

17 STEPS TO SNAGGING A NEW JOB in the New Year

By Dan Harvey

Area healthcare recruiters offer valuable insights to help put you in the driver's seat

About a month ago you might have been shopping around for the best gifts to give loved ones. Now that it's the New Year, however, you might want to shop around for the best gift to give yourself. And if you've been looking to move forward in your career, or in a new direction, that gift may be a new job.

The savvy jobhunter has many resources at his or her disposal.

For instance, this month, on January 13, the Philadelphia Inquirer will publish a Mega Job Section listing an abundance of opportunities for those in healthcare. Two days later, on January 15, the Inquirer, the Daily News and Philly.com/Monster are sponsoring a job fair specifically for nursing, allied health and pharmaceutical professionals.

Why scour job listings or visit a job fair when you might already have a recruiter or two calling?

Because you want to remain in the driver's seat. You want to hold the reins. You want to know all of the options so you can choose the one that best suits your personal and career plans. (See sidebar on career fairs.)

Once you've selected a few of the most attractive job opportunities out there, landing one of those positions comes down to how you present yourself.

Mary Hockstein, division recruiter for Bayada Nurses — a home healthcare company based in Moorestown, N.J. — says that for nursing and allied health professionals, obtaining a new position is 50 percent marketing and 50 percent selling.

"Marketing involves how well you prepare the package — that is, yourself — and that includes your appearance, resume and references," says Hockstein. Selling involves your performance during the interview process.

Following are 17 steps that three local healthcare recruiters say can help you to navigate the interview process with ease, all the while remaining in control of your own destiny.



Photo by David Gehosky

Cheryl Remolde recruits nurses for Main Line Health.

Secure the interview

Enhance your chances of being invited to an interview by taking the following steps:

- 1. Carefully read the position posting.** Make sure you fully understand the specific job requirements. This expedites the process for you and the recruiter, says Cheryl Remolde, employment specialist with Main Line Health. Remolde currently recruits for nurses but also has recruited for nurse practitioners and physician assistants. "Many newer graduates don't read the stated qualifications as carefully as they should," she says.
- 2. Know your source.** Distinguish yourself by using the recruiter's name rather than a generic salutation (e.g., "To whom it may concern"). This entails some legwork, but it demonstrates your diligence and provides a direct route to the hiring professional. "Go to the organization's website and find out who's doing the hiring," advises Remolde.
- 3. Be flexible.** When setting up an interview, always accommodate the hiring manager's schedule.

Prepare for the interview

An applicant who appears unprepared for an interview is a major red flag to an employer, says Dolly Rivera, human resources manager for NewCourtland Elder Services in Philadelphia. Preparations should include the following steps:

4. Assemble documentation. Collect appropriate documentation related to your experience and education, specifically your resume, references and recent performance evaluations.

- *Modify your resume.* Update the information and reword your stated career objectives to match the posted position. Carefully proof for grammatical errors and spelling. Bring your updated resume to the interview, even if you've already submitted an older version during the application process, suggests Hockstein.
- *Update your portfolio* with recent job evaluations signed by your manager. Some recruiters ask for these at the first interview, so be proactive; it'll gain you an advantage. "I've always found that people who do well in interviews bring their evaluations," says Remolde. "It's surprising how many nurses and allied healthcare professionals don't get copies. Evaluations document your competencies. Healthcare hiring managers love to see them."
- *Secure appropriate references.* These should come from people in management positions, and not from doctors or co-workers, Remolde advises.

5. Research the company. Pre-interview research is critical to success. Get brochures and/or reports, and visit the organization's website. Hockstein strongly advises that you read the company's mission statement. "Clearly understand the mission and relate it to your own experience and aspirations," she advises. "That proves to the hiring manager that you're serious about healthcare and not merely looking for a job."

6. Take a self inventory. "This gives you a strong sense of what you can offer a company," says Hockstein. An inventory will help you communicate how your achievements relate to an organization's healthcare mission; how your career plans would contribute to the organization's success; and how you'll go above and beyond the basic job description.

7. Prepare responses. Practice how you'll answer questions typically asked during preliminary interviews (see sidebar). "Interviewers closely observe how well candidates respond to questions," says Rivera.

Get to know potential employers at career fairs

By Cynthia Leger

While it's a fact that nurses and allied health professionals are often recruited, that's no reason to be passive. Instead of choosing only from jobs that come to you, get out there, be proactive, and visit a career fair to learn more about the many potential employers in the Greater Philadelphia region.

It won't be too difficult finding a fair that caters to health-care professionals. In fact one is coming up on Tuesday, January 15. The Healthcare Pharmaceutical Career Fair (<http://go.philly.com/careerfairs>). This fair is being presented by The Philadelphia Inquirer and Daily News and Philly.com/Monster, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Hilton Philadelphia City Avenue Hotel.

To get the most out of a career fair, do a little legwork before you arrive. There are so many recruiters represented at these fairs that you couldn't possibly meet them all in one day. Save yourself some energy by finding out which companies will be attending ahead of time and choosing three or four on which to focus.

Recruiters are most impressed by good preparation. They find it frustrating to have to respond to basic questions that are answered on their websites. If you conduct a little background research about an employer and come armed with thoughtful and informed questions, you will be sure to stand out.

You may also want to consider preparing a short introductory speech about yourself. Some people call this a 20-second sound bite. Often times at fairs, you don't have a lot of time to make an impression, and you don't want to waste precious minutes thinking about what you should say. Come up with a speech of two to three sentences that includes your name, your relevant work experience, your professional interests and the reason you chose to visit the organization's booth. Practice it a few times until you feel confident and comfortable.

