



# *Gen Y Meets the Workforce*

Launching your career during economic uncertainty



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Please feel free to post this on your blog or e-mail it to whomever you believe would benefit from reading it. **Thank you.**

## Introduction

With the economy arguably in a recession, Generation Y, also known as Millennials and generally defined as those born between 1980 and 2000, is panicking about its future. In fact, a recent [MeritAid.com](#) study found 64 percent of students are “very concerned” about finding a job after college.

“ Students are following the news about the credit crunch and predicted recession and are worried whether enough quality jobs will be waiting for them after they graduate. ”

Chris Long, president of [MeritAid.com](#)

College students aren't the only ones concerned. According to [Gallup](#), 82 percent of Americans say now is a bad time to find a job, which is 26 percent higher than this time last year and the highest since Gallup started asking this question in 2001. The translation for entry-level pros? More experienced professionals are grabbing up jobs that would traditionally be labeled as “entry-level.” When these skilled individuals are willing to accept lower-paying positions just so they can be employed, how can organizations refuse?

What's worse, a [JobFox](#) survey discovered “Gen Y workers are perceived by recruiters as being the weakest performers among the four generations that now make up the U.S. workforce.” Based on conversations with hiring managers and my [Entry Level Careers](#)

column readers, I agree – there is a definite disconnect between Gen Y and human resources professionals. HR pros feel Gen Y is not ready to enter the workforce, and most recent graduates [leave their first jobs within two years](#).

Finally, just to confirm what everyone else is saying, the [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#) (NACE) recently re-pollled employers that provided hiring projections in August 2008 to find Class of 2009 hiring will “stay even with last year’s levels.”

“ Overall, hiring looks flat for now and some employers are indicating some movement to cut back. In August, approximately one-third of employers said they were going to trim their college hiring; in our current poll, however, 52 percent said they were going to adjust their college hiring downward. ”

Marilyn Mackes, [NACE](#) executive director

These facts combined leave Millennials little ground to stand on, right? Wrong.

## Get Experience

The market is intensely competitive in nearly every industry, and employers now expect graduates to have more than a degree – they expect them to have experience.

Graduating in December 2008? Don't worry – there's *still* time to gain experience in your field! Take the lead on a class project. Volunteer at a local organization. Get involved in a campus organization. [Freelance](#) (if your field lends itself to this option). All of these opportunities look great on a résumé – and fill in any gaps you might have.

Graduating in May 2009? You have a little more time, but Spring internships are going fast. Don't think of internships as “unpaid slave labor.” There certainly are numerous positions out there fitting this description, but there are just as many that provide valuable (and paid) opportunities to students. See for yourself at [InternshipRatings.com](#), a resource to rate, research and compare internships in various industries across the U.S. If you aren't able to find an internship for next semester, look to the aforementioned suggestions.

“ Don't be afraid to work with a small organization. Many times, they fly under the radar but really give you an opportunity for hands-on experience. ”

Tom Musbach, senior managing editor  
[Yahoo! HotJobs](#)

## Turn Your Internship into Full-Time Employment

If you already have an internship for the semester (yay!) and are graduating in December 2008 – or have an internship next semester and are graduating in May 2009 – perhaps there is an opportunity to turn your internship into full-time employment.

Rosemary Haefner, vice president of human resources at [CareerBuilder.com](http://CareerBuilder.com), recommends the following tips to transition your internship into a full-time gig.

- 1. Treat your internship like an extended job interview - because it is.** Arrive on time, beat deadlines and consistently deliver strong work.
- 2. Seek out more challenges.** Employers want employees who show initiative and a desire to learn and develop. The majority of employers (59 percent) who plan to hire interns are more likely to permanently hire a college graduate who asks for more responsibilities.
- 3. Ask good questions.** Employers know you don't have all the answers. In fact, 46 percent say candidates who come to them with thoughtful questions have a better chance of getting hired full-time.

- 4. Remember the golden rule.** Always be respectful, address co-workers courteously and don't get caught up in office gossip.
  
- 5. Leave a positive impression.** Show enthusiasm for the projects you're working on and the company overall, don't complain and refrain from e-mailing or talking to friends.

## Create a Job Search Plan

If you don't have an internship that will be converted into a full-time position come graduation, you should create a job search plan.

In this digital era, most students visit online job boards, submit a bunch of résumés and sit back and wait for the interview requests to pour in. Unfortunately, this is definitely not the best strategy.

