

Workshop Prepares Job-Seekers for Bellingham Library Job Fair

Article ran in the Bellingham Bulletin Online, and is by Florence Ames, Bulletin Editor



Hari Narayanan, Business Service Representative at Workforce Central Career Center in Milford

On May 22, the Bellingham Library hosted a job fair at which approximately twenty local employers and job-placement agencies participated. In preparation for that event, the library hosted earlier in the month a presentation designed to inspire job-seekers to come and take part in the fair, but, even more important, designed to educate them in how best to do that. The facilitator of this workshop

was Hari Narayanan, Business Service Representative at Workforce Central Career Center in Milford, who modestly told those in attendance, “I want to make sure you learn one or two things that will be useful to you.” Anyone paying even a modicum of attention certainly learned much more than that.

“Looking for a job is a science,” he said; “if you follow the steps, it will work for you.” He pointed out that “the landscape [for job-hunting] has changed” over the years, and one needs to learn the process for managing that changed landscape. One must find a way to make Career Drive meet Opportunity Boulevard. Attending a job fair is one way to expedite that effort.

One must first have a well-defined and clear goal. “The employer has a specific task and is looking for a person with a specific skill,” said Narayanan. He or she wants to know specifically how your skills can add value to his or her company. This means that you, the job-seeker, must evaluate ALL of your skills and abilities. “Most of us don’t give ourselves enough credit,” said

Narayanan. We all have measurable skills (educational level, work experience) and immeasurable (such as ability to get along well with others or put others at ease or get others to do what needs to be done). He suggested that we ask people who know us what they think we are good at. Too many resumes are bios, he said, and that is not what a company wants. You need to focus, first on the job description you may be looking at and then on the skills and abilities that you have that match what the employer is looking for for that job. The hirer has a goal, so you need to target your resume and cover letter to show as clearly as you can how you can help him or her meet that goal. Scatter shot isn’t the way to go; a laser beam is, because employers are not at a job fair to play games; they’re looking for just the right person. When you’re a job-seeker, it’s all about the employer, not about you.

You too should define your goal and prioritize what is important to you. This can include a number of things: how much money you need to make, what the company benefits are, what the

working conditions would be, how much of a commute you might have, whether you might have to move and, if so, how far and whether you would be willing to live elsewhere. These things become your standards, and having them can make job-hunting a little easier by helping you target the companies where you might concentrate your efforts.

Narayanan noted that the biggest change in the altered landscape of job-hunting is the rise of networking. “The higher-level job you’re looking for, the more important networking becomes,” he said. “Who knows you is important; it makes a huge difference. It isn’t what you know but who knows you.” Therefore, people interaction is the number-one thing you need to work on, he said. “You have to go where the people are,” he said; “face-to-face interaction is invaluable, so the importance of networking can hardly be overstated. It helps you find jobs that may not be advertised, and are part of the ‘Hidden Job Market.’” One of the most important reasons for attending a job fair is to improve on what you are going to say to an important person (a possible hirer) by talking first with a lot of other people. You need to become known to many people. “It’s a numbers game,” said Narayanan; “you need to be in front of a lot of people.”

He pointed out that both you and a company take a risk when you both say “yes.” Networking helps the company to reduce its risk in hiring you; it’s up to you too to help reduce that risk.

Becoming known by many people is one way to do that. If someone whom you have not handpicked and designated as a reference puts in a good word for you, that can go a long way toward making hiring you less of a risk. You can further reduce the risk by showing a real interest in and familiarity with a company you have targeted as a place where you would like to work. Learn something about the company’s organizational structure, the products and/or services that it offers, the company’s history and philosophy, its size and location, its growth history and earnings, new markets it may be opening, new products it may be planning to offer, its major competitors, and a typical career pattern at that company. Be able to carry on a conversation that shows your interest in and knowledge of the company. Ask meaningful questions and then listen and learn.

Finally, market yourself; this is no time to be modest, says Narayanan. Look and act professional, be careful of your posture, have a firm but not crushing handshake, make eye contact, smell good but don’t overdo colognes, smile, be enthusiastic without gushing, don’t overdo anything, have a business card ready to hand out, develop an “elevator pitch” (a 20-second or so “commercial” about you that highlights how you might be the best fit for a particular job). Don’t be afraid to ask for leads, tips, and recommendations. If the person to whom you are speaking has nothing to offer you, he or she may be able to direct you to someone else who may be able to help you.

The job fair hosted by the library is now history, and you may have missed it, but there will be others, in many places, and the tips given here can help you prepare for one that you may be able to attend.