

FINDING A NEW “NICHE” IN A DOWNTURNED ECONOMY

This article is adapted from the Job Guide provided to the Kansas Society of Land Surveyors with permission from their Executive Director, Melanie Pearce. So many in the land surveying profession have lost their jobs due to the economic downturn we are all faced with today. Melanie Pearce, the Executive Director of the Kansas Society of Land Surveyors, prepared a Job Guide for Kansas Society members and agreed to allow us to offer the same resource to SCPLS members. It's been a long time since many of us have prepared a resume or been on a job interview. We hope this guide will be useful in your job search, help you navigate through the lean years, and keep you connected with the surveying profession. Surveying is a proud and honorable profession that is seeing rough times. SCSPS values each and every one of you and we wish you the best of luck in your search!

THE SOUTH CAROLINA SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL LAND SURVEYORS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

February, 2010

Everyone has acquired an extensive array of abilities and interests over the years. So before trying to identify or apply for a specific job, you should give some serious thought to what you like or dislike, what you do well, and what you enjoy doing - on the job and in your personal life.

If you need help figuring out exactly how to re-focus your skills, abilities and preferences, you may want to seek individual career counseling or career testing. Counseling involves meeting with a professional career counselor to discuss issues surrounding your current situation and to identify options, resources, and goals. A career counselor can help you obtain names and contact information to help you network within the field you're considering, **however**, independent counselors may be quite expensive. You can find career counselors connected with a Department of Labor One-Stop Center.

Career Assessment Tests

Career tests can help you assess your interests and skills, define the type of work environment that suits you best, and identify career options you may not have thought of otherwise.

- *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® (may be available in book form at your local library or on line for a fee)
- *Strong Interest Inventory*®—*Professional Version, Skills and Values*.
- One of the best and easiest tests is the *Self-Directed Search* by John Holland, Ph.D.

Many other job help tests and options are available on-line and are free.

Career One-Stop Centers are available in many areas. The U.S. Department of Labor sponsors a system of 2,000 career centers throughout the country. Each Center offers job search assistance that includes access to job postings, publications, workshops, and counseling. You can call them toll-free at 1-877-872-5627 or go to www.careeronestop.org. For help with self-assessment, click on “Testing and Assessment.”

Even before you begin your search, take a personal inventory to define your preferred work environment, schedule and benefits. Do you prefer working in a setting where you interact with colleagues all day long? Would you rather telecommute, at least some of the time? Are you happy in a large organization, or would you prefer to be your own boss? Do you need to work a limited number of days per week or perhaps on a compressed schedule? What salary, health and retirement benefits do you require?

When you have been able to define the type of job, working environment and benefits you want, you are ready to identify specific options that will mesh with your personal skills, values and requirements. Remember, you may be looking for a job, but if it isn't a good fit, both you and your new employer will be miserable.

RESOURCES: Labor Market Information

- *The Occupational Outlook Handbook*, published by the U.S. Department of Labor, describes what workers actually do, working conditions, required training and education, earnings, and expected job prospects. Go to www.bls.gov/oco for more information or visit your local main library.
- The U.S. Department of Labor's CareerInfoNet website has information on labor market trends, wages, and fastest-growing jobs. You can search by occupation or industry, or look up the employment profile for South Carolina. Go to www.careerinfonet.org.
- www.JobHuntersBible.com: This site has a guide to job hunting on the Internet and an extensive library of articles to help you get started.
- www.monster.com: This site allows you to search and apply for jobs, network with other people in the work field that interests you, get tips on resume preparation and interviewing, and research salaries and benefits.
- The Riley Guide offers instructions on how best to use the Internet for a job search. Go to www.rileyguide.com
- Technical & Engineering Human Resource in Oil & Gas recently launched a website www.easy4jobs.com to connect employers and job seekers in the community of oil & gas, technical and engineering positions. They say the services are absolutely free of charge and both employers and job seekers get benefits from the website.
- **Other sites available** – www.yahoo.hotjobs.com , www.careerbuilders.com
- And don't forget the POB website: <http://www.lsrp.com/>

STARTING YOUR OWN BUSINESS

If you are having trouble finding the right job, or if it is important to you to have control over your work environment and schedule, you may want to consider starting your own business. More frequently today, retirees, downsized executives and employees, as well as employees who have reached a plateau, and homemakers are starting businesses.

