

The following is an excerpt from the revised and updated edition of *Power Ties: The International Student's Guide to Finding a Job in the United States* by Dan Beaudry. The full book can be found at www.powerties.net and www.amazon.com.

Bulk purchase rates are available; contact dan@powerties.net.

Introduction

Desire is the starting point of all achievement, not a hope, not a wish, but a keen pulsating desire which transcends everything.

—Napoleon Hill, author of the classic book *Think and Grow Rich*

Neil, an international student¹ I worked with several years ago, would regularly complain that he never got responses to the hundreds of applications he'd submitted online for American jobs.² He resolved to send out more résumés, and to follow them up with e-mails to the Human Resources department. Bulent, another international student, sent an e-mail to as many of his school's alumni as he could find, mentioning that he was looking for a job and requesting that they "let him know" if there were any available. When he received little response, he concluded that

¹ *International student* is a term commonly used in the United States to describe a student who is arriving from outside of the country to enroll in an American degree program.

² Student names have been changed.

either there weren't any jobs, or the alumni weren't very loyal to his school. Monica, a third international student long frustrated with hearing from recruiters that they didn't sponsor US work visas, decided to begin every networking conversation by asking, "Do you sponsor?" She rarely got beyond this question, as it was often answered with a "no."

Neil, Bulent, and Monica are not unique. Their challenges are common to almost all job-seeking international students, and their responses represent three widely used, yet highly *ineffective*, ways international students try to secure jobs in the United States.

If you are studying, or planning to study, in America, you should know what it takes to remain here as an employed professional—just in case you decide that the following rewards of US employment are too attractive to ignore:

- Experience in the decision centers of some of the world's largest companies and most well-known brands
- Fluency with business English
- A more prestigious résumé
- A lucrative American salary

And the list continues. US work experience is a coveted rite of passage in the global economy—particularly for the thousands of business students entering US MBA programs. Standing between international students and these rewards is a US work visa—the documentation that immigrants need for full-time employment in

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the United States. With restrictive immigration policies and a weak employment market, finding a company willing to “sponsor” a work visa can be a challenge.³ Here’s why:

- There are many international students with very similar qualifications competing for work visa sponsorship.
- Optional Practical Training (OPT),⁴ while typically useful for an internship, is generally regarded by employers as too short for the full-time positions they need filled.
- International students must compete with many job seekers who already have US work authorization.
- Many companies have policies against sponsoring work visas (for reasons we’ll explore later).
- If an international student’s English isn’t very good, his qualifications almost don’t matter.

³ Companies wishing to hire someone who does not possess authorization for US employment must “sponsor” the person they want to hire. This means that they participate in that person’s work visa approval process with the government.

Let me take this early opportunity to note that I am not a lawyer. When relevant to the *Power Ties* strategy, this book includes some general information on work visas. But immigration is a complicated and ever-changing issue, and readers looking for details on immigration rules should consult an attorney and/or www.uscis.gov.

⁴ Typically a twelve-month period of work authorization available through the standard F-1 student visa.

Every year I see a new crop of students enter American schools with dreams of securing an American job, and every year these students begin their job searches chained to the same misimpressions that plagued the students before them. For example, every year international students are surprised to discover how many companies in the United States aren't eager to sponsor an H-1B visa (the most popular form of work authorization for recent international student graduates). Students spend hours applying for jobs on company websites and commercial job boards and quickly get discouraged when they get no responses. They fly around the country attending career fairs and are dismayed when the majority of company representatives they meet aren't interested in speaking with them about US jobs.⁵ Every year international students are demoralized when they discover that many of the companies coming to recruit at their school's campus routinely screen them out. Their frustration intensifies as they are continually denied access to jobs for which they are eager and highly qualified—jobs for which they had expected to compete.

The truth behind the frustrations mentioned above is that, all other things being equal, most companies don't want to sponsor an employee for a work visa.⁶ Sponsoring costs money, it requires

⁵ It's worth noting that an increasing number of US employers *are* targeting international students for employment opportunities back in their home countries.

⁶ Are there exceptions? As with most things in life, yes. Some companies publicly advertise their willingness to sponsor a visa, and you should include these

working with lawyers and the government (both of whom companies would prefer to avoid), and it often involves wrestling with complicated timing and risk. But despite all this, you can secure almost any job, anywhere. Keep reading.

