CAREER ADVANCEMENT: TIPS for SUCCESS
A COLLECTION of JOURNAL ARTICLE REPRINTS
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Welcome!

You've reached for this booklet because you strive for recognition, respect, and reward; and you know the American Dietetic Association (ADA) is your partner.

One of ADA's core offerings is career enhancement tools. Nearly 60% of members join/renew membership with ADA for the professional development offerings. Through its Member Value Committee and Professional Development Committee, ADA materializes strategies to enhance members' knowledge and skills, and this booklet is one such strategy.

Recent member surveys* show that more than 70% of you asked for more self-help materials on career development, leadership skills, and career counseling. In this day of competition and with the changes in the health care arena, that makes perfect sense.

Gathered here are the most requested recent Journal articles on dietetics career fundamentals: From cutting-edge resume and interviewing tips, career interruptions, and unique career choices, to salary and compensation negotiation skills.

Today's wellness-oriented environment is primed for the food and nutrition professional to assume a leadership and valued role in the clinical, foodservice, private practice, academic, and other areas. The best person to promote the dietetics profession is you, and on behalf of the ADA and its Member Value Committee and Professional Development Committee, we offer you this compilation of tools to build your success.

Sincerely,

Mary Ellen Beindorff, RD, LD, Chair
Professional Development Committee

Deborah K. Lofley, RD, Chair
Member Value Committee

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Any search for employment can be daunting, but looking for that first job can often be overwhelming. You may feel that you are finally getting the chance to prove yourself to the world, and that might mean a lot of pressure. While some of the classic job search dos and don’ts still apply, technological advances and new trends are important to keep in mind when trying to get a foot in the door. With a little hard work, before you know it, you’ll have landed that memorable first position.

**Setting Goals**

New food and nutrition professionals may have immediate dreams of working in a very specific field or area, but experts suggest starting a career with as varied an experience as possible.

“The broader and more diverse that first job is, the better it can prepare you for the future,” says Jean R. Caton, MS, MBA, RD. “A few years in a hospital is not the only way, but it’s a good way of getting broad experience.” Caton, a life coach based in St Louis, MO, with experience in clinical and corporate settings, has had articles published about career advancement and has also spoken on the topic at the Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo and at several state dietetics conferences.

Caton says that just because you might dream of one day working at an eating disorders clinic or something equally specific, that doesn’t mean you can’t gain a lot from a more general entry-level job. You can use this time to assess your professional strengths and explore future goals to make sure they are right for you.

“I have clients do informational interviews and contact people with experience in the field they are interested in,” says Caton. Not only is it a great way to gain information, it’s also a networking tool for when they’re ready to move on. A job that builds general strengths is often also an opportunity to polish skills such as using the written word effectively and speaking in public, adds Caton. By the time you are ready to make a career move to a more specific part of the profession, you might discover the dream job you had at 20 doesn’t match with your strengths or current interests.

**Perfecting the Resume**

Cindy Krainen, RD, a recruiter for Michigan-based Harper Associates, advises new food and nutrition professionals to allow themselves plenty of time to develop a quality resume. “They cannot do a resume in one day,” warns Krainen, who has been assisting food and nutrition professionals in finding employment for 19 years.

For food and nutrition professionals just entering the workforce, a one-page limit is a must, and you should put the emphasis on the right parts of your professional and educational background, says Krainen (see Figure 1). Lengthy lists of awards from your high school years and other similarly irrelevant information are not necessary. If dietetics is a second career, only briefly list previous places of employment unless the tasks you performed there strongly correlate in some way to the job for which you are applying. Instead, space should be spent describing your internship or coordinated program experience.

“That’s the most important part, and I’ve seen resumes where they don’t describe it at all,” says Krainen. “Give a nice overall description with a few specific points. Highlight aspects or outstanding things you did that other internships or programs don’t always provide.”

While Krainen admits some might disagree, she believes food and nutrition professionals just starting out do not need to list an objective on their resumes because they often take up room. Also, at such an early stage in a career, objectives are usually too general to be useful. Although Krainen says it is not a hard and fast rule, she also advises her clients to place education before experience but spend only a few lines on it. Using bullets or short sentences is a matter of preference, but no matter what format you choose, make sure the resume is proofread several times by more than one person.

“Spell check is not the be all and end all,” says Krainen. Computer programs often miss certain words, and they don’t know whether or not your phone number or address is correct. “I’ve received resumes where I’ve called the number on them and it’s a wrong number because the person didn’t check over the resume,” says Krainen. “Adding an e-mail address is a must, but make sure not to use an overly cute or childish sounding name. Sometimes you’ll see ‘cute-chickie’ as the e-mail,” laughs Krainen. “You need to watch your screen names as well as your answering machine’s and cell phone’s outgoing messages.”

Kyle Shadix, RD, a New York–based chef, member of the American Dietetic Association’s (ADA’s) House of Delegates, and coauthor of Becoming a Nutritionist: A Career Guide for Students and Dietitians, has advised new RDs as an instructor at both Columbia University’s Teachers College Nutrition Program and the New York Restaurant School at the Art Institute of New York City. Shadix says a developing trend among new food and nutrition professionals is creating a Web site using readily available software or the help of a knowledgeable friend and then adding the Web address to the resume.

The site should be simple and professional looking, says Shadix, and can include your resume, links to the

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places you did your internship and went to school, information on any awards you might have won, text of articles you helped research or write, and even relevant information on places you volunteered. A nice, professional photograph on the site may also help a recruiter connect a name with a face.

While Shadix agrees with Krainen that resumes stay at one page, he has suggested to his students that they also include a short, one paragraph biography on the back written in third person. The biography should include the same information that’s on the front of your resume, but relayed in a different, more personal format that some prefer. “Some people are more interested in reading your information that way,” says Shadix. “It shows your writing style. It captures you a bit more.”

All of the experts remind you that not everyone who looks at your resume has the eyes of a 21-year-old. Avoid unusual fonts and tiny print.
DONNA D. DIETITIAN  
123 Any Street  
Anywhere, USA 12345  
555/123-2424  
donna@food.com

TRAINING & OPERATIONS MANAGER with over 20 years of diversified experience in developing, motivating and leading personnel to achieve organizational objectives. Proven ability to:

● Achieve corporate goals by utilizing proven management techniques  
● Organize daily operations to enhance efficiency and promote open communication  
● Quickly identify, analyze and implement positive solutions to operational problems  
● Promote major changes by motivating and empowering others to become involved

QUALIFICATIONS: A personable, multi-dimensional professional offering relevant experience encompassing:

● Influential Presentations  
● Customer Relations/Service  
● Team Leadership/Coordination  
● Organizing/Planning Operations  
● Crisis Management/Resolution  
● Developing & Motivating Staff  
● Evaluating/Maximizing Potential  
● Independent Project Management  
● Market/Communication Expertise

SELECTED ACHIEVEMENTS

Restructured operating systems and improved productivity that reduced the man-hours budget by 40% overall in 8 years of hospital management.  
Contributed to compliance with federal regulations by establishing procedures and administering a quality competency check program for 50 employees.  
Trained and monitored production staff to maintain food safety standards that generated improved operating procedures and “0” recommendations from the county health department for 3 consecutive years.  
Researched, developed and implemented practical and entertaining nutrition curriculum for aspiriing foodservice professionals for their personal application and to benefit the general public.  
Coordinated team effort to consolidate the patient menu of 12 distinct hospitals, and facilitate $12MM contract with vendor to achieve corporate goals and objectives of increased purchasing power.  
Mentored 16 dietetic interns annually at a culinary institute, exposing them to fellow professionals in the food industry and alternative career opportunities.  
Investigated and promoted the decision to purchase a $300K tray delivery system to improve the quality and efficiency of the daily operation and afford the department future opportunities.  
Exhibited strong ability to “go the extra mile” and gain cooperative teamwork of staff, leading to the continued delivery of services and maintenance of operations during times of reorganization and disruption.  
Independently surveyed the marketplace, and developed and implemented innovative promotions, generating a 30% increase in hospital cafeteria participation.  
Demonstrated dietetic and management expertise by developing and implementing monthly creative food events for residents and guests in a 180-bed nursing facility, leading to enhanced market exposure and improved client satisfaction.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE: Excellent background in Training/Operations Management developed in leadership positions including:  
Lead Instructor & Dietetic Internship Supervisor, USA Culinary Institute;  
Manager of Patient Food Services, Any Hospital;  
Director of Food Services, Nursing and Rehab Center;  
Administrative Dietitian, Another Hospital; and  
Clinical Dietitian, Yet Another Hospital.

EXPANDED PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

USA Culinary Institute - Anywhere, USA  
Lead Instructor and Dietetic Internship Supervisor - 1999 to Present  
Educate and train students in a wide variety of subjects including nutrition, sanitation, food service supervision, food and beverage management, and math. Established association with Any Hospital, USA and Local Family Health, Co. and developed curriculum for Dietetic Internship Affiliation Site Program. Teach continuing education courses for professional chefs.

(continued)
Krainen says it’s a good idea to list any scholarships you’ve won as well as any certifications you’ve earned (eg, SafeServ certification). But with computer education being so pervasive, it’s a waste of space to list your knowledge of common programs like Microsoft Word or PowerPoint. If you’re familiar with a specific nutrition program, however, make sure to list it. That goes for any knowledge you might have of a foreign language.

Shadix and Krainen remind you to avoid using the letters RDE on your resume. This acronym, which implies you have completed your training but have not yet taken the Registration Examination for Dietitians, is not an approved or official credential. Instead of using RDE, you can address your status in your cover letter. You may, of course, add RD (registered dietitian) or DTR (dietetic technician, registered) to your resume if you are still job hunting after you pass the exam.

Lastly, references should not take up space on the resume, says Krainen, but can be supplied on a separate sheet. Most employers will often contact you before taking the time to communicate with a reference. Your main concern regarding references should be that they are current and available to speak for you, and you should have at least three.
BUSINESS OF DIETETICS

For more resume tips and other career advice, be sure to check out the career resources section of ADA’s Web site (www.eatright.org). See Figures 1 and 2 for examples of resumes for both a first-time job seeker and a more experienced job seeker.

SEARCHING FOR THE RIGHT JOB

So how do you know where to send a resume? And what about a cover letter? The days of subscribing to an out-of-town paper to search the classifieds are over. With new technology, a few keystrokes can help you search for a job in your hometown and all over the country. Before you begin your official search, Krainen suggests you start a file where you keep articles and notes about the dietetics job market, including the names and numbers of people who might help you find work. The file can be a useful repository when you start your hunt.

When is the right time to start applying? Krainen advises that you don’t send out resumes and cover letters until about 2 months before you are ready to begin working. Being too much of an early bird could translate into your file collecting dust on a recruiter’s desk. If you know you will be moving (or want to move) to a new city, start making contacts earlier than that. If possible, try to schedule a time when you will be in that city and available for interviews. Be prepared to pay your own way.

As for cover letters, they should be proofread as carefully as your resume. Because you’ll send out several, be sure the name on the letter matches the person you’re sending it to. If you’re applying out of town, let potential employers know when you’ll be available for an interview and make it clear you’re willing to pay to get there. Your cover letter is the time to clarify your objectives—for example, you are searching for a job that will give you broad experience in the field of dietetics and present you with challenges you will learn from. The letter is also the time to let your potential employer know when you are scheduled to take the Registration Examination for Dietitians if you haven’t taken it already.

Should you send the resume via e-mail or through the regular mail? While Krainen says most employers prefer e-mail these days, she advises you never send an unsolicited resume via e-mail. “It might get dumped in a junk folder, or they don’t like e-mail,” she says.

If the employer does request you send the resume in the body of the e-mail, be aware that formatting issues can wreak havoc on your carefully laid out creation. Krainen suggests e-mailing the resume to yourself and to a friend or family member first as a test. Also, an e-mailed resume doesn’t mean you shouldn’t write a professional cover letter in the body of the message—this means capital letters and proper punctuation. If your resume is sent as an attachment, make sure to include your name and contact information in the body of the message in case the employer can’t open the resume and wants to contact you.

