

career resource guide



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define your career preferences

Know your objectives and preferences

Define your own specific objectives, both personal and professional, before you begin.

Understand your preferences regarding work styles, environments, pace, etc.

Determine the job criteria that will help you meet your requirements.

Think about which technologies you enjoy most, especially if you are experienced in more than one area.

Consider what types of roles will help you achieve your long-term goals.

Factor in the importance of learning new skills as you work.

Consider the size of organization you like most

Many professionals want to work for large engineering, manufacturing, construction or oil and gas companies on an international scale.

Others appreciate the opportunity to pave new roads with smaller innovative start-up firms.

For others, the size of the organization does not matter at all.

Reflect on your own career experiences to date.

Have you found yourself happier in a small organization, or thriving in a large environment?

Factor your preferences in this area into your job search.

Select hands-on work or management

Moving into a management role can be very rewarding.

Management roles, however, include added responsibility, paperwork and the development of careers of those working under your supervision.

If you enjoy hands-on technical work, management may not be the right direction for you.

If you are contemplating a move into a management role, consider the reasons why.

If you would simply like to pursue a higher salary, discuss that possibility with your current manager.

If you are certain that management is right for you, demonstrate your willingness to learn and to lead.

Determine your salary or rate

Understand that there is a wide range of salaries and rates for every engineering-related role.

Research the ranges for different organizations in your local area.

Base your range on the type of work you do, your years of experience and your financial obligations.

Seek a compensation plan that is appropriate for your given role.

Factor benefits, such as training, insurance coverage, retirement funds, etc., into your evaluation.

Avoid letting salary alone influence your decision to accept or reject a potential opportunity.

define your career preferences

Are you prepared to commute or relocate?

Some individuals view a commute as an opportunity for quiet time before the day begins.

Others prefer not to travel more than a few minutes to the office each day.

Think about your willingness to commute when evaluating positions.

Determine your transportation options to and from each workplace.

Decide whether you would be willing to move to an area closer to where a given office is located.

Consider asking whether the hiring organization offers telecommuting or other work-from-home options.

Factor in your special needs

You may have special needs that affect your career choices. Single parents may require a daycare facility onsite. If you have health considerations, for instance, you might need an organization with a comprehensive benefit plan. You may be averse to accepting a position that requires travel. Communicate your requirements up front so a potential employer can map an opportunity to those needs.

Stay informed of market developments

Many engineering professionals enjoy the challenge of learning leading-edge technologies.

Others prefer to work in areas in which they have experience.

Beware of being unwilling to move with the market trends.

Stay attuned to emerging areas where there are opportunities to learn and develop as a professional.

Understand market demands before investing in training in new areas.

Read industry publications and watch trends in order to make informed career development decisions.

select contract or perm

Know your options

Traditional permanent employees work solely for a single employer.

Contract consultants work on a series of different assignments anywhere from a few weeks to over a year in duration.

Many engineering, construction and manufacturing staff are incorporated or temporary, meaning they are entrepreneurs running their own businesses.

Contract consulting is not simply a job option but a lifestyle choice that is not always suitable for everyone. Consider the challenges and benefits of both contract consulting and a traditional permanent position before you decide which option is best for you.

Benefits of traditional permanent employment

Most traditional permanent employment offers job security and stability.

Traditional permanent employees can rely on a continuous, predictable income stream that rarely decreases.

Traditional permanent employees usually receive benefits such as pension plans, paid sick leave, insurance, and medical coverage.

Companies are often willing to invest in education and training for permanent employees.

Traditional permanent employees belong to an ongoing social group and are members of a "family".

Traditional permanent employees may have the opportunity to participate in stock option and profit sharing programs.

Many companies manage their employees' careers and guide them into a desirable career path within the organization.

Benefits of contract consulting

Consultants are free to select the types of consulting assignments that meet their personal goals and preferences.

Consultants can gain a wide variety of experiences in different corporate and technical environments.

Since consultants control their own careers, they may enjoy a more positive attitude toward their chosen profession.

Consultants are usually encouraged to remain removed from the internal corporate politics of the client.

Consultants may choose to explore short-term opportunities in new communities or even other countries.

Some clients may be willing to pay more for the services of an independent consultant.

Depending on business status, contract consultants may be able to leverage allowable business deductions and lower their taxable income.

select contract or perm

Challenges of contract consulting

Contract consultants are not always able to find work when they want it at the desired hourly rate.

Even highly skilled contract consultants may have to endure unpaid periods between assignments.

Contract consultants often have to take responsibility for their own continuing education and training, including costs of tuition and unpaid time spent to take a course.

