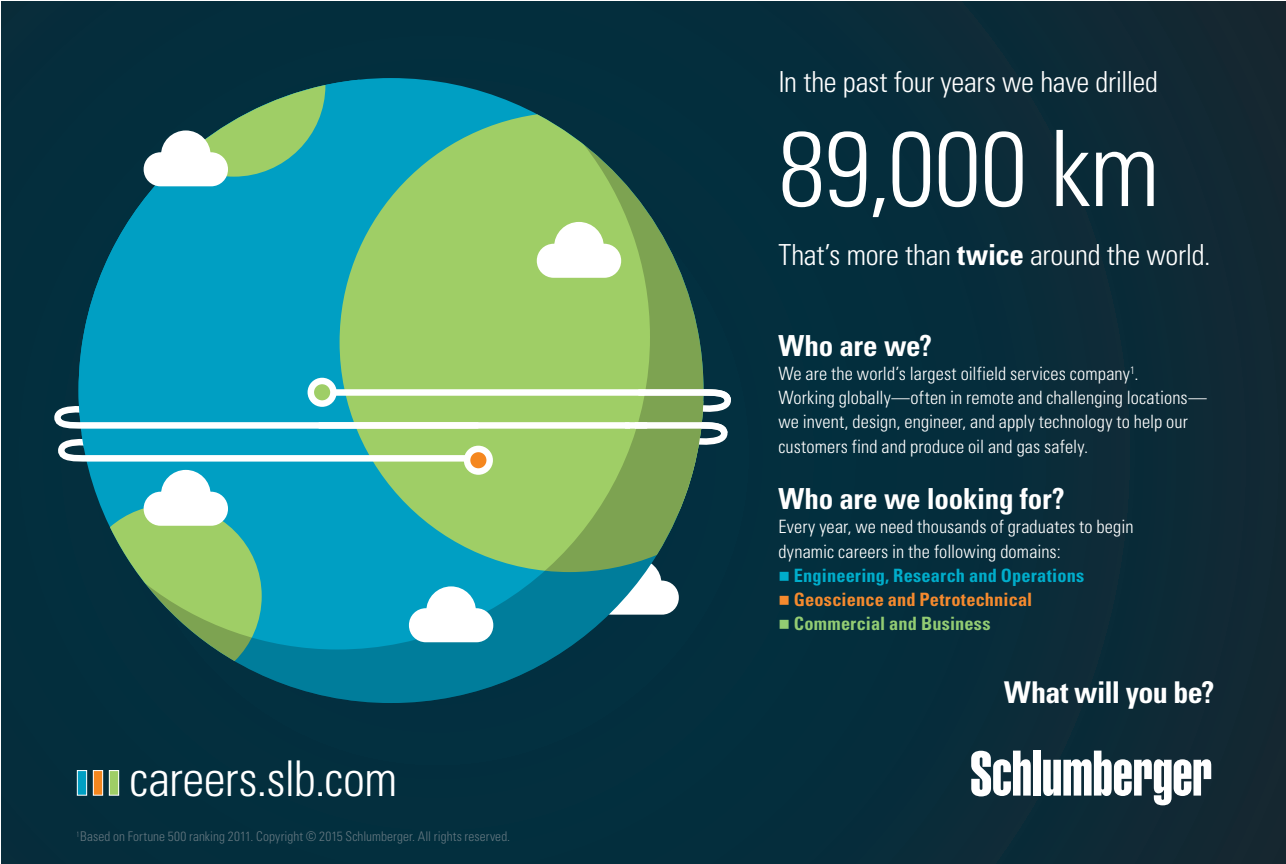
The First Floor Learning Disability Co-ordinator will be a public face of First Floor and will need to be confident at dealing with young people, families and carers, WYP staff, youth workers, youth agencies, volunteers and others in the community development, social and education sectors.

The Co-ordinator will need to be able to think laterally, creatively and with great attention to detail. They will need to be able to juggle multiple tasks and respond quickly to changing situations or opportunities, whilst always being mindful of policies and procedures and the implications of any given situation.

This appointment is made subject to an Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure. The appointees will be required to undertake the relevant training for this post as outlined in the Job Description.

### RESPONSIBILITIES OF ALL STAFF MEMBERS

- To be aware of the work of other departments in the achievement of West Yorkshire Playhouse's aims.
- To take an active part in communicating and co-operating with other staff and departments.
- To follow guidelines, procedures and policies provided by the company in relation to financial management and personnel records.
- To work in accordance with the Equal Opportunities Policy of West Yorkshire Playhouse.
- To be aware of, and comply with, rules and legislation pertaining to Health and Safety at work.



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<sup>1</sup>Based on Fortune 500 ranking 2011. Copyright © 2015 Schlumberger. All rights reserved.



- To take part in such working groups and committees as might from time to time be required for the fulfilment of departmental or company aims.

## APPLICATION

Please apply with a CV and letter outlining your relevant experience and interest in this area of work. Applications must be sent by post or email to:

Name of person  
Project Development Officer  
Arts Development  
West Yorkshire Playhouse  
Playhouse Square  
Leeds LS2 7UP  
(Email of person was shown here)

The deadline for receipt of applications is 12noon **on Monday 24 January 2011**.

Interviews will be held on Wednesday 2 *or* Thursday 3 February (tbc).

### The Covering letter submitted

#### First Floor Learning Disability Co-ordinator

Dear Mrs x,

I am applying for the above position as advertised on the West Yorkshire Playhouse website and as requested I attach my CV. In this letter I have put together a resume of the qualities, knowledge and experience I have, which I could bring to this role.

My career passion to date firmly sits within the world of theatre and over a period of 20 years I have carried out numerous roles as a leading actress for the National Theatre of Cluj in Romania. I have gained a significant amount of recognition and respect from my profession receiving several prestigious awards and over this period I have developed many relationships with directors, business leaders, politicians and fellow actors whom I have been privileged to have worked alongside.

At the same time I have also pursued my great interest in Sociology and Psychology and have achieved a PhD and Master of Science respectively. In addition as you will see from my CV I have a special interest in Reminiscence and Theatre Therapy and have on a volunteering basis through personal invitation had the benefits to share both my talent and compassion in the delivery of training to a wide range of ages, particularly those with learning issues and disabilities.

I have managed a number of projects in my career, together with teaching drama and also as a Visiting Lecturer. I have coached, counselled and acted as a mentor to others which have increased confidence and self esteem.

My range of skills have increased over my career and I have found them to be essential in the roles I have undertaken. In particular I feel that I have specialist abilities dealing with all aspects of Artistic work, creating programmes for creative dance together with my understanding of human psychology and how to interact with social and cultural changes.

I feel that I have been able to make a real difference to people's lives and their well being, through my work which has been incredibly rewarding.

I am extremely interested in this position and I would be delighted to attend an interview to find out more about the role and to share with you my experiences of the work I have carried out.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

### **Example (2)**

Our second example is where a client was seeking a promotion to a Senior Role within the company she was working for. In this case the advertisement was placed internally as well as externally and requested internal candidates to submit their application with a supporting statement setting out their suitability for the role.

### **Job advertised – Group Head of Operations**

You will have first-hand experience of working in the vocational and adult skills training environment and the challenges and opportunities that this sector brings.

Reporting directly to the chief executive you will work closely with the divisional heads of business and head of finances, to plan, develop and implement strategy for operational management and development so as to meet agreed organisational performance plans within agreed budgets and timescales (covering relevant areas of operation – e.g. IT, systems, quality, audit, administration and whatever falls within remit according to the organisation's structure)

You will be an experienced team-worker and understand the dynamics of working in a matrix structure, to deliver both individual and group success. You will focus principally on delivering operational excellence, efficiency and risk management.

Whilst your base will be Yorkshire you will also work with senior managers from across the (expanding) group and will be expected to travel, as required, within the UK, as the group delivers on its national growth strategy, through a series of acquisitions.

Given the group's strategy of both organic and acquisition led growth, you will have experience and exposure of the challenges that arise in integrating and streamlining different operational processes (including managing organisational change) and will have been successful in delivering solutions to manage growth and change.

You will be a self-starter, flexible and highly adaptable. You will have a proven ability to “hit the ground running” and expect to make a positive impact on performance right across the business.

