



No experience? No problem! First-time job hunters rely on coursework, activities and soft skills to land the job.

Congratulations! You have the shiny new diploma and are ready to embark on your first job. Whether you spent your free time on the playing field, volunteering at a local shelter or racking up extra money making lattes, with a little finesse you can get your foot in the door, even if you don't have the real-world experiences.

"The best way to get your foot in the door is to know someone who can refer you," said Tara Petty, senior vice president,

talent management, Concentra. Share your job search with as many people as possible, because that will open up opportunities you might not otherwise know about. According to the Millennial Branding and Experience Inc. study, a survey of hiring managers' attitudes toward Generation Y job seekers, 44% of employers rely on employee referrals when filling positions.¹

But once in the door, it's up to you to land the job and a top-notch résumé is the key that opens that first door all the way. One of the biggest mistakes in students' résumés is they are too generic and not tailored to a specific job. As Alan Wong, PhD, STEM advisor at the University California Santa Cruz (UCSC) Career Center puts it, "They tend to toss everything in it."

Lisa Raap, director of career services at Coyne College in Chicago agreed. She frequently sees résumés that don't use key buzzwords for the position. Beyond the content, Raap comes across résumés that are poorly formatted with a lack of consistency, failure to use bullet points, and spelling and grammatical errors, all of which create a poor impression.

A TAILOR-MADE RÉSUMÉ

From the other side of the door, hiring managers notice those résumé snafus too. Petty explains that the applicant tracking system conducts a keyword match to determine which résumés a recruiter sees. "Tailor the résumé to match the job description," she advised. "One major pitfall is people use one résumé for everything."

Just like with school, doing your homework will help you get ahead.

Research companies before applying for a job. "What about them makes you qualified for that role?" Petty asked. Raap suggests speaking to professionals in your field of interest to get an idea of common vocabulary and the qualities necessary for success. "It takes a lot of prep work to know what a job is really about," Wong said. "It's hard to decipher from just the job posting."

Beyond the right vocabulary, what should be included in the résumé? "Even if they don't have work experience, classwork can be relevant," noted Wong, adding that the classes you excelled in and have some connection to your chosen profession are especially important. The Millennial Branding study showed 69% viewed relevant coursework as important when reviewing applications.¹ Highlighting teamwork on class projects is a good way to introduce that important, transferable skill. "We work on this constantly," Raap noted. "It's important to make sure the transferable skills are on their résumé. We recommend a summary of skills at

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the beginning to highlight key strengths and experiences.”

College students do not spend the entire day in class. But even time spent away from the classroom is valuable in the job hunt. “A lot of extracurricular activities highlight skill sets like leadership skills, attention to detail and event planning,” Wong explained, and should also be included on the résumé. Half of employers surveyed in the Millennial Branding study give a lot of weight to campus leadership positions.¹ Wong shared the example of a UCSC student with no work experience who sought a web internship. The career center suggested he look for university web pages with broken links and volunteer to fix them. He created his own first work experience and beefed up his résumé. There is value behind that approach. According to management consultant Dan Schwabel who conducted a survey of employers’ attitudes toward millennial job candidates, one-third of employers prefer new graduates with some type of entrepreneurial experience.²

VISIT THE CAREER CENTER

If your résumé unlocks the first door, then an in-person interview can unlock the second. “We try to help students understand the employer point of view,” said Wong of the work at the career center. A college’s career department should be among the first stops on the journey to the job. “It’s important for students to engage early,” he explained. At UCSC, they promote career services to freshmen and sophomores. Among the skills students can learn are networking and interviewing techniques. Career

centers also host in-class workshops, publish educational handouts and continually offer students feedback for improvement. Advisors at Coyne College, as at many other institutions, conduct mock interviews and help students practice their elevator pitch, a way to focus on their strengths and passions and communicate them to the interviewer. Since 42% of employers have been turned off by how unprepared students have been in interviews, practice is critical.¹

“It’s about having a personal mission statement — who I am, what I know about the company and how I can help them,” Petty said.

The interview process is a matching process. “Students think they are at the mercy of the interviewer and that makes them sound less natural,” Wong explained. It’s a two-way street. Talking with a hiring manager can give candidates the chance to sell themselves and spin seemingly unrelated experiences into positives for the job. “You can change industries with a common theme of your talent moving through those industries,” Petty acknowledged. Don’t neglect to mention your part-time jobs. Working in retail or at a restaurant provides useful skills like prioritization, dependability and customer service.

TIPPING POINT

Although many positions require minimum education and hiring managers won’t talk to someone without, getting the job depends on more than just your degree. Soft skills can be the tipping point between yourself and another equally qualified candidate. Clinical skills can be learned on the job, but professionalism cannot.

“You only have the opportunity to make the first impression one time,” Petty observed. Wearing a suit, having good eye contact and a firm handshake are necessary preliminary steps to interview success. The right attitude is paramount for a good interview. Findings of the Millennial Branding study indicated 98% of employers want strong communication skills, 97% want a positive attitude and 92% want teamwork.¹ Those are all skills that can carry over from non-related experiences.

Concentra is patient-focused and as Petty noted, “We can’t train you to be a considerate person.” Hiring managers look for candidates who already go that extra mile. Are they smiling? How do they treat the receptionist? These little social cues go a long way in determining who gets hired. The Millennial Branding study observed 26% of hiring managers have been turned off by an interviewee’s poor attitude.¹ Petty suggests talking to current employees and browsing through a company’s website and social media pages to get an idea of the company’s voice and the type of people it employs. When it comes down to two candidates with similar backgrounds, the one who’s the better cultural fit will get the offer.

Using your transferrable soft skills, carefully curated résumé and confident interviewing technique, you can open door number three, which houses the job offer.

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