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Three Steps to Landing Your First Journalism Job

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MASTERING THE ART
CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Three steps to landing your first journalism job

Four. Five. Maybe even Six. The number of years it took to earn your ticket to the big time.

You've donned your cap and gown and celebrated. Now, it's time to take life more seriously. Your parents warn you that soon you will be responsible for your own livelihood. Student loan lenders remind you that you have only six months before you'll pay the piper.

You decide it's best to start applying for jobs. You apply to the places you've always wanted to live or the papers you read about during school. You hear nothing, or at least nothing encouraging. What's a young aspiring journalist to do? Follow a three-step plan: Put your best foot forward. Modify the game plan. Never give up.

Put your best foot forward

The package you send is your calling card. In some cases, that's your only shot, especially in newsrooms where they tell you: don't call us, we'll call you. Your package should include a cover letter, a resume and work samples. The cover letters should be informative and interesting enough to make the reader delve deeper into your work.

Be extra careful about presenting a picture free of errors — misspellings and grammar, for starters. Don't trust yourself to find all the problems. Instead, allow someone else to edit everything from names to numbers. I've seen letters with grammatical problems (your vs. you're or subject-verb disagreements) and reviewed resumes that have wrong dates of employment. Remember, you want the reader to know you have a strong command of grammar and accuracy.

On resumes, keep them to one page please. I did not go to a two-page resume until I had more than 15 years of experience. Surely, a recent grad can say what they've learned in one page. Share only the most essential work that pertains to the job you want. For example, the fact that you've

worked in the restaurant industry for three years may hold little value unless you want to be the dining critic. If you want to show you worked your way through college, then say that. In brief, tell the employer who you are.

With your work samples, create a package that's easily duplicated on a copier. The reader may want to share your work with others and still maintain a permanent file. Make it easy for that person to slip it on the copier without cutting, pasting and resizing. You can skip the expensive binder and use fancy paper only

for your cover letter and resume.

Modify your game plan

Now that you've worked on your putting your best foot forward, the next step is deciding where to send the package. Right out of college, sending your package to the places in the largest markets can lead to frustration. Most often, professional experience is what the larger employers seek. There's plenty of time to get there, so find an employer who is open to hiring recent graduates.

Become familiar with the industry by spending time in the reference section of the library or going to the journalism department to read trade magazines. For those who want to pursue print careers, Editor and Publisher Yearbook will give you a list of newspapers, state by state, and tell you the circulation size, ownership and other valuable information for each newspaper listed.

With a solid package in hand and an understanding of the industry, start identifying places you want to send your packages. You can visit Web sites such as journalismjobs.com and journalismnext.com. You also may want to visit the Web sites of various state press associations, which may list openings of their member papers; professional organizations that have job board sections; and individual media companies, which often have newspapers, radio, televi-

sion and online operations. To name a few, Cox Enterprises, Gannett, Knight Ridder, Lee Enterprises and MediaNews Group all list job openings on their corporate sites.

Even though you have a degree now, don't stop building your skills and expanding your knowledge. Join professional journalism organizations that offer training, job fairs and networking opportunities. Exercise your networking skills by contacting your journalism professors and fellow alumni who are working in your field. They may not be able to hire you, but they may be able to offer you advice or may keep you in mind if they hear of anything. Once you land a job, be sure to let your network know where you have landed and thank them for their time and assistance.

Don't give up

Now, you have completed Steps 1 and 2, but you still haven't landed a job. Remember Step 3: Never give up. The job hunt requires tenacity. Dedicate at least an hour a day to finding a job. That means visiting Web sites, following up with a phone call on packages sent, and sending even more packages. You may consider planning a road trip. That's right, a road trip. Call places in advance, tell them you will be in town on specific dates and ask for an informational interview where you can find out what qualities and experience they seek in their employees. Be sure to give them a package. They may have valuable feedback or a job.

Twenty. Thirty. Forty. Years you may spend working in journalism. The years can be filled with excitement and rewards. If, however, you find your passion for finding the truth and telling the stories of life slipping, be courageous enough to change your life and work. You spend more than a third of your time at work, so be sure you love it. Life is much too short not to do what you love.

Carla Kimbrough-Robinson has spent nearly 20 years in newsrooms and is a trained life coach with Inspire Higher International, LLC, a Denver-based personal development company. Send her questions at coaching@inspirehigher.net



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