Some contract consultants must obtain benefits such as insurance or medical coverage on their own or forgo them all together.

Contract consultants are typically not eligible for stock option or profit sharing plans.

Career planning and development is usually the sole responsibility of the individual.

On the job, consultants are often expected to be the team expert, someone who can ramp up very quickly and produce excellent results with minimal guidance.

Business and social interaction with coworkers may only last as long as a given consulting assignment.

Consider your personal preferences

Some engineering professionals prefer to grow with one organization through a number of years rather than consulting for multiple organizations.

Others rely on the security of a guaranteed work schedule and steady income without the periodic interruptions that may come with contract consulting.

Those who aspire to management may find that there may be fewer opportunities for consulting assignments.

Contract consulting may be best for you if you are a highly experienced, highly motivated individual with a lot of professional confidence and an entrepreneurial spirit.

rev up your resume

Include introductory information

Begin with a header that includes your full name, address, telephone, mobile phone, e-mail, website and LinkedIn address.

Indicate which of the numbers have voicemail.

Include a targeted description of your professional objectives at the start of your resume.

Keep your objective to 1-2 sentences in length, including keywords that cater to the position you are applying for.

Highlight sections with major accomplishments.

Provide detail

Include detailed information about your skills, not just a vague overview of past responsibilities. This can include a project list.

Under education, include only degrees you have completed.

If you have certification relevant to the position, remember to include it.

Never rely on a job title to relay your expertise in a given area. Provide as much detail as necessary for the client to make an informed decision.

You do not need to keep your resume under two pages in length. Omit personal information (e.g., your age, marital status, or social security/insurance number, pictures, hobbies, etc).

Maintain multiple resume versions

Customize your resume to the company and position to which you are applying, based on your research.

Help the potential client or employer see your relevance to the position.

Take the time to understand each client's or employer's requirements and tailor your resume to highlight required skills.

Review your structure

Document experience in reverse chronological order beginning with your most recent work experience.

Each job should include the company's name, all positions you held there, and the years and months you were employed.

List your greatest strengths up front, in point form, so the reader's attention will be captured early.

Describe your skills and achievements using descriptive, action-oriented language.

Provide a Technical Summary for each role you have held - technical skills and the amount of experience you have with each - at the end of your resume.

References

Don't include references in your resume – note that they are available upon request, and then send them when asked.

Set yourself apart

Describe significant accomplishments, tangible results, or awards of recognition that set you apart from others with comparable experience.

Explain how you've provided added value beyond your employer's or clients' basic expectations.

Include non-work activities where they reflect positively on your skills and abilities. (e.g. professional services you voluntarily contributed to a non-profit organization.)

rev up your resume

Check your presentation

Keep your resume looking aesthetically pleasing by keeping it clear and simple. Choose an easy-to-read, 10 pt. typeface in black (recommendation: Arial).

For technologies or major areas of concentration, consider presenting the information in a table.

Be sure to include any certifications, accreditations or logos that you have successfully earned.

Proofread!

Careless mistakes on your resume may lead a potential employer or client to assume you will be careless on the job.

Never rely on computer spell-check or grammar-check functions to proofread your resume.

Carefully reread a hard copy of your resume. Spell-checkers can only catch non-existent and misspelled words, not misplaced words.

Ask someone else to review it to catch any errors you may have missed.

build a powerful portfolio

How a professional portfolio can help you

It's recommended that you consider bringing a portfolio or project list with you to an interview for the following reasons:

A professional portfolio containing organized samples of your work, accomplishments, awards and certificates is a valuable marketing tool.

A portfolio allows you to present documentation demonstrating your credentials to prospective employers or consulting clients during interviews.

A portfolio can give you a competitive advantage over other candidates by projecting a very professional business image.

Packaging your materials

Creating a project history, portfolio of completed projects or a list of substantial accomplishments can provide you with a tremendous advantage over other applicants who do not provide this information by giving you a much more professional image.

Choosing your portfolio contents

Begin with your current resume.

Follow with a neatly formatted one-page list of all of your significant accomplishments on the job.

Provide reference letters from past employers or colleagues.

Incorporate hard copy examples of designs, products, business plans, reference letters, thank-you notes or certificates received.

Add articles, write-ups, or newsletters you have been featured in or written yourself.

Insert educational or training certificates, if possible.

Include awards of achievement.

Take care not to include any items that may violate a confidentiality agreement you have signed with any of your past employers or clients.

raise your industry profile

Make yourself known

Raising your profile is simply a matter of making yourself known in the industry.

Many professionals who are well known and respected within your industry community can often access a better selection of opportunities and may sometimes command higher compensation.

