

Preface

This Handbook is intended for Social Work students and new graduates of Australia.

Provided within this handbook are documents which provide an overview of the student / employment transition process of those who are entering Social Work. The Handbook then progresses readers through the key tasks involved in preparation for professional employment and information on how to manage self-care along the way. In the final chapters this Handbook provides information on accessing the Australian Social Work job market.

Development of the Handbook was brought about by the desire to provide Social Work students and new graduates a profession-specific tool to guide them through the process of entering the Australian work force. The development journey of this Handbook was a challenge in mapping the contents to practice as the field of Social Work is so diverse. The resources provided here were publically available and have been included based upon either their focus upon the individual throughout their transition or because of the clarity they provide on key milestones in developing an individual Social Work career plan.

Acknowledgements

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Starting Where the Student Is: Reflections of a First-Year Social Work Intern

By Katherine Freeman

Katherine Freeman is a second-year graduate student at the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, City University of New York. Katherine has a bachelor's degree in international relations and Spanish from the State University of New York, College at Geneseo and has experience working with at-risk youth in the United States and Chile. Katherine's current field placement is at an agency that provides trauma-focused therapy to children in the Bronx. She wrote this piece at the end of her first-year field placement.

From *The New Social Worker*, Spring 2014, Vol. 21, No. 2.

We sit down. "My name is Katherine Freeman, and I'm the Social Work intern at the clinic." She can hear my voice shaking. Is her eyebrow raised in suspicion, or am I just imagining that? "What can I help you with today?" Just dive in. There's no other way, I think to myself. I lean forward onto the desk, smile, and am sure that I sit with an open posture to the client, giving her my undivided attention as we were taught in our Social Work Practice Lab.

I'm not sure if my experience as a first-year Social Work student exactly mirrors that of others. Actually, I believe it unfair to assume that there is one "standard" experience of a student in this field, as the beauty of this profession is that it attracts people with such a rich and diverse array of experience that it is impossible to identify a "typical" student.

The one thing that binds us all together is the opportunity we were offered to recreate ourselves as professional Social Workers—delicately, and at times clumsily, weaving together our experiences, worldview, compassion, and sense of self into the work we do. With the best of intentions, we learn to apply the principles of Social Work, while at the same time we are still diligently taking notes late at night on exactly what those principles are.

As I finish my first year of graduate school, I would like to reflect and share the experiences I have had with those entering the field. The challenges that I have faced have been internal as well as external, as at times I have found myself in the position of examining where I come from and how I view the world, to learning the seemingly endless implications of providing physical and emotional care to those in need. I would like to give a voice to first-year graduate students, and shed light and calm anxieties about what this experience might be like for incoming students, as well as serve as a validation for students in their first few months of field work that it's okay to not have all the answers.

Anxieties of the Unknown

Prior to starting my field work in the fall, I had no idea what to expect. I knew my placement was at a community health center in West Harlem, New York City, and that I would be working with two Social Workers to provide case management and therapeutic support to the clinic's patients. When classes started and I began to meet my fellow students, the second question out of everyone's mouth after "What's your name?" was "Where's your field placement?" It felt reassuring to know I wasn't the only one with anxieties. However, the constant assurances from faculty members to relax and learn to "sit with your discomfort" seemed to simply mock my sweaty palms and beating heart.

My first few weeks at the clinic, I was guided through the roles and responsibilities that the Social Workers carry out and what was expected of me. I spent a great deal of time sitting in on assessments that my supervisors would carry out, and observing the kinds of questions they would ask, and the way they would respond to patients' differing attitudes, questions, and presenting problems. I was grateful that I was given this time to observe, process, and ask questions.

In this time, I learned that the clinic serves members of the surrounding community, which predominantly consists of first- or second-generation Latino immigrants. I began to learn just how pivotal the role of a Social Worker is in securing benefits for our patients, and also just how much the patients depend on our assistance in navigating the system to receive them.

The myriad of needs that our patients presented with was overwhelming to me at first. I feverishly took notes after observing every session, and I did my best to remember the exact dialogue that was carried out between my supervisors and the patients to report in my process recordings. My supervisors and I would discuss the details of the session afterwards, and I felt a rise in my confidence in how I would eventually carry out such a session on my own.

Working Through the Discomfort

When I began to carry out my first assessments independently, I experienced countless emotions. I felt excited and eager to delve into the work, but also nervous and questioning about how much I would really be able to do on my own. My supervisors were close by if I had a question, and I utilized their guidance often.

Reflecting upon my first few months at the clinic, I recognize that I felt very unsure of myself and conflicted over the way I felt I was perceived, and how I would be able to relate to patients. I felt it possible that there were judgments being passed on me in regard to my appearance and what that seemed to symbolize to the population I was working with. Given that I was a young, white American female seemingly in this position of power, I felt that many of the patients were wary of me and had guarded responses to my questions.

At times, I began to feel a sense of inadequacy to help, given that the presenting problems of many of our patients are ones that I personally have not experienced. Being in a position in which you are expected to be of help, but have absolutely no idea really how to do so, can be quite disconcerting.

Furthermore, I also realized that the position I held often allowed me to provide patients what they needed, despite the fact that I often felt unworthy of being privy to the very personal aspects of the patients' lives that they discussed with me. Given that I personally did not view myself as being in a position of power, as I was a student who felt as though she was stumbling along the helping process herself, it was a very uncomfortable situation to be in.

On top of this, at times there seemed to be cultural and linguistic barriers. Although I can speak Spanish fluently and lived abroad for years, all the cultural competency and ability to connect through shared experiences that I thought I had prior to starting this work seemed inadequate. The concept that in certain situations I could be perceived as being part of the dominant majority group, instead of someone who can connect and understand based on shared cultural experiences, was unsettling to me.

It was through the process of working through this discomfort and acknowledging the systemic context of identity and culture that I was able to come to terms with my position. As stated by Mo (2003), especially when the clinician belongs to the dominant majority group and the client to a minority group, it is important for the clinicians to explicitly address and acknowledge the dynamics of power as an integral part of the therapeutic process. After all, it is of paramount significance for Social Workers to engage in mindful practice meaningfully with people of different and multiple identities, while also examining one's own social location in the "web of these power relations" (Wong, 2004).

I began to understand that my anxiety about how I was perceived and in what ways I could help our patients was a necessary part of the learning process that propelled me toward understanding myself as an aspiring professional as well as the needs of those I was serving. As stated by Shulman (2005), students must experience "adaptive anxiety" as a necessary feature of their learning experience, as "uncertainty, visibility, and accountability inevitably raise the emotional stakes of the pedagogical encounters" (p. 57). Students must be emotionally invested in their work and experience some anxiety, as it serves as a motivating factor that stimulates students to work harder (Shulman, 2005).

I also found that if I ally myself with the patient, who in essence is the expert on his or her own life situation, and work toward finding a solution together by combining both our knowledge on the subject, we are able to make progress. As stated by Ann Hartman (2000), "knowledge and power are one, and when clients and subjects are collaborators in the discovery process, if their expertise is valued and affirmed, they are empowered" (p. 22).

The Year Draws to a Close

Since beginning my work at the health center, I have learned how to find the balance between empowering the patients we work with and making them active participants in the problem solving process. Simultaneously, I also learned that meeting agency demands, as well as the expectations of professional and practice etiquette as a Social Worker, is a difficult and ongoing process. It has taken hours of supervision with my mentors, as well as a great deal of self-reflection, to understand that it is an ongoing process and one that is inherent in the professional life of a Social Worker.

Although there are still times when I find myself rolling my eyes when I hear my professors saying to sit with our discomfort, I begrudgingly have to admit that the concept holds weight. This experience is challenging, overwhelming, exciting, and fulfilling, all at once.

What I can assure students entering this field is that you will be uncomfortable, and you will be forced to examine where you came from and what that signifies for the population with whom you are working. Not only will your supervisors, professors, and classmates be an integral source of support and understanding throughout this process, but I also believe the clients you work with will be, as well.

I have learned that when I ally myself with clients, it is as if the environment in the room has changed. I have found that if I crack a smile, allow a chuckle, or feel comfortable in asking patients to elaborate on exactly what they mean, we are able to establish a working alliance that eventually will allow them to get what they need. I am a student, and I continue to be inexperienced in comparison to the multitudes of amazing and inspiring Social Workers I have met so far in my budding career. However, I still have the capacity to help, and I believe that keeping that truth alive inside of me, despite all of the inner and external conflicts that one faces in this situation, is the key to a successful and ongoing learning process.

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Eight Tips for New Social Work Interns

By Sharon L. Young Ph.D., LCSW.

Sharon L. Young, Ph.D., LCSW, is an assistant professor and field coordinator in the Department of Social Work at Western Connecticut State University. Prior to her academic career, she was a clinical Social Worker in the substance abuse prevention and treatment field.

Editor's Note: Within the context of this article, the terms intern and internship refer to the Social Work field placement or practicum.

From The New Social Worker, Summer 2014, Vol. 21, No. 5.

Last fall, I began my academic career as the field coordinator at a medium-sized BSW program in Connecticut. Looking back over my first year, it was not unlike what a new intern experiences when beginning the semester at a new placement. The early days were both exciting and terrifying. There was so much to learn and process as I adjusted to my new role. I relied on the expertise of my new colleagues to teach me the ropes and to support me when I struggled. I found a mentor who provided me with guidance and a sounding board when I needed one.

