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Railroad Retirement Board
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INTRODUCTION

Finding a job is never easy. But by conducting an organized and thorough search, you can greatly increase your chances of success. The fact is that job openings occur every day, and being at the right place at the right time often makes the difference. This booklet provides tips on how to plan and conduct a successful job search to get the job you want.



GETTING STARTED

List Your Skills

Your first step should be to make a list of your skills, talents and experience. This list should include not only education, training and job experience, but also any hobbies, sports or charitable activities you engage in that display talent or initiative. For example, you may never have held a supervisory position, but a background in coaching or a leadership role in a civic or charitable group will give evidence of leadership that an employer may find attractive.

Match Your Skills to Jobs

You should then match your skills and experience to jobs that require the talents you have. Don't limit yourself to jobs you have previously held or for which your education is suited. Your skills may be well suited to a job you have never thought about.

Your local library and State Employment Service have publications that will help you decide what jobs best match your skills and experience. You may also arrange for an interview with a career counselor who can help you decide what kind of work is best suited to your abilities.

GETTING THE WORD OUT

Because many job vacancies are not advertised, word-of-mouth contact is one of the most effective methods of finding a job. Take advantage of school, civic, charitable and sports activities in your community to tell your friends and family you are looking for a job. Ask if their employers are hiring, or if they know of hiring by other employers. If you are knocking on the employer's door even before an opening is publicized, you have a good chance of being at the right place at the right time.

UPGRADING YOUR SKILLS

As part of your job search, you may wish to upgrade or enhance skills you already have. For example, you may have worked in a skilled position for many years, but never acquired a license or certificate that some employers require. By contacting the appropriate state agency, you can learn what steps need to be taken to acquire a license or certificate. Often, your local community college or vocational school can provide free or low-cost training that will enable you to obtain the license or certificate you need.

JOB SOURCES

While you should not limit your search to openings that have been publicized, the job sources listed below are a good place to start:

Railroad Retirement Board – The Railroad Retirement Board maintains a listing of job vacancies furnished by railroad employers. Contact your nearest RRB office for more information or check the jobs list at www.rrb.gov. The RRB list also has links to jobs on railroad web sites.

Union Hall – If you have the appropriate license or certificate, union officials can provide information on where to apply for work.

State Employment Service – The State Employment Service can help direct your job search and match you with suitable job vacancies. The Department of Labor web site at www.workforcesecurity.doleta.gov/map.asp has links to the unemployment insurance web sites of all 50 states.

Newspaper Advertisements – The “Help Wanted” section will give you information about companies that are hiring.

Government Personnel Offices – You can obtain information concerning openings for all levels of government (Fed-

eral, state, county, municipal, etc.) by contacting the appropriate personnel office. You may have to take a civil service test.

Job Fairs – Business and local governments will often hold job fairs as a means of getting employers and potential employees together.

Private Employment Services –

Private employment agencies match employers with potential employees. Some charge the employer a fee for their services, and others charge the employee if he or she is hired.

Vocational School, Community College or University

Placement Offices – The placement services of schools and colleges may be available if you are or have been enrolled as a student.

In addition to using the sources listed above, check the **“Yellow Pages,”** library and **chamber of commerce** for information about businesses and other employers to which you might apply for work.

YOUR RESUME

What Is a Resume?

Your resume is a list of your job experience, skills and accomplishments. It is your formal introduction to a potential employer. It is your opportunity to emphasize your skills, education and talents and to tell the employer how you can help the company.

When Is a Resume Necessary?

A resume is generally necessary when applying for jobs in sales, supervisory positions, office and clerical jobs, and other so-called “white-collar” positions. One is generally not required when applying for jobs in skilled or semi-skilled crafts, construction work, laborer jobs and other so-called

“blue-collar” positions. In any case, preparing a resume is good exercise for focusing on your skills, talents and experience, even if one is not required.

How Do I Prepare a Resume?

Your local library or State Employment Service can provide information on how to prepare a clear and concise resume.

Also, resume services can assist you in preparing your resume for a fee.

LETTERS OF APPLICATION

If the type of job you want requires a resume, you should also prepare a “letter of application.” A letter of application is a cover letter sent to a prospective employer or hiring official with your resume, and gives you an opportunity to introduce yourself to the employer and to request a job interview. Refer to your local library for information on preparing a letter of application.

THE INTERVIEW

The interview is usually the most important part of the hiring process. This brief conversation between you and the employer can determine whether you get the job. Successful interviewing is a skill that requires planning and practice, and is well worth the time and effort to learn.

Before the Interview

A little research will give you an advantage. Learn as much as you can about the company, its operations, and its products. If you have family or friends who work at the company, talk to them to get an idea of what to expect. Also, try to learn as much as possible about the position you are applying for, especially if it’s something new for you. Knowledge of the company and the position will set you apart from less-informed applicants.

Before you leave for the interview, do a mental check to make sure you have everything you need. Since you may be asked to fill out an application, prepare by bringing a listing of former jobs and supervisors, references, and school transcripts, as well as your social security card, driver's license, military records, union card or professional license, as appropriate.

At the Interview

Dress Properly – You should be clean, well groomed and conservatively dressed. Don't overdress or appear too casual (i.e., no jeans). Your appearance will affect your interviewer's opinion of your suitability.

