



Generational Differences, Worried Parents and Jobs with Drive-Thru Windows

By Randy Hain

It is not a great time to be a recent college graduate in today's job market. As tough as it has been for more experienced workers, these young adults have had a much more difficult time finding full-time employment related to their education. I have spoken to several 2009 graduates recently who have been looking for almost a year and found nothing better than part-time retail or restaurant industry jobs. A common joke these days is that "you can always become a Barista at Starbucks," which, unfortunately, is not that far off from reality.

This year's class of graduating seniors is understandably nervous and anxious about their career prospects. Many have college loans to repay and parents who already made significant sacrifices to put their children through school are facing the prospect of continued financial support with no end in sight. But, there are glimmers of hope. A recent survey from NACE (National Association of Colleges and Employers) shows employers are planning to hire 5.3 percent more new college graduates in 2009-2010 than they did in 2008-2009. The survey among contributing employers shows that hiring is up in nearly all reporting industries. The Northeast has the brightest hiring outlook with a 25.5% increase in projected jobs for new graduates while the Southeast is the only region in the red, reporting a 10% decrease. Statistics are helpful, but these young people need jobs...and they need them quickly. **So, what can be done?**

One of the most significant paradigm shifts for job seekers (experienced or new college graduate) is recognizing that jobs will rarely come looking for you and that applying for jobs online is often a fruitless exercise. Campus recruiters from top firms obviously still visit college campuses, but job offerings are sparse and they will likely only take candidates with the best grades. This should not be a surprise. It is an employer's job market (for now) and they have the luxury of choosing the best of the candidates referred to them, often with relevant industry experience. A typical job posting online will often receive hundreds of applicants and you will be lucky to receive an automated response acknowledging receipt of your resume.

First and foremost, it is time for a radical shift in thinking. Effective job search strategies have changed dramatically over the last few years, especially for new graduates. The changes will often feel uncomfortable and perhaps painful, but they are necessary. Before I share some very practical tips on how to jump start a job search, let's take a look at some *generational* thinking which needs to change:

Old Thinking: Generation X and the Baby Boomers must do everything possible to understand and deal with Generation Y. They think differently, live differently, communicate differently and we must engage with them on their terms.

New Thinking: Generation X and the Baby Boomers should respect Generation Y and their differences and do what they can to embrace, encourage, mentor and assist them in being successful in life. They are our future. For their part, Generation Y should recognize that they have much to learn from older Generations and must be willing to respect them and meet them half way.

Why is embracing this idea important? Until the economy crashed along with Wall Street in late 2008, one of the most talked about subjects in companies was “The Millenials are coming! The Millenials are coming!” It was almost comical to observe the lengths businesses were going to in an attempt to cater to Generation Y. Yet, I think we have done Generation Y a disservice by placing them on a pedestal. After the 2008 Wall Street crash when the new economic reality settled in, nobody seemed to care about dealing with the Millenials. It was every man for himself. “Save the ship!” was the new battle cry and this left a once mighty and feared group feeling marginalized.

The new reality must sink in that Generation X and the Baby Boomers occupy the vast majority of leadership roles in our country and they are making the hiring decisions in companies. Generation Y must move in their direction and strike a mutually beneficial compromise. This thought is the catalyst behind much of the practical advice I have for new college graduate job seekers. Here are 10 practical tips on job search strategy for this group:

- 1. Use the right communication and social media tools.** LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) and e-mail are the preferred tools of Gen X and Baby Boomer professionals. FaceBook and Twitter have their place, as does texting, but senior hiring managers are typically not adept at using these tools (and would rarely use them in the business world). You could miss out on career opportunities by not fully utilizing the tools of the people who make hiring decisions.
- 2. Ask your parents for a *different* kind of help.** Go to you parents for networking assistance. Ask for introductions to senior executives where they work, church members, friends in business, etc. This is the kind of assistance parents would love to provide, but they are not always asked. *Make the most of this largely untapped resource.*
- 3. Cultivate a professional image.** You just can’t go wrong with a business suit for all of your interviews. Make sure all of your communication is crisp, respectful and conforms to accepted standards-have your parents or a friend in business review your correspondence. I advocate mailing thank you letters over sending emails. First impressions are everything...so make a good one.
- 4. Do your homework.** If you have an opportunity to interview with a company, do extensive research to demonstrate interest and preparation. Utilize LinkedIn and Google to learn more about the person conducting the interview. Understanding their background and determining what you may have in common can help you score points in an interview.