- 1. Pinpoint five cities in which you would enjoy living and working - and more importantly, where there are ample opportunities.** I say five because students often pigeonhole themselves into their comfort zones – the “local” and “permanent” addresses listed on their résumés. These cities can certainly be included on your list, but you don't want to be stuck saying, “Can you help me find a job in [insert small town where you grew up or went to college]? I've been searching for months but haven't even landed a phone interview.”
- 2. Decide what's important to you in a working environment.** [jobCogs.com](http://jobCogs.com) offers a great “quality of life” list from which to start. Please note that you will likely never find an organization that offers everything on your list, but it will at least help you narrow your search. Two of the biggest complaints employers have about Gen Y is they [leave their first jobs within two years](#) and they

demand too many work-life balance components. However, if you go into an organization knowing its culture, you likely can eliminate both of these obstacles.

**3. Within those five cities, identify 10 organizations at which you would like to build a career.** Yes, a career, not a job – try to think long-term. Visit the cities' chambers of commerce, local chapters of your professional organization, local *Business Journal* Web sites, etc. to research what organizations are located in each city. If you're looking for a career in public relations, for example, don't limit yourself to only public relations firms. Many different types of organizations hire public relations professionals, and the same is true for other fields.

To help determine the culture of each and narrow down your list, go to [Glassdoor](#), which provides a complete, real-time, inside look at what it's really like to work at a company – ratings, reviews, confidence in senior leadership, and salaries – for free. Alternatively, visit my new site (also free), [Come Recommended](#), which only profiles organizations that have been positively recommended by current or previous interns and entry-level employees.

**4. Bookmark the organizations' job (and internship) pages, and check back frequently.** Although most open positions are never advertised, you still shouldn't skip this step.

**5. Identify key decision-makers, and find out if they are on the social networking sites you frequent.**

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 70 percent of jobs are found through [networking](#), and some would argue this statistic is even higher. Begin following the leaders of your chosen organizations – their interests, activities, etc. – and reach out to them as appropriate.

**6. Before you graduate, arrange informational interviews with the organizations on your list.**

[Informational interviews](#) are an opportunity to decide whether or not these organizations should remain on your pursuit list. If after taking part in an [informational interview](#) you decide you either don't like the organization or the city in which it's located, eliminate and replace.

**7. Utilize your helicopter parents.** Gen Y is often accused of being babied by their overly involved "[helicopter parents](#)." And, while HR pros are often upset about their intrusion in the hiring process, [helicopter parents](#) can serve as good allies by helping you conduct research, giving honest résumé feedback, paying for professional training and development, serving as a sounding board for your job search plan, providing [networking](#) contacts, conducting mock interviews, relieving financial pressures, providing encouragement and much more.

## Networking as a Job Search Strategy

Networking is not a skill you typically learn in the classroom, but it is vitally important to finding a job (or internship). As I previously stated, 70 percent or more jobs are found through this technique.

“ While some students and recent graduates try to bank on that 30 percent chance, they’ll have a faster road to success if they use a multi-prong strategy. Unless a company has a formal internship program, most of those opportunities tend to come through word-of-mouth. Regardless, networking can give you a leg up over other candidates for those precious few internship slots. ”

Liz Lynch, author of “[SMART NETWORKING](#)”

- 1. Make direct contact.** Research organizations at which you would like to work, and directly reach out to a C-level executive (i.e., CEO, president, etc.) indicating your interest and what would make you a good hire. This is best done via e-mail because you likely will not easily reach a leader of an organization over the phone (nor do they typically welcome such outreach). Be casual, but professional, suggesting you would like to start a dialogue about what you could bring to the table and offer times you are

available for an [informational interview](#). Please note that I do *not* recommend this strategy if the organization at which you hope to work is really large. (Don't try reaching out to Steve Jobs.) If that's the case, focus instead on a key decision-maker in the specific office you're targeting.

**2. Join professional associations.** Getting involved in relevant professional associations on campus can both educate you about your career decision and offer a wealth of networking opportunities.

Most professional organizations offer significantly reduced rates for students, but the potential benefits of joining should certainly outweigh the cost. Please note that in order for professional associations to function as a networking tool, it is not enough to simply join. Regularly attend meetings, become an officer and volunteer during special events. Such actions should routinely connect you with veterans in your industry.

