

5 tips for landing your first job

With South Africa in the grips of graduation fever, and the soon-to-be capped proudly displaying their achievement on social media, the reality of the challenges associated with one's first job search will soon set in for many.



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“Transitioning from studenting to adulting can be hard and often demotivating once application after application goes unanswered. Unfortunately, given the country’s constrained economic environment and the tough job market, a degree is no longer a golden ticket to employment,” says Wonga Ntshinga, Senior Head of Programme: Faculty of ICT at The Independent Institute of Education.

He says with years of hard work behind them, the real work now starts for graduates.

“You have to approach the job search with the mindset that the search is your job, for now, until you convert your CV into an interview, and your interview into a job offer,” he says.

Ntshinga says graduates should keep in mind that each job advertisement will attract scores of applications, and that it is necessary to make one’s candidacy stand out from those of one’s peers.

“Treat the job hunt process as an opportunity to learn and grow, and constantly polish your CV, your skills, and experience,” he says.

Ntshinga says there are five things graduates must do in preparing for the job hunt:

1. Sort out your CV

“Your CV will be the first impression prospective employers get of you. Structure your CV logically, make sure that it contains all the necessary information, and showcase any relevant experience and qualifications.

“Very importantly, get your CV proofread to ensure that there are no spelling or grammatical errors.”

Ntshinga says that all good higher education institutions, where it be a public university or private, should have graduate assistance.

“Approach your institution and ask for help, if necessary, in drafting your CV. Additionally, your institution’s career centre may be in a position to connect you with potential employers.”

And finally, it is vitally important to tailor one’s CV for the requirements of each individual position.

“Sending out a generic CV, which does not address the specific position advertised, is a surefire way to land your application in the recruiter’s recycle bin,” Ntshinga says.



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2. Search for opportunities

The jobs won’t come to you, you have to find them, says Ntshinga.

“You can’t apply for something you don’t know about. The way to find out about current or future openings is to keep your ear to the ground, to network, and to do desktop research.”

It can be very helpful to join professional organisations, which will provide networking events and opportunities, industry newsletters, and the possibility of finding a mentor.

A suitable mentor can guide and support you through good times and bad. Mentors are ideally positioned to help young graduates with practical, industry-specific advice – whether it be skills or career options.

Meeting with recruiters, checking in daily with career sites, and registering your CV on a number of sites will also help to get your profile out there, Ntshinga says.

3. Develop your personal brand

“The very first thing a prospective employer will do upon receiving your CV is to search your social media profiles, and peruse any other information about you they can find online. So you must do a social media audit and remove anything that could throw a negative light over your candidacy,” says Ntshinga.

“Once you’ve acted to eliminate any potentially harmful content, you have to pro-actively build a positive online presence. That means joining professional sites such as Linked-In and consistently building a positive, professional personal image.”

4. Keep growing

Ongoing professional development is non-negotiable in today's world of work, Ntshinga says.

"The work doesn't stop when you receive your degree, or even once you land your first job. You have to constantly update and build on your skills to remain employable and sought after. This means you have to commit to an attitude of lifelong learning. So what you can do right now, is for instance to sign up for a short or online course which builds on your existing skills, or provide an additional skill that complements your first qualification.

"As an added bonus, the fact that you are continuing your studies looks exceptionally well on your CV, and will definitely catch the eye of employers."

Ntshinga says during the job search process, it may also be helpful to volunteer your time and services in a field related to your qualification.

"That will help bridge that crucial gap between academic knowledge and experience, which is almost always called for in job advertisements."



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5. Stay positive

Searching for work can be a demanding, challenging and sometimes demotivating endeavour.

"The search and the inevitable rejections can be emotionally and psychologically exhausting, but you must not let this consume you," says Ntshinga.

"Don't take rejection personally, but rather view each opportunity as a chance to learn and grow. Use your time and your days wisely, by scheduling in the work you'll be doing on your search every day, by getting plenty of exercise and rest so that your physical wellbeing doesn't become an inhibiting factor."

"Finally, get help if you need it. Approach your own or a new institution, and ask for assistance if your job search still fails to produce results. Career centres will be able to advise you if you need to change your approach, or if you need to supplement your skills to be more relevant in the job market. They will also be able to assist you in honing the very important soft skills that are in such high demand from employers.

"Keep going, keep learning, keep abreast of development in your industry, and keep sharpening your skills," Ntshinga says.

ENDS

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