Like a Social Work intern, I learned on the job by applying the education and experience I brought with me. As you begin your fieldwork, you will learn how to apply your experiences to your new role as Social Work intern. This article will provide you with some tips and insider information that can make your transition to your internship smoother.

Social Work is a demanding profession. As Social Workers, we understand and respond to a myriad of political, social, interpersonal, and intrapersonal forces that affect the people we serve. Social Workers assume a broad range of roles and duties that span wider than those of other human service providers.

As a profession, we are the Jack (and Jill) of all trades. In just one position at a neighborhood agency, I have been a community organizer, a group worker, a clinician, a grant writer, and a program manager. Among my varied tasks, I have driven clients to the hospital, gone camping with a youth group, organized a task force of mental health care providers, and provided crisis support for grieving teens. I know my experience is not unique, in that all Social Workers will face a wide range of challenges, big and small. My job as a Social Work educator is to prepare students for the many roles they will play as professionals.

I am no expert on field education. Drawing from my experiences as a student, Social Worker, field instructor, field liaison, and now coordinator, I have been able to see all sides of the field education experience. I learned many valuable lessons, and I want to share them with you.

1. It's normal to be nervous and unsure in the beginning.

For some students, the first field placement is their initial step into a professional world. Even for seasoned students, each workplace brings a new set of challenges and expectations. There is a lot to learn in the beginning. Take your time and ask questions. No one expects you to know the job before you start.

2. Always begin with a learner's stance.

Learning involves watching, listening, asking questions, rehearsing, and practicing. You will find that there will be several people at your field placement who are happy to share their knowledge with you. You will likely learn as much from the clients or consumers as you do from the staff. Allow everyone the opportunity to share their expertise with you.

3. Practice, practice, practice.

Your internship not only provides you with exposure to the field of Social Work, but also allows you to try out your new skills. If you learned an engagement technique in your practice class, put it to use when meeting a new client. How about applying your knowledge about adolescent development when working with a parent group?

4. Beware of field placement envy.

When you are sitting in seminar listening to your classmate describe a fantastic field experience, don't despair about your own. Many placements start out bumpy, but they often improve as you become more skilled and empowered to take on more challenging work.

5. If you think your field instructor isn't providing you with challenging assignments, discuss it with him or her.

Field instructors sometimes like to start students out slowly, so they can be sure the intern is prepared for what is to come. It is helpful to go over your learning agreement with your field instructor throughout the semester, to make sure your agency assignments match your learning goals.

6. If you are having difficulty at your agency, tell someone.

Students sometimes have trouble discussing difficulties with new field instructors or faculty liaisons. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Your field instructor and professors are there to help you negotiate difficult situations and to aid you in reflecting on your practice decisions.

7. Develop your professional identity.

At your field placement, you will be learning what it means to be a Social Worker, especially if working in a multi-disciplinary environment. What roles do Social Workers play on treatment teams, in community meetings, in a residential setting? Remember to identify yourself as the Social Work intern, not just the intern.

8. Remember, you are making professional contacts along the way.

Make sure you leave a good impression in every professional setting. You may be meeting potential future employers at your next community meeting or task force. Make sure you introduce yourself to others when at larger agency meetings, trainings, or when visiting other agencies.

I remember the feelings of anxiety I felt as an MSW student entering a new field placement. The first weeks of field placement bring many new challenges—establishing yourself as a professional, learning the organizational culture and structure, and finding a work-life balance. It becomes especially challenging when you begin to face clients and community groups and start to connect what you learned in Practice I to the real world.

Fieldwork gives Social Work students an opportunity to apply academic training to a professional setting. Practicing Social Work skills in field practicum leads to greater learning outcomes and higher satisfaction for students (Lee & Fortune, 2013). Make the most of your internship by applying and practicing your newly learned skills and knowledge.

As an intern, you are establishing the foundation for your Social Work career. As a professional Social Worker, it is important for you to develop supportive and open relationships with colleagues and supervisors. These relationships will provide a source of both support and challenge for you throughout your career. Make sure you develop a sound relationship with your field instructor and other supportive Social Workers and benefit from their knowledge and experience.

Having a strong on-site supervisor has been associated with greater learning satisfaction in Social Work interns (Cleak & Smith, 2012). Practicing Social Work can be stressful and emotionally difficult work, even for veteran social workers. It is important that you keep the lines of communication open with your field liaison, faculty members, and field instructors when things get difficult.

Social Work students often turn to friends, family members, or fellow students to discuss stressful or emotionally charged field situations (Litvack, Mishna, & Bogo, 2010). Discussing difficult client situations with friends and family could lead to a breach of confidentiality and could also compromise your professional career. Your faculty and field instructors are there to help you and to guide you through sticky situations. Use them.

You are in the process of not only learning how to be a Social Worker but also how to manage the emotional toll this work can bring. Over the years, you will find the support of supervisors and colleagues to be important in avoiding burnout, especially when you are a new practitioner (Hamama, 2012).

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My Anxious Transition from Student to Fully Qualified Social Worker

By Louise O'Neill MSW

Setting out on your own as a newly qualified social worker can be daunting. Louise O'Neill describes her feelings of self-doubt when she started work as a professional practitioner.

From The Social Care Network, April 2013.

I completed my Masters in Social Work in the summer of 2012 and started work as a newly qualified social worker in early 2013. I am currently on the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme working for a local authority in children's services.

Despite the initial excitement of receiving my qualification, the transition from a social work student to a professional social worker has been an experience full of anxiety, complete with feelings of self-doubt, uncertainty and questions about my readiness to practice.

One thing that's made a big difference and has been very noticeable since qualifying is the greater autonomy and independence which I have in decision-making and intervention planning with children and their families. During my placement the work was often in collaboration with qualified and experienced practitioners: my supervisor reviewed all my paperwork and my analysis of risk and need was almost always in unison with a colleague or manager. This was not only to protect myself as a student learning on placement, but to ensure service-users were protected and safe.

In that sense, I did not view myself as being a "real" social worker with any real "power" to effect change. I was often assigned the less complex social work and low-level risk cases and would observe those more authoritative pieces of work with families, such as the possibility of legal intervention.

However, as an employed qualified social worker I am experiencing first-hand the professional responsibility and "power" that comes with the title of "social worker". Especially in relation to how service-users perceive my role and identity and how this affects our working relationship. As a child protection social worker, it isn't easy for parents to talk to me if they are afraid they have done something "wrong". Authority and power associated with the social work role is far greater than I experienced as a student on placement working with families.

As a qualified practitioner I feel a greater sense of accountability. Social workers are members of an internationally recognised profession, a title protected in UK law. The College of Social Work's Professional Capabilities Framework states under the key

domain "Professionalism" that, "as representatives of the social work profession they safeguard its reputation and are accountable to the professional regulator".

As a result of this I have placed a greater emphasis on my own competencies as a social worker. I often find myself asking: how does my knowledge compare to other members of the team? Are my plans of interventions correct? Is my analysis of risk accurate? This new emphasis on my professional competence is a reaction to the new meaning mistakes have as an employed qualified social worker, as opposed to the student who continues to have learning needs.

In making the transition from social work student to qualified practitioner, being part of a structured ASYE programme has so far been invaluable. To be able to reflect upon these transitions with other newly qualified social workers in a supportive environment has already begun to facilitate a smooth transition into my qualified role.

Despite feeling anxious about my career readiness, my commitment to social work remains unaltered. And while I am only at the start of my ASYE year, I am enjoying the work immensely and continue to feel enthusiastic about practice and eager to develop into the most competent social worker I can be.

Kylie Stothers: An Indigenous Social Work Student Story.

By Indigenous Allied Health Australia

Kylie Stothers (nee Wright) is a Jawoyn woman born and raised in Katherine, Northern Territory. She is a social worker and the Deputy Chairperson of Indigenous Allied Health Australia, the national peak body representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health professionals and students. Kylie is married to Simon and has two children, Kirrah and Thomas.

From Indigenous Allied Health Australia.

In 1995 Kylie packed her bags after finishing school and moved from Katherine to Darwin to start her social work degree at Northern Territory University, now known as Charles Darwin University.

“It was interesting because when I started, social work tended to attract more mature age students,” said Kylie. “I was one of only three students who started straight from school. Fortunately there were four Aboriginal people in my course, all of whom were older than me and they kept me on track. All four of us went through our course and graduated together, supporting each other and keeping each other motivated. It really helped to keep me focused.”

“Being an Aboriginal person studying social work, there were many layers I had to work through,” said Kylie. “Learning about the theory of the impact of history and policies on the social welfare of Aboriginal people is different when you have lived through it. It took a lot of self-reflection and I had to work through my feelings and the impact of social work theory on me, my family and my community. Having a strong support network was absolutely essential.”

In 1999 Kylie was one of the first Aboriginal cadets to graduate in the Northern Territory. “I got through the first 3 years of study with the assistance of Abstudy and working in the holidays, but it was tough and I thought I might have to drop out so that I could support myself,” said Kylie. “But in my fourth year I got a cadetship with the NT Government which meant that I had a living allowance, the support of a fantastic mentor and work experience.”

“The cadetship gave me purpose and I knew that I would have a job at the end of my studies,” said Kylie. “And within one week of finishing my studies I was working fulltime at Royal Darwin Hospital.”

