

## **Graduate to a Great Career Discussion Guide**

### **Chapter 1 Discussion**

1. What is the job market like in your industry, specialty, and geographic location? Write down whatever is on your mind. Discuss with group.
2. What actions have you taken so far to find a job? What else are you planning to do?
3. What informational interviews can you set up? See if other members of the group have suggestions.
4. What internships can you set up to check out different career options?
5. How can you improve your skill set to become more marketable? Do you have both math and social skills? How can you beef them up?
6. Three years from now, imagine that you are in the perfect job. If you could live your dream, what are you doing? Describe it in detail.
7. Are you career-ready? Rate yourself on having the right mix of hard power skills through internships, relevant job experience and coursework, and having strong soft power abilities such as communication, networking and relationship skills. What can you do to improve your strengths in each category?

### **Chapter 2 Discussion**

1. Do this self-evaluation by writing down whatever first comes to mind:
  - What is unusual or special about me?
  - What specific qualities or abilities make me different from or even better than others?
  - What words or phrases do I want people to associate with me?
  - What skill set, ability, or professional strength should I develop more?

Ask your discussion group for feedback.

2. **Prework:** Do one-to-one “market research” with friends and professional colleagues. Tell them you are working on a personal branding project and wanted them to provide input. Tell them to say whatever first comes to mind:

- I am trying to differentiate my brand. If I were to ask you, “What is unusual or special about me?” what comes to mind?
- What specific qualities or abilities are different from or even better than others?
- When you think of me, what words or phrases come to mind?
- If you imagine a career or job I’d be really good at, what comes to mind?
- If you visualize me at the peak of my career success, what would I be doing?
- If you were to think of a job that would not suit me and I should avoid, what comes to mind?

- If I were a character on TV or in the movies, who would it be? Why do you say that?
  - What skill sets, abilities, or professional strengths should I develop more?
3. Based on your own analysis and market research you've done with friends and colleagues, fill in the matrix in the SWOT analysis of your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the marketplace.
  4. **Prework:** Explore one of the popular career assessment tests like Myers-Briggs or StrengthsFinder available online. What did you learn about your strengths and preferences?
  5. Are there specific certifications and competencies that can improve your marketability in your chosen career? How can you acquire them?
  6. Who are the supportive people in your life giving you positive messages about job hunting? How can you increase their influence?
  7. Is anyone giving you negative messages about the job market? How can you decrease their influence?

### Chapter 3 Discussion

1. Who are you? What are the core principles you stand for? What's different about your career identity?
2. What's your unique selling proposition (USP) in a sentence? What core idea do you want people to remember about you? Is there a catchier way to phrase your brand sentence? Get feedback from the group.
3. Put different ideas together to express your brand:
  - I'm a cross between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
  - I'm like \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Explore some of the brand positioning strategies mentioned in this chapter. How can you use them to make your brand distinct?
  - **Leadership positioning:** What roles and activities have you been involved with that demonstrate leadership?
  - **Maverick or opposite positioning:** How are you different from the pack?
  - **Attribute positioning:** What is the one word or phrase that you want people to remember about you?
  - **Expert positioning:** In what subject are you particularly knowledgeable?
  - **Heritage positioning:** You have special credentials because of your background or training in \_\_\_\_\_.
  - **Cause positioning:** Is there a cause or issue that you are passionate about and want to dedicate your career to?
  - **Innovator positioning:** Do you have a special sauce that makes you come up with new ideas and solutions?
5. You have a job interview at one of your dream companies. The hiring

manager walks in and asks, “Why should we hire you?” What’s your elevator pitch?

6. **Prework:** Videotape yourself giving your elevator speech. How could it be made stronger? How can you create a stronger USP and career story?

7. Have the group watch the video and listen to their comments. If you agree, incorporate them into your pitch.

#### **Chapter 4 Discussion**

1. Write down your initial target list of ten to twenty companies and set up a Google Alert for each one. Research the names of potential hiring managers and HR professionals at each company and set up Google Alerts for them as well.

2. Expand the list to include those companies’ competitors and vendors and smaller companies. Set up Google Alerts for each one and for special people working there.

3. Set up Google Alerts for the broad industries you are interested in and stay up-to-date.

4. List the companies you have an “in” at to set up an informational interview. How can you network to build connections at your other dream companies?

5. Develop a big list of family, friends, former coworkers, bosses, coaches, and the like for your mass launch email announcing what career path you are exploring.

6. Set up a meeting with your Career Services Office to get help in your job search. Have them critique your resume, suggest alumni you should contact, and make introductions to companies.

7. Look at the alumni database at your university for people who work in your target companies and in similar roles. Reach out to them for advice and informational interviews.

8. Ask the group, “What is your best job search tip?” Write down the best tips in your notebook and how you plan to implement them.

9. See if you can get a family friend or acquaintance who is a professional recruiter to take you under her wing to help you in job hunting. Recruiters don’t handle first-time job seekers, but they can be invaluable as mentors in your job search. Share what you learned.