Self-employment has both advantages and drawbacks. It may offer you more freedom than a regular job, but it also requires you to make decisions and take responsibility for everything from setting up an office to marketing and managing the finances. Success demands thorough planning, and there are no shortcuts. Here are some of the issues to think about if you're interested in starting a business:

Motivation: Why do you want to start a business?

- To be your own boss.
- Keep busy.
- Make money.
- Just have something to do so you don't have to tell others you are unemployed?

Ask yourself: Do you have the drive and energy? Starting a business and seeing it through can take years. How do your family and others feel about your plans? Your answers will have a strong effect on future decisions.

Risks: The old adage says that you should never risk more than you can afford to lose. In some cases, starting a business can primarily involve the loss of your time and effort. But some ventures may mean risking your life savings, your home, and even your personal relationships. Investing in a new business can be especially risky if you need to tap retirement savings to start the business. What are you willing to risk? Avoid committing any retirement income or assets until your financial analysis shows that you'll be able to pay your basic living expenses even if the business does not work out.

The Federal government's Small Business Administration (SBA) is one of the best places to begin your research. Their Small Business Development Centers—located all over the country—offer training, counseling, and research. They have libraries, special services for women entrepreneurs, and access to market research databases, planning and spreadsheet software, and more.

Planning: You'll need to develop a business plan. A typical business plan includes four major parts: a cover document, a marketing plan, a management plan, and a financial plan. Drawing up and following a solid business plan is important to the success of a business. Do you have skills or experience to be successful? If not, be sure to include upgrading your skills as part of the business plan.

Success: Can you turn your ideas into a real business? What will it take to meet your own definition of success? Does your product or service fill a need? Will somebody out there be willing to pay for it? What is the competition—how many other people are doing the same thing?

Resources:

- Counseling and training are available at no charge. Go to www.sba.gov to access any of these services. You can also get help from SBA's toll-free number - 1-800-827-5722.
- My Own Business Inc. offers a free online course on starting a business. The 11-session course provides basic dos and don'ts for entrepreneurs. The course is intended for both start-up and already operating entrepreneurs. You'll find business procedures and practical examples, easily presented for users with different levels of expertise, interests, and time availability. Go to www.myownbusiness.org.
- *The Small Business Start-Up Guide*, by Robert Sullivan, provides an in-depth entrepreneurial attitude checklist and other useful tools. It's just one of many excellent books on working for yourself. *Entrepreneur Magazine* offers home-based business start-up ideas, tips on how to raise money, and information about shoestring start-ups and franchise and business opportunities. Go to www.entrepreneur.com.
- Identify other community resources such as educational institutions, state or county economic development agencies, and the Chamber of Commerce. There are 16 Small Business Development Centers in South Carolina. To find the location nearest you, go to www.sba.gov.
- The National Association of Home Based Businesses offers information, support, and services to home-based business owners. Go to www.usahomebusiness.com.

Writing a Resume

You need only to supply information on the past 10 years of your professional life. Do show how you have advanced in the field. Give only the years, not the months—this can cover any gaps without being obvious. Then move on to:

OTHER EXPERIENCE - Don't give the years, but do highlight other kinds of transferable skills: carpentry, farming, oil rig technician, mechanic experience. So you worked at a service station during high school; then you have "hands-on customer service experience." Think about the actual impact of what you did, not just the job title!

EXAMPLE

John Q. Public

Address
City, State, Zip
(a/c) Phone No.
e-mail address (if applicable)

OBJECTIVE

FORGET IT! Everyone involved knows you want a job. Instead provide the following:

PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

- 1) Pick three words that describe you in your best light, for example, “highly motivated,” “energetic,” “detail-oriented,” “organized,” “dependable,” etc.
- 2) Then add a descriptor: “*mid-level manager*” = crew chief; “*team-player*” = you play well with others and can “fit into” a new setting; “*self-starter*” = you don’t need to be micro-managed
- 3) And finish with another positive note: “*with strong communication skills*” or “*strong leadership skills*” or “*strong work ethic*”

And there, you have a nice, succinct profile of you. Now for the experience...