Shadix reminds you to look beyond the traditional dietetics job banks and search other job databases like the nonprofit job Web site www.idealist.org. (A small but important reminder from Shadix: Remember when searching online to try various spellings of the word dietitian [eg, ‘dietician’]. Many human resources employees who write up the employment opportunity may not know the correct spelling.)

Network whenever and wherever you can: Become a member of a dietetics practice group. Join a professional organization. Volunteer.

Resume Writing Tips for Entry-Level RDs and DTRs*

Many different styles of resumes exist; one is not necessarily better than another. Regardless of the type of resume you select, some rules always apply:

- Accuracy is vital in regard to spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Do not rely on your computer for checking errors.
- Information must be factual; do not exaggerate dates or other information. The only exception is that you may state your graduation date in advance (ie, if it’s March 2007 and you plan to graduate or complete your internship in May 2007).
- Your resume should be clear, concise, and easy to read. Make sure that your resume formats correctly in the body of an e-mail; try e-mailing a few test resumes to friends or family to be certain. Don’t put contact info too close to the top of the page or it may not print off.
- Do not use personal pronouns (I, me, and we); save those for the cover letter.
- Use good quality paper. Any color is okay, but dramatic colors are not recommended.
- Buy plenty of extra blank paper for cover letters, envelopes, etc. You may mail some.
- Before you begin writing, think about what relevant accomplishments you have made so far. Highlight what you have done during your program that makes you unique.
- Divide information into categories (eg, education, employment) and begin each category with the most recent information first. For first-time job seekers, education should be your first category. Include dates (month and year) of education and employment in chronological order.
- Limit the resume to one page.

• Make your registration route clear (coordinated program or internship). List coordinated program under education or separate practicum.
• Include maiden name, if applicable, to facilitate reference checking.
• A career objective is not necessary. Discuss your interests in a cover letter.
• Include a permanent address and effective date if you are moving soon after you complete your program. Include area codes. It’s fine to include a cell phone but indicate that it is and remember to answer it appropriately. Also remember to keep the messages on your answering machine professional. Do include an e-mail address. Don’t rely on just an e-mail or cell number. We all know there are times when they may not be working.
• Never use the RDE acronym on a resume; explain your status in your cover letter. Add RD or DTR after your name if you are still job hunting after you pass the exam.
• Begin sentences with action oriented verbs. Avoid repetition. Use a thesaurus.
• Include food/nutrition-related jobs or volunteer activities. If it was relevant experience, describe your duties. Unrelated work experience may be included but don’t elaborate. As your career progresses, delete these preprofessional experiences.
• Grade point averages are not necessary. Include any honors, awards, certifications, and scholarships.
• Do not include any information related to high school except National Merit Scholarship or other nationally recognized awards.
• Include fluency in a language if applicable.
• Listing computer skills may take up space, but you should list any nutrition programs.
• References should be placed on a separate matching sheet. Three are ideal. The list should include name, title, address, phone number, and your relationship. Include at least one from each dietetic program, college (if different than dietetic program), and work experience.
• Proofread. Then ask someone else to proofread it, too.
Getting that First Job: Tips for the Interview

This article is reprinted from the October 2006 issue of the Journal (2006;106:1546-1548).

In last month’s issue we gave you tips on perfecting your resume and applying for jobs. Now you’ve sent out your resumes and you’ve gotten some call backs, and it’s time to ace the interview. What can you expect, and what can give you an edge so you land that job?

HAVING A PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDE

In her nearly 20 years of working as a recruiter, Cindy Krainen, RD, of Michigan-based Harper Associates, has seen registered dietitians just starting out make critical errors when it comes to nailing the job interview. Some interviewees bring up the topic of salary and vacation right away or dress inappropriately. Others have forgotten to turn off their cell phones before an interview or, even worse, answered a ringing phone in front of a potential employer. One of the most important things you can do to perform well in the job interview is to maintain a professional focus from beginning to end.

“Some young dietitians don’t realize there is competition for every job and so they display an attitude,” says Krainen. “It’s ‘what I need,’ instead of ‘what I can bring to the organization.’”

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

A polite, professional attitude begins when you are contacted to set up the interview, says Krainen. Allow yourself plenty of time when scheduling a meeting—some interviews, especially if they’re going well, can last several hours and involve speaking with several employees in the organization. If you know you will have another important obligation on the day you are asked to come in, politely inform the employer of your time constraints in advance and ask if they believe you will have enough time or if you should reschedule.

Before you arrive for the interview, it’s crucial to research the company or organization, says Krainen and many other experts. Develop questions that reflect this knowledge and practice asking them.

Sometimes a personal touch helps. Kyle Shadix, RD, a New York–based chef and a member of the American Dietetic Association’s House of Delegates as well as coauthor of the book Becoming A Nutritionist: A Career Guide for Students and Dietitians, has advised new registered dietitians as an instructor at both Columbia University’s Teachers College Nutrition Program and the New York Restaurant School at the Art Institute of New York City. Shadix suggests that finding a potential commonality with an interviewer beforehand can help. For example, if it’s known that you and the person you’ll be meeting with went to the same university, you may want to bring that up as a starting point. Shadix even suggests wearing lapel pins that show your affiliations with universities and professional organizations. You never know who might recognize them.

“It puts you in a nice place and creates a personal connection,” says Shadix, who also advises you to allow plenty of time to get to the interview site. Do a practice run just in case. As for what to wear? “It’s a conservative profession,” says Shadix. “Err on the side of caution.” Wear an outfit that is modest and fits you well.

THE BIG DAY

Once you’ve arrived on time, make sure your cell phone is off. Offer a firm handshake and observe what Shadix calls the 80/20 rule.

“You’re supposed to be talking 80 percent of the time,” he says. “You’re supposed to be asking questions. Don’t be a mouse.” A potential employer would probably not have requested an interview if he or she didn’t think you were capable of performing the job’s duties, says Shadix. But it’s your performance during the interview that determines if you’re the right person to perform those duties at that particular place of employment.

“Not asking questions makes you look disinterested,” echoes Krainen. Still, she adds, remember to make your questions appropriate for the person who is interviewing you. You may have different inquiries depending on if the person you are speaking with is a representative from human resources (HR) or your potential future boss.

“If it’s someone from HR, you can’t ask them what kind of tube feedings they use,” says Krainen. “That HR person may feel intimidated and not pass you along.”

Questions about opportunities for professional development are always good, but avoid asking about salary and vacation right off the bat. This can make you seem too aggressive, says Krainen. Let the employer guide this part of the conversation.

Fielding questions from the interviewer is also part of the process. While it’s important to be honest about future goals, say experts interviewed for this article, it’s equally important to remain open minded.

“Young dietitians can be too highly selective,” says Jean R. Caton, MS, MBA, RD, a life coach based in St Louis, MO with experience in clinical and corporate settings. Caton says even if the job you’re interviewing for isn’t necessarily your dream job, give it a chance. If you’re asked where you think you might be in 10 years and you’re not sure, answer with integrity but without offending the employer.

“We’re not visionaries,” says Caton. “But you could answer by saying you’re excited about different possibilities, and you’re looking for an opportunity to advance your skills.”

Caton also suggests being professional but being yourself. Much of an interview is seeing if you would fit in

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with the culture of the company. “Show you can relate to people, that you have integrity,” she says. “That’s more important than trying to finesse or impress.”

While Caton says you should be open to many jobs, it is important to avoid taking a job you know would be a bad match for you. “If that little voice is saying, ‘I’m not really sure,’ you might want to give the job a chance. But if it’s shouting really loudly, you’re only going to end up being back on the job market in 6 months to a year,” admits Caton.

If the opposite is true—you really want the job—experts say you shouldn’t be afraid to show your enthusiasm in a professional way. Krainen says that obvious excitement and interest might be what gives you the edge over other candidates. “You’ve got to affirm your interest.”

AFTER THE INTERVIEW—NOW WHAT?
So the interview is over and you’ve been told that someone will be in touch. What do you do next? It’s very important that you send a note thanking the potential employer for their time. (Remember to take business cards at the interview so you know how to address the note.) If you’re told during the interview that a decision will be made in the next day or two, Krainen says a polite thank you e-mail is appropriate and time sensitive. However, if you know a decision will not be made for a week or more, send a traditional thank you note via the regular mail the day after the interview. Whatever method is used, Shadix stresses the note should refer to something that was discussed during the interview. “Don’t make it generic,” says Shadix. The thank you note, adds Krainen, is also another opportunity to stress your interest in the position.

It’s also important to make sure your interviewer has all of your contact information so they can reach you when it comes time for them to let you know their decision. That means more than just an e-mail address or a cell phone number. “We know those are not always 100% reliable,” says Krainen. Make sure employers know what number is your cell phone and provide a landline phone number as well. Include area codes, especially if you are interviewing out of town. Of course, it’s important to make sure all your outgoing messages—both at home and on your cell phone—are professional and polite.

Should you also make a follow-up call? Krainen says it’s important not to be overly persistent—it may turn employers off. However, if you haven’t heard anything once the hiring deadline passes, it is appropriate to call and politely inquire about the status of the position.

If you don’t get the job, it’s also important to be gracious. Like most professions, the world of dietetics is smaller than you might think at first. A person who interviewed you one time might become your boss or colleague down the line. “Stay in touch,” reminds Krainen. “You never know what might happen.”

Interviewing Tips for Entry-Level Registered Dietitians*

Before the Interview:
- Research the facility or company.
- Prepare questions you would like to ask.
- Plan what to wear ahead of time.
- Give thought as to how you will answer typical questions.
- If you are unfamiliar with the location, take a trial run if time permits. Take the phone number with you to the actual interview in case you get lost or are running late.
- Gather all pertinent information you may need (extra resumes, references, data to complete an application form).
- Eat before you go.
- Turn off your cell phone! If you forget, do NOT answer it during the interview.
- Allow plenty of time so that those interviewing you feel you have placed the meeting as a top priority. Interviews can go for several hours, even all day.

During the Interview:
- Always be on time.
- Shake hands firmly.
- Make eye contact—it confirms your attentiveness.
- Show enthusiasm, self-confidence, and a smile!
- Do not initiate discussion of salary, benefits, and time-off policies.
- Listen carefully and think before you speak.
- Be conscious of your appearance. Avoid fidgeting and other nervous habits.
- Don’t criticize or divulge confidential information about your present employer or coworkers.
- Thank the interviewer for their time and send a business-like thank you note after the interview.

Health Coaching: A New Opportunity for Dietetics Professionals

In recent years, health coaching has emerged as an exciting new opportunity for dietetics professionals. Unfortunately, many of them are unaware of this possible career path, or don't realize that their skills qualify them for such a position. Part of that lack of awareness may be due to the fact that the field of health coaching is still growing and evolving and is not yet clearly defined. Fundamentally, though, health coaching is about giving people the information they need to make informed decisions about how to lead healthful lives. As the recognized authority on food and nutrition, dietetics professionals possess the expertise and training necessary to do just that.

WHAT IS HEALTH COACHING?
The term “health coach” is widely used and doesn’t require credentials or guarantee the quality of health advice given. People calling themselves health coaches range from credentialed health professionals, such as registered nurses and registered dietitians working with hospitals or disease management programs, to untrained individuals espousing the benefits of their own health and life philosophies on personal Web sites. Obviously, any definition of health coaching relevant to dietetics professionals applies only in the former context. In 2003, Palmer and colleagues offered such a definition: “Health coaching is the practice of health education and health promotion within a coaching context to enhance the wellbeing of individuals and to facilitate the achievement of their health-related goals” (1). In addition, Sarah Hughes, RGN, RSCN, emphasizes that health coaching promotes independence in the patient, as coaching can be used to “identify gaps in knowledge and clarify understanding of health issues” and “increase self-awareness and knowledge of . . . resources,” which increases the patient’s ability for self-care and healthful, independent living (2). Generally speaking, health coaching consists of providing advice to clients in order to help them learn to develop more healthful behaviors on their own.

