Dude—where is my job?

by Tim Arnold, Chair of the Mining and Exploration Division

Many of you reading this are young women or men about to embark on your careers as new graduates from one of America’s fine universities. You are wide-eyed, anxious to take on big, hairy, ambiguous tasks, motivated, excited and smart. You are probably optimistic and idealistic. You believe that, in general, life is fair. In order to dispel this outrageous myth, and to help you with your career, I would like to discuss searching for a job.

Somewhere between the cretaceous period when I was in college and now, professors became more cautious with the topics that they deliver to the youth of America. It could be the result of our litigious society, or it could be that they are overworked. Judging by the young professionals that I am interviewing, I get the impression that job-searching skills are not being stressed or taken seriously in college. Much of what I am going to say you have heard before. All of what I am going to say was wounded into my head when I went to school (and walked through three feet of snow every day, barefoot, uphill both ways). Those were simpler days. A professor could grab you by the scruff of the polyester shirt and say, “Lose the orange granny glasses and most of your hair, hippie, or I’ll see to it you don’t work in mining until after a geologist becomes President.” So we lost the glasses, cut our hair, bought a new suit from the Salvation Army (which meant it was in perfect style for the people who would be interviewing us) and did what the man told us. And we found work.

With the advent of Title VII, truly egregious wrongs have been corrected. People do not discriminate with respect to race, gender, religion, national origin, age, disability, marital or veteran status. Unfortunately, this has been misconstrued by many who believe that an employer cannot discriminate for any reason. Oh, how wrong you are. Here is our dirty little secret. We laugh about you after you leave. Sometimes we do not even need to see you before we laugh about you. But it is not because of your religious persuasion, or anything like that. It’s because you are so clueless.

If you want, you can write this off as the ravings of an old man. The advice is free. But how do you expect us to listen to you when you slur your words because you cannot talk around your tongue stud? You may be postulating about the Nobel Peace Prize you won as a third grader, and all I can think is, “How long did this guy’s eyes water after he pierced his eyebrow?” Heck, you may have gotten the miners to agree with the mill on the ounces mined versus poured. But I am still going to wonder about what possesses someone to tattoo the name of a beer on her forehead.

Rules for a job interview

Rule #1: Do not pierce or tattoo anything that you cannot cover with a suit or your dress clothes.

Rule #2: Buy some dress clothes! Wear them. Show up dressed better than they think you to dress. And you should have asked. If they said dress casual, guys should wear slacks and a button up shirt—not shorts and a tee shirt that says “nipples.” If they say “casual,” you should still wear a suit. If they do not tell you what to wear, wear a suit or at least a tie. I am not interested in your opinions about how perfectly presentable you are in a sweater. If I hire you, I will ask you to do lots of things much more uncomfortable than wearing a tie—such as shoveling a busted conveyor belt while wearing boots, a hard hat, glasses and a respirator on an overtime Saturday when your alma mater is paying for the national championship.

Rule #3: Do your homework. Know what we do here. Nothing makes you look more like a more of a loser than to go into an interview and ask what product they produce. Know things like the mining method, the processing methods, the names of the principal people that work there (the SME Directory is a great help here), what they do and where they went to school.

Rule #4: Be true to your school—after the interview. Look, it is great to be proud of your school. I am. But it is not a fraternal organization. Your pride should be tempered by the fact that not everybody thinks your school is the best. And one or two of those people may have some say in hiring you. After you get hired, you can puff out your chest with the rest of your brothers and exchange the secret handshake. In the interview, say where you went to school and show constrained pride. But do not tell the interviewer how unfortunate he is that he was not educated as well as you were.

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Rule #5: Learn to write. To get a job, you must apply. To apply, you have to write a resume. There are five million different opinions on resume formatting and style. No matter which one you use, spell everything correctly. Make sentences. Use at least a few main ideas. Check the file before you send it out. You will not gain any points if the potential boss’ e-mail is tied up for two hours downloading your 130-MB file. And make sure the formatting of your electronic resume does not get messed up in the process. Unfortunately, electronic trans fer has made cover letters a thing of the past. You can get 13,326 x 10^4 reserved words with a click of a button, but it takes time to write a cover letter to a specific company. We (old guys) want to feel special. Write the cover letter.

Rule #6: We do not owe you a job. A cocky attitude might have worked with your parents or your friends, but it does not work with a potential employer. Show a little respect. Learn to shake a hand. Look them in the eye. Try the words “sir” and “ma’am.” You can laugh about it with your friends later, “Dude, like I had this old guy so buffaleted, dude. I was like ‘yes sir,’ and he was like ‘thank you son.” Rule #7: Be yourself. You may think this is in contradiction to the rules above, but it is not. The work place is not as rigid as it was when we old guys were young. It can actually be fun. We need to know that they have all fit in, so a sense of humor is important. Just keep in mind, it is not the only thing.

Scottish preacher, teacher and writer George MacDonald (1824-1905) said, “When we are out of sympathy with the young, then I think our work in this world is over.” MacDonald was wrong. We do not have any sympathy. Whether you like it or not, we old guys run the world. So it benefits you to understand what these people expect. And if you do not comply, we will laugh about it later. It may not be fair. Who told you life was fair?

It seems that interviewing skills are not being stressed as much as in days gone by. Maybe your professors are telling you this stuff and you are ignoring it. Hmmm…. that would surprise me, youth ignoring advice from their elders.