

Be the Change:

**A Guide to Finding
Progressive Jobs and
Building a Career**

BlueTent.

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Introduction

Not since President Barack Obama's historic victory in 2008 has there been such an exhilarating time to work in progressive activism and Democratic politics. With budding movements for social justice, along with Democratic victories across the country, there is no shortage of work for those looking to make a living by doing good. Whether you're an aspiring organizer, hopeful policy wonk, or PR professional looking for a change of pace, there's a path to be found.

But that doesn't mean it will be easy. Finding fulfilling and well compensated work in the progressive ecosystem can be more challenging than people think, with fewer openings than the for-profit world, and just as many (if not more) applicants. For college students or young professionals looking to get started, finding that first job and then figuring out how to advance can be a daunting task—likewise for those who built careers in another sector and want to shift gears.

That's why the team behind *Blue Tent* assembled our inaugural career guide for progressives. As a publication by, for, and about all things left of center we want to be a clearing house for those who work in the progressive world, and those who aspire to join its ranks. After many long hours of research, discussions with progressive professionals, and reflections on our own experiences, we've compiled what we hope to be an authoritative guide to building a career in progressive politics, policy, nonprofits, media, and beyond.

The guide is broken into three sections:

Part 1: Building Your Credentials and Setting Goals: Think of this as the pre-resume part, where we go over: How to prepare yourself for the challenge ahead; how to learn the ins and outs of the field you'll be entering; what credentials you'll need; and the early networking that can set you apart once you begin looking for work in earnest.

Part 2: Progressive Job Hunting 101: These are the nitty-gritty details everyone wants to know: What do I put in a cover letter? How should I prepare for interviews? Which jobs should I apply for and which should I ignore? We go into all of that in more, plus our list of the best jobs boards for progressives, tips on negotiating, and deal-breakers when it comes to job applications.

Part 3: Building a Career and Advancement: Once you finally get the job you want, how do you keep getting better and eventually get promoted? In our last section, we go over habits from your job hunt that you should stick to even now that you're gainfully employed, along with ways to keep building your resume, expanding your network, and deciding when to get another job or advance internally.

Our whole purpose in writing this guide is to make life a little easier for those who have chosen to make their living in the progressive world; we certainly don't expect everyone to use every word of guidance, but we hope that some of the advice we've assembled will give people a leg up in starting their career, changing jobs, or building their professional future.

Part 1: Building Your Credentials and Setting Goals

Whether you're a college student looking to pursue a career in progressive politics, or a business professional looking to break into nonprofit work, setting realistic goals and building a base of knowledge will be key to your success. Only then will you be able to narrow down your focus appropriately, start getting the right credentials to fill your resume, and be in a position to land a coveted full time gig.

The Tough Realities of Working in Politics, Policy, Nonprofits, and Media

When asked for the best way to start looking for jobs in foreign policy, the Brookings Institution's Peter Singer replied, "Have a rich father, who is a former president of the United States." It's good advice. While breaking into the political world doesn't require familial connections or lots of money, there's a reason why Washington, DC is able to somehow be a functional city despite being largely populated by 20-something year olds making close to minimum wage. Many of those young people are the kids, relatives, or friends of wealthy and well connected people. So don't fool yourself: even in the progressive world, who you know can often determine what you get.

But that doesn't mean it's impossible or even improbable for hard working and driven people to find their way into the system anyway. It often requires taking unpaid internships, juggling a second job behind a bar, or months doing menial tasks for very little money. Remote work makes this a little easier in some ways (you can live somewhere cheaper than New York or DC) but much harder in others (building personal relationships and networking is not ideally done over email or Zoom). Other challenges include the nature of much

political and nonprofit work, which is often cyclical—think political campaigns—or done on a contract, freelance, or project basis. It's an unfair and often exploitative system, and one that we hope will continue to get better in its efforts at diversity and worker treatment.

That being said, that's the name of the game, and if you want in, you've got to play. Here are some keys for getting started.