Kylie spent the next 14 years working throughout the Northern Territory in the areas

of child protection, hospitals and Aboriginal community controlled health services, moving back to her home town of Katherine in 2004. She currently works as a Lecturer with the Centre for Remote Health in the Katherine Office. She is passionate about improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing and has a specific interest in child and maternal health, social determinants of health, health promotion and workforce issues, particularly in remote Australia.

“I love being a social worker because I get to meet so many interesting characters,” said Kylie. “At times you work with people in difficult situations when they are at their most vulnerable, but the strength and resilience that exists out there is inspiring.”

“A career in social work is never boring, every case is different,” said Kylie. “It’s challenging at times but it feels so good when you can make a positive difference in a person’s life, and in their family and community.”

“Being a social worker in a remote community is very rewarding,” said Kylie. “Often a health professional learns skills at Uni that they never use... Working remotely can challenge you professionally and extends your scope of practice so that you are using skills that you may not within an urban context.”

“There is also a strong sense of interdisciplinary collaboration when you live and work remote,” said Kylie. “The strong relationships that are built between health professionals are both enlightening and rewarding. Everyone seems more open and willing to share their professional skills and knowledge which leads to greater respect for each other’s unique professional lens.”

“Don’t get me wrong, working in a remote location has its challenges,” said Kylie. “The high turnover of staff and the fly in fly out nature of some health professions can lead to professional isolation at times. I set up an informal network for all social workers in Katherine so that no matter where you work or how long you’ve been here you can access support. It’s sometimes disappointing when you put in so much effort to support staff and then they leave... But that’s the nature of the remote working life I guess.”

“I appreciate that we now have technology that allows us to more easily communicate with each other and access professional development,” said Kylie. “But we still need to advocate for more allied health focused professional development as often nurses, doctors and Aboriginal Health Workers are the main focus.”

“Allied health professionals are essential members of the healthcare team, and I do feel valued working remote,” said Kylie. “But we still need more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids to choose careers in allied health because there are so many ways to make a difference in their own lives and in the lives of their communities. It’s important that they can think outside the square and make informed choices.”

Ten Essential Tips for your Amazing Social Work Résumé

By Valerie Arendt MSW, MPP.

Valerie Arendt, MSW, MPP, is the Associate Executive Director for the National Association of Social Workers, North Carolina Chapter (NASW-NC). She received her dual degree in Social Work and public policy from the University of Minnesota and currently provides membership support, including résumé review, to the members of NASW-NC.

From The New Social Worker, Summer 2014, Vol. 21, No. 5.

Is your résumé ready to send out to employers? You have Googled example résumé templates, perfected your formatting, and added appropriate action words. Everything is in the correct tense, in reverse chronological order, and kept to two pages or less. What else should you think about for an amazing Social Work résumé? Whether you are a clinical or macro Social Worker, student, new professional, or have been in the field for 30 years, these essential tips will keep your résumé ready to send out to your future employer.

1. Objective or Professional Summary?

Let's start at the beginning. I am not a fan of the objective, and neither are many hiring managers. If they are reading your résumé, they already know you are seeking a position with them. Generally, an objective is used by someone who has recently graduated or has very little experience. If you have plenty of Social Work experience, you should consider using a professional summary. This is one to three sentences at the beginning of your résumé that help describe the value you bring as a Social Worker through your skills and experience. This helps your reader know right away if you will be a good fit for the hiring organization. It is much easier for a hiring manager to find that value in a short paragraph than trying to piece it together from a lengthy history of professional experience and education.

DON'T: Objective: Seeking a Social Work position within a facility where I can utilize my experience to the benefit of my employer as well as gain knowledge and professional growth.

DO: Licensed Clinical Social Worker with 6+ years experience in medical and mental health settings, working with diverse populations in private practice, health care, outpatient, and inpatient treatment settings. Recently relocated to Georgia.

2. Don't assume your reader already knows what you do.

This is one of the biggest mistakes I see when reviewing résumés. Write your résumé as if the person reading it has no idea what you do. Really? Yes! This will help you to be descriptive about your experience. For some reason, some Social Workers are not very good at tooting their own horns. Your résumé is exactly the place you need to brag about what an amazing professional you are. Don't assume that because your title was "Outpatient Therapist," the reader of your résumé will know exactly what you did. Be descriptive. Give a little information about the organization or program, the clients, and the type of therapy or work you performed. This can easily be done in three to five bullets if you craft thoughtful, complete sentences.

DON'T: Provide psychotherapy to clients.

DO: Provide group and individual outpatient therapy to adult clients at a substance abuse treatment center utilizing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), psychoeducation, and motivational interviewing.

3. List your accomplishments.

If you worked in a position for five years but don't list one relevant accomplishment, that is a red flag for a hiring manager. Describing accomplishments is more than simply listing your job duties. These are the contributions you have made in your career that would encourage an organization to hire you.

Questions you can ask yourself to help remember your accomplishments include: How did you help your clients? Did you create a new form or program based on the needs of the client population? Did your therapy skills reduce the relapse rate in your agency? Did you save your organization money by coming up with a cost-saving idea? Were you selected for special projects, committees, or task forces? Even if the only Social Work experience you have on your résumé is your field placement, you should be able to list an accomplishment that will entice the reader to want to know more.

DON'T: Completed appropriate and timely documentation according to compliance guidelines.

DO: Recognized need for updated agency forms. Developed 10 clinical and administrative forms, including no-harm contract, behavior contract, and therapist's behavior inventory, which increased staff efficiency and productivity by 15%.

4. Quantify your accomplishments.

Numbers aren't just for business professionals. Numbers also help with the bragging I mentioned that needs to happen on your résumé. The most convincing accomplishments are measurable and help your résumé stand out from the crowd. How many clients did you serve? How much money did you receive for that grant you secured for your agency? How many people do you supervise?

DON'T: Wrote grants for counseling program in schools.

DO: Co-wrote School Group Experiences proposal, which received a \$150,000 grant from State Foundation for Health, resulting in doubling the number of children served in group counseling from 120 children to 240 children, and increasing the percentage of minority children served from 20% to 50% of the total child population in group therapy.

5. Tailor your résumé to the specific job.

You have heard this over and over, and it should make sense. Still, not many Social Workers do this correctly or at all. Many big organizations, hospitals, and university systems use online applicant tracking systems to review résumés. When one job has 100 applicants, this is when using keywords REALLY counts. Look at the job description for keywords.

For example, what words do they use to describe the clients? Patients, clients, residents, victims, survivors, adults, children? If you have worked with the same client populations, used the same therapy techniques, or provided the supervision listed in the job description, make sure these SAME words are in your résumé. Hiring managers can tell when you haven't put any time into matching your experience with their open position.

DON'T: Provide in-home therapy for families.

DO: (Similar language from job description) Perform individual and family, agency, and home-based therapy for medically fragile children and their families (parents and siblings) with goal of maintaining intact families and improving family functioning.

6. Spell out all acronyms.

Social Workers LOVE to use acronyms. Many Social Workers spend hours writing case notes, and to be efficient, they rely on acronyms to describe their work. For the same reasons you should use keywords, it is essential that you spell things out for the computer or human resources person who may not know what certain acronyms mean. I am a Social Worker with limited clinical knowledge, and I often have to Google acronyms when I review NASW members' résumés. The reader responsible for finding the right candidates to interview will consider this a waste of his or her time and might move on to the rest of the résumés in the pile if he or she has no idea what you are talking about.

DON'T: Scored and analyzed clinical assessments to include SIB-R, CBCL, CTRF, or SCQ in packets for families scheduled for autism evaluations.

DO: Scored and analyzed clinical assessments for autism evaluations including Scales of Independent Behavior-Revised (SIB-R), Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), Caregiver/Teacher Report Form (CTRF), and Social Communication Questionnaire (SCQ).

7. Bullets, bullets, bullets.

Most résumés I review are succinct and formatted very nicely by bulleting experience.

But there are still some folks who use paragraphs to describe their experience. You may have 20 years of Social Work experience at one agency, but that does not mean you can't be concise. I guarantee you that hiring managers are not going to read a paragraph that is 15 lines long to look for the experience that will fit the position they are trying to fill. Write your résumé in such a way that it is easy to scan and find the keywords in 30 seconds or less. Use three to eight bullets to describe your experience and accomplishments.

8. Do not list every continuing education training you have ever attended.

Whether or not you are licensed in your state, you should seek out continuing education in Social Work. Don't forget, it is in the NASW Code of Ethics: Section 4.01 (b) Competence: "...Social Workers should routinely review the professional literature and participate in continuing education relevant to social work practice and Social Work ethics."

It is great to show your reader that you are up to date on the latest clinical information on your client population, but the section on your résumé for Continuing Education or Professional Development should only list the courses that are relevant to the job you are applying for. It is a great idea to keep a list of all your continuing education, for your own reference and for your license renewal. You just don't need to list them all on your résumé.

9. Less is more.

I hope you are seeing a theme here. Recently, I have come across a few résumés that have all of the following sections:

- Professional Summary
- Education
- Relevant Social Work Experience
- Work Experience
- Additional Experience
- Summary of Skills
- Professional Affiliations
- Volunteer Experience
- Publications
- Relevant Coursework
- Activities
- Honors

Every résumé is personal and different. You don't need 10 categories on your résumé. Professional Experience and Education are musts. But after that, limit the

places hiring managers need to search to find the information that will help them decide to interview you. Only put the information that is most relevant to the job to which you are applying.

