

ing to a number of different people."

As needs arise, employees are assigned new responsibilities, and job descriptions can become outdated the week after they're written. "In our company, a new employee may start in sales and end up in an entirely different area," says Don Marino, human resources director at Alpha Metals Inc., a solder manufacturer in Jersey City, N.J. "Our total workforce is only about 400 employees, so we put a premium on candidates who are flexible, don't need a lot of hand-holding on the job, and have a strong work ethic. They're not always easy qualities to find."

Karen Dombrowski says she saw the importance of stressing her versatility during job interviews with Curtze Co. "It was clear they were looking for someone who was flexible and diverse—not 'one-track,'" she says. "They wanted someone who could keep her head straight and go with the flow."

Demonstrate your versatility by describing your involvement in extracurricular activities during college, such as sports, fraternities or sororities, and other social or professional student associations. Perhaps you handled every aspect of a fundraiser or party, from budgeting to organizing support to garnering publicity.

Small companies see these activities as an indication of your versatility.

Dedication

Small firms often demand a lot from their employees.

Since they're usually short-handed, it's

important

that all

members of

the staff be

prepared to

give 110%

when the

occasion

arises. If

you have

your sights

set on join-

ing a small

concern, you

must demon-

strate your will-

ingness to be

a self-starter

who goes the

extra mile.

"You have a lot

of independence

at a small

company," says Mary

Hecht, "and there's no room

for laziness or a constant need for attention."

One common way that new graduates can highlight their dedication is by describing their part-time or summer work experience. A demonstrated ability to juggle schedules and manage time efficiently will help convince employers of your drive and determination. If your earnings helped pay your college expenses, note it on your resume and mention it in interviews.

Grades can also be a strong indicator of

good work habits. A high GPA doesn't just happen, it's the result of long hours of studying. For this reason, academic honors should be brought to the employer's attention. And don't be afraid to talk about subject areas that were difficult to master. The extra effort you made in organic chemistry will reflect favorably on your aptitude for tackling problems on the job.

A few obstacles

The biggest problem in working for a small company is getting a job in the first place. It's often difficult to connect with small-company hiring managers. For starters, few have the resources to recruit at local colleges and universities. Even contacting small companies directly can be frustrating, since most don't maintain formal recruiting, college relations or personnel departments. This can stall even the best resume mailing campaigns.

Sporadic company growth at small firms can also be a problem. It's nearly impossible for them to determine how many new employees they'll need next year or the year after. Consequently, new hires are recruited on an "as-needed" basis. If you're not in just the right place at just the right time, you'll lose out.

Since traditional search strategies rarely do the trick, it's critical to combine the sleuthing abilities of Lieutenant Columbo with the resourcefulness of Indiana Jones. Two tactics that are worth a try are looking for hidden leads and customizing your contacts.

Looking for hidden leads

Small companies don't advertise job openings nearly as often as large firms. To find out what's available, start by identifying small companies in your geographic area. Look first in the reference room of your campus or local

public library. Magazines such as Inc., Business Week and Forbes compile lists annually of successful small companies. Reviewing recent issues of these and similar magazines and trade journals will clue you in to up-and-coming firms.

Not all small companies are represented in these publications. You'll also have to focus on local information resources, such as the business section of the local newspaper. It's

loaded with articles and features about area employers. Any change in the local business scene could mean employment opportunities. Pay close attention to columns listing new businesses, and to descriptions of company mergers and acquisitions.

For an easy-to-access depository of local business information, nothing can match the chamber of commerce.

Membership lists are often available, and many chambers pro-

duce directories indexed by company size, products and industry. Some chambers also have committees or publications designed especially for small businesses.

Keep an eye out for local business conventions and seminars related to your career. These events attract a host of potential employers. Melinda Klaber, a business administration major at the University of New Hampshire, used this source to land a position at Members Only, a men's apparel manufacturer in New York.

"One of my friends attended a professional conference and gave me a list of attendees. I went through the list and wrote to several companies that looked interesting," Klaber says. "Members Only happened to be looking for a new director of promotion and event marketing, which was exactly the kind of job that I wanted."

Professional associations represent another excellent source of business contacts. The "bible" for locating relevant associations is the Encyclopedia of Associations (Gale Research Co., Detroit), available in the reference section of most libraries. This directory can help you identify professional groups by occupational interest, such as engineering or marketing. Once you've identified an appropriate organization, check the telephone book

"The ultimate allure of small firms, especially to entrepreneurial new graduates, is their informal atmosphere and fast pace"

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