



**UNLOCKING THE
HIDDEN JOB MARKET**

A program from the Canadian Abilities Foundation that assists young Canadians facing barriers to employment.

canadianabilities.org



POWER UP IS SUPPORTED BY:



The Canadian Abilities Foundation envisions an inclusive, diverse accessible society, where all people belong and are valued. Our mission is to make Canada the most accessible country in the world through awareness building, education and programs.

Welcome to Power Up!

Your Pathway to Hidden Job Market Success

Power Up is a program designed to help young adults unlock real opportunities, many of which are hidden and not easy to find. As you journey with us through this program, we'll help you to build confidence, as you step into the world of work with purpose and momentum.

We're excited to have you here — this is your space to learn, grow, and take charge of your future.

The job market has changed — and many of the best opportunities aren't posted on job boards, in advertising or online. They're discovered through conversations, connections, and by showing employers who you are and what you can do. **Power Up** gives you the tools, support, and new skills to navigate this hidden job market and stand out.

Throughout this program, you will learn how to navigate the hidden job market. You will build networking skills and learn how to discover with people who can help you move forward in your search. You will learn how to set meaningful employment goals, develop your personal brand, and build a stronger, professional online presence.

You will also get our support and guidance to strengthen your resume and cover letter, and learn the latest strategies to help you shine in interviews.

By the end of this program, our hope is that you will:

- ✓ Develop a resume and cover letter that highlight your strengths
- ✓ Know how to find opportunities beyond job boards
- ✓ Build and grow your professional connections
- ✓ Feel more skilled and confident when presenting yourself to employers
- ✓ Strengthen your interview and communication skills
- ✓ Understand who you are as a candidate — and how to show it

We know the job search can feel overwhelming — especially when you're getting started. But you don't have to do it alone. **Power Up** is here to support you in your search.

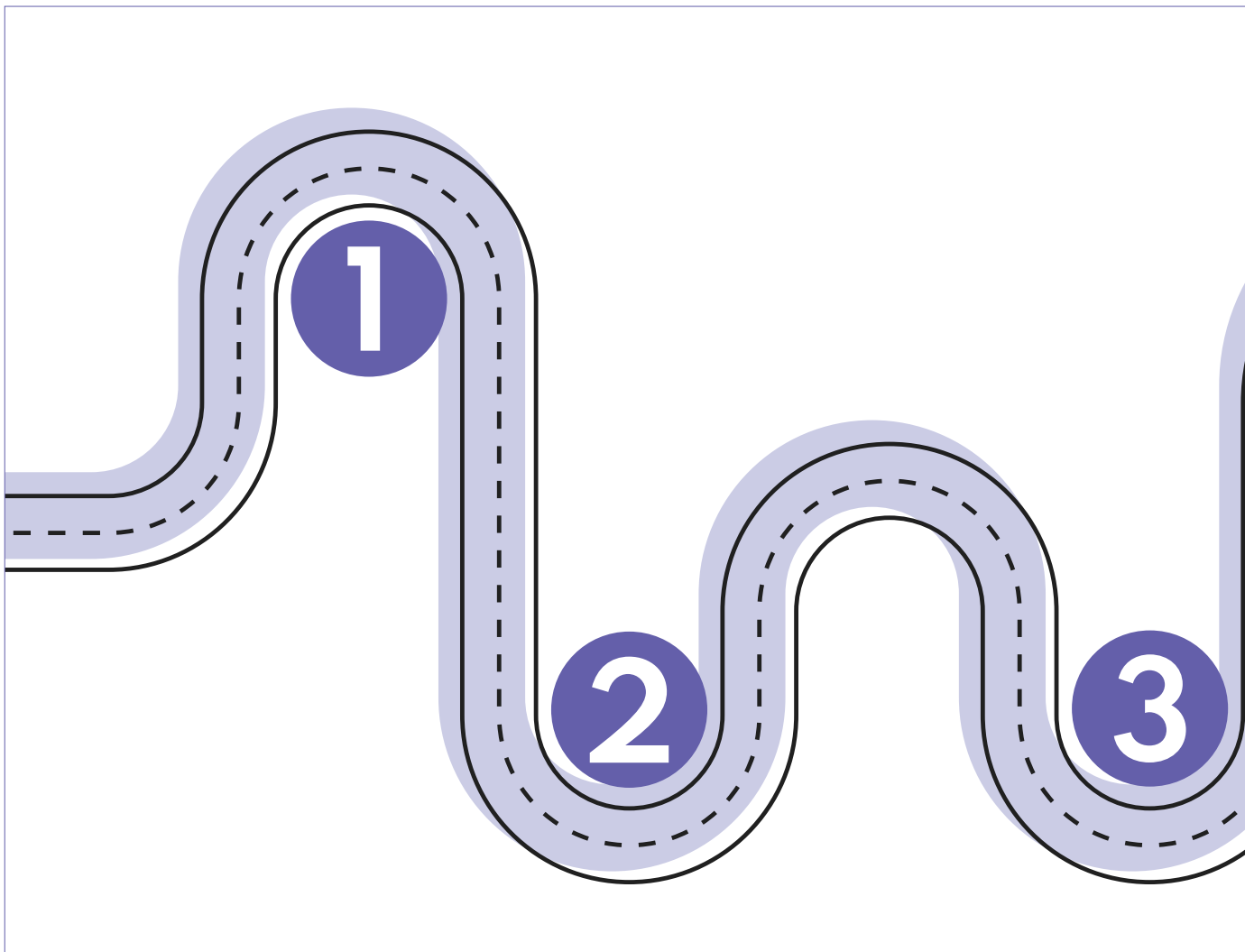
You bring your potential, perspective, and goals — and we'll help give you the tools to turn them into action.



You are capable. You are ready. Let's Power Up and get started!



Your Program Overview



1

Pre-Program Questionnaire

Complete our pre-program survey that will help us understand your experiences, goals, and job search challenges.