10. Your references should always be available upon request and not on your résumé.

If the last line on your résumé is “References Available Upon Request,” this one is for you. It is not necessary to tell your reader that you have references. If you get far enough in the interview process, they will ask you for your references. Have them listed in a separate document.

Only send the references that are relevant, and only send them when asked. It is imperative that you inform your references that they may be contacted, and always send them a copy of the job description and your recent résumé, so they can be prepared when contacted. Nothing is a bigger turnoff to me than getting a call to be a reference for someone I supervised five years ago and I can’t remember exactly what their job duties were. It is great to get a heads-up and a reminder of what the person did under my supervision. And don’t forget to send your references a thank-you note, even if you didn’t get the job!

DON’T: References Available Upon Request

DO: (Separate document with your contact information at the top) References:

Remember, your résumé is your tool to get an interview. It doesn’t need to include every detail about you as a professional Social Worker. Use your cover letter to expand on details that are specific to the job you are seeking. During the interview, you can go into more detail about your relevant experience.

Additional Information:

Use active voice and include words that pack a verbal punch. Engage your resume reader with vivid language that captures what you do and why you do it well. Here are some words to make your resume attention-grabbing and dynamic.

100 Great Resume Words				
Assist	Earned	Managed	Pursued	Supervised
Able	Enhance	Marketed	Quantified	Targeted
Action	Evaluate	Maximized	Ranked	Taught
Analysis	Examined	Mediated	Received	Tested
Achievement	Facilitate	Modernized	Recommended	Trained
Accomplished	Formulate	Motivated	Redesigned	Transcended
Advanced	Fulfilled	Negotiated	Reengineered	Unified
Conduct	Forecasted	Observed	Reorganized	Upgraded
Consult	Generated	Obtained	Represented	Utilized
Committed	Gained	Operated	Restructured	Validated
Conducted	Gathered	Organized	Revised	Valued
Contributed	Gave	Originated	Safeguarded	Wrote
Coordinated	Headed	Overhauled	Secured	
Delegated	Hosted	Oversaw	Selected	
Develop	Identified	Participated	Specified	
Deliver	Implemented	Performed	Spearheaded	
Design	Improved	Pioneered	Standardized	
Defined	Improvised	Planned	Strengthened	
Diversified	Influenced	Prepared	Structured	
Devoted	Launched	Presented	Suggested	
Distinguished	Lobbied	Promoted	Superseded	
Encourage	Maintained	Provided		
		Published		

Cover Letters for Social Workers: Get Yourself the Interview

By Valerie Arendt MSW, MPP.

Valerie Arendt, MSW, MPP, is the Associate Executive Director for the National Association of Social Workers, North Carolina Chapter (NASW-NC). She received her dual degree in Social Work and public policy from the University of Minnesota and currently provides membership support, including résumé review, to the members of NASW-NC.

From The New Social Worker, Summer 2014, Vol. 21, No. 5.

Should you submit a cover letter when one is not required? The answer is yes. Cover letters are essential to getting an interview. They are a concise way to communicate your value to an organization, and hiring managers do use them to winnow candidates. Your cover letter should tell the employer that you are the perfect match for the position. Do this by using the language from the job description and organizational mission. It is essential to tailor your cover letter to the specific job.

Here are some basics for writing an interview-winning cover letter:

- **Salutation:** Find out who will be reading your letter. This is essential. If it is easy to find out who will be reviewing applications and you don't take the time to do this, they probably won't take the time to read your letter.
- **Name of Organization and Position Title:** The organization may have multiple openings. Be sure to indicate which position you are applying for.
- **Referral Source:** If someone in or close to the organization suggested you apply for this job, mention that person in the cover letter. This will let the reader know you have a connection to the organization and will score big points.
- **Why you want to work for them:** You need to describe to your reader how the organization's mission and goals are a good fit for you professionally. This shows them you know about the organization and have done your homework.
- **What you can do for their clients/organization:** Sell yourself. Let them know how your experience and education is a perfect match for the position and a good fit for the organization. This is where you use the keywords from the job description to really hit it home that you are a candidate worthy of an interview.

Below is a real job description with keywords highlighted. If you have the experience they are looking for, you should invariably use the same language in your cover letter.

Title: Social Worker

*Job Details: Responsible for completion of **psychosocial assessment** of **patients** and **families** enrolled in **Hospice**. Will work as **part of a team** to address **end-of-life needs**, some **counseling** and emphasis on **case management**. Able to access **homes** in **Moore & Montgomery County** service areas. Must be able to take **call rotation**. Strong **organizational skills** needed.*

After a strong introductory paragraph, the body of your cover letter should be concise and address the two to four most important details from the job description:

My experience and areas of expertise are an excellent match for the requirements stated in your announcement:

- *Hospice Assessments: As a clinician with St. John's Hospital, I prepared extensive psychosocial assessments and treatment plans for patients.*
- *End-of-Life Care: I provided counseling and accurate case management to more than 1,000 patients and their families over 7 years as a member of the St. John's Hospital end-of-life team.*
- *Home Visits: I made regular home visits to hospice patients in Moore and Montgomery Counties and was responsible for two on-call shifts per month.*

Close by stating that your experience and passion make you a perfect fit for the employer. Include the best way for them to contact you for an interview.

Social Work Interview Questions – Practice, Practice, Practice

The Social Work Career Center

Information taken from Social Work Career Center. www.careers.socialworkers.org

Modified from: ©2005 DiNitto Center for Career Services, School of Social Work, University of Texas at Austin

Before the Interview

One of the most important things that job applicants often overlook actually happens before the interview even begins.

Imagine this scenario; you're sitting in the waiting room of your chosen agency, it's 11:55 am and you know that, in approximately seven minutes, you're going to be sitting in front of a selection panel and answering questions. Anxiety provoking, right? Well yes, it is, and that's a really important thing to acknowledge. Being nervous before you walk into an interview isn't necessarily a bad thing, being so nervous that you forget your own name, on the other hand, can be a bit of a problem.

There's a very simple way to lessen the likelihood of the latter scenario occurring, and that is to give yourself the time to relax. Arrive at the interview location ten or fifteen minutes ahead of schedule and find a space outside to sit and gather yourself. Engage in some light mindfulness techniques, close your eyes, breathe, listen to relaxation tunes, listen to drum and bass, listen to whatever music centres *your* thoughts and feelings.

Give yourself a countdown before you continue on and provide a brief statement of affirmation after each number. 5 – it's going to be okay 4 – I know what I'm doing 3 – I'm confident 2 – I'm prepared 1 – I'm ready. You'll be surprised at how much of a difference engaging in this five to ten minute activity can make.

Now, in each and every interview situation, there are common questions that will be asked.

Practice. Practice. Practice.

Don't wait until the interview to decide your response to questions! Be prepared and think through your answers before you arrive. Write down your answers and practice in the mirror and with a friend or colleague. Keep your answers brief, usually less than 1 minute. Remember, confidence, quality of presentation, and listening are keys to successful interviewing.

S Situation	Detail the background. Provide a context. Where? When?
T Task	Describe the challenge and expectations. What needed to be done? Why?
A Action	Elaborate your specific action. What did you do? How? What tools did you use?
R Results	Explain the results: accomplishments, recognition, savings, etc. Quantify.

'STAR' Technique to Answer Behavioral Interview Questions

<http://www.RightAttitudes.com>

Sample Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this agency?
- How does the work in this organization fit your professional mission or experience?
- Why do you want this job? Why do you want to work for this organization?
- What are your experiences with the target population?
- Why do you want to work with this target population?
- What are your qualifications?
- What kind of supervision do you expect?
- How has your education/work experience prepared you for this position?
- What do you hope to accomplish at this agency?
- What would you like to learn here?
- Have you done this type of work in the past?
- What issues might you have with [adoption, for example]?
- What schedule will work for you?
- What are your career goals? For the next 3 years? The next 5 years? The next 10 years?
- What are some of your strengths? Some of your weaknesses?
- How do you define success for yourself?
- How do you plan?
- What is your work style?
- How do you work with others?
- Tell me about a time when you had to juggle your regular responsibilities and deal with a sudden priority?
- Are you a leader ... a follower?

- Describe the process you go through in developing a [case plan, budget, workshop, contract, or marketing plan, for example].
- Describe your supervision experience? Supervision style?
- What is your ideal position and career path?
- Is there anything you would like to say to close the interview?
- Do you have any questions? YES–You should always have questions.

Sample Direct Practice Interview Questions

- What is your understanding of service delivery in [a particular field or region]?
- Tell me about a time you were in a disagreement over a treatment plan.
- What has been your experience with agency paperwork and how do you feel about it?
- How will you deal with the dual-relationship issues of working in a small community?

Sample Community Administration & Leadership Interview Questions

- What type of research skills/computer skills do you have?
- What specific policy issues are you interested in?

Sample Policy Interview Questions

- How do you handle shifting priorities and working in a fast-paced, pressured environment?
- What is your experience with writing quickly, under pressure?
- What do you do to keep track of a lot of information at once?

Program Development Interview Questions

- How would you go about locating community resources in a neighborhood in which you have no relationship?

Sample Questions for You to Ask an Interviewer

- What do you like best about working here?
- How often, and by whom will I be supervised? What types of supervision are available? Is case consultation available?
- Are there opportunities for professional development within and beyond the agency itself?
- What can I count on from the agency to assist me in my professional development?
- With what other staff members will the person in this position work [for example, marketing department director]?
- What are the opportunities for advancement?
- Is the staff on call, and how is that handled?
- What are the agency's service delivery strengths and weaknesses?

