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Time to get hired

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© 2012 EmploymentCare & Ventus Publishing ApS
ISBN 978-87-403-0059-8

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Contents

	Introduction	**7**
1	**Recruitment companies**	**8**
1.1	How recruitment companies operate	8
1.2	Search and selection	9
1.3	Temporary employment agencies	9
1.4	What to do	10
1.5	Assignment	12
2	**How to use your network**	**13**
2.1	"I don't have a network"	13
2.2	Your social network	13
2.3	Using social media – Facebook	14
2.4	Your professional network	15
2.5	How to use your network – LinkedIn	16
2.6	"I don't like contacting people I know"	18
2.7	The important follow-up	19
2.8	Assignment	19

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2.9	Evaluate your network	19
2.10	Use your network	19
2.11	Template: Networking activity	20
3	**Unsolicited applications**	**21**
3.1	What does it take to succeed?	21
3.2	How do you find the companies?	21
3.3	Companies you know	21
3.4	Talk to people you know	22
3.5	Companies in your area	22
3.6	Search for companies on the Net	23
3.7	Job portals	23
3.8	Company websites	23
3.9	Company databases	24
3.10	Submitting unsolicited applications	25
3.11	The unsolicited application	25
3.12	How to write an unsolicited application	25
3.13	Assignment	25
4	**Interviews – how to make the best-possible impression**	**28**
4.1	The appointment process	31
4.2	The appointment process	32

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4.3	"Tell us about yourself"	32
4.4	Tips for job interviews:	36
4.5	The pay question	36
4.6	The body talks	38
4.7	The interviewers' body language	38
4.8	After the first interview	39
4.9	Learn from your experiences	39
4.10	Assignment	40
4.11	Template: Job Interview	41

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Introduction

'Time to get hired' is a step-by-step booklet that helps you to understand what it takes to land a new job through alternative channels that applying as a response to a job ad. We will cover how to approach recruitment and employment agencies, how to use your network and how to submit unsolicited applications. Finally we will prepare you for the interview.

Our vision is to make it easier for you and help you find a new job as quickly as possible.

Students that are about to graduate often don't quite know how best to approach job-hunting. Being a jobseeker can be very stressful, because there are so many things you need to do.

Most people approach the task in a fairly disorganised manner and just muddle through.

'Time to get hired' structures the process from start to finish, so that you approach job-hunting one step at a time.

The process is built up in such a way that once you have completed all of the steps, you'll have done everything possible to plan your job hunt and you are then ready to find your job.

At each step, you will acquire the knowledge and tools you need to find a job.

The idea is to help you get off to a good start and the 4 steps to do so are:

- **Step 1 Recruitment companies/employment agencies**
- **Step 2 How to use your network**
- **Step 3 Unsolicited applications**
- **Step 4 The interview – how to present yourself**

Each step consists of an explanatory text that provides in-depth information and guidance on how to approach the task at hand.

Once you have studied the text, you'll be all set to carry out each task in practice.

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1 Recruitment companies

What is a recruitment company and what do they do?

A recruitment company specialises in hiring the right person for the job. They help the company to draw up a job description, receive applications, read them and select people for interview.

In other words, they manage the entire recruitment process. They also send rejections to unsuccessful applicants, invite interviewees, conduct the first round of interviews and check up on references.

Recruitment companies handle the entire process right up until they have whittled the field down to 2–3 people – only then do they introduce the applicants to the company.

Companies typically use subcontractors for recruitment when they lack the time and resources to cope with the whole process themselves. If you are not used to it, it takes time to read 100 applications and select candidates for interview.

The company may also want to be absolutely sure that they get the most suitable person for the job, so outsources the task to an expert.
Many small to medium-sized enterprises use recruitment companies because they don't have an HR department.

If you notice that a recruitment company is given as the point of contact and recipient of applications, there will, therefore, be a barrier between you and the company. You can't do much about this, but you should be aware of it.

1.1 How recruitment companies operate

Recruitment companies may be useful to you in your job search for the following reasons:

- They often specialise in a particular field or sector
- They have an established network and work closely with a number of companies based on extensive knowledge of their current staffing needs
- Many vacancies are filled primarily from their network or their database of prospective employees
- Most vacancies are also advertised on their websites.

As a jobseeker, you should therefore be aware that agencies advertise vacancies in exactly the same way as companies do.

Not all vacancies are advertised, however. In many cases, the recruitment company uses its database to find suitable people for the job. It may therefore be worth your while submitting an unsolicited application to relevant recruitment companies and asking to be added to their CV database.

In other words, recruitment agencies both advertise vacancies and accept unsolicited applications.

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1.2 Search and selection

When you start looking for recruitment companies in your field, be aware that the professional term for recruitment is "search and selection".

"Search" means headhunting, i.e. the position is never advertised, but suitable candidates are found through research. The head-hunter contacts both jobseekers and candidates not actively seeking a new job at the moment. Search is primarily used in relation to high-level posts.

"Selection" means the company typically finds suitable candidates for a position through advertising and through their database.

As a jobseeker, you should be aware that many consulting companies work with both search and selection.

1.3 Temporary employment agencies

Many recruitment companies also act as temporary employment agencies. This means that they are intermediaries for short-term contracts at companies that need somebody for a temporary position, which may be of shorter or longer duration, or for a seasonal job.

If you are between jobs, you should consider taking a temporary position if one is offered. This can be a welcome "foot in the door" of a company, and may lead to a permanent post.

The advantage of a temporary position is that the company gets to know you and see your potential in a different way than they would via the recruitment process. They learn first hand about both your personal and professional qualities, and you become a natural part of the company. So if a vacancy does crop up, you will be an obvious candidate. The company know what they will be getting, and recruiting staff this way is much easier than having to go out and search for new people. Temporary positions are therefore often a path to a permanent job.

This approach is particularly recommended for older jobseekers. It's a really good way of getting in the company's back door. The reason is simple: it's all too easy for applications to be sorted on the basis of age. But experience shows that if they already know you, the age barriers disappear.

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1.4 What to do

To find recruitment companies in your area, we recommend that you visit: www.agencycentral.co.uk. Here you will find a complete list.

You could also use the directory of links at www.gotorecruitment.co.uk.