2

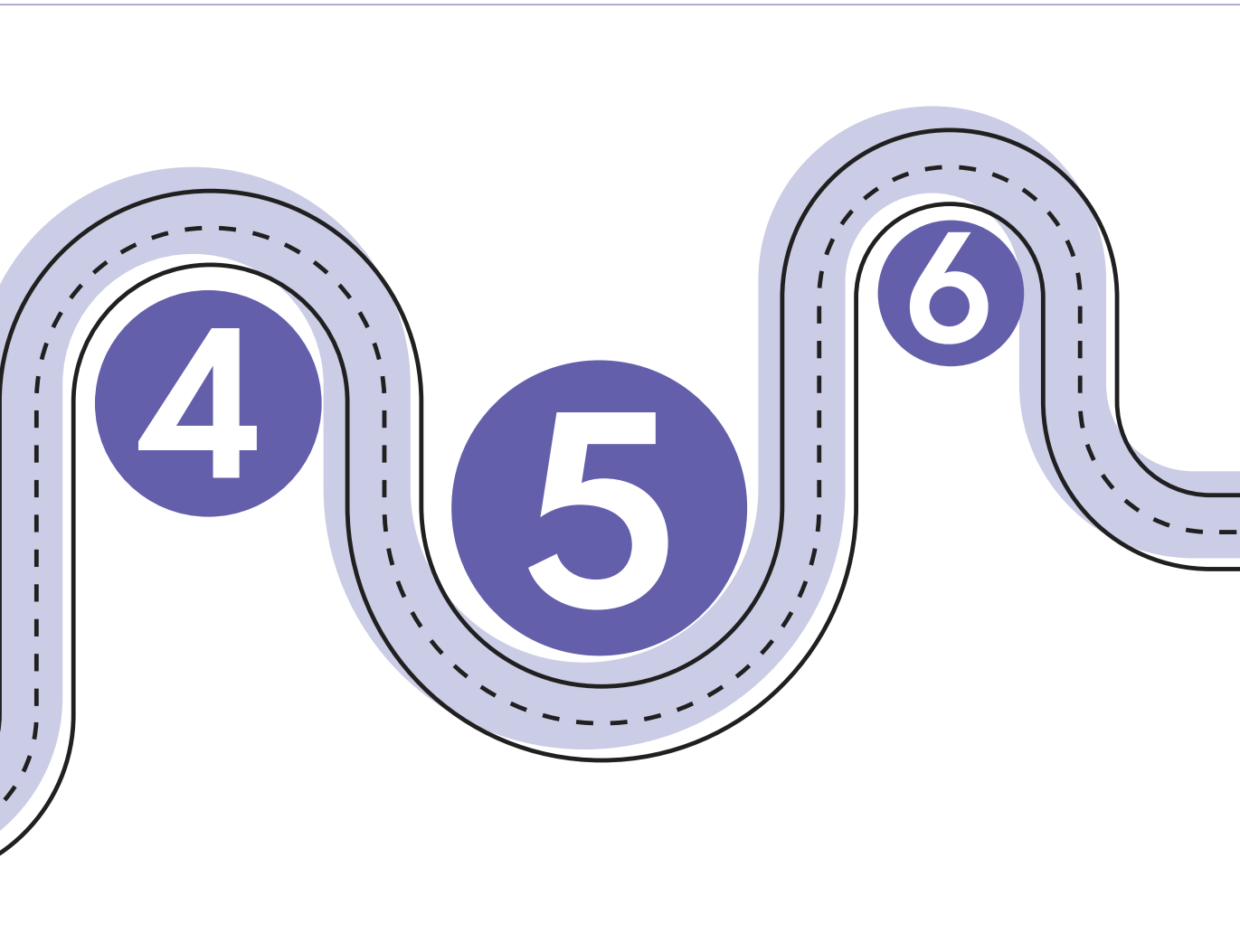
Complete Online Materials

Complete the four online components: Work through the Power Up workbook, fill in the resume template, View the Speakers Series videos, and review the online resources.

3

Mid-Program Coaching

Sign up for and attend a mid-program virtual one on-one check in with one of our employment coaches.



4

Decide/Complete Your Capstone Project

Complete a capstone project to showcase what you have learned throughout the program.

5

Post-Program Reflection

Attend a virtual group coaching call and complete our post-program survey to share reflections on what you have learned.

6

Program Complete

Congratulations, you have completed the Power Up Program! You can now start your job search.



Your Guide to Learning

Creating an inclusive workplace starts with understanding that everyone’s needs are different —and that’s okay. In Canada, we all have a responsibility to remove barriers that might prevent someone from fully participating at work. It begins with open, respectful conversations and a willingness to find solutions that work for all. Considerations might include your need for flexible hours, adjusted duties, supportive technology, or gradual return-to-work plans.

As your needs change over time, ongoing communication helps ensure everyone can do their best work. When workplaces take accommodation seriously, employees feel valued and empowered, stigma is minimized, and the whole team benefits.

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Canada’s Top Employers for Young People, published by the Globe and Mail, recognizes Canadian employers offering workplaces and programs for young people.

Visit: canadastop100.com/young_people/



CHAPTER ONE

GOAL SETTING



*“ People often say that motivation doesn’t last.
Well, neither does bathing – that’s why we
recommend it daily.”*

- Zig Ziglar



Defining Your Career Goals

It's important to be intentional about choosing roles that help you grow, gain confidence, and build toward the future you want. Setting clear employment goals gives you direction and keeps you from drifting from one random job to another.

STEP 1 **Explore What's Out There**
Take time to look into different types of jobs. Ask yourself: What kind of tasks appeal to me? Understanding your interests helps you choose roles that feel like a good fit.

STEP 2 **Choose a Job to Aim For**
Create a goal you can work toward—for example: "Within the next six months, I want to secure a full-time entry-level office job where I can build my communication and organization skills." This gives your job search direction and purpose.

STEP 3 **Break It Down into Smaller Steps**
What do you need to get job-ready? That may include updating your resume, practicing interviews, taking an online course, or getting volunteer experience.

STEP 4 **Use the SMART Method**
Make sure your employment goal is:
✓ Specific ✓ Measurable ✓ Achievable
✓ Relevant ✓ Time-Bound

STEP 5 **Reflect, Adjust, and Celebrate**
Every step forward matters—finishing a course, getting a call for an interview, or even figuring out what isn't the right fit. Check in with your goals regularly and adjust them as your experience or interests change.

