

Chapter 1

Getting Started

It's never easy to look for a job. Naturally, there are a number of fears we all have to overcome. As an immigrant, however, there are usually some additional fears with which to contend. Take a look. Do you identify with any of the fears on this list? They are the ones that come up every time I ask a Latino or a Latina, "What are your fears when you look for a job?"

"I don't speak English well."

The majority of immigrants who arrive in the U.S. don't speak English. So, find out TODAY where there is an ESL (English as a Second Language) course being taught near you and sign up! Good places for you to check are the public library, local high schools, churches, and community centers. Many times these classes are free and they are usually held at convenient hours in the evening or on weekends. It is EXTREMELY important that you learn the language as soon as possible. Not only will it open many, many doors for you, but it is one of the most important fac-

tors to level the playing field. English and education are the two key elements that will help you achieve all your goals.

“I don’t have working papers.”

Although it has gotten tougher in recent years to get papers, with the help of a good lawyer, many immigrants have found a way to solve their situation—some sooner and some later! It is important not to ignore the issue because it will not get resolved on its own. Check the resources in the back of the book. In the meantime, you should make it a priority to learn English and to advance your educational agenda. If you haven’t finished high school in your country, read the paragraph below. If you want to work in a particular trade, take courses in a community college or seek the apprenticeship training programs offered by your state. Do not wait until you have your papers to study; use this time to get the education you need!

“I only finished elementary school.”

Find out where you can take a GED (General Education Development) course. This is the course for the GED exam, the high school equivalency diploma, a very useful certificate if you want to get a better job.

“I never did this type of job.”

Many immigrants had a different occupation or profession in their native country. Remember that in the beginning you may have to do jobs that you do not like that much. As you learn English and get the education you need (or take the tests to validate your degree), your

job opportunities will improve. Unlike in many Latin American countries, in the U.S., people are not embarrassed to work in a field that might not be their own.

“I am afraid I won’t know how to answer certain questions at the interview.”

In this book you will find many commonly asked questions at job interviews. There are many others related to your own personal job experience that you will have to think about on your own with the guidance of this book.

“I’m afraid of going to an interview.”

This book will show you what to expect in an interview, how to behave, how to dress, and the questions you will most likely be asked. The best cure for your nerves is to be prepared!

“I don’t have a car.”

In all major urban areas there is usually a good public transportation system. Call your local public library and find out where you can get a schedule of buses, trains, and subways. If they don’t have one, they will be able to point you in the right direction. You can also look for the Transportation Authority in the telephone book.

It is very important to learn to drive and to obtain a driver’s license. In the United States, this is one of the most important IDs a person can have. However, states are getting more strict in the documentation you need to present in order to get a license—your Social Security number and a document establishing you are staying legally in the country, a passport, a green card, etc.

However, in some states you may still be able to get a driver's license by bringing the following documents: 1) a letter from the Social Security Administration establishing that you do not qualify for a Social Security number (called a "refusal letter") and 2) a valid passport with a valid visa and a valid I-94 or I-94W visa waiver program attached to it.

Some states require that your I-94 has been issued for a certain amount of time (for example, a year in New York) and that you have a certain amount of time left on it (for example, six months in New York). Each state has different requirements. Get in touch with your local department of motor vehicles. Find the list of department of motor vehicles website addresses at: www.dmvonline.com.

Beware of people and companies selling International Driving Licenses—especially on the Internet—because it is just a scam.

Insider's Tip

The Division of Motor Vehicles Administrator, Roger Cross, pointed out in April 2002 the following: "This scam is all the more confusing because something called an International Driving Permit does exist."

International Driving Permits (IDPs) may be purchased for \$10 from an automobile association authorized by the U.S. Department of State. At this point, only the American Automobile Association (AAA) and the American Automobile Touring Alliance are authorized distributors. IDPs are honored in more than 150 countries outside the United States and function as a legal

identification document that translates U.S. driver's license information into eleven foreign languages. The IDP you obtain here is only good for driving overseas.

So, it may not be possible to obtain a driver's license until you have your paperwork in order. If your job is not too far from your residence, you should consider buying a bicycle.

“I don't have a résumé and I don't know how to write one.”

You came to the right place. Not only will you find the information on how to write a résumé, but I will show you sample résumés for all kinds of occupations and professions. You can also get help writing a résumé in community colleges, at the public library, at many community organizations, and at government-sponsored employment centers.

“I don't know how to use a computer.”

In today's world, computers are an integral part of doing business. Although you may not choose to work with them, your job may require some basic computer knowledge. In general, administrative jobs now expect you to know how to use the complete Microsoft Office suite, which means that if you wish to work in an office environment you need to go beyond the basics and learn: Word, Outlook, Excel, and if you can, Powerpoint and Access. In addition, you need to know how to navigate the Internet. You can learn how to navigate the Internet in Spanish at Learn the Net: <http://learntnet.com/spanish/index.html>.

