You’ve earned your diploma, completed an internship or two, and held down a few after-school jobs. Now you’re wanting to hit the big time: a career. How do you get one of those? Get a Job (and keep it) will take you through the necessary steps of building your career—from creating your résumé and cover letter to developing interviewing skills to mastering what it takes to be considered a valuable employee. This section will also cover some of the essentials to keeping and succeeding in that job once you land it. Good luck!

Before you can get started on your career path, you need to know what you like to do and what you do best. If you haven’t done that yet, you should put this down and do some soul-searching. Here are some steps to get you started:

• Perform a self-assessment — find out what you like, what you value, and where your talents lie. Ask friends and family to help, but pay the closest attention to your own feelings. You’re the one who will be living with your decision.
• Research possible occupations — look for careers that match the personality traits you discovered in the self-assessment. This can be done through internships, part-time jobs, shadowing experiences, or by researching on the Internet or at the library.
• Make decisions — sometimes the scariest part, this is where you take the information you’ve gathered in the previous steps and make decisions on schooling and career paths.
• Pursue the path you’ve chosen — put it all into action.

Sources:
• Body Language in the Workplace by Julius Fast
• 12 Simple Secrets of Happiness at Work by Glenn Van Ekeren
• How to Survive Your First 90 Days at a New Company by Paul Kaponya
• Jumpstart Your Career in College by Adele Scheele, Ph.D.
• American Vocational Association
• National Association of Colleges and Employers
To succeed at any job, you need certain tools: the specific skills the job requires as well as general life skills, such as effective communication and time management. Those skills will serve you well once you have the job, but to get your foot in the door you need a cover letter and a résumé.

The cover letter

Though much emphasis is put on creating a great résumé, the cover letter is the first thing a potential employer will see. If it’s well done, they’ll move on to the résumé, if not, well … your prize-winning résumé may be tossed aside.

What makes a good cover letter? Here are some pointers:

**Know your audience.** That means a cover letter should be written with the needs of the employer in mind. Find out what the job entails and think about what the employer would consider important, then tell the recruiter how you can fill those needs.

**Customize it.** Each cover letter should be written specifically for each job you seek. When possible, address your letter to a specific person, and be sure that person’s name and title are correct.

**Get to the point.** A potential employer may only read the first paragraph. So be sure your first paragraph tells why you’re the best person for the job. Don’t ramble. Your résumé will fill them in on the details.

**Proof it.** Nothing turns a potential employer off faster than grammatical errors or misspellings. If proof-reading isn’t your strong suit, ask your parents or a friend to proof it for you.

**Presentation.** Use the same high-quality paper you use for your résumé.

**Contact information.** Don’t forget to include your contact information, including phone numbers and an e-mail address if you have one.

What employers are looking for in job applicants

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, the following are some of the traits employers want most in their employees:

- Communication skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Motivation/initiative
- Work experience
- Computer skills
- Leadership abilities
- Strong GPA/academics
- Writing skills
- Teamwork skills
- Ethics
- Analytical skills

Employers don’t want students. They want enthusiastic, contributing employees. They want employees who have excellent written, computer, and oral skills as well as collaboration skills.

— Adele Scheele, Ph.D., Jumpstart Your Career in College
A résumé is basically a marketing tool. That sheet of paper is your personal representative to a potential employer; it’s important to make sure it does a good job!

Here’s how:

**Keep it neat.** Use high-quality paper and organize the information in a tidy, easy-to-read format. There should be no smudges, wrinkles, or spots.

**Tell a story.** Use active verbs when listing your experience, such as organize, assist, manage, develop, implement, create, initiate, supervise, and coordinate. And, wherever possible, quantify the work you’ve done. That means use numbers to tell the recruiter how effective your work is.

Here’s an example:

Assisted in creating a fund-raising campaign that increased contributions by 105 percent.

**Include honors and activities.** As a student you may not have much actual work experience, but honors you’ve received or extracurricular activities can tell an employer a lot about your leadership skills and social maturity.

**Proof it.** This can’t be emphasized enough. Make sure your résumé is free of errors in spelling and grammar.

**Contact information.** Just like on the cover letter, be sure to include your contact information — phone numbers and an e-mail address if you have one.
It worked! Your cover letter was read, your résumé impressed them, and now they want to interview you!

Like public speaking, interviews can be nerve-wracking. The best way to control your nerves is to prepare yourself.

**Dress the part**

Your first order of business in an interview is to make a good first impression. Is the job important to you? Then you should dress as though it is.

If the company you’re interviewing with is a formal company, both men and women applicants will be expected to wear a suit. If the company is more casual, a dress or slacks and sports coat is acceptable, but you should never dress as casually as the employees. Once you get the job, you can wear what they wear, but until you get it, you need to show how much you want it.

Above all, your clothes should be clean and neat.

**Body language**

Experts say 65 to 90 percent of every conversation is interpreted through body language. In other words, people are going to “listen” to your body language more than your words!

If you want to appear confident and energetic, stand or sit up straight, make eye contact, and smile.

