

WHY EARLY-CAREER PROS SHOULD CONSIDER STEPPING BACK

Summary: Find out how to land a mid-level post after having worked at entry-level positions since graduation.



Question: I received a master's degree with a 4.0 grade-point average from a liberal arts program at a well-known state university. Since graduating I have had a less-than-outstanding career, with a series of low-level, dead-end jobs. Hiring managers say my education makes me overqualified for entry-level positions, but my lack of relevant professional experience keeps me from obtaining a midlevel post. How can I bridge this gap?

Answer: While midlevel opportunities are hard to come by without the requisite experience, you are definitely in the ballpark for entry-level professional jobs. Shift your attention to that arena. To position yourself for appropriate opportunities of interest, develop a focus.

To present a compelling case to employers, first get clear in your own mind about your target market. Use the library, the Internet and the local chamber of commerce to research career fields and employers. Also plan to set up informational interviews with people about the pros, cons and potential connections of careers and organizations you decide to pursue. Consider opportunities with both for-profit and nonprofit employers.

Once you are psyched about the pursuit of a particular career path, create a resume that reinforces your direction. Start with an objective that says, for example, "Entry-Level Position in Human Resources." Immediately after the objective, include a "Highlights of Qualifications" section that states four or five related skills/attributes. Next list work experience, noting anything that is even remotely related to your intended career field. Include your education in the final section of the resume.

You are likely to find that once on the job, your liberal arts education will prove tremendously valuable in managing daily work situations and advancing your career. Getting a foot in the door, however, may require a referral from a recruiter or a nudge from a networking contact.

If you haven't tapped the resources of the alumni of your alma mater, this is the time to do so. Your research should lead you to 10 to 20 organizations that are potential employers. Alumni, former colleagues, family and friends may know someone at these organizations who could be helpful to your search. Be sure to read up on networking etiquette to avoid wearing out your welcome.

This targeted approach, combined with proactive networking efforts, will enhance your outcome.

See [33 Quick Tips to Improve Your Networking Experience](#) for more information.