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The Ability to Transfer Your Skills to Any Industry

In order to compete in this global marketplace, you will have to be able to transfer your skills to various industries. You are going to have to constantly develop new ones and polish the existing ones to make yourself more marketable. With companies shipping their jobs overseas and highly skilled people being laid off, you are going to have to stand out among the rest. How do you stand out? Can you think of one word that best describes how you stand out among all of the other students at your school; local and national schools; recent graduates; or high level managers who took a buy out? In this economy you are competing against all of the people who fit in these categories. It is going to take more than general experience and an education. A degree is now obsolete. It is hard for people with master and doctoral degrees to find a good job because everyone has one.

This reminds me of the movie, "What A Girl Wants". It is about a teenage girl who had been raised by her single lower income mom. She was out on a quest to find her father who was a very rich and high profile politician in another country. She tried so hard to change her ways and adapt to the new affluent lifestyle. She wanted to please her father and fit in with her new acquaintances. She met a local boy who asked her a very profound question. He said, "Why do you want to be like everyone else when you were born to stand out, to be different and to win?" That statement changed my outlook on life. In order to be my true self, I have to be different. Now I live my life on how I can be more memorable and make a dynamic impact at school, my job, activities and my personal life. My focus is on the bigger picture and not the smaller one.

Your focus should not be on getting a job, but on developing your career. You should take everything you have learned and experienced with you

to the next open door of opportunity. In developing a career, it is a process which is not a quick fix. The process does not happen overnight. It starts before you go to college with researching the best colleges that offer the best programs in your area of interest. This includes scholarships and grants. Some schools are looking to give money to study at their institution in a certain field of study. Since this is a technological society, take advantage of all the valuable information on the Internet.

Once you are enrolled in the college program that best fits your objectives and goals of your career, start gaining experience and knowledge in every aspect of your career search during your matriculation in college. Count everything so you can stand out! Here are some ways to gain skills and exposure that you can transfer to your major or any industry:

Take Related Course Electives – No matter what you major in, take electives that will help enhance your education and future. Take other foreign languages that might not even be outlined in your paradigm. If it is not offered at your school, take an on-line course or a class at a local community college simultaneously. Also, take a speech, global culture or dining etiquette course. You can even buy books at your local bookstore in these areas as a reference. Most companies hire people who are bilingual and have excellent verbal and written communication skills.

Increase Computer Skills – Technology is changing everyday. So keep up with it and learn the latest software and hardware packages. There are free computer classes at your local Urban League, other local career centers and staffing agencies.

Acquire Internships/Work Experience – Start applying for internships for college credit and for pay during your second semester as a freshman. Each semester or summer work at different companies and various cities to gain more versatile skills. You can apply through Inroads, which is an organization that helps students land internships in various majors. Also, work at part-time jobs that line up with your major, purpose or internship. Even if you work as a cashier at a store, you can transfer those skills to any accounting or regular job by focusing on being detailed oriented, multi-tasked and trustworthy; able to handle large amounts of money; provide excellent customer service; work under pressure; and learn quickly.

Study Abroad – One way to get employers to notice you quickly on your resume is if you study abroad for a semester or summer. There are so many programs, scholarships and internships that support various study abroad programs.

Join Organizations – Companies look at the organizations and extra curricular activities you are involved in as well as work experience when considering you for a job. You might apply for a Manager Trainee position but feel that you do not have management experience. If you were over the girl or boy scouts in middle school or the president of SGA in college, you have leadership skills and can transfer those skills to the stated above position. They also do not care which organizations you belonged to but what impact you made while you were a part of them.

Become a Board Member/Association Member – You can be a student member to any professional association such as the National Association of Black Accountants (NABA). Every major has related associations that you can get involved and attend meetings. You will be surprised of the networking and job contacts you will make by meeting with them once a month. There are so many unpublished job descriptions that you will only find out about when making these contacts. This also applies to being a board member for an organization that makes a difference in the community.

Attend Leadership Conferences – Every summer many organizations give outstanding leadership conferences and institutes where students can learn even more about leadership, branding, career development skills, etc. The National Urban League's Black Executive Exchange Program (BEEP) has an excellent student leadership institute every summer in various cities. It is their 40th anniversary this year. Monster.com also has a dynamic Diversity Leadership Summer Conference in various cities as well.