Still unsure about a specific direction?
It's okay to begin with a broader goal, then refine as you gain experience and insight. Not every job is going to be your dream job—but it can be a stepping stone toward something bigger.

“Defining my career goals helped me focus on roles that truly matched my strengths and interests. As a result, I felt more confident in interviews, found a job where I can grow and feel proud.”



CHAPTER TWO

WHAT IS THE HIDDEN JOB MARKET



“Don’t wait for the right opportunity. Create it.”

– George Bernard Shaw



What is The Hidden Job Market

Did you know that about 80% of jobs in Canada aren't advertised publicly? These positions are often filled through connections, referrals, and networking — this is what is referred to as the “hidden job market.” For young job seekers, understanding it can open doors that online job boards can't.

What is the Hidden Job Market?

The hidden job market refers to jobs that:

- Aren't posted online or in newspapers
- Are filled through word-of-mouth or internal recommendations
- Often rely on networking or direct outreach
- Are AI screened without human intervention

This means that who you know can be just as important as what you know.

How to Access It

1 Network, Network, Network

Talk to people in industries or roles that interest you: Friends, family, teachers, coaches, past supervisors, colleagues, or online professional communities (LinkedIn, Twitter, industry forums).

2 Conduct Informational Interviews

Reach out to professionals to learn about their roles or organizations. You'll gain insights, advice, and potentially be remembered for future openings.



87%
of recruiters use LinkedIn to source candidates.

Source: Toronto Metropolitan University



3 Volunteer or Take Part-Time Opportunities

Volunteering, internships, or casual jobs help you gain experience and meet people who might later hire you.

4 Build Your Online Presence

Even without a posted job, a strong professional profile can attract opportunities. Update LinkedIn, showcase projects, or create a small portfolio.

Why It Matters

- Jobs in the hidden market are often less competitive
- Employers hiring this way often look for reliable, proactive, and visible candidates
- Early connections can lead to long-term career opportunities.
- Learning about AI – a new tool employers are using – will get your resume noticed



85%
of positions are filled through networking.

Source: Toronto Metropolitan University



A new skillset is needed for those entering the workforce to adapt to the changing landscape. (See pages 12–13 for more details).



Skills That Help You Stand Out

These skills show employers (and your network!) that you're motivated, capable, and ready to grow.

Communication

Being able to express yourself clearly — online, in person, or by email — builds trust.

Examples:

- Asking well researched questions
- Introducing yourself confidently
- Writing professional messages.

Initiative

Taking action without being told shows you're someone who gets things done.

Examples:

- Reaching out to someone to learn about their job
- Asking to shadow or volunteer
- Starting a personal project or online portfolio.

Problem-Solving



Employers love people who find solutions, not just identify problems.

Examples:

- Figuring things out independently, then asking when needed
- Suggesting improvements at school, work, or volunteer roles
- Staying calm when plans change.

Growth Mindset

Showing you're willing to learn is just as valuable as past experience.

Examples:

- Asking for feedback
- Taking short online courses
- Being open to trying new tasks.

Relationship-Building

People hire people they feel connected to — not just resumes.

Examples:

- Remembering names
- Checking in with people you meet
- Showing appreciation and enthusiasm



Reliability

Being dependable builds your reputation — fast.

Examples:

- Showing up on time
- Completing tasks when promised
- Keeping your word and following up.

AI Literacy

Learning to make new technology work for you.

- Researching AI search keywords for each position
- Using AI-powered job search tools
- Being open to and curious about experimenting with technology.





Accessing The Hidden Job Market

- 1 Set goals** - Create goals that you can check in with - using the SMART method to set your goals can help break them down into more manageable steps.
- 2 Make a job search plan** - determine how many hours per day or week you plan to commit to your job search. This can include time spent online networking, outreach to employers or your network, etc.
- 3 Update your resume** – A polished, up-to-date resume ensures you're ready to act quickly when unadvertised opportunities surface.
- 4 Build an online presence** - A strong online presence increases your visibility and helps decision-makers find you before a job is ever posted.
- 5 Develop a personal brand** - A clear personal brand tells your story at a glance and makes you more memorable when opportunities arise.
- 6 Network** - Networking opens doors to conversations, referrals, and roles that never make it to a job board. Volunteering, making connections on LinkedIn, and attending events or workshops specific to your industry of interest are all great ways to network.

Build Connections Through Volunteering & Passion Projects

Becoming a volunteer or leader is a powerful way to grow your network — especially when you're just starting out.

When you show up, contribute, and bring enthusiasm to causes you care about, people notice.

Coaches, organizers, and community leaders can become references, mentors, or even connect you to job opportunities. Passion projects — like running a small online shop, organizing events, or creating digital content — also help you meet people with shared interests. It's important to show your commitment, be reliable, and stay curious.

“Having a professional online presence made it easier for employers to get a sense of who I am and what I can do. It helped me make connections and led to openings I probably wouldn't have found otherwise.”



QUICK TIPS

Job opportunities often come from the communities, places and people you invest in.



How AI and ATS is Influencing Recruitment

Did you know that the majority of Canadian employers now use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to screen candidates? Being able to stand out in the job market has always been a unique challenge, but with employers relying on an automatic process called ATS to select first round candidates, you've got a few new things to think about.

How are employers using AI?

Simply put, AI can be a barrier, but it can also be a tool that can pave your way to employment. It is now common practice to use Artificial Intelligence Applicant Tracking Systems (known as ATS) to automate the hiring process. ATS is used by employers to source and screen candidate resumes and even schedule interviews. You may not actually interact with a human until you're invited to an interview on Zoom, Teams, or in-person.

It's software that's a huge help to employers as it helps them to quickly and efficiently find the best candidates based on skills, experience, and job requirements. Sometimes these tools can inaccurately screen some of the most qualified applicants by mistake.

What does AI screen for?

When analysing resumes, different employers will screen for a relevant set of keywords that applies to the company and the jobs they have available.