A third option is to go to www.freeindex.co.uk and search for "recruitment agency" or "temporary employment agency", and then state your geographical area.

You can also visit www.google.co.uk and search for "recruitment agency".

Or you could have a look in your local Yellow Pages.

This is where the hard work starts –you need to look at all of the links and select recruiters who work in your industry and have one or more vacancies that match your profile.

This is a big job and can take a long time, so be prepared to devote several days to it. There are many recruitment companies, but the trick is to find those who operate in your professional and geographical area.

In many cases you'll be able to find the names and contact details of recruitment consultants who specialise in exactly the areas in which you're interested.

Once you have a list of recruitment agencies, look at which ones already have vacancies that you could apply for. You might as well start with these.

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But before you write an application, do yourself a favour and call the recruitment company to ask if the position is still vacant. It would be a shame to spend a lot of time writing an application for a position that has already been filled.

Recruitment companies are not always good at removing ads from their website once a vacancy has been filled. This is because it's not only jobseekers who read their vacancies, but companies and competitors as well. So it's not in their interest to indicate that they might not have many vacancies available at the moment.

After applying for any suitable positions, the next step is to register with the recruitment companies' databases. Many recruitment companies let you submit your personal details and CV to their database, while others invite CVs via e-mail.

However, before you start inputting or e-mailing your CV, it is again recommended that you call the recruitment consultants that are specialists in your area. Say you are between jobs and tell them about what kind of work you're looking for. They will be able to tell you whether they expect vacancies in your field in the near future – or whether they deal with that type of position at all.

It is always an advantage to make personal contact with the recruitment consultant. That way, when a vacancy comes up in your field, they will think of you as a possible candidate. If you "know" each other, you won't just end up as a random CV in a very large database, which will increase your chances of getting a job.

If a recruitment consultant expects to have a vacancy in your field in the near future, you may even be invited to an informal meeting. Once he or she has learned about you and your background, they will have you in mind when a relevant post appears. This will obviously increase your chances of being considered for the job.

You could even suggest an informal meeting to the consultant. But be prepared for a rejection if he or she hasn't suggested this. Most consultants are very busy, and their focus is on filling their current vacancies. They are therefore only interested in you as a candidate if they have or are sure they will have a vacancy for which you would be suitable.

Once you have submitted your CV and you're registered in their database, it is worth regularly (e.g. once a month) following up with the recruiting company. Call your contact and ask how things are going, and whether they have or expect to have jobs in your field.

Another advantage of entering into dialogue with recruitment consultants is that they know the job market. They have their finger on the pulse and know exactly what is going on. They'll therefore be able to give you good advice along the way. They'll also give you highly qualified feedback on your CV or an application, as they read thousands of them every year and know what works and what does not.

It can be highly beneficial to get feedback from a recruitment consultant. But you must also bear in mind that recruitment consultants work for the companies that are seeking new employees, and they are paid per recruitment. They are therefore "company men/women" and put their clients' interests first. In other words, be thankful for any advice but don't take it for granted.

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1.5 Assignment

Question1	How many recruitment companies and/or employment agencies did you find?
Question2	To how many of them have you sent your CV and an unsolicited application?
Question3	Which employment agencies or recruitment companies have you contacted either by phone or by turning up in person?
Question4	How and when do you plan to contact the others?

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2 How to use your network

2.1 "I don't have a network"

Most of us use our network quite naturally throughout our lives. We ask for and receive help and advice from people we know, in virtually every aspect of our lives – we just don't think about it. We ask for advice when we are considering buying a car, going on holiday, starting an education, finding a home or looking for a partner.

You need to be aware of how people in your close and peripheral social circle can help you find work.

Many who are unfamiliar with the concept say they don't have a network that can help them with their job search. You may be one of them. But be aware that your network may prove to be your greatest asset in your search, and could be a shortcut to a new dream job.

2.2 Your social network

We are all part of multiple networks. Family, neighbours, friends and acquaintances are all examples of networks. Collectively, they make up your social network. But this isn't something we think about on a daily basis.

As mentioned previously, many of us use our social networks unconsciously, for all sorts of different things. We typically ask for help with practical things or seek advice when we're making an important decision.

The classic example is that we often meet our life partners through our social networks.

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Another common example is when you're considering buying a new car. You're interested in a Volvo, and since you know a good friend with one, you ask if she's satisfied with it, where she bought it, etc.

Perhaps your car needs to be repaired and a good friend is a mechanic. It's natural to ask him.

Or you want to make improvements to your home, so you ask your friend who's a joiner for advice or maybe for help.

We all use our networks for things in life, big and small – but we just don't think about it too often. We just do it, and it works well. Now that you're looking for a new job, it pays to take a closer look at how to use your network.

Where to start?

An obvious place to start is, of course, your social network. Is there anyone in your family or among your friends who can help you find a job?

They know you so are able to provide tips and suggestions – e.g. companies they know or have heard about and where you might want to apply for work. Perhaps one of them works in a big company where they can give you the name of someone to whom you could submit an application.

2.3 Using social media – Facebook

Social media are here to stay and they have become a good way of keeping track of family, friends, colleagues, business partners and others in your network.

You may already have a solid network of friends and acquaintances on Facebook. Remember that everyone in your network has his or her own network, of which you are a small part. Most people have more than 100 Facebook friends. This means that you are one step removed from 10,000 potential contacts. You should make use of this fact. This can be done in several ways.

But before you start, you should look closely at your Facebook friends. For a start, avoid suspicious types. Don't display photos where you look drunk, where you're partially undressed or at some wild party or event. Be aware of what groups you join, and what they say about you. Ask yourself what impression you want to give to a potential employer, and what they'd think of you if they looked you up on Facebook.

This is also a matter of you protecting yourself and your personal life.

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Getting started

Start by making your own network aware that you are looking for a new job. All this requires is a status update in which you mention that you are looking for work and would love to e-mail your CV to anybody who is interested.

You can also set up your own page on, e.g. linkedin.com and post the link on Facebook – preferably with a message to recipients that they are more than welcome to forward the link to others in their networks. This is a quick and effective way of spreading the message.

A second, more strategic way to use Facebook is to find insiders – friends who work at the companies in which you're interested. Find contacts that work in the company or maybe know someone who does, and then take steps to contact them. Ask about the working conditions, what qualities are prized by the company, and whether s/he might be able to put in a good word for you.