Health coaching is about giving people the information they need to make informed decisions about how to lead healthful lives.

As important as knowing what health coaching is, is knowing what health coaching is not. Health coaching is not disease treatment. For dietetics professionals, it is important to draw the distinction between providing general health information and medical nutrition therapy (MNT). MNT is a systematic process that involves performing nutrition diagnosis, therapy, and counseling services for the purpose of disease management, while health coaching is advice. Health coaches do not assess patients’ health or make diagnoses; they rely on the diagnoses of physicians and then use their expert knowledge to advise patients about the best way to manage their health issues. They also do not prescribe a specific course of action, as in MNT, but only make suggestions and provide information and motivation, leaving it up to the patient’s discretion whether and how strictly to adhere to the coach’s advice. Any dietetics professional pursuing a career in health coaching should be aware of this distinction and, as with any position, familiarize himself or herself with state licensure laws to ensure compliance.

Finally, because of the wide range of people calling themselves health coaches and the variety of services performed under the rubric of health coaching, it is important for credentialed health professionals such as registered dietitians to distinguish themselves within the field by emphasizing their education, experience, and training. Clients only generally familiar with the term health coach may be skeptical about the legitimacy of the advice they are given, so it is important to reassure them that although they may have heard that “anybody can be a health coach,” they are actually getting expert advice from a health professional with years of education and advanced training. The National Commission for Health Education Credentialing has attempted to improve the credibility of health coaches by introducing the Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) credential (3). They require a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree with a major or concentration in health education or a specific concentration in a particular area of responsibility. Then, once a health educator earns the CHES credential, he or she must maintain it by earning continuing education credits toward recertification every 5 years. Currently there are more than 6,000 people carrying the CHES designation, illustrating the importance of credentials in the health coaching field. Dietetics professionals with the Registered Dietitian (RD) or Dietetic Technician, Registered (DTR) creden-

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tial can go a long way toward assuring clients of their expertise by simply including those two or three important letters after their names.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

A major factor driving the demand for health coaches is the rising cost of health care. Employers seeking to reduce the cost of providing health insurance to employees have increasingly turned to disease management programs. Disease management involves actively managing the care of patients with chronic conditions that are likely to be costly, and includes pharmaceutical treatment as well as secondary prevention (4). According to Mary Hager, PhD, RD, FADA, senior manager of Regulatory Affairs for the American Dietetic Association (ADA), “Most health coaches are employed by disease management companies, which typically contract with insurance plans or with employers. Disease management firms generally have disease- or condition-specific products that are designed to manage a disease, such as diabetes, and prevent the development of complications that are costly.” Coaches work alongside physicians, helping individuals improve their compliance with the physician’s treatment plan. In doing so, health coaching can provide organizations with significant savings in health insurance costs by reducing the risk that a patient will need costly medical care, thereby lowering insurance premiums.

In the 2003 Kaiser/Health Research and Educational Trust survey, two thirds of employers surveyed indicated that they believed that disease management was very or somewhat effective (2), a belief that has led to the continued growth of the health coaching field and increased opportunities for dietetics professionals. In 2005, for example, two major health care companies announced disease management programs aimed at treating patients with obesity and metabolic syndrome. CIGNA Corp of Philadelphia, PA, launched a clinical management program to assist patients with obesity-related illnesses, and Richmond, VA–based Health Management Corp added metabolic syndrome to the list of chronic conditions addressed by its disease management program (5). Dietetics professionals, who have long been leaders in the fight against obesity and metabolic syndrome, are ideal candidates to serve as health coaches in such programs.

Though the majority of health coaches are employed by disease management programs, there are also other organizations that provide dietetics professionals with the opportunity to put their expertise to use as health coaches. One such organization is GlobalFit, a network of fitness centers that allows companies to offer their employees discounted fitness benefits. In addition to offering access to fitness centers and personal training, GlobalFit employs health coaches to assist clients with smoking cessation, stress management, and weight loss (6). Insurance companies have also turned to health coaching as a means of reducing the medical costs of those they insure. UniCare, for example, employs a team of health professionals, including dietetics professionals, as part of a program designed to assist insurance plan participants in adopting behaviors that lead to a more healthful lifestyle (7). As evidence of health coaching’s effectiveness in both improving health and reducing health care costs continues to mount (6), demand for health coaches will rise and the employment opportunities for dietetics professionals will continue to expand.

FROM DIETETICS TO HEALTH COACHING

Why do dietetics professionals make excellent health coaches? “Registered dietitians have the skills and education, through coursework and supervised practice in psychology and behavior modification, as well as medication and health assessment, that are well suited for health coaching,” says Hager. ADA member Stephanie Grimes, MS, RD, is an excellent example of a dietitian who made the successful transition into health coaching. After graduating from Lipscomb University and the Middle Tennessee School of Nutrition and Food Science, Grimes worked variously as a nursing home consultant, a foodservice manager, and as a registered dietitian at a dialysis clinic without finding a position that fully captured her attention. When a colleague told her that Nashville, TN–based Healthways, the nation’s largest provider of disease and care management services, was hiring dietetics professionals as health coaches, she seized the opportunity and was hired as a member care coordinator. In this role, Grimes provided health coaching to patients with a variety of chronic illnesses and health needs, including diabetes, coronary heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and asthma.

Grimes’ experience offers insight into the specific duties of a health coach and the skills needed to perform them. In her role as member care coordinator, Grimes would have chronically ill patients referred to her for health coaching. After an initial assessment of a patient’s dietary needs and issues, she would begin telephonic counseling, which could consist of a single session on food label education, or an ongoing program designed to encourage and assist the patient in accomplishing a series of predetermined health goals, potentially including dietary changes, physical activity, or smoking cessation. While Grimes was prepared by her dietetics education to handle the majority of these tasks, there were additional skills required to perform effectively in her role as health coach. Because health coaching is conducted primarily over the phone, Grimes stresses that communication skills are especially important. Hager agrees, stating that “listening skills and cognitive behavioral techniques would be essential” for any dietetics professional working as a health coach. A wide variety of other skills and knowledge are equally important to successful health coaching, which is why Healthways and other disease management companies such as Health Dialog and Gordian Health Solutions provide in-house training to their health coaches. Grimes’ own training included building skills in motivational interviewing, empathy, and behavior change techniques, as well as disease-specific education on her patients’ chronic illnesses. Exemplifying the commitment to lifelong learning that is the hallmark of dietetics professionals, Grimes effectively incorporated this new information into her broad base of dietetics knowledge to become a successful health coach, eventually earning the distinction of being named a Recognized Young Dietitian of the Year.
the ADA in 2005. For her, health coaching wasn’t just a new job, it was a breakthrough.

Grimes’ successful career path illustrates yet another benefit of pursuing employment in health coaching. Since starting at Healthways as a member care coordinator, she has gone on to become a business systems analyst, working to develop a clinical information system to facilitate and improve patient care. Because most health coaches are employed by disease management programs and other large organizations, the position offers the opportunity to establish a reputation at a company and then advance within that organization. Grimes cites herself as an example and mentions that several colleagues at Healthways have moved from health coaching into account management, sales, and product development. In her mind, there is one key element that makes these transitions, and the transition from dietetics professional to health coach, possible: “I believe the decision-making skills I learned as a dietetics student and developed as a dietetics professional allowed me to become an effective health coach and prepared me to succeed in the future, no matter what I choose to do.”

References
Unique Careers for Dietetics Professionals

Four dietetics professionals have found their own niche within some rather unique environments. They saw opportunities, took several risks, and, in the end, say they are happier than they would have been within a traditional professional career track.

ORDERING THE COURT

Nancy Collins, PhD, RD, has always known that her main mission as a dietetics professional was to improve nursing home health care. However, a decade ago she discovered that some of her biggest influence would be not only within the homes themselves, but the legal system. Aside from running her own Florida consulting firm since 1990, Collins has served as an expert witness in several nursing home court cases.

“It started out about 10 years ago when I was asked to do two cases. The next year it was six, then 15. Right now I’m involved in more than 20 cases,” says Collins, who is also chair of the Nutrition Entrepreneur dietetic practice group.

She specializes in long-term care and geriatrics, specifically wound healing and involuntary weight loss. “Many are in nursing homes, have a wound that didn’t heal and lose weight and eventually die,” she says. Collins has done both defense (for the nursing home company) and plaintiff (for the loved one’s family) work, which helps her see both sides of long-term care issues.

Court cases can be time-consuming, but Collins, who has her PhD in dietetics, also has a busy consulting practice, primarily working with pharmaceutical companies on marketing materials, white papers, and monographs, among other projects. She’s paid for her legal services and it only makes up 25% of her annual work—people who become full-time expert witness are generally considered opportunistic, she says. Furthermore, you should participate because you have an expertise and a desire to help in a specific area, especially since you’ll be sitting on the stand . . . a lot.

“You need thorough knowledge of the law. I’ve seen a lot of dietetics professionals try to rush and get a proper understanding of the nursing system before a trial, but the lawyer’s job is to break down your credibility. ‘What makes you an expert?’ ‘Why do you know this?’” Collins says. “You have to anticipate what they are going to ask and what you are going to be questioned about. A 10,000-page history of a patient is not uncommon, so you need to read it . . . and be able to converse about it without getting flustered.”

This confrontation is exactly why Collins loves being a witness. “I like detail-oriented work. To me, it’s like a mental chess game.”

HELPING PEOPLE FIND THEIR WAY

Jean Caton, MS, RD, has a simple mission statement: “Inspiring and empowering the women of the world, one woman at a time.” It is a lofty goal, one that she found she could achieve better leaving the corporate world after 25 years and starting her own company, McKinley Coaching and Consulting, 2 years ago.

She found her calling as a life coach, something she might not have discovered without being in a traditional business environment. “I worked in the field of marketing and, in a way, was always coaching [other professionals]. It was just who I was,” says Caton, who also works on marketing and public relations for the Nutrition Entrepreneur dietetic practice group. “When I stepped out on my own, I already had people calling me ‘Coach.’”

Caton began studying at Coach U (www.coachu.com), a well-regarded online program that gives certifications in coaching, and found that she could do well in both professional and personal coaching. “I work as both a life coach and a coach for business people. Your life and your work, well, it’s all your life. You don’t shut your
life off when you go to work in the morning.”

However, Caton’s view wasn’t always so broad. “When I first embarked on coaching, I called it ‘My Food Coach.’ But then I started getting clients interested in [healthful] living, so I broadened it to ‘Healthy Living Coach,’ encompassing health, nutrition, and so forth. And then I realized that I was attracting people who didn’t want coaching, but dietetics—and I didn’t want to get involved with diet. I realized that the problem was my marketing. So I changed my marketing strategy and now I coach people on issues with personal identity, self-esteem, and negative self-talk, since you really have to clean up the inside in order to live a [more healthful] lifestyle.”

Her own challenge in finding a niche gives her the perspective to help other ambitious dietetics professionals as a consultant. “I also coach [dietetics professionals] on business skills. Many are great [dietetics professionals] and have opened their own practice, but they don’t have the business skills in their tool bag,” she says. “That’s how we are going to move forward. Whether we are entrepreneurial [dietetics professionals] or working within a hospital, we’re still business people. You need business skills and strong self-assurance, even if you’re trying to get a promotion or asking for a raise.”

WATCHING OUT FOR SHOPPERS

For Linda McDonald, MS, RD, publisher of Supermarket Savvy, her business that would eventually span the past 2 decades of her life came through one of her clients. Luckily, she was paying attention.

McDonald says she was doing food industry consulting and public relations, regularly contacting then-Supermarket Savvy publisher Leni Reed, MPH, RD, about reviewing company products in her newsletter. Reed was one of the first dietetics professionals to do supermarket tours and, with Supermarket Savvy, she gave the pros and cons of new major products on the shelf.

