

What Job Seekers Need to Know Today



Columns originally published in

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What Job Seekers Need to Know Today

HR executive Christina Stokes started writing the Hire and Seek column for *Strategies & Tactics*, PRSA's award-winning publication, in January 2019.

To date, she's penned 50-plus pieces for us (and counting!) about the job market — from both the perspective of the job seeker and the hiring manager — covering everything from refreshing your résumé to organizing your job search.

Here, we've highlighted her content — along with work from our other three regular columnists — for soon-to-be graduates and new professionals.

We hope this will be a helpful resource for students looking to begin their communications careers as well as those who are still relatively new to the profession — both to help them on their PR journey and to let them know about resources available from PRSA, the nation's leading professional organization serving the communications community. — Amy Jacques, managing editor, *Strategies & Tactics*

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As someone who has led talent acquisition strategy and executive recruitment in the public relations profession for over a decade, I know firsthand how important it is for an organization to have a team of passionate leaders and talented professionals who can think creatively, communicate effectively, celebrate inclusivity and nimbly adapt to change.

I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to share some of my wisdom and guidance on best practices with hiring managers and job seekers alike through my monthly column, "Hire and Seek," for PRSA's *Strategies & Tactics*. Over the years, I've explored a range of topics, including what hiring managers are really looking for, diversifying talent pools, explaining résumé gaps, acing virtual panel interviews and much more.

The job market is more competitive than ever before, and things are changing rapidly across the PR and media landscape — we all have to embrace the evolution that comes along with the times. Remember — stay curious and stay humble.

Cheers,
Christina Stokes



Christina Stokes

Our other three regular columnists have also shared career advice on topics like attracting talent, influencing employees, changing jobs and more. You may find topical articles from each of them in the pages that follow.



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Your Professional Elevator Pitch

When you work in public relations, making a pitch to clients, reporters and colleagues is second nature for you. However, even the strongest PR professionals can fall flat when pitching themselves during an interview.

In earlier issues of *S&T*, I wrote about telling your career story and creating your personal brand. This time, I will zero in on refining the professional elevator pitch you deliver during a job interview's first minute or so.

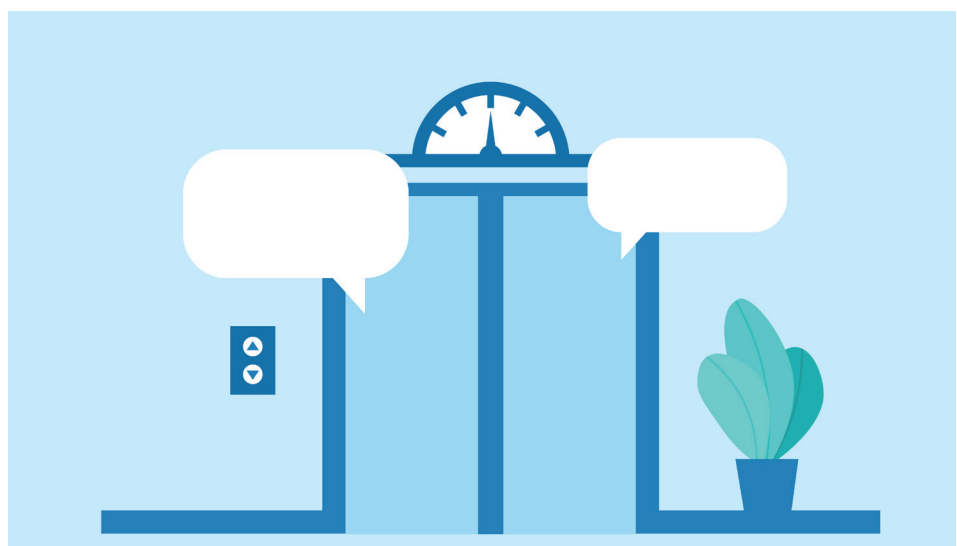
In an interview scenario, a solid elevator pitch includes five key components: an introduction, a summary of what you do, your value proposition, a specification of what you want and a closing. The interviewer sits down and says to you: "Tell me about yourself." The good news is that you don't choke because you're prepared for this moment! Let's break down each of the elements above in detail (with some examples from my own pitch).

“Your elevator pitch should always be a succinct introduction of ‘professional you.’”

Introduction — This is the briefest part of the process, and it's self-explanatory. Introduce yourself to the interviewer, and create a pace here. If you start off speaking calmly and clearly, then you will avoid picking up speed and rushing throughout your pitch.

