



Mastering the Job Search Process in Recreation and Leisure Services

SECOND EDITION

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Second Edition

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Mastering the Job Search Process in Recreation and Leisure Services

Preface

How we Americans spend leisure time might seem to have little bearing on the strength of our nation or the worth and prestige of our free society. Yet we certainly cannot continue to thrive as a strong and vigorous free people unless we understand and use creatively one of our greatest resources—our leisure.

—President John F. Kennedy

The fact that you are reading this text means that you are probably near completion of your academic study in recreation and leisure services. With an increased awareness by the American public of available recreation and leisure opportunities, we have seen a tremendous growth in participation in this field, which has responded with new and expanded programs to meet these needs. This growth has created a tremendous market as well as a new era with challenges that we, as recreation professionals, must meet. It also has created significant career choices and employment opportunities in a variety of recreation and leisure services settings.

Career development and planning by definition is a never-ending process—it continues throughout one's lifetime. Effective career planning in recreation and leisure services requires the acquisition of specific skills, a conceptual knowledge base, and accurate information. Common sense tells us that people make better decisions when they have as much information as possible. More specifically, effective career planning depends upon the identification and understanding of your current abilities, interests, skills, values, aptitudes, and priorities followed by the communication of these items to potential employers during the job search process.

Today the job search process has become far more sophisticated, complex, and complicated than ever before for new college graduates. Over the years, scores of how-to books have been published about the job search process in general, including networking, constructing and designing resumes, writing cover letters, and interviewing. Most of this information is subjective, opinionated, and written for individuals pursuing jobs in business-related positions. Furthermore, these opinions transform over time because of changes in the industry, new laws affecting the job search process, and employer demographic variations. The fact that there are no ground rules or standards results in a significant amount of contradictions and confusion for job applicants. Everyone seems to be an expert, but few agree. Many of the trade book publications on the job search process advocate a wide range of advice. To date, few publications have focused on the specifics of the job search process for those pursuing careers in recreation and leisure services.

Mastering the Job Search Process in Recreation and Leisure Services, Second Edition, is a guide full of practical tools and advice for future recreation and leisure service professionals. This text aims to simplify the process of securing a job in recreation and leisure services by explaining every step from both employers' and applicants' points-of-view. The information presented here is based on our years of practical experiences in the hiring process; reflects on research that we have conducted with over 1000 recreation and leisure services practitioners involved in the job search process; and includes our personal advice and secrets to success. This practitioner-research-based information, which is the cornerstone of this text, sets *Mastering the Job Search Process in*

Recreation and Leisure Services, Second Edition, apart from other general trade books on the same subject.

Chapter 1 begins with an overview of the job search process and focuses on the importance of conducting a personal self-assessment by identifying personal goals and career expectations. Chapter 2 describes the various career settings in recreation and leisure services, such as the emerging sports tourism setting. Chapter 3 illustrates various resources for locating job opportunities in the field and specifics on how to research a prospective agency as well as—new to the *Second Edition*—a section on how to use social networks to research different organizations. Chapter 4 explains how to organize and create a personal portfolio that highlights your strengths and abilities and includes information on the latest developments in electronic portfolios. Chapter 5 contains information on how to use the Internet to search for jobs specifically in the field of recreation and leisure services. Additionally, the impact of technology on the job search process is discussed with the latest information on the use of electronic resumes, blogs, and professional networks.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 focus on cover letters, resumes, and interviews, respectively. Each chapter offers an in-depth look at how to successfully complete the step as well as information from practitioners in the field about current content preferences. New to Chapter 7 is a section on the use of video resumes. Chapter 9 explains the role and value of the internship process in recreation and leisure services. Chapter 10 guides you through the process of deciding which job offer to accept while Chapter 11 gives new ideas on how to realistically navigate the transition from college to professional life. Lastly, the appendices include lists of recreation and leisure organizations, online resources for newspapers and journals, questions most frequently asked by interviewers, and questions most frequently asked by candidates.