2.4 Your professional network

But there is also another network, consisting of former work colleagues. This is called your professional network.

During your working life, a large number of people have been colleagues at some level or other.

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Experience shows that this particular network is very effective when it comes to finding a new job. Your professional network consists of:

- former colleagues
- former bosses
- people who you know in the sector
- suppliers
- collaborators
- customers.

People in your professional network know you both professionally and personally. This means that their recommendation has a higher degree of credibility and can open many more doors for you in terms of potential jobs and companies.

They can also give you tips and suggestions for your job search, e.g. suggestions of companies they know or have heard about where you can submit unsolicited applications. They also have their own professional and personal networks, so before you know it, you'll have expanded your network just by making your circle of friends aware that you are looking for work and would like tips on who to contact.

2.5 How to use your network – LinkedIn

LinkedIn is another virtual network for the more career-minded. Here, you can set up a profile and upload your CV. Many employers and recruitment companies use it when searching for candidates for a vacancy.

Think of it as a folder containing electronic business cards. The brilliant thing about LinkedIn is that you can keep track of your contacts. You will automatically be notified whenever one of your contacts changes job or position. LinkedIn also acts as an online CV. It is a quick way to distribute your CV and see those of others, which is useful when preparing for an interview. You can learn about the person who will be interviewing you.

You can also join trade and professional groups, a route many have used to find new contacts and job opportunities.

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Another important function is the option to recommend someone. It may be your former boss or a colleague. It always looks good in the eyes of potential employers if you have been recommended.

Headhunters and recruitment companies are also extremely active on LinkedIn.

Recommendation

Although many believe that "all's fair in war, love and job-hunting", you must remember to comply with the rules and norms. Don't claim to have titles, degrees or diplomas you don't have – and make sure the ones you do have are from recognised colleges or universities. Remember that your former colleagues and classmates are watching.

Getting started

If you are not already on www.linkedin.com click on the link and register.

If you are already signed up and have contacts, update your profile. You may want to signify that you are looking for a job, and list your expectations for a new post. This will automatically be sent to your contacts when you next update your status.

You can also send messages directly to your contacts, stating your wishes and expectations for the future.

You can also use LinkedIn as a search engine. You can search for specific companies, see who works there and compare their qualifications to your own. You can also search for new contacts. All you need is a name or e-mail address.

Join trade and professional groups or forums within your work area. Here, you will often find new contacts, and many companies post job advertisements in these forums.

The value of a network is not only a question of the number of people you know and have been in contact with. It's also about the quality of these acquaintanceships, the nature of your relationship with the people in question and, not least, the positions they occupy. In other words, whether the person will be able to open doors for you.

When you first make contact with people in your network, ask if you can pop in for a short meeting or call them on the phone.
Say you are between jobs and tell them about what kind of work you're looking for. Also, talk briefly about your background and qualifications, and give them your CV and phone number. You may even want to order some business cards online, which you can easily hand out when you meet someone who could be useful to you.

Ask them if they have any ideas for things you can do, or suggestions about who to contact with a view to submitting unsolicited applications or establishing contact with a company in some other way. Ask if they'll be willing to provide advice throughout your search for a new job

We also recommend that look at the following guide if you want more information about using LinkedIn
http://learn.linkedin.com/new-users/

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2.6 "I don't like contacting people I know"

For various reasons, many jobseekers don't like contacting someone they know and asking for help. Maybe you're one of those who think it's embarrassing or outside of your comfort zone – or maybe you just don't like to be any hassle.

But remember that most people are basically friendly and helpful, as long as you approach them in the right way. Think back to situations where someone has asked you for help and how you helped out. Weren't you pleased to help?

Nor should you forget that most of us have actually experienced losing a job, being unemployed and looking for a new job. They will understand you and your situation better than you think. They know how hard it is to be in your situation and how important it is to feel that your circle is helping and supporting you in your job search. So rest assured that they will be pleased to help you.

When you contact your network about jobs, observe the following rules:

Never ask for a job – ask for a suggestion
Never ask a favour – ask for advice

Say, for example:

- "If you hear of a job, please bear me in mind."
- "I'm looking for a new job. Can you give me some advice?"
- "I've been made redundant, so if you hear of anything that might be interesting for me, please let me know."

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Also be aware that a network is based on give and take, so you must be willing to reciprocate later.

2.7 The important follow-up

However, it is not enough that you contact those you know and tell them that you're looking for a job. This won't automatically find you a new job.

Most people lead busy lives juggling their job, family, friends and hobbies, so it's easy for them to forget that you're still on the lookout for a job. It's a matter of continually reminding them.

We recommend that you follow up the contacts on your network list approximately once a month. You've probably added some new names in the meantime too, so be sure to also get in touch with them and remind them that you are still looking for a job.

Perhaps they've remembered something that may be useful to you, but getting back to you slipped their minds due to their busy lifestyle. It's good to keep in touch and seek advice from your contacts.

You may also be lucky and time it just right – maybe someone has gone on sick leave or resigned, a large order has been won or a company is planning to hire new staff.

Insider tips like this are invaluable when you're looking for a job. But you need to be proactive and seek out the people who are likely to possess knowledge that will benefit you.

2.8 Assignment

Everybody has a much bigger network than they think. Start by drawing up a list of 40-50 people. This may sound like a lot, but your network will be much bigger than you think.

2.9 Evaluate your network

The value of a network is not only a question of the number of people you know and have been in contact with. It's also about the quality of those acquaintanceships. What kind of relationships do you have with these people? Who can advance your professional development and open doors for you?

Divide them into two groups. Group 1 consists of those who can open the door to a potential job. Group 2 you delete

2.10 Use your network

Contact the people on your list. Either pop in for a short meeting with them or get in touch by phone.

- Tell them that you are looking for a job and what kind of job you'd like.
- Give the impression that you're not just passively waiting for the right job to come up but have decided to be proactive.
- Briefly tell them about your background and your qualifications and give them your CV and phone number

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- Also tell them about the jobs you've already applied for.
- Ask for ideas and suggestions for people and companies to contact
- Ask if you can use them as sparring partners.
- Stick to the business at hand – don't complain about your situation or moan about being made redundant
- Request permission to use them as references.