“ With networking, opportunities arise that might never make it to the job board because your contacts have you top-of-mind for consideration based on what they already know about you. You can stand out. ”

Craig Powell, president and CEO of [ConnectEDU](#)

**3. Use social networking sites.** The invasion of social networking sites, such as [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#), provide a unique opportunity for students to network not only with their friends and family, but also potential employers.

According to Willy Franzen, founder of [One Day, One Job](#) and [One Day, One Internship](#), using social networking sites as a job search tool is a six-step process: joining, seeking out interesting people, listening, talking about yourself, interacting and taking relationships offline. He recently used these techniques on [Twitter](#) to schedule meetings with three CEOs and a vice president of recruiting within a two-week timeframe.

“ As you enter the workforce, make sure you keep your profiles and activities on-brand with your professional endeavors. If a potential employer can find your profile, a customer, prospect or vendor could also find it.

”

Jason Alba, CEO of [JibberJobber](#)

**4. Tap your alumni association.** Alumni associations are pre-existing networks in which all students should participate, both during college and after graduation, to connect with professionals who share a common link – their alma mater. These networks offer professional development opportunities, mentors, casual and formal networking opportunities and exposure to various career paths. Note: Many

alumni associations have groups on the popular social networking sites. Check to see if yours is included.

**5. Find a mentor.** Everyone at any stage in their career should have a mentor, preferably more than one, but mentors can be particularly helpful when searching for an internship or a first job out of college. Not only can mentors offer you advice, but they can be out there networking for you, tapping into their contacts to find available positions.

“ Mentors are born out of existing relationships that you already have. Mentors are college professors, high school teachers, neighbors that work within an industry, community leaders, coaches, church leaders and other people in our lives. ”

Art Taguding, executive director of career services  
[Stevenson University](#)

## Manage Your Online Identity

As the old saying goes, first impressions count. Did you know employers are checking you out online before they ever make contact with you? According to a recent [CareerBuilder.com](http://CareerBuilder.com) survey, one-in-five employers use social networking sites to research potential employees. One-third (34 percent) reported they found content that caused them to dismiss the candidate from consideration. On the other hand, nearly one-in-four (24 percent) said they found content that helped solidify their decision to hire a candidate. What does your online identity say about you?

The [CareerBuilder.com](http://CareerBuilder.com) survey found the top five mistakes candidates make include:

- Posting information about drinking or using drugs (41 percent)
- Posting provocative or inappropriate photographs or information (40 percent)
- Poor communication skills (29 percent)
- Bad-mouthing a previous employer or fellow employee (28 percent)
- Lying about qualifications (27 percent)

So, how can you clean up (and keep clean) your online presence?

**1. Don't provide compromising information in the first place.** I think this speaks for itself.

- 2. Control access.** Most, if not all, social networking sites allow you to make your profile private, viewable only by your connections (or not even by them).
- 3. Remove information that indicates you may not be appropriate for a particular organization.** You may be a die-hard Barack Obama fan, but the potential employer might be a John McCain supporter. Keep all political, religious and social views to yourself.
- 4. Replace negative content with positive content.** When searching the Internet, most individuals do not dig deeper than the first results page. So, if there is negative content you cannot remove (because the author refuses or for a variety of other possible reasons), simply create new, positive content that will appear higher in a Google search. One easy way to do this is through [QAlias](#), which for \$9.95 per month, or \$119.40 for the year, will allow you to create a profile of yourself guaranteed to show up on the first search page in Google and Yahoo.
- 5. Stay on-brand.** How you present yourself, both online and off, should be consistent with how you want potential employers to view you. Assuming you want to portray yourself as a hard-working, dedicated, astute individual, that is what your online presence should prove.

## Cover Letters and Résumés and Thank You Notes, Oh My!

The importance of well-written cover letters and résumés cannot be overstated. In fact, these two documents can mean the difference between landing a first interview or receiving a generic “we’ve decided to pursue another candidate” e-mail from an organization (if they communicate with you at all).

### Cover Letter Don'ts

There are, of course, numerous common sense ways to botch your cover letter (i.e., typos, spelling and grammar errors, using a “cookie cutter” template and accidentally leaving in references to another organization, inconsistent formatting and forgetting to include something specifically requested in the job advertisement). But, the following are ways to ensure your cover letter lands in the circular file that you might not have heard before – or bear repeating.