There are plenty of inexpensive and even free courses for computer literacy. You will find them at community colleges, high schools, libraries, community organizations, and community centers. Also, throughout the country, there are government workforce development and job training programs. They help people overcome any barriers to getting a job, such as lack of English skills, transportation, child care needs, etc. Visit this site for more information: www.acinet.org. Read more about the One Stop Centers under “Activities” on pages 13–14.

You can also check the local newspaper and the community boards at the supermarket and at the library to find out about free computer courses.

Make Bilingualism One of Your Strengths

Remember that a key element to your success in this country is to learn English. A lot of people spend many years here without taking the time to attend English classes. Sometimes they don't feel the need because they work with other Spanish speakers. But the truth is that they are limiting their opportunities. Many people work at jobs that are beneath their abilities because they don't speak English well. They are afraid of even applying for the jobs they really want.

Unfortunately, another fact is that some employers will consider people with poor language skills to be less intelligent than they might really be, just because they cannot grasp what they are all about. They cannot tell if you are well educated and smart because you can't communicate your knowledge. So, in most cases, how

you articulate information is more important than the content of what you are saying.

Keep in mind that people who have the ability to communicate clearly and to express their ideas effectively are the ones with the best opportunities for success. Consequently, you will not be able to move on to positions of higher responsibility and leadership until you learn how to use the language to persuade others to follow you. In addition, until you learn the language you run the risk of being taken advantage of.

Being bilingual will open great job opportunities for you. With Latinos being the largest minority in the United States, there is an increasing need for bilingual speakers. To take full advantage of the wonderful job offers out there, you not only need to master English in all its forms, but you also need to make sure your Spanish skills are as good as they can be. If your Spanish is not polished, or if you can speak it but not write it, you will need to take courses in order to improve your language ability. Many recruiters have mentioned to me that when they hire managers with a Latino background they want them to be able to communicate well in Spanish with their Latino subordinates. They find it to be a great advantage to have someone who speaks more than one language.

Get Organized

Before we start, I want to help you get organized. It is as important to your success as having a good résumé. You don't want to lose a job because you misplaced the lead or because you didn't mention who referred you to the employer or because you missed an appointment.

You will need the following items.

- A *calendar* (electronic or paper) where you can keep track of the phone calls and appointments you make and résumés you need to send out.
- A *direct phone number* (if you don't have one) or a cell phone. You need a phone number where you can be reached or where people can record a message. Don't trust anyone in your household to take messages for you.
- A *calling card*, if you think you will be making phone calls from a pay phone. By prepaying the amount of the card (\$5, \$10, etc.) you can make a large number of calls without having to worry about getting changed.
- A *computer* with Internet access. If you don't own one, you may use one at the library or at the One Stop Center near you. A computer will allow you to type your cover letters and résumé and to quickly modify them to target each job. It saves a lot of time and helps your material look professional. Owning a computer is not enough, though. If it is sitting on your desk or your children are the only ones using it, find out where you can take a course to learn the most important software programs.
- A *printer*. You can get a good ink jet printer for \$150.
- Your own *email address* so people can connect with you easily. To get your free email address, go to **www.hotmail.com** and set up your account.

- Access to a *fax machine*. Many employers will ask you to fax your résumé so they can scan it. If you don't own one, you may be able to find a Kinko's, Staples, Office Max or other office supply store near you. (Another possibility is to use the fax at the One Stop Center or other nonprofit organization.)
- Several forms to keep track of your job search. (See the following examples.)

Every morning, before you start making phone calls, dress nicely as if you were going to work, brush your teeth, comb your hair, shave, wear a little perfume, make yourself a cup of coffee. This little ritual will make you feel confident and that confidence will come through your voice.

WARNING

Never eat, drink, chew gum, or smoke while you talk on the phone!

Job Search Log

This log records the information of each phone call you make. In order to follow up efficiently, you should also keep a monthly calendar where you enter future dates for phone calls and appointments.

Date I called: _____

Contact's name: _____

Company: _____

Phone number: _____

Referred by: _____

Comments: _____

Follow up steps: _____

Call again date: (put it in the calendar under the right date) _____

Appointment date: (put in the calendar under the right date) _____

New phone call date: _____

Comments: _____

Follow up steps: _____

New phone call date: _____

Comments: _____

Follow up steps: _____

Before you make a phone call, write down the name of the person you will speak to (contact's name), the company's name, and phone number. You should also write who referred you so you can mention that person's name. It is important that you think through the phone call before you make it: what do you plan to say? What is your goal for that phone call: get an appointment, get the name of the person hiring, get the address to send your résumé? If you are nervous about calling, practice the phone call out loud several times before you actually make it. Once you make the call, fill out what happened under Comments and then the Follow up steps (talk to a different person, send a résumé, call in a week). If you are told to call again, write down the date when you should call and also put it in the calendar. Do the same if you have an appointment. The next time you call, record that date and phone call in the next section of your form.