Example: *Hi, my name is Christina Stokes. It's great to meet you. Thank you so much for speaking with me today!*

Summary — Here, you will provide a simple overview of what you do and where you worked most recently. You could also mention any degree or relevant certification you possess here. You should be proud of your abilities and accomplishments. Being confident is a positive thing, as long as you don't cross the line into arrogance.



Example: *For over a decade, I've led the talent acquisition efforts of PR firms, most recently with RUBENSTEIN (nearly six years now). My work includes full life-cycle recruiting, DE&I efforts, employer branding, employee relations and more!*

Value Proposition — This is where you will differentiate yourself from your peers (i.e., other candidates applying for the position). Why should you be considered for the job? If you have a passion for the field or bring something to the table that others may not, then mention that to the interviewer.

Example: *I'm well connected and invested in the PR industry, and I take a lot of pride in my work and love to be a forward-facing representative of my workplace. Recruiting is the sort of job where you do have the power to change lives for the better. I put time into understanding who a candidate is, in addition to their skills and experiences, to see how that aligns with the hiring needs, culture and overall goals of my firm.*

Goal — Think about why this job (or specific company) could be the best next step for your career, and share that with the interviewer. Are you seeking an opportunity for advancement, mentorship, or something else? It's OK to be a bit more general here since this is only the first minute of your conversation, and later on, you will have the opportunity to elaborate

further.

Example: *The role you're looking to fill resonates with me — not only because of the distinction of your organization but also because I see it as an opportunity to continue learning and growing in my profession.*

Closing — Your closing can be several things, ideally a call to action, depending on the situation. You could give the interviewer an opening to introduce themselves next. You could also offer the interviewer an opportunity to probe into some of what you highlighted. Read the room (or Zoom) and let this part flow.

Example 1: *I'm excited to go more in-depth on my experiences and abilities with you. I'd love to hear about you and your role in the organization, too!*

Example 2: *That's me in a nutshell! Please let me know where you'd like me to elaborate at any point in our conversation.*

Your elevator pitch should always be a succinct introduction of "professional you." It should also sound natural and spontaneous — overly rehearsed never lands well. Practice with a friend and get some honest feedback.

If you take anything away from this article, then let it be this: Do not drone on for several minutes without breaking to let the interview interject, ask questions and create a fluid conversation.

Good luck! ♦

Degree in Hand, Now What?

Graduation season is always full of excitement and promise. With the uncertainty of the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic diminishing at long last, the world is our oyster again. This time is also one of reflection, change and important decision-making.

Perhaps you've just achieved a degree in public relations, journalism, digital marketing or something else under the vast communications umbrella. Now, you're beginning to search for a job — a brave and thrilling venture into your professional career. At this point, you likely have a clear picture of why you want to work in PR. Your degree has opened the initial gateway, and now that you have it, where is the best place to start?

“The PR space is constantly expanding and evolving. It's imperative to absorb everything you can, particularly in the early days.”

How should you dig in on what is important to you?

With every opportunity you are considering, break them all down into buckets of importance, and drill down into those further while researching on your own and during interviews. Think about the skills that you want to develop, and explore whether the job will afford you the chance to dive into relevant duties. Ask about expectations and opportunity for growth and development. Think about what sort of workplace environment is best suited for you.

Are you looking for a role with a mission-driven company that prioritizes empathy and diverse collaboration? Ask about how they put action to their purpose. Do you prefer to work autonomously, or is regular, hands-on leadership favorable? Ask about management styles, how feedback is delivered and what the preferred communication methods are.

Rick Ferraro, chief communications officer at GLADD and vice president of



DE&I with PRSA's New York Chapter, encourages preliminary exploration and plenty of thoughtful questions.

“Candidates who stand out for entry-level roles are ones who do thorough homework about my organization and team before the interview. It's easy to tell which candidates have only done a cursory scan of the homepage of our website versus those who have spent real time researching and familiarizing themselves with specific campaigns, social posts and other communications,” he said. “Committing the time and asking thoughtful questions about our work is a good indicator of the research skills and self-starter attitude that I look for in full-time hires.”

What do hiring managers want to see during the interview process?

A PR pro needs to know what makes a great story, so you have to be able to identify what is newsworthy. As you will eventually be pitching stories to journalists, relationship-cultivation skills are important. It goes without saying that proficiency across social media platforms and an understanding of digital content will also serve you well.