### The role

This is a “hands on” role and a fantastic opportunity for the right candidate to manage the operations within an expanding group. You will work with an experienced, well respected, management team to help create a leading provider of education training in the UK.

You will:

- Initiate and support improvements to all internal business processes and systems to achieve the highest levels of efficiency and to ensure that efficiencies are delivered across our operations.
- Oversee and manage the integration of any acquisitions and projects/events from an operational standpoint.
- Evaluate and implement new technology as appropriate to increase operational advantage.
- Establish and maintain appropriate systems for measuring operational development.
- Monitor, measure and report on operational issues, opportunities and development plans and achievements within agreed formats and timescales.
- Manage and develop direct reporting staff.
- Manage and control departmental expenditure within agreed budgets



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- Liaise with other functional/departmental managers so as to understand all necessary aspects and needs of operational development and ensure they are fully informed of operational objectives, purposes and achievements.
- Contribute to the evaluation and development of operational strategy and performance in conjunction with the executive team.
- Ensure activities meet with and integrate with organisational requirements for quality management, health and safety, regulation, CSR policies and duty of care.
- Be part of the senior management team.
- Assist in delivering the overall strategy.
- Add value through challenging established practices and delivering creative solutions to business problems.
- Be able to develop and inspire people towards common goals dealing with conflicts that arise.
- Be able to provide sound business analysis to support decision making at senior management and board level.
- Support the business through organisational change to manage both organic and acquisition led growth.
- Be adaptable and flexible, being able to rapidly assimilate new concepts, technologies and cultures.
- Have relevant systems and IT experience required for this role.
- Support the development of relevant KPI operational dashboard indicators to measure and drive the growth of the group, supporting the CEO to embed a continuous improvement culture.
- Be able to devise strategies to improve profitability across the product and business portfolio.
- Serve as primary liaison to legal counsel in addressing legal issues e.g. HR, contracts etc/

### **Application process**

It is Woodspeen policy to actively support employees seeking promotion and advancement within the Group based on ability.

You should apply in writing in the first instance to your line manager or senior manager. You should enclose a statement setting out your suitability for the role. You should include at this stage any information that you believe will support your application including relevant prior experience.

All written applications will initially be screened for suitability. Successful applications will be invited to progress to the interview stages.

**Salary:** On application, based on experience.

**Location:** W.Yorkshire (with travel)

**Start:** By 01 March 2012

**Deadline for submission of applications: 08 January 2012**

**E-mail created**

### **Group Head of Operations**

Dear x,

I am formally applying for the role as Group Head of Operations and as part of the process I attach a copy of my CV, which clearly brings together my achievements in my current role as Regional Childcare Programmes Manager and my accomplishments of the other roles I have undertaken since joining the company in 2003.

Included within my CV are a range of key skills and abilities which have continued to improve during my progressive career with the company so far.

I feel that I have many attributes to bring to this position, together with my experience of operating as a Senior Manager and my in-depth knowledge of working within a vocational and adult training environment.

Having recently been the lead manager in an Ofsted inspection, I have a clear understanding of quality both in the delivery of training and the detailed paper work required on funded projects.

I have successfully led and managed my current teams across all 4 sites in West Yorkshire and fully supported, developed, coached and inspired them to achieve both their team and individual objectives.

I have been recognised to also support other departments in the business and have been involved in personally delivering training and have undertaken a wide range of personnel responsibilities, including recruitment of new staff, carrying out interviews and dealing with disciplinary issues.

I have enjoyed meeting new challenges during my employment with the company and feel that I am now in a position to take onboard more responsibility and bring my passion and experience to this role.

You will also see within my CV that I have been able to make a real difference to the learners journey in my present role through many initiatives including the development of partnerships both internally and externally to the business, through my ability to build and maintain relationships.

I would be delighted to attend an interview to find out more about the position and to be given the opportunity to let you know more about myself.


Yours sincerely

Make sure that your letter or e-mail arrives in good time for the closing date but also take care that it does not arrive too early, as this may show that little thought has gone into your application.

Advertisements usually have a very large response so there could well be hundreds received. A good idea to give your letter a further boost (if this is the method you have used) is to ring just before the closing date, to enquire whether they have received it as not all employers acknowledge your application.

Sometimes what takes place at the other end is that your response may be placed at the top of the pile, and may be marked that you took the trouble to phone. This can be a positive step as you are showing a keen interest in the position.


If e-mail has been the chosen approach set up your e-mail to request a read receipt and in that way you will have no doubt that it arrived safely!

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What if you could build your future and create the future?

One generation's transformation is the next's status quo. In the near future, people may soon think it's strange that devices ever had to be "plugged in." To obtain that status, there needs to be "The Shift".



Click on the ad to read more

**Completion of application papers**

There are so many different types and styles of formal applications around that it is just about impossible to give individual examples. However in this section, we can take a look at the common ground and provide you with a number of hints and tips, which will prove useful if faced with this task.

Job seekers can sometimes find the whole process quite daunting, time consuming and bordering on frightening, so let's put the whole scenario into context.

Formal applications are doing a couple of things. Firstly they are requesting information from you in a structured way, which enables them to immediately make comparisons between candidates and secondly they will show instantly if you meet the personal specifications of the role.

Having already completed your CV you will find that it contains an incredible amount of information about yourself and there is little doubt that it will help you in completing your application.

It is very unlikely that anyone who applies for a position will fully meet the job specifications, so it is recommended that if you meet 75% of the essential and desirable requirements of the role, then apply!



Before making a start, go through the application and if you have questions do not assume the answer. Ring them and ask. Taking this action shows that you are taking the process seriously and can save time in completing the papers without any uncertainty creeping in.

Common practices adopted by companies of all sizes is to ask you for examples of particular situations you have found yourself in and are looking for the answer of course, but equally the thought process you used to solve the issue. Another set of questions may very well be surrounding a number of competences.

In both cases your CV will help. Your achievements will kick start your responses and as you already have a list of your key skills and abilities this will enable you to think about situations where your skill was tested and what the end result was.

Remember that in both cases they are concentrating on your experience and knowledge on how you addressed the situation and are looking for a positive outcome. Honesty as always has to be the key, so if for any reason there are questions asked where you can't fully respond you have to say no experience gained and move on – never make up a response at all cost!

Once your application has been completed you must ask someone to check through this to make sure that both your spelling and grammar are correct. It is vital that you keep a copy too, either a hard copy or an electronic version for future reference and to take with you to a potential interview.

As with other recommendations made within this chapter be sure to follow your application up. If posting your application, ring in a couple of days to ensure that they have received it and if sending by e-mail, either set up a read receipt or again ring them, as in this wonderful world of technology, strange things do happen!

The reason for taking this action is simple – you do not want to have spent a considerable amount of time in completing your application, only to find that it has not been received and in today's environment you will find that employers do not always acknowledge receipt of applications, so it gives you total peace of mind.

If at the end of the day you are not called forward for an interview, you need to contact them again and ask for feedback, so that you can understand their reasons and gain further experience for the future.

### **Essentials of how to maximise your CV**

Once you have your CV in place it is essential that you begin to explore all the avenues we have looked at in this chapter. Don't let your CV collect any dust just leaving it on your PC, get it out there as there is a whole world waiting!

Ensure that you know your target audience and stick to it!

Remember that you have to be able to reach employers in various ways today and be able to tell them all about yourself, so take each of the areas we have reviewed and start planning.

Take your time when you are planning and setting your objectives, it's not a race against time here but the quicker you start the process the earlier you begin to create that window of opportunity.

Review your values throughout this process and be prepared to compromise if required to do so.

Don't let your efforts go to waste, remember to have the confidence to follow up every action you take to increase your knowledge and experience.

One final word on this chapter is to re-emphasise the power of Networking as this is considered a very important tool to use in your tool box.



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# 4 Interviews

All your hard work has now paid off and you have received that all important invitation to attend an interview.

Your head will be full of thoughts and emotions and will typically be thinking about the following:

- How do I feel right now?
- Am I excited about the opportunity?
- I am nervous about the whole events which are going to take place, how will I cope?
- What do I wear to the interview?
- How am I going to create the right first impression?
- What research do I need to carry out?
- What questions will they ask me and how will I manage any awkward and probing ones?
- What can I ask them?
- What if they start asking about salary expectations?
- How am I going to get there and where is it?
- How can I assess how well I think I have done after the interview?

