

Top Tips for Landing Your Dream Nursing Job

Whether you just graduated from nursing school or you have 20 years of experience under your belt, finding a dream nursing job is a challenge. As employers tighten their budgets and implement new hiring policies, it will be up to applicants to craft compelling cover letters and professional resumes that highlight relevant skills. Professional networking is also a must, as many nurses find their dream jobs not through newspaper advertisements or online job postings, but through word of mouth and personal recommendations. Use these tips to position yourself as the best candidate.

Avoid Boilerplate Application Materials

Many nurses make the mistake of submitting the same cover letter and resume for every job opening. Although many of the skills you used in one position may relate to another, hiring managers want to know exactly how your experience will benefit them. If you're submitting the same application materials for every job, you won't be able to demonstrate how your skills apply to a specific nursing unit or type of nursing. If you use a template, make sure you tweak the text every time you apply to a new job. This will improve your chances of making it past the initial screening.

Use Job-Related Keywords

Recruiters are now relying on screening software to pick out potential candidates for job openings. These software programs search for specific words and phrases related to each position. If your resume and cover letter don't contain the keywords the recruiter is looking for, there's a good chance your application will never make it to a human reviewer. Look at the job posting for clues about what keywords you should include in your cover letter and resume. If you're applying for a position in the labor and delivery department, for example, you might use keywords such as fetal monitoring, obstetrical, maternal patients, labor and delivery, and postpartum.

Start Networking

Your professional and personal networks are a good source of information about job openings, so start networking as much as possible to build a group of powerful contacts. Join local or national nursing organizations and take advantage of the opportunity to attend seminars, workshops, or meetings. Have business cards printed with your name, contact information, and professional certifications. Give two cards to everyone you meet and suggest that each person keep one card for themselves and pass the other on to a nursing manager or recruiter. Offer to do the same for each new contact.

Nurses should also be using LinkedIn and other online networking tools to their advantage. One way to reap the benefits of joining LinkedIn is to become a member of LinkedIn groups related to the nursing profession. One of the biggest LinkedIn nursing groups is Nursing Network, which has more than 24,000 members. The American Nurses Association also has a LinkedIn group with job postings and other information of interest to nurses.

Stay Active in the Community

Broaden your network by participating in community activities and getting to know a variety of people. Whether you volunteer at a free medical clinic or participate in a walk to raise money for a nonprofit organization, there's a good chance you'll meet nurses, physicians, healthcare administrators, and other people who may be able to write you a professional recommendation or give you information about a job opening that has not yet been made public. If you're interested in volunteering for a nonprofit related to the health industry, use VolunteerMatch to (www.volunteermatch.org) find opportunities in your neighborhood.

Enhance Your Credentials

Full-time nursing experience is no longer enough to compete with nurses who have multiple professional certifications. Improve your chances of landing your dream job by obtaining a certification related to your desired specialty. Examples of valuable certifications include the Certified Critical Care Nurse (CCRN), Certified Dialysis Nurse (CDN), Certified Hospice and Palliative Nurse (CHPN), and Certified Nurse, Operating Room (CNOR). Once you obtain your certification, be sure to maintain it by taking the required number of continuing education credits each year.

Use Job-Specific Search Engines

Using a general search engine like Bing or Google isn't the best way to find a job. As of March 2023, a Google search for "nursing jobs" yields approximately 4.1 billion results. Instead of wading through pages of results that aren't a fit for your qualifications or your location, use job search engines created especially for nurses. NursingJobs.org, DiscoverNursing.com, NursingWorld.org, and Nurse.com all have valuable resources for nurses who are searching for that perfect career opportunity. Narrow your search by location or salary to filter out results that don't meet your needs.

Prepare for Interviews

Getting a recruiter to invite you in for an interview is just one step in the process of finding your dream job. You must prepare by practicing your answers to different types of questions and ensuring that you sound as poised and professional as possible before you meet with a recruiter or nurse manager. Many recruiters use behavioral-based interviewing, which is an interview technique that involves asking candidates questions about how they have handled past job challenges. The recruiter might ask you to describe a time when you handled an emergency or resolved a conflict between two coworkers.

Recruiting professionals use this information to determine if you would be a good fit for the job and the organization, so giving complete answers is important. Rehearse your answers to this type of question so you can highlight your skills when the time comes to discuss your experience with an interviewer.

Pay Attention to Details

If you're applying for multiple positions, make sure you keep them straight when mailing your resume or filling out online job applications. Always double-check your envelopes before mailing them, as you may inadvertently place the cover letter meant for Hospital A in the envelope addressed to hospital B. Proofread your resume and cover letter to ensure that there are no errors that could cast doubt on your professionalism.