Each chapter in this text provides practical techniques for handling the various phases of the job search process as well as worksheets, checklists, and case studies to make this information more personal and specific. *Mastering the Job Search Process in Recreation and Leisure Services, Second Edition*, also incorporates the following graphical features in each chapter to help identify and illustrate important information:

- **Did You Know:** Spotlights interesting facts about careers and organizations in the field of recreation and leisure services.
- **Job Search Tip:** Coaches you through the job search with quick highlights on the process.
- **Time Out:** Features time-saving advice.
- **Be Alert:** Assists you in avoiding potential problems and pitfalls in the job search process.
- **Case Studies and Assignments:** Presents practical case studies and exercises where you can share your ideas and opinions.
- **Keys to Job Search Success:** Highlights, in liberal doses, short tips relating to success in the job search process.

Additional resources for students and instructors are available at <http://health.jbpub.com/recreationjobs/2e>, including Web links to field-specific career resources, a guide to identifying suitable careers, and a checklist for starting a new job in recreation and leisure services.

We live in an age where we are responsible for the development of our own careers. Bursting with valuable and pertinent information and interactive worksheet exercises, we have done our best to make *Mastering the Job Search Process in Recreation and Leisure Services, Second Edition*, a practical, up-to-date, and accurate tool for college graduates wanting to enter the field of recreation and leisure services. The rest is up to you!

Acknowledgments

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Dr. Ross has served on numerous university committees as well as National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) committees, including the NIRSA Journal Editorial Board, Career Placement Center, Professional Development Committee-Recreational Sports Curriculum Subcommittee, Computer Utilization Committee, and Research Committee. He was past-chair of the Board of Regents for the NRPA/Oglebay Computer Use Institute for Parks and Recreation. Dr. Ross has made over 65 presentations at the NIRSA and Big Ten Recreational Sports conferences, published numerous articles, and is co-author of *Recreational Sports Management, Third Edition*.

Dr. Brent A. Beggs earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Recreation (1991) and his Master of Science degree in Recreation (1995) from Southern Illinois University. He completed his Doctorate in Leisure Behavior (2002) at Indiana University. Dr. Beggs is currently an associate professor at Illinois State University, teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in the management of sport and recreation, research methods, leisure theory, commercial recreation, and facility design. Prior to teaching at Illinois State, he served as a lecturer and internship coordinator for the Department of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Studies at IU. Dr. Beggs began his career in leisure services with the Collinsville Area Recreation District in Illinois and moved on to the Maryland Heights Parks and Recreation Department in Missouri.

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The Job Search Process: Where to Begin?

For most college students, their primary purpose in selecting a school, taking courses, choosing a major, attending class, writing papers, and studying for exams is so that they can obtain an education and subsequently land a job. Some students assume that because they have labored hard in gaining an education, finding a job should be relatively easy. However, because employers are constantly looking for ways to stretch their budgets while obtaining the most for their money, competition for positions has increased. As a result, it is not enough for job seekers to be ready and willing to work. A successful job search requires a calculated effort of organization and preparation.



Visit the Web site for this book to learn more about the organizations and topics covered in this chapter. <http://health.jbpub.com/recreationjobs/2e>

Job Coach Tip

The more organized and prepared you are in your job search, the more successful you will be.

To complete the job search process successfully, candidates not only need marketable skills, they also need the skills to market themselves. The Minnesota Workforce Center (2003) stated that although job candidates may be motivated toward employment, and they may be very good at what they do, if candidates are not able to convince a potential employer they are the most qualified, they will not be the one who wins the job. So, another key to being successful in the job search involves communicating one's qualifications.

The field of recreation and leisure services is no different from any other in that employers seek the best qualified candidates for open positions. Whether candidates for recreation positions are just graduating from college or have been working in the field a few years, they must use a variety of skills and strategies to land their coveted job successfully. The information contained in this book is designed to assist job seekers interested in recreation and leisure services in planning and organizing each step of their job search process. Furthermore, this text provides qualified candidates the strategies to communicate effectively with potential employers in the recreation and leisure service setting so that both candidates and employers can find the best match for the job.