So with all these thoughts it is absolutely essential that we address these issues and attempt to overcome any negative feelings in order to give you additional confidence and a structured approach in dealing with the interview situation.

It is fully accepted that nerves are common in all of us and it would certainly be very unusual not to have these. Let's face it who can say that they really enjoy the experience of going for interviews, not many I think!

We do need to get the whole process sorted out as best we can in our minds, so this chapter will deal with this and will put forward a range of suggestions and recommendations for you to take onboard and develop.

There is a real must thought to get straight from the moment you know that you are going for an interview and that is that you need them for all the reasons you applied for the role in the first place and don't ever forget that they may need you just as much. So, they are asking you in to find out more about yourself and for you to find out more about them! Remember that.

Before we start to prepare you for attending interviews there are some generic areas to talk about first which apply to all types and styles of interviews.

There has been a great deal written and discussed by experts from a wide range of professions about how candidates come over during an interview and there is certainly some room for thought that they are of the opinion that 55% of body language plays a major part in the overall situation, 38% is attributed to how you sound and as little as 7% as to what you actually say.

With this in mind it is important to take these 3 individual areas forward with a very open mind as the Author understands that these areas do impact on the interview but also has a personal opinion too, especially about what you have to say!

### **Body Language**

Make no doubt about it your body language can and will influence what others think about you in all walks of life and particularly in an interview situation.

Anyone who watches sport will see quite clearly the different styles of body language e.g. see how different a winning football team is as opposed to the team who are losing heavily. The winning team are all smiles, heads held high and full of spirit and energy. The opposition who are losing have their heads down, grim faces and lack the energy to run after the ball.

As far as interviews are concerned there are 4 key areas to look at, namely the initial handshake, eye contact, smiling and finally posture. If all 4 are in place it will create a positive and professional image.

We will keep these straight forward and easy to understand by looking at the following illustrations and short but concise comments.

### **Handshakes**

It says you are a professional. A handshake is a well-accepted and expected form of greeting in all situations. Make it firm to create that welcoming image.



### **Eye Contact**

Difficult as it sometimes can be, making eye contact with who you are talking to makes a huge difference. It shows that you are interested and creates a bond.



### Smiling

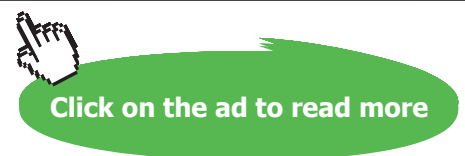
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### **Sitting posture**

Very important – sitting back can be displaying a lack of interest sometimes, but if done correctly is acceptable. Look at the lady & gentleman here.

Sitting forward can often display interest in what has been said.



### **How you sound**

We are all different and should not hide the fact of the dialect we use as this is where we come from.

How we sound though is quite different and comes more from our tone of voice, our pitch and the speed of how we normally talk. Quite often if we are nervous a couple of things often take place. Firstly we tend to mutter, can look away from the person we are talking to and secondly we talk so fast that nobody understands what we are trying to say.

Only by practising talking slowly and clearly will you overcome these negatives and it will make a difference to the communication and making yourself more easily understood.

**What you say**

Although as already said experts have commented that what you say is of least importance, do not fall into the trap of readily accepting this view as it is vitally important that what you say is clear, concise and to the point. If not why have interviews in the first place. They are there for a purpose as already covered within this chapter.

When questions are asked during an interview the interviewer is looking for a certain response or a thought process used in responding.

We will have a more detailed look at questions and answers later on in the chapter which will include a range of typical questions asked and equally as important how to handle the more difficult ones which normally make us feel quite uncomfortable.

**Steps to be taken prior to attending an interview**

As soon as that communication is received that you have been invited to attend an interview your preparation starts at that point.

It is a true statement that preparation is very important as to attend an interview with none is nothing more than a recipe for disaster as the outcome will not be what you intended it to be!

Make an everyday comparison. You are painting a new door and decide not to bother either applying a primer or undercoat paint beforehand, so it's straight in with the gloss paint. It will not be too long before you visibly see what takes place.

Taking time to prepare for your interview will give you the best possible chance of securing the position and it gives you the personal satisfaction that you gave it your very best shot. You cannot ask for any more than that.

Let's now look at the process of that all important preparation.

Some of these areas seem so obvious that you may initially think why bother to mention them and it is for that reason why we will, as many interviews can fail before even attending!

**Accepting the invitation**

Read carefully what the information is asking you and if there is even just one piece you do not understand make contact to find out the answer. Do not assume the answer yourself!

Make your response as requested within the letter and take this opportunity to express your delight that you have been given the opportunity to attend as this immediately displays your continued interest in a very positive manner.

### Where and when is the interview?

Be sure you know where you are going and how you intend to get there. Even if you are aware of the location, carry out some research beforehand regarding transport whether this is public or if you decide to drive there yourself. Strange things quite often take place e.g. perhaps the most common one unexpected road/rail works which can and do seriously impact on how long it can take to get there.

You really need to arrive at least 15/20 minutes beforehand as a safety net in case of delays.

If you are unsure of where you are going, there will often be a map and details within the invitation or failing that use the internet to establish your route or via the company website. Satellite Navigation tools are very useful too but will not tell you of everything which you may encounter along your trip.

### What to take with you

Don't overload yourself!

If you are a lady and taking a handbag then take with you a folder which should contain a copy of your CV, a copy of the application form you completed and a list of questions to ask at the interview (We will be covering questions later in this chapter).

If you are a gentleman just take a folder with you with the same contents as referred to above.



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### Research and Analysis

You should have already carried out this task prior to submitting your application to the company but in any event you must recap by starting to research their website in order to gather up to date information on the business. Carrying out this will show that you have had the initiative if asked a question about the company as in your response you can honestly say “I picked up that point or I read with interest that you.....)

So whilst not trying in any way to memorise a company’s website you do need to have a feel for what they are all about and who their customers are.

### What to wear

Appearance is more important than we think, it is a well known fact that creating that positive impression on meeting someone for the first time will take place immediately you walk into that room. In fact some consider that even before that time it starts as soon as you walk into their building and meet the receptionist.

Unless it’s a well known fact that the company dress code is informal, play safe every time.

So for the ladies, it’s a suit, skirt & blouse/jacket or trouser suit combination and for the gentlemen a suit with tie or a really smart jacket and trousers, again with a tie. In both cases don’t let yourselves down by displaying dirty shoes or boots!

### Questions to ask

In most interviews you will be given an opportunity to ask questions about the position and the business, so as part of the preparation make sure that before you attend the interview you have these written down.

The questions themselves don’t need to be over complicated, but again asking them will show that you are interested in the role and will display initiative.

To kick start your thoughts on bringing together a list here are a few examples that will start the process:

- What would the first 3 months look like from a training point of view and building up knowledge of the business?
- I am keen to carry out on-going personal development, will there be opportunities for me to achieve this?
- Feedback on performance is important to me. How do you carry this out and how regular will it be?
- Do you see this role changing at all, taking on additional responsibilities and what will they be?
- What opportunities exist for progression within the business?
- Do you have any plans for expanding the business and diversifying in any way?
- When will you be making your decision on who will be successful in securing the position?

### The Interview

There are various styles of interviews which take place which will vary across the business world. The most common ones are:

- 1:1 situations with the person who will be your immediate line manager.
- The line manager and a representative from the Personnel/Human Resources Department.
- A panel interview, which may include the above personnel and other key managers or team leaders across the business.
- There is also evidence of increasing telephone interviews taking place as part and parcel of an employer's screening procedures prior to an actual face to face interview. We will cover this in a little more detail later on in this chapter.

It is becoming more common practice that at least 2 representatives from the business will be there, as this does not put the sole onus of just one person to make the decision and it's like the saying, 2 heads are better than 1.

### **Types of questions**

Anyone who attends an interview will never really know what type of questions will be asked so to break all the rules about making assumptions this is probably the exception.

Having made this statement let's look at what may happen and keep a very open mind as we begin to unfold the unknown.

As already covered earlier in his chapter an interview has the sole objective of finding out more about you, what you have achieved and what you have to offer in terms of your skills, abilities knowledge and experience and will you simply fit into the business.