Certifications/Licenses – Add certifications and licenses in other areas to enhance your skills such as CPR training, real estate, teacher certification, baby sitting, professional development, human resources, massage therapy, cosmetology, home repairs, forklift, CPL, etc. These areas can come in handy for extra disposable income or if a lay off occurs. You can easily work in these fields part-time or full time. Always have something to fall back.

Volunteer/Community Service – Volunteer as much as you can. Most colleges offer service learning courses where students can get class credit for volunteering with local organizations. When companies are hiring candidates, they do not care if their experience is paid or nonpaid. They just want someone who they can train easily and who has a heart to give back.

Hang Around People With Similar Goals – Make sure that some of your friends or acquaintances line up with what you are achieving. They can introduce you to people in your industry that might land you that job, internship, graduate school, etc. They can also encourage you when you get discouraged while you are pursuing your goal and hold you accountable and get you back on track if you go astray.

Update Your Resume Constantly – Add or delete anything on your resume as soon as it happens so you will not forget. Opportunities come quickly and you might miss it if you are not ready and the most recent documentation. Most company representatives are visual and like to be able to see your accomplishments.

Be Careful What You Put on the Internet – This last one is so important! Some students have Facebook or MySpace accounts that show a totally different side of them. Most of it will appear negative to an employer. Most employers look up their candidates on-line now to see how they represent themselves outside of the interview. Be careful what you put on the Internet about yourself. If it appears wild, sexy or unorthodox, you will not get hired by anyone. Employers want someone who will represent them in or out of the office. Your reputation is your most important asset!

These examples were a couple of ways you can stand out and brag on your resume or during your interview. You can take some of these and incorporate it in your 60 second elevator speech about your accomplishments. A great interviewer knows about the first 60 seconds if you are to be invited to the second interview.

I met a young lady who was a make-up artist. She was going to school pursuing a degree in Business/Marketing. Since all of her jobs were in cosmetics or retail, she had a hard time answering questions about herself. She did not know how to transfer the skills she had to marketing or any job outside of her industry. I quickly assessed her situation and reminded her of her awesome skills that any employer would love to have. Her skills were creative; 15 years in retail; 12 years in cosmetics and make-up artistry for celebrities and local women; display and inventory management; sales, marketing of new products; detailed oriented; work well under pressure; training employees; teaching; interpersonal and verbal communication skills; adaptive; motivating; dependable; innovative ideas and promotions for new and seasonal products; and a passion to serve and help others. I saw all of that in 60 seconds even though she had a hard time articulating her experience.

I will use one last example to show how employers look at your transferable skills when making hiring decisions. When I was hired in Career Services years ago, my boss looked at everything I had done or been through. He even watched me from a far for years in the community before he pursued me for a job at the college. You never

know who is watching you. He pursued me for a whole year for my current position. He said “because you have a degree in Journalism/Advertising, I need someone who can write real well, edit resumes and letters, advertise students to companies and companies to students, design brochures and flyers”. “Because you have been over the dance ministry for 17 years, I need someone who can work well with young people and who they love”. “Because you are a professional entertainer, I need someone who can speak to the students at assemblies at the last minute with platform and presentation skills”. “Because you have traveled all over the world and you and your mom know so many people, I need someone who can bring new contacts to the college”. “Because you have gone through an extensive lay off for several years and have stood in an unemployment line, I need someone who will have the compassion for our students and not think that they are much better. You learned every skill, attended different workshops, took computer classes, worked in various industries through a staffing company during this time. You can work with any major”. He said that he needed someone who can make a difference in these young people’s lives. At that moment, I knew that it was not about me but about me giving back to these young people for this season in my life. My boss looked at my purpose and the bigger picture of what I would give the college.

When you are pursuing a career, you should look at the bigger picture of how you will make a difference at the company and not just getting a job. You want something where you can grow and learn even more skills that you can take to your next open door. The key is to use everything you have done positively and transfer it to each new experience when it is appropriate. You do not have to use everything at once, but only when it is needed to market yourself exclusively.