

Job Search Advice for New Graduates: The Reality of Your New Qualifications

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Another year is ending and a new crop of freshly-minted Bachelor's Degree Graduates will soon begin their searches to find that perfect job that will help them launch their careers.

But with the number of students who will finish their programmes this month, the number of job seekers already in the market, and the number of available and attractive vacancies, it bears reminding that one has to approach his or her job search in a strategic and practical way, in order to compete in Jamaica's current labour market.

Luckily, a new year also brings a new set of opportunities; companies will have just approved (or be in the process of approving) their labour budgets for the new year and these will hopefully result in several new vacancies, some of which could be won by these new graduates, if they play their cards right.

But first, it is important for new graduates to understand 'where they stand', so that they can make smarter decisions in their job hunt.

New Graduates,

Congratulations for finishing your degree; we are sure you put in a lot of work, time and money and we know that you, your family, friends, mentors and professors are very proud of your accomplishment.

However and forgive me if I come across a bit too frank, you need to understand that your new educational qualification does not actually make you qualified for a job. You see, *experience and job-specific knowledge and achievements (among other things) always trump educational qualifications*, and **most** Bachelor's Degrees afford you none of these (not even the job-specific knowledge – you'll be surprised, once you start working, how little job-specific information you actually learned while completing your Degree).

That isn't to say that your new Degree isn't something of value - completing your Degree shows that you are reasonably intelligent and capable of committing to and following through on, which is great! But it usually doesn't prove that you'll be able to apply practical skills and knowledge to accomplish tasks in a professional environment, doing real-life work that will likely have real-life implications (possibly monetary) on other real-life people. It doesn't prove that you'll be able to interact proficiently with others, in a way that allows you to feel confident in your abilities, in a professional setting that's possibly fraught with challenges such as lack of resources, unhappy clients, and uncooperative colleagues. It has only allowed you to gain an understanding of your strengths and weaknesses in a structured, academic environment; it has likely told you nothing of your strengths, weaknesses, and what you truly have to offer – what makes you special – in a professional setting, doing real-life work, that will likely have real-life implications, possibly monetary, on other people.

Your Degree doesn't make you as qualified as persons who've actually worked – in your chosen job, in your chosen field, in your chosen industry – and already proven that they can not only meet

expectations and follow instructions, but also excel, achieve, accomplish, and flourish. It certainly doesn't make you as qualified as the internal candidates – the persons who already got through and work for that Company and are also interested in that job – who you will be competing against. And, unless you have a 'special in', it's highly unlikely you'll be able to contend in a pool of applicants such as these. (And, if you do have a 'special in', for goodness sake, use it – but this is advice for another time).

So if you're not qualified (and don't have an 'in'), then how are you going to get a job? How do you gain experience, if you need to have experience in order to get the job needed to build up experience?

The answer is that you're going to get one by paying your dues and being willing to gain experience *anywhere you can*, to build up your qualifications. You're going to go after the experience that your 'competitors' – the more experienced candidates and the internal candidates – aren't going to go after the 'less attractive' experience. You're going to get your foot in the door, and go after the volunteer opportunities, the unpaid internships, the holiday work, the short-term contracts, and the positions with the small 'never-heard-of-you-before' companies. (*And, if you already started accumulating some of these while you were completing your Degree, good for you! Keep going!*) Then, one special day, after you've held enough of these roles, you'll realize that, cumulatively, you're able to say "oh yes, I have several years of experience in that area; let me tell you more about some of the challenges I had to address and some of my professional accomplishments and highlights over the last two years."

And if that doesn't sound so great – after all, you have bills to pay too – recognize that this is the market we're in and you, like almost everyone else before you, need to pay your dues and prove you deserve better opportunities before you actually get them. You are quite possibly the most amazing person in the world – someone whose knowledge, skills, and talents entitle you to every opportunity this world has to offer – but you can't expect other persons to know how amazing and deserving you are, until you give them the time and the proof they need, to learn this. (That 'proof' will be the experiences you're able to relate, once you actually have some).

So – for those new graduates who are only applying to permanent positions, managerial positions, those positions where the job advertisement is asking for three years of experience, the positions with the "Employers-of-choice" – if your job search hasn't quite been working out for you the way you'd hoped, we hope now that you'll heed our advice. But a word of caution to this tale; while you want to get as much experience as you can, you also need to try, to collect experience *relevant to your chosen career field*, and to avoid the approach of "I'll take anything I can get."

But that's, again, advice for another time. Until then, good luck in your job search and the best of luck to you as you seek to supplement your hard-earned Degree with the 'real' qualifications you need to launch your career.