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Pay it Forward...Advice from an ASPA Member

Christine Gibbs Springer, Red Tape Limited
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Christine Gibbs Springer

As a practitioner, a business woman and an academic in the public service, I often serve on interview panels and also am asked to assist students and practitioners with getting or changing their job in these challenging times. I have discovered that many qualified workers are changing jobs and changing organizations and that doing so successfully requires that they focus on what they truly want to do with their lives. When I have conversations with students and new and experienced professionals about moving ahead in their careers, I usually attempt to get them to focus on the following five key steps to success:

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- *First and foremost, research the organization or sector that you are interested in joining.* That often requires that you revisit what you are truly, personally passionate about, what changes you and your family are willing to make, and then, where the job opportunities are most likely to be. As an example, federal jobs are considered by many to be most available. According to the Partnership for Public Service, the fields in which the federal government will be doing the most hiring in the next three years are medical and public health (54,000 jobs), security and protection (24,000 jobs), and administrative and program management (17,000 jobs). This means that looking for postings on the websites of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Homeland Security, the Justice Department and intelligences like CIA and NSA may be most beneficial in looking for a job. Sometimes, agency specific sites are as or more useful than the government's main job site (USAJOBS).
- *Once you have researched the organization or sector that you want to join, develop your resume with an emphasis on key words noted in the posted job opportunity.* Be aware, as an example, that federal job applications have a very specific format which will require that you spend some time editing your resume so that it responds to the job opportunity and needs. As part of the resume rebuilding, I recommend listing references that are specific to both the job and the organization and, if possible, activating those references so that they are both aware that they are being asked to support your job search but also could call key decision makers who may have some influence on those making the final hiring decision.
- *Review what networking groups you are involved in and how they may be useful to finding and pursuing job opportunities.* Many new positions become visible first to networking groups, as part of a networking session or as part of the agency's regular job fair. As an example, someone interested in becoming a travel planner might join the Society of Government Travel Professionals. Someone interested in crossing boundaries within the public sector, might become more active in local ASPA Chapter Meetings and might seek out individuals in those settings to become a Mentor or advisor.
- *Activate your references and seek out new people who are aware of your accomplishments and would be willing to be listed on your resume as a reference, but even more importantly, would call others who know or are key decision makers to engage them on your behalf.* As an example, recently I called a couple of people who knew the Executive Director of a nonprofit where a student of mine was going to interview and shared with them his resume and my understanding of his capabilities. They proceeded to call the executive director to say good things on his behalf and he was eventually hired for the position. Also, recognize that reference checks today may also include determining whether or not you have a Facebook page or what might be on your Twitter or LinkedIn page.
- *Finally, prepare and rehearse for the interview.* Know that you should be prepared to answer questions like: Tell me about yourself; Why do you want to work here; Describe a difficult work situation and how you dealt with it; What are your strengths and weaknesses, Where do you see yourself in five years. But also know that you should be prepared to ask your interviewers questions about their organization so that you demonstrate your motivation to be hired. I also recommend that you dress appropriately for the interview. Your research about the organization should include developing an understanding of what the level of acceptance is for body art and whether or not business attire is required. If you are unable to clearly define what acceptance there is for casual dressing and body art, then take the conservative approach in dressing and cover things up or leave them at home for the interview.

In the final analysis, be true to yourself when pursuing your future career and be willing to consider professional development and career advancement opportunities that are consistent with what resonates with you!

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