



Chapter 1

Hitting the Pavement

There's good news and bad news about job hunting. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projections forecast a favorable job market for the major industries over the next several years. BLS research suggests growth in most occupations for the period of 2004-2014. Some occupations such as computer systems analysts, registered nurses, physical therapists, and pharmacists are predicted to experience growth by as much as 25 percent. The overall economy has improved over the last few years. Large U.S. corporations are hiring more; employment trends among mid and small sized employers also appear steady. For some industries, hiring has increased as much as 25 percent over the last 18 to 24 months.

For the latest economic recovery, research in early 2005 found that it will take a graduate, searching eight hours a day, 4 months to find a job. Subsequent data, published in mid 2006, suggest a strong improvement with the median search taking 2.7 months.

However, the bad news is that the economy is showing signs of slowing. Already, as many as a fourth to a third of college graduates will graduate without a job waiting for them. Employment data indicate better job prospects but a highly selective market. According to some statistics, as many as ten percent or more of college seniors will still be looking for work six months after graduation.

The key is to be flexible. You may need to relocate further than expected for your ideal job. Likewise, you may need to take a stepping stone job outside your ideal career path to get started. Alternatively, you may need to interview with a variety of employers, even those whose industry is different from your ideal job. For instance, you may end up taking, as a first job, an electrical engineering job with a power company but your goal is to be with a manufacturing corporation.

Ideally, you could anticipate their needs and then market yourself as meeting those needs. Companies surveyed in 2004 by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) said they are most interested in good communication skills. The NACE survey also identified honesty, interpersonal skills, initiative, a good work ethic, and team skills (in that order) as important characteristics.

I've had the opportunity to read several students' resumes. I've been greatly disappointed in the terse nature students often have in describing jobs. Pull from job experiences all available skills and experiences and strategically describe them on resumes. That includes fast food jobs which have a surprising level of value. For example, here's the job description a student used for her waitress job at an assisted living facility. She wrote in bulleted format: "served and bussed tables; experience in working with and serving elderly people."

Here's how she could have described the job: "served food to residents in a timely manner with attention to details of dietary restrictions of residents, evaluated customer service needs and complaints of residents, handling minor complaints myself and independent of supervision; bussed tables; on an ad hoc basis trained new employees, developed excellent communication skills to meet needs of the hard of hearing and infirmed, earned employee of the month recognition two times." That's the same job, but the second job description clearly makes the job and the candidate far more interesting. Notice the relationship to the NACE list of desired traits.

Chapter 4

Office Politics

At the dawn of the new millennium, a research group surveyed households across the country and asked what respondents thought were the issues that would be facing the nation in the new millennium. It was an open-ended question. The responses took on several themes. One of which was dealing with racial issues. A quick glance at the headlines and government statistics demonstrates that problems still exist.

Very few people are fortunate enough to go through their career without hearing a sexist or racial comment. An unfortunate few have to deal with even more unpleasant situations of a racial or sexual nature. Though rarer, the workplace is still a virile environment for unwanted romantic passes and sexual harassment.

Discrimination has fertile ground in the U.S. Southern Poverty Law Center data show that the U.S. is home to at least 602 hate groups. Neo-Nazis top the list of hatemongers; there are 180 such groups in the U.S. These individuals and others like them have jobs and their poor attitudes and beliefs carry over into the workplace.

Most civil rights attorneys will tell you not to quit. That seems a bit hard to believe but the legal principle is that the courts can't help to "make you whole" after you win the case if you voluntarily left. However, if the situation is so unbearable, there is a legal precedent for relief. The concept is that the conditions were so bad that no reasonable person would stay.

In the worst case scenarios, ultimately you'll have a decision to make. If you're dealing with an unpleasant situation at work, of course you can file a complaint but you also need to think long-term of what's best for you. If it's a real problem and not a misunderstanding, you need to plan an exit strategy.

My philosophy is that every worker is a valuable asset; by staying in a discriminatory situation, you are allowing the aggressor to use your talents and assets to benefit. If you do leave, as consultant Cheryl Green put it in a magazine interview, "don't take the problem with you." Try to keep an open mind about what you'll face in a new job. In worst situations, you should consider counseling.

I know one person who left a sexual harassment situation at one job but felt her biggest regret was not seeking counseling afterwards. She said it took years to get back to normal.

