

HOW CAN I GET A GOOD JOB WITH NO EXPERIENCE?

IT'S A QUESTION AS OLD AS TIME. HERE'S HOW TO GET YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE ANY PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE.

BY LOLLY DASKAL

Thousands of college students across the country will soon be asking this age-old question: If all jobs require experience, how can you get that first job when your only experience is your degree?

Leadership coach Lolly Daskal helps graduates get their foot in the door.

Hi,

I graduated in December with an English degree (useless, I know). I didn't really know what I wanted to do for most of my time in college, and I'm still kind of grasping at straws.

I spend a lot of time looking at job postings and applying for things (even unpaid internships), but I have no previous experience in the fields I think I'm most interested in. How do I get a job without any experience?
Please help!

First, remember that everyone begins with no experience—so you're not alone.

You didn't mention which fields you're interested in entering, but you did say your English degree was useless. I strongly disagree. An English degree may not translate immediately to a great focused job the same way a degree in, say, accounting might do, but it certifies that you have high-level skills in communication, analytical thinking, and creativity—skills that are greatly valued in many workplace settings. Depending on the professional and educational choices you make now, your degree can be the springboard to anything from law to journalism to technical writing to teaching.

When you are just out of college and embarking on finding a career path, it's easy to feel intimidated. Job searching without much work experience can be frustrating, but with some hard work, a lot of ambition, and confidence in yourself, it can happen.

Here's how to get there:

1. EMBRACE YOUR REALITY

If you're applying for entry-level positions, most people aren't expecting you to come in with a resume filled with experience. Instead, embrace your inexperience and leverage it as motivation

to learn. Highlight examples of your dedication, curiosity, and commitment to learning and growth. People who are hiring are looking for people who are willing to work hard and want to learn.

2. IDENTIFY YOUR SKILLS

Make a list of all the skills listed in postings for the role you're looking to get: computer skills, technical skills, communication skills, research skills, problem-solving skills. What do people come to you for help with?

3. MAKE THE LINK

When you decide to apply for a given position, you must have a reason to believe you can do the job well. Spend some time analyzing that link. What formal or informal experience do you have, or what personal traits, that make the job a good fit? Be analytical and creative in this process. Once you establish the link for yourself, you can explain it to a potential employer.

4. EMPHASIZE "SOFT SKILLS"

What will make you stand out from the rest? Remember to showcase qualities like friendliness, professionalism, responsiveness, and follow-through. Strong soft skills can go a long way, because they can't really be taught.

5. KNOW YOUR OWN WORTH

You might not have years of work experience, but what else in your background can demonstrate your worth to an employer? Experience doesn't have to just come from traditional jobs; market any skills you've developed in other areas of your life.

6. BALANCE CONFIDENCE WITH BEGINNER'S MIND

Confidence is important, but it has to be laced with humility and modesty—the hallmarks of "beginner's mind." Show that you can do the job, but also show that you're willing to learn.

7. START VOLUNTEERING

If you can't find a job, work for free. A volunteer position can be easier to find than an internship. Volunteer for as much relevant service as you can. You'll not only gain valuable experience, but will also be able to build a network and get a foot in the door.

8. NETWORK

Building your personal network is a reliable path to a great job at any stage of life. Connect with everyone you know—and in turn with everyone they know—through social media, community and professional events, setting up lunch or coffee dates to stay in touch, any way you can find.

9. KEEP LEARNING

It may be that you need more education to qualify for what you really want to do—for example, if you discover an interest in law, then it may be time to apply to law school. But even outside of formal education, find ways to keep current and expand your base of knowledge—take non-credit or audit classes, enroll in professional development or special training courses, or just do a lot of reading in your fields of interest.

10. BE REALISTIC

Even making the most of your skills and experience, make sure you're applying for positions that are appropriate for you. In a tight job market where employers are flooded with highly qualified applicants, there's less incentive to take a chance on a marginally qualified candidate. Carefully target jobs you truly can prove you can succeed in—not just those where you think, "I could do that," but those where you can excel with the strength and skills you already have.

The more defeated you allow yourself to feel, the more defeatist this experience will be. Every day, do something to find a job, and do it with the mind-set that it is not a futile undertaking but an adventure, a chance to learn and explore.

Along the way, remember to put yourself in the shoes of those who will be hiring you. What should make them excited about you? The answer to that question needs to be reflected in everything you do—from your responses on job searches to your cover letter, your résumé and your interview. Make a compelling case for yourself, take your life in your own hands, and make this work.

You'll be surprised at what you can achieve with the right mind-set. Good luck!