All other things being equal, employers will pass over your résumé in favor of a candidate with US work authorization. *Therefore, the successful international job seeker works to ensure that all things are NOT equal.* The savvy job seeker realizes that landing a job means uncovering opportunities that others cannot or will not find, and then impressing decision makers by selling what no one else can—her personal credibility, likability, and value. Luckily for you, most organizations will endure the inconvenience of sponsoring a work visa if there is a clear business reason to do so. Successful international student job seekers exploit this fact by clearly demonstrating their business value to the right decision maker. Finding hidden jobs and presenting value to a decision maker are accomplished through building a strong support group of professional and personal allies—power ties.

Every year, it takes many frustrating months for international students to realize that building professional connections is the most effective and only reliable way to secure work in the United

companies in your job search *if* they are a match for your career interests (as opposed to simply a match for your desire for a visa). However, how many other international students do you think are applying for these jobs? Quite a few, indeed.

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States. Most have spent their lives in a quid pro quo environment where academic achievement guaranteed advancement. Unfortunately, countless students waste months mistakenly believing that their qualifications alone will get them a job in the United States. Eventually, painfully, some begin to comprehend the following truths:

- Applying online doesn't work very well.
- Jobs will materialize quickly if you can show someone that you can solve his/her problems.
- You can't discover and truly understand those problems without speaking with that person.
- You won't be seen as the *solution* to those problems unless you've established credibility for yourself and articulated your value.

Once students understand and accept these realities, they are mentally prepared to implement the *Power Ties* system and capture the opportunities that emerge.

My objective in writing this book is to expose the very real US employment opportunities that exist for international students and to motivate you to seize them. You deserve a job, and you deserve to know how to get it. In the pages that follow, I'm going to show you how.

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So what qualifies me to write a book on the international student job search (and to have such strong opinions on the subject)? In short, I've built a career on finding jobs for people. After a few years of management consulting, I started on a career path that has taken me deep into the world of hiring. I've played the recruitment game from all positions: "headhunting" technology professionals for client companies, teaching business students how to find and win jobs, and leading the campus recruiting machine inside a major public corporation. Throughout, *I've met, counseled, and recruited hundreds of job-seeking international students from all parts of the world.* As the architect and director of the campus recruiting program for Monster.com, I've discussed job search strategies with international students at events throughout the United States. I've interviewed them, and I've hired them with H-1B sponsorship. As the associate director in the career development office at Boston University School of Management, I constructed and delivered a seminar series on international student employment to educate foreign students on the US job search. I also created individual job search plans for these students and coached them on selling their skills in the American labor market. Many of these students found meaningful employment in the United States, and several have become my friends. All of this experience (and five years of presenting this book to international students around the country) has plainly revealed that a shocking number of international students have a poor understanding of how to find a job in the United States.

I now work in sales, bringing international relations and career development technology tools to universities around the world. Although selling is something that scares most international students, basic sales skills are critical to the *Power Ties* system—and to your life as a professional.⁷ My experience in sales has informed much of what I'll share with you in this book.

Other than a three-year stint consulting with Towers Watson, an international people-management consulting company, recruiting and education have consumed my entire working life. I want to share what I know with you so you don't need to waste your time repeating the job search mistakes of those who have come before you. Let me put you on the right path now so you can win a job early and enjoy the last months of your student experience without the stress of a job search.

In the 2012/2013 academic year, over 819,000 non-American students were enrolled in US institutions of higher learning—a record high.⁸ Perhaps you were one of these. Because you're

⁷ In his best-selling book *To Sell Is Human*, Daniel Pink makes the compelling claim that “Like it or not, we're all in sales now.” His point is that selling—the act of convincing people to exchange something they have for something you have—is fundamental to almost any profession.

⁸According to the Institute of International Education's 2013 Open Doors Report.

<http://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/All-Places-of-Origin/2011-13>.

reading this, I assume that you are at least considering the prospects of US employment. Whether you have only begun to entertain getting a degree from an American school or are already in the midst of an intense US job search, what you are about to read will make your life easier.

This short book is an international student's guide to navigating the US job market. It will help you get on track early so that you don't waste time chasing remote possibilities or feel forced to accept a low-quality job because you can't find sponsorship for the one you really want.