Chapter 6

Getting Ahead

The office of the new millennium differs sharply from that of a decade ago. There's a new set of what's in and what's out. Cooperation and team skills are in. Scapegoating and blame games are out, despite what you may see on TV. Whereas at one time, the old belief was to look for someone to blame for a problem; the attitude now is to find solutions, according to Rochelle Teising and Catherine Joseph's Scenarios for Success: Directing Your Own Career. Teising and Joseph advocate continued education, self-determination about one's future, and seeking security in one's own skills.

It's not about being so gung-ho for your employer or workplace that you forget your own interests. Getting the job done and self-development go hand in hand. Self-development includes finding solutions to all those uneasy questions of life.

"What if I lose my job today?" is what you should always be thinking, according to job coach Andrea Kay in a *Money* magazine interview. Can your abilities be transferred? Periodically update your marketing tools (cover letters, resumes, portfolio) even if you're not looking. You should constantly be in a self-development and self-marketing mode. Unfortunately, there is no plateau in one's career when a person can completely relax about his/her career.

Anne Kates Smith, writing for *U.S. News and World Report*, suggested five strategies for dealing with the new millennium's workplace. Among them, she advocated forming alliances (be loyal to colleagues and the community not companies). Smith also suggested workers increase "soft" skills. Things like team-building skills and customer service would count here.

Years ago, I received advice which rings eternal. Prudential College Future Leaders Conference provided nine steps to being successful within an organization. As your parents have probably also told you, the conference urged students to be themselves and to work hard. As you leave college, you leave many of the demands to conformity but may be on your way to new demands for conformity. Adapting to a new environment is essential and so is having an open mind to learning, growing and changing. The trouble starts when people cease to be true to their nature. As author Judith Sills, Ph.D. noted there's a difference between moving up and sucking up. The latter often ultimately results in self-destructive behavior.

The Prudential point about working hard is one not to miss, either. Working hard is not just an adage. The conference suggested hard work improves the perception others have of you *and* your self-perception. Hard work forces you not to hide behind "I wish I had" as former Olympian Debi Thomas reinforced to herself. Remember in work life and, sometimes, in social life, there are no do-overs. Working hard allows you to build a product over which you can be proud and a product you can use as a stepping stone to building a professional reputation.

Chapter 9

Image and Style

Style Tips for Different Body Sizes

Image research has found large and small people deal with extra image issues. Fortunately, image consultants have a fair amount of advice to help counter negative stereotypes of certain body sizes.

For large people, experts urge solid, dark colors, particularly for pants or skirts. Pants that are tapered can emphasize or exaggerate the lower proportions. Instead, straight leg pants including pants with cuffs are recommended by image professionals.

Likewise, for smaller people, experts suggest they concentrate on darker colors and tailored suits. For petite women, white or pastel colored suits or dresses can project a girlish image. Don't try shoes with stiletto heels to add height. For one thing, it's a safety hazard and can have long-term detriment effects on your podiatric health. For another, stiletto heels are not considered professional business attire.

Filipino President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is petite, standing just over four foot tall. Her height is a distant second to the strong image she projects with the right clothes. She keeps others focused on her position rather than her height by wearing tailored clothes and solid colors.

Her choice of colors also helps to reinforce her powerful status. Although she periodically does wear pastel colors, Macapagal-Arroyo usually wears darker colors including shades of red. Red attracts attention and the shades she wears project image of power. The one fashion mistake to her credit was to wear a formal dress with huge shoulder pads to a presidential reception for George W. Bush. Don't try unnatural shoulder pads or hats to add height. Invariably, all people remember are the unnecessary accessories, rather than focusing on the person.

Hair

In my survey, few respondents had complaints about hair. Your hair certainly is part of your style and can have major image impacts. I circulated an advance copy of this book to deans of selected U.S. business schools. One dean, Dr. Sid Howard Credle of Hampton University, urged me to add a section on hair. He's an expert on image and labor-management disputes associated with grooming.

I'll admit hairstyles have had unexpected impacts to careers. The outgoing Japanese Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi, is probably the only person on the planet who has enjoyed immense political popularity and success because of his unorthodox hairstyle.

For the rest of us, experts urge uncomplicated hairstyles. That means staying away from or minimizing on highlights and having hairstyles that are easy and quick to manage. Research has shown that hair pulled away from the face projects a polished image.

Throughout Dorm Rooms to Boardrooms, the final edition adds new comments from survey respondents, new research, and updated data. Formatting and typographical errors have been corrected.