Family and social circles
Former colleagues
Old classmates
Suppliers or Customers
People you know from clubs, societies, etc.

2.11 Template: Networking activity

Contact person	Phone/e-mail	Application sent (date)	Results (contacts, appointments, etc.)	Follow-up (date)

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3 Unsolicited applications

3.1 What does it take to succeed?

Let's start by discussing what it takes to get a job by submitting unsolicited applications. First of all, finding companies that need your particular skill set will require a lot of legwork. But it also requires that you are well prepared, that you send a lot of unsolicited applications, and that you are willing to follow them up.

Always remember the golden rule:

"You need to send min. 40 unsolicited applications, and then follow them up at the end of the month. Sooner or later, it will pay off."

3.2 How do you find the companies?

Finding interesting companies is the biggest challenge when it comes to unsolicited applications – this alone takes a certain degree of effort.

3.3 Companies you know

A good and simple way to start is by making a list of companies you already know, especially those that you know need staff with your specific qualifications.

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They may be companies that you know from the sector where you worked, or companies that you've heard about. This will give you a few interesting names to start with.

3.4 Talk to people you know

A good way to make progress is to talk to people in your network. Ask if they have any suggestions for companies that accept unsolicited applications.

They'll often be able to give you some insight into the recruitment process at the company they work for. Most will know companies in your sector that are located in your area.

They will definitely come up with several good suggestions for companies to try.

3.5 Companies in your area

Now consider the geographical area for your job search. Most major cities have one or more industrial areas in which companies are grouped together. Take a trip out to the area and see what companies are located there. At first, just write down their names. Not all companies are located in industrial areas, so it's also worth having a look at the local Yellow Pages, where many local companies will have ads that say a little about what they do. You'll find some interesting ones here. Add them to your list.

When looking for companies, also try to find some smaller ones.

Jobseekers tend to look at the big, well-known companies, which therefore receive huge amounts of applications.

This tends not to be the case with smaller companies. And if you do manage to land a job with a small company through an unsolicited application, you'll usually be in a better position to influence your job, enjoy greater responsibility and challenges, and make your mark on the company.

We also recommend that you start reading local newspapers, which often publish articles about companies in the area. You'll then be able to keep up to date with developments in the different companies and get ideas for new prospects. For example, if you read that a company in the area has won a large order, it might be a good idea to contact them and show that you are interested.

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3.6 Search for companies on the Net

You can also try searching for companies on the Net.

Go to www.yell.com, and use the search boxes at the top. In "I'm looking for": Write different industries or types of company. In "in": Enter a town or postcode in your geographic area.

3.7 Job portals

There are also other ways of looking for businesses on the Net. At www. freeindex.co.uk, you'll find an index divided by sector. Click the various sub-menus and get links to businesses in your sector.

Once you've clicked on the appropriate menu for your industry, the trick is to find companies in your geographical area. It may take a while to go through all of them. But if you find a single company worth sending an unsolicited application to, then it's worth it.

3.8 Company websites

You now have a list of companies to apply to. The next step is to find information about each company.

Start by visiting the company's website. Virtually all businesses have a website – often the company's name followed by ".com" or ".co.uk". Alternatively, look them up on Google.

Go through your list and find the various companies' websites. If you can't find a company's web address right away, try Yell.com. Look up the company by name and location, and the search results will include a link to their website.

In the first instance, write a list of names of companies and their websites. Once you have a complete list, it's time to find out more about the various companies.

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In addition, many companies only advertise vacancies on their own website – under "Vacancies", "Work for us", "Opportunities", etc. This can be another source of interesting jobs.

Under this heading, most companies also state that you can send them an unsolicited application if there are no current vacancies that match your profile. They usually also stipulate the format in which they prefer to receive applications. Unsolicited applications may be sent via e-mail, or they may ask you to fill in an online form.

3.9 Company databases

A lot of big companies have a database of prospective employees, and will ask you to enter your personal data and submit a CV and application.

When they have a vacancy to fill, this is their first port of call. It's faster and cheaper for them.

Be aware that it can be a lot of work and take time to input all of the information required. It's therefore a good idea to have your application and CV to hand before you begin.

If you don't feel entirely comfortable about entering your data, get someone you know to help you.

Your list will almost certainly include a lot of companies that have CV databases, so you might as well start by entering your data in them. This gets it out the way.

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3.10 Submitting unsolicited applications

You now have a number of companies on your list. Before sending your application, it's important that you find out exactly who to send it to. In other words, find out who is empowered to make a decision on whether your application is interesting to the company in question – i.e. someone who not only knows whether new employees are needed, but who is also authorised to make decisions about whether you meet the requirements.

In smaller companies, this is often the owner or director. In medium-sized companies it is often the head of department/manager, while big companies usually have an HR department.

In many cases, you will find contact names on the company website. But you can also call the company and ask them who to send your application to.

Before submitting the application, ask yourself whether anyone you know works at the company. They will be able to tell you who to send it to.
This person may also be able to put in a good word for you.

Before you send an unsolicited application, we recommend that you call the company

3.11 The unsolicited application

You now have contact names for the companies to which you want to send unsolicited applications. Now you just have to write one. But how do you write an application when there is no ad describing the job or qualifications?

In principle, unsolicited applications work in the same way as applying for an advertised post.

You can therefore use the same approach/method and the same template as the targeted application.

3.12 How to write an unsolicited application

The main challenge is that there is no vacancy on which to base the application. Instead, you have to focus on explaining how your personal and professional qualifications fit the company's work and needs.

Use the company's needs as your starting point – explain what you can bring to the table, and exactly why they need you and your skills.

Once you have submitted the unsolicited application, we recommend that you regularly follow it up by calling the person to whom you sent the application. Call at the end of each month and ask your contact how things are going.

3.13 Assignment

Remember that three out of four jobs – or 75% of all vacancies – are filled without being advertised. It's time to try and land one of these jobs by submitting unsolicited applications.

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Remember that telephone follow-up is far more effective than sending an e-mail. (Placing the calls may take you out of your comfort zone but it will pay off in the long run).