Don't make the mistakes that thousands of others have. Your job search as an international student will be more complex in the United States than it will be in your own country. But don't worry—you have an experienced guide. I'm going to show you that you won't need to limit your job search to the few companies that openly welcome job applications from international students. Through reading this book, you'll find that a visa is attainable at almost any company. You will be in control of your job search, choosing the company and your role in it. You will distinguish yourself as a person of action and achievement. Your drive and boldness will make all the difference in your US job search, just as it has so far in your career, in your education, and in your life. Your time in the United States is limited. Make the most of it, and get your rewards.

In the chapters that follow, you'll discover that your path to success is through mobilizing people who care about you to act on your

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behalf. If you've spent time in your school's career services office, you've probably heard the word *networking* relentlessly trumpeted from every direction as the solution to all your job search challenges. It's surprising how many people don't really understand what networking means or how to do it. Some assume it means approaching strangers and asking for things. Others imagine it's making witty remarks at a cocktail reception or pretending to like people so you can get something from them. Many international students I've met over the years are uncomfortable with these (false!) conceptions of networking. And understandably so! Most reasonable people would agree that these activities are transparent at best, and manipulative at worst. Networking to build power ties—the relationships that will lead you to your US job—does not work this way, as you'll see.

Working a room and standing out in a crowd are both challenging and intimidating things to do. I'm going to show you a way to build power ties that is far less scary than those sorts of activities and much more effective. It's a method that the best American job seekers use, and it is critical for those without US work authorization.

Here is what *Power Ties* covers:

- Why and how companies decide to sponsor work visas
- How to uncover jobs that others can't find
- How to determine, articulate, and position your value to a potential employer so that you can get

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- the job you want
- visa sponsorship
- In addition to finding a job, why building power ties will help you
 - beat your competition
 - change careers
 - have a positive impact on others
 - accomplish almost anything else in your career

As I've said to countless international students throughout my career, if you don't have time to build power ties, *make* time. Stop searching the Internet for job listings. Stop working on your résumé. Stop writing cover letters. Stop studying as much! I'm not joking about this. You'll find that the quality of your job and the depth of your happiness depend much more on your relationships than your grades. To a hiring manager, a person she knows and likes is always a more viable candidate than a stranger who makes no impression—regardless of grades (within reason, of course). In short, the techniques I'm going to show you in *Power Ties* will help make you known and liked. I'll demonstrate how to harness the support of other people and make a positive impact in their lives as well. Is there anything more rewarding in life?

A last item to consider: power ties are not just for the present. Once you get your US job, what will you do? Stop building power ties? I hope not. Consider the following example:

I worked as a third-party recruiter (aka “headhunter”) around the time of the dotcom crash in the United States. Just before the recession, there were crowds of technology professionals working with H-1B visas in my home city of Boston. Many of my employer clients had been quite happy to sponsor work visas because of the acute shortage of technology professionals in Boston at the time. However, when venture capitalists started pulling their money out of unprofitable Internet start-up firms early in 2001, the economy began to deteriorate, companies started to close and the need for technology professionals plummeted. Interest in sponsoring visas evaporated and downsized foreign workers were given a few weeks to either find another H-1B sponsor or leave the country. You wouldn’t believe the number of calls I received at the time from desperate strangers offering to do “anything” to get a new job providing sponsorship.

Was I able to help these poor people? Not much, unfortunately. First of all, when someone approaches you with an offer to do “anything,” it’s tough to believe that he’ll be able to do it well! And second, their requests came too late. I didn’t *know* them. I was busy working with people that I already knew and trusted—the people who had invested time in getting to know me by being credible and helpful.

When crisis strikes—and it will from time to time—you need a support group to rely on. Will you be someone with power ties already established and ready for mobilization, or will you need to start from scratch in the midst of adversity? Building power ties is a long-term career growth strategy, not just a job search technique.

We've all heard that success comes from preparation and hard work. What we haven't heard often enough is that both preparation and hard work can be made infinitely more effective through building quality relationships. Advance your career as you would lead a project team at work; leverage the scale and efficiencies of inspired cooperation. With power ties, you'll motivate your team not with cash, but with the currency of goodwill. You're about to learn how to accumulate a sizable goodwill budget and how to turn it into the US job of your dreams.

Now, let's go get it.