ASK THE SONIC COACH (Q&A)
Career Advice for Aspiring Health Researchers
January 2008

From a Tongue-Tied Networker: It’s one thing to tell people I’m looking for a good summer job, but when they ask me “What kind of job?”, I don’t know what to say. How do I know what I’m looking for if 80% of the jobs are “hidden”?

SONIC Coach: Employers want to know what’s in it for them by hiring you—and you need to be able to tell them in clear, concise language. So before to speak with anyone in your network, examine your skills, knowledge and experience and identify what can be transferred to a business environment. Then develop an appropriate “30-second commercial.” For example, if you’re a whiz with computers, there may be opportunities for you in tech support, or as a trainer with a computer coaching company. When approaching the members of your network, you could say: “I’m looking for employment that would build on my proven expertise in computer software. Throughout high school I have tutored many of my classmates through difficult programming assignments, and taught my parent’s and their friends how to use many of the Microsoft software packages, surf the Internet and use simple email and messaging services.” Practice your introduction until it sounds perfectly natural.

From an Inexperienced Job Seeker: I don’t have much job search experience, but many of my friends who do say it’s all about word-of-mouth. So is networking ALL I need to do to get a good summer job?

SONIC Coach: Networking is just one aspect of a thorough job search. You also need to tap into the published job market, through ads in community newspapers, on career centre job boards, and job posting websites; attending summer job fairs, and the like. Once you learn about the opportunities, you still have to compete for the job. With a well-crafted resume and cover letter, you may earn yourself an interview. And with excellent preparation and interviewing skills, you may be offered the job!

There are many excellent websites on networking and the other skills necessary for an effective job search. The Canadian Government’s youth.gc.ca, the University of Waterloo’s Career Development eManual, and the Riley Guide are excellent places to begin. In upcoming months, I will provide more information on resume writing (February) and interviewing skills (March).
From a First Year University Student: I’m finishing my first year of a science degree and already have a summer job, thanks to the connections I made through my volunteer work. I’m so glad I attended the workshop on networking that was offered by our university’s career centre! I learned so much about making connections with people, introducing myself properly, asking the right kinds of questions, and following up on referrals. It was a bit scary at first, but it was worth it. Now that my summer is arranged, I can concentrate completely on my studies.

SONIC Coach: Congratulations. And thank you for sharing your story. As you continue to practice your networking skills, you'll find it'll become a natural part of your working life. But networking is not just about tapping into the hidden job market for summer, part-time or permanent employment. It can help you form study groups while at university, develop collaborative research teams in your work as a scientist, and create strong professional and social supports throughout your life.

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