If you have experience developing pitches and writing press releases, then consider having those examples available in a shareable digital portfolio. You must be able to articulate your skills, interests, experiences and intrinsic desire to learn.

Omar Bourne, associate vice president at Rubenstein, confirms that nerves are to be expected. “I'm looking for someone who's enthusiastic about learning. The

interview process is nerve-racking, and I want to see that you're willing to improve on skills you gained in college and internships to become a well-rounded, competent professional,” Bourne said. “It is essential to understanding the basics of the field, but I'm willing to work with someone who's willing to learn and may not have mastered the basics.”

What do teams expect from you in your first months?

The PR space is constantly expanding and evolving. It's imperative to absorb everything you can, particularly in the early days. Consider joining professional associations that offer regular programs, training, development and networking opportunities. Consume media avidly, and be up to date on news and trends.

In the beginning, your work will consist of media list creation, building press kits, proofreading and editing, and familiarizing yourself with journalists. You'll also be able to observe the senior practitioners on your team. Your leaders want to see that you are capable of navigating competing deliverables, while maintaining efficiency and attention to detail in all assigned tasks.

Ask questions, apply feedback and always be open to improving — constructive criticism is a learning opportunity. Be adaptable, flexible and ready to shift gears as needed by your team and clients. Your leaders want you to be successful, and will often challenge to push your boundaries.

Best wishes to all recent graduates entering the PR profession! ❖

What Do Hiring Managers Really Look For?

As the PR profession continues to rapidly evolve, it is expected that experienced comms leaders, hiring managers and talent acquisition professionals will likely deviate from, and expand upon, what they have historically sought in candidates for their strategic staffing needs.

Specifics vary from the agency side to the brand side and everything in between, but the hard skills are often the same: exceptional writing and research skills, a keen understanding of media across various platforms, and a demonstrated strategic acumen to navigate all kinds of key moments for an individual, organization or brand.

Soft skills, often much harder to vet for than tactical skills, are usually among the first things considered when reviewing an application and interviewing a person for a PR role. “Soft skills” is a commonly used term that captures intangibles, such as interpersonal communications capabilities, emotional intelligence or ability to take initiative.

“Soft skills, often much harder to vet for than tactical skills, are usually among the first things considered.”

I spoke to some PR leaders for their thoughts on soft skills and the various gauges for success in today's market.

The essential soft skills

“Two of the most important soft skills that I look for, and have found to be most indicative of future success, is whether the candidate is an active listener and innate problem solver,” said Annette Juriaco, managing director of the Office of the President at Rubenstein. “Good strategic counsel is never executed from a playbook or binder, no matter how well conceived. It's executed by someone skilled in meeting the challenges of the moment, and who can listen, adapt and pivot in real-time. If a candidate seems too subscribed to their ‘script’ in an



interview, then I will usually worry that they don't have what it takes to be nimble for a client.”

In navigating the internal hiring goals of her clients, Carly Mednick, partner and founder at Monday Talent and vice president of membership with PRSA's New York Chapter, says, “I am always looking for candidates who are open-minded, adaptable, loyal and eager to learn. These skills tend to translate into the best employees who make the biggest impact. In this crazy job market, where there is a lot of movement, loyalty has never been more important, as there is a plethora of job options for candidates to choose from and quite a lot of competition out there!”

Brandi Boatner, manager of digital and advocacy communications at IBM and PRSA Tri-State District chair, says, “With the expanding role of public relations over the past two years, professionals have gained new skills overnight. However, there are some skills that remain foundational and fundamental to those who are looking to pursue a career in the PR industry.”

She looks for “the 5 C's of soft skills”: clock-watching, creativity, collaboration, current events/culture and creating connections.

Ensuring that the ways in which we deliver and tell stories remain creative, time management and prioritization skills, and a keen understanding of the importance of working as a team to execute tasks and achieve desired outcomes, are top of mind for Boatner. And she highlights,

“Candidates really impress me when they know what's going on in the world and understand the external marketplace. Bonus points if they know the cultural background related to current events and news happening globally.”

A change in the media landscape

To that point, the media landscape is shifting just as rapidly as the PR profession, especially within the last three years of the COVID-19 pandemic. How important is it for a candidate to have a full list of media contacts? Are networking and relationship-building acumen more important now?

Aaron Kwitken, founder and CEO of Prophet, founder and chairman of KWT Global, and president of PRSA's New York Chapter, says, “Media relationships used to be paramount. When I first got into the business, I would spend a good portion of my days wining and dining reporters. This approach was waning long before the pandemic, but COVID all but shattered how we interact with journalists. It's far more transactional, transparent and data-driven today. In other words, charm won't get you anywhere, but doing your homework using tech-driven tools, will, as will resonant narrative.”