Depending on the sophistication of their software used, "keyword matching" will look for an exact set of terms that the employer designates. So, choosing the right keywords to put into your resume is really worth the effort.



QUICK TIPS

"Keywords" are not the same as a job description or a job title. So, even if an employer sets something like "project manager" as a keyword for screening, it doesn't mean they are necessarily looking for someone with experience as a manager.



Understanding Keywords

Here are some examples of “keywords” that many employers look for and what they mean. If you feel your skills and experience match, use the keyword in your resume and cover letter.

It may be tempting to stuff as many keywords as possible to give yourself the best chance possible, but this can backfire. Even if your resume passes the AI screening, you need it to look good for human eyes too!

When you use keywords, try integrating them naturally into your resume. For example, you can focus all the keywords you would like to use in your resume to a dedicated ‘Skills’ section.

Check out some of the keyword examples below:

“Customer service”: Involves: Clear and professional communication, problem solving, consistency, patience, empathy, active listening.

“Administration”: Involves: Defining goals, decision-making, coordination, organization, time-management, scheduling and calendar management, professional written communication, strategic planning.

“Social media marketing”: Involves: Defining goals, developing and sharing platform-specific content, strategic planning, publishing, listening, engaging professionally with customers/audience members, understanding analysis tools.

“Budgeting”: Involves: Estimating and tracking data over a specific period of time, resource management, organization, visualization (making spreadsheets, charts, and reports).

“Data analysis”: Involves: Defining goals, data collection, quality control, interpretation, visualization (making charts, reports, or dashboards).

“Project management”: Involves: Defining goals, breaking down work into tasks, allocating resources appropriately, risk management, communication.

Other keywords you could use

Keywords don’t just have to be related to your skillset. They can also refer to software. If you know how to use Google or Microsoft Office, Zoom, or Adobe products, list the programs specifically as they can be picked up by ATS.

Additionally, certain certifications can be keywords as well, like First Aid and WHMIS. If you want to know more about having these on your resume, please refer to Chapter 4: Resumes and Cover Letters.



QUICK TIPS

Employers will often highlight the keywords they are looking for within job descriptions and About Us pages. Look for anything that discusses role expectations and company DNA or culture, as these tend to use keywords that may help you appeal to the employer.

CHAPTER THREE

PERSONAL BRANDING



“Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.”

– Oscar Wilde



Building a Professional Online Presence

What is a personal brand?

Your personal brand is how you present yourself to employers—it's your reputation, image, and the story you tell about your skills, values, and work ethic. A strong personal brand helps you stand out, build credibility, and show employers what makes you unique.

Whether you're applying for your first job or exploring new opportunities, your personal brand helps employers understand what makes you unique.

Why It Matters

A strong personal brand helps you stand out in a competitive job market. Employers often look beyond resumes and check your online presence, attitude, and communication style.

It helps you:

- Make a memorable first impression
- Build trust and credibility
- Show professionalism and confidence
- Open doors to new opportunities
- When done well, your brand does the talking before you do
- Create a lasting impression that represents your goals, attitude and commitment to success

How to Build or Improve Your Brand

- 1 **Know Your Strengths** - List what you're good at, what excites you, and what kind of work reflects your values.
- 2 **Be Consistent** - Make sure your resume, social media, and LinkedIn all share the same tone and message.
- 3 **Show Your Skills** - Share examples of your work — projects, volunteer roles, or achievements — that highlight what you can do.
- 4 **Clean Up Your Online Image** - Review your posts and privacy settings. If something doesn't fit your professional goals, take it down.
- 5 **Keep Learning & Connecting** - Follow professionals you admire, join events, or take short courses. Growth keeps your brand fresh.

Final Thought

Your personal brand is like your digital handshake — it introduces you before you even meet someone. Make it authentic, positive, and consistent with who you are and where you want to go.

Be intentional about your story — and let your personal brand work for you!



How to Network

Networking isn't just for business people in suits — it's something every job seeker can do. It can open doors you didn't even know existed and build ongoing relationships. Networking simply means talking to people who can help you learn, grow, and find opportunities. With a little preparation and a positive attitude, you can turn everyday conversations into career connections.

Know Your Purpose

Before you start, take a moment to ask yourself:

- What do I want to learn?
- What kind of work interests me?
- Who could teach me something helpful?

Having a goal (even a small one!) helps guide the conversation and gives you more confidence.

Listen & Ask Good Questions

Networking is NOT all about talking — it's about being curious! Ask simple questions like:

- "How did you get into your job?"
- "What skills do you use the most?"
- "What advice do you have for someone starting out?"

People enjoy talking about their experiences — and you'll learn a lot.

Share a Little About Yourself

You don't need to give your whole life story. Just briefly share: What you're interested in, something you're learning or working on, what kind of opportunities you're exploring. Keep it real and positive — you're starting a conversation, not selling yourself.

Follow Up Afterwards

After the conversation:

Say thank you (in person or by message). Connect on LinkedIn if they're comfortable. Send a short message later to stay in touch such as: "I tried that tip you gave me — thank you!").

Try This Formula:

- 1 Who you are
- 2 What you're learning or interested in
- 3 What you're working toward

Example:

"Hi, I'm Alex. I'm really interested in working in trades and have been learning basic carpentry skills through a community program. I'm hoping to get hands-on experience and explore apprenticeship opportunities."

The Elevator Pitch

An elevator pitch is a 30-second introduction you can use when meeting someone new. It helps people understand who you are and what you're working toward.



"Updating my resume to better showcase my experience and skills made a huge difference—I started getting interviews almost immediately. Being more clear and looking polished helped employers see what I could bring to the role."



QUICK TIPS

Keep it short and natural. Practice saying it out loud, you can adjust your pitch depending on who you're talking to.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONSIDERING ENTREPRENEURSHIP?



“I’m convinced that about half of what separates the successful entrepreneurs from the non-successful ones is pure perseverance.”

– Steve Jobs, Co-Founder and CEO of Apple



Starting your own business?

Self-employment is a progressive way to overcome traditional labour market barriers and social stigma. By starting your own small business you can create customized, accessible and meaningful work opportunities for yourself and others.