On the day of the fair, arrive as close to the beginning as possible. Like all of us, recruiters grow tired later in the day, and it's better to catch them when they are still fresh and alert. Starting early may also allow you to maximize the amount of time that you spend speaking with each potential employer.

While not all recruiters are expecting you to arrive in business attire, to some a lack of professional dress is a huge turn-off. Play it safe by dressing as you would for an interview. Bring multiple copies of your resume, a strong handshake and a personable smile.

As you make your rounds, don't forget to pick up business cards along the way. If you find an employer that you think is a good fit, ask about the next step in the employment process.

With the awareness you'll gain at a job fair, you know you won't be settling for second best when a job offer comes your way.

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Rules for interview day

8. Don't be late. Confirm the appointment time, get precise traveling directions, and show up about 15 minutes early. "Showing up late is totally unacceptable," emphasizes Rivera.

9. Wear a suit. Hiring managers don't want to see belly buttons or cleavage. "I'm always surprised about how many younger interviewees wear tank tops and flip-flops," Remolde says. "Remember, you'll be interviewing with managers who've been in the profession for a long time. They may not understand the casual dress attitudes of generations X, Y and Z." As such, she advises that interviewees follow the "old school" dress code and wear a suit.

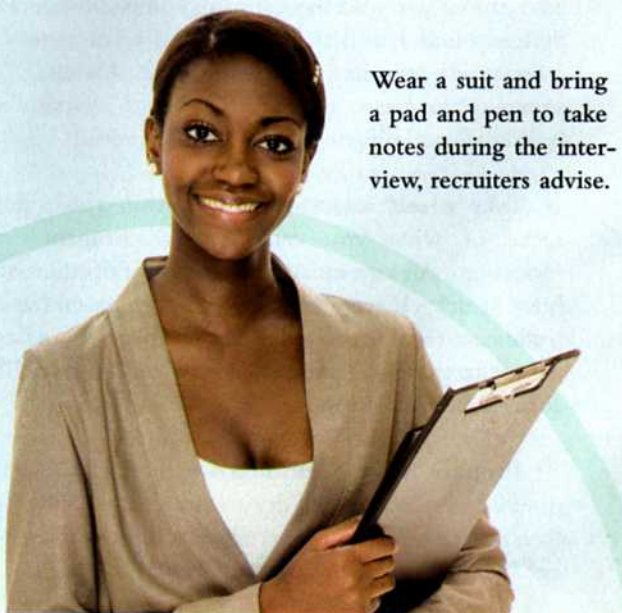
Appropriate interview attire can provide you with an immediate edge over most other candidates. "Nine times out of 10, an interviewee dresses inappropriately," Rivera notes. "If I have two candidates who are equally qualified, the one who comes in better dressed always gets the position."

Hockstein adds the following advice: "Don't go to the interview with extremely long, artificial nails, as they're a sanitary hazard and source of infection."

Demonstrate professional polish

Here are some additional ways to distinguish yourself during an interview and increase your chances of being hired:

10. Be conscious of how you speak. "Your 'voice' is very important," stresses Hockstein. "Because healthcare involves so much person-to-person contact, the candidate should exude confidence, professional warmth and friendliness."



Wear a suit and bring a pad and pen to take notes during the interview, recruiters advise.



Common interview questions

Before an interview, prepare yourself by practicing responses to these typical questions:

- Describe your best/worst boss.
- What would you say are your biggest weaknesses?
- What are your major strengths?
- Describe your biggest accomplishments.
- Provide an overview of your career.
- Why do you want to leave your present position?
- How would you differentiate yourself from others who perform the same responsibilities?
- When can you start?
- Put yourself in the place of one of your references, and indicate what he or she would say about you.

Be sure to thank the recruiter at the end of the interview and follow up with a hand-written note.

11. Indicate flexibility about work schedules.

"Healthcare is a 24/7 profession, and managers don't like it when candidates dictate their schedule needs," says Remolde. "You must be willing to work nights and some holidays."

12. Bring a pad and pen to take notes during an interview.

13. Address people by their professional titles.

"Sometimes you'll be talking with someone who is a doctor," Hockstein points out. "Make sure you remember their titles when you're introduced."

14. Turn off the cell phone. Never answer a cell phone call during an interview. Turn it off before you begin. Better yet, leave it in your car and not in your purse or pocket. "It's hard to recover after that cell phone rings," says Rivera.

15. Bring questions. At some point, the interviewer will ask if you have any questions. "Always be prepared to ask some good ones," says Hockstein, who offers the following examples:

- Can you provide some specific details about the position and the responsibilities?

- What's a typical workday like?
- How many people will I work with directly each day?
- Do you offer opportunities for further education and advancement?
- How soon would you like me to start?

"Such questions indicate that someone is genuinely interested in the position," she says. "Conversely, you should never ask about vacation, pay or benefits. If you ask me about those, I'll question your commitment to healthcare."

Follow up after the interview

16. Offer a sincere "thank you" at the end of the interview, and punctuate it with a positive statement, such as: "You've helped me learn so much about the position."

17. Send a thank-you note when you get home. It's not only proper etiquette, it acknowledges that you were interested in what was discussed. "Hiring managers love to see that someone actually was listening to them, because many people just don't listen that closely anymore," says Remolde.

Don't take the easy route and send an email. "The note should be handwritten and sent via regular mail," recommends Hockstein. "It shows me that I'm dealing with someone who is truly a professional."