

Handbook for Laid-Off School Employees

III. The Job Search

You have been laid off. Now what? After the shock and disappointment, keep in mind that you do have options, and there are jobs available out there. Here are some tips and guidelines to keep in mind as you search for new employment.

The job search: This is your job now. Use all the resources available to you — from Web sites to friends and colleagues — to find job leads. Stay focused and don't get discouraged. Use any and all resources to find leads and follow through on them. Many medium-sized and larger school districts have employment pages on their Web sites. Here are some other job search sites:

- Monster.com
- Careerbuilder.com
- Jobsinnh.com
- Edjobsnh.com
- Indeed.com
- Craigslist.com
- Nhschooljobs.com
- Nhworks.org
- Seacoastcareers.com

Do your research: Learn all you can about schools or organizations you are targeting for a job. A wealth of information can be learned on their Web sites or by talking to people who work there. You want to be well informed when you apply. Knowing the specifics about a school makes it easier to point out in your cover letter how your skills fit the opening.

Structure your time: Now that you have free time on your hands, make the most of it. Plan specific hours of the day for your job search, phone calls, and sending resumes. Visit your local library weekly and read regional newspapers and periodicals to get ideas for job leads. Keep a spreadsheet to track your applications, noting the date sent, to whom, position applied for, and follow-ups.

Network: Many jobs are not ever advertised but are filled by applicants who find out about the opening by word of mouth. Get the word out to friends, colleagues and professional contacts that you are seeking employment. Include brief information about your background and targeted fields. Meet with friends and colleagues on a weekly basis to share ideas and leads. It will also help keep your morale up to be out talking with other people.

The resume: Be sure your resume and cover letter are free of errors and up-to-date. Share them with friends and professional colleagues to review and proof before sending them out to potential employers. Get tips and facts from job search professionals on Web sites such as Careerbuilder.com and Monster.com. Refrain from elaborate resume presentation portfolios. Most Human Resource (HR) departments take them apart to save file space or electronically scan the documents.

The cover letter: Your cover letter should be clear, concise and polished. It should answer two important questions: why you are applying for the job, and what makes you especially qualified for it. To answer the first question, talk about your interest in the position and organization, how it ties in with your experience, and how you see yourself contributing to the organization. In discussing your qualifications for the job, highlight specific experience

or skills that are directly related to the job. Having done your research about the job, you should be able to make those connections for the person reading your letter.

Informational interview: If there is a company or school district you are interested in targeting for a job, ask the HR office personnel, principal or superintendent for a short informational interview to learn more about it. Be professional and keep your interview to 30 minutes or less. Ask informed questions such as, "Please tell me about the education philosophy of the middle school," and "What have been the greatest successes for the school in the past year?" The informational interview will help you determine whether you want to apply for jobs there. It will also give the person you are interviewing a better sense of who you are when they see your resume.

Volunteer: Contributing to your community by volunteering at your child's school, a community program, or non-profit will give you a renewed sense of purpose. It will also help you to network for job leads, and it will provide additional material for your resume to demonstrate you used your time productively while you were between jobs.

Think outside the box: If you are a laid-off teacher or school support staff and are unable to find a job in a school setting, consider other like positions. For example, many social service agencies hire people with special education and school experience. Some suggestions are listed below:

- Moore Center Services, Manchester, NH, moorecenter.org
- Odyssey House NH, Hampton, NH, odysseyhousenh.org
- Measured Progress, Dover, NH, measuredprogress.org
- Riverbend Community Mental Health, Concord, NH, riverbendcmhc.org

The place holder: It may not make sense to hold out for the ideal job after many months of not finding one. It is perfectly acceptable to take a job for which you are overqualified, or is outside your expertise, knowing that it is going to be short term until the ideal job comes along.

The interview: Here's your chance to show your skills and talent. Be prepared by researching the position and organization before the interview. If possible, drive to the location once before the day of the interview so you know where to go, or give yourself plenty of time to get there. Arrive a few minutes early. Dress professionally with clean, understated and professional attire. Wear something in which you feel comfortable and professional. Ask a colleague if the outfit is appropriate for an interview. If there is an interview panel, acknowledge each person when you are introduced. Bring a copy of your resume in case they do not have one. Do not bring a portfolio or other projects to show, unless it is relevant to the position. Answer each question with a succinct, clear answer. Do not ramble onto other topics. If you are unsure about a question someone is asking, ask for clarification. The interview is not a test; it is an opportunity to have a discussion about your skills and experience, as well as for the potential employer to get to know you. If you are asked to share a little about yourself, be brief with personal details, but do tell the interviewer why you are interested in the position, and briefly how your background is a good fit with it. When the interviewers are finished with questions, ask a few of your own. This will demonstrate your interest in the organization and knowledge of it. At the conclusion, shake everyone's hand and thank them. Within 24 hours send a note or e-mail to the person leading the interview expressing your thanks for the opportunity to meet with them. If you left out some key element during the conversation, include that in your note.

Back to "Handbook for Laid-Off School Employees" Introduction.