Benefits to consider:

- **Personalized:** Business ownership allows for tailored work environments, flexibility, and accommodations as needed
- **Innovation:** Living with a disability provides a unique perspective that frequently leads to identifying market gaps and the opportunity to develop innovative projects
- **Assistance:** There are unique, support resources and programs to access loans, business coaching, and technical assistance in Canada for starting or expanding businesses.
- **Mentorship:** Opportunities also exist to find others to guide you and support your long-term goals.

Before you take the leap

Starting a business requires preparation in a variety of foundational areas from legal compliance to financial, insurance and resource planning. According to experts, validating your idea with market research, a competitive analysis, a business plan, cash flow and financial forecasts and the selection the right business structure are key.

Personal Readiness is also a consideration. Running a business is a major commitment that often requires more time and energy than a traditional job, the flexibility to pivot as the market changes or you receive customer feedback. You'll also need to know how to seek professional advice and the talent to identify the skills you'll need to build a dedicated and supportive team.

Here are some things to ask yourself if you're considering starting a business:

- 1 **What ideas do I have that I can monetize?** What kind of business do I want? Do I want to sell goods to customers or is there a service I can provide? How will my idea make money?
- 2 **What problem does my idea solve and for whom?** Who am I marketing to? Who will want what I have to offer?
- 3 **Where will my business be located?** Do I want to be online-only or have a store-front? Do I want to provide goods and/or services locally or to a wider customer base?
- 4 **What is my competitive advantage?** Are other people/companies doing what I want to do? Is there a gap in the market I can fill? What makes my idea different and interesting to potential customers?
- 5 **How much money will I need to get started?** What are my startup costs? How long can I survive without profit? What resources will I need to pay for?
- 6 **Am I prepared for failure?** Approximately 90% of start-ups fail within the first five years. Can I handle the disappointment of failure? Am I ready to try again even if I fail with my first idea? What are my backup plans if things don't work out as planned?

Once you have answers to these questions, you can begin working on your Entrepreneur Capstone Project (in our Google classroom).

CHAPTER FIVE

RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS



*“Your resume isn’t a biography, it’s a billboard;
make every word count.”*

– Unknown



How to Build a Resume that Stands Out

Your resume is another great opportunity to show an employer who you are, what you can do, and why you're a great fit. A strong resume doesn't just list tasks, it highlights skills, achievements, and growth.

Here's how to make yours stand out:

Start With a Clean Layout

A good resume is clear and easy to read.

Use:

- Simple fonts like Arial or Calibri
- Short bullet points
- Headings & spacing for organization

Focus on Skills + Achievements

Instead of just listing duties, show impact.

Example:

- ✗ "Worked the cash register"
- ✓ "Handled cash and card transactions accurately and delivered friendly customer service"

Showcase Soft Skills

Even if you haven't worked much, you have valuable skills!

Examples:

- Teamwork from sports or group projects
- Time management from school deadlines
- Problem-solving from volunteer or part-time roles

Use Action Verbs

Start bullet points with powerful words:

- Assisted
- Organized
- Created
- Communicated
- Supported
- Led
- Designed
- Improved
- Solved

Add Training, Certifications & Volunteering

Employers love to see initiative.

Include:

- Workshops and courses
- Certifications (e.g., CPR, food safety)
- Clubs or volunteer experience
- School leadership roles
- Edit & Proofread
- Typos lose interviews.



“Adding strong action verbs really brought my resume to life. It clearly showed what I could accomplish and made my relevant experience easier to understand.”



QUICK TIPS

Check spelling and grammar, and ask someone else to review your resume before you send it.



Action Verb Resume “Cheat Sheet”

Use these powerful verbs to start bullet points that show what you did and achieved.

Communicate

- Communicated • Presented • Explained
- Shared • Assisted • Answered • Supported
- Welcomed • Promoted

Teamwork

- Collaborated • Helped • Participated
- Contributed • Coordinated • Encouraged
- Guided • Assisted

Problem Solving

- Solved • Improved • Identified • Organized
- Analyzed • Planned • Adapted • Developed

Time & Task Management

- Managed • Completed • Scheduled
- Prepared • Prioritized • Organized
- Handled • Delivered

Leadership

- Led • Supervised • Motivated • Facilitated
- Trained • Delegated • Mentored • Supported

Creative & Technical

- Designed • Created • Edited • Built • Produced
- Updated • Tested • Assembled

Customer Service

- Served • Responded • Helped • Provided
- Addressed • Supported • Resolved • Greeted

Hands-On Tasks

- Stocked • Operated • Delivered • Loaded
- Maintained • Built • Cleaned • Prepared

What to Say

Instead of saying:

“Worked at a café.”

Say: “Served customers, prepared orders, and handled payments.”

Instead of saying:

“Helped in youth program.”

Say: “Supported youth activities, organized materials, and led group games.”

Instead of saying:

Did data entry and filing.

Say: Maintained accurate digital records and organized filing systems to improve document retrieval.

Instead of saying:

“Worked with others to complete tasks.”

Say: “Collaborated with team members to complete assigned tasks efficiently and on schedule.”



QUICK TIPS

Start each resume point with an action verb + result: “Organized supplies and improved efficiency by keeping materials easy to find.”



Writing and Effective Resume

Finding a job can feel tough when your resume looks light — but don't worry! Employers care about your potential, skills, and attitude, not just past jobs. Here's how to make your resume stand out.

1 Incorporate a Transferable Skills Section

You already have skills from school, volunteering, hobbies, and everyday life. Focus on what employers want:

- Communication • Teamwork
- Time Management • Problem Solving
- Digital Literacy • Leadership • Reliability

Example:

“Collaborated with classmates to complete a group project on time.”

2 Add Volunteer Work

Volunteer experience counts as real work and shows responsibility.

Example:

“Assisted at community events, set up tables, and greeted visitors.”

3 Include School Projects & Extracurriculars

Group projects, clubs, sports, or student council show real-world skills.

Example:

“Led a team of 4 to create and present a marketing project for class.”



“When I started asking thoughtful questions during interviews, I felt more confident and prepared. Employers seemed to appreciate my curiosity, and it made the interviews feel more like a two-way conversation.”