- 1. Use an over-casual approach (i.e., emoticons, inappropriate e-mail addresses, etc.).** I’m always amazed when I receive a cover letter that includes a ☺, begins with “Hi Heather” or instructs me to contact the candidate at [hotmama@aol.com](mailto:hotmama@aol.com). Even if you do know me personally, this is a professional document in a professional setting and should be treated as such.

## **2. Indicate you know nothing about the organization.**

I cannot emphasize this enough – research the organization before submitting your application package. Reference information specific to the organization (i.e., “Like XYZ Company, I believe we must make drastic changes in order to reverse global warming.”). Every cover letter you send out should be distinctly different.

**3. Mention going back to graduate school.** While you might actually plan to do so, employers don’t want to know about it, trust me. All this says to them is you don’t plan to stick around very long.

**4. Let your letter run longer than one page.** I have held 12 positions since graduating from high school, and I’ve never submitted a cover letter longer than one page – you shouldn’t either.

**5. Hand-write your cover letter.** Written notes have the air of personalization, right? For holiday cards, yes. For cover letters, no. Instead, you project unfamiliarity with computers and how the business world functions.

## **Cover Letter Do’s**

Now that you know the ways to assure your cover letter won’t be taken seriously, how can you write a stellar cover letter?

Several positions ago when I screened intern and entry-level candidates, I would not even look at a résumé unless the cover letter truly impressed me. The following are tips to catch a hiring manager's eye and potentially entice a first interview.

**1. Address your cover letter to a specific person.**

Unfortunately, not all position advertisements list a contact name, particularly at larger organizations. However, that should not stop you from placing a brief call to the organization and inquiring. Don't ask a bunch of questions about the position or organization, just the contact person's name and title.

**2. Don't deviate from the norm.** These days, there is little temptation to use colored or scented paper because most organizations encourage candidates to submit application packages via e-mail. However, you should remember to use standard fonts (i.e., Times New Roman or Arial) and margins.

“ Most organizations systematically hire people more inclined to conform, thus a nonconforming cover letter might tag you as someone who would ‘rock the boat.’

”

[Dr. Todd Dewett](#), associate professor of management at [Wright State University](#)

- 3. Apply only to positions for which you qualify.** There are two schools of thought on this topic. One says apply for anything and everything and let the organization decide if you qualify or not. The other says quality over quantity, and apply only for positions you would feel confident fulfilling. As a former hiring manager, I implore you to abide by the latter. It is more than annoying to receive an application from an individual who appears to have not read the position description.
- 4. Include relevant information not listed in your résumé.** Perhaps you completed a class project directly related to the position for which you are applying or you volunteered in high school for one of the organization's clients. These are items you would not necessarily include in your résumé but would be important not to leave out of your cover letter.
- 5. Emphasize what you could do for the organization, not what the organization could do for you.** Often times, with Gen Y in particular, candidates focus their cover letters on how wonderful it would be for them to join such a prestigious organization. After all, what's wrong with buttering them up a bit? Don't waste the space – talk about your past achievements and how you could repeat this success at their organization.

## Résumé Don'ts

Like with cover letters, there are many common sense résumé writing mistakes, such as typos, spelling and grammar errors, and inconsistent formatting. However, the following are little-known (or so important they are worth repeating) résumé pitfalls.

- 1. Attach a photo.** Unless you're applying for a modeling or acting job, a photo is not necessary. I have to admit, it has never once occurred to me to include a photo of myself with a résumé, and frankly, I find it to be somewhat creepy. (If you are still compelled to include a photo, I highly recommend building an online résumé using [VisualCV](#).)
- 2. Unscannable formatting.** Lynne Sarikas, director of the [MBA career center at Northeastern University's College of Business Administration](#), brought this one to my attention. Apparently, many employers capture their incoming résumés into a large database using scanning software. So, if you use odd fonts, formats, etc., your résumé will not scan properly and likely not be considered.
- 3. List only job duties.** Employers already likely know the duties associated with your previous positions based on your title. So, compel them with concrete achievements, such as you helped raise \$10,000 in donations or increased sales by five percent.

**4. Include an objective statement.** Again, there are two schools of thought on this subject. One is an objective statement for an intern or entry-level candidate is likely to be too broad or too limiting. The other is that objective statements set the whole tone of your résumé and should never be left off, just carefully worded. I tend to agree with the former and instead encourage you to include any objective-type statements in your cover letter – *unless* you can come up with something truly compelling.

