

7 tips to help recent grads in hunt for first job

Inside the Job Market

- By Heather Boulger

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PITTSFIELD — If you are a new graduate and feel uncertain about your future, you're not alone. Everyone has experienced significant and unexpected disruptions to their plans due to COVID-19.

Searching for work right out of college or high school is always stressful and challenging during any circumstance. But it feels especially daunting when the economy, the job market, and the world in general seem to be turned upside down. As the number of people filing for unemployment reaches into the millions, seniors and other first-time job seekers might be wondering how to break into this uncertain job market.

Berkshire County's employment rate soared to 16.7 percent in April, the highest on record and is now at 15.3 percent in May. More than 7,500 have filed new applications for unemployment insurance benefits since the state at home orders have been enacted, and an additional 2,000-plus people have filed for pandemic unemployment insurance. This job market is tough even for the most experience workers.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Great Recession shrank the U.S. workforce by 8.8 million jobs. When the recession ended in June 2009, the unemployment rate for college graduates ages 20 to 24 was 10.8 percent higher than the national rate of 9.5 percent. In April of this year, the jobless rate for college graduates that age surged higher still to 17.2 percent.

Those who do land jobs after graduating during a recession tend to start at lower salaries than their counterparts whose careers start in good economics. Nearly half of college graduates in the early stages of their careers were underemployed. Millennials, who came of age during the Great Recession, have struggled to pay off student debt, buy homes and save for retirement. Current college students and recent grads also carry a large student debt load. Unlike the Great Recession, the pandemic struck abruptly, reversing years of economic progress in mere weeks. The uncertainty of how long the effects will last may complicate the prospect for new graduates. But don't be discouraged, the economy will bounce back in time.

TAKE ACTION

Career experts say it is critical to continue to look for work and stay connected during the economic downturn. Don't go into a place of fear and complacency. There are actions you can take to empower yourself and make informed decisions about your future.

Here is some advice:

1. Let your skill set be your guide. Instead of focusing on the job you want, focus on the industries most interested in the skill set you have built. Think about how the skills from your courses, past internships, summer or work-study jobs, and volunteer work can be leveraged in our current economy. Use your resume and cover letter to show you have transferable skills employers are seeking.

2. Engage your network. You are more likely to get a job through a connection so reach out to the people you already know to ask them to keep an eye out for opportunities. Ask them if they would be willing to do an email intro to people who work at the company or the hiring manager. Be focused on staying connected and telling your story rather than finding a job. This will help to lay the groundwork to build and grow your career in years to come.

3. Create a professional presence on social media and on remote networking groups. This may also help you find opportunities and meet professionals in your chosen field while social distancing. Join professional interest and industry groups online and interact with similar professional social accounts to expand your network and improve your online profile.

Networking, mentorship and informational interviews can be done remotely and could help better prepare you to enter the workforce after graduation.

4. Consider short-term or unexpected work in the interim. If you are able to work during this time, adding experience to your resume could help improve your resume and give you an advantage in the long-run. Showing employers that you were able to adjust to this challenging situation could make your application more competitive.

5. Stand out from the crowd. Demonstrate that you have done your homework. Show why you want to work for that company and that you are already familiar with their products, challenges and recent announcements. Emphasize what you can offer, the skills and qualities you bring to the table.

6. Be virtually prepared. Now that many people are working remotely, it is important to practice phone and video job interviewing. You'll stand out if you learn the ins and outs of phone

etiquette. The MassHire Berkshire Career Center has a variety of virtual workshops to help you stand out.

7. Continue to update your skills. Take classes that interest you and show that you are adaptable and eager to grow. Expanding your knowledge will be especially helpful when potential employers ask you how you spent your time during the pandemic. You will want to show you were productive, so be ready to talk about the online class you took, the volunteer work you did, or the 10 books you read.

KEEP THE FAITH

With so much uncertainty in the world right now, it can be overwhelming to try to conduct a job search. Don't get discouraged. It takes time and patience. There are 1,400 jobs posted in the Berkshires this month alone ranging from entry-level service jobs to nursing and engineering positions. Utilize the Career Center to help you take the first step in finding the right fit for you. Be persistent, stay focused, network and be proud of yourself for facing challenges that many people will never experience. No matter what you decide to do, it is important to acknowledge that you are facing challenges as a new graduate entering the workforce that many people will never experience. Above all, take care of yourself and the people around you as we navigate this situation together. Cheers to the Class of 2020!

Heather Boulger is the executive director of the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board in Pittsfield.