

Author Offers Advice on Landing a Job

Jonathan Blake Huer is the Director of Emerging Technologies and Media Development at Ball State University, an Apple Distinguished Educator, an Adobe Education Leader, and the author of *Be Employed When You Graduate*.

Q. What are the key real-world skills for job seekers?

A. I frequently joke that the most challenging piece of technology in our office is the front desk phone. Students today communicate through a wide variety of means including texting, Snapchats, Twitter, Facebook, gChat, and occasionally email. But, they use the phone for voice communication less than prior generations. And, they are less likely to be comfortable in face to face interactions. If you're a job seeker, it is valuable to be able to vary your communication style to match that of your prospective employer and the situation.

Job seekers need to know how to communicate effectively through various methods and with various groups. Communication methods can vary greatly between different office cultures. And, differences in styles can create confusion and misperceptions. For example, a supervisor asks an assistant to "call and find out if they are open" in reference to a business. The assistant looks online, finds the hours, and says, "Yes, they are open." The assistant didn't complete the task as assigned and may or may not be giving accurate information. At the same time, the assistant feels that he or she completed the task in a more efficient way than a phone call. The supervisor considers a phone call with a real person a reliable source of information. The assistant considers the website (or Facebook, Twitter, etc.) a reliable source of information. If the supervisor finds the store to be in fact closed due to weather, holiday, or outdated website information, the assistant looks like he or she can't follow directions.

In addition to basic communication, job seekers should have an understanding of technology, the Internet, and how and when to use the many forms of digital media available today. In reality, this involves critical thinking and problem analysis. But to me, it really comes down to communication. Job seekers must be able to assess a situation and reply through the best method for that situation. It doesn't matter how smart, skilled, or experienced you are if your communications aren't being received. The only way to gain these skills is experience. But how often do you get feedback when your communications aren't being received in the first place?

Q. What are the most common mistakes of first-time job seekers?

A. The most common mistake first-time job seekers make is starting too late. Finding a job takes time. It takes time to network, perfect a résumé, find job openings, fill out applications, and get an interview. I find the most common problem is not allowing enough time to do all this. That leads to other mistakes like typos in a résumé, missing an application deadline, or not following through with a new contact. In *Be Employed When You Graduate*, I advise starting out your freshman year finding an on-campus job so you have some work experience, then finding a volunteer opportunity or internship in your field over the summers, and working those into a full-time job when you earn your degree. If nothing else, repeating the job search process each year gets you organized and gives you experience so that you're prepared to go after your dream job instead of scrambling at the last minute to figure out what date you did something so you can put it on your résumé!

Q. How can job applicants use technology to help them land a job? What should job-seekers definitely be doing and not doing online?

A. In most cases, the Internet is a great tool to research and find opportunities. But, it's an in person interview that is going to secure the job. LinkedIn has become the standard for online résumés and professional interactions. So job applicants should get a LinkedIn profile set up and keep it updated (as well as a traditional résumé). I've had recruiters tell

me they find 70 percent of their applicants through LinkedIn. If you're in a creative field, you should have your own website as well. At the same time, LinkedIn is not Facebook. So don't accept everyone who tries to add you. You can, however, use Facebook and other social media to reach out and find if you know anyone through your social networks who works at a company you'd like to work for. Having an inside person pushing your résumé is always helpful.

I trust job applicants to be able to find openings online. Applicants can look at their desired employer's websites, which will list the job openings available as well as the numerous job posting sites. What concerns me more are applicants who don't Google themselves and examine their own social media from an outside perspective. Old negative tweets ("so bored at work today #worksucks") and publicly viewable Facebook photos of inebriated debauchery are far more damaging than most applicants realize. In a competitive job market, it makes it easy for a prospective employer to cut you from the list. Practically speaking, it shows that you lack the self discipline or understanding to know what's appropriate to post online and what is not. Job-seekers should make sure that they have their social media accounts properly secured by viewing them from a public computer.

Q. Can you tell us a little about the Digital Corps?

A. The Digital Corps is a unique on-campus job at Ball State University. We bring students from a variety of majors together to work on projects ranging from mobile apps to websites to videos. The Digital Corps students apply lessons learned in their various classes to real world projects working directly with the professional staff of the Emerging Technologies unit. Students can move up the ranks from apprentice to specialist to master through a combination of industry standard certifications and portfolio reviews. By the time Digital Corps students graduate, they have more than just class assignments. They have several years of work experience as well as the stories and impressive digital artifacts to prove it.

Q. Can you tell us a little about your book, *Be Employed When You Graduate*?

A. I wanted to write a book that speaks directly to students. *Be Employed When You Graduate* is based on my experience the past seven years helping Digital Corps students find jobs. I realized that smart, capable, and highly skilled students couldn't find and "win" the great jobs that are out there because they had never learned those job-getting skills. So, I started doing workshops sharing some of the lessons I'd learned along the way. I crafted the workshops to be a safe place where students could ask questions they were too embarrassed to ask elsewhere. Then I'd talk to those same students as they were going through the job-hunting process and get feedback on what they felt they didn't know so that I could add it to the workshops. Over time, this evolved into a system that I lay out for the first time in *Be Employed When You Graduate*.

The Digital Corps students can do amazing things like make iPhone apps and craft stellar marketing campaigns. But the most common question I get is "what do I wear to the interview?" A discussion about what to wear to an interview isn't as compelling as other more intellectual topics. But, it's an important one that is easily overlooked. So we discuss, practice, and discuss some more. I frequently joke that the Digital Corps is "NCAA for nerds." I want students who go out and win jobs in competitive fields. But just like any sport, the fundamentals are really important. Students wanted to know practical job hunting basics like networking, résumés, interviews, negotiations, and even what the advantages are of working at large versus small companies. I find most adults feel these things are so basic they don't need to be explained. But, how else are students going to learn?

College is extremely important. But it is fundamentally designed so students make progress towards an academic degree. I want to build on that knowledge and for students to make progress towards a job. That's what *Be Employed When You Graduate* is all about. ●

Visit <http://beemployedwhenyougraduate.com> to learn more about *Be Employed When You Graduate*.