5. **Connect through Content.** Distinguish yourself by emailing links for articles (relevant to their business) to people you are trying to meet for interviews. It shows that you are taking them and their time seriously. It also demonstrates insight and a real desire to know their business. You can also mail articles along with a well crafted letter instead of sending an email.
6. **Tap into your school's alumni group.** Your school career office can help you get access to the alumni database. You can also search school alumni through LinkedIn and Google with ease. This is an under utilized resource in many job searches, but it can be one of the most effective. Once you locate an executive who graduated from your school, contact them in the hopes of getting advice and networking help for your search. In my experience, there is a powerful bond among college alumni and a desire to help "one of their own." Make full use of their goodwill.
7. **Practice Affinity Based Connecting.** Playing off the advice on alumni connecting, connect with people with whom you share affinity. In other words, who shares your personal interests (skiing, tennis, hiking, etc.)? Who was a member of your fraternity/sorority? Who shares your faith? Who shares your passion for the same non-profit causes? The list of affinity based connections can be endless and this is easily searchable through LinkedIn and Google and to a lesser degree through FaceBook and Twitter. It is so much easier to approach people through shared interests versus the ineffective: "I am looking for a new job, can you help me?"
8. **Be a Volunteer.** Get involved in the community. Volunteer for your favorite causes and make a difference. You will often get an opportunity to interact with business professionals from companies who give back to the community. This is an excellent way to give back to others and make connections. In a perfect world, try to offer your volunteer efforts where you can utilize your educational background. It goes without saying that you should be motivated primarily in this approach by a selfless desire to serve others.
9. **Try a new approach to Internships.** Internships are available in far fewer numbers these days and companies typically select the top of the graduating class for these opportunities. Want to be radical? Consider an approach advocated by Brandon Smith, a co-founder of Core Growth Partners and Senior Lecturer at Emory University: "Where graduates are having the most success today is through creative unpaid internships. The most successful are proactively targeting companies, reaching out through their networks and offering to help them with one of their current struggles through an unpaid internship. Companies today are still quite risk averse and resource strapped. They don't want to take on a freshly minted, and largely untested, graduate, train him or her and then wait and see how things pan out. The graduate, who recognizes this and finds creative ways to reduce the risk and resources that would typically be invested, ultimately becomes the graduate who is not only employed, but is fast-tracked because of his or her initiative."
10. **Cultivate a circle of Mentors.** Seek out senior business leaders who might be willing to provide guidance and mentorship. Schools may be aware of business leaders who are willing to work with new graduates. A more effective way would

be to go through your alumni network, seeking out people who are leaders in companies you are interested in. Your parents and family may also be able to make introductions to business people who will participate. Look for business leaders who will challenge you, coach you and help you with connections.

You may view this article as my firm grasp of the obvious or exactly the advice you have been looking for. Either way, finding a good job in today's economy demands innovation, tenacity, hard work and compromise. I don't claim to have all the answers and I can't guarantee these tips will land you a new job. I can promise you will be much more effective and see more opportunities with this strategy.

Generational differences are a real issue, which is where the need for compromise comes in. Engage with Generation X and the Baby Boomers, seek their assistance, learn from their experiences and you will likely find them receptive to giving you the job opportunities you seek. Remember that 20+ years from now you will be helping to run the world and a whole new generation of college graduates will be knocking on your door. Hopefully your experiences today will positively shape your response to them in the future...and help talented college graduates not settle for jobs with drive-thru windows.

*For further resources on job search strategy, how to use LinkedIn, interviewing tips and much more, please read the helpful articles in the ***Insights*** section of my company's website: www.belloaks.com.

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