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Are You "Interview-Ready"?

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In today's changing job climate and transitional workforce, the average employee changes jobs every two to three years. It is estimated the average worker could have as many as 20 different jobs in his or her working lifetime. Some occupations average longer periods than others, but the days of working for the same company until retirement are almost unheard of. With that in mind, how prepared would you be if you had an interview today? The truth is, we should be conducting ourselves as "interview-ready" everyday.

Each day we are presenting ourselves to employment "decision makers," in both our work and private life. Unfortunately we don't always take advantage of these encounters by either being under-prepared or by failing to market ourselves in a professional, positive manner. By being cognizant of the fact our professional image is always on display to current and potential employers/decision makers, we can position ourselves into an "interview-ready" state simply by taking a few important steps:

1. Know who your target audience/potential employers and "decision makers" are. Short answer- EVERYONE. Potential employers and "decision makers" are everywhere. People mistakenly think of potential employers as being limited to owners/managers in their chosen field. But "decision makers" can be those in associated fields who have connections. Vendors for instance, call on numerous customers/organizations in your same industry and may know of potential job openings. Sometimes they are even asked their opinions/references on job candidates. Co-workers who are not in positions of authority today could be promoted to positions of authority tomorrow at your, or an associated, organization. Your industry peers may be used as references or asked for name suggestions when

organizations are looking at potential openings. Are you treating these and other potential "decision makers" *everyday* with the same respect and professionalism as you would a potential employer?

2. Give yourself a raise today/Make your resume a constantly growing and updated reflection of you. In today's economic times, raises can be few and far between—especially with local/state government employers or schools. But why wait for a raise when you can reward yourself? Many employers still offer reimbursement for college classes or will pay for continuing education courses through trade industry seminars. These classes, paid out of pocket, can be worth thousands of dollars, but are *worth far more* as future career-building and advancement tools. If reimbursement funds are not available, ask your HR department about what courses are currently available through your organization. Often supervisory classes, time management, first responder courses, etc., are available through your company. These classes are not only resume builders but sends a message to HR and company officials that you want to grow and improve yourself. If classes through your company are not available, check the website at your local library or county extension office: computer classes, public speaking courses, etc., are available for little to no out of pocket cost. Upon completion of any course, be sure to forward your HR department a copy of your certificate of completion to update your employee file with the personal improvements you've made. Most importantly, update and maintain a running list of the names, locations, dates, and thesis or summary statements of any courses you complete for a resume attachment. Showing potential employers a desire to continually educate oneself and update skills is always impressive.

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3. Resumes must be current and a hard copy within reach at all times - no exceptions! Even with all of the electronic media available for posting online resumes, there is something special about being able to present a current, well-written, hard-copy resume in person. Your resume should be a growing/changing record of your career, and with today's technology there is *no excuse* for not keeping it updated and current. The need for having a copy of your resume available at all times is because you never know when those “in-person” meetings with decision makers will be. Luck has been described as “being prepared for great opportunities.” Make your own luck happen by being prepared to introduce/sell yourself to potential employers wherever you may meet them. Have multiple copies of your resume stashed everywhere- your briefcase, your car, at work/home, etc. *Never fly without a resume handy*; talk about the place for a truly “captive audience!” A resume instantly provides someone access to your best selling points, all the ways in which you can be contacted, etc. Anyone trying to get “discovered” in the music industry never leaves home without a demo CD to sell themselves; why should a resume be any different?

4. Network! Network! Network! As important as resumes are in providing a decision maker with a synopsis of your skills/work experience, they do not open doors like they used to. The days of sending your resume to a random person on a company listing/website and receiving a callback are almost extinct. Doors are opened by who you know and, more importantly, who knows you! Joining industry and local networking groups can be crucial in keeping you informed of upcoming job openings and keep your name in the right circles for opportunities. Media social circles can cast your net beyond local boundaries to opportunities throughout the state, country, even the world! Joining sites like LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and industry-specific websites allows your resume to be in the hands of decision makers before you are even aware of a job opening! According to the online magazine “The Recruiter File,” one in every six people gets hired using a form of social media.

5. You are your own marketing department. Everyday, every encounter, every project, every “tweet”, every Facebook entry; you are selling yourself. But are you selling yourself to potential decision makers in an “interview-ready” mode? As helpful as social media can be in opening doors, it also has the ability to shut doors tightly when not used correctly. We would like to think that our private life is separate and apart from our work image- but social media has blurred those lines like never before. Companies want to know what potential employees are interested in, what they are like, and how they work with others: social media can be a great insight to these questions. It's not hard to “Google” anyone, and some hiring companies now request that job seekers provide their LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook links as part of the interview process. While college friends may appreciate hearing about late Saturday night activities, will potential employers appreciate it as well? If you are working hard to market yourself in the best light, make sure you are covering all of your bases.