The job search process is a linear process involving different phases, each of equal importance. To progress successfully through the job search process, candidates must be able to master each phase. Not fully understanding or appreciating just one phase could result in candidates not achieving the job offer. So, candidates must know what steps to take and the expectations of employers in recreation and leisure services for each phase of the job search. The purpose of this book is to help candidates successfully progress through each phase of the job search process on their way to a career in recreation and leisure services. Ready for the challenge? Let's get started by reviewing the steps of the job search process:

1. **Self-assessment:** This involves candidates understanding their values, skills, personality traits, and job priorities along with how to utilize these attributes throughout the job search process. The assessment process is covered in this chapter.
2. **Identifying career opportunities:** Understanding and utilizing the multitude of resources available in locating job opportunities in recreation and leisure services is crucial to the job search process. A review of career opportunities in recreation and leisure service settings is addressed in Chapter 2.
3. **Researching an agency:** Candidates must learn as much as possible about any recreation agency they are considering for a job opportunity. The more candidates know about an agency, the more complete their application for the position will be, thereby, enhancing their opportunity to obtain an interview. Chapter 3 addresses the steps to take in researching an organization.
4. **Job search tools:** These tools are key elements in the application process and consist of preparing a portfolio, understanding how to use technology effectively, and developing both the cover letter and resume. Details on each of these tools can be found in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7, respectively.
5. **Interviewing:** In addition to answering questions and being aware of interview behavior, candidates must spend a considerable amount of effort preparing for the interview. Chapter 8 provides candidates insight into preparing for this very important dimension of the job search process.
6. **Internship:** The role and value of the internship process in recreation and leisure service are discussed in Chapter 9.

Be Alert!

The job search process is linear. Failure to master any phase will most likely prevent you from getting to the next phase.

7. **Evaluating the offer:** Should candidates be offered a position, they must have a strategy prepared for responding to that offer. Their preferred strategy is often influenced by individual needs and priorities, and is explained in detail in Chapter 10.
8. **Navigating the transition:** Even after candidates accept their position, there are still tasks to be accomplished. Newly hired employees should be aware of the expectations and realities their new position will demand. Chapter 11 addresses issues candidates will want to know and consider regarding this transition.

The Assessment Process

The first step in the job search process is for candidates to conduct a self-assessment. The self-assessment starts by candidates reflecting upon values, strengths, limitations, and preferences for a career area in recreation and leisure services, and perhaps even a specific job. From this reflection, candidates then develop a personal philosophy, establish career and personal goals, and establish job-related priorities.

The personal philosophy is a reflective narrative of what is important to candidates. When writing a personal philosophy, candidates should describe themselves, their values, and the personal meaning of their lives. Many people have a personal philosophy, yet have never taken the time to write it down. By capturing one's personal philosophy on paper, candidates are more easily able to recognize what is important to them. This reflection can then be extrapolated to the candidate's short- and long-term goals. Although there are a variety of ways to write a personal philosophy, the most common method for getting started is to reflect on values, people, and experiences that have had the greatest impact on the candidate's life. It is important to remember that a personal philosophy is personal for candidates, with the ultimate purpose being to identify candidates' values.

Once a personal philosophy has been developed, the next step is for candidates to establish goals, both personal and career. The primary difference between the personal philosophy and individual goals is that the personal philosophy is a reflection of the past representing current values, whereas goals are an indication of the future. These goals should be grounded in the candidate's personal philosophy and focus on short- and long-range expectations. In other words, the desired future of candidates should be a reflection of their values. The process of establishing goals is different from the personal philosophy in that career and personal goals consist of a listing of the candidate's specific desired outcomes and expectations.

Career goals help candidates focus on professional aspirations for a career, rather than just drifting from job to job. The focal point of a career goal can be a specific job or a particular sector of recreation and leisure services in which a candidate wants to work. Once candidates have established career goals, they should think strategically about the

Time Out



Take time to do a self-assessment prior to identifying potential jobs.

Job Coach Tip



Establishing career goals and using them to guide career choices will result in meaningful jobs that meet individual career objectives.



Keys to Job Search Success

Writing a personal philosophy allows an individual to reflect on his or her value system. Personal values play an important role throughout the job search process. Take some time to think about what really matters to you. You'll be surprised how important this is in establishing career goals and prioritizing factors related to the job.

Job Coach Tip

Preparation-based planning is the way you acquire, enhance, and organize the skills and resources needed to enact your plan.

Rosenberg

steps to accomplish their goals. Understanding and accomplishing career goals will be easier if the candidate outlines specific steps to achieve each goal. These steps are called objectives and become measurement points for goals (Rossman & Schlatter, 2008). By this definition, objectives should be written in a way that can be measured. For example, stating that a job search task should be accomplished by a specific time or date allows for that objective to be measurable.

