

Conclusion

It's Not a Small World after All

Everyone has a story that proves how small our world has become. Sherry once ran into a former colleague she worked with in Washington, D.C., and hadn't seen in years in a Moscow department store. Mark bumped into a classmate whom he hadn't seen for years from his university located in South Bend, Indiana, on the steps of Sacre-Coeur in Paris. When a chance encounter like this occurs, when we see someone who lives close to home in a place so far away, we all have a tendency to exclaim, "What a small world!"

Yet, these chance encounters aside, the reality is that it's *not* a small world after all. Rather, the world of the individual has simply grown enormously. Each of us is coping with so much more information today than ever before. Most of us encounter far more people and places than our grandparents ever dreamed about. When we are transported by the Internet, television, or cell phone to other countries and continents, we are not any closer to these places than we were before. Instead, the size of our individual world, measured by the amount of information and experiences we have access to, has grown exponentially.

The consequence of this for your job search and career development is that there are more roads than ever before that you can take. There is so much more information available to help you learn about those avenues. One of the realizations we came to during our collaboration on this book is just how huge the world of the job seeker has become, how much information is out there for you to sift through and evaluate. While editing the lists of resources contained in part II, we found ourselves amazed by the sheer volume of it all. Career websites and books, job boards and search engines, long lists of organizations, more acronyms than you could ever care to decipher—the amount of information was daunting. And we are the first to admit that the information contained in this

book is only “selected”! It was staggering to realize that there is so much more beyond what we had already compiled.

The Internet not only has transformed the way a job search is performed, but it also plays host to more information about jobs and careers than any one person can possibly process. When Sherry wrote her first book on careers in 1998, using the Internet for career research was almost an afterthought. Now it is a primary tool for a job search. Even in the last several years, the job search capabilities on the Internet have been further transformed and expanded—the recent emergence of dynamic networking websites is a good example of this ongoing transformation. The major challenge then becomes, once you have logged on (or opened this book, for that matter), where do you begin? With so much information out there, how do you know what to use, what sources to trust? How do you deal with “the overwhelm”?

We wanted to give you simple answers to these twenty-first-century questions. We hoped we could conclude with a nugget of advice that would allow each and every reader to easily transcend the overwhelm and find that one career resource that will lead to his or her dream job. We found this to be an impossible task. We certainly encourage you, as we have throughout, to begin where your interests lie. Locate your cause, find what drives you, then seek out the resources listed in part II that match. Yet even this advice, we realize, is complicated. What if you are like Mark and still unsure of where your cause lies? How do you find the right resource when you are not even sure what you are looking for? While we could not come up with a single solution for these questions, we do offer some simple suggestions.

The first is acceptance. Accept that, in our information-saturated society, overwhelm is a permanent condition. Whether it is in our job searches or our actual jobs, we will forever be dealing with too much information, too many demands, and too little time. Whatever you cross off your to-do list will always be replaced with an even longer list of things yet to accomplish. By coming to terms with this fact, rather than trying to deny it or change it, you will find that you are better equipped to adapt to information overload.

Second, be patient. Especially if you are still in the midst of honing your interests and discovering your cause, give yourself time to locate the organizations and opportunities that are right for you. This may mean allowing yourself plenty of time to page through part II, as well as consider

and research the many resources there. But more often than not, it will also require you to have multiple experiences, whether they be short-term volunteer projects, internships, or full-time jobs. In the end, as Luby Ismail points out in her profile, the trial, and sometimes error, of experience is often the only way we can uncover what we are truly meant to do.

And finally, take comfort in the fact that everyone else is on overwhelm too. You're not the only one whose world has grown. Others are bombarded by information and requests as well. Everyone copes with that feeling that if I can *just* get this one big project done, then everything will be okay.

So what can we do when we feel overwhelmed? We can step back from our work and our career deliberations. We can take a walk or talk to a friend. Maybe grab a beer or watch a movie. We can work out or play with a pet. We can decompress and unwind in some way and, when we feel energized again, tackle things with renewed vigor. There is no escape from the overwhelm; there are only strategies to deal with it. And sometimes the best way to deal with the stresses of your job search and career development is to just not think about them at all for awhile.

Another realization we came to during our collaboration is that writing a book is a lot like building a career. Both are continuous journeys. As we discussed in chapter 4, building your career does not end when you land that first dream job. In the same way, our roles as authors were not over when we submitted the final draft of the manuscript. Already we were considering ways to share the substance of the book—identifying distribution sources with our publisher, serving as panelists for sessions on careers at professional association meetings, and elaborating on subjects in jointly authored articles.

We have set in motion an ongoing process that has engaged us, helped us distill lessons learned, and clarified our thoughts on a wide range of topics. Just as rewarding careers are avenues of constant learning and growth, how much we learned as the book developed—from our research and from each other—amazed us. We knew we worked well together, but we were pleasantly surprised at the ease of our cooperation. We quickly agreed on tasks that needed to be done and divided them between us with little discussion. Again, this is parallel to building a career. It is not a process that can be forced but grows naturally from working with people you like and respect and embracing a cause that is meaningful.

In one of the quotations we share at the beginning of the book, Albert Schweitzer predicts that “the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve.” As we examined our own experiences and those of the professionals we profiled, it became clear that tremendous benefits rebound to us when we help others. Sherry remembers hearing the revered management guru Peter Drucker speak at a conference in the early 1990s. In a presentation focusing on nonprofit leadership, Drucker pointed out that volunteers benefit as much from performing the services they render as do the recipients of those services. He reminded his audience that once their basic needs are met, human beings gain great satisfaction from being of service—from making a difference. Thinking of your career as the way you will be of service to those around you is the best advice we can offer.

In the end we must admit that our take on careers in the fields of international education, exchange, and development are but two in a sea of many. The resources presented are only selected—it was not our intention to provide a comprehensive list of every conceivable organization or reference that could have relevance for you. Rather, our goal was to provide a service, to *be* of service to you as you plan your career. We certainly hope that our work will act as a compass to help you map a professionally and personally rewarding career path. We wish you all the best on your continuous journey.