Employment Agencies: Know Where You are Going!

The employment agency is the second most frequently used job resource. Some agencies are career specialists and focus on particular career fields, such as medical personnel, skilled secretaries, computer/ high-tech specialists or administrative positions. Other agencies are more generalized to handle many types of listings and service many different types of employment needs.

You may be requested to pay a fee, often a percentage of your first year's salary. Do not choose agencies that ask you to pay a fee. Many employment agencies, however, are paid a fee by the employer to find the right candidates; you will not have to pay a fee in these instances. In either case, it is best to find out as much as you can about several agencies before deciding to deal with a particular one.

Among the things you should look for in choosing an agency are:

- The policy for temporary employees accepting full-time positions
- Availability of training services to supplement your skills
- The number of years in business
- The size of the agency
- Types of business or career fields the agency seeks to service
- Fees involved in accepting full-time employment and who pays these fees

You may also wish to check with the Better Business Bureau to see if there have been any complaints or commendations directed towards the various agencies you are considering. If you are asked to sign a contract, be sure you understand the terms before signing.

Most Agencies are not Career Guidance Counselors

Before deciding to visit an employment agency, you must know what type of job you want. Agency counselors are in the business of job placement and are generally not trained to offer guidance or testing services. The vocational career guidance service is the only type of employment agency equipped to offer job counseling and testing services. Although they will charge you a fee for their services, they are valuable if you do not know where you want to go or what you want to do.

Narrow the Field

Once you are sure of what you want to do, visit five or six employment agencies and decide on three; any more than this would be needless repetition as many agencies in the same geographic area have access to the same job openings. Avoid an agency's offer to write your résumé for you (though you should not object to their reviewing it); they cannot represent you on paper as well as you can.

Agencies specializing in one particular career field are good if you are sure you want to be employed within that field. The client companies of career specialists (sometimes called Head Hunters) often are looking for experienced employees.

These agencies often function as recruiters looking for people, most already employed, with at least a specified number of years of experience.

These agencies usually are not appropriate for the job-hunter looking for his or her first job unless he or she has specialized training. The career specialists' list of potential employers also tends to be smaller than the general employment agency's list.

When Your Experience is Limited

The large, private, employer-paid agencies are usually the best choice for the candidates with limited work experience. You can develop a good list of these by asking friends or by calling the Better Business Bureau and asking for assistance. Some advertise in the local newspapers and most can be found in the ***Yellow Pages*** of the telephone book.

These agencies are trained to review not only your qualifications but your appearance and personality. It is best to visit the agency dressed as you would for the interview. You will be asked to complete an application, perhaps take a typing test and then speak to a counselor. The counselor will be your contact with the agency; do not forget the counselor's name. Call this individual on a weekly basis if he or she does not contact you. Let the counselor know of any changes in your plans. Let this call also serve as a notice that your job search is still active and serious. Other agencies to consider are the trade associations such as plumbers, carpenters and electricians. Many maintain their own placement bureaus. The list of associations in your area can be found at your local library; ask at the reference desk.

Don't Ignore State Agencies

Most states have a government-sponsored employment agency which can be located through the telephone book. Some states require employers to list certain job openings with these agencies. It is a good idea to register with your state agency, particularly since their services are free. Some even offer seminars on job-hunting. The job listings are often computerized and listed by number. The agency may assign you a registration number corresponding to the job listing code numbers for the type of work you are seeking.

Many government agencies list a large number of entry-level positions and their listings tend to be several days to a few weeks old, so regular visits are necessary. Although public agencies have many good counselors, they are not on commission and the numbers they serve prevent them from giving the individual job seeker a large amount of time and attention. Public agencies can be used very effectively by familiarizing yourself with their equipment and acting as your own counselor.

They Work for You, Not the Other Way

There is no guarantee that employment agencies can do a better job of finding you a job than you can but they do have access to more listings of job openings. Do not allow an agency to talk you out of your own plan. Ask them to add to it or work within it. Do not lose sight of the fact that the employment counselor who is working with you is not a guidance counselor, confidante or friend but a person assisting you in implementing one segment of your job-hunting plan.

Remember that an employment agency counselor is paid when you get a job. He or she is not being paid to get you the job. You must protect your own interests by making sure that an employment agency is working to get you the job you want, not just one they have available and one you can fill.