The higher your industry profile and the more contacts you make within industry-related circles, the easier it will be to market yourself.

Join professional organizations

Active participation in business and industry associations can help raise your profile.

Try joining industry-related user groups, your local Chamber of Commerce/Board of Trade, and industry associations.

Consider such organizations as the Canadian Construction Association, Canadian Society of Professional Engineers, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters Canada, Canadian Association of Drilling Engineers and many others. Attending and socializing at meetings adds to your network of contacts.

Joining the executive committee of user groups or industry associations helps build ties to other executives.

If you lack time for an executive position, becoming a speaker at the group's meetings is another excellent way to establish your credentials as an industry expert.

Get published

Another option is to write articles for publication in association newsletters or industry trade press.

While local trade press usually does not provide monetary compensation for articles, you usually receive a byline and a one or two line description of your credentials.

Presenting samples of your published articles can be very impressive to a potential employer or client.

Maintain high professional standards

Your professional reputation stays with you throughout your career.

Dealing with prospective employers or clients in a professional and ethical manner is extremely important, both while you are looking for work and on the job.

Follow through on your commitments.

Exceed the expectations of your employer or client.

Treat clients, employers, and coworkers the way you would like to be treated in return.

interview with precision

Do your homework

Find out as much as you can about the employer and the role before the interview. A corporate Web site is an excellent source for this type of research.

Check your local reference library for news or magazine articles on the company.

Talk to other professionals who have worked with the organization before.

Role play

Practice your interview skills before meeting with a potential employer.

Role play is an excellent way to anticipate interview questions and to prepare answers.

Have a friend or colleague play the interviewer while you rehearse your responses.

Insist that your friend or colleague play a tough interviewer.

Repeat the role-play several times until you feel confident and prepared.

Dress for success

While many organizations have adopted "business casual" attire, a business suit is usually the best choice for an interview.

Alternatively, slacks and a button-down shirt, or a skirt with a blouse or sweater are suitable casual looks.

Keep your outfit simple and professional, avoiding distracting jewelry, strong colognes, and flashy accessories.

Ensure that you appear clean and neat to project a polished, professional image at all times.

Know the logistics

Show your respect for the interviewer's time by being prompt for all appointments.

Make sure you know exactly how to get to the interview site. Make time allowances for traffic or other delays.

Many organizations have multiple sites and/or buildings. Know exactly where you need to go.

Bring the name and telephone number of the person with whom you are scheduled to meet.

If you absolutely must miss the interview, provide as much notice as possible so the meeting can be rescheduled with minimal disruption to the interviewer.

Bring along an extra copy of your resume in case the interviewer does not have one.

In the interview

Make a great first impression. Greet the interviewer with a friendly smile, a firm handshake, and direct eye contact.

You may want to bring a portfolio into the interview. The portfolio may contain hard copy samples of your work, accomplishments, awards and certificates. Take care not to include any items that may violate the confidentiality of a past employer or client.

Thank the interviewer for taking the time to meet with you.

Talk

Begin by asking questions that will help you navigate the meeting.

When you respond to questions, provide complete, detailed answers.

When describing your skills, include related experiences such as courses you have taken, volunteer projects you have worked on, or similar technologies you are very familiar with.

Try to keep your responses under 60 seconds in length, checking back with the interviewer to ensure the question has been adequately answered.

interview with precision

Listen

Avoid monopolizing the conversation - spend as much time listening as you do talking.

Allow the interviewer to fully explain the opportunity to you and to gain some assurance that you are truly interested.

Pay close attention to the questions asked and provide concise, informative answers.

Active listening can help direct the conversation toward the skills and strengths that will help you win the position.

Think about your weaknesses ahead of time

Interviewers may ask you to list some of your weaknesses in addition to your strengths.

These types of questions are not designed to trick you, but to test your honesty and how well you know yourself. As you describe weaknesses, discuss steps you are taking to improve, such as courses or additional reading.

Your ability to admit to your minor weaknesses will reflect positively on you in an interview, particularly if you show dedication to improvement.

Do not mention weaknesses directly related to the role at hand which will likely disqualify you right away.

Honesty is the best policy

Take care not to exaggerate about skills you do not have. Overstating your skills may cause irreparable harm to your reputation later on.

Speak honestly about all of your past interactions with colleagues, clients, and projects.

If you are asked about negative past experiences, discuss these truthfully and tactfully.

Explaining what you learned from negative experiences will illustrate your commitment to growth as a professional.

Remain positive

Frame all questions and comments so that they reflect positively on you.