The other sign of the coin is to give you the opportunity of finding out more about them from a range of perspectives including:

- Does the position meet my values and aspirations?
- Are there opportunities for progression and personal development?
- Is the culture right?
- Do I get excited about the atmosphere and working conditions?
- Can I fit in here?
- Does it just in overall terms feel right?

Moving now to the types of questions which may be asked. There are 3 main areas which may be covered and will determine the style of question.

The first one may surround the information in either your CV or the application papers you completed. They are likely to be competency/skilled based questions or probing about your previous achievements.

The second one may be what do you know about the business and questions arising from the job specification.

The third one may just be generic ones covering all interviews, industries and positions.

Let's look at each of these areas in a little more detail.

### Competency/Skill based questions

If as recommended by the author you have downloaded his book "Creating your CV as a self marketing tool". In chapter 4.2 you will have seen that he extensively covered how to realise your skills and gave the tools on how to uncover these and then how to make a professional statement about them to include within your CV.

Here is an extract of that part of the CV and following are a range of questions covering each one. It may also be the case that the application papers you completed had a range of competency based questions where additional information is now asked, so in both cases the key here is to be able to give examples of how you use that skill in a situation you have experienced.

### Key Skills and Abilities

- Displays strong interpersonal skills, through the ability to gain the trust and respect of others, being sensitive to people's needs and feelings, and enjoying the building and bonding of teams.
- Listens very effectively and is able to write in a concise manner, and speaks in a persuasive style.
- Inspires and motivates others when leading and managing, giving at all times clear and concise direction with the added ability to think in a strategic manner.
- Develops and coaches others through the training of new skills and competencies, which motivates them to achieve their goals and aspirations.

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- When planning and organising is able to prioritise tasks and assignments, introduce contingencies and delegates extremely effectively to make the best use of others skills.
- Works effectively under pressure and where both demanding and stringent deadlines are present and prioritises to ensure that the needs of both the client and business are fulfilled.
- Professional expertise and learning is displayed through personal development to maintain up-to-date knowledge on policies and procedures.
- Thinks in a strategic manner and sees the bigger picture at all times which contributes to the establishing of achievable objectives.

- Develops an innovative and effective solution to complex problems and is able to diagnose an issue by getting to the root cause.
- When carrying through detailed research and analysis possesses a keen eye for the attention to small details and is able to interpret underlying themes from complex information.
- Is fully cost sensitive and is able to set budgets and carefully monitor expenditure.
- Actively seeks business development opportunities and can bring about new services and products to meet the future needs of the business.
- Is clearly visible at making a real difference to all areas of client service and expectations and is fully recognised as being able to build and maintain both internal and external relationships at all levels.
- Readily accepts change, and adapts quickly by recognising the benefits and is promotes change to others in a positive manner.
- Possesses a working knowledge of a variety of standard Microsoft packages with additional experience at operating specialised software used by the business.

**Questions about each statement made:**

- You say that you gain the trust and respect of others – how to you do that and have you an example?
- Can you give me an instance of how you were sensitive to a person's needs?
- What do you consider is important when communicating verbally to others?
- How do you ensure that your written communication is clear and concise?
- What examples do you have when listening was vitally important?
- How do you motivate and inspire others and can you give me an example?
- What are your key objectives when leading and managing others?
- What experience do you have in training, coaching and developing others?
- How do you prioritise tasks, can you give me an example?
- How do you react to pressure where demanding deadlines exist?
- Give me an example of something you planned or organised – what difficulties did you encounter and how did you overcome them?
- How do you display professional expertise and carry out personal development?
- What steps to you take to enable you “to see the bigger picture”?
- How do you solve problems and have you an example of bringing about an innovative solution?
- How do you pay attention to small details to minimise errors and mistakes?
- What experience do you have in budgetary control?
- How do you ensure that you meet the demands and expectations of customers and how do you build and maintain these relationships?
- What examples do you have of managing change, conveying this to others and recommending change?
- Information Technology is vitally important to our business, can you give me an overview of your experience and knowledge?

Probing about your previous achievements is testing further about any statements you have made, remember to recap on these and be able to respond to any questions asked.

### What do you know about the business and the Job Specification

Companies may ask you about what you know about them, ensure that you carry out research and analysis beforehand. Look for the initiatives they are undertaking, what awards they have achieved, what is their reputation, are they the leading company or major player in their industry, are they a recognised local business etc.

### Generic style of questions you may come across

These types of questions are often used by interviewers, across all industries and for any given vacancy.

### Situational

These questions will normally take the form about previous situations you found yourself in, or they could pose a question of what would you do if you found yourself in a given situation.

- Tell me about a skill you have developed during the last 12 months. How did you identify this and what action did you take?
- What have you personally introduced to kick start a culture of personal development in your current area of responsibility?
- What is the most significant goal you have achieved in the last two years?
- Describe a situation where you were involved in setting targets. Goals for yourself and others.
- Tell me about how you would tackle a member of your team who was under performing.
- What improvements have you made to productivity and quality in your current position?

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- Tell me about a project you have introduced, how did you go about it?
- What kind of decisions do you make in your current role?
- What steps do you take when looking for improvements in a process?
- Describe a difficult and challenging activity you have been involved in.
- Tell me about a situation where you have had to provide a service/help to others.
- How would you deal with a difficult customer on the telephone/written word?

### **Behavioural**

These questions usually cover areas about you and your individual profile/experience/skills and knowledge.

- Can you describe yourself, by giving a history of your career to date and what you do in your leisure time?
- How would you describe your strengths and what are your weaknesses?
- What is your personal working style?
- What is most important to you in your job?
- How would you run meetings and what do you think about them?
- How would you know if you were successful in your job?
- How would you describe your current organisation?
- Tell me about the person who has influenced you more than anyone else – why?
- What kind of people do you have difficulty with and how do you overcome this?
- What do you know about this company?
- Why do you want to work here and what qualities/experience can you bring?
- How can this company meet your career aspirations?

### **More potential questions!**

Here are a final set of questions which again may arise at an interview:

- Tell me about yourself
- What do you know about this company?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- Why do you want to work for us?
- Have you any experience of this kind of work?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?

### **How you see yourself**

- How would you describe yourself?
- What sort of personality are you?
- What are you good at or what are your strengths?
- What 3 major qualities do you possess?
- Would you describe yourself as innovative/analytical/well organised?

- How do you behave in a crisis/when under pressure?
- Are you computer literate?
- Can you speak a language?
- What motivates you?

**How you see & interact with others**

- How would you describe your current/last boss?
- How would you describe the best/worst boss you worked for?
- What sorts of people do you most like working with?
- What sort of people do you find most difficult to work with?
- How have you handled a difficult colleague or boss?
- How do you get on with your colleagues?
- How well do you fit into a team?
- What contributions have you made to a team?

**How others see you**

- How would your last boss describe you?
- What will you be remembered for in your current/last job?

**Positive things about your current/last job**

- What do/did you like most about your current/last job?
- What gave you the most satisfaction in your last job?
- What was the most interesting or rewarding job assignment you have ever tackled?
- How would you sum up the contribution you made to your last company?

**Negative things about your current/last job**

- What are your weaknesses?
- What do/did you find most difficult in your current/last job?
- What was the biggest problem you have had to overcome?
- What was the greatest disappointment or failure?
- How do you handle criticism?
- Describe a situation when you were criticised & how did you handle this?
- What do/did you like least in your current/last job?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- If you had your time over again, what would you change/do differently?
- With hindsight would you have chosen a different career path?
- What was the last thing/person to make you very annoyed?



**What you want from your job**

- How ambitious are you?
- Are you interested in promotion and increased responsibility?
- What are your long term aims (5/10 years)
- What are the most important factors you require in your job?
- How important is money/status etc?
- What is the ideal job for you?

**Research and fitting in**

- What do you know about this company?
- Why do you want to work for this company?
- What attracted you to apply for this position?
- Why should we employ you?
- What makes you think you will fit in?
- What experience do you have with this type of work?
- What would you bring to this job?
- What would you not want to do in a/this job?



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**Personal development**

- What training have you done in the last year? Who initiated this?
- Are you interested in training?
- What have you learned/did you learn from your last job?
- How do you keep up to date with technology?

