

Dear Coach

What are your career aspirations? How are you going to reach those goals? This column will guide you to a new career stage. //

This will be the final Dear Coach column in T+D. The editors thank Judy Estrin for sharing her knowledge, and the many readers who sent in their stories and questions. For 2009, T+D brings you 12 new Career Path columns, with articles and information addressing the career questions that matter to workplace learning and performance professionals.

Read Career Path each month for tips and resources on new trends in interviewing, writing cover and follow-up letters, discovering and working your strengths, launching a successful job search, and much more.

Dear Coach

I am a proud military spouse about to face another Permanent Change of Station (PCS) move. This means that I get to search for employment in a completely different area, with few if any networking contacts.

For the last three years, I have worked as a career counselor for the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP). I help military service members and their families transition from military to civilian life. We assist them in résumé preparation, hold job fairs, and conduct workshops on various topics ranging from job fair preparation to networking and everything in between.

At the next duty station, there is no guarantee that a position will be available for me at the ACAP Center there. Currently, that office is fully staffed with no anticipation of turnover.

To provide you a bit about my background, I earned my master's degree in both HR Management and HR Development in 2005. My current position has helped me realize that the field of training and development, specifically adult learning and curriculum development, is the component of human resources that I thoroughly enjoy. It is my passion!

So here's my dilemma. Yes, I have the master's degree, but I have limited experience in the training and curriculum development realm. In addition, my presentation skills are solid, and I have consistently received positive comments about the workshops I've conducted.

How can someone like me compete for training and development positions when most positions require direct training experience of at least five or more years? What do I need to be doing to get noticed and taken seriously as a training and development professional?

Signed,
Military Spouse

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Dear Military Spouse

Being the trailing spouse can be an interesting adventure. While your spouse goes directly to his/her new position, the trailing spouse, who may or may not receive outplacement assistance from the employer responsible for the relocation, is left to start a transition in a new location with what feels like very little in the way of support or resources.

Fortunately, the experience you have had as a career counselor prepares you for part of the transition. Your challenge is to package your experience to support *what you want to do in your next position*, not do more of the same.

Mine your experience

What are the key words that come to mind when you think about the position you want to obtain? "Designed?" "Facilitated?" "Conducted?" "Developed?" "Led?" "Coordinated?" These are the types of words you want to use to start your accomplishment statements in your résumé... and when you are in the interview process. Paint a picture for potential employers that demonstrates that you have what it takes to do the job.

Write a job description for yourself, detailing exactly what you want to have in your ideal job. Look to your experience and education. Mine that experience to fill in the details of your résumé. Hold onto your passion!

Ask yourself these questions: How can I exploit the limited experience in the training and curriculum development realm that I already have? What have I done in my volunteer or educational experience that supports what I want to do next? Think in terms of building on what you have done to suit what you want to do next.

You've heard this before...network, network, network

It's a whole different ballgame out there than it was when you completed your degree. Not only must you be in touch with professors and colleagues from your graduate program, you have to start using the social networking tools that are at your fingertips.

Your challenge is to use them judiciously, constantly moving your search forward instead. Without endorsing one network over another, the more popular ones are: Plaxo, LinkedIn, and Facebook (yes, even for professionals).

Once in the social networks, seek out groups that pertain to your area of interest and expertise. Here is where your networking takes on a different focus. In your profile, make sure you emphasize what you do and what you are looking to do.

Search not just for mid to large sized corporations, but also HR and training consulting firms who just might need some curriculum design. Look to align yourself with firms that may have adjunct opportunities for design and delivery, even if they are not in your new backyard.

How to compete

Stop looking for solely for full-time positions. Look for work. Project-based work and consulting assignments can help fill in the experience gap you perceive. Focus on what you do have in your background—on what you can do, not what you don't have. The quality of your experience will far outweigh an arbitrary time element.



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