**5. List your hobbies.** Unless your hobby directly relates to the position for which you are applying, leave it off.

### Résumé Do's

Entry-level résumés, particularly if you have not had prior relevant work experience, can be tricky. However, the following are some general “best practices” you should follow.

**1. List experience chronologically.** For me, it's just easier to follow your history if you list positions chronologically, with your current or most recent position at the top. Additionally, it highlights your career growth nicely.

**2. If your first name is long or difficult to pronounce, use your nickname.** Again, this is just about making it easier for the potential employer. There is no set rule about how long your name has to

be before you should shorten it, but if you've grown up with teachers and classmates mispronouncing your name, you should likely use your nickname instead.

**3. Remove any experience not directly related to the position for which you are applying.**

Four years of working at Victoria's Secret does nothing for me if you're applying for an entry-level public relations position, for example, even if you worked your way up to supervisor level. Instead, supplement any gaps with class projects, volunteer experience, leadership within campus organizations, etc. And, be sure to customize your résumé for each potential employer.

**4. State accomplishments using action verbs.** Examples of action verbs include "increased," "reduced" and "expanded."

**5. Use the correct tense.** When referencing your current position, use the present tense. Everything else should be in the past tense.

## Thank You Notes

Skipping ahead a bit, if you aren't following up every interview – and by that I mean each individual person with whom you meet or speak – with a thank you note, you are likely costing yourself the position.

But, let me be clear. The simple act of saying “thank you” is not enough. To really put yourself ahead of your competitors, consider the following elements.

- 1. Send your note within 24 hours.** I have always sent mine as soon as I arrived home from the interview so I didn’t forget what was said. But, up to 24 hours after an interview is acceptable. Waiting longer than that tells the potential employer the position is not that important to you.
- 2. Reference your conversation.** Ask each individual you meet with for a business card at the end of your interview, and make notes on the back about what you discussed to help you remember later. Show them you were really paying attention.
- 3. Emphasize your strengths.** Review the position description and your notes about the actual conversations you had, and express exactly why you are the best person for the opening.
- 4. Reaffirm your interest in the position.** Remind each interviewer that you are truly interested in the position and why. Or, if you are no longer interested after having been through the interview process, tell them so. Send your thank you note regardless because you never know when the interviewer will cross your path in the future.
- 5. Keep it short.** Two paragraphs are plenty. Quality over quantity.

## What Will Your References Say?

Every organization is different in terms of when they request your references. Some make you fill out an application, with your references included, while you wait for the individual interviewing you to be ready. Others won't ask for references until you've reached the final stages of the hiring process.

Regardless, it's amazing how many internship and entry-level candidates hand references over to potential employers either without informing the references beforehand or without being entirely certain what their references will say about them.

When employers ask you for references, 99 percent of the time they will actually contact them. So, be prepared with a list of three professional references (this can include professors) and one personal reference (*not* one of your relatives). And more importantly, know what these references will tell the organization.

After asking the reference his or her relationship to you (professional or personal), here are the most common questions hiring managers will ask:

### Professional References

- Please explain the candidate's responsibilities when he or she worked with you.
- How would you rate the candidate's ability to fulfill those responsibilities on a scale of one to 10?

- Can you give me an example of a time the candidate showed initiative or extra responsibility?
- What is the candidate's greatest strength?
- What is the candidate's greatest weakness?
- Why did the candidate leave your organization?
- Would you hire this person again?
- Is there anything else I should know about the candidate?

“ When speaking to a professor, I will ask about the student's performance in class, relationships with their classmates and how the student compared to other students in the class. References make a big difference when comparing entry-level candidates, especially if they don't have prior work experience. If a professor goes out on a limb and says someone is 'the smartest and hardest-working student I had all semester,' we pay attention. ”

Andrea Ballard, SPHR  
recruiter and retention specialist  
[Peterson Sullivan PLLC](#)

## Personal References

- How long have you known the candidate?
- Give me an example of a time when the candidate impressed you.
- Would you describe the candidate as an introvert or extrovert? Would the candidate work well with others or prefer working alone?

So, make a list of potential references, both professional and personal, and contact each one about both their willingness to serve as a reference and how they might answer these questions – prior to handing the list over to a potential employer.

## Informational Interviews

Informational interviews are one of the most powerful tools in your job hunting arsenal, yet it was recently brought to my attention that some college students are unaware of this tactic. Basically, an informational interview is just that – an interview that allows you to better understand an organization’s culture and the possibility of future openings.

