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The Six Keys to Successfully Getting a Government Job

by Dennis V. Damp

Author of *The Book of U.S. Government Jobs – 11th edition*

There are six basic ingredients to successfully finding federal employment for qualified applicants:

- Understand the differences between the private and federal sectors
- Seek out all job vacancies and bid on multiple positions
- Completely read and analyze each job announcement
- Package a professional federal style résumé
- Don't give up when you receive your first rejection
- Prepare for interviews

Here is a little more detail on each element:

Understand the differences between the private and federal sectors

Many applicants submit a private sector résumé, which is insufficient for federal jobs. The differences are significant. Considerably more detail is required for the federal style résumé and if you don't provide the exact information requested, your application may be rejected. At the very least, you risk not being placed in the highest category rating and less likely to be referred to the selecting official.

Seek out all job vacancies and bid on multiple positions

Many job hunters send in an application for only one job announcement. Seek out all available job vacancies and continue to send in applications with every opportunity. Don't limit yourself to www.usajobs.gov. This excellent site does advertise about 80 percent or more of all federal jobs; however, you may be passing up job opportunities in your own backyard by not visiting individual agency recruitment sites in your area. Visit www.federaljobs.net/federal.htm for direct links to over 140 federal agency recruiting sites.

Completely read and analyze each job announcement

First and foremost, when applying for any federal job READ the job announcement front to back. The job announcement will explain everything you need to know to apply for that specific job. Every job announcement is unique, so don't assume because you read one for the exact same job series and grade that

the requirements are the same for this new job. This is especially true for the required key Duties, Responsibilities and Specialized Experience. Each advertised job has specific requirements such as proficiency and experience with computer software, equipment, programs, reporting systems, skills, and other factors.

Package a professional federal style résumé

I can't stress enough the importance of tailoring your federal style résumé to the job announcement's key duties, responsibilities and specialized experience. If you tailor your résumé to the job announcement you will improve your chances of being referred for interviews. Everything is about ranking factors and showing rating officials through your detailed work descriptions that you deserve to be placed in the "Best Qualified" group.

Another factor to consider is that most résumés — over 90 percent or more — are now submitted online through federal résumé builders. I suggest completing your federal style résumé offline on your desktop computer rather than going straight to a résumé builder. You need quality time to compose and tailor your résumé, and many of the online résumé builder and submission programs have time limits and other constraints. You can copy and paste your résumé into the online résumé builders after you professionally compile your application on your desktop.

Don't give up when you receive your first rejection

You can learn from rejections by contacting the selecting official and/or the HR specialist. Ask what training and/or experience would have enhanced your application package for future positions. If the selecting official or HR specialist suggests obtaining certain education, training or experience, work to achieve their recommendations. A rejection may also be due to things beyond your control such as funding restrictions, a hiring freeze, or your selection may have been blocked by a military member claiming veterans' preference.

Prepare for interviews

The better prepared you are, the less anxious you will be and the greater your chances for success. There is an old saying in the real estate business that value is determined by three things: location, location, location. In interviewing, it's preparation, preparation, preparation.

One very important consideration in your preparation is the role that stress plays in these situations. They say that public speaking is the most stressful situation for the majority of people. Well, interviewing for a career position is a close second. Learn about the agency before the interview, review your application, dress appropriately and be positive throughout the interview.

If you should get frustrated, and many do, just think of this: the average annual total compensation in 2010 for federal civilian workers was \$123,049, compared to \$61,051 for the private sector. The benefits are outstanding — federal employees' benefits ranged between 26 percent and 50 percent of pay based on time in service, the employee's age, and retirement system. Federal jobs are well worth the time and effort that you INVEST in the process.

Finally, I must add that it is unwise to get angry with the process; instead of getting mad, GET INVOLVED.

Dennis V. Damp is the author of *The Book of U.S. Government Jobs – 11th edition* and numerous other books. He is a recognized government employment expert. He retired at age 55 with over 35 years federal service. He can attest firsthand to how rewarding civil service employment can be – as it was in his case. Damp has been a guest on CNN's Your Money show and on hundreds of radio talk shows. He lectures at universities and has written articles for — and been quoted in articles in — national and regional magazines, newspapers, and web sites. His books have been featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *U.S. News & World Report*.