“So one time Leni mentioned that she was looking for someone to buy the company so she could move on to other endeavors, and at that point I was interested in having my own business,” McDonald says. She made Reed an offer, realizing that she was fulfilling a special niche that she had always been interested in. “There weren’t a whole lot of materials for [dietetics professionals] to use to educate consumers about shopping and [the newsletter is] a great format to get the info out to consumers about their buying decisions.”

The monthly print newsletter is now available online every other month, and McDonald hopes to go fully electronic soon. Her company also provides tip sheets, PowerPoint presentations, and other tools to help dietetics professionals educate their clientele.

However, she wants to reach more consumers directly as well, and hopes that going completely electronic—a cheaper route than print—will bring Supermarket Savvy to a price point welcome to the health-conscious layperson.

“What has intrigued me is taking the science info we are inundated with and putting it into terms, representations, and visuals in ways that consumers will understand,” she says. “The bigger challenge to me is to take one of these concepts, like n-3 fatty acids or whole grains, and to put it into a form that will really make the consumer want to choose a particular product.”

LONG-DISTANCE DIETETICS

It took Renata Shiloah, MS, RD, only a year of working in a hospital environment to realize that wasn’t where she wanted to be. “It was the same thing every day, but here it’s different every day.” When Shiloah says “here,” she means her house.

For the past 2 years, Shiloah has run a virtual dietetics business, Nutritionist 4 U Counseling, from her home office. Using the Internet, she guides and counsels clients on losing weight and having healthful diets. “I have a Yahoo! support group online called ‘Lose Weight Feel Great’, which consists of patients from my part-time work at a doctor’s office and my own clients,” she says. Shiloah also provides a monthly newsletter with recipes and other dietary tools.

She began virtual dietetics counseling on America Online in 1997, around the time the Internet was gaining popularity. It was a chat-room setup and, in those couple of years working with America Online, she realized the positives of being a virtual dietetics professional for her clients. “People can ask questions and find goal buddies. It works because it’s a way to keep them motivated and to meet other people, but they don’t feel the pressure online. No one really sees you,” Shiloah says.

At the same time, virtual counseling has allowed her to spend time with her five children while working from home. It’s all based on e-mail and Web updates, so punching a clock isn’t a problem. “I could do work at three in the morning if I liked,” she says. This also means that patients can contact her, via e-mail, any time they are in need. Some patients even include her on an instant messenger service, such as AOL Instant Messenger, that allows them to talk with her immediately in a chat room if she’s on the computer when they are.

Shiloah warns that, like most entrepreneur ventures, shifts in clients can mean money could be great one week and nonexistent the next. She recommends versatility. Like Caton and Collins, she has other work that keeps her financially secure, including dietetics work at a gym and a local doctor’s office. “You have to do different things to get ahead,” Shiloah says.

Contact these RDs

- Nancy Collins, expert witness and consultant, NCtheRD@aol.com
- Jean Caton, McKinley Coaching and Consulting, catonjr@sbcglobal.net
- Linda McDonald, MS, RD, Supermarket Savvy, www.supermarket.savvy.com
- Renata Shiloah, virtual counselor, www.nutritionist4u.com
Preparing for Reentry: Handling Career Interruptions

Career interruptions, whether unexpected or planned, can pose a difficult challenge for dietetics professionals looking to reenter the workforce after significant time spent away. This can be a frustrating, stressful experience, but, as with any challenge, with the right preparation and the necessary tools, career reentry can be achieved. In many cases, a return to dietetics after a career interruption can even provide entirely new opportunities.

The first step in successfully reentering the workforce is preparation. Even a sudden, unplanned career interruption can be handled effectively with the right plan in place. Long before leaving any position, a dietetics professional should begin cultivating relationships with peers and coworkers that will extend beyond the current workplace. During a career interruption, a network of such contacts provides a link to the profession, offering news of the field and connections to employment opportunities. A varied group of contacts can provide advice and ideas from a fresh perspective and open up possibilities that may otherwise have gone unexplored.

Cindy Heroux, RD, an author and wellness consultant in Oviedo, FL, spent 11 years away from dietetics. She explained that business associates in other wellness fields were very helpful in her career reentry process, and that, “Networking with other professionals in a variety of fields helped me evolve and expand my business to include all that it does now.” Janet V. Ross, RD, a clinical nutrition manager in Cincinnati, OH, stressed the importance of keeping an open mind to the new and different possibilities contacts across the entire spectrum of the health and wellness field may suggest. She advised anyone returning from a career interruption to, “Network with others in the field, even if it’s not ‘your end’ of the field. I never would have thought I would end up as a clinical nutrition manager. My contacts helped.”

One of the best ways to establish and maintain contacts is through professional associations at the local, regional, and national levels. The American Dietetic Association (ADA) and its affiliates offer a variety of resources and opportunities to stay involved with the profession while one’s career is on hold. Membership in these associations is a link to the profession and to colleagues that doesn’t require the time commitment of full-time employment, an important factor for dietetics professionals who have taken a break from their careers to raise children or pursue other interests or obligations. Dr Lynne Kinghorn of AtHomeMothers.com advises anyone trying to keep career skills up-to-date while at home to not only maintain membership in a professional organization, but “to maintain your involvement by attending meetings or perhaps serving on a committee.”

Cynthia Cadieux, PhD, RD, a professor in the Department of Health Sciences at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA, explained how her association membership helped her stay current with the field of dietetics during the 3 years she spent raising her young children: “Not only did I maintain my membership with ADA and thus the Virginia Dietetic Association and Tidewater Dietetic Association, I was able to take on board positions during this time and serve without the stress of job responsibilities.” She added, “I felt like I stayed connected and up-to-date.” Christine Palumbo, RD, of Naperville, IL, also found staying involved with the ADA and her local association to be extremely helpful in her efforts to reenter the dietetics profession. “Being able to participate in committees, the House of Delegates, and other volunteer work provided leadership, speaking, and writing skills, and helped me make connections with people who eventually hired.”

Dietetic practice groups (DPGs) offer another avenue for maintaining involvement with dietetics and keeping knowledge of the profession current. While local and regional dietetic associations bring people together along geographical lines, DPGs draw dietetics professionals according to their professional interests by focusing on a particular aspect of dietetics practice. Like associations, DPGs offer opportunities to stay active in the profession by volunteering to fill leadership positions and serve on committees. (For more information on DPGs, go to: www.eatright.org/Public/index_8040.cfm.) Cheryl Winter, MS, RD, RN of HealthSteps Rx, Inc in Flower Mound, TX, calls it “a non-intimidating way to become reoriented to the profession.” Most DPGs also offer newsletters and e-mail listservs that allow dietetics professionals with common interests to share knowledge and exchange ideas. “The greatest benefit for me was joining the e-mail lists,” said Julie Beyer, RD, of Nutra-Consults in Auburn Hill, MI. “Through the DPGs and lists I have access to some of the most forward-thinking dietitians in the US. Many of these gracious people have shared their wisdom and have been very encouraging as I reinvent myself as a nutrition communicator.” Charlotte Hayes, MS, RD, CDE, of Atlanta, GA, became involved with the Diabetes Care and Education DPG newsletter, “On the Cutting Edge.” “As editor of ‘On the Cutting Edge,’ then communications coordinator, I was in a position that required me to stay abreast of dietetics and diabetes care. I was able to strengthen professional networks on a national as well as a local level.”

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These lists and newsletters are valuable not only for the knowledge they offer, but also for the opportunity to post or publish, allowing dietetics professionals to gain recognition for their ideas even when they are not employed in the field.

DPG newsletters and listservs are just a part of the professional discourse in which dietetics professionals can take part. Professional and scientific journals, such as the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, also offer a wealth of information on current research and dietetics practice. Kinghorn encourages anyone experiencing a career interruption to maintain subscriptions to journals and newsletters. “These provide the most current information in any business. If anything, you will probably find that you actually read more in them than you did when you were employed. When you run across an article that rings your professional bell, take the time to write or call the author to express your appreciation or even dissent—this is networking on the grander scale, and with the ‘biggies’ in your field” (2). The *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* also provides continuing professional education (CPE) articles every month, allowing dietetics professionals to earn up to 4 hours of CPE credit for keeping up with the latest research in the field. Beginning with the March 2005 *Journal*, CPE credit is provided at no cost to ADA members, a cost-effective asset for dietetics professionals experiencing a career interruption. This service is also offered on the ADA Web site, www.eatright.org, along with information about other opportunities to obtain continuing education credit, including conferences, workshops, webcasts, webinars, teleseminars, self-study guides, and audiotapes.

For dietetics professionals who feel as though they may need to audit or retake undergraduate dietetics courses before reentering the workforce, the ADA Web site provides a “Careers and Students” section at www.eatright.org/Public/Careers/94.cfm that includes a listing of dietetics education programs accredited or approved by the Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education (CADE). Those seeking an advanced degree can access a listing of advanced degree programs from the Continuing Education section of the ADA Web site at www.eatright.org/Public/94_13288.cfm. Lastly, dietetics professionals who have let their registration slip during a career interruption may obtain a study guide for the registration examination for dietitians published by the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) at www.cdrnet.org/products/index.htm.

Community colleges, adult education programs, and public libraries provide another way to continue one’s professional development during a career interruption, according to Kinghorn. “This is an opportunity to maintain or upgrade skills, or to obtain additional education in areas that will make you more employable” (2). In addition to efforts specifically aimed at staying current with the dietetics profession, those looking to reenter the workforce must also keep more general skills up to date. Many dietetics professionals mention the need to update their computer skills and gain familiarity with new software to meet the demands of a new workplace. Local programs often provide the perfect opportunity to develop those skills.

Newfound computer skills can be put to good use at the ADA Web site. In addition to the aforementioned educational resources, www.eatright.org also features links to information on every aspect of the dietetics profession, from research to business advice, association news to practice tips—and the ADA CareerLink, the free online job service for dietetics professionals seeking new positions, which gives ADA members access to more than 4,000 employers around the country. The Web site even features a Career FAQ section that includes a list of answers to typical questions posed by “career changers.” Winter says, “The ADA Web site has been an excellent resource for keeping up to date on position papers and reimbursement issues. There is a wealth of information at our fingertips, making the transition easier. After attending my first FNCE in 2003 in San Antonio, I discovered what a fabulous resource this was as well, and a great way to become excited and passionate about a career in nutrition and dietetics.” With so many resources available to provide help throughout the reentry process, a dietetics professional need only take advantage of them in order to turn a career interruption into a career opportunity. For anyone wanting to reenter the workforce, Winter provides an appropriate mix of advice and encouragement: “If you are contemplating a career interruption, I would definitely recommend keeping your licensure and registration current. But also stay involved in your local and national organizations and continue networking. Stay abreast, as much as possible, of your specialty areas, and even consider a position that only requires a minimal amount of your time per month, if possible. When returning to the workforce, be confident in your abilities. It is easy to start to doubt yourself, but graduating in this field is really an accomplishment. We have a strong foundation that really does stay with us. Yes, ‘if you don’t use it, you lose it,’ but ‘get right back up on that horse’ and continue the journey. No one expects you to know everything right now, and in time, you will be back in the swing of things. Hang in there!”

References
Career Advancement: Tips for Success While on the Job Hunt

This article is reprinted from the August 2004 issue of the Journal (2004; 104:1215-1216).

“Own your career,” advises Suzanne Nye, MS, RD, FADA, president of the California Dietetic Association. “You are responsible for defining and refining your success throughout your career. But first and foremost, it is important to realize that success is a very individual benchmark; some registered dietitians (RDs) believe it is the level of pay they receive; some contend that it is the number and type of job benefits provided by an employer; I have also heard RDs say that the ultimately successful professional is one that does not have to work for a living and is able to volunteer for a benevolent purpose.”

But no matter how you measure a successful career in dietetics, the key to achieving professional career goals is to avoid the common mistakes many RDs make during the job-hunting process.