**Outside work**

- What are your hobbies & interests?
- What do you do to keep fit?
- How do you alleviate stress?

Having now reviewed all the different types and styles of questions the author truly hopes that you can understand and appreciate that no one will ever know what questions are likely to be asked at an interview. There is little doubt that looking at the ones covered in this section will give you a head start on that all important preparation.

You will be fully aware having read this book so far and indeed having read “Creating your CV as a self marketing tool” that the author shares with readers as many examples as possible from life as this displays real situations in addition to just the theory side of the subject being discussed.

So with this in mind, here is a situation which he found himself in recently after a client had engaged him to create a CV and then to carry out a mock interview.

The client in this case was looking to return to a Personal Assistant role which she had carried out very successfully in the past and wanted both a CV to clearly display this fact and an interview to gain confidence and where necessary how to improve any weaknesses identified.

A copy of her CV is shown below. A job specification was created for a PA role within the authors business to make the situation as real as possible, a set of questions which were asked at a mock interview and finally written feedback provided by e-mail to back up the face to face one given after the interview.

**The CV**

A completely new style document was created to maximise and display her **PA achievements under 4 specific headings first**, key skills and abilities followed with employment history next and then educational qualifications and hobbies and interests.

The Author has created a name for this type of CV entitled “**Revised Functional CV**”, as it presents an individual in a very similar way to that of the well know Functional CV.

**Name**  
**Address**

**Town**  
**Postcode**

Telephone No

Mobile No

E-mail address

**A highly dedicated and passionate individual who has gained invaluable knowledge and experience as a confidential Personal Assistant to Senior Management across the corporate, motor, manufacturing and insurance industrial sectors. Displays an exceptional range of skills, with particular strength in planning, organising, time management and information technology. Fully recognised to have the ability to form, build and maintain relationships at all levels both internally and externally to the business.**

**Career Achievements** (See Employment History on page 3)

### **Business and Information Technology**

- Fully contributed to the design and implementation of a new Microsoft CRM Database to handle the increase in the number of garages joining the programme and replacing an existing paper based procedure, resulting in cost saving and vastly increasing efficiencies.
- Personally inputs to the content of advertising booklets promoting the programme, ensuring that the benefits as well as the features are clear and concise for existing and new members.
- Plays an active role in putting forward recommendations and ideas prior to production of a quarterly newsletter.
- Takes an active part as a member of the AutoCare Web Team, ensuring that all information regarding training courses, customer service surveys and latest news items are posted on the site.
- Proof reads a wide range of material for the business including brochures and newsletters.
- Researched, developed and implemented detailed procedures for the outgoing post process to complement businesses technology.
- Instrumental at setting up a monthly statistical report on performance achievement of solicitors against targets laid down by Senior Management.
- Reconciled over 6000 re-mortgage completions per month.

### **Customer and Client Services**

- Instigated and followed through a change in procedure for all Yellow Pages advertisements, by taking these in-house for all garage members, saving invaluable time, controlling all invoices on a monthly basis and improving accuracy and quality by having a consistent approach.
- Liaises with garages twice a year to kick start local advertising campaigns, contributes to the design and content of the marketing material and then fully co-ordinates with Royal Mail for deliveries to take place and carefully follows their strict rules and regulations to avoid any penalties occurring.

- Following new members joining the programme co-ordinates a number of activities e.g. The designing and fixing of new signing, external painting and arranging a 1day course on an IT package which will be used at the garage.
- Recognised to have built and maintained relationships with all external suppliers.
- Fully supports the garages to ensure that the benefits available to them are always available e.g. stationery, free give aways etc.
- Developed tailored made reports for all re-mortgage and sale/purchase clients from receipt of instructions through to completion.

### Project Management

- Plans, organises and arranges the Annual Conference with the Network Manager for over 800 members and garages. Has the responsibility for all communication activities surrounding the conference which has now grown to a 4 day event, together with the logistics, payment of all associated invoices, booking of rooms and assisting with table plans.
- Promotes local member initiatives through the arranging of Regional Mini Conferences, which has encouraged networking of all attending and increased communication.
- Plans and organises training courses throughout the country for members and none members and is recognised to be the key contact with the external training providers eXponentia and Frank Massey. (In 2011, over a 1500 candidates attended).

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- Organised and co-ordinated conferences and seminars throughout England and Scotland for 123 Branches in the network, having personal responsibility for the venues, the programmes for the day, travel arrangements and the control of all expenditure.
- Put together a programme to ensure that all Branches met the requirements of Health and Safety by arranging internal inspections and then reporting any weaknesses to Head Office so these could be addressed.
- Reduced e-mail traffic by introducing and streamlining internal communications procedures, e.g. creating a shared drive facility, so that access was readily available for the Branches where minutes, sales figures, monthly reports, health and safety information could be found and posted.
- Created an in-house system to ensure that the whereabouts of title deeds were known by all end users within the firm.
- Successfully project managed the introduction of productivity measures for solicitors and operational support staff.

### **Personnel Management**

- Centralised the control and authorisation of annual holiday entitlements for all direct reports of the Director to ensure that customer service was never compromised.
- On behalf of the director controlled his diary, meetings, travel arrangements, e-mails and any information required by Head Office was gathered for his final approval.
- Controlled and authorised all holiday entitlement for over 100 solicitors and operational staff.
- Carried out additional responsibilities as a Fire Warden, having undertaken the relevant training.
- Supported the finance team by assisting in the inputting of remuneration information via Sage and the subsequent running off of pay advices, maintaining confidentiality at all times.
- Managed and directed a specialised team of 10 staff with the key responsibility of ensuring that the technology of the business was fully operational at all times.

### **Key Skills and Abilities**

- Prioritises tasks and assignments when carrying out planning and organising activities, introduces contingencies as required and is able to delegate effectively to make the best use of others skills.
- Works extremely well under pressure where both demanding and stringent deadlines exist and is able to balance the needs of both the customer and the business.
- Has advanced IT skills and experience of working with specialised software products in addition to an in-depth knowledge of a wide range of Microsoft Packages.
- Displays strong interpersonal skills with the ability to gain the trust and respect of others and being sensitive to people's needs and feelings.
- Manages projects by leading and managing from the front and enjoys the co-ordinating aspect of bringing others together to achieve a team goal.
- Professional expertise is recognised through staying current and up to date with policies and procedures and by developing new skills and knowledge to remain leading-edge.
- Builds and maintains customer relationships at all levels and delivers a quality service at all times having fully understood their individual expectations.

- Develops and coaches others through maintaining confidences and being able to teach new skills and competences.
- Possesses a keen eye for the attention to small details when carrying out research and analysis.
- Puts forward recommendations for making change, is able to convey change to others in a positive manner, but will when required challenge this too where the immediate benefits are not clearly visible.
- Takes personal responsibility for making decisions when problem solving and follows these through with confidence and conviction.
- Always sees the “bigger picture” and thinks in a forward manner in order to establish any future needs and requirements.
- Listens effectively and is able to speak and write in a persuasive style for any given situation.
- Is cost sensitive and is able to manage activities to stay within budget.
- Actively seeks new opportunities to promote brand and puts forward ideas for business development.

### **Employment History**

- **ABC – Programme Co- Ordinator – 2008 to present**
- **Agency work – various positions – 2007 to 2008**
- **DEF – Personal Assistant to Director of Sales & Operations – 2004 to 2007**
- **GHI– Systems Administration Manager – 1998 to 2004**
- **JKL Bank – Assistant Campaign Manager, Marketing Executive & PA to Marketing Manager – 1993 to 1998**

### **Education Qualifications**

- Certificate in Management Studies
- Certificate in Marketing
- Institute of Personnel Management
- NEBBS – Supervisory Management
- Teacher Training Certificate & Diploma in Administrative Studies
- RSA Word & Text Processing Diploma (Includes RSA 111)
- RSA Document Presentation & Legal Processing
- RSA Audio Typing
- City & Guilds Desk Top Publishing

### **Hobbies and Interests**

- Pilate
- Gardening
- Walking with Westies dogs
- Travelling

## The Job Specification



### Peak Career Consulting – Personal Assistant

Peak Career Consulting is a Career Consultancy based in West Yorkshire and is looking to recruit a Personal Assistant to join this established family run business.