Question1	What companies have you identified that you think might have jobs that match your profile?
Question2	What ones have databases on their website where you've entered your personal data?
Question3	Plan when and how you'll contact these companies.
Question4	Make a plan for contacting the others.
Question5	To which companies have you already submitted unsolicited applications?
Question6	Plan when and how you'll follow up on your applications.

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Example – unsolicited Application

TT Accounting Ltd
117 River Road,
London SL682 4PT

Attn. Hiring Manager Thomas Hanson

James Smith
451 London Road
London SL82 4RT
0792 221 221
js1990@gmail.com

London, 25 May 2011

Your new associate accountant

Having researched your company's values and services, I believe TT Accounting would be the ideal place in which to begin my career.

I will shortly finish my honours degree in accounting at the University of Manchester, and expect a final grade of 2:1.

I have already had the opportunity to apply in practice some of the theory acquired at University. I have spent the last two summers working as an accounting intern, which has given me a solid understanding of the tasks and responsibilities that the job entails. My duties included:

- accompanying accountants on company audits
- helping to prepare accounts for small-business owners
- producing audit reports for small-business owners
- preparing accounts using SAGE and Microsoft Money
- understanding customers' needs.

My focus is on delivering great results as part of a dynamic team, in an environment that fosters professional development.

I look forward to hearing from you. I hope that you will consider me for an interview so that I can introduce myself in person and learn more about the job opportunities by TT Accounting Ltd.

Kind regards,

James Smith
Appendix: CV

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4 Interviews – how to make the best-possible impression

Worth knowing

It may sound obvious, but the purpose of an interview is to find out if you are the right person for the job. If you've been invited to the first interview, it means that the company believes that your profile/CV lives up to what they envisaged when they advertised the job. So the interview is very much about whether you will fit into the company/team, and whether you can see yourself in the job/workplace.

It's therefore important that you spend time expanding on your professional and personal qualifications for the job. This applies both when you are asked to talk about yourself and during the rest of the interview.

Concentrate on highlighting your personal and professional qualifications for the job.

This will increase your chances of success.

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Example:

If you are going to an interview for a job as a receptionist, focus on talking about your skills and experience in this area. If the interview is for a secretarial post, concentrate on your experience and greatest strengths as a secretary. If it's for a job as a salesperson, talk about your skills in sales and marketing and show that you know what the job entails.

Talk about your work experience and go into detail about what you've done that's relevant to the job for which you're being interviewed.

If you have had jobs in other areas, don't spend unnecessary time on them. Focus on qualifications that are relevant to the job in question. You won't have a lot of time, so it's important to get everything across in the 30, 45 or 60 minutes available.

It can be hard to remember everything at an interview, especially when you're feeling nervous. So make sure you're well prepared beforehand. Practise presenting yourself and have some questions ready that you would like to ask. And remember not to talk too much or too little – keep things relevant.

As an example, here's the story of Annette, who had worked hard to land an interview as a receptionist for a physiotherapist. Her CV showed that she had the right profile, and she had written a good application, so she was called to an interview. She had previously worked at a beauty clinic, and her application emphasised that she knew what it was like to work with patient bookings and be the face that the company presents to the world.

The physiotherapist was keen to meet her not only because she had the right profile, but because she had called after she had sent her application, which made her seem eager and interested. There was little doubt about her qualifications – the physiotherapist mainly wanted to check whether her personality would suit the clinic.

It's summer, and since the clinic is not very big, the waiting rooms soon get warm. The first thing Annette does is loudly remark that it's incredibly warm in the reception area. There is no doubt that it is, but this is an extremely inappropriate remark to make to a person who is proud of her very modern and inviting clinic and is considering hiring Annette.

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When the interview starts, the physiotherapist begins to explain a little about the clinic. The current receptionist, who is also present at the interview, explains how a day in the reception usually pans out, and what the job entails in more detail. The physiotherapist then asks Annette about her previous job.

At this point, it all goes horribly wrong. She starts talking about how her former employer had been very fond of her but that she had been fired due to cutbacks. The physiotherapist had not indicated that it was a problem that she was between jobs, or in any other way asked about her current status. She only really wanted to hear reasons why she should choose Annette over one of the other three interviewees, but Annette went on to "defend" her redundancy by listing her professional skills.

The physiotherapist then asks if she has plans for a summer holiday in the near future. Instead of answering where and when she plans to be unavailable for work, she starts talking about her three-week holiday in detail – where she's going, what she and her family will do there, and why they always goes to the same place every year.

The physiotherapist has now lost patience, and Annette has no chance of being offered the job. She could have remedied things had she made a serious attempt to turn the interview around and talk about why she wanted the job and what experience she could contribute. But instead she launches into the minutiae of family circumstances that are utterly irrelevant to the job.

The interview was scheduled for 30 minutes and the physiotherapist repeatedly tries to round it off after the half-hour mark. However, Annette is oblivious to this, so they run over by 15 minutes. When she finally leaves, followed by the physiotherapist and receptionist, the next candidate is already in the waiting room.

Annette has obviously still not understood the situation and concludes by once again commenting on the temperature in the waiting room. On her way out, she says: "It's almost impossible to bear."

It's obvious to anyone why Annette did not get the job. The most annoying thing is that she got so close but was unable to "read" the situation and talk about what was relevant and could have landed her the job. That's why she was rejected.

Had she instead drawn on her experience, entered into a dialogue with the physiotherapist and her prospective colleague about what makes a good receptionist and emphasised her strengths in this role, the job would perhaps have been hers.

In other words, you have a great deal of the power at an interview – it's about saying enough, saying the right things and avoiding irrelevant chit chat. The following pages deal with how to act at an interview.

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4.1 The appointment process

Before the interview – remember

Arrive on time, or preferably 5–10 minutes before the interview starts. This makes a good impression. First impressions are important.

The clothes you choose for the interview should ideally reflect who you are. However, you are welcome to adapt them to the job and the company.

Don't go out and buy a new wardrobe. Nobody expects you to wear the latest fashion to an interview. It's more important that you feel comfortable and relaxed. Obviously, it's important that your clothes are clean and ironed and your shoes are polished. All of this makes a good impression when you enter the room.

Women should think about the cut of their blouse and length of their skirt. You don't want to give the wrong impression.

