

# Getting Your Foot in the Door

## Editorial

In early 2020, Namrata and I found ourselves in between jobs when COVID-19 entered our lives. In this edition of Getting Your Foot in the Door, we share our experiences and learnings while searching for employment in the midst of a global crisis. This might not be entirely fitting

with the usual theme of “getting that first job”, but we feel this is very relevant in the current landscape. We are happy to report that after a few months of persistence, we have landed industry roles that are keeping us busy, sane, and happy.

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## SECTION EDITOR



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## Job search during the COVID-19 era

COVID-19 was a pandemic that was well predicted yet seemingly ignored by most world leaders – until it happened. From the next major global recession to the permanent damages caused by global warming, our world is full of predictions. We signed treaties to give the scientists a bit more due for their hard work yet forgot to act on them. So here we are, in a world on lockdown, itching to be released into the wild again like caged animals in a zoo.

As we applaud our doctors and healthcare workers facing the brunt of the disease, the scientists dedicated towards the research and development of a COVID-19 vaccine and the medical device industry focusing on mass production of necessary equipment, one of the many and most dreaded repercussions of the sudden halt of business is the prospect of losing one's job. Many are already in this boat, many may enter it in the coming days, and some may never have to enter it, yet fear it nonetheless.

### Impact on business and the economy

Industries most severely affected by COVID-19 are those related to mobility and leisure, such as aviation, tourism, gastronomy, and sports. Sectors least affected are those that cater to our basic needs such as food, healthcare products, and technology.

We may wonder then why jobs in the pharmaceutical and medical device industries are endangered. There may be increased demand for

certain drugs and devices but manufacturing and distribution face challenges in manpower shortages that cascaded into supply chain and logistics. In addition, mobility restrictions resulted in disruption of clinical trials; many studies have been suspended or even terminated.

With every industry being directly or indirectly affected by this pandemic, companies are struggling to calculate the best routes possible for retaining their existing employees. Consequently, despite Q1 and Q2 being the best time to hire new personnel, this year it had been slow if not almost negligible. This is not to say that people are no longer required to fill those positions, rather the decisions on how to make it happen, plus the best time period to allow it, is burdening organisations. Q3 and Q4 saw an increase in open positions after the dry spell of Q1 and Q2. However, one may quickly see the after effects of the pandemic by most positions being offered as “remote”. Organisations have worked hard this year to figure out how to adapt to a remote work ethic. One might go as far to say that the “taboo” behind the “working from home” concept has been shattered for some organisations via this pandemic. As people decipher the logistics of working and managing teams from home, recruitment agencies have been forced to get creative and find solutions.

It may also be mentioned that recruiters and headhunters might have to eventually face the axe if the hiring freeze goes on and their revenue channels disappear.

Luckily, we were not at a complete standstill,

thanks to advancements in information technology. One may only wonder what the situation would have been had we not discovered the internet. Information technology is our saviour for now, vaccines the next.

### Business works on predictions

The immediate response to this disease by businesses worldwide was large-scale hiring freezes

followed either by reduced pay, furloughing, or outright termination of employment. For those positions that were posted in Q1, some companies were, and still are, ghosting on candidates, unable to efficiently inform them on the status of their applications due to the handicap they themselves

face. The frustration is high on both ends. The solution? Patience (monk level).

Amidst this nature-caused recession, we have the utmost responsibility to network and to assist those who are jobless as a result of the pandemic. Despite the lack of clarity, it is paramount to assist those reaching out in search of job opportunities.