When preparing to interview for your next opportunity, give thought to these sought-after soft skills, and be ready to highlight more than just your traditional skill sets and experience. ♦

Seeing Is Believing for Latino Candidates

You've probably heard a lot about the Great Resignation by now. Perhaps you were one of many workers in the United States who decided to switch jobs or even career paths. If you're new to public relations, then welcome!

The COVID-19 pandemic shook up our workplace norms and routines. For some, working remotely out of the office was a new opportunity. If it was a dream, you may not want to go back to commuting. If it was a nightmare, you're probably already back in the office! We experienced many ways to work, and some people had time to think through their situations.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, almost 47 million people left their jobs voluntarily in 2021. No matter the industry, there seems to be a labor shortage. Just about every organization is looking for reliable, skilled employees. Things have changed, and by that, I mean work culture.

“No matter the industry, there seems to be a labor shortage. Just about every organization is looking for reliable, skilled employees.”

“Young people don't want to work,” is a grumble I've heard a lot lately. Generation Z, our newest cohort of workers, is different from other generations. But every generation differs from the next, and everyone differs from the other. So labeling what's happening isn't that clear-cut.

Most of the college students or new professionals I meet are eager to work. Many who approach me come from Hispanic or Latino backgrounds. I can only assume that's because of the representation effect. When someone seems similar to us, we're more likely to relate to them. Relatability is a cornerstone of connection, so my appearance, surname, or personal story may offer connection points for others.

Hispanic or Latino professionals who ask me for advice or opportunities are willing to “pay their dues” as interns and



work studies — students like Avah De Leon, a college freshman who attended two of my talks at her university. Avah had considered working in public relations but didn't know what that entailed. She asked to shadow me to learn more and began assisting my team this summer. Now, she's our official Junior Intern and learning about public relations much earlier than I did in my college career!

The rules of attraction

You can attract more candidates into the profession if you make time to share what public relations is. By happenstance, I've helped many Hispanic students learn about public relations. Now, I understand how to strategically make more room at the industry table and will work the rest of my career to do so. Given the country's Latino population growth, it's smart to recruit with culture in mind.

Here are some tips on recruiting more Hispanic or Latino professionals into your organization.

Think beyond PR majors.

Visit Hispanic-serving institutions or colleges without PR majors to share about jobs in communications or host a table at Career Days to introduce more students to the profession.

According to *Excelencia* in Education,

44% of Hispanic and Latino students are first-generation college students. A lack of awareness of public relations, and a lack of familial know-how searching is likely. Reach out to students in English, business and communication majors to tell them about PR.

Hire talent to attract talent.

Recruiting is best done by employees who represent the kind of employees you're looking for. If you don't have any Hispanic or Latino employees on staff, acknowledge that fact and change it. Research by Veris Insights found that seeing people from similar backgrounds in successful careers reinforced aspirations in Hispanic/Latinx students.

Be respectful of inclusive practices.

Appreciating diversity is less important to Hispanic/Latino candidates than the actual treatment of employees. Respectful practices around honoring an employee's work-life balance, their family needs, and offering flexibility mattered most, according to Veris Insights.

Posting jobs like always won't change things. Be strategic and creative and you'll soon have plenty of talented staff to grow with. ❖

Explaining a Résumé Gap

It is not uncommon to have an employment gap in your background from a time that you were unemployed. This gap may be wide enough to be very noticeable on your résumé.

Perhaps you took family leave to welcome a new child into your life, or maybe you needed to care for an ill loved one. There could have been an economic crisis that hit the job market hard and made your search much longer than you would have liked. You could have taken time off to complete a degree, or maybe you tried to start a business that didn't end up working out for you.

