

Covering “Looking for a Job in a Recession”

By Seghel Yohannes, Career Planning Peer

On April 29th, at approximately 5:30pm in McLaren 252, five panelists offered their perspectives on what students can be doing to improve their chances of getting a job during the current economic crisis. These five panelists were Norman Caito (NC), who works at the financial aid office on campus, Molly Zook (MZ), a psychologist at the Counseling Center on campus, Bjorn Strummer (BS), a recruiter with the General Services Administration, Jeff Brzozowski (JB), a College Relations Manager with Travelers Insurance, and Sara Menke (SM), CEO of Premier Staffing. Ellen P. Kelly Daley (EPKD), the Associate Director of the Career Services Center, prompted the panelists with questions that were relevant to the student body. Students also asked the panelists questions at workshop. Many different topics were covered during this fabulous event, and I will provide you with a brief overview of each one.

*EPKD: What are the **top five tips** you would give to a college student [during the current recession and while possibly trying to find a job]?*

JB: It’s important to take inventory of your current responsibilities and obligations. Making a plan leads to success. Do research on companies, and write everything down. Network with as many people as possible who are willing to help you (friends, family, etc.). Networking doesn’t just mean saying hi. Ask for information about any job openings anyone knows of, schedule informational interviews [just to chat], even if they’re just over the phone. Handing out resumes [alone] won’t cut it. Even if a company isn’t hiring today [and you do an informational interview with them], they may keep you in mind for something down the road.

BS: Don’t panic. Have a positive, relaxed, go-getter attitude. Understand the market and do tons of research, especially to find companies that are hiring aggressively.

MZ: Turn challenges into opportunity. Stay resilient, and structure each day as if you’re working a 40 hour-week. Don’t let stress from disappointment take you down.

JB: Reward yourself if you *do* get a job interview!

NC: Start figuring out your financial obligations (loans, financial aid, etc). Go to loan exit counseling, and ALWAYS stay in contact with your lender. Never stop making payments or walk away. Use the grace period to get things in order.

EPKD: What is a good job search plan for students?

JB: Attend any in-person job fairs, shake hands, network. Check out online resources like Monster.com, CareerBuilder.com, Indeed.com, Craigslist.com, Nuresume.com, and school job databases, like DONSCAREERS and Internship Exchange.

SM: Be prepared, clean up your resume, make sure it doesn't have jargon, be clear and concise about your skills. Don't mess up your one chance [by sending in a resume that isn't great]. When writing a cover letter, be specific about what job you want and why. Identify what YOU think would make you most happy, then find companies that match that. Use personal social networking to your advantage, like FaceBook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Google job positions you want and see what pops up.

BS: It's all about attitude and how you market yourself! Be sociable and friendly. Employers want to see the "spark in your eye," they want to see that you want the job more than anyone else.

EPKD: How do you deal with bad news?

MZ: Don't block it out, manage the stress because you don't want it to build into something worse. Identify your stressors and stay positive. Something simple you can do is through your everyday behavior: sleep and eat at a regular time every day and take deep breaths to calm yourself down.

NC: Take advantage of the grace period [to plan before you have to start paying back your loans].

EPKD: How do you talk to your parents about the difficulty of finding a job and financial stress?

JB: Don't just go to graduate school to escape debt or if you feel you have no other choice. Think about how it will make you look in two years in the job market if you've taken time to work and develop/apply the skills you learned at school at an actual job. It's a good thing.

SM: Take jobs that are available, and consider them an opportunity, that lets people see you're willing to take it as a learning experience. There's an opportunity to move up in any company, even Starbucks.

MZ: You can come to the counseling center to talk about your individual situation.

BS: Your parents care for you, so talk to your parents about everything you're doing so they can meet you halfway. Also remember that any job is valuable.

EPKD: What are some post-school, post-graduation activities students should be engaging in?

SM: Absolutely get an internship, even if it doesn't pay, get some valuable professional experience.

MZ: Internships help figure out what kind of industry and type of people you want to work with.

BS: Learn how the world works, being at an internship helps you learn how to act socially [in a professional environment]. It already puts you a cut above the rest because you're using your time to learn, not to drink!

EPKD: Would you recommend a buddy or support system or a mentor?

SM: Check out the USF alumni network. They're highly responsive and help you get your foot in the door. They might know someone who can help you. However, even if you have a mentor, be able to make confident decisions for yourself and by yourself.

QUESTIONS FROM STUDENT ATTENDANTS

Q: When should we call lenders to talk about aid if we're going to walk in May but also plan on taking summer classes?

NC: Call the lenders any time. Explain your situation; they'll help you figure it out.

Q: How can you compete with people [for jobs] when they are more experienced and have had more education than you? Or other college graduates?

JB: Since they've had more education and more experience, they're less desirable because they command more salary, which doesn't make them a match for college/entry-level employment. Also, know who you are and what you're looking for. And take the time to personally thank each interviewer (either electronically or mail a handwritten note) for the time they spent with you.

BS: Send a letter [even if they don't hire you], which says that you're sorry you're not the right fit and asks what you could do to improve your chances in the future.

EPKD: Send a thank-you letter to references also!

Q: I'm not sure what my passion is yet. Is it okay to tell your interviewer that you're interviewing to just kind of feel out the job?

JB: Use informational interviews for that. Interviews are for when you're ready to "bring you're A-game."

MZ: Gauge how passionate you are about a job by how well you connect [also on an emotional level] with the interviewers.

PARTING THOUGHTS

NC: If you're stressing over debt, try instead to look at your loans with a sense of gratitude because they helped you reach your goal. Your loans were an investment; don't

feel like it's a burden. Accept the responsibility to repay them intelligently, and ask for help from the financial aid office.

MZ: Take control over what you can in this economy. It'll help you to stay resilient. Be kind to yourself and treat yourself well.

BS: This [attending the workshop] is the first step, and get out there.

JB: I think four years from now, or whenever the economy turns, there will be a labor shortage for us to fill, especially with so many people being able to go into retirement. [Keep in mind] the recession is temporary.

SM: Appreciate the now and the value of gathering knowledge capital.

EPKD: And come to the Career Services Center!