Base Knowledge

Here are three words that you should keep in your mind at all time: read, read, read. There are few better ways to get the knowledge you need to get a career in the progressive world than reading about it as much as you can. Publications like *Politico*, *Inside Philanthropy*, *Blue Tent*, *Washington Monthly*, *The American Prospect*, *Common Dreams*, and *The Intercept* all publish great long and short form reporting on the ins and outs of the liberal world, from the center to the far left. Listening to related podcasts and skimming through books on the issues and jobs that interest you are also a great way to build your base of knowledge (and podcasts are especially good, as you can listen while you cook dinner or go for a run).

This doesn't mean researching your chosen field should consume your life, but the more you know, the better suited you are to pursue your goals.

Demonstrated knowledge and interest helps you write cover letters and perform better in interviews, and it can sometimes make up for deficits in your resume. Organizations can teach employees how to do their jobs or work within their system, but they know that they can't instruct someone on how to have passion or knowledge about their work.

Setting Goals

Once you've done some research, look into the sorts of jobs you're interested in and set goals for yourself. While setting short and long term goals is an important distinction, what you should really be thinking about is setting short term goals as subsets of long term goals. For example: If your long term goal is to land a full time job at a big name liberal advocacy group after college, your short term goals should consist of things like getting an internship, working on campus issues related to your field, and having coffee once a month with people who work in related organizations. Getting a job is a daunting task, so breaking it into smaller, achievable, and short term goals makes it seem much more manageable.

Narrowing Your Focus (But Not Too Much)

As you do your research and begin to set goals, an important aspect of achieving those goals will be to define exactly what you want to be doing. Whether you're starting your career or making the change, narrowing down your interests should not be defined by a singular job or even organization, as that may leave you with limited options. Moreover, you may also be preventing yourself from learning about other jobs or fields that you would greatly enjoy if given the chance.

If that's a bit unclear, here's an example: Say you're passionate about education as an issue, and you know that whatever it is you end up doing, education needs to be the focus. In that case, stick to your guns on searching for jobs in the education world, but don't be too picky about it being at a think tank, a teacher's union, an advocacy group, or even a nonprofit school. If your passion is the issue, then widen your net in terms of what roles you're willing to take. On the flip side, if you really like

Special Tip:

For those making a lateral career move, options for building credentials are in some ways more limited, and in some ways better. While internships may not be an option, you can do volunteer work with groups for whom you'd like to work (or associated nonprofits) and this doesn't just mean setting up events or asking for money door-to-door. Every major legal group uses Pro Bono lawyers, while professional fundraising at a high level is something few nonprofits are in a position to turn down. Whatever your skill set, find a way it can be useful in the field you're trying to enter.

working for organizations with more of a legal focus, then aim more for the type of work than a particular issue. Maybe instead of working on civil rights, you get a job in the legal arm of a reproductive rights or immigrants' rights group.

Just remember, especially for your first job, that you can always move on, and you'll almost certainly be in a better place than before you had the job. The important thing here is to give yourself a manageable area of focus, which will help down the road in drafting resumes, writing cover letters, and doing interviews. Even if you have your heart set on a particular job or organization, keep an open mind.

Building Credentials

In Part 2, we cover the best ways to put together a cover letter and resume, but for now let's talk about getting those bullet points in the first place. Obviously a key for landing any job is relevant experience, which can be hard to come by, whether you're in college or years into a different career. For

those looking to start their career, internships are obviously the name of the game. Quality will always trump quantity on a resume, but doing a lot of different internships, even if it's only for a few hours a week during the semester, will help you figure out what you like (and just as importantly, what you don't like) and will still help you get jobs.

And while internships are seemingly a necessity these days, they aren't always the most accessible to those who don't have rich parents or generous financial aid packages. The plain and honest truth is that this is an area where life simply isn't fair; while progressive organizations, businesses, and politicians have become better about paying interns a fair wage, a lot of nonprofits—especially smaller ones—simply don't pay those on the lowest rung. Getting the credentials you need to land a job you'd want after college may mean interning only part time and supplementing your income with another job. Never be afraid to ask your school or internship employer about options for grants or stipends; while too often you'll be told to go it alone, sometimes you may be surprised.