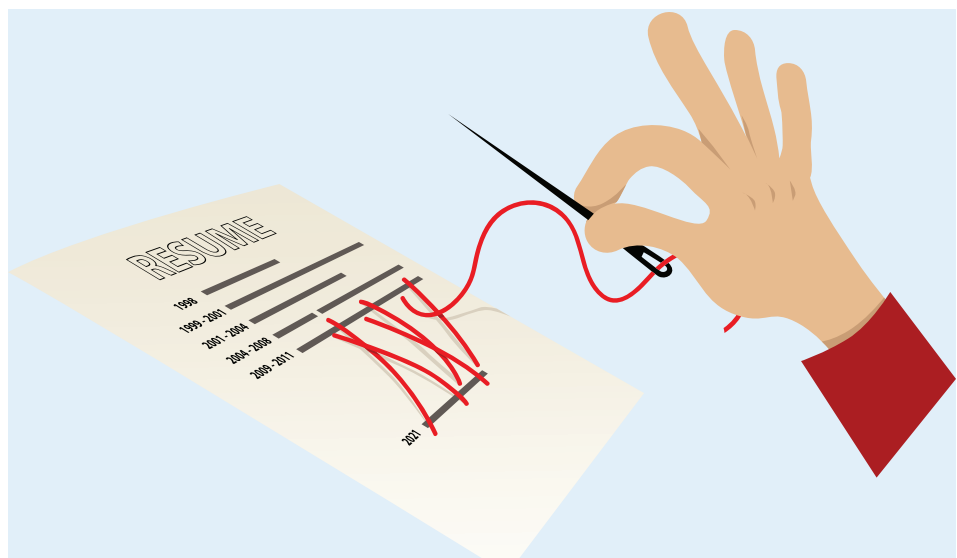
If you approach your résumé gap in an appropriate, honest and ethical way, it will become part of your story, and not just another red flag to potential employers.

“All our professional and personal experiences combine to form our unique story, and a résumé gap doesn't have to be a hindrance.”

Don't lie on your résumé.

Résumé gaps cause most hiring managers and recruiters at least a slim degree of worry, because the tendency is to assume the worst. What you have to do is guide them to the truth. A 2019 survey conducted by ResumeGo uncovered that applicants who provided a reason for their work gap received close to 60% more interviews.

Don't just try to hide the gaps by writing years of employment and leaving out the months. Instead, explain what you were doing during that time. You don't need to explain every gap, either, if there are a few — just the more recent ones. Focus on providing context for gaps that are longer than a few months. Whatever you chose to do, please be honest. Employment background verification checks will uncover the truth, so it is best to be transparent. Also, make sure the employment history on your résumé is reflected on your LinkedIn profile!



Be prepared to explain the reason behind the gap.

Your résumé edits worked well, and you have landed an interview. Be it an in-person interview, a Zoom call, or an initial phone screen, you must be ready to verbally explain any notable gaps in your employment history. When the interviewer brings it up, address with confidence the reason for your gap in a brief, concise way, and affirm that whatever the situation was is behind you now. Then, bring the conversation back around to your experience, skills and the position at hand.

This provides reassurance and will position you as a professional, stable and dedicated potential employee who won't jump ship immediately. And remember: Never disparage former employers during a job interview.

Highlight how else you filled the time.

Maybe the gap on your résumé was due to a sudden layoff or difficulty securing new employment. Instead of just saying that you were seeking work, you should also make note of any other relevant ways that you filled your time. Employers want to be sure that your skills have remained strong and current.

Share any volunteering that you did, classes you completed, or even consulting or freelance work that you took on while

also seeking full-time employment. Any of these activities reflect as a value add, and guess what? It also fills the gap!

Be cautious about how you use your cover letter.

While your cover letter might seem like a great place to explain a résumé gap, think it through. A cover letter is an excellent place to provide some supplemental information about your qualifications while also highlighting your interest in an organization.

Going into a long explanation about a break in your employment history on a cover letter might read as defensive, so instead, you might want to present it more conversationally: “Following my tenure with xyz company, I spent six months with my family, caring for our new baby. I was excited to get back to work, and I took on a role with abc company, where I...” This is honest and straight to the point, and it brings the focus back to your work history and skills.

Approach your job search and interviews with enthusiasm and integrity, and it will be apparent to hiring teams that your skills and experience are truly what define you as a potential great fit for a job opportunity. All our professional and personal experiences combine to form our unique story, and a résumé gap doesn't have to be a hindrance. You've got this. ❖

Shifting the 'People Leave Managers' Narrative

We typically hear: “people don’t leave companies; they leave managers.”

Let’s reframe the message: People *stay* at companies *because* of their manager.

I was blessed throughout my career because of my managers. I stayed at my companies because they trusted me and gave me life-changing opportunities. I learned something from every manager I had.

And, just as you learned from your managers, those you manage learn from your actions every day.

Here are three ways we can lead by example to positively influence our employees.

“Data suggests ‘the real cost of turnover is often estimated to be 33% to two times the employee’s annual salary.’ There’s never been a better time to design your career path.”