WORK EXPERIENCE

Job Title - 1998 - present

Business Name, City, State

- Responsible for. . . *give a brief summary of your duties*
- Consult with . . . *use strong verbs, all in the same tense, to showcase your abilities*
- Organize *and strengths*
- Prepare
- Manage

Job Title 1989-1997

Business Name, City, State

- Responsible for ...
- Organized
- Operated
- Assisted

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

South Carolina Society of Professional Land Surveyors

National Society of Professional Surveyor

Local Chapter Membership

VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITIES

Boy Scout Leader

baseball/football/soccer coach

Civic organizations-Kiwanis, local Chamber,

EDUCATION

Provide only the facts, not the dates for any degrees after high School. Include serious continuing education credits. *Received more than 15 hours of Professional Development Hours annually.*

REFERENCES

Provided upon request

NOTE: *Prepare a list of people willing to vouch for you and contact them **before** you send their name as a reference. You never know if someone you like and likes you, has a bad history with another person that could impact your hiring. Check first!*

~~~~~

## ALTERNATE HEADING:

John Q. Public

Home address  
City, State Zip

Phone number  
e-mail address  
Cell phone \*\*

## **WHAT NOT TO SAY**

Don't list your hobbies! Let's say you like to golf. But the boss is a bowling nut. What are the chances you'll be viewed as a person who will fit in with that company's culture? Stamp collecting? Brings to mind a serious and intensely private, **old** and quirky person.

*Never* give anyone the date of your graduation. Not from college, or high school, any more than you would give them the date you "graduated" from kindergarten.

If you hold a position in your church, it is sometimes wise to simply give the position and not the denomination. I know, that can be viewed as prejudicial and not a basis for hiring, but the bias can be unconscious. Don't give anyone a reason to put your resume into the "maybe" pile.

## **COVER LETTERS**

A good cover letter will not only introduce you to a prospective employer but grab the employer's attention. It is another chance to market yourself and encourage the person to read your resume and ultimately grant a job interview.

### **Why are you writing?:**

Cover letters can be written in various styles and formats. Depending on the situation, you will use a cover letter with different first paragraphs.

1) Applying for a position in response to a job advertisement or online job posting:  
"Enclosed is my resume in response to your advertisement for. . . ."

2) Submitting the cover letter after being referred from a colleague:  
Dear \_\_\_\_\_(use the name)  
"Sue Jacobsen suggested I contact you regarding. . . ."

3) Sending your resume cold to employer that you know hires people in your field and industry is the hardest letter to write, because you are essentially making a "cold call." Do not let that stop you. "Dear Sir or Madam" may not be the catchiest opening, but it is an opening.

If possible, however, call the company to ask the hiring manager's name (as well as the correct spelling) and title if it's not apparent in the job posting. Addressing the letter to a specific individual will demonstrate both motivation and resourcefulness.

### **Keep it simple:**

Limit your note to two or three short paragraphs.

Paragraph 1: Why you are writing?

Paragraph 2: It's important to target each letter to the actual job opening and use the same language used in the ad to explain why the job interests you and what qualities you can bring to the position.

Paragraph 3: "Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you."

OR

"Thank you for your time. May I call you in 10 days or so to see how your search is going?" ( if you are really interested in the job.)

### **Every company has its own language:**

Pay close attention to what terminology the ad uses to specify qualifications. For example, if you are applying for a position that involves managing a small team, play up your interpersonal skills and previous experience overseeing small groups. Your cover letter should always respond to the ad's intent. To do this, incorporate the job posting's keywords into your cover letter.

**Do your homework:**

Visit the employer's Web site, read their print publications, talk to people who work there about the organization. Pick out buzzwords and phrases. Use this information as you write your letters and remember to use the same language in your interviews. Employers who hear “their” language conclude that the job seeker understands the company culture and will fit in.

**Dos and Don'ts:**

Avoid asking for a specific salary or making other work-related demands (“I prefer working from home every other Friday.”). The purpose of your letter is to explain what you can do for the company, not vice versa.

Don't stretch the truth about your accomplishments. Even seemingly minor misrepresentations can come back to haunt you during the reference or background check process.