You can also build up your resume by volunteering for related causes or working with campus groups on issues you care about; some organizations, like the ACLU and Planned Parenthood, have campus chapters where you're able to meet and network with people who work for the local and national branches, who can help you land internships, find jobs, or write recommendations. It doesn't pay, but it will look great when you apply for jobs.

Networking and Getting Prepared to Job Hunt

Much like you should never stop reading, you should never stop networking. But don't confuse this edict with a demand to constantly be trying to

climb the ladder or use people for your own career benefit. In the progressive world, and in the broader world of altruistic work, networking is about helping those who want to help others (okay, in politics, maybe not so much—but you get the picture). Many people who work in the progressive world carry with them a desire to “pay it forward” for people who are trying to make a career in social justice, and are especially keen on advising the next generation of young activists, scholars, and policymakers.

Networking can be as simple as sending an email to someone whose work you admire, asking to meet for coffee or chat on the phone. This doesn't need to be a daily or even weekly practice, but trying to meet (virtually or in person) with interesting and successful people once a month to discuss their work and life can help you learn about the fields you're interested in and how to get a foot in the door. A good rule is to never expect to get any immediate benefit out of such meetings aside from information, but getting a job or recommendation out of a chance phone call or after work drink certainly isn't unheard of (though directly asking, unless you have a strong baseline relationship, is considered somewhat uncouth).

Networking is a craft, one you get better at with practice. When you get started, just sending the email or making the call can be a heart wrenching process—after a few tries, you'll get the hang of it and it'll become second nature. As you learn more inside dope about the field or organization you're trying to break into, you can begin the process of doing the really hard work: actually applying for jobs.

Part 2: Progressive Job Hunting 101

Below you'll find tips for every step of the job hunt, starting with how to find job listings, focus your search, understand the field, and build your network. After that you'll move on to crafting an eye grabbing resume, writing flawless cover letters, and shaping your social media and online presence. Finally, you'll find strategies to prepare for interviews, the dos and don'ts of accepting, denying, and negotiating offers, as well as ways to expand your network and prepare for the inevitable next step in your career.

So whether you're a longtime activist seeking a new job, a student hunting for your first gig, or an established professional attempting to switch fields, there's inevitably something in Blue Tent's guide to help you get on the path to your dream job.

Widening Your Net While Narrowing Your Focus

The best strategy for finding work, regardless of your interests, is to keep an open mind and apply as widely as possible. Naturally, this will not necessarily lead to a perfect fit, but there is always strength in numbers. This is an especially good strategy if you have a wide array of interests, you're willing to explore new ideas and develop new skills, and your biggest priority is fighting the good fight in whatever way you can contribute. Applying for jobs is often a crapshoot, and if you don't have your heart set on anything in particular, casting a wide net is a good way to start quickly getting your foot in the door. One thing to keep in mind, however, is that this gives you less opportunity to distinguish yourself. Further, with the upsurge in interest in politics and advocacy over the last few years, many others will be joining you in blanketing progressive groups with their resume. For those who are driven

a bit more by the "what" than purely the "why," digging in and focusing on a particular issue, organization, or job is the more effective strategy. The more specific you are in your job hunt, the better you can tailor your resume and cover letters. If you're applying to a number of positions in reproductive justice, for example, you can more easily recycle previous cover letters (it's okay, we won't tell) by changing only a few lines here and there—just make sure you double and triple check that you actually cut and paste Planned Parenthood over Center for Reproductive Rights. A narrow focus also frees you up to research the field and organizations well in advance, whereas the wide net approach makes it hard to fully read up until you land an interview.

For either strategy, here's a key piece of advice: don't waste time applying for jobs you wouldn't take. It may sound obvious, but so many people spend time writing cover letters, doing research, and even interviewing for jobs they don't want purely to feel either productive or less insecure. Having a fallback is totally understandable, but don't waste too much time trying to get a job you don't want when you could devote yourself to fine tuning your applications for something better. Even if you're keeping an open mind and cast a wide net, try to identify jobs you definitely wouldn't want so you don't waste your time.

