

GAINING EXPERIENCE: A CLASSIC CATCH-22

Summary: Learn how you can gain the necessary experience to land a job where you can utilize the degree or degrees you are working on.



Question: I am working on two degrees in financial planning and law but don't have any practical experience in either of the disciplines. Because of a family situation, I am positioned as the sole provider, so I am looking for a reasonably well-paid position in either of these professions. I keep getting knocked back because my resume doesn't show any practical experience. How do I overcome the problem of needing relevant work experience when not being able to get it in the first place?

Answer: This is the classic Catch-22 of experience: you need a job to get the experience, but you can't get a job without the experience. Combine three strategies to break the cycle.

Make the case for your transferable skills. While you may not have the direct experience, chances are you have developed skills and personal qualities that apply to the positions you are seeking. Analyze every detail of the job requirements listed and come up with as many specific examples as possible of competencies and characteristics that relate to the jobs and employers you are focusing on. Highlight these in your resume. You are, in effect, building the bridge that will link who you are to what employers are looking for.

Network your way in. It isn't always the most qualified person who gets the job. Compelling personalities and "good chemistry" sometimes speak louder than credentials and experience. Start circulating in the financial and legal worlds you are looking to become a part of. Work through alumni connections, become an active member of relevant professional associations and attend business events to become visible and make connections. Look for opportunities to contribute. As insignificant as small gestures like passing along articles of interest and following up on requests might seem, they help you build reputation capital. The best way to develop relationships is by giving, not just taking, so communicate and demonstrate your interest in others. Employers will be much more inclined to give you a chance if you have established that type of reputation for yourself.

Get the experience. Think outside the box. You obviously have pressing financial needs that unfortunately will have no bearing on employers' hiring decisions. If experience is what employers want, find a way to get any experience. Volunteer for a nonprofit association; arrange for an internship or shadowing experience; try to get a temp or contract position; incorporate a case study into a class project; and write a paper that involves interviewing financial planners or legal associates.

While none of these approaches are easy or obvious, any combination of the above will strengthen your candidacy.

- See [How to Gain Business Experience](#) for more information.