TEN TIPS FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Nye, author and creator of the Be a Star Not a Square: The Ready! Set! Go! Star Method of Negotiating program, a career advancement tool geared towards RDs, offers the following list of 10 pitfalls to avoid during job hunting or re-hunting:

1. Do not focus on job title alone. Focus more on the details of the job listing: required skills, duties and responsibilities of the position, and pay.
2. Do not forget to examine the alternate and/or substitute requirements included in the job posting that meet minimum requirements. Dietetics professionals are qualified for many different types of positions using their transferable education, training, skills, and experience.
3. Always have your resume current, as many job opportunities require fast responses.
4. Do not forget that successful leaders stand on principle, not on politics. In other words, be honest and have integrity when representing yourself to a potential employer.
5. When utilizing friends and colleagues as sources for possible job leads, encourage them to be honest with you so they will feel comfortable sharing real thoughts, concerns, and suggestions.
6. Develop a personal transition plan, complete with timelines, actions, and benchmarks to illustrate goals for retooling your knowledge, skills, and experience.
7. Challenge yourself to expand your professional basket of skill sets. Valuable skills include learning how to manage financial budgets, successfully supervising people, and improving public speaking abilities.
8. Do not make a career change without researching first. Shadow an expert in the field and/or volunteer your time until you understand your potential new career.
9. Remember to give yourself permission to change your mind. View your job explorations as a professional adventure rather than a personal failure.
10. Always have a fall-back plan. Anticipate challenges associated with breaking into a specialty market and talk to those already in practice.

Nye also strongly recommends utilizing a headhunter or health care recruiter, especially for dietetics professionals who are serious about investigating higher-level, specialized positions. “Health care recruiters will provide you with an opportunity to better understand how the job hunt occurs and how you can successfully participate to win, by learning how to successfully conduct a job search, and how to evaluate, negotiate, and maximize your job opportunities. Learn from the experts by employing the same tactics and strategies. Don’t re-invent the wheel!”

LEARNING FROM THE EXPERTS

Cindy Krainen, RD, with Harper Associates in Farmington Hills, MI, and Stacey Dunn-Emke, MS, RD, owner of Nutritionjobs.com, are health care recruiters with experience in helping dietetics professionals locate job opportunities. Both Krainen and Dunn-Emke urge dietetics professionals to be honest with recruiters in terms of what they are looking for, and they stress the importance of being prepared, in advance, before negotiating a salary and benefits package with a potential employer.

How Can RDs Best Present Themselves to a Health Care Recruiter?

Cindy Krainen: Treat recruiters professionally, not as if they owe it to you to find you a position. Since a recruiter relies on fees charged to the employers, not job seekers, their first priority is to find a dietitian to match the employer’s needs. Be sure to keep the recruiter abreast of any changes in your contact information or job preferences, even if you have not heard from them since your initial correspondence. A reputable recruiter with experience placing dietitians will have a presence in major trade publications or within dietetic associations. And be aware of recruiters out there who don’t know the first thing...
about dietitians and think that all RD positions are the same. One clue is when “dietitian” is misspelled “dietician.”

Stacey Dunn-Emke: Highlight not only your work experience, but also your education, training, and unique skills. Remember to include any volunteer work, tasks involving a multidisciplinary team, or special projects in your current position. Let your true personality shine through, but present yourself in the most professional manner. Remember to make frequent contact with your recruiter to stay on top of the game. You can also be your own recruiter by searching online as well. Searching for job listings on the web is one of the most time-efficient, easy, and cost-effective ways for RDs to find jobs today.

What Key Skills or Buzz Words on a Resume and/or Cover Letter Are Most Likely to Get the Attention of a Recruiter?

Krainen: Buzz words vary based on the type of position or specialty. MNT and reimbursement are good for clinical, when appropriate. Specialty certifications are very desirable. For food service, HACCP and type of patient food delivery system is helpful (eg, room service). Computer systems and/or software specific to dietetics is also helpful. If, for example, you used CBORD, include that. Above all, be sure to spell any acronyms or buzz words correctly! Most common misspelled words I see on resumes are those like JCAHO, HACCP, CBORD, ASHFSA, etc, and spell check doesn’t catch those. Don’t use buzz words just for the sake of it if they don’t apply to you. For entry-level dietitians, it’s important to list the type of program attended (eg, Dietetic Internship and Coordinated Programs).

Dunn-Emke: Resume format is a key issue with employers. Since the content and format of the resume are entirely determined by the job seeker, often key elements are either missing or over-emphasized. It’s important to list specific skills, training, certifications, and courses taken related to the job you are applying to. Be sure to list computer programs you are skilled at as well. Nontangible skills such as organization skills, or people skills, or more specific skills such as logical thinking, follow-through, planning, analytical skill, marketing, or attention to detail.

The cover letter is a valuable piece of communication that gives you an opportunity to explain why it is you are interested in the specific job and why you are the best qualified for the position. Start your cover letter with a paragraph about your interest in the position, your interest in the company (which you have researched), and your unique qualifications for the position which make you the most qualified candidate. Keep your cover letter as professional as your resume. Personal information can be offered later in the interview process when it feels appropriate. The cover letter is often your first impression. Take the time to do it right.

What Issues Should RDs Be Aware of When Considering Specialization?

Krainen: Don’t attempt to specialize in something as an entry-level RD. Even if you land a job in a particular area of interest early on, it may be difficult to make a change later on if you didn’t get some solid general experience. Also, if an RD wants to climb the career ladder in a particular specialty, one must realize that other skills outside of the specialty will be necessary to succeed. A pediatric RD, for example, who eventually wants to be a clinical nutrition manager or in charge of a pediatric program, will also need training and experience in leadership and management.

Dunn-Emke: You should know the market that you are considering specializing in well; know what career opportunities are available and the market trends in your area of specialization. If the opportunities are limited, consider partnering with another similar specialty, such as pediatric obesity. You might even consider going outside the field of nutrition to enhance your opportunities. For example, consider a certification in exercise or yoga to market yourself as a lifestyle or in-home coach.

What Are Some Key Things to Remember When Negotiating a Salary and Compensation Package?

Krainen: Wait until the salary issue is raised by a potential employer—do not be the one to initiate the topic, unless a job offer is made and a salary is never actually discussed. Also, keep in mind that an arrogant attitude can cost you the job. I have seen employers rule out candidates who seemed self-centered and only interested in how the job could benefit them. Before the interview, formulate a list of your most marketable skills and keep those in mind when trying to sell yourself. Sincerity and honesty regarding desired compensation when communicating with the potential employer are often most appreciated.

If the salary and benefits appear to be absolutely firm, perhaps there is some flexibility in regard to relocation assistance, sign-on bonus, or continuing education allowance. These factors can make a significant difference. If you are negotiating through a human resource department, make sure the individual you are working with has a clear understanding of all your credentials, certifications, and experience. You may have to politely mention these.

Dunn-Emke: While salaries are often fixed in the field of dietetics, don’t be embarrassed to get paid what you are worth. Don’t be intimidated by a savvy hiring manager who offers less than what you know to be the fair market value for the position. Practice asking for the salary you know is fair out loud (using a friend as a sounding board can be helpful). RDs and many women in general feel awkward about the topic of money and often are afraid to ask for what they are worth.

Besides salary, which can often be non-negotiable, consider what else can be offered to improve the salary. Consider asking for other financial incentives and rewards, such as an annual bonus or a bonus after 6 months of excellent performance (define specific criteria for evaluation). If those are unavailable, ask for professional development incentives such as a paid training course, professional conference, or workshop that you could attend. If the dream job you are interviewing for truly doesn’t have the financial capacity for the compensation package you had in mind, then ask about nonfinancial rewards, such as a flexible schedule, the ability to work from home a few hours or days a week, the ability to bring your child to work a few hours a week, personal use of office equipment, etc.
What distinguishes the best negotiators, the class of negotiators called master negotiators, from others who have lots of experience but do not bring back the kinds of outcomes that master negotiators bring back?

Masters are distinct from other negotiators in that they have a very firm objective—to maximize their own gain. Normally, people want to find an outcome that maximizes joint gain. When the objective is to maximize joint gain, people end up doing is measuring it in terms of “when-when” or “happy-happy,” which would be fine, except happy-happy is really, “can you live with it?” Both parties work to obtain their bottom line. Having obtained it, they are satisfied and they quit. Joint gain is a counterproductive objective. Not only does it decrease the gain that you get, it actually decreases the gain to the employer. That, in a nutshell, is what effective negotiators do.

In addition, master negotiators use a very flexible strategy while having a firm objective. Master negotiators pull from the best of the creating strategies and the best of the claiming strategies, to apply them specifically to the person with whom they are negotiating, the circumstances of the negotiation, the boundaries around and limitations of that negotiation, and the kind of negotiation they are doing. Everything effective negotiators do falls into these categories.

Convince the employer that you’re the best candidate, you’re the one they really want, and do so in a way that is respectful and constructive. Constructive negotiation means being honest and being straight-forward. Being honest does not mean being timid; it means telling the truth clearly and accurately. You need to be interested in problem solving and try to constructively brainstorm to find the best solution for yourself in such a way that it translates into utility for the employer. That, in a nutshell, is what effective negotiators do.

Negotiation Perspectives

Most negotiators who are considering negotiating salary and compensation tend to fall into a couple of different categories. In Perspective A, negotiators don’t want to come across as professional and personal well-being, and the objective should be to maximize your own gain.

Secondly, master negotiators have a clear plan for maximizing their own gain. What they do is very simple. Master negotiators recognize that they have to partner with the other side. They have to manage not only themselves in their own strategies, but they have to manage the other side’s strategies in order to take them to where the master negotiator wants them to go.

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Negotiation Perspectives

Most negotiators who are considering negotiating salary and compensation tend to fall into a couple of different categories. In Perspective A, negotiators don’t want to come across as greedy by asking for too much because they want to start on the right foot and have a good relationship with their employers. In Perspective B, negotiators believe they can do this job better than most people because of their personal skills, education, and experience.

Headhunters and recruiters, even the ones who don’t negotiate, believe that it is acceptable to attempt to negotiate. The majority expect candidates to negotiate, so 90% of employers do not include all of the value they are willing to offer for a position in the first offer. If you accept the first offer as made, you are not claiming the value that you could have obtained. You are walking away with less than they expected they would need to pay you. You increase the probability that you would be behind not only the external market and how others are doing, but also the internal market. The longer you stay in the same position, the more likely it is that you get behind the market.

We find that only 25% to 50% of people negotiate salary and compensation. Actually, when we talk to candidates they tell us that 50% of the time they negotiate. But when we talk to recruiters, they tell us that only 25% of the people they interview attempt to negotiate a job offer. Only 15% renegotiate salary and compensation, despite the fact that the longer you are in a position, the more likely you are to be behind the market. Isn’t that an interesting difference? I think it’s because some people negotiate in such a timid way that the recruiter never even knew they were attempting to do so.

There are many men in the dietetics profession, but the majority are women. However, women on average are paid 75 cents compared with the dollar that a man receives for the
same position. The statistics get even worse when we talk about minority women. For example, African-American women get about 63 cents on the dollar. Over the course of a lifetime it can accumulate. Fifty years of work and the fact that people move about every 5 years, starting with a base salary of $50,000, over a lifetime career the financial differences for those women who negotiated and those who don’t is over a million dollars. Women are much less likely to negotiate salary compensation than are men and, when they do, they do it in a way that is less assertive. There are all kinds of evidence that suggests that this factor alone, the failure to negotiate, accounts for at least half of the variance between men’s and women’s salaries. If we can get women to negotiate job salary and compensation, and do so effectively, we can wipe out that difference.

Ninety-two percent of women, compared with 21% of men, view themselves more in Perspective A than in Perspective B. The vast majority of potential employers prefer person B to person A. You would think they would prefer people who don’t negotiate, but recruiters prefer people who negotiate to those who do not, as long as they do so constructively. When you negotiate effectively, you are modeling exactly the kinds of skills, personality traits, and strategies that employers want: a good problem solver, someone who is capable, someone who thinks strategically, someone who does their homework and has detailed information about value, someone who is willing to assert that value in a way that is highly constructive, and someone who is flexible.