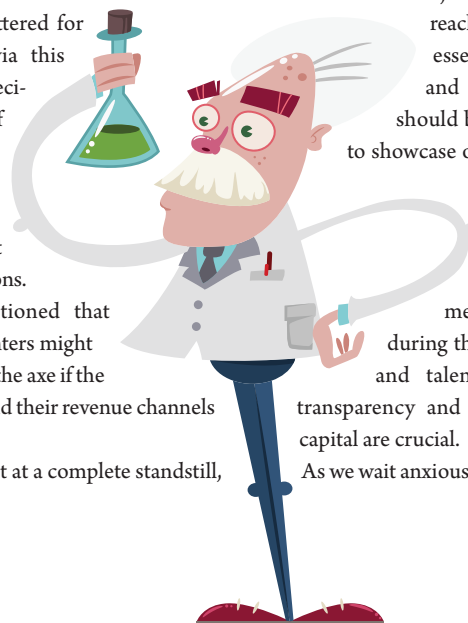
For the job seeker, being proactive and reaching out to their network is essential. Temporary positions and contingency contracts should be taken as an opportunity to showcase one's competencies that are

worth keeping in the long-term. For the employer, creative stop gaps such as short term contracts are a means to maintain a work flow

during this crisis. For the recruiters and talent acquisition specialists, transparency and empathy towards human capital are crucial.

As we wait anxiously to see how events unfold,

At the start of every disaster movie, there is a scientist being ignored.



This article was published first as a post on LinkedIn at:  
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/job-search-during-covid-19-era-dr-namrata-upadhyay/?trackingId=QckNbU2%2FS7qCqzAgaCJLxw%3D%3D>

a positive approach would be to acknowledge the gift of time that has been given to many. Although it seems a cliché to say, never again would we get such an opportunity to work on personal and professional growth, develop personal business ideas and advance our time/energy management skills (and sleep management skills for those with young children). Enterprises and professionals are plunged into managing a kind of risk that they would have never intentionally put themselves through. Hence, as uncomfortable as it may be, the only outcome is growth.

As world leaders juggle the sensitive battle between prioritising the health of their people or the wealth of their nations, the people remain cautiously hopeful of a return to normalcy. Whatever circumstance one is to face professionally, it is paramount to use it as a means of self-growth rather than a reason to count one's losses.

## Recruitment during and after COVID-19

Despite initial slowdown in the hiring process, several progressive companies picked up in Q2 and Q3 where they left off during the lockdowns. Companies and businesses, too, have to grow, and in order to grow, they need to hire. In the healthcare industry, there is definitely lots of work to be done once the initial setbacks in mobility have been addressed.

To circumvent the need to travel for face-to-face meetings, technology has become our best friend. Video interviews with several people across different time zones are not without their challenges, but they can be done. There are, however, some ground rules to be observed. The candidate has to exhibit flexibility but also the same commitment that one invests in a face-to-face interview. The minimum is to ensure a working technology and, if possible, freedom from interruptions from one's personal life.

The employer, on the other hand, should treat candidates with respect and consideration, taking into account time differences and biological need for food and rest. Instead of marathon interviews à la assessment centres, consider breaking up video sessions across 2 or 3 days. Allow breaks between virtual interviews. Don't leave the candidate traumatised, bruised, and battered at the end of a long virtual interview day.

## COVID-flavoured interview questions

Any job interview now and post-COVID-19 will be flavoured by pandemic activities and mindsets. The question of "how did you cope with the lockdown" may not be asked openly but



For job seekers, an added mention that you would consider temporary positions and freelancing will go a long way to attract potential employers.

this would be in every interviewer's mind. Using one's learnings and experiences during the lockdown can demonstrate a candidate's resilience, crisis management skills, and resourcefulness.

The job seeker can also formulate questions around COVID-19 to ask a prospective employer. "How did the company support patients/clients/employees during the pandemic?" This will gauge a company's values and their commitment to people. The employer should not forget that candidates are also assessing them.

## The bottom line

Facing unemployment is always taxing to the psyche of those affected, more so in these times. Ghosting from recruiters, empty promises from

employers, and shoddy recruitment practices are unnecessary yet resolvable hindrances. Empathy is paramount. Imbalance of power should be avoided. A candidate should not be coerced into accepting an offer out of desperation. We must keep in mind that employment is a partnership, preferably a long-term one that is mutually beneficial to all parties. If done right, recruiting and hiring during the COVID-19 crisis can be turned into a win-win situation and possibly create new trends altogether that may be here to stay.

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