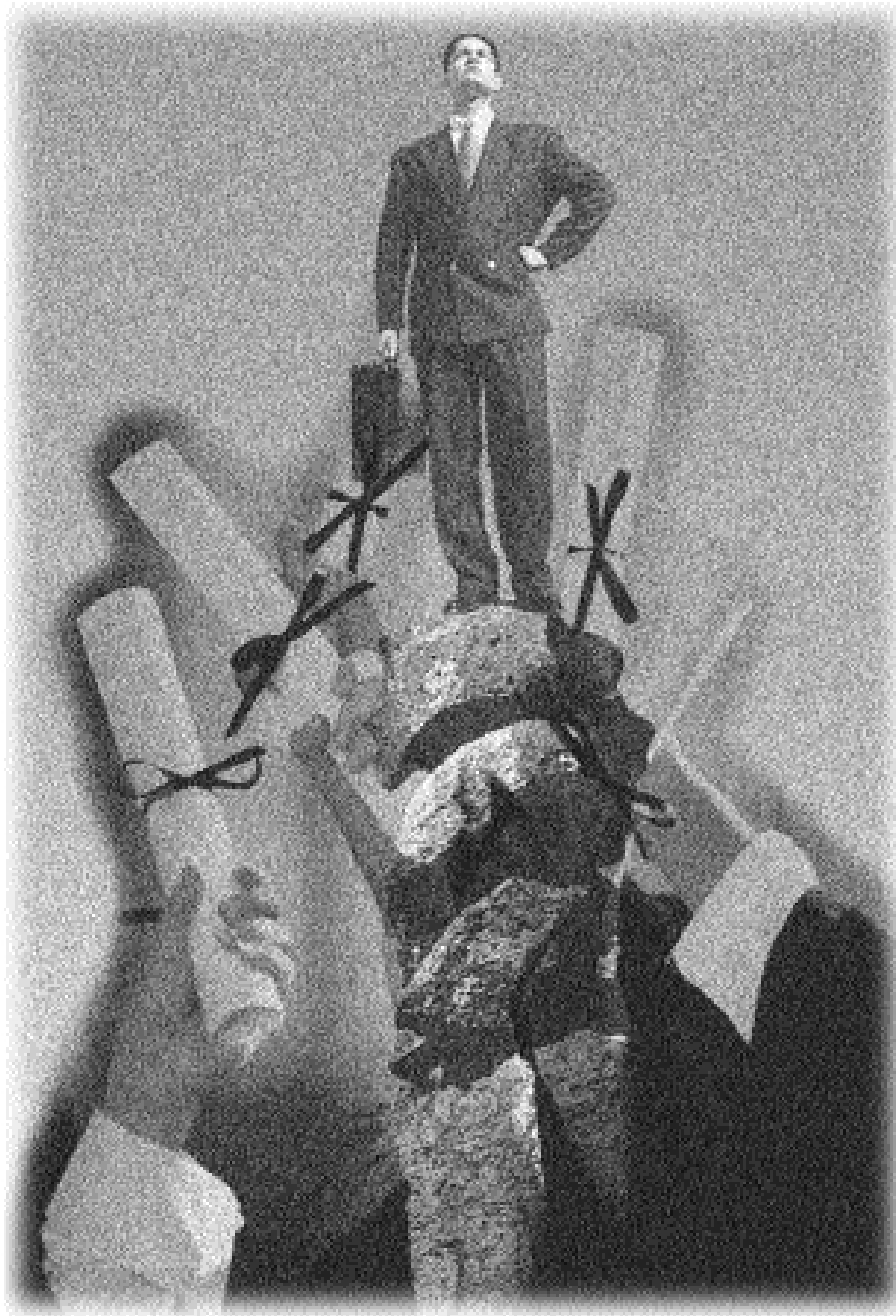


Professionals Give Advice on Preparing for Employment

During a panel discussion addressing industry expectations and graduate aspirations at Kansas State University's 1999 Cattlemen's Day in March, speakers shared their views on how students can prepare for positions in production agriculture and related industries.

BY T. L. MEYER



Job trends are changing constantly, making it difficult for recent graduates to know what employers want.

"Your world changes because of job changes," says Marvin Reimer, general manager for the Wichita, Kan., Management Recruiters International (MRI) office. MRI is a recruiting company that finds employees for employers. They have offices worldwide.

"The current trend is that one person will work in three nonrelated jobs and industries in a lifetime," he adds.

According to Reimer, the most important thing a graduate needs to have when searching for a job is career focus. "Career focus explains why I have studied what I've studied," he says.

In addition to career focus, Reimer says employers look for candidates with experience in combination with their degree; communications skills, including oral, written and interactive; enthusiasm for the job; and technical capability.

Technical capability includes computer skills and the ability to use e-mail and the Internet. These skills are becoming more important, Reimer says, because many companies are starting to require employees to do their own clerical work.

■ More than expected

Communication skills and enthusiasm are the key points stressed by agricultural industry representatives. Additionally, they stress that employees should be willing to do more than is expected of them.

"Sometimes you have to get involved in things you weren't expecting. Be a team player and get in there," says Mario Ochua of Excel Corp. in Wichita, Kan.

Reimer agrees. "Someone who works much harder and is more creative than the employer expects of them is very valuable," he says. "Most famous people became famous because they did twice as much as was necessary."

Communication skills also are essential because employees come into contact with many people. Being a good listener allows students to pick up things that can help them in their careers, says Dan Dorn of Decatur County Feedyard near Oberlin, Kan.

Byron Rice of Elanco Animal Health, Coralville, Iowa, advises students to take care of business while they are still in

school. This includes maintaining a respectable grade point average, being active in clubs and maintaining a strong work ethic.

"There are many opportunities for people who take care of business," he says.

Reimer says involvement is important, but prospective job candidates should remember one thing: "The employer is not interested in how big of a star you were on the basketball team. They only care about what tools you can bring to them — if you can do the job they need done."

Sarah Leonhard of Farmland Industries, Kansas City, Mo., emphasizes the willingness to do more than is asked.

"Think outside of the box. Do more than the employer expects of you. Constantly challenge yourself," she says.

Reimer says companies utilizing MRI's services may or may not admit it, but many like risk-takers — people who are willing to think differently and try something new.

■ Beyond the classroom

Internships are important, too.

"Internships are wonderful. They can take a dream and make it into a reality," Reimer says.

Clayton Huseman, a senior in animal sciences and industry at Kansas State University, shares a lesson from his internship experiences. The ability to adjust and enthusiasm for the job are critical, he says.

Most industry representatives agree a one-page resumé tailored to a specific job is best.

"Do not clutter your resumé," Leonhard says.

However, Reimer doesn't necessarily see it that way. "A one-page resumé is better than a two-page resumé, but zero pages is better than one page," he says. "A resumé is trying to match your past with a job's present and future."

He adds, "If an employer reads your resumé before he or she meets you, they will read between the lines and make judgment decisions without you there. Personality traits do not come off of a written document."

He adds that more than half of the resumé today include an inaccuracy, and the candidate knows it. He also says more than half of the resumé on the Internet have bogus names on them.

"These inaccuracies dilute other people's value," Reimer says.

Instead of sending a resumé to an employer in hopes of getting an interview, he suggests job seekers call the employer to schedule a meeting and take their resumé with them.

"A resumé is not a link to the interview. However, the interview is the link to your next job," Reimer says.

Once candidates obtain an interview, they should practice by answering possible questions about challenges or important decisions they have made.

Honesty is the best policy when it comes to answering interview questions.

"Elaborate on what you do know, but don't make something up if you don't know the answer," Leonhard says. "Be straightforward."