Conversely, always apply for the jobs you really want. You might not feel qualified, you might think there are better people for it, but it doesn't matter. The worst thing that happens is you don't land the job. But you'll never know if you don't try, and you may be pleasantly surprised. So edit that cover

letter, double check your resume, and send the dang email already.

More things to do regardless of your strategy:

- Never stop reading relevant news, especially insider and industry publications like *Politico*, *Inside Philanthropy*, *Blue Tent*, *Washington Monthly*, and *The American Prospect*.
- Practice your writing, whether it's journaling, blogging, Tweeting (appropriately), emailing, freelancing, or whatever gets you to put words on a page. It will help you break the logjam with cover letters and improve your communication skills.
- Ask for informational interviews. It's a funny thing: people will often meet for coffee or talk on the phone with complete strangers who express interest in their work! Just be polite, thankful, and don't expect it to lead to a job.

The Best Job Boards and Email Lists



One of the biggest and best job boards around for people looking to do good. Along with listing jobs and internships, [Idealist](#) can also connect you to volunteer opportunities at a number of organizations, which is a great way to build your resume and make connections.



As both a networking site and mailing list for jobs in the progressive world, [GainPower](#) is a more focused version of sites like Idealist. If you join their listserv, you'll get job postings sent to your inbox as they're posted, giving you the chance to apply quickly and possibly even connect personally to your potential employer, from political campaigns to media and nonprofit work.



If your heart beats for the political scene, it's hard to do better than [Tom Monatos](#), the longtime Washington, DC jobs list. Access to the site or app isn't free, but at only \$5 for one month and discounts if you sign up six months or a year, it's well worth the cash if you can afford it. Tom Monatos also has the benefit of longevity, having operated since 2002, meaning some employers may post here what doesn't appear on other job sites.



Like Idealist, [Work for Progress](#) is a great job site for nonprofit and other do-gooder work, with listings across the country. While the name may imply a political leaning, Work for Progress is not an explicitly liberal or left jobs board, like GainPower, but still lists plenty of great positions in the progressive world.



If you want to work on economic justice and labor issues, [Union Jobs](#) is a great place to start. Since 1997, it's been a clearinghouse for both labor unions and associated organizations of all kinds. If you have your heart set on becoming an organizer or joining the labor movement as a staffer or policy specialist, Union Jobs will have something to offer.



Founded by longtime *Political Wire* blogger Taegan Goddard, [Political Job Hunt](#) is another great resource for finding work in politics and policy, especially in DC Land. The site also publishes blog posts with tips and tricks for applying for jobs in the political world.

Writing Your Way to Success: Cover Letters, Resumes, and Correspondence

When you've finally found a great organization with a position you want, you'll be faced with what many of us always dread: a blank page on Word or Google Docs. Putting together a new resume—especially if you don't already have one—is often boring and meticulous work, while writing cover letters somehow seems to put a brick wall in front of even the speediest writers. So don't be discouraged if you feel like you've hit a wall or lost your way, and if you're wondering what distinguishes a good job application with a killer submission to a progressive organization, keep on reading.

Just Start Writing

The hardest part of writing your resume, cover letter, or questionnaire answers is often the first draft. A helpful first step is to write a rough outline, then start to fill things in as you go. You'll probably rearrange and change things as you add more detail, but the nice part about resumes and cover letters is that they're formulaic. Get down the main points you want to hit, and the rest will follow easily. And don't be afraid to get help: ask friends or mentors (or Google!) for resume and cover letter samples to get the ball rolling.

Also, unless you've got a passion for graphic design, just use a template (there are a number of free and paid services for both resume and cover letter templates online). Procrastination has a way of creeping into every minute when the task at hand is a boring and anxiety inducing one, so don't let yourself go down a rabbit hole adjusting fonts and tables when you should be doing real work. Procrastinating can also be a killer for getting your foot in the door: in many cases, after a job has been posted for a week or two, hundreds of others have

already applied. You can always send in a resume late, but it's much more effective to apply early and often.

The Tricky Business of a Good Resume

Let's start with the easy parts: one page, and one page only. Along with making it easy for the person reviewing your resume, it will stop them from asking themselves "did this person really ignore every article and website telling them to keep it to one page?" It's okay to expand the margins or shrink the font (doing this and then saving the document as a PDF will help it to print without cutting off) but if the page is jam packed and hard to read, you've still got work to do.