Empower your employees to create their path.

Data suggests “the real cost of turnover is often estimated to be 33% to two times the employee’s annual salary.” There’s never been a better time to design your career path. And your employees know this as well.

Give your team the flexibility to design a future job role. Talk to them about your career path, share the unique career paths of others in your company, or suggest they hold discussions with other mentors to learn how to create their job descriptions. Your team will appreciate you’re thinking about their future.

Set and live your boundaries.

Recent studies suggest “more than half of Americans fear their employer would think less of them if they request-



ed time off for mental health.” This is a problem! Your team members, particularly those new to their careers, will follow your lead on how and when you communicate with them.

Conduct a self-audit of how you spend your nights, weekends and vacations. Do you send emails late at night? Your employees may well be waiting online to receive them. Join meetings while on vacation? Your employees will keep their notifications on while getting a tan at the beach.

Even if you have the best intentions to ask your teams to take time off and shut down their phones, people won’t follow if you don’t do it yourself!

Think like you’re the one receiving communications.

I’ve received poorly written emails

throughout my career. Unfortunately, they cause more anxiety, stress and confusion than necessary. Keep your communication tight, yet solution- and action-oriented with the right level of context to help set the receiver up for success.

The most important thing is to think through the lens of the recipient. Do they have everything needed to act? Will a calendar invite titled simply “Chat” help reduce the stress levels of the recipient? Probably not.

Installing these techniques will help build trust and rapport with your team, giving them the flexibility to manage their family and job and, ultimately, show your value as a leader. ❖

Common Interview Questions for PR Roles

Answering an interview question is an opportunity to showcase your experience, knowledge, goals and personality. As an interviewee, it is always a smart tactic to think about some of the questions that may come up during an interview, and prepare some thoughtful responses. For a PR role, you will most likely be speaking with one or more experts in the field.

I would never suggest memorizing answers to interview questions, because sounding too rehearsed is not a positive; but practicing in advance is definitely a good idea. The STAR Method (situation, task, action, result) is the most efficient way to respond to the majority of strategic interview questions.

If you answer a question well, then it may lead to a vibrant back-and-forth conversation that will be memorable in the mind of an interviewer, and it will help you stand out from other applicants. Here are some common questions that might arise in your PR interview, and ways to think about your responses in advance.

“The STAR Method (situation, task, action, result) is the most efficient way to respond to the majority of strategic interview questions.”

Why did you choose a career in public relations?

You can approach the answer to this question in a few different ways. Think about what you love about public relations and why. What does PR mean to you, and how does it align with your personal story? Communicate your dedication to this field in a clear and succinct way.

If you studied public relations and communications in college, then detail why you made that decision. If you studied something else and later decided to pursue PR, then explain that choice, and how you've been making moves to get on the right track.



Are you a great writer and researcher? Does telling stories make you excited? Does successfully addressing a crisis for a client give you a sense of fulfillment? Look at how the PR industry has changed in the past few years, and even the last few months alone. This is a great question that allows you to showcase both your knowledge of PR, and who you are as a person.

Where do you consume your news?

The news outlets you follow may be very interesting for an interview panel, as well as your knowledge of current events. If you're applying for a PR role within a specific industry, such as entertainment, then you should be aware of the relevant outlets and trades, such as *Variety* and *Hollywood Reporter*. If you're applying for a PR role in the technology space, then media outlets like *Wired* and *TechCrunch* will be more pertinent.

It's helpful for a publicist to have their finger on the pulse of the industries and trends that are of importance to their primary stakeholders and clients. This line of questioning may also serve as an opening for you to proactively discuss how you identify which outlets to pitch, how you develop relationships with reporters and journalists, and how you strategize and execute your media

relations efforts for a campaign.

Why are you interested in working here?

This question is critical because if you can't answer it with any specifics, then interviewers will know that you did not prepare and haven't done any research.

If you're applying to a PR firm, then educate yourself on sectors serviced, clients represented, and even some of the history of the agency and their staffers. If you're applying to work in-house, then you should review the organization's website, social media presence and mentions of them in the news to better understand how they self-represent.

Also, think about what is important to you, in terms of mission and values, and be able to articulate how that might align with the company's mission, values and vision. Be prepared to discuss what is interesting to you about what they do, and why you want to get involved.