BARRIERS TO NEGOTIATION
Why don’t people negotiate? Many people think they lack power. Who do you think has more power, candidates or recruiters? Is it the person who is being asked or the person who is asking? The person who is being asked has already had the employer acknowledge their pick, that you are their preference. You have not yet decided that this is the organization for you. In reality, you have more power in many instances than the recruiters. However, these things do vary significantly in terms of the economy. In the current economy you have less power than you had in the past. In response, some recruiters are using strategies they would not have used in the past, but most will still negotiate. If you talk to recruiters, guess who they say has more power? You.

Another reason why people don’t negotiate is that they are afraid it will hurt the potential organization’s perception of them. Well, we’ve already distilled that myth: they are actually going to perceive you in a more favorable light if you negotiate than if you don’t. Negotiation is a productive decision-making process. It is not one that necessarily instills conflict. A lot of negotiation has to do with how you approach it personally. You can be very warm and direct and respectful to the employer, but it doesn’t mean you have to make concessions and compromises all over the place. You can assert yourself and still be extremely likable and personable.

THE QUESTION OF SALARY
Salary history is one of the first things that any potential employer asks for. They ask you for that information for two reasons. One is because they want to know how much they are going to have to pay you. The other is to look at the salary they are offering compared with other candidates they are considering, and to look at their salary in terms of how much you make vs the other candidates. Employers make all kinds of attributions about why it is you are being paid more than others, and it’s not because they think you must have negotiated and the other party didn’t. The attribution they make is if you are paid more, you’re better. If you’re paid less, you’re not as good. Salary says things about the quality you bring to the organization, as well as how much they are going to have to pay you. You cannot afford to have information that you are behind the market in the marketplace.

We also find that if you go in and start at the same time as other professionals in your organization, and they negotiate and you don’t, they end up making more money than you do. If your performance is equivalent, you would think they would let you catch up. It doesn’t happen. That self-perpetuates regardless of whether you are staying in the same position or moving positions.

If you want something, and the employer is not offering it in the front end, you’d better ask for it. In addition, you need to realize that what you get paid is a combination of what you’re worth and whether you negotiate, and if you do negotiate, how successfully you do so. Therefore, if you want to have the salary compensation that you believe you’re entitled to, you’ve got to learn to negotiate effectively.

STEPS TO SUCCESS
Step one: start negotiating. The worst thing the employer can say is, “No. I’m sorry, it’s not negotiable.” The worst thing that will happen if you don’t negotiate is you’ll end up with less than what the employer is willing to pay you. Step two: learn the right time to negotiate. Premature negotiation is a bad thing. Normally, you don’t want to have the discussion about salary and compensation until you’ve been made an offer, if at all possible. The problem is that if you are willing to tell employers the salary and compensation you want, before you get an offer, you need to recognize that they are going to use that information to determine what they need to pay you and whether or not you are in their subset of potential candidates. Are you likely to go in and lowball how much you say you want, or ask for the extreme? Most people lowball. They lowball because they don’t want the chance of being kicked out of the pool. They want to increase the probability that they are going to get an interview. However, if you start by asking something or saying something that will keep you in the pool, it will probably haunt you as you discuss salary and compensation later. The employer will use whatever you said to make up a proposal to you that is also lowballed and probably low in terms of the market. You want to avoid the problem of being kicked out of the pool, and therefore being able to provide high numbers when you talk about salary and compensation, numbers that can be substantiated by information that is available in terms of the marketplace.

Doing your homework before you’ve even had the first interview is very important. Occasionally, employers will insist that you talk about salary and compensation right away. If they
do, you want to be able to talk about it. You want to be able to say: “I've done my homework. I've gathered this information, and what I'm finding is that for positions of this type, with this level of experience, salaries tend to be this. I perceive myself as somebody who is higher in terms of that market. Therefore, what I'm shooting for is this amount. Of course, we can discuss salary and other aspects of compensation in some detail later.” Cite the market. Give reasons why you are putting that amount out there.

You want not only to gather pertinent information, but also plan your own approach to the negotiation. First, you should think about all of the issues that are relevant to you in this negotiation. Now, many of those are likely to be concrete issues, such as salary. Sometimes there are other issues that are also really important (eg, the responsibilities, the upward mobility of the position, the quality, and how much this fits with what it is you really enjoy doing in terms of profession). Things like these are implicit issues, but we want to assign value to the implicit issues, just like the more concrete issues; otherwise, you will allow salary and other forms of compensation to dominate, which leads you to accept an offer even though that opportunity might not be as good as an alternative. You want to manage yourself by including issues that are of value beyond specific concrete issues. You want to list all the issues that are relevant.

Next, you want to consider what your bottom line is for these issues. Now, it could be that you only have a bottom line for salary and that everything else is just a combination. As a matter of fact, I encourage you to focus more on having a bottom line for the overall package than for each issue. If you have a bottom line for each issue, it’s going to make even the trivial issues deal breakers. It's going to mean that you might be willing to reject an offer that is far better than any alternative, simply because the employer didn't meet the bottom line on one of your least important issues.

You need to come up with some metric that allows you to compare each issue to another, apples to apples, not apples to oranges, so that it will allow you to determine and move in accordance with giving up lesser issues for the sake of getting more important issues. To do that you can come up with a point scale of some sort (Table). You can start with 100 points and divide it across the issues and the issue options, in terms of their relative assessment value. Doing this exercise is also a very informative way to figure out what you care about in a job. You can start with salary in dollar figures, but then translate that into points. Then think about the other things in terms of points in accordance with how valuable they are compared with salary. The only relevant point is that you create a point system that informs you of the value of each issue compared with the others, the values of how much you give up or gain during the negotiation. The point system also allows you to compare the overall value of this deal with another possible offer or your current position.

You also want to include the value of your best alternative to a negotiated agreement. Your best alternative may be another offer you have elsewhere that’s worth more than your current position in terms of all the issues. You need to compare the current offer to your best alternative because you want to keep yourself from accepting an offer that does not provide as much value as your best alternative.

If there is an impasse and you can’t reach an agreement and don’t take this job, what does that mean? If you accept a job that is really low in compensation, the problem with that is, again, salary history is predicated on that amount. It will take forever to get yourself back up to where you should have been, if you start out behind in that regard. Sometimes it is better to reject a low offer and stay in the market for another month or two than it is to accept a low offer. That is why it is important to think about your walk-away.

If you just pick a bottom line and focus on it, guess what you end up with? You get the bottom line and you quit. Pick a bottom line and stick to it, but get information and think about what you aspire to, what you would like to obtain. Determine what is your highest goal for this particular position and use that as your target. Then what you have is a bottom line that you stick to, but a target that you focus on. What that ends up doing is it makes it so you don't satisfy and quit right after you get your bottom line. You walk away with a salary and compensation that is worth more than if you just picked a bottom line and focused on it.

Your target should be the highest amount you can defend. Where did that salary come from? What do you have to substantiate it? How does it compare to the information you obtained from the market? What is it you have to say to verify and confirm the reasonableness of that position? If you made it up, now you have no credibility in the rest of the negotiation, plus you now have a black mark against you in terms of the way in which you do business.

THE COUNTER-OFFER

How do you counter-offer? It is important for you to base your strategy both on your own bottom line and walk away and the whole overall picture; however, it’s also very informative and tells you what directions to go in, if you know why the employer selected a particular compensation package and salary. For example, one of the things that is common is the basis of your education and the quality of the institution that you went to. An organization will compare you to all the candidates in the whole national network, all the candidates who have the same experience from varying institutions. They will have biases about the quality of the education and the experience that you came from, one institution vs another. You need to know if the employer uses those kinds of measures for determining what kind of salary and compensation you get because then you can address such issues: “I know you did a great deal of work to survey the market, to see all the viable candidates that were out there. I know you did an amazing job based on my interview for assessing the value of each of us relative to others. I know that having done all that work, you’ve decided that I am the most promising candidate and are making me the offer. Given that, you have just told me that I am better than the marketplace. You have just told me that the skills I bring to the table are at the top of the pool you saw. Well, guess what? What you’re telling me is my experience and background and education come April 2007 ● Supplement to the Journal of the AMERICAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION S25
BUSINESS OF DIETETICS

Table. Sample point system for assigning value to issues in a salary/compensation negotiation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Recruiter points</th>
<th>Candidate points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonus</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+2,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>+400</td>
<td>+2,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>+800</td>
<td>+1,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>+1,200</td>
<td>+700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>+1,600</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Assignment</td>
<td>Division A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Division B</td>
<td>+500</td>
<td>+750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Division C</td>
<td>+1,000</td>
<td>+500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Division D</td>
<td>+1,500</td>
<td>+250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Division E</td>
<td>+2,000</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacation Time</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.5 weeks</td>
<td>+700</td>
<td>+1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>+1,400</td>
<td>+800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.5 weeks</td>
<td>+2,100</td>
<td>+400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>+2,800</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting Date</td>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July 15</td>
<td>+500</td>
<td>+750</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June 15</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving Expenses</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>+400</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insurance Coverage</td>
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<td>+1,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plan B</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plan C</td>
<td>+1,600</td>
<td>+800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plan D</td>
<td>+2,400</td>
<td>+400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plan E</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>+4,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$85,000</td>
<td>+3,000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$80,000</td>
<td>+4,500</td>
<td>+1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$75,000</td>
<td>+6,000</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>+500</td>
<td>+3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>+1,000</td>
<td>+2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>+1,500</td>
<td>+1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>+2,000</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

together to make me at the top of the market. Therefore, I anticipate that you will pay me at a level that reflects that.” To make those kinds of addresses, you have to know why the employer made the offer they did. You need to be familiar with all of the issues that are often included in negotiating, things like compensating additional education or paying for you to go to conferences. You need that information and you need to think about how it compares to others, as you ask questions about the nature of what it is the employers are proposing.

Whenever possible, should you be the first one to put an offer on the table in negotiations of this type? It’s interesting and we’ve all been told that you don’t want to be the first to put an offer on the table. People are afraid they are going to ask for an amount that is less than the organization may be willing to offer them. What we find is that most agreements, and this is particularly true in salary and compensation, fall between the first offer and counter. It falls somewhere near the middle because we have this compromise, win-win mentality. Because of that, we end up near the middle. Except it is closer to the first offer. The first bid on the table becomes an anchor against which every other solution is compared. I would rather have my target out there than the employer’s proposal.

If you don’t know what the employer might propose, don’t make an offer because the cost is too great. Because dietetics professionals have ADA’s 2002 Dietetics Compensation & Benefits and Salary Survey, the probability that you will ask less than what the employer is willing to offer is very slim. Now, I’ve said before, don’t talk about salary and compensation until the employer makes an offer. They will tell you they are going to make you an offer, or you’re going to be in that pool, which is when you want to talk about it. You should feel free at that moment, if they have not given you a formal offer, to tell them the things you are looking for. It’s advantageous to do that before the employer makes an offer because it can often mean that the recruiter will go back and negotiate with the organization to try and enhance the offer that they give you. It’s easier to do that at this point than to get them to go back and try to change after the fact.

If the employer makes the first offer, don’t come in with compromises. Respond with good supporting information about the marketplace that corresponds to the contribution you think you are going to bring.

Your goal is to change the form of the offer, not the value of the offer below your target. To do that, it means that you can either compromise or have the employer compromise, or you can find other creative ways of enhancing your value without costing you value.

Remember, you want to try to shoot toward obtaining your target. Typically, organizations are willing to dis-
cuss what issues are the most important to them and ones on which they have less flexibility. That way you get a sense of their priorities vs your priorities. Salary is most important to the candidate, bonus is second, and office is third; the recruiter's priorities are not the same. When priorities are not the same, it provides a wonderful opportunity for enhancing gain without costing benefit.