If you're having trouble keeping things short, the editor's trick is to slash and burn rather than trim the hedges. Let's say you have jobs or internships that fit well for the job you want, but you're fearful of cutting another section because it will imply a gap in your job history. Always leave the gap, unless you have some compelling insider info that if HR sees a job gap they send your application to the trash bin. Put that stuff on LinkedIn, where your potential boss will probably look anyway.

Special Tip:

If you can afford it, shell out a few dollars for the paid services, whether they're job boards, recruiters, or LinkedIn premium. While people can and will always get jobs without spending extra money, any leg up is helpful. Joining professional associations, usually just a few dollars a year, is another good way to get access to more job posts.

Formatting is another scary question with a pretty simple answer: whatever you choose, keep it consistent. If you have periods on your bullet points in one section but not another, you come off as sloppy or unserious. Use the same fonts, font sizes, bulleting, and punctuation, and stay in the active voice throughout. A lot of jobs in progressive politics, policy, and advocacy require strong writing, editing, and document creation skills. Your resume, like your cover letter, acts as both information and a work sample. It should be flawless.

As for any other job, stress your most relevant skills and experience. Keep it chronological, but beef up your strongest relevant sections. Include pertinent volunteer work and projects related to the cause you're interested in, but be aware that this is more a list of jobs, skills, and accomplishments than a way to showcase your passion. Save that for the cover letter. Some people send separate, carefully crafted resumes to every individual job; this shouldn't be necessary, but if you have the time, it also doesn't hurt.

The Dreaded Cover Letter is Easier Than You Think

Like your resume, keep your cover letter to a single page. You want to stand out, but not as the one person who thinks their work history or reasons for applying are so precious they cannot be condensed to one page.

Like applying for any job, it's important to maintain professionalism. While nonprofits have a reputation as less corporate and more casual, professionalism is still key. Showing your passion and your voice are a great way to stand out, but it can be a tight needle to thread. Do your research: see how your potential colleagues interact on social

media or in published writing and reports, and use that to gauge how loose you can get. When in doubt, keep it conservative.

Speaking of keeping it conservative, applying to a progressive group—even an explicitly partisan or leftwing group—does not mean you should take the chance to dive into your strongest political beliefs. Again, do your research; some organizations are fearful of being seen as partisan or overly political, while experienced professionals (i.e., the people who will be hiring you) have probably heard whatever hot takes you have.

At the end of the day, the most important questions are how well you'll fit in and if you can do the work. Passion is just an added bonus, so explain it through personal experiences and broadly held beliefs. Some examples: your religious beliefs inspired a strong desire to help the homeless; your love for history solidified your desire to fight for racial justice; you or family faced abuse at work, which is why you want to organize unions. Just make sure your passion and commitment come off as assets and not liabilities.

Don't Forget the Email or: What If They Don't Want a Cover Letter?

For organizations that do not use LinkedIn or another online submission system, you'll be sending attachments of your cover letter, resume, and perhaps work samples via email. Save and label your attachments accordingly, preferably all in PDFs, and always double check for a preferred subject line in the application description. Again, it's all about the details.

As for the email itself, while you're already sending a cover letter, still put a short note in the body of the message. One or two sentences at most, checked

over for spelling and grammar. *Do not forget to double check the email.*

In the rare case that a job posting does not ask for a cover letter, write a truncated version in the body of the email anyway. Expand on a point or two about your work experience and desire to join their team, keeping it short and professional. You want to give them some context for your resume, but since they didn't ask for a cover letter, don't overdo it.

Special Tip:

Get a friend, parent, or colleague and have them double check your work for consistency, spelling, and grammar. Our own eyes deceive us too easily —don't be afraid to get help.