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Personal grooming is a natural part of the preparations before an interview.

For example, look out for the following:

- Smells (food, e.g. garlic, sweat, alcohol, tobacco)
- Unkempt/greasy hair
- Dirty hands/nails
- Stubble.

Of course, you don't want to smell like a perfume shop either – just use your common sense.

4.2 The appointment process

We have previously touched on the fact that there can easily be 100 applicants for a job. Some are rejected straight away, some are put in a "maybe" pile, and a few are chosen for a first interview. Out of the 100, typically 5–8 will get an interview.

From that group, the two or three most suitable interviewees will be invited to the second round, and one will ultimately be offered the job.

In small and medium-sized enterprises, the head of the department concerned conducts the interviews. However, in larger companies somebody from the HR department may sit in on the first round.

An interview usually starts with you being welcomed and offered a cup of tea or coffee. There may be some small talk, e.g. about the weather. The interviewer will then usually briefly talk about the company and the job.

After that, you'll almost certainly be asked the classic question: "Could you tell us about yourself, please?"

Once you've done that, the interviewer will usually begin to question you. Finally, you'll be given the opportunity to ask some questions. Over the next few pages we will look at how to approach the different stages of the interview:

4.3 "Tell us about yourself"

No matter what kind of job you're after, you will be asked to talk about yourself in the interview. This allows the company to evaluate whether your professional and personal qualifications are suited to the job.

This is your opportunity to make a positive impression. It's important that you spend the time talking about your qualifications and present yourself in a positive light.

This should only take a few minutes, so you must be prepared to talk about yourself and your background without trying to say too much. It's a very good idea to write down a few keywords and follow the points you've thought about in advance. This will help you to avoid repetition and include all of the important details.

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Always remember to practise what you want to say. You may want to ask someone you know – your spouse, partner or a friend – if they'll listen to what you intend saying. This will let you practise your presentation and assess how it sounds. When you hear yourself speak, you may decide that you should say something in a different way, or perhaps you'll think of something else that you should include.

If you have not prepared in advance, the chances are that, after the interview, you will be left thinking, e.g. "I didn't get to mention my strengths."

Use the template below for your preparations

A little bit about your personal life:

- Age, marital status, where you live

Work experience

- Your education and training
- Which companies have you worked for?

Your qualifications for this job

- Professional qualifications for the job
- Personal qualities in relation to job

When you talk about yourself and your background, talk about the positives in terms of work experience, professional skills and human qualities.

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Leave out stories about your former boss treating you badly, etc. Or that because of the heavy workload and poor working environment you were off sick for a prolonged period.

All of this may well be true and be a part of your background, but keep your eyes on the goal. Talk about your qualifications for this job. You don't want your prospective future boss to sit there thinking, "I don't want him/her talking like that about me some day!"

After your presentation, the company will usually ask you some questions.

If you are only being interviewed by a department head, the questions will largely be work-related (e.g. "How many years' experience do you have in a particular area?", "How long did your previous job last?") and about whether you have experience with particular types of work.

Questions to expect from a head of department:

- What do you know about our company?
- Why do you want to work for us?
- What can you bring to the table that others can't?
- What do you think is the most attractive aspect of the job?

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And the least attractive?

- Why should we take you on?
- What aspects of a job are most important to you?
- What do you think the job will consist of?
- How long do you expect to be employed by us?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What are your pay expectations?
- How flexible are you?

If an HR officer is present, be prepared for some "softer" and broader questions as they judge whether you're the right person in relation to the job, the staff and the company.

Questions to expect from an HR officer:

- Who are you?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- Would you mind taking a test?
- Were you sacked from your last job?
- Why were you sacked?
- What do you understand by a good working relationship?
- How many children do you have? How are they doing in terms of development and health?
- What does your spouse/partner do?
- What do you think of your current boss?
- What would your former boss say about you?
- What would your former colleagues say about you?
- How is your financial situation?
- How many sick days have you had in the last year?
- How flexible are you?
- Are you willing to take further training?
- What do you do in your spare time?

We recommend that you prepare your answers to these questions in advance. If you are asked an uncomfortable question, it's best to avoid having to think of an answer during the actual interview. You risk being unable to explain yourself properly. You don't want to walk away thinking that you didn't make the right impression.

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Your questions

In much the same way as the company has questions for you, you should also have prepared some questions for the company. For example, you can ask about the actual job content, the department, your potential colleagues, the company, if there are any future plans for the department, etc.

Make a list of questions and take it with you. In the end, you may not need it, but you will show the company that you have thought in advance about the job and company. This makes a positive impression. It shows that you are interested and committed.

We also recommend that you do some research on the company. For a start, you can Google it and see what comes up.

You can also visit www.guardian.co.uk and www.ft.com, etc. and in the search field, type the company name and see what articles have been published about the company. This will provide useful background and help you pose more informed questions.

4.4 Tips for job interviews:

- Always be honest and be yourself as far as possible
- Always express yourself in a positive manner
- Talk about your good qualities
- Talk about your qualifications – NOT what you CAN'T do
- Prepare a short presentation of yourself and your work experience
- Give an impression of who you are, both as an employee and as a person
- Prepare answers to the sort of questions you can expect.

4.5 The pay question

At the first interview, the company will usually sound you out about what kind of pay you expect. You must NOT start to negotiate pay at a first interview. You could say how much you were paid in your previous job, or whatever wage the statistics suggest is appropriate. If you're a member, it's worth discussing this with your union before the first interview.

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REMEMBER – even if the wage is negotiable, actual negotiations won't begin until you are offered the job.