**Honesty is the best policy**

Review the list of traits employers are looking for on page 3 and put a check mark next to the ones you think you have. Put two check marks next to the ones you think are your strongest traits. Now, circle the ones that are not strong points for you. It’s likely that a potential employer is going to ask you to discuss these skills, so it’s best to be prepared for that discussion. Be honest when marking the list; a job interview is no place for dishonesty.

For the traits with check marks, think of examples you can give during an interview that show you have those traits.

For those you’ve circled, take a minute to think how you can improve on those. If one of those traits is brought up in the interview, be honest with the interviewer that you recognize this characteristic in not a particular strong suit of yours, but put a positive spin on it. Briefly discuss your plans for improving in that area. An interviewer will be impressed that you are mature enough to recognize a weakness and have a plan to improve on it.

**ACTIVITIES**

- Go to the comic section of your newspaper and pick a comic strip character. Read the strip every day for a week, then write a résumé for the character. Keep in mind the list of traits employers look for in their employees.

- Go through your newspaper, looking at the photographs of people you do not recognize. Without reading the captions, write down your first impressions of each person. Then read the caption. Were your first impressions correct? Discuss as a class.

- Find the Op-Ed section of your newspaper and read through the articles to find an issue you are particularly interested in. Do you have a solution or an opinion that isn’t represented? Write a letter to the editor that presents your solution and makes a case for it.

- Go through your newspaper each day and look for articles that give advice on interviewing techniques, job markets, career success, etc. Clip the articles and create a career portfolio that you can thumb through to remind yourself of strategies and tips.
While it’s important that you try to highlight your best characteristics in an interview, it is even more important that you demonstrate them or work at developing them once you get the job.

Some of these traits, such as work experience, simply take time, while others, such as motivation or ethics are innate values that must be fostered if you don’t possess them already.

Here’s a closer look at some of these traits and how you can develop them:

**Communication skills**

To be an effective communicator you must be able get your message across clearly as well as receive messages clearly. To get your message across effectively, take a few moments to collect and organize your thoughts before speaking and try to illustrate your points with examples. To be sure you correctly understand a situation or a request from your manager, listen with your ears, eyes, body and mind. If you are unclear about what is being said in the conversation, or whether someone has understood your message, ask.

**Computer skills**

If you don’t have them already, it’s time to acquire them. Knowing the appropriate software programs for your career will not only keep you moving up the corporate ladder but will help you handle your workload most efficiently. If you feel you need help in this area, talk to your manager about training available through the company. If that isn’t an option, investing in a computer class will be an investment in your future.

**Leadership abilities**

While it might be terrifying, the only way to learn to lead is to volunteer to do it! Don’t just volunteer for anything, though. One trait of a great leader is knowing your strengths and limitations. If a project comes up at work that seems right up your alley, step forward and take the lead. Also, don’t think that good leadership means you have to do it all yourself. Recognize your limitations and ask for help as soon as you realize you need it. Another part of leadership is the ability to delegate tasks to others and track their progress.

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... studies indicate that the single most important factor affecting success and failure is the ability to work effectively with others. This includes the ability to understand people and communicate with them effectively.

— Paul Kaponya, How to Survive Your First 90 Days at a New Company
Being a good employee requires more than just being able to perform the specific functions of your job. It also means behaving in a professional manner. While your co-workers may someday feel like family and become some of your closest friends, it's important to treat them and your company with respect. You are all there to do a job together, so adopt the following habits:

**Be on time.** If you are always late, you are giving the message that other people's time is not as important as yours.

**Be honest.** If you've let someone down on the job or dropped the ball on a project, speak up and take responsibility for it. Your co-workers will forgive you more quickly, and they will be more likely to offer to help you out of a jam.

**Keep a positive attitude.** People with positive attitudes help motivate the people around them and create a happier workplace. If you adopt a negative attitude, you may soon notice that you're eating by yourself in the lunch room.

**Be prepared.** Show up for meetings fully prepared. Know what the topic is, read any materials handed out beforehand, and show up on time ready to work.

**Don't interrupt.** Good listening skills are imperative in the workplace. And waiting for a person to stop speaking before you start talking shows that you respect them and their opinion. If you show others that respect, they will soon start listening carefully to you as well.

Most employees are hired on a 90-day probation period. That gives you three months to prove yourself worthy of the job and to make sure the job is right for you. At the end of that 90 days, you can expect a performance review, in which your manager will discuss what you are doing right and areas you may need to improve.

**ACTIVITIES**

- As you look through the news stories each day, think about the traits listed earlier. For each trait, find someone profiled in the paper that you think demonstrates that trait in their behavior. Write a paragraph on each person explaining how they represent that character trait.

- Sports are recreational activities, however some people make their living (and very good livings) playing sports professionally. Read through several stories in the sports section of the paper, then decide whether the same traits that make good employees are necessary for athletes. Discuss as a class.

- Look through the comic strip characters in your newspaper. Choose three or four and consider whether you think you would want to work with them or not. Why or why not?
THANK YOU