Salary and benefits dependant on knowledge and experience.

### Job Specification

#### Responsibilities & Essential requirements of the post

- Managing the diaries of the 2 proprietors, setting up meetings as and when required.
- Taking calls from prospective clients, making appointments and confirming the work to be undertaken by e-mail.
- Being able to sell the benefits of the services we offer and closing the sale.
- Carrying out ongoing research and analysis of the local market and its competition.

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- Researching local networking events, their associated cost, and potential benefit & feeding this back on a regular basis.
- Fully conversant with the Internet & Microsoft packages used within the business.
- Have an in-depth knowledge and experience of customer relationship management.
- Possess a keen eye for the attention to detail and be able to meet targets for the delivery of work for clients.
- Prepared to work outside of normal core hours.
- Being able to work on own initiative
- Fully experienced of carrying out the role as a PA
- Strong range of skills including organising, planning, IT and communication.
- Maintaining confidentiality at all times.

### **Desirable requirements of the post**

- Possessing knowledge of the current employment market
- Experienced at working within the career industry
- Receptive to personal development
- Being sensitive to customer needs, especially if they have been out of work for a considerable amount of time or just being made redundant.
- Creative at putting together presentations from information discussed
- Experienced at managing change and putting ideas and suggestions forward to improve efficiencies of the business

### **The Questions**

#### **About the role**

1. What do you know about Peak Career Consulting?
2. What are your current thoughts about the employment market?
3. What experience do you have in keeping confidential information to yourself?
4. A situation. A client phoned up to enquire about our services, we had a brief discussion but he wanted us to call him back later. You ring later as requested & a lady answers the phone what do you say when she asks what you want?
5. We often carry out presentations. If you were given an outline of a forthcoming one could you start to bring it together?
6. Do you think you could generate ideas for newsletters – in our case what would you suggest?
7. What additional information do you feel would benefit our clients if introduced to our website?

#### **The CV & generic questions**

1. What difficulties did you experience in arranging the Annual Conference at ABC and how did you overcome these?
2. How to you go about building and maintaining customer relationships?
3. You say that you have advanced IT skills, what have you carried out as examples of this statement?
4. What is the biggest achievement in your career?



5. What are your 3 main strengths and why?
6. What is your main weakness?
7. How do you gain the trust of others?
8. Attention to detail is important, have you an example of carrying this out?
9. If offered this position, what do you consider would be your priorities during the first 3 months?

There was no doubt at all that the client felt that she had attended a real interview and feedback was immediately given to her and was then sent to her by e-mail, where any weaknesses identified could be addressed for the future.

They are here for you to see.....

### **Things that need a little more thought**

- If given the opportunity to talk about yourself e.g. my question on a potted history, do just that. You don't need to go into a great deal of information about any given role, just give a flavour. It's also a great opportunity to highlight the role(s) you most enjoyed & if going for a PA role you can bring this position to the front. Your point was good re that you are looking for a fresh challenge, so you can keep that one if asked why have you left your current employment.
- I am no different to anyone else about repeating words, it's just one of those things, so try not to use **hopefully** as this may come over in a negative way.
- Carry out research about the business, don't go overboard, but be selective, so that if asked a question about them, you can answer with a touch of knowledge & I really do believe that firms like to hear about themselves.
- Bring together some questions if given the opportunity to ask them when they have finished with their questions – typically these may be, what kind of training will I receive, will I have regular feedback on how I am performing, how or will the role develop over a period of time, will there be any other areas of taking forward personal development, how do you see the business moving forward, are there any plans for expansion or diversification etc.

### **Things that went really well**

- When asked about your achievements all your responses were to the point & gave an example to back up your answer.
- The situation question was handled well & retained the confidential aspect I was looking for.
- You know your skills back to front, so your answers on those questions asked were again clear & concise.
- The weakness question was handled great – remember as you did turn this around, so it sounds more positive than negative – we all have them, but we don't want to tell the world!
- Questions asked about how you would handle bringing a presentation about and ideas on newsletters & website again showed an element of creativity

### General points

- As suggested & it worked, pause for a second or so in making your response as it does give you a time to think.
- Don't be afraid to ask for the question again or ask them to expand on it.
- If taking a folder with you as we talked about, have it there just in case (CV/Application to hand) - maybe just a sheet reminding you on the points of maintaining eye contact, smiling & of course your questions.
- If given the opportunity and you get that exciting feeling about the role, express your continued interest as the interview comes to a close & remember to thank them for giving you the opportunity to attend the interview.
- Don't beat yourself over the head after attending, focus on what you feel went well and really importantly does the role meet the majority of your current values. No job will be perfect, so be prepared to compromise.

### Telephone Interviews

As previously mentioned earlier some organisations having already sifted through applications/CVs and may consider a telephone interview as a further step in bringing about a short list of candidates to call in for interview.

The questions we have already looked at will play a part here with the only difference being that there is no face to face contact, but equally as important is the manner and tone you will use over the telephone.



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Again, preparation is key in carrying out this type of interview. Do not be fooled in any way that this will be easy and straight forward just because the interviewer is not visible.

With this in mind consider the following. Some of these recommendations may seem unimportant, not necessary and bordering on crazy. They are not.

- Do not adopt a too relaxed style about where you are going to take this call. Ensure that there is quiet and that there will be no known interruptions which are likely to take place.
- Dress as if you were attending the interview face to face as this instils a professional approach.
- You need to create that all important first impression so you have to come over in a positive and confident manner.
- Ask, if not given the name of the caller.
- Take your time to listen carefully to what is been asked and speak clearly when responding.
- If you want to increase confidence, then stand up during the interview.
- Remember to smile – this sounds silly and trivial but it makes a difference in your tone of voice.
- Have all your documents close to hand e.g. application papers, CV, job specification and your questions.
- If given the opportunity as this has not been made clear, ask when you will hear if you are successful in progressing to the next stage.
- Finally thank the caller and express your continued interest in the position.

### **How to handle difficult questions**

Anyone attending an interview would be extremely fortunate if there were no awkward questions asked, so we do need to prepare for those albeit that with any questions we will never know what is coming our way.

We will look at some of the most common generic difficult questions together with a suggested response.

The objective of responding to these types of questions is to turn them around and to be confident in reversing a potential negative reply into a positive one.

Difficult questions are there to see how you handle and cope with them but rather than just for example admit that you have a weakness there are ways of communicating a response in a structured and professional manner.

We do have to realise though that we are not perfect but nor is the interviewer!

Here are some examples and immediately shown below is the suggested response:

#### **Question**

What are your weaknesses?

**Overview and Answer**

This is a classic one which often follows the previous one of “What are your strengths?”

We all have weaknesses but the way we respond is to clearly display that we are taking steps to address the issue and have implemented a structured plan to overcome and improve the situation.

Our weaknesses will surround our skills and abilities as these directly impact on our achievements in life. As a further reminder realisation of skills was covered in depth in the Author’s book “Creating your CV as a self marketing tool” and once again it is strongly recommended that reference is made to that particular chapter as the exercise to establish skills also highlights and identifies weaknesses too.

So with that in mind a good example is that you may have previously had an issue in delegating to others.

Your response could be “I realised that I needed to develop others and with my new or increasing responsibilities I was simply trying to manage far too many tasks. I needed to gain the trust and respect of others. Once I had trained another person to carry out a task and monitored the outcome to ensure that all was well, I then had the confidence to just let the task go. The feeling was great personally, but equally as important was well received by the individual”

So the response is not avoiding a reply, but acknowledged the fact that there was issue and then displayed how it was overcome thereby leaving the interviewer with a positive outcome.

**Question**

Why are you leaving your existing employment/employer?

**Overview and answer**

There will be a whole host of reasons and in many circumstances they will be personal and in this respect you will not want to share them with anyone least of all a potential new employer. The response therefore needs to surround areas such as limited progression, personal development and challenge to name just a few.

Your response could be “I feel that my skills and abilities are not and will not be stretched in the future and there are limited opportunities for me to progress in the areas I am interested in. I am looking to seek new challenges and I feel that I can bring added value to this vacant position you have here and also share my experience and knowledge with others which will contribute both to the success of the business and existing personnel too”.