Personal goals help candidates to focus on issues outside their careers, such as family, health, and living location. Candidates' personal goals are generally influenced by their personal philosophy. Specific objectives for personal goals should also be listed. Career goals and personal goals will undoubtedly overlap for many candidates. As a result, the values in the personal philosophy also play an important role in prioritizing career and personal goals. A final consideration is that career goals and personal goals will change throughout life, so it is important for candidates to revisit this process each time they consider a particular job.

The next step in the assessment process is for candidates to evaluate their personal attributes, such as skills and personality traits. This helps candidates become more aware of their strengths while helping them understand areas needing improvement. The best method of carrying out this evaluation is, once again, to put it in writing by completing the Self-Assessment of Skills Worksheet and the Personality Traits Inventory Worksheet.

The Self-Assessment of Skills Worksheet (Figure 1.1) is completed by candidates using a plus (+), check (✓), or minus (-) to indicate their assessment of a specific item. A plus (+) indicates candidates have experience or are very skilled; a check (✓) indicates candidates have some experience or adequate skill; and a minus (-) suggests an area in which candidates have little to no experience or are not skilled. Skills include the basic competencies that recreation and leisure service professionals should possess, such as leadership, programming, and communication skills. If the self-assessment reveals areas where candidates need to improve, then they should focus upon the Action column corresponding to that skill. In the Action column, candidates identify the action needed to improve the skill. For example, if candidates have a minus for budgeting, they can write down actions that will help them bump budgeting from a minus to a plus, such as attending a professional development session on budgeting or taking a class on finance and budgeting. For those candidates already in the workforce, improving a skill may be a decision to take on a greater role in their current position that will provide them with this experience. Once all of the minus areas have been addressed, then candidates should address those items receiving a check. Although the check indicates skills in a specific area are adequate, candidates may wish to strengthen that area. The goal of such an exercise is to identify areas needing improvement to maximize the number of attributes a candidate can promote to potential employers.

Although understanding strengths and weaknesses is crucial to the self-assessment process, candidates should also understand their personality traits. Personality traits address a wide variety of characteristics applicable to most jobs in leisure services and other disciplines. The Personality Traits Inventory Worksheet (Figure 1.2) allows candidates the opportunity to address the strengths and weaknesses of their personality traits using the same plus (+), check (✓), or minus (-) system. A plus indicates candidates possess and have refined a specific personality trait; a check indicates candidates possess a specific personality trait, but need to refine it; and a minus suggests candidates are very weak or do not have a specific personality trait.

Figure 1.1

Self-Assessment of Skills		Date _____
Skills	Action	
Mark each item with: +, √, –		
_____ Budgeting	_____	
_____ Communication (oral)	_____	
_____ Communication (written)	_____	
_____ Computer skills	_____	
_____ Creativity	_____	
_____ Delegating	_____	
_____ Employee supervision	_____	
_____ Evaluation	_____	
_____ Facility supervision	_____	
_____ Initiative	_____	
_____ Leadership	_____	
_____ Marketing	_____	
_____ Negotiating	_____	
_____ Organizing	_____	
_____ Planning	_____	
_____ Problem solving	_____	
_____ Programming	_____	
_____ Scheduling	_____	
_____ Team building	_____	
_____ Time management	_____	
_____	_____	
_____	_____	

Self-Assessment of Skills Worksheet

Job Coach Tip

When conducting a self-assessment, try to be objective. This will be of greater benefit to you in understanding your strengths and weaknesses.

Once candidates have assessed their skills and personal traits, it is much easier for them to understand their strengths and weaknesses.

The last step in the self-assessment is determining job-related priorities. Candidates can do this by completing the Job Preferences Worksheet (Figure 1.3). Establishing priorities will help candidates determine the types of jobs for which they want to consider applying. There are many different job-related priorities that candidates may want to consider, such as the following:

- **Career setting:** Candidates may be interested in a position because of the way it fits with their career goals and objectives. If candidates are moving from one position to another, or are seeking to meet career objectives, they may seek a position with a specific title. Additionally, the job title, level of the position within the organization, the supervisor for the position, and the supervisory role