Unlike the formal interview, *you* are usually the one asking the questions. Informational interviews typically take place when you’ve identified an organization at which you would like to work, but they currently do not have an opening that fits your qualifications.

Hint: School breaks (Thanksgiving, winter/holiday, spring) serve as an excellent time to arrange informational (or [formal](#)) interviews. Hopefully your professors have not given you too many assignments, and you can shift gears to thinking about your future.

### Your Approach

Some organizations offer “tours” in which students can visit the organization in groups in order to find out what it’s like to work there. Smaller organizations are typically open to a more one-on-one style. Either way, all you have to do is ask.

I recommend calling the organization and asking the receptionist who typically conducts informational interviews and the best way to put in your request (whether via phone or e-mail). It’s that simple.

If the organization is not located in your area, explain to the potential employer you are interested in relocating once you graduate, but you do not have the capacity to travel at this time. Most often, they will be willing to set up a time to talk with you over the phone.

## What to Ask

Unlike a [formal interview](#), you are exploring the organization's fit for you, not the other way around (although they will likely form judgments about you). So, this is your opportunity to ask questions you normally wouldn't.

- How would you describe the work-life balance at [insert organization]?
- Can you please describe the benefits package you offer new employees?
- What do you enjoy the most and the least about working at [insert organization]?
- If you were currently hiring at my level, how would you describe the profile of the perfect candidate?
- How could I bolster my résumé for when you do have an opening?
- What would someone at my level make at [insert organization]?
- Do you know anyone else in [insert field] who's currently hiring at my level?

As with [formal interviews](#), [dress appropriately](#) and don't forget to send a thank you note – the same rules apply.

## Formal Interviews

### Dress for Success

Several years after I was no longer in an entry-level position, one of my mentors took me aside and told me I should start dressing as though I was at least one level higher in the organization – or I would never reach that level.

Now, those who know me know I'm not a slouch by any means, so her comment took me by surprise. I always wore a nice blouse, slacks and shoes. What was wrong with that? I was certainly better dressed than those both at my level and below me, and I'm still young, so I shouldn't be dressing like my mother yet, right?

But, as I have always done, I took my mentor's comment to heart. In a relatively short period of time, I jumped two positions higher and now run my own department. Maybe your appearance really *does* reflect your job aspirations.

Because knowing how to dress appropriately also is important during formal interviews, read my five-part series about do's and don'ts for both men and women [online](#).

## **Toughest Questions (and Best Answers)**

While on the job (or internship) hunt, potential employers will throw you some real curve balls in the interview room – and your answers to these questions will determine whether or not you move to the next stage of the hiring process.

So, what are some of the toughest questions you might face, and what are the best answers?

- 1. Why should we hire you?** Basically, what can you provide the organization that others can't? You must go into the interview knowing how your skills, knowledge and personality relate to the position – and convey this to the potential employer.
- 2. Tell me about yourself.** I've always found this question particularly difficult. It's so open-ended you could go in a wide variety of directions with your answer. Once more, this question requires you to know what you bring to the position. I recommend discussing specific past accomplishments. Don't talk about your personal life unless directly asked.
- 3. What is your biggest weakness?** Again, another real stickler. I've been known to answer this question with "I work too hard" and "I'm a perfectionist." While both of those statements are true, they are really just strengths disguised as weaknesses. Be honest about areas in which you could improve, but be sure to identify qualities that would not eliminate you from consideration for the position.

**4. Why do you want to work for our organization?** For this question, you need to know yourself, the organization and the particular interviewer extremely well. The only real way to be successful here is to do your homework before walking into the interview.

**5. Where do you see yourself in five years?** I once had someone respond to this question with, “Five years is a quarter of my life so far. It’s really hard to imagine the next five!” While I understand five years is a long time for students and recent graduates, this is an important question that shouldn’t be callously answered. Because this question is frequently asked (I’ve already said I use this question), think about it before your interview. Where *do* you see yourself in five years? Know the typical path someone in your field takes and provide an answer along similar lines.

### **Best Questions to Ask**

Your potential employer has just finished grilling you with tough questions and turns the conversation over to you. “Is there anything you would like to ask?” If your answer is anything but “yes,” you can kiss the offer call good-bye.