In this example it is purely making a statement that it’s time to move on and look and secure new opportunities. It may also be the case that you are aware from the research you have carried out that the company is expanding and has a proven record of developing its workforce to maximise their potential whilst at the same time increasing the reputation, brand and profit of the business.

**Question**

Why should we employ you?

**Overview and answer**

A straight forward question, where if truth was to be told you would answer why not or I am the best candidate!!

Clearly we cannot make that statement.

There is an element of the previous answer here to some extent.

Your response could be “I really do feel that I have the skills and abilities you are looking for and that they meet the job specification for this position. I am also very committed to personal development and that this could bring added benefits to the business and I am quick to learn and adapt to change and love a challenge”.

In this response it may be possible to give relevant examples to back up your point, so have a think about that aspect.

**Question**

How do you cope with pressure and deadlines/targets?



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**Overview and answer**

From whatever background we have come from we have all some form of experience of this question. For those of us who are just starting out on the career ladder we need to look at our school, college or university for these instances. There will be many.

Your response could be “I have learnt to deal about pressure and targets in my existing position by prioritising my tasks and assignments, planning and organising myself and introducing my own key milestones leading from the start of the particular project to its expected completion date. In that way I do not leave everything to the last minute” Again an example would be ideal here to back up the response.

If you were a student faced with this your response could surround a piece of work you had to complete to enable you to secure your qualification and might be “I have experienced significant pressure in my studies where work throughout my course had to be delivered by a certain time. I ensured that I spent my time wisely and organised myself in such a way that I created as much spare time as possible. I set myself an objective to finish a piece of work at least 1 week before it was due, so as to give myself some breathing time just in case!”

With these responses in mind, it will kick start your thoughts on other situations too and experiences.

**Question**

How do you cope when you have to work with people you don't really get on with?

**Overview and answer**

As already discussed in this book we are all different. Having made that bold statement we do however have common ground with others as we may for example share similar interests, views, opinions, thoughts and values.

It is often said that those people who we most get on with are very similar to ourselves to the extent that it can be compared with looking at a mirror and seeing your best friend. In fact why not take out some time and list the qualities of your friends and then compare these to people you just don't get on with!! You will find the results very revealing!!

Your response could be “I know that it is impossible to get on with everyone, so I take the steps to try and understand what their values are towards work and then adapt my style to meet theirs. It's very difficult and if that does not work I would certainly not avoid confrontation, I would take the initiative of asking them to meet me and establish how we can move forward and ask them to make compromises as I would do to generally improve the way we work together in the future”

**Question**

We are aware that your current remuneration is higher than this position offers. How do you feel about this?

**Overview and answer**

This is becoming an ever increasing question due to people switching industries, changing from public to private sector(s) and finally the current global economic climate.

The answer on this occasion is not as onerous as it may initially appear as it can be answered from looking back at your high ranking values where you find that money alone is not the key driving force when looking for employment. That is not saying it is not important but take the time to look at the other values you had when you completed the exercise.

So, with that in mind your response could be “Yes you are correct that my current position does offer more salary, but having established my values recently money does not stand alone. (You then go on to explain what some of your others are and expand on these) I realise that this position offers more potential flexibility on hours worked or my travelling will be reduced if I secured this position etc”

Also as part of your reply you can then go on to say “I am of course looking for progression over a period of time, but from a monetary point of view I do not have any immediate concerns”

Awkward questions can be handled in a positive way as seen above and can turn a negative situation into a more positive one with a little thought. **The one important factor is that you have to be open in your response and believe in it.**

### Post Interview(s)

Is there anything more stressful than this period? The answer is simple - probably not!

Other than your first day of new employment, this is the most difficult time you will experience of the job search. So much now depends on how you performed, the impression you created and do you fit the organisation in their eyes. A few days to learn the outcome may very well feel like a few months!

Most of us will relate to the feeling we had in our school days having taken a test or an exam. All those emotions come flooding back in our heads. The most important thing to remember is to believe in yourself and remain as positive as you can in the way you conducted yourself.

A simple, effective and quick way of assessing how the interview went can be carried out by asking yourself the following questions and rating them.

Use the rating scale 1 to 5, where 5 reflects very well, 3 to reflect moderately and 1 to reflect not at all.

General Personal Behaviour	Rating
Did I communicate in a clear and concise manner?	
Did I answer the questions to the best of my ability?	
Did I display my skills, knowledge and experience?	
Did I feel relaxed?	
Was I happy with my appearance?	
Did I have the opportunity to ask my questions?	
<b>Total Rating</b>	

If you score 23 or more, then consider that the interview went really well.

If you score 15 to 23, then improvements in some areas are necessary.

If you score under 15, there are weaknesses that need immediate attention.

How do I rate the organisation	Rating
Does the role meet the majority of my values?	
Was I impressed by the general atmosphere and working conditions?	
Did the culture feel right?	
Does the role meet my career aspirations?	
<b>Total Rating</b>	

If you score 15 or more, then consider that the organisation potentially offers what you are looking for.

If you score 10 to 15, then consider if the organisation is a good fit – can you compromise?

If you score under 10, this is beginning to indicate that this organisation is not for you and that compromising cannot be stretched any further.

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Having carried this exercise out brings the exercise to a conclusion by asking yourself these final questions:

- Where did I do my best?
- Where did I do my worst?
- What were the difficult questions?
- What did I achieve in this interview?
- What did I not achieve in this interview?
- How could I improve next time?

### **How to deal with rejection**

In the next chapter we will be looking at receiving the offer of a job and negotiating, but before we move on to this stage we have the most important hurdle to overcome and that is how to deal with rejection following an interview.

The job search process can be a hurtful experience. Let's face it nobody likes to receive bad news in life but those communications after an interview which say "We are sorry." or "I regret." can and will be difficult to cope with and manage. The plain fact is though that we have to.

The one key point to always bare in mind is to never think that the world is coming to an end but to sensibly remember that rejection is a fact of life. It's a bland statement but true.

There can be many reasons why you have not been offered a position. These could range from the fact that someone else was just a better fit and maybe had an edge from a skill or experience point of view.

So, the only way to find out is to obtain feedback from the company. Having had the confidence to go through the interview ask why you were not successful. Ask what in their opinion went well and not so well during the interview.

Take a step back and be honest with how you performed from the post interview analysis which has been covered in this chapter.

Think about the whole experience logically and sensibly. Work on any areas where a weakness was identified so that this is minimised the next time.

Finally remember that you don't always get good feelings about everybody you meet, so why should everybody get a good feeling about you?

### **Essentials of interviews**

Let's recap on the chapter by bringing together the key elements of the interview procedure and its purpose.

- It's a two way process, an organisation needs to know more about you and you need to know more about them.
- Remember that they potentially also need you as much as you need them.

- Constantly review that within reason your values are being met.
- Preparation is key from the minute you receive an invitation for an interview.
- Carry out your research prior to attending.
- Play safe dressing for the interview and take minimum accessories.
- Be polite throughout the interview and use the name(s) of the interviewer(s) where possible.
- It's impossible to know what types of questions you will be asked but use the ones covered in this chapter to kick start how you would respond.
- Treat a telephone interview in the same manner as a face to face one.
- Be yourself at all times and ensure that body language projects positive signals.
- Take time to answer the question and don't be afraid to ask them for more information if you are not sure.
- Turn any negative questions asked into positive responses!
- Have your own questions to hand together with a copy of the application papers, CV and job specification.
- Close by thanking them for the opportunity to attend, continue to express interest in the position.
- Ask them what is the next stage and when it will be taking place.
- Carry out the post interview analysis.
- Pick yourself up if you are not successful by asking for feedback to identify where improvements could be made.

## 5 Job offer

All your hard work in carrying out your job searching has now paid off as you have received the great news that a job offer is on the table. Hold off the celebrations just for a while longer to make sure that it is in your interest to accept!

Now comes the difficult part in deciding whether or not the job meets all your expectations. You will need to carefully assess the key elements of the role in a structured way rather than just jumping head first as there can be a tendency to do this when excitement and emotions are running high.

As part of the decision process it is important to review your values, your skills and knowledge in carrying out the position, personal development, the overall salary package, additional benefits, working hours and the advantages and disadvantages of taking the offer.