4 Add Certifications & Courses

Short courses demonstrate initiative and a growth mindset:

- First Aid / CPR
- WHMIS or food safety
- Microsoft Office / Google certifications
- Free online courses (Coursera, LinkedIn Learning)

5 Highlight Personal Projects

Self-driven projects show passion and responsibility.

Examples:

- Designed social media graphics for a school club
- Started a small online shop
- Edited videos or created digital content



QUICK TIPS

Tip: No volunteer experience? Try local events, food banks, libraries, nonprofit organizations, or online volunteering.



Tips for Writing a Great Cover Letter

When you're applying for a job, your resume shows what you've done — but your cover letter tells your story. Think of it as your chance to introduce yourself, explain why you're excited about the job, and highlight the skills and experiences that make you a great fit.

Why Cover Letters Are Important

A cover letter helps you:

- Stand out from other applicants who only submit resumes
- Show your personality and motivation
- Connect your experience to the job, even if you don't have much work history
- Explain unique experiences — volunteering, school projects, team roles, personal achievements

When You Should Include a Cover Letter

You should send a cover letter when:

- ✓ The job posting asks for one
- ✓ You're applying for a professional or office role
- ✓ You're emailing your resume to someone directly
- ✓ You want to make a strong impression or explain your story

You don't always need one for fast-apply online platforms or casual applications, but submitting a cover letter still shows that you care — and that can give you an edge.

7 Tips for Writing a Great Cover Letter

- 1 **Keep it to one page** - Short, clear, and friendly is best.
- 2 **Personalize it** - Mention the company and why you're interested — avoid sending the same letter everywhere.
- 3 **Tell your story** - Highlight experiences like volunteering, school clubs, babysitting, sports, or part-time jobs that show responsibility, teamwork, problem-solving, or leadership.
- 4 **Show enthusiasm** - Employers love energy and effort! Explain why you're excited about the role.
- 5 **Use a professional tone, but be yourself** - Imagine you're speaking confidently to someone at the workplace.
- 6 **Finish strong** - End by thanking them and expressing interest in an interview.
- 7 **Final Thought** - A cover letter is your chance to say, "I'm motivated, I care, and I'm ready to contribute." Even if you don't have much experience, your voice and your potential can shine — and that can open doors.



QUICK TIPS

For early-career job seekers, a cover letter can show employers your enthusiasm, potential, and willingness to learn — which can be just as important as experience.

CHAPTER SIX

ACE YOUR INTERVIEWS



*“A diamond is merely a lump of coal
that did well under pressure.”*

– Unknown



The Dos and Don'ts of an Interview

A job interview is your opportunity to show a potential employer why you would be a good fit in the role and at their company. But keep in mind that an interview goes both ways! You are also exploring whether or not the job and the company are a good match for your goals and interests.

To help you in preparing for and doing well in your interview, here is a list of “Dos” and “Don'ts” to make sure you ace it:

Dos:

- ✓ Know the type of job interview you will encounter.
- ✓ Demonstrate your interest in the job by doing research on the employer.
- ✓ Prepare thoughtful questions. Asking questions demonstrates interest in the job/company.
- ✓ Ask for a clarification if you don't understand a question.
- ✓ Bring extra resumes.
- ✓ Be aware of your body language.
- ✓ Ask about next steps in the hiring process at the end of the interview.

Don'ts

- ✗ DON'T arrive late. You should aim to arrive 10-15 minutes before the interview begins.
- ✗ DON'T speak negatively about former employers, supervisors, colleagues, or yourself.
- ✗ DON'T give one-word answers. Elaborate or give explanations - the STAR Method can be helpful.
- ✗ DON'T answer calls or texts. Have your phone turned off and put away.
- ✗ DON'T let nerves get the best of you. Remember that you know what you are talking about. You've got this!

The STAR Method

The STAR Method helps you give strong interview answers by telling a clear and positive story about your work or school experience.

S — Situation: What was needed?

T — Task: What did you need to do?

A — Action: What steps did you take?

R — Result: What happened because of your actions?

“I didn't have formal work experience, but using the STAR method helped me show what I could do by describing school projects, volunteering, and times I solved problems. The structure made my answers clear and confident, and it helped me land my first entry-level job.”





Top 10 Interview Questions and Answers

Interviews can feel intimidating — but being prepared makes a huge difference. Here are the most common questions employers ask and how you can respond with confidence.

1 Tell me about yourself.

Tip: Focus on education, interests, and your goals — not your life story.

Example:

“I recently finished high school and I’m interested in starting a career in customer service. I’ve volunteered at community events where I learned teamwork and communication. I’m excited for a role where I can grow, help people, and build my skills.”

2 Why do you want to work here?

Tip: Show interest and do some research on the company beforehand.

Example:

“I admire how your store values customer service and community involvement. I enjoy helping people and would love to grow with a company that supports learning and teamwork.”

3 What are your strengths?

Tip: Share strengths with examples.

Example:

“I’m dependable and good at solving problems. During a group presentation, our presentation software crashed, so I quickly moved everything into Google Slides and kept the team organized. We still presented on time and got great feedback.”

4 What are your weaknesses?

Tip: Be honest, positive and mention improvements.

Example:

“I can get nervous speaking in groups, so I started attending campus club meetings and practicing presentations. I’ve already noticed improvement.”



Think of a time you helped solve a problem — at school, work, volunteering, or in your personal life.

Write your answer using the in STAR format below:

Situation: _____

Task: _____

Action: _____

Result: _____

5 Tell me about a time you handled a challenge or solved a problem.

Tip: Use the STAR method — Situation, Task, Action, Result.

Example:

“At my part-time job, customers often asked the same questions. I suggested a simple FAQ sheet at the counter. My manager liked the idea, and it helped customers get answers faster.”

6 Why should we hire you?

Tip: Highlight your attitude and strengths.

Example:

“I’m reliable, eager to learn, and enjoy helping others. I bring positive energy, show up prepared, and am excited to contribute to your team.”

7 Tell me about a time you worked on a team.

Example:

“In a volunteer event, we had a rush of people needing support. I coordinated with others, divided tasks, and helped new volunteers. We finished on time and served everyone efficiently.”