In negotiations, we have a tendency to talk about one issue at a time. We talk about salary, resolve it, and move onto vacation. However, it is better to talk about combined issues—talk about vacation at the same time as salary. If you talk about one issue at a time, the only strategy available is compromise. For example, salary is the first issue that is the greatest importance to both sides. The two sides want opposite things, but they care about it equally. Somebody has to compromise. But that is only one type of issue. In most issues, one side does not value it at the same level as the other side. That is the case with bonus and office. The candidate cares much more about bonus than they do about office space, while the recruiter cares a lot more about what office they send you to than they do about bonus. If you compromise you would have a bonus of $10,000 and an office of 'y'. If you are willing to take a step back on an issue the employer cares less about to take two steps forward on an issue you care more about, then what you find is that by trading off those issues, rather than compromising, the employer gets what they care more about and you get what you care more about. You end up with, instead, a bonus of $15,000 and office space 'x'.

If you follow these steps, if you think creatively, if you are determined to maximize your own gain, and are willing to be assertive in terms of that and still be warm, respectful, and constructive, you can achieve your goals.

You need to listen carefully and ask questions about what is motivating the recruiter's offer. Sometimes they can't give you salary of a certain type because there is that boundary (internal equity within the organization), but you have other compensation issues. For example, you just finished getting your master's degree and you owe money to the institution. Since they have a program where they pay for education, would they be willing to compensate for the degree you just obtained? One of the things that people use more and more successfully are contingency contracts, whereby you determine where the employer has certain expectations that you will bring in. You can, however, even though they cannot pay you as much salary as you like, create a system whereby you are additionally compensated, contingent on the additional value you bring in beyond the employer's expectations. It's these kinds of strategies that require us to realize that negotiating does not involve all issues that are "I want the opposite thing as you" and "We care about it equally." Those things are strategic, not the objective.

Another thing that people are using very successfully is early performance reviews. Perhaps the employer can't pay you this because the starting position only allows for this; however, based on your performance, you could be reviewed in 6 months and get your salary increase then as opposed to 1 year. It's that kind of flexible thinking that we find is very productive in salary negotiations.

If you follow these steps, if you think creatively, if you are determined to maximize your own gain, and are willing to be assertive in terms of that and still be warm, respectful, and constructive, you can achieve your goals.
Good or Bad: What You See Isn’t Always What You Get

From childhood, many are taught not to judge based on appearance. Whether viewed as an act of morality, ethics, or decency, such early lessons focus on the fact that how a person looks is just a small part of who that person is. However, many people have a difficult time ignoring how a person looks when it comes to drawing conclusions about potential friends, companions, employees, and even health care practitioners.

The importance of appearance might even be especially true for registered dietitians (RDs) and dietetic technicians, registered (DTRs), given that a client might engage their services for assistance in improving his or her own appearance, by way of weight gain or loss. Even in today’s society, where the acceptance and expectations of professional clothing and grooming have relaxed somewhat, leading to “a patchwork of appearance standards that has created an ‘appearance diversity’ never before seen in the American workplace” (1), patients/clients have clung to a certain image of the health care professional. It is important to recognize that “in the workplace, an employee’s physical appearance is a powerful symbol that affects job success” (2) and that “appearance can affect confidence and communication, thereby influencing productivity” (3). In other words, appearance does matter.

INNER BEAUTY

Another childhood lesson heard by many is that internal beauty is the one that counts. Unfortunately, however, the media are a loud and pervasive force, and their oft-criticized emphasis on external beauty leads many to self-doubt and discomfort related to appearance.

However, according to Jean Caton, MS, MBA, RD, chair-elect of the Nutrition Entrepreneurs dietetic practice group and a business–life coach and marketing strategist from St Louis, MO, it is the negative attitude on the inside that affects what others see on the outside: “It is all about that little inner dialog (often an inner self-critic) that makes a huge difference in our outer behavior, satisfaction, and fulfillment in our lives.” Caton says part of her work as a coach is to help clients “be more comfortable in their own skin.”

EXPECTATIONS AND PREFERENCES OF DRESS

Employees in many industries have enjoyed relaxed standards in the past decade. Where business suits and hose-y once were the rule, it is increasingly acceptable for staff to wear more casual clothing, display visible tattoos and multiple piercings (in the ears or elsewhere on the face), and sport less-conventional hairstyles. “Business casual” is creeping into many businesses as the weekly dress code for staff, rather than the special treat for “casual Fridays.” However, service-oriented industries have been late to embrace such changes in standards of appearance (1).

For the health care industry, the resistance to relaxed standards is governed by what consumers want. Research has shown that when it comes to health care, not only are consumers very specific in their preferences for what practitioners should look like, but there has been a documented “strong association between physicians’ physical appearance and patients’ initial perceptions of physician competence” (4).

One study asked 496 patients at two family practice clinics in Tennessee about attitudes toward physicians’ physical characteristics (4). The results from this questionnaire revealed that a nametag and white coat were the most desirable characteristics; clogs, sandals, and tennis shoes were considered the least desirable attire. Respondents indicated a preference for more conservative clothing such as dress pants and dress shoes for all providers and a dress shirt and tie for male providers. Questionnaire participants were less favorable toward items such as jeans and earrings on all providers, perfume on women, and jewelry and long hair on men.

In another study (5), 451 patients at a tertiary hospital in New Zealand were asked to judge photographs of physicians displaying different styles of dress by ranking them by preference and to complete a questionnaire. According to these results, the least acceptable dress and style characteristics for both male and female physicians were facial piercings, brightly dyed hair, training shoes, and several rings. Undesirable items specific to women were short tops, sandals, loose hair, skirts above the knee, long earrings, and sleeveless tops; specific to men, the least desirable characteristics were earrings, t-shirts, long hair, ties depicting a cartoon character, and no tie. Patients in this group were more comfortable with long sleeves, covered shoes, and dress trousers or skirts, but jeans were acceptable.

In both studies, researchers determined a correlation between preference for conservative appearance and age of the respondent, which suggests the general sentiment that the movement toward relaxed standards of appearance is driven by younger generations entering the workforce. Though the gulf that separates generational preferences cannot be ig-

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nored, it is less controversial to latch onto the more conservative preferences expressed by consumers informally and through scientific studies. Furthermore, not all studies reach the same conclusions. For example, the results of studies of preferences for beardedness in hiring decisions revealed that the association with beardedness runs the gamut from masculinity, strength, intelligence, and desirability to increased recklessness, dirtiness, lower mental competence and intellectual ability, and reduced social maturity and physical attractiveness, with year of publication yielding no generational clues regarding biases (6).

The patient preference for a more conservative physician appearance as described in the studies discussed above is reflected in the appearance expectations of various other members of the allied health community, including RDs and DTRs. The policies and procedures manual for the dietetic internship at the University of Houston lists dress requirements very close to the patient preferences indicated earlier. For instance, women should wear a dress, business suit, pants suit, or a blouse with slacks or skirt; hosiery; and closed-toed shoes. Men are expected to wear a suit or sport coat and slacks with a tie and socks with business footwear. Interns are specifically asked not to wear athletic t-shirts, halters, tank tops, leotards, sundresses, low-cut blouses, mini-length skirts and dresses, and sheer apparel. Additional requirements state that hair must be neat, clean, and cut in a conservative style; beards and mustaches must be neat and of moderate length. It is advised to avoid perfume and cologne because a patient or client could be allergic. Excessive jewelry is deemed inappropriate. Enhanced and artificial fingernails are not allowed. And except for earlobes, piercings are out (7).

Does this mean there is no room for originality? “Dress and the inside are aligned,” says Caton. “It is never good to try to be something other than who you are. Creative people working in a conservative environment will need to blend their style with the dress that will help them reach their employment goals.”

But Milton Stokes, MPH, RD, chief clinical dietitian, Nutrition Services, at St Barnabas Hospital and Nursing Home in Bronx, NY, and a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association, believes allowing tradition to dictate look and dress can hurt the profession: “The consumers we serve come in all different shapes and sizes. If we always wear a white lab coat, for example, we may hamper the relationship with the patient. I don’t think we should wear shorts and flip-flops in the clinical setting, but I do think we should dress professionally without adhering to one person’s definition of ‘professional.’”

PERCEPTIONS BASED ON SIZE

Obesity and eating disorders remain major challenges in the health and nutrition fields and major obsessions in the beauty arena. As one celebrity might be criticized for being too heavy and, two paragraphs later, another celebrity is criticized for being too thin, all eyes are on weight—be it the reading on a person’s own scale, or that person making assumptions about the scales of others. And because RDs and DTRs work with issues of weight maintenance and control, an RD’s or DTR’s weight can have an impact on how clients and patients perceive her or him.

It is a sensitive topic, and opinions vary widely. It is commonly known among health care providers that over weight is not always a result of excessive intake [insufficient physical activity, genetic predisposition/family history, metabolism, and behavioral factors also play a role in overweight and obesity (8)], yet a pervasive anti-fat bias exists among the populace— including a strong anti-fat bias among overweight people themselves (9). In addition, the anti-fat bias has been shown to exist even when no explicit indication of such bias has been communicated (9). Therefore, although it is psychologically unhealthy to become fixated on one’s own weight, food and nutrition professionals should acknowledge that appearance is a part of who they are and it could have an impact on how clients/patients respond to dietetics messages.

That thinness is a cultural preference is implicit in models, marketing strategies, and products presented by the media, and explicit in the studies critical of this longstanding trend. Many individuals—women especially—report that “the cultural theme that thinness is the key to happiness” had shaped their body image in childhood and adolescence (10). According to Psychology Today’s 1997 survey of its readership (n=4,000 respondents, 3,452 women and 548 men), discontent with body shape is more prevalent today than ever before, with the most self-disparagement toward abdomen and body weight (10). And this personal overweight can influence how a person perceives other overweight people—even among health care practitioners.

Stokes acknowledges that there could be great risk in becoming overly obsessed with one’s own appearance: “Who doesn’t have some doubts once in a while about self worth and ability? I think most of us do. If you constantly think about your body weight, it can disrupt your personal and professional life, and it can prevent you from actually doing anything about your weight problem. I would encourage people to focus on solutions rather than dwelling on the problem.”

Studies have shown the impact of personal overweight among health care providers on the ability and willingness to counsel overweight patients and clients. Physicians have been found to have a predominantly negative attitude toward obese patients, describing them as “weak-willed, ugly, and awkward” and nurses have indicated in studies a preference to not care for obese patients (11). RDs, on the other hand, have been shown to express ambivalent feelings about overweight clients. However, when it comes to personal overweight, the feelings toward overweight were much more negative: in one study, among the 439 surveys completed by RDs who counsel overweight patients, those who identified themselves as personally overweight “blamed themselves for personal overweight, worried about excess weight, and were concerned about physical well-being when overweight” (11). Another study found that a perception of overweight people as unhealthy and physically unattractive was similar among nutrition and non-nutrition majors, but there was a higher incidence of negative feelings about personal overweight among nutrition majors (12).

The delicate balance between dealing with one’s personal weight while counseling another on his or her
weight issues can become a no-win situation for food and nutrition professionals: “If you are overweight or obese, your patients may question why you do not help yourself, and whether you would be able to help them modify their own weight. Alternatively, if you are of normal weight, you may appear incapable of relating to their issues” (13).

When asked if the consumer questions regarding the credibility of overweight food and nutrition professionals are founded, Stokes says he cannot say with certainty and that there is no simple solution. “What if that dietitian had hypercholesterolemia instead of obesity? Is it fair for that dietitian to give a patient advice on how to manage cholesterol? What would the patient think if he or she knew the dietitian had cholesterol problems?”

Lissa H. Corman, RD, a dietitian in private practice in Dover, NH, notes that clients have mentioned to her their preference for an “average-sized person” providing nutrition counseling and that most dietitians they have seen have either been unrealistically thin or extremely overweight. Stokes adds, “We tend to make quick judgments based on appearance. I think the overweight/obese dietitian would need to determine if his or her counseling consumers on their weight actually helped them or not—regardless of weight status, all dietitians should determine the helpfulness of the services they provide.”

