

HOW TO GET “EXPERIENCE”

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IT’S A FRUSTRATING CYCLE

If you’ve ever looked for a job, you’ve heard it all before. Experience required. Even when applying for so-called “entry-level” positions, experience is often a must. Here’s why it’s frustrating: you need a job to acquire experience, but you need experience in order to get a job! It seems like a never-ending cycle – and one that is particularly difficult to break.

So how do you go about getting experience, in an everyone-wants-experience world?

1. Start Early

The best time to get experience is before you need it, so start early. High school and post-secondary education offer great opportunities to build your skill set, especially through the many extra-curricular activities you can get involved in. But if you’re beyond high school and university, it isn’t too late. Start building a portfolio of experiences – though part-time jobs or contract work or as a temporary employee. Each of these types of jobs has something to offer, especially if you are willing to go above and beyond! Offer to take on extra tasks and make it clear to everyone that you are eager to learn. You’ll be surprised by the experience you can gather this way! All of this work experience will add to your skill set, making you more desirable to a future employer. If you find that the experience you’ve accumulated this way still isn’t enough, volunteer your skills to show potential employers exactly what you are capable of.

2. Do What You Love – For the Community

There is no better way to get experience doing what you want to do than by doing it! Just because you need experience to land a paying gig doesn’t mean that a charity or non-profit group wouldn’t love to have you and your skills as part of their team on a volunteer basis. If you know that marketing is your calling, offer to help out with or run the marketing campaign for a major charity event in your area. If you’re into web design, Google some of your favourite charities and reach out to the ones with particularly horrendous websites – offer to fix them up, pro bono. And even if you don’t have the skills to take on a major responsibility with a community group when you start, you’ll be amazed by how much you learn and develop just by getting involved and helping out where you’re needed. Soon, your particular strengths and interests will come to the surface, and since you’ve already shown that you’re a committed volunteer, you’ll be the obvious choice to take on more responsibility – and add to your portfolio.

1 800 GO DRAKE**3. Experience Isn’t Everything**

It’s important to recognize that experience isn’t everything – and to be able to confidently explain that to employers. If you know that experience is going to be an issue for the job you really want, tackle this head on. In your cover letter, use a significant portion of it to explain exactly why your lack of experience in the particular field they’re looking for is irrelevant, and back it up by explaining how the work experience you have is more than sufficient. You can also explain how the skills you’ve developed and the experience you’ve accumulated through community work has more than prepared you for the role in question. Be prepared to answer lots of questions in the interview as well. If you can make the employer confident in your ability to succeed in the role they’re hiring for, your lack of experience will be irrelevant.

Keep in mind, though, that honesty is of the utmost importance. Always be truthful about your employment experience and avoid the temptation to embellish. Consider what your previous employers are going to say if they’re called for a reference check – and act with this in mind. However, just because your experience is limited doesn’t mean that you aren’t going to be a star performer in your next role. If you’re confident in your ability to succeed in the role you’re applying to or interviewing for, don’t hold back. Make sure your potential employer knows exactly how you feel, because this can make the difference between landing the job and having to continue your job search.

As you’re looking for your first job or to change careers, you’re likely to run into the “experience required” dilemma more than a few times. Don’t let it get you down. At some point, everyone – including your interviewer and the CEO of their company – lacked experience as well. It’s something that everyone has to deal with at some point in their career, but by following the tips outlined above, you’ll be able to move past the “you don’t have enough experience” objection quickly and easily.

