Have You Taught Your College Grads How to Get a Job?
by Jack Falvey
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Getting children into and through college is many parents' major life goal. But before you settle back into your empty nest to heal your financial wounds, you have one last task. You have to teach your college juniors and seniors how to get a job.

Colleges are, by design, out of touch with the real world. Unfortunately, that includes almost all of their career centers as well. Students are told to write resumes of their accomplishments when they haven't accomplished anything yet. And that's only the beginning of the misinformation.

Here are several principles you must teach your college graduates. They will never learn them on campus:

- **Success has always been a game of who you know**.

Graduates must begin with a list of friends (last year's seniors who are now working, for example), relatives, their friends, anyone off campus and in the real world. They must visit each contact in person to see what the world of work is really like. They should conclude each visit by asking, "If you were me, whom else would you talk with?" Building a contact chain is time consuming, but it's the only way to go.

- **Don't look for a job; look for information first.**

Professional sales representatives know they must spend 80% to 90% of their time prospecting and qualifying. They only sell 10% of the time, and only after doing the hard work of finding out who can buy. That information isn't found in a library or an annual report. Graduates have to get face-to-face meetings in order to gather the data they need to find potential opportunities. They also will learn to make a strong first impression by asking good questions, i.e., "can you tell me how you arrived here?" "What makes this organization unique?" Where is this industry going?" "Where is this company going in the next year?" (and similar but specific questions tailored to the individual situation). These questions must be prepared in advance, in writing, and the general outline for the questions can be re-used.

- **Do NOT lead with a resume.**

Graduates don't need a resume; they need stationery (monarch or note size, so they won't be tempted to write too much). A letter and a phone call are all that it takes to get off campus meetings. A follow-up thank you note (mentioning something learned as a result of the meeting) and a copy of the note back to the person who gave the name is the accepted practice. Graduates can learn to write a resume when they are thirty-something and have a career to summarize (they may not even have to do it then because these techniques work at any and all stages of life!).

- **Real practice makes perfect.**

Videotape interviews only indicate acting talent. You have to meet real people and ask your customized list of 20 questions. Begin with alumni. They are by far the easiest to get meetings with. As a graduate you have something in common with them. Don't forget your roommate's father, a professor's brother, anyone who is off

campus and in the real world. In doing career research, you want to stay open to ideas. No need to focus on specific career paths. You may have some ideas, but let people fill in the details with their stories and their advice.

- **Stay away from job interviews.**

You don't want to become an applicant. It's possible to be hired by a company without ever being an applicant. You don't want to get in the pile to be evaluated and screened by the personnel department or some campus recruiter. (Another good reason for not leading with a resume: it ends up in a pile to be screened.) You want to meet key professionals. You want to listen to them. You want them to like you (which they will if you ask them questions they can answer). You want them to be impressed by your research and your detailed follow-up. (Your thank-you note has to be in the mail within 24 hours of every meeting.) When they ask about your plans after graduation and invite you to come back and see them, you will know you are home free.

- **The most powerful phrase in the language is "Thank you!"**

It is amazing how few people take the time to say thank-you in writing. Thank them for their insight (citing specific examples of what they said), their advice and for providing the names of other people you should see (using them as a referral). You can even add an additional hand-written "thanks" on the copies of the follow-up letters and thank you notes you send to the people they recommended. Instead of trying to tell people how good you are (a major interview pitfall), you will be demonstrating in practice your attention to detail and your communication skills.

- **You can't expect to find out what you want to be unless you see what is out there.**

College is ideally used to gain an education, not a vocation. That is why a liberal arts major is one of the best. Summer internships are vital for both making contacts and especially for seeing the actual inside workings of organizations. It's always different from even the most educated guess. You must walk the ground. There is no other way.

- **Careers are mosaics, not blueprints.**

Beware of extended training programs. Go for something that gets you involved in real work. You will be amazed how fast you can become part of the action if a training program doesn't get in the way.

- **Look for a first boss, not a first job.**

Whom you work for and with is the single most important factor in a first job. Don't accept a position for assignment to someone, somewhere at a later date. Personal chemistry is critical for initial success.

The "easy life" of college is not the best preparation for the hard facts of the real world. But break this hard lesson to them slowly. And remember: For all the dismal news about this being the worst year ever for job-seeking graduates, there are more than enough opportunities around (1.5million graduates/15 million companies). Be sure your graduate knows how best to make his move.

Mr. Falvey is the author of "After College: The Business of Getting Jobs" (Williamson Publishing)