But Caton advises that an overweight dietitian should not ignore his or her overweight when dealing with clients. “Ignoring [the issue] will not create a climate conducive to successful nutrition counseling,” she says. “The signals (verbal and nonverbal communication) sent from within the dietitian will affect the client’s response.”

Elizabeth Ward, MS, RD, a nutrition consultant from Reading, PA, states, “Any health professional, especially one who is recommending healthy eating and regular exercise, needs to be aware of the impression his or her physical appearance makes, although it does not always accurately portray how hard (or how little) he or she works to maintain a healthy weight.” Ward notes that a person doesn’t need to be pencil-thin or overly muscular to convey the idea that he or she values a healthful lifestyle, adding that for some people good health comes at size 10 or 12, whereas for others it can be a size 6 or 8. Instead, she says, the emphasis should be on leading by example by way of a healthful weight that has been achieved by balancing physical activity and food intake. An RD cannot expect to be taken seriously by clients and patients if it appears that person does not practice what he or she preaches, says Ward. Still, when patients or clients know that their RD has to work at maintaining his or her own weight, the RD could gain more credibility with them; for example, “If you have lost weight and kept it off, even though you are still overweight or obese, it lends credibility to your weight-loss advice” (13).

But negative attitudes about personal overweight could have an impact on the effectiveness of counseling, particularly if negative self-perceptions lead to a pessimistic or discouraging attitude toward a client’s/patient’s ability and commitment to follow through with therapy (11). However, says James O. Hill, editor-in-chief of Obesity Management, RDs “cannot be criticized as a role model simply because of . . . weight”; instead, the criticism is due when the RD does not behave as a role model (13).

The fact remains that many people do judge based on appearances, often without even being aware of doing so. Therefore, the most important message that food and nutrition professionals can send about themselves is that they are well-versed in dietetics, concerned about their patients’ clients, and rational and responsible stewards of their own bodies.

References
Contracts abound in the business aspects of professional life. Professionals find themselves confronted with a wide range of contracts, including leases, supplier contracts, purchasing contracts, provider contracts, employment contracts, and personal service contracts. Without some legal training, a professional may feel overwhelmed by the technical language and legalistic concepts that she or he finds in the typical contract.

Notwithstanding the efforts of many lawyers to make them virtually incomprehensible to the layperson, however, there is nothing mystical about contracts. A contract is simply an agreement between two or more entities to take on mutual obligations toward each other. Contracts may be in tangible form, such as in writing on paper or some other medium, or merely oral; although, the written contract is preferred and it has some distinct advantages such as precision and clarity (if drafted properly). An oral contract, while fully enforceable, may be more susceptible to misunderstanding and possible misunderstandings, it fails to do so, and leaves ambiguities or possible misunderstandings, and may be adjudged unenforceable or work an undue hardship on one party or another. If you don’t understand language in a contract, ask that it be rephrased or explained.

In order to be enforceable, a contract must reflect a common understanding among the parties as to what is being agreed to. Make sure that you are both agreeing to the same thing. If there are ambiguities allowing each party to construe differently what is to be done, it is likely that a court will need to resolve them. Be clear.

Rule #2: Imagine the worst. No contract is problematic if all goes well and all the parties perform as anticipated, but many contracts end up in litigation because things did not go as the parties assumed. In reviewing the contract, imagine what will happen if one of the assumptions is not well founded. What will happen if the goods are not delivered or the services performed in a timely manner? What if the other party to the contract goes out of business? Be a cynic, and use your imagination. Remember that a well-drawn contract serves best when unanticipated problems arise.

Rule #3: Make sure all your questions are answered. In looking through the contract, questions may occur to you. If the contract provides that you will be paid a certain amount, does it say when the payment will occur? If notice is to be given by one party to the other, how is it to be accomplished? If there are questions that come to mind, make sure that the contract is revised to ensure that none of the questions are unanswered.

**Contract Provisions**

Armed with these rules, you should also have a working knowledge of some of the provisions that you are likely to see in a contract. The following list is not exhaustive, but it attempts to highlight some of the more significant kinds of provisions or elements that ought to be included, and to give you a passing knowledge of some others that you might see:

1. **Recitals.** The recitals, sometimes reflected as “whereas clauses,” will usually set forth at the beginning of the contract the reasons for the contract, the relationship of the parties, and the factual premises. It is often helpful to have the recitals to lend context to the contract, and perhaps resolve conflicts, but the recitals are not an essential part of the contract. It will be the substantive contract provisions, and not the recitals, that will govern the performance of the parties.

2. **Definitions.** Provisions defining the terminology in the contract are not essential, and some contracts will neither have nor require definitions. You may wish to use such provisions, however, if there is any possibility of confusion over the meaning of a word.

**Understanding Contracts**

Despite these complexities, you should, as a dietetics professional, be able to gain a basic understanding of contracts. It is always helpful to retain a lawyer to help, especially where the contract is particularly complicated or where the value and subject matter of the contract justifies the additional costs. However, to understand the contract for your own purposes, try following a few simple rules and becoming familiar with some basic contractual provisions.

Rule #1: Strive for clarity. The modern contract is a simple document that should be drafted in simple and clear language. It should define the parties’ obligations to each other in an unambiguous way that makes clear the understanding among the parties. To the extent the contract fails to do so, and leaves ambiguities or possible misunderstandings, it may be adjudged unenforceable or work an undue hardship on one party or another. If you don’t understand language in a contract, ask that it be rephrased or explained.

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2. **Definitions.** Provisions defining the terminology in the contract are not essential, and some contracts will neither have nor require definitions. You may wish to use such provisions, however, if there is any possibility of confusion over the meaning of a word.
or words used repeatedly in the contract. A term of art, for example, that you assume to be the subject of common knowledge, may have a different meaning to the other party or no meaning to a third party asked to construe it. Defining one or more terms or phrases may avoid misunderstandings or confusion that might cloud the issues between the contracting parties.

3. Performance. Who’s doing what? This is the essence of the contract. Setting aside all the “whereases” and “heretofores,” a contract should clearly spell out precisely what each party is obligated to do under the contract. If one party is doing everything, and the other is doing nothing in return (such as paying money), the contract may fail “for lack of consideration.” The provision dealing with the performance of the parties should set out what each party is obliged to do and the schedule by which it is to be done. The prudent professional should ensure that this provision is clear, sufficiently detailed, and comprehensible.

4. Price. How much is being paid for the goods or services? Price is an essential component of a contract, and the contract should be clear as to what the amount and terms of payment are. Contracts have been voided where there is no specificity as to the price. Make sure that the contract is clear about how much is being paid and when the payment is being made.

5. Term and Termination. This provision and its components are particularly significant, as they bear upon the parties’ rights to be relieved of their obligations under the contract. The following questions are important ones to ask and have answered:

a. How long will the contract run? There should be a provision defining the length of the contract, or an event that will automatically bring it to an end. Contracts cannot be perpetual in nature. The preferable practice is to provide for a reasonably short term, with a method for renewal for comparable terms if one is desired. A contract may, for example, contain a provision to the effect that the contract will automatically be renewed for another term unless either of the parties gives notice of nonrenewal to the other within some specified period before termination.

b. Who can terminate? Look to see who has the right to terminate the contract, as some entities will provide for termination only by the party who drafts the contract. You will want the right of termination, in all likelihood, to be mutual.

c. For what reasons can it be terminated? Some contracts may be terminated at will, or for no reason, by either party, while others may be terminated only for “good cause” or upon the breach by one party. Which way is appropriate will differ according to the nature of the contract. You will not want, for example, to permit the other party to terminate the contract at the drop of a hat if you have made a substantial investment in performing your part of the contract unless you have had the opportunity to recoup your investment.

Make note that some contracts will permit the termination of the contract on account of the insolvency or bankruptcy of one of the parties. It is usually permissible to terminate if one party is insolvent or cannot confirm its ability to pay its obligations in a timely manner, but the federal bankruptcy law will not permit the termination of a contract by one party because the other has filed for bankruptcy protection.

d. What notice is required to terminate? Can the breaching party cure? Give consideration to how much notice should be required to terminate the contract. Some contracts may be terminated instantaneously, but others may require some period of time, such as 30 or 60 days, to terminate. Which way to go, once again, depends on the nature of the contract. You may require some period of time to account for the termination or get someone else to provide the goods or services. You may also wish to give the breaching party an opportunity to cure the breach, but this again will vary according to the nature of the contract and the nature of the breach.

e. What happens when the contract terminates? It may be that both parties may simply go their separate ways, but you need to figure out whether that’s appropriate. If one party has turned over confidential materials to the other, it may be that the contract should require the return of those materials. Similarly, if one party simply stops performing, perhaps that party should be required to provide his plans or otherwise assist a new contractor in completing the project.

6. Indemnification. If something goes wrong with the performance of the contract, and a third party sues as a result of injuries sustained, who assumes the risk? In the case of an injury, the likely result will be that the injured party will sue everyone connected with the event that caused the injury. If you are sued, however, you would prefer that your costs be covered by the other party to the contract. An indemnification clause will require one party to “indemnify” the other for any costs or losses incurred. Probably the fairest clause would provide either party to indemnify the other for any expenses or judgments that arise from the indemnifying party’s performance. The nature of the indemnification can differ from contract to contract, depending on the nature of the contract, but you should try in all cases to ensure that you will be indemnified for the acts of the other, or perhaps simply for his negligence.

7. Force Majeure. Since the lawyers seem to insist that there be some Latin phrase in every contract, this one will usually be it. The force majeure provision will simply mean that there are unforeseen forces beyond the control of the parties, such as acts of God, labor stoppages, or natural disasters, which will excuse one or both parties from performing the contract. This provision is usually a good thing for both parties, but that may differ according to the nature of the duties of the parties.

The force majeure provision, however, should be broad enough to cover the kinds of things that you can foresee as affecting your performance. In the case of a hotel contract, for example, the party contracting for the space may wish to have the provision cover terrorist acts or events that may adversely affect attendance. After September 11, 2001, some organizations had to cancel their annual meetings or conventions because no one would travel, but it was not clear whether the contract language excused performance when the terrorist act was not in the same geographic area as the hotel and did no physical damage to the surrounding area.

8. Miscellaneous Boilerplate Provisions. These are fairly standard provisions that routinely appear
in contracts. They will usually not cause any real problems, but they shouldn’t be ignored. A contract will sometimes contain:

- a “choice of law” or “choice of forum” provision that sets forth which state’s law will govern and where any dispute must be litigated (usually the state where performance occurs, but each party may argue for her or his own state);
- a clause indicating that the prevailing party in a dispute over the contract will be entitled to costs and attorneys fees (this is negotiable but usually acceptable since all parties expect to be the prevailing party);
- a “severability” clause to the effect that the rest of the contract will be upheld if one of its provisions is found to be invalid;
- a “merger” clause stating that the written contract is the entire agreement and that any prior discussions are “merged” into the contract;
- a clause requiring all parties to obey all laws and regulations in the performance of the contract, perhaps including a prohibition against wrongful discrimination;
- a clause defining the relationship between the parties as one of “independent contractor” and not one of employer-employee or agent-principal; and
- an “assignment” clause giving either party the right to assign her or his duties under the contract (which may be unacceptable if it is the party’s specific expertise or ability that the other party wishes to obtain).

There may be other similar provisions as well, but it is fairly easy to tell which are the standard clauses. As noted, they are usually routine, but should be read to ensure that nothing unexpected is inserted in them.

Obviously, this is not exhaustive, and there are various aspects of contracts and the law that may pop up from time to time. For example, other relevant terms may include confidentiality provisions or assignments of copyright, depending upon the particular contract. Nothing here is intended to substitute for the expertise that a lawyer can bring to the transaction, and you would be well advised to engage a lawyer to assist you.

The basic underlying rule, however, is to use your common sense and basic intelligence to make sure the contract reflects what you understand your deal to be. In most cases, there will be no issues. But in the cases where there are, you will be glad that you took the opportunity to review the contract and insist on changes before signing it.