- How many Social Workers do you employ? What is the average length of time Social Workers have worked for this agency?
- What is the typical career path of Social Workers within this field/agency?
- To what extent will I have the opportunity to network with other agencies, or other professionals in the field?
- How would you describe the organizational culture?

Sample Questions for You to Ask as a Social Work Intern (Student)

- What do you think would be the most challenging experiences for a Social work intern in your agency?
- What do you think would be the most rewarding experiences for a Social work intern in your agency?
- How are expectations for students different from those for agency staff?
- To what extent do students have an opportunity to offer input into administration and planning?

I'm Not Sure How to Tell You This: Delivering Unwelcome News

By Misty L. Wall Ph.D., MSSW, LCSW.

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From The New Social Worker, Winter 2012, Vol. 19, No. 1.

Many times, Social Workers are called upon to deliver unpleasant news to clients and families. Some of the most difficult discussions have to do with death, dying, long-term care placement of a loved one, loss of custody or removal of children, and placement in foster care. There are a few simple steps you can take to facilitate the conversations that no one really wants to have.

Let's look at an all-too-common experience for Social Workers specializing in child protection. Consider this: As a Social Worker, you have been working with a family for several months to alleviate risk of injury to their child while living in a home that is full of safety and sanitation hazards. To date, the family has been unable, or unwilling, to make the necessary changes that will allow their child to safely remain in the home. No suitable family members have been located who can provide care for the child while the family makes the necessary changes, so the child will be removed from her biological parents and placed into a foster home.

P-R-E-P-ing for the Conversation

If you are entering the field of Social Work, you can safely assume that at some point you will have to deliver news that is not going to be easily received, like the situation mentioned above, when you must tell a family that their child will be placed in foster care. A great deal of work happens before you actually meet with the client to deliver the bad news, and you can use four simple steps (pause, react, evaluate, plan—or PREP) to prepare to deliver challenging news.

Pause. It is important to pause before the delivery of unwelcome news, because the focus of the delivery should be the client(s) rather than the Social Worker. New Social Workers may feel overwhelmed with feelings surrounding self-doubt, including mistrusting their ability to convey the unwanted news, being unsure of their ability to stay in the moment, fear of the client's reaction, or alarm about their personal safety. Pausing allows you, the Social Worker, to take a personal inventory of your fears, emotional triggers, and physical reactions before you meet with the client.

React. Taking inventory of your fear, emotional triggers, and physical reactions is not enough to ensure you are able to stay present and focused on the client during the delivery of unwelcome news. After taking a breath, Social Workers should give

themselves permission to react emotionally or physically, consciously allowing whatever physical and emotional reaction simmers to the surface to happen. Stuffing or refusing to acknowledge emotional and physical reactions can lead to burnout, compassion fatigue, or somatic complaints. Everyone's reactions will be different—it may mean crying, screaming, venting to a trusted peer, or any number of things. Only after you allow this initial reaction can you refocus yourself on your goals.

Evaluate. Evaluation while PREPping to deliver unwelcome news includes consideration of the client's perspective and planning to reduce the impact of trauma resulting from negative news to the greatest extent possible. Considering the task before the child protection Social Worker described earlier, we may feel limited in our ability to empathize with the parents who have been unable, or unwilling, to make the necessary changes to allow their child to remain in their care. However, many of us can imagine a time that we have received painful news that changed our lives forever.

Reflect on the setting where you first learned there had been an attack on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. Chances are that when you think about that time, you can remember everything about where you were, what the room looked like, who was with you, what they were wearing, what you heard, and how you felt.

When preparing to deliver unwanted news to a client, it can be beneficial to acknowledge the pain associated with receiving such news. Potential ways in which Social Workers may be able to reduce the stress caused by receiving hurtful news may include considering location and physical setting, ensuring there are adequate chairs for everyone, and providing for small comforts such as water or tissues. Also, it is important to take into consideration who will be present, who will be excluded, and timing.

Reflect on the chore before our child protection worker. Although there is likely never a good time to convey the decision to remove a child from his/her parents, there are times when such information may be received with less difficulty. Contemplate the difference between delivering the news of a foster care placement at the client's place of employment and delivering the same news at the client's home or trusted family member's home. Likewise, imagine that you are delivering the decision to remove a child from the parents in the lobby of your office versus in a visiting room with a bottle of water, a chair, and tissues available for the client. Your empathy for the client's experience will be evident in the setting you choose for the delivery of undesirable information.

Plan. After you have paused, reacted, and evaluated the situation objectively, it is time to actively plan your delivery. At the least, you should know the reasons leading up to the "news" and be able to respond concisely to your client's concerns and questions. This is not a time to have to review the file or ask someone else.

Again, remember where you were when you heard of the first and second attacks on the Twin Towers. Remember the agony you experienced, as so many questions remained unanswered? Imagine the agony of the mother who has been told she is unable to provide a safe home for her child and the questions that would swirl through your mind after hearing such news. What can I do to have my child returned? What about a relative? How long will she be gone? Can I see her? Imagine a Social Worker

retorting to your concerns with uncertainty, ambiguity, or disinterest.

Additionally, consciously determine your goal for the delivery. Take a deep breath and think about what you want your client to remember at the end of this conversation. This is the goal. It should be short, specific, and clear.

S-O-A-R-ing Through the Delivery

The actual delivery of a hard-hitting announcement is generally over very quickly. In fact, when you have prepared yourself thoroughly as described above, the actual delivery of bad news should not take more than a few minutes. Many beginning practitioners feel they must stay with the client while he or she processes the worrisome information. This is not true. The actual processing and making meaning of bad news is the responsibility of the client. If we stay, we can actually prevent the client from beginning this important work. Consider the following suggestions to SOAR (stay present, observe reactions, acknowledge reactions, restate and refocus) through the actual delivery of difficult news.

Stay present. Stay present in the room with your client and help the client stay present. Remember that you have taken considerable time to plan for this moment. You have a solid plan that is client-focused. If you feel the conversation is getting beyond your control, take a break, refocus on your goal, and trust in your ability.

Observe reactions. Your client will undoubtedly give you the clues you need. Pay attention. If someone appears lightheaded, offer water or a place to sit. If your client appears to need some time alone, offer to step away for a moment. Your reaction to your client is important to maintaining your working relationship, because the delivery of unwanted news is often the beginning of a Social Worker's relationship with a client.

Accept reactions. It does not matter if your client should have seen this coming; his or her initial reactions will be genuine and emotion-focused. Think about our child protection Social Worker once again. Comments from the Social Worker such as, "You have had several warnings and could have prevented this if you wanted to," put your client in a defensive stance and make you the enemy rather than a teammate. Validate immediate emotional reactions without judgment. Another way our child protection Social Worker may respond, this time with the focus being on acceptance and empathy, may be, "I can see you are extremely upset by this news. I imagine you have questions." This is not the time to make connections between behavior and consequences.

Restate and refocus. After you paraphrase the news and the client's reactions, point out any strengths you have seen in your client, and convey that you will work with the client to sort out the pieces and that you are confident that you and the client will be able to work together to find a path of action. Our child protection Social Worker may close with something such as, "You seem very upset and tearful at the thought of your child being in foster care tonight. I have seen you face many difficult situations during our work together, and I am confident we will make a plan that will help keep your child safe."

P-R-E-P-ing For Next Time

Remember again your reaction when you found out about the terrorist attack on New York City. Just hearing the story and subsequent news coverage was simply the beginning. The real processing or sorting out of the events happened later. The same is often true of delivering bad news to a client. We may relive or replay the scenario in our heads, have difficulty sleeping, doubt or second-guess our decisions, or have other physical or psychological reactions.

Understanding that your work does not end with the actual delivery of arduous information is critical to your ability to provide the best services to your client, remain healthy, and avoid burnout or compassion fatigue. When you finish delivering the bad news, it is time to revisit the original PREP (pause, react, evaluate, plan) process previously discussed, this time with an eye toward your future work with this client and many more to come. The following are a few suggestions for managing your reactions to delivering bad news and preparing for the inevitable time when you find yourself in a position to deliver trying news again.

Pause. As quickly after the delivery as possible, pause. Take a few deep breaths.

React and refocus. Allow whatever physical and emotional reaction simmers to the surface to happen. Only after you allow this initial reaction can you refocus yourself on your goal.

Evaluate. After you have given yourself the opportunity to feel the emotions that simmer up, it is time to start sorting out your professional performance. Is there something that seemed to help the client? Is there something you think was ineffective or even unhelpful? How can you improve next time?

Plan. After you have given yourself time to pause, react, and evaluate, it is time to plan for next time. Respect the fact that you are an important vehicle for effecting change for your client. Take the reactions of you and your client and plan to increase the positive experiences next time and reduce the negative impacts when possible.

'Tis the Season: Managing Client Gifts

By Frederic G. Reamer Ph.D.

Frederic G. Reamer, Ph.D., is a professor in the graduate program of the School of Social Work at Rhode Island College. He is the author of many books and articles, and his research has addressed mental health, health care, criminal justice, and professional ethics

From Social Work Today December 2013 Edition.

Raise your hand if a client has offered you a gift. That Social Work club has lots of members, especially this time of year. Did you accept the gift or politely refuse it because you thought accepting the gift might complicate the boundaries in your professional-client relationship?

