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A Simple Assignment that Could Land a New Grad a Job

The last thing new grads want to hear after they have walked the stage at commencement is a new assignment. Unfortunately though, without completing this assignment, most new graduates will struggle to find employment. I have seen it.

I started giving this assignment to new graduates, as a response to one of the common questions new grads ask: How do I get a job if I have no experience? In today's competitive job market I hear the question even more often. By the way, this assignment works for everyone who is looking for a job, not just new graduates.

Before a new grad begins the assignment, I need to reassure them that the assignment will take time, thought and effort. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that they have more experience than they think they do. This assignment just helps them discover the experience.

Step 1. Do you know the top 10 skills and behaviors employers look for in new college graduates? Fortunately, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) surveys employers every year to answer exactly this question.
Based on the 2012 NACE survey, the 10 skills are as follows: Leadership, problem solving, written communication, teamwork, analytic thinking, strong work ethic, verbal communication skills, initiative, computer skills and technical skills.

Step 2. Create a spreadsheet with three columns. Left column header is "Skills". Middle column header is "1-10" and final column header is "Example."

Step 3. In the left column list the 10 skills, one per row. In the middle column, give yourself a rating on a scale of 1 to 10 on your ability regarding the stated skill. In the 3rd column, and this is the tough one, identify the BEST example of a time when you demonstrated that skill. This is where the assignment gets tough, because invariably people will rank themselves a higher number than the BEST example demonstrates. If the best example was in high school; we have a problem.

This simple assignment has 5 great benefits.

1. Invariably, once the new grad starts to think it through, they find tons of examples where they have demonstrated excellent behaviors in these areas.
2. It is a reality check for those new grads or any job seeker who ranks themselves really high with a skill and then has weak examples to back it up. These are areas you stay away from in the interview or identify in answers to the “weakness” question. This could still be a winner for you in an interview, if you add what you might be doing to improve.

3. It will boost the new grad's confidence about what skills they can actually demonstrate to an employer and therefore where they can add value to the company.
4. The results will help a new grad focus their job search on specific strengths. Job seekers who focus their efforts on showcasing strengths, rather than worry about what they have to offer, are more successful in the job search.
5. Not everyone is great at everything - so don't expect great examples for every item. This assignment helps to identify skills and more importantly, gets new grads talking about the BEST examples. This is great preparation for job interview success.

The clock is ticking. Get started now!