You can certainly add a question to your mental list if something particular comes to mind during the conversation, but always walk into an interview knowing what you will ask each individual with whom you meet. Here are some questions to get you started.

- 1. Who was formerly in this position, and why did he or she leave?** It is essential you understand why the position is open. Was the previous person fired? Is the position a revolving door? Perhaps it's a new position, and the organization does not have a precedent for what equates to success or failure. Depending on the answer, *you* might not want to work for *them*.
- 2. What brought you to (insert organization), and what keeps you here?** I have been through many interviews, and this question is always revealing. It provides insight about the organization's culture (and gives the interviewer a chance to talk about his or her personal experience with the organization). Culture is just as important, if not more so, than the actual job description.
- 3. What support systems are in place for entry-level professionals (or interns)?** Again, a revealing question. You can always tell how much an organization values its junior staff members by the level of support it provides them. Do they offer a mentoring program? Are there regular professional development seminars?
- 4. What is your management style?** If you are interviewing with someone who would be your direct supervisor, always ask this question. This is another make-or-break question in terms of your liking the organization as a potential place of employment. If you thrive by being hounded every five minutes about a task, then a

micro-manager is best for you. However, if you would find this extremely annoying and stressful, as I do, then you know to walk away.

**5. If I do an outstanding job for the next five years, where can I be in this organization?** This question helps candidates understand the growth potential they have within the organization (and shows the organization they are thinking long-term). If there are little or no opportunities for growth, you will likely not be very satisfied in the position in the long-run.

Above all, leave salary and benefit questions for after an offer has been made. (Or, if you participated in an informational interview with the organization at an earlier time, you might already know the answer.)

## Creative Ways to Land Entry-Level Jobs

Due to the struggling economy, entry-level jobs are increasingly going to people with experience rather than recent graduates, even those who had a fair amount of internships during college. Networking, both online and off, has gotten you interviews – perhaps even to the final stage of the hiring process – but organizations continue to offer open positions to those who simply have more experience than you. What should you do next?

[Evan Michner](#), a 2005 [Butler University](#) graduate who majored in English, wanted a job as an advertising copywriter. Knowing the stiff competition he faced, he came up with a “recipe.”

- He bought jars of salsa, peeled off the labels and put on his own that said, “Evan Michner’s Word Salsa: For Tasty Copy.” He included his phone number, e-mail address and a list of ingredients: “Powerful Ideas, Brilliant Insight, Caffeine, Creative Stimulation, Funk, Outrageous Imagination, Pure Genius and Natural Flavorings.”
- He mailed the salsa to potential employers, without a cover letter or résumé.
- A week later, he sent them his résumé (a spiral-bound minibook that included several work samples), a two-sentence cover letter and a \$5 Starbucks gift card. What did his cover letter say? “Have a cup of coffee on me. And, while you’re doing that, take a look at my work.”

[Michner](#) is now a project manager at NetSpend Online.

Salsa might not work in every industry, so here are a few more ideas.

- 1. Stay in contact with the employers who liked you but opted for the more experienced candidate.** I went through three interviews with a company just this past summer, but they decided I wasn't an exact fit. However, I stayed in contact and was referred to an open position at another organization because they valued the skills I brought to the table. I interviewed with the second company within three days.
- 2. Practice interviewing.** Just like public speaking, practice makes perfect. Knowing the tough questions you might face, ask a friend, family member or mentor to prep you. Also, [career coaches](#) can be helpful in this area.
- 3. Consider the interview only the first step.** Seriously, don't forget that thank you note. I, along with many other hiring managers, have chosen between otherwise equally-qualified candidates solely on the fact that one sent me a thank you note. Also, if you haven't heard back from an employer within a reasonable amount of time, don't be afraid to follow-up.
- 4. Send a David Letterman-style top 10 list.** [Allison Brinkman](#), public relations manager at the Eisen Management Group, submitted a top 10 list for why EMG should interview her. However, I challenge you to take her creative

idea one step further. In your thank you note, provide the top 10 reasons why the organization would be crazy not to hire you.

**5. Show them your potential.** In addition to being extremely knowledgeable about the position, organization and industry, come to the interview prepared with “tangible” ideas. For example, if you are interviewing at a public relations agency, research their clients, and what they’ve done for these clients, and develop new, innovative ideas. You might even want to prepare a sample press release for your suggested “campaign.”

