

# 5 Ways to Land that Post-College Job (Even if You Graduated Years Ago)

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For college seniors and grad school students, graduation is no longer something on the distant horizon. In the next several weeks, many will be entering a tough job market, although the good news is it's starting to look up. According to a 2012 survey by the [National Association of Colleges and Employers \(NACE\)](#), participating employers reported that they plan to hire 10.2 percent more new college graduates from the college Class of 2012 than they did from the Class of 2011.

However, with many experienced workers looking for jobs and companies still watching their budgets, it can still be quite challenging to land that first post-graduate position. In *BE YOUR OWN BEST PUBLICIST: How to Use PR Techniques to Get Noticed, Hired, and Rewarded at Work* (Career Press; Jan. 2011), the career guide I co-wrote with fellow Forbes blogger Meryl Weinsaft Cooper, we discuss why it's essential for job candidates to stand out from the competition and market themselves as a valuable and unique brand. This is especially important for recent grads because many will be interviewing for entry-level jobs along with fellow graduates who have the same basic qualifications.

So what can graduates do to improve their employability in 2012? Here are a few pointers from our book:

\* **Know Your Key Messages:** One of the toughest requests to answer is "Tell me about yourself." Before going into an interview, write down the adjectives that best describe you, what makes you unique, some of your key accomplishments and what you can bring to the table. Make them succinct and snappy and rehearse them so you can be sure to weave them into the conversation in a confident way. Think about what you'd say if you got stuck in an elevator with your dream employer — what would you say about yourself during the short ride that would impress him or her and showcase what makes you a great candidate? Another trick: Ask others (parents, friends, former employers, teachers) what they think is great about you and that will help you see how you're perceived by others.

\* **Always Have a Plan (and a Backup Plan):** You may not get your dream job on the first — or fiftieth — try. Think about what you'd like to get out of your first job and, if you can't land the #1 position you desire after months of trying, have a contingency plan. Whether it's to explore other companies, industries or take some time off to freelance, you always want to be ready with another route to success. Starbucks, for example, offer great benefits to employees and, what's more, you'll get to interact with lots of customers every day, some of whom may end up helping you land your next job. In fact, at a recent conference where I spoke, the COO of a major apparel company told a story about how she ended up hiring the barista who made her latte every morning because they had struck up a relationship and she was impressed with the young woman's attitude and work ethic. You never know — every interaction is an opportunity!

\* **It's All About Who You Know and Who Knows You:** In PR, our network is our net worth and the same goes for your job search. Go out of your way to develop relationships everywhere you go: For example, leverage your alumni association, join professional organizations and attend events, become active on [LinkedIn](#) and follow industry folks on [Twitter](#). Lastly, do as many informational interviews as you can — they're a great, non-threatening way to meet people, get good information on companies and fields, and can potentially result in a real job opportunity.

\* **Be a Know-it-All (In a Good Way):** A PR professional would never meet with a reporter without reading up on his or her previous stories, interests and angles. Likewise, when interviewing, it's important to gather as much information as you can about a situation or company prior to sitting down at the table. In this day and age, when all the information you need is a keystroke away, there's no reason not to do your research before walking into an interview. All that detail will inform your conversation and allow you to ask smart questions — two things that will help you stand out from other candidates.

\* **Don't Wear a Ballgown to a Ball Game:** Looks aren't everything, but they can sure help, especially in the job search. There's no doubt that one's clothing can, at a minimum, be a distraction and, at a maximum, a barrier to entry. Consider both the occasion and the audience when selecting what to wear. Do your research, ask around and find out what the culture and expectations are for the open position. When in doubt, err on the side of professional and classic style. Then, add your twist: a signature element, be it cool glasses, a nice tie or a statement necklace that could help you make a positive impact.

As new grads seek full-time employment, they must also remember to stay positive, be flexible and willing to do whatever the job requires. You may not get your dream job right out of the gate but if you're able to have a healthy mix of persistence and patience, you will ultimately land a position that will kickstart your career.