**Check for errors:**

A sure way to get your resume tossed is to have a typo or grammatical mistake in your cover letter. Use Spell Check on your computer then ask a trusted friend or family member to review the document before you send it out.

**Electronic filing:**

When applying for a position electronically, paste your cover letter into the body of the e-mail message you send to the hiring manager or into the appropriate space on an online application, if possible. Keep in mind that not all online job services will allow you to take this step.

## **INTERVIEWING 101**

Interviews are stressful. The secret of having a good interview is in selling your strengths—and that means being positive and parking any baggage at the door. If you take time to research the employer, to anticipate questions, and to prepare your talking points, you're well on your way to success.

**What to Expect:**

- De-stress yourself before the interview. Use relaxation techniques, such as exercise, deep breathing, visualization, or whatever works for you, (excluding a stiff drink!).
- Employers want to know you're a good fit. Be prepared to answer this question: How will hiring you add to the success of our organization?
- If you can, find out who will be interviewing you and whether it's an individual or a group interview. Know that there's a good chance the interviewer will be younger than you.
- You may be asked how you would respond to specific situations (often referred to as behavioral interviewing). For example: “Tell me about a time when you were faced with making a difficult decision.” Cite examples from recent jobs.

**What to Say and What Not to Say:**

- Focus on skills and achievements rather than on your many years of experience. Talk only about your accomplishments that relate to this particular job.
- Respond to questions directly, but limit your answers to what was asked. Ask for clarification if you don't understand a question.
- Learn and use the current language and terminology in the field. Industry jargon is prevalent in every profession.
- Never say anything negative about former employers or coworkers.

**Be Informed and Ask Questions:**

- Research the employer beforehand. Visit the company's Web site, look at their advertising, signs, and marketing materials. Search online and read articles about the company.

- Show your interest and initiative by asking questions. When asked, “Is there anything else you’d like to add?” Don’t just shake your head and say “no.” Ask the interviewer specific questions about the organization and what you can expect in the job.
- At the end of the interview, reaffirm your interest in the job. Summarize your strengths and how you can help the organization. Then ask about next steps and when you can expect a contact.

### What About Salary Issues?:

- Do not raise the issue of salary unless the interviewer brings it up.
- If asked about your salary history, ask what range the employer is working with for the position.
- If the interviewer presses you to say what salary you are looking for, you can say “negotiable,” or use a range rather than a specific number. Be prepared by researching salary levels for similar positions in your area.

### Act the Part:

- Be on time. If you’re extremely early, it can signal that you’re overanxious. But absolutely do not be late. Know where you’re going ahead of time, and map your route if necessary.
- Dress appropriately and professionally. Better to dress up than to look too casual. Update your wardrobe and replace that interview suit from 20 years ago!
- Walk tall, speak clearly, use eye contact, and smile. Practice your handshake; it should be firm—neither a wet noodle nor a vise grip.

To do your best at an interview, anticipate the questions you may be asked, then practice what you’re going to say. Practice in front of a mirror, record yourself, or ask family and friends to ask you the most dreaded questions during lunch or dinner. Have them ask you the questions until you are “spot on” ready. You’ll be more relaxed, confident, and more likely to be hired.

The following questions are examples of some you might be asked. Answered with confidence, each one gives you an opportunity to present yourself as a skilled, energetic worker who brings high value to an employer:

1. **Tell me about yourself.** Make your answer short and sweet. Start with “I was born in \_\_\_\_\_,” or “I was a farm kid from \_\_\_\_\_, moved here in \_\_\_\_\_” Then move on! Stick to experiences and goals that relate to the job for which you’re applying. Resist the impulse to stress your years of experience. It’s more important to talk about your skills and achievements that show you can deliver. Emphasize your flexibility and positive attitude.
2. **Why are you looking for a job?** A straightforward, brief answer is best. For example, “My organization was forced to downsize.” Avoid negative statements about yourself, your work, or your ability to get along with others. **Never** criticize former employers or coworkers.
3. **What are you looking for?** It takes a lot of thinking to be ready for this question. Don’t speak in generalities. Be prepared to name the type of position you think would be appropriate for you and how your skills would translate to a new employer.