## Beware of Scammers

It's incredibly easy to become the victim of an entry-level job scam, particularly in the age of the Internet and during times of economic uncertainty. Some of them just waste your time, but others go as far as taking your money.

According to Rachel Zupek, a [CareerBuilder.com](http://CareerBuilder.com) writer, the following are “red flags” of a job scam:

- A request for bank account numbers.
- A request for your Social Security number.
- A request to “scan the ID” of a job seeker, like a drivers’ license. Scammers will say they need to “verify identity” – this isn’t a legitimate request.
- A contact e-mail address that is not a primary domain. In other words, be wary of the free e-mail address, such as AOL or Gmail.
- Misspellings and grammatical mistakes in the job ad.
- A lack of interest in meeting the employee.

To add to Zupek’s list, many (although not all) “work-at-home” jobs are scams, as are positions in sports or entertainment sales, marketing and promotions. And, there should be no start-up costs associated with a real job.

When you feel a job may be a scam, the [Federal Trade Commission](#) recommends asking the following questions:

- What exactly will my roles and responsibilities be?
- Will I be paid a salary, or will my pay be based on commission?
- Who will pay me?
- When will I get my first paycheck?

If you believe you've identified a scam, report it.

- [Better Business Bureau](#)
- [Federal Trade Commission](#)
- [National Consumers League](#)

## Resources

I encourage everyone reading this e-book visit [Come Recommended](#), an exclusive online community connecting the best internship and entry-level job candidates with the best employers, only allowing participation from members who come highly recommended. I launched the site, which is completely free to both candidates and employers, to help bridge the gap between Gen Y and human resources professionals.

Unlike other exclusive recruiting networks, [Come Recommended](#) requires both candidates and employers to provide a least three positive recommendations to gain access to the community. Employers are also strongly encouraged to provide [Vault](#), [Glassdoor](#) and [InternshipRatings.com](#) company ratings, as well as employment-related awards.

Features for candidates include:

- Custom profiles / résumés
- Search and view employer profiles, which include recommendations
- Access to employer member openings, searchable by date, location, industry and position type (internship or entry-level job)
- Daily job alerts via e-mail
- Receive recommendations from both members and nonmembers
- Private chatrooms to network with potential employers
- A candidate-only forum to share “best practices” with other candidates

## Internship and Entry-Level Job Boards

- [AfterCollege](#)
- [CampusCareerCenter.com](#)
- [CBcampus.com](#)
- [CollegeGrad.com](#)
- [CollegeRecruiter.com](#)
- [Experience, Inc.](#)
- [InternshipPrograms.com](#)
- [MonsterTRAK](#)
- [One Day, One Internship](#)
- [One Day, One Job](#)
- [ROCS College Student Staffing](#)
- [YouIntern.com](#)

## Other Job Boards

- [BounceBase](#)
- [Craigslist](#)
- [GreatPlaceJobs](#)
- [Indeed.com](#)
- [JobFox](#)
- [LinkUp](#)
- [RealMatch](#)
- [SimplyHired.com](#)

## Recommended Reading

- [301 Smart Answers to Tough Interview Questions](#)
- [Job Search Bloopers](#)
- [The Career Coward's Guide to Interviewing](#)

## About the Author



Heather R. Huhman is passionate about helping students and recent college graduates pursue their dream careers. As the oldest child in her family – even among her extended family – she did not have anyone to guide her through the trials and tribulations of developing her career. Now, as a former hiring manager and someone who has been in nearly every employment-related situation imaginable, she is serving as that much-needed guide for others.

Because of her other passion, public relations, Huhman founded [EntryLevel-PR.com](#) – a free, niche online job board for internships and entry-level positions in public relations – in 2003. The site continues to receive approximately 150,000 unique visitors each month.

In 2008, Huhman began penning an [entry-level careers column](#) for Examiner.com to educate high school seniors through recent college graduates about how to find, land and succeed at internships and entry-level jobs – no matter their career paths.

Most recently, she launched [Come Recommended](#), an exclusive online community connecting the best internship and entry-level job candidates with the best employers, only allowing participation from members who come highly recommended. A project she funded out of her own pocket, much like [EntryLevel-PR.com](#), [Come Recommended](#) is free to both candidates and employers. Huhman hopes the site addresses the obvious disconnect between Gen Y and human resources professionals.

Huhman is available to answer your questions or speak at your next event. She can be reached at [heather@heatherhuhman.com](mailto:heather@heatherhuhman.com).