Pose all questions in a positive tone.

Your tone will speak volumes about your attitude toward the position and your sense of professionalism.

Ask about the job content before asking about compensation and benefits.

Recap pertinent information

By the end of the interview, ensure that you have all information you require to decide whether you want to accept the position.

Be certain that you are clear on the role and what will be expected of you.

Ask whether there will be adequate opportunity for advancement.

Taking a moment to recap your discussions throughout the meeting will show that you are a good listener who is skilled at summarizing.

Close the interview by soliciting feedback

Before leaving the interview, solicit immediate feedback from the interviewer.

Leave yourself the opportunity to uncover and address any unanswered questions or concerns.

Focus on the negative, asking the interviewer exactly what might prevent him or her from bringing you into the organization.

Close the interview only after all outstanding issues have been addressed.

Thank the interviewer for his or her time and reiterate your interest in the position.

evaluate multiple offers

Know your needs and preferences ahead of time

Know what you are looking for well before you find yourself in a multiple offer situation.

Consider what is an exciting project or role for you.

Think about new skills that you would like to add, or existing ones you would like to build.

Contemplate the type of work environment you prefer.

Determine your rate or salary, relative to market value for the type of position you are pursuing.

If you are a consultant, know your ideal contract length.

Decide whether you are willing to relocate for a contract or permanent position.

Be prepared to decide before you interview

Research each company and opportunity fully before you reach the interview stage.

Evaluate how each opportunity could help build your profile in the long run.

Decide ahead of time which opportunity you would most like to accept.

Use each interview to confidently sell your skills without having to make rushed assessments.

Anticipate your reaction to an offer in each interview setting, knowing that there may be some pressure.

Be open and honest about your needs

Be forthright about all of your needs and preferences during each interview.

Request clarification of any factors about which you are uncertain.

Map the opportunities offered by each position back to your established set of goals and preferences.

If a good opportunity does not match your needs exactly, ask whether there is room for negotiation.

Evaluate each opportunity based on long-term career objectives

Avoid basing your decision on salary or rate alone.

Determine the skills and industry knowledge you stand to gain from each position.

Inquire about future paths for promotion and growth within each organization.

Ask about training programs available with each opportunity.

Assess the business performance of each individual organization and the industry as a whole.

Find out how important your department or industry is to the success and culture of each organization. Make your choice based on sound business judgment rather than emotion.

Respond to each organization in a professional manner

Word of mouth about professionalism can spread quickly throughout your industry.

Once an offer is extended, you may not have much time to make a decision.

Establish timeline expectations early in the process.

Respond promptly to all offers that have been extended to you.

If you turn down an offer, take the time to clarify your reasons.

Regardless of your final conclusion, be professional and courteous to everyone involved.

you've got the job! now what?

Submit your resignation

Hold off on resigning from your position until you have a firm offer from a new employer.

Write a brief letter to your manager giving notice of your last day.

Outline a list of projects you have been working on.

Detail exactly what you will and will not be able to finish before you leave.

Provide ample information for your manager to redistribute your responsibilities to other team members.

Ensure your letter has a positive tone, even if you are leaving due to personality conflict.

Avoid accepting a counter offer

It is almost never in your best interests to accept a counter offer from your former employer.

Statistics indicate that most employees who accept counter offers leave anyway within 10 months.

Your former employer may offer more money to evade larger issues or buy time to hire a replacement.

Think about the reasons why you sought a new position in the first place.

Remember that a committed organization will do what it takes to keep you satisfied before you choose to seek a position elsewhere.

Close your relationship with your employer amicably

Do all you can to turn potentially negative circumstances into an amicable separation.

Maintain your sense of professionalism and integrity at all times.

Demonstrate a commitment to minimizing workflow disruption. Keep details about your new position, and how you secured it, confidential.

Leave on good terms - you may find yourself working with the same colleagues again in the future.

useful links

Check out these and other links that will help you elevate your career and enhance your engagement.

[Randstad Engineering](#)

randstadengineering.ca

[Association of Canadian Search, Employment and Staffing Services](#)

acess.org

[Engineers Canada](#)

engineerscanada.ca

[Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters](#)

cme-mec.ca

[Canadian Institute of Mining, Metallurgy and Petroleum](#)

cim.org

[Petroleum Services Association of Canada](#)

psac.ca

[Canadian Construction Association](#)

cca-acc.com

[Services Canada](#)

servicecanada.gc.ca

[Green Building Council](#)

cagbc.org

[Canadian Institute of Quantity Surveyors](#)

ciqs.org

[Gold Seal Certification](#)

goldsealcertification.com

