

Resumes & Job Hunt

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Career makeover: Budding social worker gets help

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By Lora Shinn / Special to NWjobs

Amanda Saab knew in high school that she wanted a career in social work. Since then, she has interned at a hospital, earned a master's degree, participated in community activities and gained professional experience helping others as a volunteer with multiple organizations.



Amanda Saab, 23, is just starting out in Seattle -- and in a career in social work. (Lora Shinn / Special to NWjobs)

"I loved being able to serve those in need," says Saab, who is now 23.

But the bubbly, outgoing Saab found herself seeking help after moving to the Seattle area in May from Detroit. Despite submitting multiple applications and having three interviews, she hadn't landed a full-time position in her chosen field -- hospital social work -- when she entered to win a [NWjobs job-search makeover](#) in early summer.

Managing the interview process from resume to follow-up left Saab feeling uncertain. "I often key into nonverbal cues -- that's the social worker in me -- but many interviewers were hard to read," she says.

When an interviewer asked Saab to imagine responses to specific situations, particularly those she hadn't faced before, Saab fumbled for words. She also felt stuck on the ground floor with her "elevator pitch," a coherent, quick bio about who she is and where she's going.

New to the area, Saab struggled to build a network, encountering the infamous "Seattle freeze." She's not imagining it, says [Matt Youngquist](#), president of [Career Horizons](#) in Bellevue and a [NWjobs.com](#) blogger.

"Seattle residents have a reputation for being superficially nice but standoffish, making it tough to really make friends here," Youngquist says.

Finding friends (and network connections) in our region can take time, he says. "It seems like you often have to have a 'sponsor' who can let other people know you're a good person and somebody safe to hang out with," he says.

"Instead of only going to pure networking events, also get involved with interest-focused groups," suggests Youngquist, whether charity-, hobby-, career- or fitness-related. "You'll have a built-in common denominator with everybody in the room and feel less pressure to schmooze and network in an awkward, artificial way."

As a result of Youngquist's advice, Saab is looking into joining the [Seattle Counselors Association](#) and may find more options through the [Seattle Networking Guide \(iloveseattle.org\)](#), which lists a wide variety of special-interest, charity and professional organizations.

Saab was fortunate to identify a passion early in life and then build on that, says HR specialist Seia Milin, who reviewed Saab's resumé. "I love the alignment of her skills, knowledge and experience -- they all build her highly credible resume," Milin says of Saab.



To help Saab refine her resume, Milin suggested demoting descriptions like “passionate and hardworking” in favor of quantifiable facts: work performed, frequency of work, tools used and any milestones or schedules met.

“Seia gave me some really good tips,” Saab says, such as bolding academic degrees (instead of the university name) and job positions (rather than the name of the employer).

For interview advice, Saab met with Lisa Quast, president and founder of [Career Woman, Inc.](#), and author of “Your Career, Your Way!” Quast introduced Saab to the STAR approach to responding to interview questions:

S = Situation (describe situation)
T = Task (explain task or goal)
A = Action (describe actions taken)
R = Result (highlight positive results)

Quast and Saab practiced STAR with typical situations social workers might encounter; after the rehearsal, Quast says that Saab could answer with confidence.

To develop an elevator pitch, Quast had Saab create a top-10 list outlining important information that differentiated her from the pack — such as her education, work experience, personal attributes and volunteer experience. Then, Quast asked her to select three items that fit the job requirements or employer mission and practice her elevator pitch.

The pitch is perfect for when a hiring manager asks, “Why should I hire you over all the other candidates?” says Quast.

Saab says she put the experts’ suggestions to good use when applying for a job at [Swedish Medical Center](#).

“Meeting with the coaches definitely helped me during the interview,” Saab says. “I was able to combine their advice with my experiences, which overall made for a great interview experience.”

Last month, Saab received an offer for a full-time social-work position at the hospital.

“I am really excited to begin work at Swedish, about being able to give back to others and to be a part of a team that is dedicated to providing great care and service to the community,” she says.