4. **Aren’t you overqualified for this position?** Even though “overqualified” can be shorthand for “old” or “expensive,” it’s important to stay positive. Express your enthusiasm for the job and pride in your qualifications. Explain what makes you interested in this position at this point in your career—such as wanting to apply your skills to a new field or to achieve more flexibility and work-life balance.
5. **We have state-of-the-art technology. Would you be able to jump right in?** Show you are adaptable and tech-savvy. Give examples of projects you’ve done which required computer skills. Emphasize training you’ve taken to keep your skills up to date.
6. **What are your strengths?** Don’t be shy. Tell them one or two of your best points: “I am dependable; In 10 years, I have only missed two days of work.” OR “I’m an experienced team leader; I was a crew chief for \_\_\_ years” OR: “I am a great team member; I was part of a survey crew for the past \_\_\_ years.”
7. **What’s your biggest weakness?** This is a reverse invitation to toot your own horn. Do it with an answer that puts you in a good light. For example, “I’m too detail-oriented, but I work hard to control that.” Keep it simple—and smile.

8. **What are your salary requirements?** Try to postpone this question until a job offer has been made. Prepare by knowing what the salary ranges are in your area. (Sites like Salary.com can provide national averages). If you don't know the range and the interviewer persists, reply "What salary range are you working with?" The interviewer may very well tell you.
9. **Do you have any questions?** YES! Show your interest and initiative by asking specific questions about the organization and what you can expect in the job. Use your questions to demonstrate how your skills can contribute to the organization. Answering "no" to this question says you're not really interested in the job.
10. **Do you mind reporting to a boss who is 10 years younger than you?** "No, I respect competency and seniority and have no problem with that."
11. **If you could be an animal or a fruit or a car what would you choose?** While this may sound stupid, be prepared to give an answer that puts you in good light. Stay away from the fruit and the animals and go for the car, perhaps one that has a good record for safety, reliability, and versatility, or a sleek sports car with lots of zip and drive. Keep it short and simple—and smile. **Another off-the-wall question is, "What animal would you choose to be?" or "What color best describes you?"**
12. **Where do you want to be in five years?** "I'd like to be in a challenging position with this company, with more responsibility."

FINALLY, just in case:

13. **We don't have many employees who are your age. Would that bother you?** Explain that you believe your age would be an asset, you are eager to learn, and it doesn't matter who helps you. Describe recent experiences, whether at work or in other situations, where age diversity has been an asset. Federal law bars employers from considering age in employment decisions. Though it's not illegal to be asked your age, the question could be a red flag about the employer's commitment to age diversity. Know your rights under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act.

(Question and answer provided by the AARP web site.)

### **Follow Up After the Interview**

- Send a thank-you note or e-mail immediately.
- If you don't hear anything in the expected time, wait a few more days. Then call once more to check in.

### **FINAL NOTES:**

In addition to using the web and this Guide, check your local library for other, printed, resources:

#### **BOOKS: "Guerrilla Marketing for Job Hunters"**

**"What Color is Your Parachute?"** Updated each year, this is one of the best resources for re-careering.

**"Do What You Love, the Money Will Follow."**

The local library can be your new best friend. Reference books cannot be checked out, so you have to **go** there if you prefer to read the printed word instead of the computer. Read the morning papers there if you don't want to do heavy-duty research.

Besides, where are you going to spend your time? Not at home—unless you are doing all the little "to-do" list of things you have been putting off for the past several months (or years).

Plan your day; plan your week. Make sure you get out at least once a day.

Have coffee with a friend. Strike up a new friendship with the retired folks that gather at the local McDonalds, or the local equivalent.

Walk in the park or around your neighborhood. Exercise is a wonderful way to clear your head. And ideas can pop into your head while you are walking that won't appear when you are stressing.

Ever wondered what so-and-so down the street or the company you passed on the way to work actually did? Stop and ask.

Book stores are a wonderful get-away, too. They actually don't mind if you sit in one of their comfy sofas or chairs and read for an hour or two. You might want to *alternate* books stores, but that's your choice.