



Do you ever wonder why most “entry level” positions still seem to require a minimum of one to three years of work experience? How can you overcome this obstacle and potentially find your first job lead as a recent grad? Executive career coach, Anna Hunter, offers tips on networking as well as leveraging your skills, education, internships and volunteer experience to help with your search.

It’s that time of year again, when soon-to-be college graduates are polishing up their resumes and getting ready to set out into the adult world of full-time employment. But many job listings require one to three years of experience (and sometimes more) – even when they are listed as entry level. How can new graduates who want to apply for one of these “entry level” positions sell themselves well enough in a resume and cover letter to at least get a foot in the door?

Who better to ask than someone who works with recent college graduates? That’s why I reached out to executive career coach Anna Hunter, founder and COO of ArcVida, Inc., a service designed to guide recent college graduates into careers they love.

The good news for these eager young people?

“It’s OK to ignore the one to three years of experience if the position is entry level and your skills and education otherwise qualify you for the role,” Hunter says.

But there are exceptions to that advice. For example, that won’t work if the listing is for a highly specialized job in a field like engineering, Hunter cautions.

When considering jobs they might be qualified for, soon-to-be graduates shouldn't forget about any relevant internships and volunteer stints they've had over the course of their college career. Even projects they've completed in which they've used skills applicable to the job are important to include.

All those things, Hunter says, count as experience. "That's often how people get their foot in the door," she says.

However, the best way to get that foot in isn't by "positioning yourself" in a resume or cover letter, Hunter adds.

"Instead, have conversations with people in the company, talk about why you're excited about the role. If they think you're qualified, they will invite you to apply, which will put you ahead of the other candidates," she suggests. "The fact is, no matter how great your resume is, it will never be as impressive as you are when you talk to someone. So lead with a conversation whenever possible. This is good vetting for both you and the company: you will never be invited to apply for a role that isn't a good fit."

That advice underscores the importance of networking throughout the job process – from beginning to end.

"Everyone should be having work-focused conversations all the time, especially if they are in job search mode or know that they will be shortly. Effective networking isn't transactional; it isn't about asking, 'Are there any open positions at your company?' or 'Can you help me get an interview?'" Hunter stresses. "It's about building relationships and being genuinely curious about the other person and their work."

If you make networking an integral part of your job search – everything from discovering what your fit is, to exploring opportunities, to building relationships with people who are doing what you want to do or hiring for what you want to do – Hunter says you should be able to network your way into a conversation at the company that's hiring.

"Applying for a position should be the last step in your process, after you have a strong sense of your talents and skills and have done enough research to know that you would be a good fit for the company," she concludes. "Never apply as a way to learn more about the company or the role you're considering."

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