Let's Get Personal: Interview Time

If you've gotten this far, give yourself a pat on the back. Just getting your resume pulled from the pile is a huge lift, and you've now got a way better chance of landing the job than you did when you finally managed to press "send" on that email. You're probably anxious to mention all the stuff you couldn't include on your perfectly edited resume, or to dive into the grand theories and brilliant ideas that didn't make the one page cut of your cover letter. Once again, you'll have to ignore your impulses. Nothing that you left off of your resume got you this interview, and your potential employer is much more likely to ask you about all that great stuff you *did* mention.

Know Your Resume and Your Work Front and Back

Whatever you included in your initial application, you've got to be ready to expound upon in detail.

Maybe they asked for a writing sample and you included a paper you wrote back in college; read it again carefully, and be ready to talk about it. Tried to big up your volunteer work while downplaying your current, less relevant job? Be ready to talk details on both and connect it to the job.

Remember, this person (or people) don't know you and can only rely on what you've told them and put online.

Have Strong, Concise Answers Ready:

"So, tell me about yourself."

"What is your ultimate career goal?"

"What are your hobbies outside of work?"

"Why do you want to work here?"

These questions sound simple and obvious, but it's easy in the excitement and anticipation of discussing specifics about your favorite causes and issues to forget to prepare for these incredibly common questions. For these and other potential questions, you don't need to recite a practiced answer word for word, but think through your responses, maybe in the shower or before you go to bed (it also helps to actually say them out loud) so you can breeze through them. As always, keep it short and sweet. Your interviewer will appreciate it.

Research, Research, Research

It should go without saying that once you secure an interview, you need to learn everything you can about the organization and the person who will be interviewing you. We probably all have some dream job or ideal group we'd like to work with someday; if you're applying to one of the big name organizations (think ACLU, Planned Parenthood, AFL-CIO, etc.) if it isn't your dream job, it's probably the dream job of someone else they're

interviewing. People will know their stuff here, so be familiar with the organization's history, leadership, current work, and claims to fame.

Outside of the blue chip liberal nonprofits, it's still important to have a good working knowledge of where you're trying to land a job and the people to whom you'll be answering. Scroll through their Twitter and LinkedIn and see if they have any published writing. There might even be interviews with them online, giving you a chance to become familiar with their voice and conversational style. If you find they have a common interest or some other connection, try to work it into the conversation. Along with seeing if you're as qualified as your paperwork says, this person wants to figure out if you'd be pleasant to work with; some casual chit chat can go a long way, but don't force it.

Being Natural Shouldn't Be a Problem

If you're trying to break into the progressive political, nonprofit, or media world, then odds are you're doing it out of genuine interest and a desire to do good. While doing what you love, contrary to popular belief, does not mean you'll never work a day in your life, it does mean less faking it through job interviews. One of the big perks of working in politics and public interest is that you get to just be yourself a lot of the time, and job interviews are no exception. Be polite, be professional, and stay on topic, but interviews are where you get to let your passions and interests run free a bit. As always, you want to tread lightly, but something widely known among (well adjusted) veterans of progressive politics is that passionate and idealistic people are key to doing the hard work of making positive change. After all, they were probably just like you at some point—so don't be afraid to show how much you care.

Hit the Ground Running

Politics, policy, and media are all about ideas, so have a few in your back pocket when you interview. It doesn't have to be anything earth shattering, but it helps to show you've thought seriously about the job, the organization, and what kind of work you'd like to be doing. If you're interviewing for a media position, be ready to pitch content ideas. If you're applying to a fundraising job, have some thoughts on small dollar campaigns or untapped donors. You should also be ready to hear pitches for their plans and upcoming projects, with thoughts on ways to improve or how you can contribute. Again, this will come back to research. Look into their recent media campaigns, read reports they've published, get on their mailing list so you can see how they engage their constituents, and jot down some thoughts.

Send a Thank You Note

Unless they somehow contact you first, always send a follow up to thank your interviewer for their time and stress how happy you would be to work with them or talk with them again in the future. Two days to a week later is generally good timing. Moreover, if you don't hear back for a while, don't be afraid to follow up again; it's possible they made an offer to someone and got turned down, and your message showing continued interest might be the difference between being the second and the third choice. Always leave things on a positive note, even if you don't get the job or the interviewer is not particularly nice.

You're In: Now What?

