



THE DEPARTMENT OF BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING

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Student Highlights

Job Search Strategies for the Savvy BME

Alumni Advice on Getting a Job

Getting a job depends on two things – what you know, and who you know. Most graduating students realize this, but many of them put too little emphasis on the more important of the two: who you know. By building a network and using it, they could dramatically improve their ability to get interviews, job offers, and ultimately land a position. To succeed in your search, make sure you have the necessary knowledge *and* network at your command.

To understand why you should put the effort into this, just look at the recruiting and hiring process from the point of view of the employer. In the biotechnology sector, there is a large pool of experienced candidates with five or more years of experience. Employers may not be willing to risk hiring students directly from college when they can instead choose from these experienced candidates, who have already bridged the gap between academic learning and research and development in an industrial setting. This results in that common lament uttered by disappointed would-be new members of the workforce – you can't get a job without experience, but you can't get experience without a job. Here are some suggestions for overcoming this barrier, with knowledge and networking.

Knowledge:

- Never sacrifice performance on your coursework. While grades are certainly not the only thing that matters, a solid base of knowledge in all relevant subject areas will help you maintain a high intellectual level for years. For biomedical engineers, this means not only mastering your core coursework but also getting as much exposure as possible in your concentration area. A BME degree is viewed as being quite broad, so back it up with solid scientific knowledge and understanding.
- Take advantage of all available opportunities to get exposure to industry. Attend *every single* seminar conducted by someone outside of academia, such as those offered through the "BME in the Real World" program. At each lecture, ask yourself how the speaker got to be where he or she is now and what path the person followed. Also, be sure to participate in any industry outreach or entrepreneurship programs. By observing critically, you'll see more clearly how to shape a future that is right for you and will

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make you happy.

- Do whatever it takes to get direct exposure to outside industry. One great way to do this is to take on undergraduate research work, even if there's no financial compensation. If the project is part of work being done on a grant, find out exactly what the purpose of your efforts are, and how the combined group effort will reach the end goal of the grant. Read the original grant proposal. Pay attention to how the project has been scheduled and broken into tasks, and what methods are used to determine when the technical work meets the requirements.
- Aside from research, another way to get direct exposure to industry is through internships. If neither of these options is available, then get creative. Find some unique way to get the first-hand experience that will give you a competitive edge in the job market.

Network:

- Keep a written record of every industry person with whom you have contact. Whether the person is a speaker at a seminar, a representative from an organization making a grant, or someone interviewing for industry internships, always make sure to record the person's name, position, email address, phone number, as well as any thoughts you have about the person's job or expertise. Too often, students fail to realize that these people are extremely valuable resources. Even if you don't meet face to face and shake hands, you'll find more often than not that the person is very receptive to helping you upon receiving a phone call or an email. Always say where you met – such as, "I was in the audience for your 'BME in the Real World' lecture last spring" –and you'll immediately earn a bit of credibility.
- Actively use your network as much as possible. Don't wait until you are looking for a job. Contact various people from your network to ask questions or convey news on a regular basis (six months to a year, at most, between contacts). Never forget that these people are experienced professionals and will have a lot of useful suggestions, such as which classes might be more valuable for certain careers, how best to write an essay for an internship application, or how to choose an undergraduate research project. Try to develop a professional rapport with these people, but don't ever waste their time. Engage in discussions, give feedback and updates, and always be gracious when your network contacts give you some time.
- Use your network when you are beginning to look for a job. There are many stories about people who "fell into" great jobs and careers, but these are rarely random circumstances, no matter how they appear. Often, the best job opportunities arise through casual conversation and a general awareness by one person of what might be interesting and useful to someone else they know. The more people you maintain professional contact with, the better the odds that these opportunities will present themselves. Furthermore, it will be much easier to get a prospective employer to actually look at your résumé or consider giving you a call if you've been recommended by a trusted industry colleague or if your networking has already brought you into direct contact with the employer. Using your network beats posting your résumé on job websites, hands down.

Along with all of these tips, take one more piece of advice. You might need to assert yourself more than is normal or comfortable for you. Just remind yourself that this is the beginning of your professional career, and your future success depends on how well you can communicate your worth. With a strong knowledge base, good networking and a pleasantly assertive manner, you can get your career off to a fast start.

Please send additional comments and suggestions to [Cathy Jancuk](#).

Posted: 11/21/05

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