The Gift That Keeps on Giving

Throughout Social Work's history, practitioners have wrestled with the perennial challenge of gifts offered by clients. Clearly, some clients offer Social Workers gifts—often modest in value—as genuine expressions of appreciation with no ulterior motive or hidden agenda. A client may give the practitioner a home-baked bread or Christmas tree ornament at holiday time, an infant's outfit when the counsellor has delivered a baby, a framed poem that has special meaning to the client, or a piece of handmade pottery at the conclusion of treatment. Typically, these gifts represent tokens of appreciation—nothing more and nothing less. The client likely would feel wounded or insulted if the professional rejected such a gift on ethical grounds.

Then there are more complicated situations involving clients who offer Social Workers gifts of considerable value or gifts that represent a more complex practitioner-client relationship (sometimes from the client's view, sometimes from the practitioner's, and sometimes from both). Relatively affluent clients—and even clients of more modest means—sometimes will feel moved to give a practitioner a gift as a gesture of pure, unadulterated generosity.

In my experience, most clinical Social Workers agree that in many instances, especially when there is no evidence of ulterior motives that may lead to egregious boundary violations, practitioners may keep gifts of minimal value and emotional significance. As a matter of policy, some social service agencies permit staffers to do so, particularly when the gift is one that can be shared among staffers, although they may stipulate that staff members must thank the clients on behalf of the agency. This protocol can defuse the interpersonal dynamic and potential boundary confusion between the client and practitioner; depersonalizing the transaction may help staff members avoid complicated boundary issues.

Social Workers face unique challenges when they receive gifts that appear to have no ulterior motive but could introduce complex boundary issues. Sometimes clients may not be consciously aware of the emotional meaning and significance—and the mixed messages and complications—that may be attached to a gift.

Social Workers sometimes face a difficult choice in these situations; the decision to reject a gift can have significant clinical repercussions because the client may feel hurt, wounded, humiliated, or guilty and the decision to accept a gift may trigger boundary issues that complicate and reverberate throughout the clinical relationship.

Ethical Judgment

In such circumstances, Social Workers are wise to obtain sound consultation and supervision to think through how best to handle the client's gesture, including assessing the meaning behind the gift, ethical and clinical implications, potential responses and related consequences, and any risk management issues (e.g., related to potential ethics complaints and lawsuits). It is critically important to document the client's gift and any related consultation and supervision to protect both the client and clinician.

In their book *Preventing Boundary Violations in Clinical Practice*, Thomas Gutheil and Archie Brodsky encourage practitioners to carefully consider several key criteria when deciding whether to accept a gift from a client:

Monetary value of the gift

Inexpensive gifts are more likely than expensive gifts to be mere expressions of appreciation or personal consideration, although their potential symbolic meanings still must be considered.

Handmade vs. purchased gifts

If a client makes the Social Worker a ceramic bowl as an expression of appreciation, it may be best to accept the gift while exploring its meaning. A client may be especially upset by the rejection of his or her own handiwork. At the same time, the clinical significance of such a gift is that it was made with the Social Worker in mind and therefore could be saturated with personal meaning and active fantasies, including perhaps the assumption that the gift would be accepted coupled with fear that it would not be. Thus, a handmade gift is all the more to be appreciated and all the more to be understood.

Characteristics of the client

The clinical and ethical calculus with respect to giving or receiving gifts is different when the client is a child. Likewise, since gifts have different meanings in different cultures, the client's cultural background is another contextual factor to be evaluated. The nature of the client's unique clinical profile and challenges also is a factor. Managing gifts offered by clients who struggle with boundary issues in their personal lives can be especially complex.

Type of therapy or relationship

Where the contract between a clinical Social Worker and client does not limit their interaction to words, a gift is not necessarily a breach of contract. In contrast, when a Social Worker is in a position of authority (e.g., a Social worker who serves as a client's probation or parole officer), it would not be appropriate to accept a gift, which could take on the appearance of a bribe even if it is offered innocently.

Appropriateness of the type of gift

A homemade Christmas fruitcake generally is regarded as innocuous. Likewise, books or articles relevant to the clinical relationship may be appropriate when offered in a spirit of mutual interest or simple goodwill. At the other extreme, sexually suggestive gifts are clearly inappropriate.

Stage of relationship

Early in the professional relationship, considerations of trust and therapeutic alliance building may argue for accepting a gift, at least provisionally, in marginal cases. On the other hand, early in the relationship it is also critical to establish and maintain a therapeutic frame strong enough to withstand the client's wishes, fantasies, or bribes. Gifts at termination also raise special issues.

Red-flag contexts

Anything out of the ordinary about the situation in which a client offers a gift should be documented and explored, and usually will rule out accepting the gift. Any circumstances indicating an expectation of a quid pro quo (a return of a gift or favour) also change the nature of the gift.

In Conclusion

Whenever a Social Worker seriously considers accepting a gift or favour from a client, of whatever value or tangibility, the practitioner should consult with thoughtful colleagues and supervisors, when feasible, and critically examine the clinical and ethical implications, including current ethical standards and agency policy, the client's and practitioner's motives, and any alternatives.

The Social Worker should carefully document in the case record the client's offers, the process the practitioner used to make the decision, the nature of the decision, and the rationale. This documentation can prove to be enormously helpful if the client or some other party raises questions about the appropriateness of the practitioner's judgment.

Taking Care of Business and a Few Other Things Along the Way

By Marc Laferriere HBSW, MSW, RSW.

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Please, let's relax.

Let's all take a breath; a deep breath. Okay, now let it out. Try it again, and again and again. Get to the point where you are not really thinking about breathing, but it is more like you are being breathed. Did you feel that? Did you let go of your day just a little? Good. Remember that feeling, and do it again—once a day even. It won't hurt.

We take very poor care of ourselves. Life is hectic and stressful and sometimes full of emotional, personal, professional, and in the day and age of media and social media, public conflict. We need to take better care of ourselves. I know this on a first hand basis having multiple work, business, community, and personal commitments. There are many others out there who can also feel overwhelmed and over-extended. In a way, this has become the new normal for too many of us.

As a Social Worker, I've see clients regularly, and spoken at many workshops to those of us in the helping fields about this issue. Far too often, self-care is referred to and referenced as a way to prevent burnout. Although that is a good reason to take care of yourself, I do find another less talked about and more appealing reason.

It's okay to just want to enjoy your life more. If your prime motivation for taking care of yourself is to avoid burnout, then in my experience, it still means burnout is going to come—just maybe a little later than it would have if you weren't doing some self-care. Too often, people engage in self-care only because they feel as if they are this close to burning out already. We've got to change that mindset. Again, it's okay to just want to enjoy your life more.

We tell ourselves it is about preventing burnout, because that is more socially acceptable. What kind of social space have we created when we have to have dire reasons to take care of ourselves, or make excuses to enjoy life? I don't need an excuse to play with my cats, or read a comic book, or take a walk on the trail system, and neither do you.

That brings me to another point. We tend to over-complicate self-care. It can be as simple as breathing, having a cup of tea, playing with your pets, taking a walk, reading a book, listening to a podcast while you do the dishes, stretching for five minutes in the morning. You have time for it. Yes, even you. One of my favorite self-care activities is to watch a movie; another is to read a comic book. Going to a movie means no cell phone, no distractions, and it's a good way to just let go of the stress of the day. With comic books, I've enjoyed that graphic form of storytelling for years. I find them immersive and colorful. I enjoy the way they can tell a story in 10 to 15 minute chunks over a period of years, and sometimes decades. When you are busy, it's nice to be able to check in with something you enjoy for that brief period of time.

When counseling, I often refer people to a web page called [70 Ways for Self Care](#). They have an abundant list of possible activities that you can do to take better care of yourself on any budget, and for any schedule. In the past few years, I have probably shared this web page with 200 to 300 people individually, and maybe another 500 to 700 who have attended workshops or presentations I have been asked to give. Take me up on this challenge. Read through the list, put a checkmark beside the ones you have done, and put a plus sign beside ones you are willing to try. Then try them. Put it on your fridge, or near your computer, and when you're feeling bored or stressed, or just because it is okay to want to (remember that!), leaf through the list and try one. The ones you don't like, just ignore. Not everything is the right fit. There are many that wouldn't be a good fit for me, but I have seen them work wonders for others.

That's it. No need to overthink it or feel guilty about it. It's okay to take care of yourself. Enjoy.

Self-Care Assessment

Adapted from Saakvitne, Pearlman, & Staff.

Adapted from Saakvitne, Pearlman, & Staff of TSI/CAAP (1996). *Transforming the pain: A workbook on vicarious traumatization*. Norton.

From the University of Ballarat website, 8 June 2010.

The following worksheet for assessing self-care is not exhaustive, merely suggestive. Feel free to add areas of self-care that are relevant for you and rate yourself on how often and how well you are taking care of yourself these days.

When you are finished, look for patterns in your responses. Are you more active in some areas of self-care but ignore others? Are there items on the list that make you think, "I would never do that"? Listen to your inner responses, your internal dialogue about self-care and making yourself a priority. Take particular note of anything you would like to include more in your life.