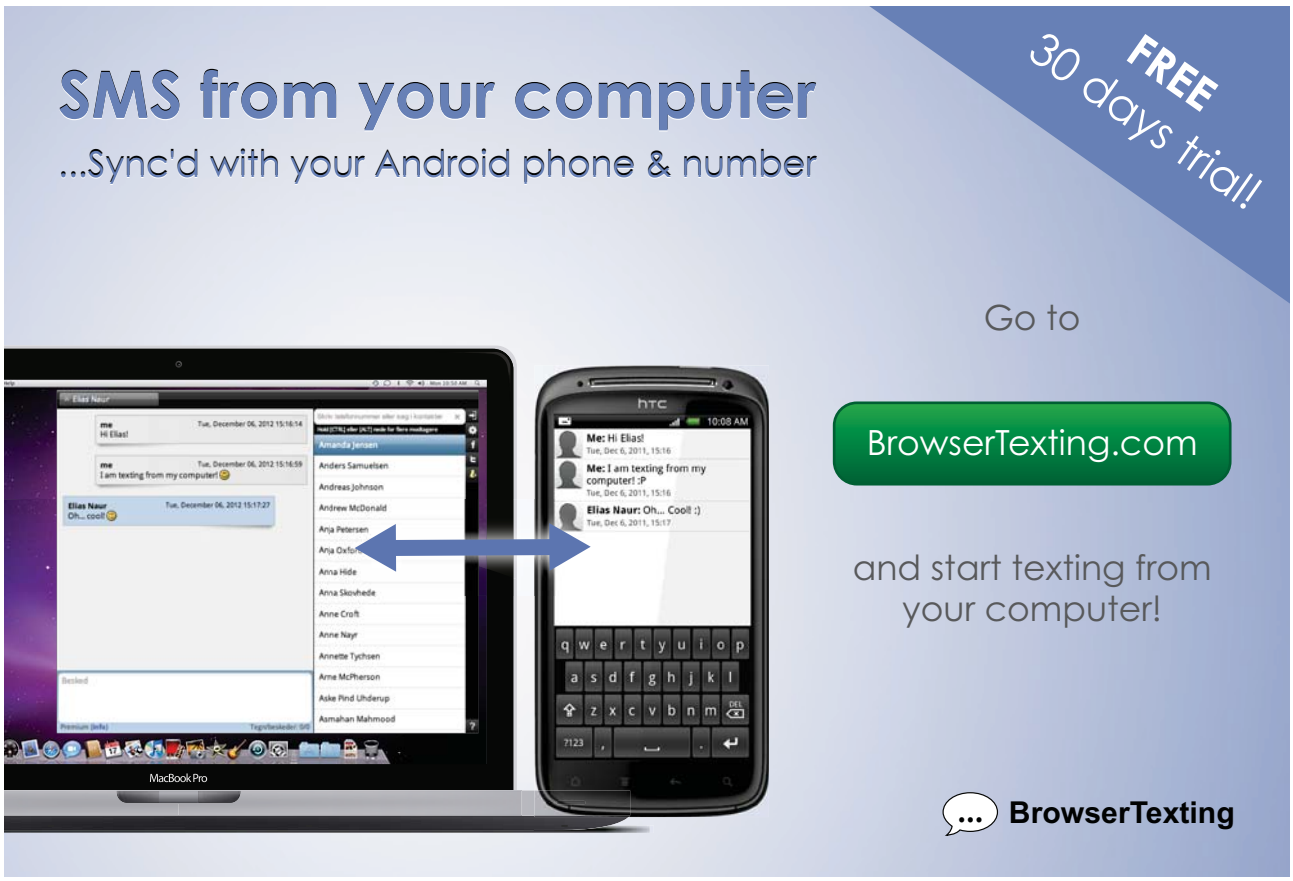
If you have been served notice of redundancy from your current job:

- account for what happened – but don't spend unnecessary time on it.
- explain, for example, that it was part of a larger round of redundancies, or that your position was abolished. These are neutral reasons, nothing to do with your professional or personal qualities.
- indicate that you are fine with the situation (don't let any bitterness or anger shine through)
- keep your feelings about your redundancy and your former employer out of the interview
- reply briefly, precisely and carefully to avoid the need for supplementary questions
- avoid using the word "fired" – instead, use e.g. "notice" or "redundancies".
- Be courteous and tactful, create a positive atmosphere
- Show that you are well prepared for the interview – it reflects well on you and your commitment
- Ask about the rest of the appointment process.

Your body language

A **job interview** is about people meeting in person and getting an impression of each other. It is therefore not enough just to be mentally prepared. You also need to be aware of **your body language**, as it may undermine what your mouth is saying.

Remember that you are being assessed from the moment you enter the room:



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the way you knock on the door, how you open it, how loud you speak, whether you look the interviewer straight in the eye or look down at the floor, your smile and your handshake.

Be especially careful about how you shake hands. A weak handshake may be taken as a sign of a weak character!

4.6 The body talks

It's easy to test whether what you want to say is sensible and coherent. But what you actually say is only a very small percentage of the amount of information you impart. The rest consists of body language, in the form of tone of voice, eye contact, posture, clothing, etc. If these signals do not match the words coming out of your mouth, you will lack credibility.

Be aware of your body. Think about how often you have been annoyed by somebody playing with a pen, drumming their fingers or swivelling on their seat without thinking about it. Be mindful of your arms and legs – make sure you look people in the eye rather than let your gaze wander around the room.

Focus in particular on these aspects of your body language:

- As mentioned, your handshake is the first physical impression that the interviewer gets of you. After that, it's important to look at the person you're addressing. If you look away all the time, it will seem as if you're trying to cover up something.
- The famous comedian Victor Borge once said "A smile is the shortest distance between two people." So remember to smile! Who wants to work with someone with a permanent scowl?
- You will, of course, be asked to sit down, but the way you do it is important. Sit up in your chair, don't hang over the armrests.
- Lean slightly forward and you'll look active and interested. Try to be as relaxed as possible, but not so much that you slouch in the chair.
- Maintain eye contact with everyone around the table. It's not uncommon for you to be interviewed by more than one person, so remember to look at all of them in turn.
- You may, for good reason, not know which of the interviewers is the most important – so make sure that no one feels neglected and is left with a negative impression of you.

4.7 The interviewers' body language

Have your prepared questions to hand in a notepad – and bring a pen too. Nobody remembers every piece of information they are given, so if you take a few notes you'll seem positive and interested.

Concentrate and listen – don't fall into the most common trap of asking something you've already been told about.

Tick off your questions as they're answered. It's guaranteed that the person who has spent 15 minutes telling you all about the company will be really annoyed if you let slip that you weren't listening.

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A good tip is to keep an eye on the interviewers' body language. This is the easiest way of finding out if what you say is interesting to them, whether it's time to change track if you're not getting a favourable reaction, etc.