#### **Chapter 5 Discussion**

1. **Pre-work:** Give your resume an editorial pass, then ask members of your group to double-check it for typos. Then ask for a formal critique.

2. **Market research:** Give each member of the group your resume to read for ten seconds. Then ask:

- What was the overall message?
- What specific points do you remember?
- What words or phrases come to mind?
- How could the layout be improved?
- What about me is missing?

Repeat the exercise, this time showing them your resume for thirty seconds.

3. **Actions:** Based on the feedback you received, how will you tweak your resume?

- What keywords do you want to emphasize?
- How can you strengthen the “above the fold” portion of your resume: the headline, profile statement, and support points?

4. Draft your pitch email letter and ask the group to give you feedback on how to improve it.

5. What other marketing materials do you plan to develop?

- Business card
- Signature line for emails
- Slide presentation pitch
- Infographic resume
- Achievements one-pager
- References one-pager
- Narrative bio

### **Chapter 6 Discussion**

1. Set a timer for sixty seconds. Practice your elevator speech for a specific job you’re interested in.

- What’s your brand sentence that positions you for the job in a memorable way?
- What specific stories and examples can you bring to life?

2. Ask a friend or professional in your university’s CSO to do a mock interview with you. Videotape the whole session, beginning with how you enter the room and greet the interviewer. Show to the group for feedback:

- How good are your answers to interview questions? What stories do you share that demonstrate your abilities?
- What is your body language? Are you doing high or low power positions?
- Watch your video again, stopping it after the first ten seconds. How would you rate your first impression?

3. Do a mock Skype interview and share with the group. How can you improve the lighting, room setup, or your appearance? How can you improve your performance?

4. Now do a mock telephone interview. How can you improve your voice quality and your answers?

## Chapter 7 Discussion

1. What are the main touchpoints or contact points where people can access your brand? Are they all consistent?
2. Videotape yourself giving a mock interview and ask the group to critique it. Then play it again for them with the sound off. How can you improve the image you project?
3. Before your next interview, do one or two power poses for two minutes by yourself. Consciously try to adopt some power poses in the meeting such as leaning in toward the interviewer.
4. How can you project a stronger image that's right for the job area you are exploring? Do you need to change up your clothes or hairstyle?

## Chapter 8 Discussion

1. Spend time crafting a complete LinkedIn profile with all sections filled out. Here is your checklist:
  - **Headline:** Write down your LinkedIn headline. How can you make your headline more compelling?
  - **Picture:** Is it appropriate and flattering?
  - **Summary:** Try to use the complete word count so that you have a powerful career identity and room for relevant keywords. Do you have any rich media you want to attach to your Summary, such as a short slide presentation?
  - **Experience:** Include your internships and summer and part-time jobs.
  - **Honors and Awards:** Do you have any awards or recognition you can cite?
  - **Publications:** Do you have any articles or blog posts published online?
  - **Education:** Include university and summer courses
  - **Interests:** Give companies a snapshot of who you areAsk the group for suggestions on how to improve.

2. Ask three people to write you a professional recommendation on LinkedIn.
3. Write professional recommendations for three former coworkers.
4. What keywords do you want to be known for? What keywords are recruiters likely to use in finding someone in the field you are targeting? Make sure your LinkedIn profile includes these keywords. What suggestions does your group have?
5. Google to find out the keywords or buzzwords in your profession. For example, search for "marketing keywords or buzzwords." Write them down. Which should you incorporate into your LinkedIn profile?

## Chapter 9 Discussion

1. What specific things can you do in the next three months to make more

professional contacts? Brainstorm with the group.

2. What can you do to make more contacts in the specific field you are targeting?
3. Close Confidants network: Who are the people you can really count on? Do you need to add someone new to the mix?
4. Career Champions network: Who are your recommenders, mentors, sponsors, allies, and connectors? Which group needs to be expanded, and how can you attract new people?
5. Career Contacts network: Which organizations and events can you get involved with to increase your professional contacts?
6. List three to five LinkedIn groups that you plan to join and be an active member of. What groups or online sites do members of your group recommend?
7. Look at your target list of companies or organizations. Do a LinkedIn search to find people key people in each and reach out for advice or an informational interview.
8. Look at your first-degree contacts on LinkedIn (the people you have imported from your address book). Who do they know that you want to know? How can you approach your first-degree contacts for an introduction?
9. Look at the industry conferences in your field. Which conference do you plan to attend this year to expand your professional network? Which conferences does your group recommend?

### **Chapter 10 Discussion**

1. For your next interview, plan what you will say to close the sale and ask for the job. Write down your ideas. Ask the group for feedback.
2. Think of the jobs you are seeking. What is the going rate of pay based on your research? What is the salary range? Why might you deserve pay on the higher end of the salary range?
3. Set up an account on Klout or other social media that helps you track your brand strength and monitor it every few months. What specific things can you do to increase your brand strength, such as posting content online?
4. Set up a plan to measure and track your personal branding progress with Google Alerts and LinkedIn profile views. If you have a website, set up Google Analytics to measure site visitors. Set up bit.ly links to see who is clicking on your links and which messages are getting the most traction.