



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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10 Secrets to Landing Your Dream Job (Part 2)

by John West Hadley

Editor's Note: Catch up on Part 1 of "10 Secrets to Landing Your Dream Job" in the January 2008 issue of The Stepping Stone, and watch for Part 3 in the July 2008 issue.

3. Know Your Value

Unless you've done an in-depth analysis of what you bring to the table, how can you hope to convince others of that value? Make a list of your key accomplishments from throughout your career. Then add to the list key personal accomplishments, whether in the classroom, on the playing field or in community service. For each, think about what you had to do to make it happen, and what made that difficult:

- What roadblocks did you have to overcome?
- Why were those roadblocks there?
- Why was it important to even undertake the project in the first place?
- Who suggested the project—was it on your own initiative?

A good story helps others visualize what you've done. It should:

- Illustrate how you've applied your skills, qualities and experience to achieve critical results.
- Demonstrate the challenges you've overcome to achieve those results.
- Generate excitement about what you can accomplish. This is what taps into the emotional level and gets others thinking deeply about what results like that could mean to them and their organization.

Get crystal clear on the results produced for your employer or client. A hiring manager is not going to be interested in hiring you because you have experience in redesigning systems; it's going to be because of how those redesigned systems can help his or her unit get more done

with fewer resources, reduce losses due to errors, etc. Don't tell me you are a great product manager; tell me the story of a team you managed that delivered a product two months ahead of schedule, gaining your operation an extra \$200,000 of revenue in 2007.

And just as importantly, this approach shows that you understand the broader implications of your work. It shows that you are a strategic thinker with leadership potential. And if you are really in touch with what your work means to the organization, you will be perceived as much more likely to put in the extra effort it takes to get the job done, versus someone who just sees work as tasks to be finished.

4. Express Your Value Convincingly

Review your stories carefully. Think about the solutions you've brought to your employers and the problems you've solved. Focus on those in all of your messaging—your résumé, your cover letters, your "30-second elevator pitch", etc.

Never answer the question "What do you do?" literally. You always want to reframe the question into "Why do I pay your salary?", or "Why should I want to pay your salary?" Give result- or solution-oriented answers.

Come up with a compelling (and short) statement of what you do, or what you want to do, that gets the ball rolling. No one is impressed if your statement is too generic, trying to position you for anything that comes along. Instead, have more than one statement to cover different types of problems you can solve. In the course of the conversation, you can determine which are most interesting to your audience, and use those. But even if you have to come out with your 'problem statement' before you can do



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that, if it is short and compelling, and gets me to ask you more questions, you can then segue into your other statements as you develop a better sense of my needs and interests.

For example, having started out my career as an actuary, a very general statement I might have used is:

“I measure the financial impact of future contingent events.”

Not very effective, is it? Many people wouldn't have a clue what that means, and even if they did, it doesn't really say very much. On the other hand, what if I said:

“I help insurers deliver products that are both profitable and marketable.”

This is guaranteed to get a lot more attention. So don't tell people you want a job as a corporate trainer, tell them you have been recognized for your ability to engage and motivate difficult audiences.

5. Have an Outstanding Résumé

Would this grab your attention and make you excited to read the rest of my résumé?

“Seeking a management-level role that will let me use my acquired skills and talents in mentoring, leadership and work unit reorganization to help a forward-looking company improve its efficiency and enable me to energize my career.”

This is a very common mistake job seekers make – to focus their résumé on what they want instead of on what's important to the hiring manager. I'm not hiring you to solve YOUR problems; I'm only interested in you if you can solve MY problems!

If you want to grab a hiring manager's attention, you need to answer three fundamental questions:

1. Does the résumé have a strong professional image?
2. Does it pass the 10-second test?
3. Does it prove you will deliver?

The Strong Professional Image

This is the first work product of yours I'm seeing, and I am going to draw immediate conclusions about the potential quality of the work you would do for me by what I see. **This is your “sales brochure,”** a piece over which I'm going to assume you've sweated bullets (or should have) to get it just right. If it's put together sloppily, with indentations that don't line up, spelling errors, or tiny margins or fonts so that it looks like it's crammed onto the page and hard to read, etc., then I have an immediate concern.

One of my pet peeves is if you make a statement in the opening section about your “outstanding communication skills,” but have spelling or grammar errors in the résumé. You've just disproved your statement! And why should I then trust any other statements you make?

The appearance of your résumé should communicate that you are a professional who cares about the quality of the work you present!

The 10-Second Test
Hiring managers, HR professionals and recruiters are facing stacks of hundreds of résumés for any opening. They don't have time to read all of them. Most aren't

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going to spend more than 10 seconds making that initial determination of whether to bother to consider you a “possible” candidate, or to put your résumé with the 90 percent that get rejected out of hand.

Instead of opening up with an “Objective,” which is about you, start with a statement that’s relevant to a hiring manager. **Tell me right away about the package you bring to the table, and the problems that will enable you to solve for me.**

Prove You Will Deliver

Once you’ve passed the first two tests above, you’ve got my interest. Now demonstrate that you can produce results that will be relevant to me. Don’t waste your time giving me a laundry list of the duties you’ve been assigned and responsibilities you’ve held. (And don’t get me started on bullets that say “Responsible for...”

Just get to the point and tell me what you did!)

This is about results. Don’t bother with all the details of what you did, just get straight to the high-level accomplishment and the results you achieved for the company or client. No one pays you just to perform duties. They pay you because the work you are doing produces results. Get really clear on what those results were—whether you completed a difficult project on time, delivered a new program under budget, made a procedure more efficient, or turned around a dissatisfied customer so that they continued to purchase your products or services. And wherever possible, include metrics so that I have an idea of the impact. “Increased efficiency” is a result, but it’s much more meaningful as “reduced run time by 25 percent.” □

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