It also helps you relax if you concentrate on something other than yourself – you can actually learn to decipher quite a few signals that way.

In the example of Annette given earlier, it's clear that she just didn't pick up on subtle signals, so remember to look out for signs that the interview is over.

Stand up straight away – don't try to give one last good impression. This can be very annoying and ruin an otherwise positive interview. Finish with a smile, a firm handshake and "Thank you for the interview".

4.8 After the first interview

After each interview, whether you get the job or not, it's important to spend time thinking about how it went. What went well? What can you do better next time?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What went well?
- Why?
- What went less well?
- Why?
- What did you think of the person you were talking to?
- How do you think you came across in the interview?
- How was the chemistry between you?
- What did you learn from the interview?

4.9 Learn from your experiences

We particularly recommend that you spend a little extra time reflecting on what didn't go so well. Replay the situation in your mind and consider what you should have said instead. There is a high probability that you will encounter the same problem again, so you might as well take the bull by the horns and figure out what to say next time.

For example, if you didn't present yourself well enough, keep working on it – get it right by simply practising and practising. You might want to do a role-play, in which you ask a friend to play the part of the interviewer.

This will help you practise in a highly realistic way, and you may also get feedback from the person you role-play with.

Perhaps you feel that you didn't answer particular questions well enough. Practise answering them better, so you will be prepared the next time.

Try to see interviews as a learning process. The trick is to continually correct what isn't working as well as it could. Nobody is born a world champion – practice makes perfect. So don't get down, get practising – and you'll do better next time.

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4.10 Assignment

Typical questions posed by an HR officer. Try to answer them

Question1	Who are you?
Question2	What do you see as your strengths?
Question3	What do you see as your weaknesses?
Question4	Would you mind taking a test?
Questin5	Why did you apply for this job?
Question6	What can you contribute with in this job?
Question7	What can you learn in this job?
Question8	What do you understand by a good working relationship?
Question9	How are they doing in terms of development and health?
Question10	What did you think of your last boss?
Question11	What is your financial situation like?
Question12	How flexible are you?
Question13	Are you willing to take further training?
Question14	What do you do in your spare time?

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4.11 Template: Job Interview

Position	Contact person	Time and place

Facts about the company

(turnover, number of employees, business areas, etc.)

Reasons for application

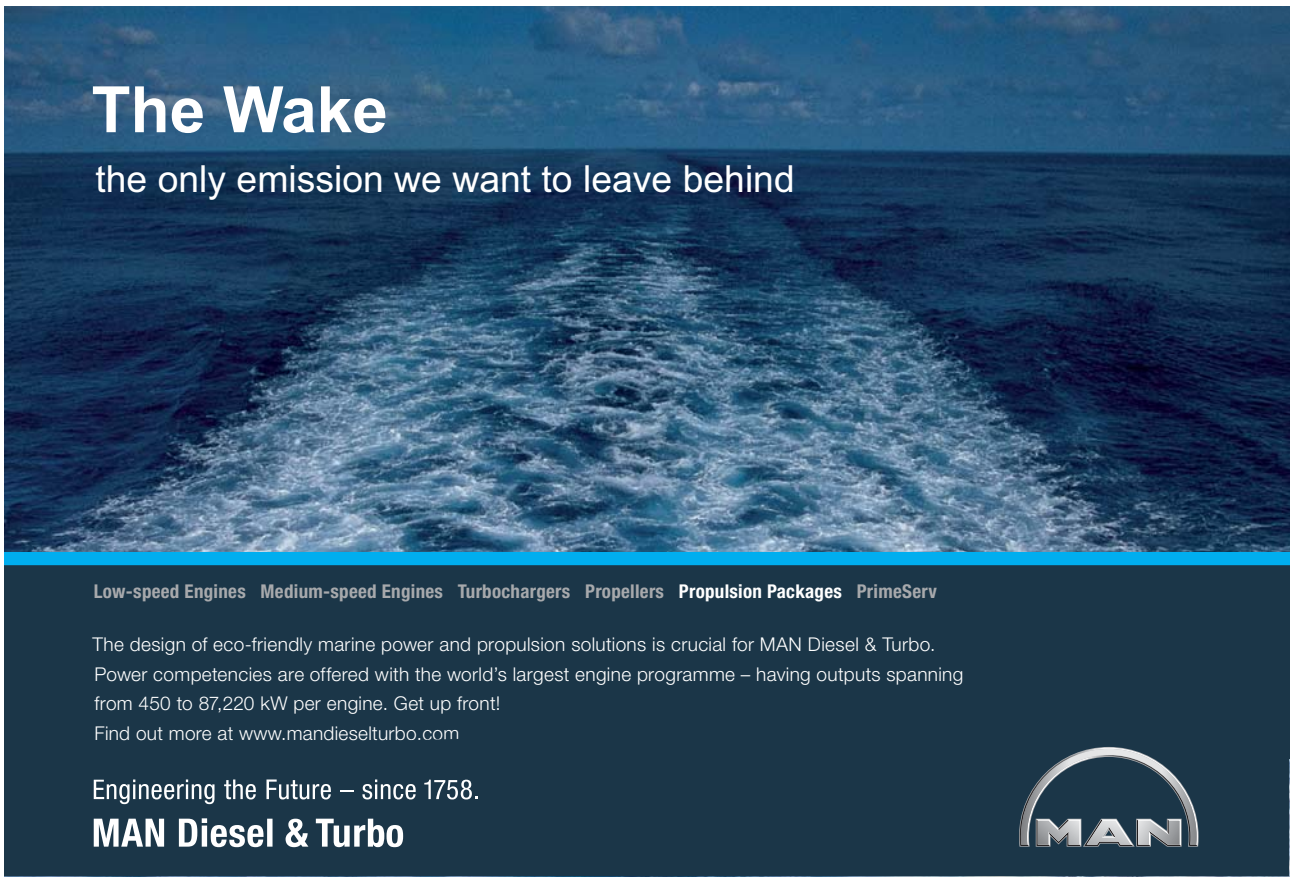
Your personal presentation

-
-
-

What do I have to offer? *(Qualifications, personality)*	What can I learn? *(Why does the job sound interesting?)*
•	•
•	•
•	•

Questions for the company
(about the job, about the company)

-
-
-



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