After hours of writing and editing cover letters, dozens of emails, a handful of interviews, and countless second guesses later, you've finally gotten that job offer, or maybe even a few. In the event you

Special Tip:

If the job you're going for requires a lot of relationship building (recruitment, fundraising, anything in politics, really) put special care into your thank you note. A prompt, handwritten thank you card may seem like overkill, but it leaves an impression. And, like the cover letter doing double duty as a writing sample, it shows your ability to schmooze.

need to turn down an offer, give your most profusive thanks, express your hope to keep in touch or cross paths again, and keep your reasoning short but respectful.

As for the job you do decide to take, maintain professionalism and humility, but also don't be afraid to negotiate. Just stay positive, know where you'll concede, where you won't, and if you're willing to walk away, and have a strategy for

declining the offer respectfully if you can't come to an agreement. Likewise, if you decide to accept the job despite them denying your negotiations, have a plan to save face a bit ("Let me talk things over with my partner/family" or "let me think things over for a day") before accepting. In many cases, especially for entry level fellowships or internships, the pay is, sadly, non-negotiable. Don't be afraid to ask for more, but don't be surprised if the answer is a categorical "no."

Part 3: Building a Career and Advancement

So you've got a good job and finally moved on from the world of cover letters, resumes, and daily coffee meetings with prospective employers...well, not exactly.

Things can move fast in politics, advocacy, and philanthropy, and you may be moving up or over sooner than you'd think. Your first job will open the door to tons of potential connections and insider knowledge, which only begets more opportunity. Maybe now that other job you wanted before is open again and it's time to give it another shot. Maybe you have a new dream gig, one that seems as out of reach now as your current job was once before. Whether you're looking to move up quickly or not, here are Blue Tent's tips for building your career now that you've got one.

Never Stop Reading, Networking, or Writing

If you've read this guide parts 1 and 2, this first recommendation shouldn't come as a shock. There is always more to know about your field, about the progressive world as a whole, and about new ideas that may win the future. Don't get lazy: keep reading relevant publications, following journalists covering your field, and digging into books on subjects you care about whenever you get the chance. Finding trends early on or being inspired to new ideas will always help you, whether it's in your current work or preparing yourself to move on.

The same applies for networking. The more people you know in your organization, in your field, and in the progressive ecosystem, the better you'll be at your job, and the more likely you'll be to have your

name mentioned for promotions, new jobs, or quotes in the press. Being a reliable source of inside information is a great way to get in the good graces of your boss and colleagues, and you might get tipped off about big news before it breaks or job openings that other people don't know about.

Finally, for anyone working in advocacy, policy, or politics, writing should be daily practice. Strong communication skills are always in high demand, from maintaining a strong social media presence to drafting succinct memos and talking points. If your bosses and communications department approves, you should also try your hand at writing freelance articles. Getting op-eds published is a great way to get your name out there, build a personal brand, and practice your writing. You can also get paid for your work, and a little extra cash is never a bad thing.

Look to Build on Your Credentials

Adding to your resume can seem like a challenge when you have a full time job and don't plan on leaving anytime soon. As discussed above, writing for publication—academic, journalistic, or even just blogging—is something everyone in the progressive world should be thinking about, and it will help add to your work experience and perception of expertise. Think of attending and presenting at conferences in the same vein: it looks and sounds good on a resume, and it's great to talk about in future job interviews.

Other ways to add to your credentials while still working full time is to attend trainings and seek certifications, from diversity, equity, and inclusion to technology. Again, these look good on a resume, but they also provide valuable new skills and set you apart from your peers. Think of it like reading and networking: the more you know, the better.

Finally, there's the ultimate credential builder: school. Obviously, going to law school or getting a master's in public policy is a huge commitment, so you should think things over carefully before making that choice. But school doesn't have to be a multi-year, six figure commitment. Many universities now offer specialized certification programs that last less than a year and are a fraction of the cost of grad school (though still pricey). Attending school at night is also a good option for many working professionals, with a number of business and law schools offering programs for full time workers.