Monthly Log

The large desk calendars where you see the complete month at a glance are the best to keep all your appointments in front of you. You can make one yourself by following the format of a monthly calendar and leaving enough space to make notes. Remember, after each phone conversation write down the name of the person, company, and phone number under the correct date when you need to call again. Also, enter all future dates for interviews on this calendar.

Activities List

Looking for a job is a job in itself and you can get demoralized quickly if you are not very organized.

Having a list of activities you have to accomplish each day will help you be more productive. So, write down the names of companies you will call, the people you need to send résumés to, and the interviews you have to go to, and then prioritize them. Do this every morning when you sit at your desk and cross out the activities as you complete them.

Example:

- Call Mr. Richard Jordan at ABC Foods 314-000-9090.
- Send résumé and cover letter to: Jillian Smith at KYC General Products, Susan Sanders at XYZ Consumer Goods, and Robert Wilkins at The Society for Consumers.
- Call about the ad in the Pennysaver.
- Research Kraft General Foods for interview next week.

Local Resources

The first thing on your list should be to familiarize yourself with the *resources in your community*. In this country there are a lot of organizations that will help you along the way and many of them offer their services for free.

Visit the *public library*—find the address in the phone book and ask for a directory of local nonprofit organizations. If the library has access to the Internet, you can

visit their sites online. The nonprofit organizations are usually listed with a description of the services they offer. Look for the ones you can consult about work, housing, immigration, education, etc. Also look for churches or synagogues that cater to Latinos.

After you find out about the nonprofit and religious organizations in your neighborhood, visit them. Become familiar with the services they provide. You may even be able to volunteer some of your time, which is a good way to make connections in the community.

The mission of many of these organizations is to help Latinos get ahead. They receive funds from the government or from private donors to provide services to immigrants. The list of organizations in the back of this book will be a start for you, but it is by no means complete. Every state, every city, every neighborhood has a growing number of organizations ready to help you.

State Employment Agencies

There are a number of government sponsored resources of which you should be aware: The state employment service, sometimes called *Job Service*, in coordination with the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, maintains a national database of job listings, educational and training requirements, and local career resource centers. These centers are State Employment Agencies. You can access all the information at *CareerOneStop's* website: www.CareerOneStop.org or by telephone at 877-348-0502.

CareerOneStop consists of three separate career resource tools: 1) *America's Job Bank* allows you to

search through a database of over one million jobs nationwide, create and post your résumé online, and set up an automated job search. The database contains a wide range of mostly full-time private sector jobs that are available all over the country. Visit them at: www.ajb.org. 2) *America's Career InfoNet* provides information on educational, licensing, and certification requirements for different occupations by state. It also provides information on wages, cost of living, and employment trends, and helps job seekers identify their skills and write résumés and cover letters. They feature over 450 videos of different professions that you can easily see on your computer. You can also search for scholarships, loans, and other financial assistance programs. Visit their website at: www.acinet.org. 3) *America's Service Locator* provides listings of local employment service offices which help job seekers find jobs and help employers find qualified workers at no cost to either one of them.

These local employment service centers help people develop the skills they need to get a job. Beware that these centers have different names in different locations. They can be called Job Center, Workforce Center, One Stop Career Center, Career Planning Center, etc. You will find the name of the one closest to you when you enter your zip code at this website: www.servicelocator.org. (In this book, I refer to them as One Stop Centers.)

Anyone can get help at these centers, from people who need help writing their résumé to people who have other barriers that interfere with their ability to get a job—for example, people who don't have transportation or who don't speak English. Even people with

more severe barriers like welfare recipients who have never had a paying job or ex-convicts can get help at these employment centers.

The main focus of One Stop Centers is to prepare you to get a job and then help you find one. If, for example, you need to take an ESL course, they will refer you to one. In the meantime they will help you improve your résumé, your networking skills, and your interviewing skills. When your résumé is ready, they will match your skills and credentials with available jobs. They will give you the leads, but what is even better, they will call ahead so that the employer will take your call or read your résumé. They will help you conduct searches on the Internet, post your résumé, and find more information about companies in which you are interested.

