



FINANCE

Finding and Keeping Your First Job no. 9.154

by J. Carroll and K. Wolfe¹

Quick Facts...

Look for a job that fits your needs, goals, education and experiences.

Applications, cover letters and resumes must be flawless.

Build your skills and competencies with job experiences that prepare you for your chosen career.

“How can I find a job—my first job or my best job?” This is the question being asked by young people who want to know how to get into the paid workforce. Places to start looking for a job include Internet web sites, public or school libraries, newspaper classified ads, job listings on a bulletin board, and referrals from family or friends. However, finding the job listing is only the beginning. Getting and keeping a job involves three aspects: preparation, presentation, and performance.

Starting a Job Search

Preparation

- Identify your own needs, wants, goals, and ambitions. A part time job during school or a summer job can be different from your first job after you have received the education or training you need. Knowing your criteria makes it easier to know which job is right.
- Research the job market and the companies and employers that interest you. Look broadly and explore options.
- Use resources on line, as well as printed materials and information you gather by talking with people who are employed in an area in which you are interested. This takes time and pays off as you save time by pursuing jobs that actually exist and closely fit your needs and plans.
- Shadow someone already working in a job that interests you, if possible. Conduct informational interviews to hear first-hand stories about the work.
- Explore what education or training you need for career and economic success. Try to match your job with your educational plans and obligations.

Presentation

Once you find a job possibility for which you qualify, begin the application process.

- Create an effective cover letter. It “dresses” your resume and lets you mention qualities and attributes not highlighted in the resume. Make it concise and action-oriented.
- Package your resume, application, and references to reflect your professionalism. There can be no errors of any kind: grammar, spelling, typing. Use good quality paper and be sure the materials are very, very neat. See fact sheet 9.150, *Putting 4-H Experience on Your Resume* for more information on preparing a resume.
- Participate in an interview. Remember it is a conversation, and you will want to ask questions, too. Keep a positive attitude and be

Reference: *What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for American 2000*. June, 1991. Department of Labor, Washington, DC. Available from the national Technical Information Service, Springfield, VA 22161.

The days of being employed by one organization or company until retirement are over.

Job satisfaction increases financial security and quality of life.

The "hidden job market" includes approximately 80% of available positions, which are never advertised. Networking is the single most effective method of gathering career related information, developing contacts within a community or an industry, and uncovering the "hidden job market."

honest. See fact sheet 9.151, *Tips for a Successful Interview* for more information on interviewing.

- Send a thank you letter and follow up after your interview. Regardless of how the interview went, you must send a note that thanks the interviewer for his/her time and restates your interest in the position. You can ask for additional information, or answer a question more completely than you did in the interview.
- Phone for feedback. Ask where they are in the selection process, and for feedback on your interview. Add qualifications you may not have emphasized already, or reemphasize your skills.

Performance

- Demonstrate the characteristics of good employees: competence, intelligence, honesty, and likeability. Employers want value for their money so listen to and follow directions from your supervisor and do your job to the best of your ability.
- Develop your SCANS (see page 3) competencies to be ready for the next opportunity. Employers have identified the necessary skills for today's workplace. Be aware of the skills you have and work on acquiring additional skills.
- Commit to lifelong learning.
- Schedule time to learn and grow. Just as you plan for a workout, a lunch with friends, or a vacation, plan also for continuing education and professional development.

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SCANS

A survey was conducted of employers nationwide which identified key competencies and foundation skills sought in employees. Employers need workers who are creative and responsible problem solvers and have skills and attitudes on which to build. Five competencies and three foundation skills were identified as critical for employment through the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). See if you can recognize some competencies and skills in yourself. Look for opportunities to practice others.

WORKFORCE COMPETENCIES		
Skill	Description	My opportunities to practice
<i>Utilizing Resources</i>	Allocate time, money, materials, space and staff.	
<i>Working With Others</i>	Participate in teams; teach others; serve customers; lead; negotiate; and work well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds.	
<i>Using Information</i>	Acquire and evaluate data; organize and maintain files; interpret and communicate; and use computers to process information.	
<i>Understanding Systems</i>	Understand social, organizational and technological systems; monitor and correct performance; design or improve systems to improve performance.	
<i>Working with Technology</i>	Select equipment and tools; apply technology to specific tasks; maintain and troubleshoot equipment.	
<i>Basic Skills</i>	Reading, writing, arithmetic, science, math, speaking and listening.	