To help you to do this is a rating system similar to the ones we have already used which is a simple but effective way of making you reach your final decision.

The range of questions you need to ask yourself are shown below:

Use the rating scale 1 to 5, where 5 reflects very well, 3 to reflect moderately and 1 to reflect not at all.

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**Month 16**  
I was a construction  
supervisor in  
the North Sea  
advising and  
helping foremen  
solve problems





<b>Personal factors</b>	<b>Rating</b>
Are 75% or more of my top 10 values being met in accepting this position?	
Will I be able to use and build on my existing skill set?	
Are there opportunities for Personal Development?	
Is there career progression available?	
<b>Total</b>	

<b>Review the Salary Package and Benefits</b>	<b>Rating</b>
The basic salary	
Overtime/Commission/Profit Sharing/Bonus	
Health insurance	
Life assurance	
Holiday entitlement	
Sickness benefit	
Pension	
Working hours	
Travelling	
<b>Total</b>	

<b>The Organisation</b>	<b>Rating</b>
Is the company business sound and likely to expand?	
Does the company have a good reputation?	
Do I feel that I can fit into their style of management and culture?	
Do I get that feeling that they value their employees?	
Do I have an initial idea of what is expected of me?	
Am I happy with my potential line manager?	
Do I get that real excitement and buzz when I attended their premises and that the working conditions met my expectations?	
<b>Total</b>	

Once you have completed the exercise and have your individual ratings for all 3 areas, transfer them to the following overall matrix:

Summary	Rating
Personal Factors	
Review the Salary Package and Benefits	
The Organisation	
Total	

Add up your final rating and think about the following statements resulting from your overall score:

If you have scored between 75 and 100 there is every reason to accept the position.

If you have scored between 50 and 75 could you compromise and live with a little give and take?

If you have scored under 50 it indicates that the position is not really meeting your expectations and is not for you!

### Negotiating the job offer

Negotiating does not come easy to the majority of us as it could be felt as being confrontational.

In job searching it is fair to say that initially negotiating salary and benefits will be limited to more senior managerial positions, whereas working hours can be approached in a different way as employers these days are more open to exercising flexibility in this area.

In the majority of cases remuneration will be known at the time you apply for the position, unless the advertisement clearly states that salary will depend on experience.

Remuneration generally speaking is not discussed at a first interview but once you are selected for the position it will crop up at that stage.

As with every aspect of job searching the one common thread which runs throughout the process is preparation, so knowing your expectations with regard to salary and benefit beforehand is vital. You will no doubt have an idea what you are looking for, but you will need to prove the case by carrying out research in order to begin any potential negotiations and find out what the industrial norm is for a similar position within other companies.

You have to be realistic though and be prepared to compromise without selling yourself short.

At this stage, other than your interview(s) so far and what the organisation knows about you, you are in reality unknown on how you are going to perform in this new position.

If you go down the path that the offer is less than you feel is justified even after negotiation then try to establish when a review is likely to take place. It is common practice today that organisations offer employment conditional on a probationary period of say 3 or 6 months. Having performed well and met or even better exceeded expectations this could be a more professional way of asking for a remuneration review at that point.

It is strongly recommended that you keep a full list of your achievements during this period and afterwards too, so that you begin to have concrete evidence on what you have carried out and how well. This will show initiative.

For those of us at the beginning of our careers negotiating will be more difficult. As already briefly discussed you may be able to talk about flexibility regarding hours worked. It is quite usual today that organisations are open to talk about working hours to suit personal circumstances e.g. starting earlier and finishing earlier or maybe working longer days and reducing the working week to say 4 days.

There are of course those professions where there will be no or limited flexibility e.g. the armed forces, police and the teaching profession.

Remember to review the ratings you have completed in the first part of this chapter as a starting point as these cover key areas of your overall decision regarding the job offer, in particular your personal values, where money might not be the most important value you have.

**Essentials of job offer**

By adopting a structured approach in reviewing the job offer and taking a step back you will avoid the saying that your heart has ruled your head in making a decision to accept the job offer.

At the end of the day you need just to make sure that your gut feeling about the job is backed up with some sound and sensible evidence.

Make sure that you exercise compromise when negotiating any aspect of the job offer and give yourself sufficient time during any probationary period to prove who you are and what added value you can bring to both the position on offer and the organisation itself.

All your hard work has now paid off so it only remains to be said good luck for the future.

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## 6 Job secured – what follows next?

Our final chapter will cover a range of hints and tips for you to carefully consider during the probationary period of your new role. You may feel that all the hard work has been completed in securing the job, do not fall into the trap of letting your guard down and assuming it's just plain sailing from now on.

Having created that all important professional image throughout the process and reaching this point, you must now have the sole objective of proving your worth to your new employer and maximising your opportunities, overcoming any settling in issues and establishing yourself in a new environment.

During the early days and weeks ahead of settling in, remember that this whole experience is a two way affair.

Firstly your new employer will be reviewing your performance and seeing how you fit in.

Secondly and equally as important it is a period for you to ensure that the role is meeting your expectations and that you really do get that feeling of being accepted and excited about what you are doing. Ensure that there is no doubt about a bright future ahead and that career progression is available.

Let's now have a look at a number of key areas during this time ahead. Some of these may look trivial but don't underestimate their value and impact.

### **Get there on time**

Don't be late going to work as it gives the wrong impression and arriving on time gives you the opportunity of looking at the day ahead and seeing others arriving. It also continues creating that all important professional image.

### **Company politics**

Avoid these at all costs. You are the new person within the business, others will be testing you out and without even realising you may be forming incorrect opinions and even be drawn in into taking sides.

You will of course have your own views, but keep them to yourself!

### **Record your achievements**

From the day you walk into your new role keep a written record of your achievements, knowledge and experienced gained. This action will prove really useful when sitting down with your line manager and will form part and parcel of discussions throughout the probationary period. It will avoid having to just recall this type of information at the drop of the hat.

In addition to keeping this record make notes too on things that you see and where you feel that improvements could be made for discussion with your line manager too.



**Assume nothing**

Never make assumptions, as they have a nasty habit of biting you back!!

Follow things through at all cost and if you are not sure simply ask to find out the correct answer.

**The Climate**

Keep track on what the atmosphere is like within the business. Does it vary from one area to another, is everyone happy, does everyone co-operate with other etc?

Difficult as it is, don't add to the general climate by saying "At my last place of employment we used to do this a different way". Whilst you may be 100% correct in what you are saying your colleagues will not want to hear and know about your previous role.

So faced with something you feel could be done better and more efficiently, just make a note and suggest a recommendation of change later on once you have established yourself in your new role.

**Building relationships**

Building and then maintaining relationships are vitally important. Depending on the role you have start by building these internally. You will be surprised how this pay off in the long term as by understanding what other departments do and what roles individuals have within them, can and will help you in your own role.

Given the opportunity forming external relationships are crucial as you begin to understand what the expectations of customers are and in addition they may be reliant on others in the supply chain.

There is also an old saying "That it is who you know rather than what you know that can make a real difference".

**Looking at the bigger picture**

This to some extent is a build on the above point. Wherever possible you need to always look at the bigger picture from a number of angles. These may range from:

- Where do you and your department fit in to the company's strategy?
- Where should the key relationships be made?
- What direction is the company taking?
- How could changes of policies and procedures bring about improvements, maximise profits and bring added value?
- Who are the key personnel decision makers?

The majority of people in a new role will have periods of extreme motivation during the early days and can and will experience days of doubt and lack of confidence especially the first time when something goes wrong or an error of judgement is made.

Remember that we are all human and these mistakes will be made. The important lesson is learning from these and not falling into that particular trap again.

### **Essentials of job secured – what follows next?**

A reminder:

- Maintain good time keeping.
- Build and maintain both internal and external relationships.
- Avoid company politics.
- Look at the bigger picture.
- Keep record of achievements.
- Assume nothing.
- Continue to create that all in all professional impression.
- Learn from any mistakes made.
- Encourage and act on feedback.

So to end this chapter and the book it only remains to be said that provided you have tackled the whole process in a structured and professional way, there is no reason why you should now not enjoy all the benefits from your new role.

The Author concludes by wishing you all the very best and good luck in whatever the future holds for you.