Typically, when you visit a One Stop Center you fill out an application to become a member. As with all the services they provide, membership is free. After you receive an orientation that covers the services they offer, you can:

- use the self-service section (use computers, Internet, copiers; read newspapers and business publications; pick up flyers on specific topics; research the job bank, etc.);
- attend workshops on a variety of topics from English as a Second Language to using computers to writing résumés to learning specific computer programs;
- talk to an employment counselor about your résumé, job search objectives, and strategies; get job leads; and, be referred to additional workshops; and,

- be referred to intensive services where someone will sit with you and help you with any barriers you might have whether it is that you don't speak English, have no transportation to get to a job, have child care needs or clothing needs, etc.

Insider's Tip

"Nobody leaves this place without an answer to their questions," says Ali Tarchoun, Program Specialist at the One Stop Center in White Plains, New York. "Not only do we have partners like community colleges and the Department of Social Services, but we work with all of the nonprofit organizations in the community. If someone tells me they can't pay their child care, I put them in touch with the agency that offers child care subsidies. If someone is about to be evicted, I put them in touch with the right person to help them."

These centers are well versed in the resources available in your community, the ones that can help you develop the skills you need to find a job. They work closely with employment agencies because many companies only hire through employment agencies. Whatever your situation, if you need training in any area (maybe you are changing careers or you have been out of a job for a while) you should visit your local One Stop Center. Approach them with ease. They don't ask if you are legal or not.

To find a center, go to www.servicelocator.org where you can enter your zip code and see a list of offices near you.

Keep in mind that organizations such as the One Stop will help you get ready to look for a job. In today's

competitive marketplace, you need to be prepared before you actually look for a job. To improve your chances of success, you need to have a good résumé; know yourself (What do you want from a job? Where do you want to be in five years? What do you have to offer?); know where to look for a job; know about the company to which you are applying; and, have good interviewing skills.

Taxes

Whether you work on your own or for someone else, whether you have legal documents to work or you don't, you should talk to an immigration lawyer about paying taxes even before you talk to your accountant. The lawyer can advise you on minimum income requirements, a very important issue if you are applying for adjustment of status or for a job.

If you are employed, your employer will require your Social Security number in order to withhold your taxes. If you are self-employed, you can report your taxes with your Social Security number or—if you don't qualify for one—with an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN).

Right now, you need to send your income tax report along with the application for your ITIN in order to get a number. Consult one of your local nonprofit organizations that specialize in immigration issues, an accountant, or your immigration lawyer on this topic. It is usually a safe step to take if you are undocumented.

For more information on obtaining your social security number, contact your local Social Security office. You can find the address at www.socialsecurity.gov.

Your Degree

Any degree you have obtained in your country needs to be evaluated here to establish its equivalency to the American system. (Do not forget to bring the copy of your diploma, the translation, and the evaluation to your interviews. Companies here have a hard time doing background checks on education received overseas, therefore reducing your chances of getting a job offer.)

Obtain the originals of all your educational degrees beginning with your high school diploma. Have the documents translated by a certified public translator. You can find one by calling your local school for translators. They usually have a list of graduates and can tell you who has been certified. For every degree, you not only need the diploma, but two additional documents: 1) one stating the courses you took and the grades you received and 2) a second stating the number of hours involved in each course (not necessary for a high school diploma). This is a crucial piece of information because many countries issue graduate degrees with fewer courses than required by the American system, but with a larger number of hours involved. It can make the difference between getting your degree evaluated as a bachelor's or as a master's.

Contact the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) at www.naces.org for a list of credential evaluation companies. On this web-

site you will even find companies that offer their application form in Spanish such as Educational Credential Evaluators (ECE) at www.ece.org. I suggest you check out World Education Service at www.wes.org, a company used by many employers and educational institutions. Visit their website to obtain all the information that is relevant to your country and your career. Be aware that most of these companies work exclusively via email and snail mail. They don't see clients in person.

Professional Certification

To find out about any special certifications you might need to validate your degree in the United States, go to www.acinet.org and click on "Certification Finder." There you can enter the name of the certifying association (American Occupational Therapy Association, for example) or click on your occupation to obtain the names of the entities that will give you information regarding requirements for certification.

Type of University you Graduated From

If you have a degree from a prestigious university in your country, it is important that you find a way to convey to your interviewer what kind of university you attended. You need to find a line or two to describe how the UNAM is ranked in Mexico or the Universidad Católica de Chile in Chile or the UBA in Argentina. In your résumé, you can include something like: Master in Fine Arts, Universidad de Buenos Aires (Ivy League equivalent).

Arturo Poiré, a sociologist with expertise in Human Resources who works in a global financial services company, suggests that if you don't have a degree from a prestigious school in the U.S., you can get a certificate from a prestigious association. Many professional associations offer certificates that are well regarded by the business community. If a master's degree is out of the question, try another option. For example, the American Management Association offers certification programs in the following areas: Administrative Support, Communication and Interpersonal Skills, Finance and Accounting, Human Resources and Training, Leadership, Management and Supervisory Skills, Marketing, Project Management, and Sales.