Just don't decide to do something because you think you're *supposed* to—the progressive world is filled with plenty of former future lawyers—those who planned to pursue law but realized it was neither their passion nor a necessity—and even more people with unnecessary graduate degrees. Make sure grad school is something you both need and want to do.

Keep Your Eyes Peeled for Internal Advancement

Depending on where you land that first gig, your path to advancement may already be somewhat set for you. Organizations like think tanks and legal groups are notorious for rarely promoting junior staff, while certain offices on Capitol Hill promote at a frankly staggering pace. Websites like Glassdoor are a great resource for finding out how likely your bosses are to hire from within, as are your colleagues. Talk with coworkers, and reach out to friends and contacts in related groups to find out who's looking to hire someone with your level of experience.

Remember to be thoughtful about your choices here, though. Make sure you aren't being too cavalier about the possibility of leaving your job

(your bosses might not be thrilled to hear this) but don't be afraid to let it be known you're looking to move up. Once you feel you've been around long enough (at least six months to a year) mention offhandedly to your supervisors that you'd be interested in a higher level position. While you should never be afraid to ask for a raise or a promotion, this is something slightly different: putting your name into the minds of your bosses when an opening comes up.

When it comes to asking for raises or promotions, make sure you feel confident in your reasoning for why you should be making more money and given more responsibility. It's also good to time your request around finishing a big project or a milestone, like one year on the job. When you feel it's time, ask colleagues whom you're close with for advice on how they approached asking for raises or promotions. Put together your best pitch, practice with a friend or parent, and then schedule a meeting with your boss solely to ask for a better job or more money. Be prepared to negotiate, write down any promises they make, and take a win when you can—there's always six months or a year from then, when you can ask for even more.

Be Ready to Job Hunt All Over Again

Nonprofits, sadly, are not exempt from things like financial hardship and layoffs. Regardless of how confident you are in the prospects of your organization, with the unpredictable ups and downs of the economy over the last two decades, you should always be ready to hit the ground running applying for new jobs. But this isn't all about anxiety: new opportunities are always presenting themselves, whether it's a hot new nonprofit, a new offshoot of an existing org, or just a cool job listing at a group you admire. Things can

move fast in progressive politics, and you shouldn't be afraid to ride a wave.

While updating your resume can be something of a chore, it's good to at least keep a running list of accomplishments, projects, tasks, and other relevant bullet points to one day discuss in an interview. It will also make going back to part 2 of our career guide much easier. You can keep a word document, a note on your phone, or just throw things onto your LinkedIn page, so long as you're allowed to discuss your work publicly.

As for actually applying to new jobs, don't be afraid to pull the trigger if a position seems ideal, even if you're not quite qualified by their metrics. As the old cliché goes, you miss 100% of the shots you don't take—so don't let "I might not get the job" be a reason you don't apply. As always, here's our caveat: be thoughtful when you apply for jobs. The progressive world as a whole is quite small, and the more narrow your focus, the more likely you are to be writing a cover letter to someone who is friends with your current boss. It never looks good to badmouth your current employer, and if you're blanketing related organizations with your resume, be ready for your colleagues and supervisors to get asked for a recommendation.

Relatedly, unless you're devoted to leaving your current office, never accept a job without talking to your current employer first. If you're just looking for more money, more responsibility, and a better title, they might counter offer (and yes, *asking* for a counter offer is absolutely something you should do if you want to stay; just be ready to deal with the consequences of being told no). Taking things a step further, having a counter offer on the table can also help you negotiate for a better package from your

new job. Just don't get too cocky, and know your limits for when to accept and when to decline.

All in all, don't feel pressured to climb the ladder for no reason. But if you think you'd enjoy the job and could make a positive difference, send in an application—what harm could it do? And if you see

higher levels where people like you aren't represented, all the more reason to go for it.

Network as much as you can, and remember where you came from: you'll inevitably get a message from someone a couple years younger asking to meet for coffee or talk on the phone about your career. Be sure to pay it forward.

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Feedback?

Our team updates Blue Tent papers periodically to integrate new information, additional data and evolving perspectives. If you have questions, comments, concerns or information you'd like to share with us, please email us at: editors@bluetent.us