8 What motivates you?

Example:

“Learning new skills and feeling like I’m making a difference motivates me. I enjoy working on goals and seeing progress.”

9 Where do you see yourself in a year?

Tip: Show ambition and willingness to grow.

Example:

“I hope to build strong work experience, take on new responsibilities, and develop skills so I can grow in this field.”

10 Do you have any questions for us?

Tip: Always ask at least one! It shows interest.

Questions you can ask:

- “What skills help someone succeed in this role?”
- “What does training look like?”
- “What does a typical day here look like?”
- “Are there opportunities for professional development in this role?”
- “How would you describe the organizational culture of your (department, company, etc)?”

Final Tip: Practice builds confidence — rehearse your answers and be yourself.



“Requesting workplace accommodations showed me that speaking up about my needs is okay. I am now able to work comfortably, stay productive, and I feel valued by my employer.”



QUICK TIPS

Keep your story short and focus on what you did. Practice 2–3 STAR stories using some of the questions from pages 23–24 — they become great interview answers!



Staying Connected

Congratulations — you've completed your first interview with the company! That's a huge step, well done! But the process doesn't stop when the interview ends. Following up shows professionalism, gratitude, and keeps you on the employer's radar. It's your chance to leave a lasting impression and stand out from other candidates.

Why Following Up Matters

Employers are busy, and hiring decisions take time. A thoughtful follow-up:

- ✓ Shows appreciation for the interviewer's time
- ✓ Reminds them of your skills and strengths
- ✓ Demonstrates initiative and professionalism
- ✓ Helps you stay memorable in what may be a competitive process

When to Follow Up

- Within 24 hours of the interview:
Send a thank-you email
- One week later (if you haven't heard back):
Politely check in on the status

Tips for Following Up

- **Keep it short and professional** - Thank the interviewer, reference the role, and remind them why you're a good fit.
- **Mention something specific from the interview** - This shows you were engaged and paying attention.
- **Reaffirm your interest** - Express excitement about the role and the company.
- **Proofread** - Typos can undo all your hard work, keep your email polished.

Sample Thank-You Email

Subject: Thank You

Hi [Interviewer Name],

Thank you for meeting with me today. I enjoyed learning more about [Company Name] and the [Role Name] open position.

I'm excited about the opportunity to contribute my [specific skill/experience] to your team. Please let me know if you need any additional information.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Best regards,
[Your Name]
[Your Email]
[Your Phone Number]

TIP: Following up isn't just polite — it's smart. A well-timed, professional message can make the difference between being remembered and being forgotten.

Take the extra step and show employers you're motivated and ready to contribute.



QUICK TIPS

Even if you don't get the job, following up leaves a positive impression for future opportunities.

CHAPTER SEVEN

JOB OFFER



*“If you hit the target every time,
it’s too near or too big.”*

– Tom Hirshfield



How to Accept a Job Offer: Step-by-Step Guide

Getting a job offer is exciting and whether it's your first job, a promotion or a new opportunity, how you respond helps to set the tone for your success. For persons living with disabilities, it's also important to recognize that this is your opportunity to ask questions and speak up about the supports you might need to do your best work. Here are some suggestions that will help you to both navigate your offer and figure out the type of questions you might want to ask before signing:

1 Read carefully

Before agreeing to join the company, look carefully at the job details: the position, pay, schedule, start date, and any benefits. Make sure everything matches what was discussed during your interview. If you have questions or need clarification, now's the time to ask.

2 Think about your needs

If you need disability related accommodations to do your job, now is the time to consider them. You are not required to disclose your disability, but you can do so if you feel it will help your employer to understand your requirements. While you aren't under any obligation to share detailed information, educating, creating awareness and having open, honest conversations is what some job counsellors recommend.

3 Accept the Offer in Writing

After any necessary changes have been made most employers ask that you accept the job in writing, usually by email. Even though it's exciting to get a job, your email should be polished and respectful. Use proper greetings, full sentences, and a professional closing.

Clear: State that you are accepting the job.

Polite: Thank them for the opportunity.

Confirming: Include key details like your start date and role.

A clear acceptance ensures everyone is on the same page and helps prevent misunderstandings.

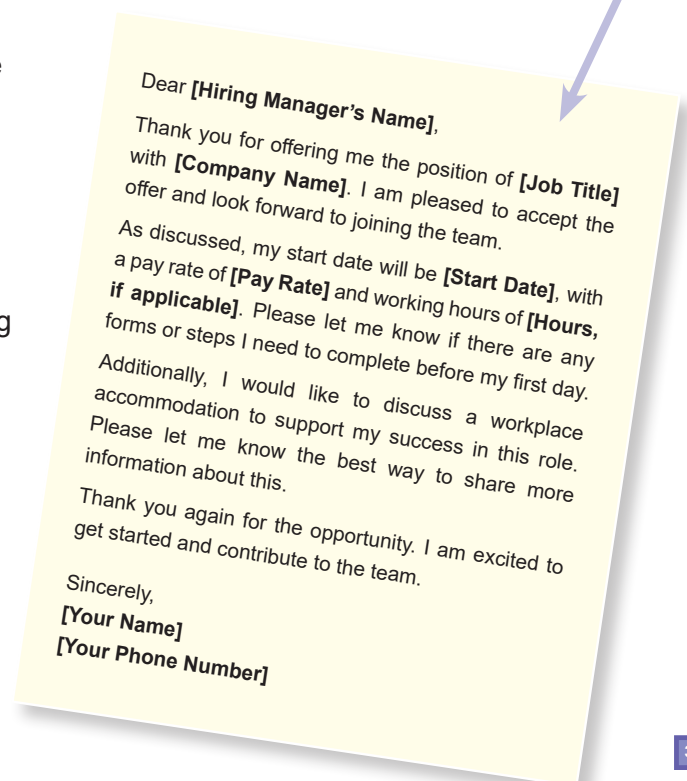
4 Proofread and Send

Double-check your email for typos or missing details. A clean, clear message shows you are organized and ready to start your new job confidently.