Rate the following areas according to how well you think you are doing:

- 3 = I do this well (e.g., frequently)
- 2 = I do this OK (e.g., occasionally)
- 1 = I barely or rarely do this
- 0 = I never do this
- ? = This never occurred to me

Physical Self-Care

- ___ Eat regularly (e.g. breakfast, lunch, and dinner)
- ___ Eat healthily
- ___ Exercise
- ___ Get regular medical care for prevention
- ___ Get medical care when needed
- ___ Take time off when sick
- ___ Get massages
- ___ Dance, swim, walk, run, sports, sing, or do some other physical activity
- ___ Take time to be sexual - with myself, with a partner

- ___ Get enough sleep
- ___ Wear clothes I like
- ___ Take vacations
- ___ Other:

Psychological Self-Care

- ___ Take day trips or mini-vacations
- ___ Make time away from telephones, email, and the Internet
- ___ Make time for self-reflection
- ___ Notice my inner experience - listen to my thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, feelings
- ___ Have my own personal psychotherapy
- ___ Write in a journal
- ___ Read literature that is unrelated to work
- ___ Do something at which I am not expert or in charge
- ___ Attend to minimizing stress in my life
- ___ Engage my intelligence in a new area, e.g., go to an art show, sports event, theatre
- ___ Be curious
- ___ Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes
- ___ Other:

Emotional Self-Care

- ___ Spend time with others whose company I enjoy
- ___ Stay in contact with important people in my life
- ___ Give myself affirmations, praise myself
- ___ Love myself
- ___ Re-read favourite books, re-view favourite movies
- ___ Identify comforting activities/objects/people/places and seek them out
- ___ Allow myself to cry
- ___ Find things that make me laugh
- ___ Express my outrage in social action, letters, donations, marches, protests
- ___ Other:

Spiritual Self-Care

- Make time for reflection
- Spend time in nature
- Find a spiritual connection or community
- Be open to inspiration
- Cherish my optimism and hope
- Be aware of non-material aspects of life
- Try at times not to be in charge or the expert
- Be open to not knowing
- Identify what is meaningful to me and notice its place in my life
- Meditate
- Pray
- Sing
- Have experiences of awe
- Contribute to causes in which I believe
- Read inspirational literature or listen to inspirational talks, music
- Other:

Relationship Self-Care

- Schedule regular dates with my partner or spouse
- Schedule regular activities with my children
- Make time to see friends
- Call, check on, or see my relatives
- Spend time with my companion animals
- Stay in contact with faraway friends
- Make time to reply to personal emails and letters; send holiday cards
- Allow others to do things for me
- Enlarge my social circle
- Ask for help when I need it
- Share a fear, hope, or secret with someone I trust

Other: Workplace or Professional Self-Care

- ____ Take a break during the workday (e.g., lunch)
- ____ Take time to chat with co-workers
- ____ Make quiet time to complete tasks
- ____ Identify projects or tasks that are exciting and rewarding
- ____ Set limits with clients and colleagues
- ____ Balance my caseload so that no one day or part of a day is “too much”
- ____ Arrange work space so it is comfortable and comforting
- ____ Get regular supervision or consultation
- ____ Negotiate for my needs (benefits, pay raise)
- ____ Have a peer support group
- ____ (If relevant) Develop a non-trauma area of professional interest

Overall Balance

- ____ Strive for balance within my work-life and work day
- ____ Strive for balance among work, family, relationships, play, and rest

Other Areas of Self-Care that are Relevant to You

- ____
- ____
- ____

The AASW Horizon Career Centre: Plan Your Career

Copyright 2011 of the Australian Association of Social Workers

The Horizon Career Centre is an initiative of the Australian Association of Social Workers to provide a forum for employment solutions and career resources.

Phase one: clarify your purpose.

Gaining insight into **WHO** you are and **WHY** you are a Social Worker is the foundation step in purposefully planning your Social Work career. When you know yourself well, you will be equipped to reach out for experiences that resonate with your unique purpose. A fantastic way to begin this process is to clarify and articulate your strengths. Through committing to this process you are beginning a journey that will take you to where YOU need to go.

Exercise 1

Begin by thinking through the following reflective questions. These will help you focus in and gain insight into who you are and what motivates you.

- What do I value?
- What qualities in people do I admire and why?
- What challenges me?
- What makes me laugh?
- What am I passionate about?
- What would I like to contribute?
- What would I like to learn?
- What sparks my interest?
- What life experiences do I want to have?
- What is my life purpose?

Exercise 2

Understanding your key strengths will be incredibly useful in planning your career. Knowing your strengths and feeling confident helps in finding your passion at work, and to find work that best suits you. Start by listing your top-five strengths. Be honest and direct when determining your strengths, then you will be able to look for jobs that are in line with them.

Exercise 3

Building upon the insights you've now gained you can begin to focus in on your purpose in Social Work. Through reflecting on the questions below and asking them of Social Workers you admire, you will be able to grow your vision of what your Social Work career can look like.

- Why did I choose to study Social Work?
- Why do I want to be a Social Worker?

Exercise 4

Consider an experience of 'thriving' in Social Work (an experience that left you thinking, "Now that's why I'm a Social Worker!").

- What happened?
- Why was it so powerful?
- What did I learn from it?
- How has it influenced me?

Now that you've thought about your own experience of thriving, ask a colleague. If you're not yet a Social Worker, ask one!

Phase two: understand the purpose of Social Work.

Now that you have more clarity on your own purpose, the next step is to revisit the purpose of Social Work. Although you would have come across this during your studies, reflecting on it after you have completed Phase 1 will enable you to put the two together and uncover how to use your purpose to contribute to the purpose of Social Work.

There are a multitude of Social Work definitions around the globe. Whilst many differ

in their wording, commonalities exist in the commitment to the five values of: human dignity and worth, social justice, service to humanity, integrity and competence.

The Australian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2010: 5) states:

The Social Work profession is committed to the pursuit and maintenance of human well-being. Social Work aims to maximize the development of human potential and the fulfilment of human needs, through an equal commitment to:

- Working with and enabling people to achieve the best possible levels of personal and social well-being.
- Working to achieve social justice through social development and social change.

This involves:

- Upholding people's interests and rights
- Working with individuals, groups and communities in the pursuit and achievement of equitable access to social, economic and political resources
- Providing assistance to improve the well-being of clients. (Clients are individuals, families, groups, communities, organizations and societies, especially those who are neglected, vulnerable, disadvantaged or have exceptional needs)
- Raising awareness of structural inequities
- Promoting policies and practices that achieve a fair allocation of social resources
- Acting to bring about social change to reduce social barriers, inequality and injustice.

Exercise 1

Read the AASW Code of Ethics (you can download a free copy at <http://www.aasw.asn.au> - you may like to save it to your hard drive for future reference!). Even if you've read it before, take some time now to re-read it. This is a critical step in the 'Plan Your Career' journey.

Exercise 2

The next step is to take your answers to the questions and your Signature Strengths identified in Phase 1 and apply them to the above dot points (refer to the six final dot points on page 6), to develop some ideas about how to use your particular values, beliefs and strengths within your profession.

For example, let's say you discovered in Phase 1 that you value fairness and believe that all individuals deserve the right to freedom; and you additionally identified that one of your Signature Strengths is Leadership. Reading over the above list, let's imagine that the final point, acting to bring about social change, really resonated with

you. By putting these together, you might articulate that organising an event to advocate for and promote change for a marginalized group would tap into your purpose.

There are lots of really creative ways to do the above. You might like to think broadly, and consider using the media, theatre, social entrepreneurship, politics, art or the Internet within your Social Work career. As long as you know your WHY (to maximize human potential), the HOW could be anything that draws not only on your fundamental Social Work skills, knowledge and values, but the strengths, passions and interests you bring to Social Work!

Exercise 3

The final step in this phase is to articulate your statement of purpose. We like to call it our 'career objective' or 'tagline'. This statement will be useful to you throughout your career as it will guide your path and provide you with a way to check in every now and then to see if you're still on track. It can be as simple and broad, grand and dramatic or detailed and specific as you want. You may find that it sums up way more than your career aspirations, but also captures your life 'mission'. This can be used as an introduction to your resume or you may just want to stick it to your wall to remind you of your bigger picture purpose - it's powerful stuff!

Example Career Objective

My intention in all areas of my life is to commit to building connections with others that promote relationships of integrity. This approach to living and working enables me to join with others in a journey towards reaching our full potential as individuals and as a human collective.

Example Tagline

"Assisting Social Workers to fulfil their potential"

Now that you've completed Phase 1 and 2, it's time to review.

Review phase one and two.

Pause awhile to take stock of your responses. This is an INCREDIBLY important moment.

This will ensure that you move far beyond a reactive, quick fix (I need a job TODAY and I'll take anything!!) mentality, and instead equip yourself with the tools to proactively create a sustainable, meaningful and purposeful career.

Review...

- What are my five Signature Strengths? (from VIA Strengths Survey)
- How might I use these in my career?
- What would I like to learn?
- What do I want to contribute?
- Where do my interests lie?
- What stood out when I recalled a moment of thriving?
- What do I value?
- Did a particular way of working, client group, core value, colleague or field of practice stand out?
- Can I articulate a particular way of working that I'm interested in exploring?

If you're excited about progressing your ideas, move on to **Phase 3!** If you're finding it challenging to answer these questions, keep trying...you will get there!

Phase three: create your purpose.

Now it's time to use your newly gained insights to proactively develop career possibilities that will allow you to work with your strengths and purpose. Get ready for action!