Be Punctual – Arrive a little early so you have time to find the proper office and collect your thoughts. You should attend the interview alone and should not bring any packages or other personal items, except possibly a briefcase.

Speak Clearly – During the interview, speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard. Sit straight and avoid nervous habits like foot-tapping or fidgeting. Do not smoke or chew gum.

Be Positive – Answer questions in a clear and positive manner that shows you have an interest in the position and the qualifications to successfully perform it. Listen carefully to the interviewer and allow him or her to lead the conversation, but don't be afraid to bring up a point you believe is important to your effort to obtain the position. If you are not immediately sure of how you want to respond to a question, take a few moments to formulate your reply, rather than blurting out your first thought. Look directly at the interviewer to avoid appearing nervous or evasive, and if you don't know or aren't sure of an answer, say so, rather than trying to bluff your way through.

Expect Certain Questions – You will likely be asked questions concerning prior jobs and/or experience. It's best not to

make negative comments about former employers, even if you were fired or left on less than amicable terms. Rather than complaining and appearing petty, simply explain that there were problems and things didn't work out. Many employees' complaints are justified.

Also, many interviewers will ask general and somewhat vague questions to allow you to talk about yourself.

Examples Include:

- ▶ What are your outside interests?
- ▶ What can you contribute that other applicants cannot?
- ▶ What do you hope to be doing in five years?
- ▶ What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- ▶ Why should I hire you?

Questions like these allow you to relate your strengths and experiences to the position you are seeking. They also can give you the opportunity to present qualities not directly related to the position, but which display diversity, initiative and a well-rounded character.

After the Interview

As you leave, you should be mentally evaluating your performance, in order to learn from the experience:

- ▶ Was I too tense? Too relaxed?
- ▶ Were my answers too general? Too specific?
- ▶ Did I present my qualifications well?
- ▶ Did I stress qualities and experiences that will make me stand out?

Think of things you can improve so that your next interview will be better. Practice your interviewing with a friend or family member, so that you develop confidence and a positive attitude toward your ability to project a good image.

You may want to mail a brief thank-you note to the interviewer for taking the time to talk to you. This will emphasize your interest in the position and cause you to stand out in the interviewer's mind.

If you haven't heard anything within a reasonable period, contact the employer. If the position has been filled, let the employer know you are still interested in future openings. Ask what you could do to improve your chances next time.

KEEPING TRACK

Set up a file for recording your efforts to find work and your plan for continuing your job search. This will enable you to follow up on your contacts with employers after you have written to them or been interviewed and will help you organize and plan your efforts.

In addition, if you are claiming unemployment benefits under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act and do not have good prospects for returning to your railroad job, you are required to make appropriate work-seeking efforts. Your records will assist you in documenting your work-seeking efforts when you are interviewed by a representative of the Railroad Retirement Board.

The following Job Search Plan summarizes the advice in this booklet and is a handy guide for organizing your work-seeking efforts.

JOB SEARCH PLAN

Complete items 1-3 on this checklist before starting your job search.

Complete items 4-5 every day of your job search.

Complete items 6-9 when you have interviews.

1. Identify Occupations

- ▶ Make a background and experience list.
- ▶ Review information on jobs.
- ▶ Identify jobs that use your talents.

2. Identify Employers

- ▶ Ask relatives and friends to help you look for job openings.
- ▶ Go to your Railroad Retirement Board and State Employment Service offices for assistance.
- ▶ Contact employers to get company and job information.
- ▶ Utilize other sources to get job leads.
- ▶ Obtain job announcements and descriptions.

3. Prepare Materials

- ▶ Write resumes (if needed). Use job announcements to “fit” your skills with job requirements.
- ▶ Write cover letters or letters of application.
- ▶ Assemble a job search kit: pens, writing tablet, maps, public transportation guides, clean copies of resumes and application, background and experience list, social security card, and picture ID.

4. Plan Your Time

- ▶ Wake up early to start looking for work.
- ▶ Make a “to do” list of everything you’ll do to look for a job.
- ▶ Work hard all day to find a job.
- ▶ Reward yourself (do a hobby or sport, visit friends, etc.)!

5. Contact Employers

- ▶ Call employers directly (even if they’re not advertising openings). Talk to the person who would supervise you if you were hired.
- ▶ Go to companies to fill out applications.
- ▶ Contact your friends and relatives to see if they know about any openings.
- ▶ Update your written record of your contacts with employers.

6. Prepare for the Interview

- ▶ Learn about the company you’re interviewing with.
- ▶ Review job announcement to determine how your skills will help you do the job.
- ▶ Assemble resume, application form, etc. (make sure every thing is neat).
- ▶ Arrange for babysitter, transportation, etc.
- ▶ Give yourself plenty of time.

7. Go to the Interview

- ▶ Dress right for the interview.
- ▶ Go alone.
- ▶ Be clear, concise, and positive.
- ▶ Thank the interviewer.

8. Evaluate the Interview

- ▶ Send a handwritten thank-you note to the interviewer within 24 hours of the interview.
- ▶ Think about how you could improve the interview.

9. Take Tests

- ▶ Find out about the test(s) you're taking.
- ▶ Brush up on job skills.
- ▶ Relax and be confident.

10. Accept the Job

- ▶ Understand job duties and expectations, work hours, salary, benefits, etc.
- ▶ Be flexible when discussing salary (but don't sell yourself short).

Congratulations!