These are just a few examples of lines of common questioning that might arise during your PR interview, and they will often lead to many other lines of discussion. Listen to each question carefully, and think about it before you respond. Good luck on your next interview! ❖

Don't Let Unemployment Crush Your Self-Worth

Being out of work is one of life's most stressful events. Beyond the worries about economic security, unemployment (or underemployment) can take a serious toll on your sense of self-worth.

I know. I've been there. So, here's some advice for maintaining your mental and emotional well-being when you're between jobs.

Build your network now.

Successfully surviving unemployment begins *while you're already comfortably employed*. That's when you need to lay a foundation for success that will strengthen your confidence and help you bounce back more easily.

Be sure to cultivate a strong network of people you wouldn't hesitate to call for help — i.e., people you have actual relationships with.

“When we project positivity instead of hopelessness, and confidence instead of neediness, we tend to better perceive and attract the kind of opportunities that can make a difference in our lives.”

If that's not something that comes naturally, then create a plan. Make a list of people who could be helpful to your career — those you know and those you'd like to know. Start small and build from there.

Connect on LinkedIn, Twitter or wherever else they spend time. Interact regularly, schedule Zoom chats, get together IRL. Keep notes and use reminders to stay in touch.

And don't wait until you're unemployed to get active on LinkedIn. Keep your profile up-to-date and spend 15 minutes a few times a week scanning your feed and commenting on others' posts.

Get involved with your local PRSA chapter and other organizations you belong to.



Finally, keep up with the market by regularly monitoring job boards to get a sense of hiring trends, skills sought, pay levels, etc.

Laying this groundwork will take some of the fear and anxiety out of unemployment.

Stay busy.

For many of us, our sense of self-worth is closely tied to our work. If we're not busy accomplishing meaningful things, we feel lost, adrift, even useless.

So, treat your job search like an actual job. Get up in the morning, go to your desk, set goals, do your research, outreach and all the rest. Keep spreadsheets, track results and update your to-do lists.

And maintain your public profile. Showcase your expertise by posting two or three times a week on LinkedIn. Contribute articles to industry publications. Create and post videos wherever your network is.

Volunteer with organizations in your community — ideally in a way that plays to your professional expertise. Doing good will not only help you feel good; it could also lead to valuable connections.

Finally, get organized. Tackle all those boring administrative tasks we put off when we're busy. Put your files in order, update your contact lists and organize your systems. These may be small things but, in the darkest times, even minor accomplishments can boost your mental outlook.

Feed your mind, body and soul.

As hard as it may be, try looking at your situation as a gift. You now have some time to pursue interests you've always (or haven't yet) dreamed of.

Sign up for a class at your local park district. Take an online course. Try your hand at art, improv, cooking, photography or creative writing. Start playing an instrument.

Be a tourist in your own town. Check out those landmarks you always recommend to visitors but never quite get to on your own. Visit museums and art galleries — many have free days or hours.

Tackle that stack of books on your nightstand. Or dig into the classics that you never found time for.

Get in shape. Exercise, eat right and do all the rest of the things we know will make us feel better and stronger.

Finally, make time for friends and family. Get the emotional support you need. Call, email or text someone you've lost touch with just to catch up and chat.

Staying busy and engaged with the world will broaden your perspective, improve your outlook and raise your visibility. But you may also find, as I have, that the more energy you put out there, the more good things come back to you.

When we project positivity instead of hopelessness, and confidence instead of neediness, we tend to better perceive and attract the kind of opportunities that can make a difference in our lives. ❖

Showcasing Knowledge and Education on a Résumé

Crafting a winning résumé that will attract the attention of recruiters and hiring managers isn't an easy task.

One area of the résumé where some job seekers fall short is the education section.

There are so many things to consider including, such as the name of the school you attended, the degree you attained, coursework and GPAs, not to mention where exactly to put these tidbits of information. I want to walk through a few scenarios that might apply to you — and how to either maximize this space, or overcome challenges presented by it.

How to format the education section on your résumé

In your education section, you firstly want to list the name of your school and its location, followed by the degree you achieved (this part also works in the reverse). Make a specific mention to your major (and minor).

“Remember to always be honest, clear and thoughtful as you begin to flesh out your education on your résumé”

If you are earlier in your career, or a recent graduate, then it might be helpful to mention some of the coursework you completed that relates to the industry in which you are applying for jobs. If you have more than one degree, then you should list your most recent degree first, and work backward, in reverse chronological order. If you have attended more than one institution, then only list the one that awarded you your degree.

