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Transitioning careers: Assessing skills is paramount

Are you recently laid off and in the need to quickly update your résumé to apply for new job opportunities? Are you considering a career change and in a dilemma as to how to effectively determine your transferable skills needed in today's job market? Looking for resource material that can help get you re-directed? Well, not to worry. In this column, I'll bring you a few strategies and resources that can move you forward on the road to success.

It's quite surprising how many people do not fully understand the many skills they can offer an employer. Generally, people either undervalue their skills, or, if they've been doing a particular job for a long time, things come so naturally to them that they aren't aware of all of the skills they use on a daily basis. Research indicates that the average person has more than 500 skills. Unbelievable? Well, you simply need to identify at least five to 10 skills that are the most attractive to potential employers in the job/career of your choosing. So, let's begin the skills "brainstorming process."

- Determine your technical, non-technical and transferable skills. Technical skills are those skills specific to a job or occupation. For example, a salesperson's skills would include account management, customer service, contract negotiating, etc. An accountant's skills could include using computer accounting software, preparing taxes, handling accounts payable/receivable, and the list goes on.

- Nontechnical skills are many times referred to as "soft skills or

self-management skills"; i.e., a collection of personal qualities, habits and attitudes that make an individual a good employee and compatible to work with. Companies value these skills because research suggests and experience shows that they can be just as important an indicator of job performance as hard or core skills. Examples encompass interpersonal communication skills, teamwork, flexibility/adaptability, problem solving, time management, strong work ethic and ability to accept and learn from constructive feedback.

- Transferable skills, simply put, are the skills you've gathered/acquired through various jobs, volunteer work, hobbies, interests, civic/community/church activities, sports or other life experiences that can be used in your next job or new career.

- Consider skills assessments. "Strengths Finder 2.0" by Tom Rath is a great book that provides an online assessment that enables you to discover your top five talent themes and how they play out/make you stand out in a career, job and life. It's in the \$20 range, and I highly recommend this as a great resource to help you further assess your skills. To discover other resources, Google "free online skills assessments," and you'll discover a plethora of materials.

- Reflect on work experience stories. Sound weird? Maybe. Yet, it's a great strategy for discovering skills. Consider situations/tasks you perform on the job; then, think about what skills you have that enable you to do really well. Take for example a customer service scenario — you calmed down a customer and worked

with him to get a problem resolved, and he left your office satisfied with your actions. What skills allowed you to accomplish this task? Skills you might consider include active listening, empathizing, conflict management, problem solving and use of appropriate nonverbal cues.

- Network with friends, associates and family. Ask them what skills they see that you have. Many times they'll do a better job of describing your skills than you will.

- Visit online resources. In my opinion, two of the best online career resources you should visit are www.online.onetcenter.org and www.indeed.com. O'Net Center is a comprehensive occupational information Web site. It provides you with free online information regarding job titles and corresponding skills, plus so much more. It's one of my favorites that I consistently recommend. The other Web site, indeed.com, is an aggregate of job opportunities. The site is quite easy to navigate. When you begin your job search, indeed.com is a valuable resource to investigate.

I encourage you to take the time to complete a thorough skills analysis. Make the effort to understand all of the skills you can offer an employer. Begin to think of yourself in terms of your skills rather than just a job title. You will be surprised at the world of career options you had not previously considered for which you would qualify.

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