

Become a Familiar Face

Lessons learned and shared in the pursuit of a job in HVACR

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"As a manager, I would receive mountains of job applications. The 'Familiar Faces' were the ones that got hired! When I really needed a warm body, it was the person that showed up and bugged me that came to mind and got the phone call for the interview -- classic human nature." -- Dan Linthicum

The following advice and direction to entry level HVACR students has been developed, provided and exercised over the past 20+ years by myself as an HVACR educator advising students. The job search success for any student that actually followed through with the advice given has been very impressive. The main issues that I have encountered are: A) a majority of the students will not follow through and B) those that do follow through end up with more opportunities than one and have a difficult time deciding where they want to go to work (a tough problem to have).



Often those that do follow through are able to begin working with the employer before they are finished with their program of study. This is an ideal arrangement due to the workplace experience that enhances and re-enforces the lessons learned in the program of study thereby accelerating the success of an entry level tech. One real danger in this arrangement is that the employer will ask you to quit school and go full time. If that is the case the employer is not displaying professional business sense and is inadvertently asking you to compromise your professional growth and opportunity.

My plug to the students (those that pay attention) is coming from experience. My rose colored glasses have always seen opportunity. *HVACR does not have a glass ceiling*, you can go where ever you want to aspire to. The field is open for anyone that "performs".

The steps below focus on gaining employment with a "Professional" HVACR employer. The key term is "Professional"! The HVACR industry in the United States consists of a number of occupational paths for entry level technicians with contractors or facilities. These directions could apply to either of the paths. There are approximately 220,000 HVACR contractors in the United States and an unknown number of facilities maintenance shops. I suspect that the facilities maintenance positions are as significant in number as the contractor base.

FET (Facilities Engineering Technicians) are typically employed by companies or organizations that have a significant amount of HVACR equipment in their owned buildings or under contract. Think of hospitals, school districts, hotels, large commercial complexes, etc. The position is NOT a janitor gig, rather a continuous monitoring, service and maintenance process on the HVACR equipment that serves the facility, often called the physical plant. The work is very much the same but it does not fall under the category of contracting. The primary difference is that you deal with the same equipment on a continuous cycle and the hours are much more of an 8 hour shift arrangement.

Because I don't have any specific knowledge of the facilities maintenance numbers I am only able to address the contractor market. Statistically the National contractor base consists of companies that are small in size averaging "5 trucks". This means that they employ 5 to 9 persons total. The HVACR contracting business follows the same rule that many other occupations follow, the 80/20 rule. This means 20% of the HVACR contractors generate 80% of the sales revenue and the other 80% of the contractors generate the remaining 20% of the sales volume that is attributed to the industry. These numbers have not changed much if at all in the 33 years that I have been paying attention.

Obviously there is a huge difference between the 20% and 80% contractors. The difference is *professionalism in the business operation and workplace*. My consistent recommendation to any person working in the HVACR industry is to work for a Professional Company! How do you know they are professional? Read on.....

This timeline for the process begins during the first week of school/program:

Step One:

- Engage the student/s in conversation and ask why they are studying HVACR.
 - The #1 answer is because they want a job
 - Go figure (the expected response)
- The student is informed that "NOW" is the time to begin a job search
 - Normal student response is surprise, they are just starting school
- The student is given the steps to follow
 - Get a phone book for the area that you wish to work in
 - Look in the yellow pages under the following categories
 - Air Conditioning
 - Heating
 - Refrigeration
 - The category with the most employer potential is usually AC and Heating
 - The same employers are found under both categories
 - Size of advertisement is not an indicator of professionalism
 - The yellow pages are for identifying employer locations only
 - Make a list of the potential employers and their locations
 - Visit the employer location park in their parking lot or across the street and gauge the professionalism of the company
 - Professional employer visual references
 - Professional looking building, well marked, clean, inviting
 - Front reception area / sales floor with receptionist type person greeting the public
 - Professional looking vehicles, clean, well marked, well maintained
 - Professional looking staff and employees, uniforms, clean cut and well groomed

- If the employer looks like a professional operation it probably is
- After viewing the locations from your yellow page search prepare to go visit those you have noted as professional companies
 - Prepare for your initial visit by being clean cut, well groomed and dressed in reasonable clothing; slacks or neat blue jeans and a nice shirt (no tie)
 - Enter the professional office area and introduce yourself to the receptionist person. Tell them that you are engaged in a HVACR program of study and have identified their company as someone that you are interested in working for and are doing your initial job search
 - If you determine it is a shop that you think you would like to work for obtain 2 company application forms
 - The first one is for practice, fill it out in pencil and continue to work with it until you have it perfected
 - The second one is for a final application that you will turn in to the company, nice, neat, complete, correct spelling, etc. (no coffee stains)
 - Some companies will not allow you to take an application home, in that case fill it out in their office BUT.....
 - Make sure you use correct spelling
 - Make sure you print clearly
 - Make sure you fill it out completely to the level that you have information for
 - You might want to prepare more, return and fill one out later
 - If you can return with the nicely completed application later, (they allow you to take them home), that is a good situation.
- One of the primary objectives in getting hired by a HVACR employer is to "***become a familiar face***".
 - HVACR employers do not normally use State or other employment services
 - Entry level jobs are not usually listed anywhere
 - The one common place is HVACR wholesale distributor bulletin boards
 - These are usually looking for experienced techs
 - The return to employers that are looking for experienced techs is very small
 - If a tech has experience and is successful in his occupation they are already working somewhere and happy with their situation, not looking for different job
 - Most HVACR entry level techs are hired because they are known of by the employer
 - ***Become a familiar face***

- By using the yellow pages, verifying the professional appearance of your target potential employers, and obtained an application you have completed the first step

Step Two:

- You now should have a list of targeted professional HVACR employers and applications completed and ready to return to their offices
- Depending on your ability you need to create a "route" and return to those locations on a regular basis
 - Every two weeks is adequate
 - ***Become a familiar face***
- The next time you return to visit hand in your application form
 - Introduce yourself to the reception person again
 - Express an interest in the company
 - Ask to meet with the person concerned with hiring
 - Don't be disappointed if they are not available
 - HVACR people are very busy
 - Don't be disappointed if they tell you they are not hiring
 - It is often the case. They are not hiring now but when the time comes that they need someone you want to be the one that they are familiar with and think of
 - When they need to hire they are going to think of someone that has taken the initiative to enroll in a program of study
 - When they are ready to hire they are going to think of someone that is interested in their company
 - When they are ready to hire they are going to want someone that looks professional, clean cut, well groomed, reliable
 - Generally professional HVACR employers don't want to hire anyone, they will not increase their payroll until their level of business increases to the point that they either have to turn down work (profits) or they need to hire additional help
 - This means they are paying attention to *business*
 - #1 Reason that you want to work for a professional
 - Generally most HVACR contracting companies are familial companies (family owned and operated) all of the small shops and many of the larger operations.
 - Contracting professionalism is not dictated by the size of the company
 - You want to be the ***familiar face*** that they think of
- Repeat the exercise on a regular frequency, run your route, talk to the people and one of two things will happen
 - They will tell you not to return

- This is good, you won't continue to waste your time and can concentrate on other potentials
- They will ask you to come in for an interview
 - This is good, get the job

If you're looking for a career path that will carry you through life, I recommend Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration. Start learning about the industry by going to school. Check our [catalog](#) of online courses at www.hvacedu.net. Studying online allows you the flexibility you need to keep your current job, maintain your current commitments, and study on your schedule. But remember, to be successful you must be focused on your career path by completing the educational program.