Unless you are a recent graduate, you do not need to include the year of your graduation. You also do not need to mention your GPA when you are further along in your career. (And, if you do, only mention it if it was 3.4 or above.) If you achieved high honors, then definitely speak to that. Lastly, recent grads should share their education at the top of their



résumés (right below your objective/intro), followed by internship and/or work experience.

What to do if you're still in school

If you are still in school and have not yet graduated, then list everything we have already covered, but also include “anticipated completion” or “degree expected,” followed by the month and year you are expecting to receive your degree.

You also want to showcase your internship experience, relevant academic or professional affiliations, extracurricular activities, study abroad program and volunteer work. Your thesis topic may be interesting to include, as well. All these things combined paint the picture of who you are as a person and a rising professional.

Don't have a degree? Here's what to do

Whether you attended some college and never completed your degree, or perhaps went straight into the workforce and don't have any college experience to speak of, do not give up hope. It's true that some employers may reject your candidacy if you do not meet specific educational

criteria, but others will see that you can be a valuable addition to their team because of your overall experience.

You could opt to pour the emphasis into your career background, voiding the education section of the résumé entirely. Emphasize your career achievements, articles you have had published or public speaking you have done. These things stand out in the eyes of many a hiring manager!

If you have completed certificate courses or workshops relevant to your career path, then you should absolutely include those certifications and be proud of them! Ongoing professional development says a lot about someone. If you have won awards in your field, then be sure to speak to that, as well.

Final thoughts

Your styling and font choices will improve readability, so be mindful about the look and feel of your résumé in its entirety, not just the education section, and proof-read it several times before beginning to put it out there. Lastly, remember to always be honest, clear and thoughtful as you begin to flesh out your education on your résumé (and all the rest of it, too). ❖

Writing an Effective Post-Interview Thank-You Email

Writing an effective post-interview thank-you email is one of the most important things you must do to elevate yourself as a serious candidate. Many recruiters and hiring managers find the thank-you email to be critical — how soon you send it, and how spot-on it is, will likely impact their overall impression of you.

Not sending one is a major red flag, and you will, most likely, be kissing the opportunity goodbye. Always confirm the email address of the person who has interviewed you because you'll need it! Let's go over some key things to keep top of mind when it comes to drafting your thank-you note.

“Whatever you do, don't skip the thank-you email at any point of the interview process. Every conversation you have is vital and worth follow-up.”

Be Timely

Within 24 hours following your interview, whether it is virtual or in-person, be sure to send a great thank-you note to the person who you met, and if you met more than one person, send a unique note to each individual. It's even better to send it the same day, if possible, to ensure the details of your discussion aren't lost. Sending it too quickly, though, leaves you open to errors and may look like you didn't give thought to your message. Give it a few hours before sending. Remember that most interviewers will share your note among themselves as part of the review process, so don't copy and paste the same letter to each person.

Be Concise

Your thank-you email should not be longer than three paragraphs. Hit the key points, but be professional, concise and respectful of their time. Start your thank-you email by — you guessed it — saying thank-you! Show gratitude to the person who carved out time to have a conversa-



tion with you about the job opportunity, and express your pleasure in having learned more about the organization, the team and the role. Do you think you'd be a great fit for the role, and did this interview confirm that belief? Be sure to tell them that, and explain why!

Be Thoughtful

Next, it is helpful to make mention of a part of the conversation that stood out to you most of all. Think about it. What did the interviewer say to you that excited you or intrigued you? Referencing something that you talked about previously can show how engaged you were during the meeting. This may also give you the chance to briefly highlight a specific point of your expertise that aligns with the job and what was discussed. How can you add value to the team and their current initiatives? Detail it!

Be Clear

In closing, you should reiterate your interest in the position and stress that you are looking forward to next steps. Also, mention that you would be happy to provide any additional information that may

be needed to aid in the decision-making process. If your résumé has changed at all since you initially applied, then attach the latest version to your email, too. Include links to any work samples that might be relevant to share (or were requested). Sign the email with your full name, and include your contact information (phone number, email address, link to your LinkedIn profile) in the signature. Being very easily accessible is imperative!

Whatever you do, don't skip the thank-you email at any point of the interview process. Every conversation you have is vital and worth follow-up, even if you have already spoken with several other people on the team. Your energy and interest should be easily perceived, without being forceful. Lastly, be sure to thank the person who scheduled the interview for you, and if you're working with a recruiter or talent acquisition person, then give them your feedback and appreciation too.

First impressions matter and so do final impressions! Check for spelling and grammatical errors before you click send. Good luck with your thank-you emails! ❖



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