Exercise 1 – Map Your Interest Map your interest, and chances are you'll do more than find a job, you'll create a dynamic, holistic, long-term career full of amazing experiences! Seek out information, resources, organizations, ideas, inspiration and most importantly interesting and uplifting people. During this process, going beyond the traditional realm of Social Work will ensure that you develop as wide a pool of resources as possible – think big!

Use the following suggestions to build your map.

Peak Websites

There are many local, national and international organizations that are valuable hubs of information. Use these websites as a launch pad to find people, organizations, articles, events, job listings, discussion forums, and blogs.

Professional Organizations

Look for communities that you can tap into (e.g. AASW, IFSW, Alumni networks, business groups). Find out what they do, who's involved, how they meet, and if they hold regular events. Think about how you might also contribute to those groups. Being involved in active committees is a fantastic way to meet with well-connected people and start your own supportive professional network. Seek out people who are generous, experienced and warm.

Events, Training, Conferences

Find past and/or future events (seminars, workshops, conference, meetings) and read the biographies of the presenters. If their details aren't on the event listing, search their name on the Internet and you'll probably come across them. This is also a great way to find fascinating people from other countries.

Magazines, Journals, Online Publications

Search for publications and take note of any interesting people, research or projects. If contact details aren't included in the publications, do an Internet search as previously mentioned.

EXERCISE 2 – Build Relationships Now that you've mapped out people and organizations that interest you, the next exercise involves reaching out to build positive connections. Rather than making connections aimed at meeting your immediate needs, approach people solely because you're sincerely and genuinely INTERESTED IN THEM. Below is an example of how to connect by e-mail, over the phone or in person.

BRIEFLY Introduce Yourself

Connect through COMPLIMENT

If you've read about the person and were impressed with what they've done, or perhaps heard some-one else talk about them positively, start off the contact by letting them know.

Add VALUE

Approach with the purpose of adding value to them, rather than asking for something for yourself. If you come across someone doing research or working on a project that you're interested in, look for ways to add value. For example, you may have books, articles or contacts that could be useful to the other person. If you offer something that adds value to the other person they are much more likely to respond.

Be SPECIFIC

Make it easy for people to respond by being clear and specific about what you would like to happen next. This is particularly important when connecting via e-mail (the aim is for the person to be able to reply without having to leave their computer!). If they don't reply, that's ok! You only need a small number to reach back for things to snowball.

Meeting in Person

Meet with people in person and focus completely on them. The purpose of the meeting is to learn more about the other person - ask questions, be genuinely interested, and hear for ways to add value. When you know what someone is doing,

what their interests and passions are, you can identify ways to contribute. If it fits with the flow of the conversation (i.e. If they ask you what you do) bring up that you're looking for new opportunities, but keep it brief. When you've genuinely focused on them for the majority of the interaction they will hold you in high regard and be more inclined to share information and contacts that might add value to you. After the meeting send an e-mail or card in the post letting them know how much you enjoyed meeting them and WHY.

Networks

The connections you have developed will begin to grow supportive networks that can be personally and professionally enriching. From this solid foundation, you will ensure that your long-term career experiences are as positive as they can be.

Work

By building positive relationships you will develop a more meaningful understanding of current and future career opportunities. By staying connected you will not only become more aware of jobs being advertised, but also those that are less visible. Additionally, you will have gained new insights into particular organizations and/or people you would like to associate with – make informed decisions!

Inspiration

Through connecting, you will be perfectly situated to ensure a steady stream of inspiring and motivating experiences that will contribute to sustaining your professional and personal growth. These might include collaborating with colleagues to present papers, develop a project or write a book. You may be inspired to undertake further training, travel or even start your own business!

The AASW Horizon Career Centre: Job Hunting for Social Workers

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The Horizon Career Centre is an initiative of the Australian Association of Social Workers to provide a forum for employment solutions and career resources.

The Horizon Career Centre

The Horizon Career Centre provides Social Workers with help in finding employment in a variety of ways, including:

Online resources: Horizon Career Centre has a range of useful information, publications and links to help you enhance your career. Our online resources are available and may be useful to AASW members and the wider human services sector alike.

Online Job Search Engine: An easy to navigate search engine designed to provide users with Social Work vacancies across the country. It can be found at:

<http://www.horizonemployment.com.au/search-careers-in-social-work-australia/>

Telephone Career Services: Horizon Career Centre provides guidance to people seeking information, resources and referrals regarding Social Work, including:

- Social Work tertiary studies (undergraduate and postgraduate).
- Australian Social Work jobseekers looking for work in Australia.
- Australian Social Workers interested in working overseas.

If you would like some advice, please call us on 1300 731 314 or email horizon@asw.asn.au with your details. We will respond to your message as soon as possible.

Overseas Social Workers interested in (or in the process of) migrating to Australia, seeking Qualifications Assessment information please visit the main AASW website www.aasw.asn.au

Common employment questions

Which job should I ask for?

It may be helpful to go through the processes outlined in the **Plan Your Career** document above before you begin your job search. To create meaningful and purposeful career experiences, it's essential to know why you want those experiences. This document provides you with exercises so that you can reflect, clarify and clearly articulate who you are and what matters to you. Knowing these answers will help you to seek out jobs (and broader career experiences) that are right for you.

When you're ready to begin applying for positions, we recommend being mindful of two questions: "What do I want to contribute?" and "What do I want to learn?" These two questions will help you view and research advertised positions in a very different way. If the position would allow you to contribute that which you want to contribute, as well as learn that which you want to learn, fantastic! If it doesn't, do you really want the job?

What research should I do before I apply?

Now that you know why you want the position you've seen advertised, spend a little time getting as much information as possible about the role, the organization and the team you would be working with. You can do this by looking at the organization's website and reaching out to your colleagues or networks. Ask people whom you admire, trust and respect if they know anything about the organization. In doing this you may hear that it's a great organization with a wonderful reputation or a not so great organization with a history of high staff turnover. Please be careful whom you listen to. Is their information current? It may have been an organization or team in turmoil five years ago, but that doesn't mean it still is.

After you've done your informal research and read the Application Package, contact the organization directly. Most advertisements include the name of someone to call for further information. Questions you may like to ask during this call include:

How has the position come about?

You really want to know, did the organization just get new funding; has someone resigned; is there a locum in the position and will that person or another internal applicant be applying?

Could you tell me about the team?

You really want to know who you would be working with, if you'd be supervising anyone, who'd be supervising you, and what the general team dynamics are.

Is Continuing Professional Development part of the organization's culture? If so, could you tell me a little about that?

For example, is there a recurrent budget for CPD and do staff engage in regular professional supervision? Some organizations have very clear policies and budgets for CPD and others don't. Some have no idea what professional supervision is.

Know this BEFORE you apply!

What are the expectations of the role in the short and long term?

You really want to know if the organization is planning on expanding or shrinking and where does this role fit in those plans; is this position about creating something or maintaining something?

How do I address selection criteria?

Selection criteria are used by most organizations as a means of identifying the best person for the job. Spending time really thinking about your answers is also great preparation for any interview that may follow, as it's likely that the selection criteria will be used as a format for the interview. As with writing resumes, there are multiple resources online with advice on how to address selection criteria. If your potential employer is a government department, they may even have their own information on how to address selection criteria on the employment section of their website. A popular method to use as a guideline when addressing selection criteria is the Star Model, outlined briefly below.

Situation

Provide a brief outline of the situation or setting

Task

Outline what you did

Action

Outline how you did it

Result

Describe the outcomes

In summary, research the organization, address all criteria thoroughly (roughly 250 words per criteria point), use specific examples of the work you have done, use positive, action orientated language and ensure there are no spelling or grammatical errors.

Final Tips

- Create yourself a profile on a professional network like **LinkedIn**  and keep it well maintained. These can be a great way of mapping out your network and keeping up to date with what's happening in the discipline.
- Take advantage of the **Career Services** available at your University. They're free to access and, in some cases, can be used even after graduation.
- If you find yourself in the situation of knowing an agency that you're particularly interested in working for, but having no vacancies listed for them online, call their offices and enquire as to whether or not they accept speculative applications.

Speculative applications involve sending a copy of your résumé and cover letter to an employer to enquire about possible vacancies that you are interested in. They are a good way of accessing the 'hidden jobs' that exist in the market. Always check prior to sending your application though, as some agencies do not accept them.

Useful Links

Social Work Careers - Graduate Careers Australia

<http://www.graduatemcareers.com.au/CareerPlanningandResources/careerprofiles/SocialWork/>

Networking in Social Work – by Gabriela Acosta

<http://msw.usc.edu/mswusc-blog/social-work-networking/>

Recruitment Agencies - by Karalyn Brown

<http://interviewiq.com.au/are-recruitment-consultants-for-real>

Understanding the Changing Nature of Life and Work Roles - Blueprint for Australian Career Development

<http://www.blueprint.edu.au/AbouttheBlueprint/WhatareCareerManagementCompetencies.aspx>).

Social Work Workforce Report – by Skills for All

<http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/6778>

Web search methods – by Danny Sullivan

<http://searchenginewatch.com/article/2049177/Search-Engine-Tutorials>

Videos

Informational Interviews – by Eric Brown

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=L-9yq2_g5TQ

Professional Networking: How to Add Value to Your Connections – Colorado Technical University

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6M7ahzk0dGU>

Postgraduate Networking – by Richard Carruthers

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=BgznosQIDPE

Transitioning Careers – Seinfeld Excerpt

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3k7lykTWTK>

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