5 Prepare for Your First Day

After sending your acceptance, follow any instructions from your employer about onboarding, forms, or training.

Sample Offer Acceptance Email:



CHAPTER EIGHT

ACCOMMODATIONS & OVERCOMING STIGMA



*“ Somewhere, someone is looking for exactly
what you have to offer.”*

– Louise Hay



A Look at Accessibility and Accommodations

You are entitled to an accessible workplace and disability related accommodations that will better enable you to do your job. Here's a guide to help you get started.

1 Know what's possible

In Canada, there are laws that protect workers living with disabilities from workplace discrimination. Employers are required to provide reasonable accommodations to help you do your job which means providing you with assistive technology, physical adaptations, scheduling supports or other supports. You are legally entitled to request them.

Remember, you do not have to disclose your disability if you do not want to, but sharing this information can be beneficial in helping your employer understand your needs and respond to them effectively.

2 What is a workplace accommodation?

A workplace accommodation is a change, support or tool that you can request that allows you to perform your job successfully. Some examples of sensitivities that require accommodations might include:

- Flexible start and end times
- Adaptive equipment or software
- Adjusted workload or deadlines
- Physical accessibility modifications
- Visual schedules
- Notice of changes
- Noise cancelling headphones
- Dimmable lights, walls or closed doors,
- Spaces where strong scents can be avoided.

Reminder...

Follow up politely: Check in to make sure your accommodation is in place

3 Understanding workplace accessibility

Accessibility goes beyond physical access. It includes policies, technology, and workplace culture that allow everyone to contribute fully.

Examples of accessible workplaces include:

- Clear communication and instructions
- Inclusive meetings and training materials
- Policies that respect diverse needs
- Pay attention to your environment and don't hesitate to ask questions if something isn't accessible.

4 How to request your accommodations

- **Know what you need:** Think about what would help you do your job effectively.
- **Communicate clearly:** You can request accommodations in writing or in person. Keep your message professional and focused on how the adjustment aids you in your success.
- **Provide documentation if required:** Some employers may ask for supporting information from a health professional.



5 Addressing Disability-Related Stigma

Here are strategies for handling discussions, comments or questions:

- **Focus on your strengths:** Show what you can do rather than what you can't.
- **Educate politely if needed:** Sometimes coworkers don't understand your abilities or needs. A brief, professional explanation can help.
- **Find allies:** Seek out mentors, supervisors, or HR staff who can support you.
- **Document concerns:** Keep notes if you experience discrimination or bias, as this may be useful for reporting issues.

“By changing negative thinking to positive thoughts, you can boost your confidence and keep moving forward.”



Step 1:

Learn to recognize any negative or discouraging thoughts.

Step 2:

Pause and take a breath.

Step 3:

Find a positive version and replace the discouraging thought with this new, more helpful version.

To learn more, visit:

<https://alis.alberta.ca/succeed-at-work/make-your-work-life-more-satisfying/move-forward-with-positive-thoughts/>

Steps to Request a Workplace Accommodation

Step 1: Identify Your Needs

Think about what makes your job easier or possible.

Examples: flexible schedule, adaptive equipment, accessible workspace.

Step 2: Gather Information

- Remember – you are not required to disclose your disability, but educating can help
- Collect any supporting documentation if needed (doctor, therapist, or specialist notes).

Step 3: Request the Accommodation

- Contact your supervisor, HR, or designated workplace contact.
- Communicate clearly and professionally: explain the needed adjustment and how it helps you perform your job.

Step 4: Discuss and Collaborate

- Try not to get emotional or angry. Maintain a cooperative attitude.
- Your employer may ask questions or try to suggest alternatives.
- Work together in the spirit of finding a solution.

Step 5: Implementation

- Accommodation is put in place.
- Confirm that it works for you and your role.

Step 6: Follow Up

- Check in with your supervisor or HR if adjustments need tweaks.
- Keep records of requests and responses.



Online Resources and Article Links

To complement the Power Up workbook, we have curated this list of links to additional resources to help you build your professional network, improve your resume, write a tailored cover letter, interview confidently, and everything in between. You'll find useful information on an array of topics to guide your job search and help you stand out to potential employers.

Navigating the Job Search:

<https://managementconsulted.com/hidden-job-market/>

https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/tedrogersschool/business-career-hub/hub-insights/strive-to-thrive-reports/job-search-strategies/STT-Job_Search_Strategies.pdf

<https://www.ymcagta.org/blog/5-tips-to-improve-your-job-search>

Building a Standout Resume:

<https://www.coursera.org/articles/ways-to-enhance-your-resume>

<https://resumeworded.com/blog/beef-up-resume/>

<https://www.edgepointlearning.com/blog/hard-skills-vs-soft-skills/>

<https://www.jobscan.co/blog/how-to-write-a-resume/>

Using Networking and Personal Branding:

<https://ca.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/how-to-network>

<https://blog.theinterviewguys.com/personal-branding-for-job-seekers/>

<https://alis.alberta.ca/look-for-work/labour-market-information/tips-for-a-successful-informational-interview/>

<https://standout-cv.com/stats/social-media-recruitment-statistics>

Acing the Interview:

<https://www.livecareer.com/resources/interviews/prep/interviewing-dos-donts>

Planning for Employment:

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/choosing-a-career-path>

<https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/career-planning>

<https://achev.ca/a-guide-to-choosing-the-right-career-path-for-youth/>

<https://www.bdc.ca/en/articles-tools/entrepreneur-toolkit/business-assessments/entrepreneurial-potential-self-assessment>

Free Start-up Resources:

Government of Canada Guide on Starting a Business:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/business/start.html>

Government of Canada Business Benefits Finder:

https://innovation.canada.ca/innovation/s/list-liste?language=en_CA&token=a0BMm000006ACNqMAO

GrantCompass Business

Grant directory:

<https://grantcompass.ca/grants-directory.html>



Ask Joanna

Read Career Counselling Columns from Abilities:

<https://www.canadianabilities.org/ask-joanna>



**UNLOCKING THE
HIDDEN JOB MARKET**

A program from the Canadian Abilities Foundation that assists young Canadians facing barriers to employment.

canadianabilities.org