

CHAPTER 4

Present Your Case Effectively

A LETTER of application or a personal call at an employment office of a company are the two usual methods of presenting your case. A telephone call is seldom satisfactory but may be helpful, especially if you have been recommended to the company and wish to ask permission for an interview with a specific person. Unfortunately, however, it is easier to state over the telephone than directly to a person that there are no positions and that an interview cannot be arranged at this time!

Letter of Application

A letter of application is a thumbnail sketch of you, your personality, training, and abilities to fill a specific position. Present your case truthfully, interestingly, effectively, and completely enough to give the essential facts, but not your life history.

The form of the letter. Use white business paper, 8½ x 11, bond — not note-size or decorative personal stationery. The letter should be typewritten. If you can't do professional typing, it may be worth while to pay to have your letter typed. A handwritten letter is preferable, however, to poor typing, erasures, and mistakes.

Single-space and center the message with even margins. Consult a book on letter writing if you are in doubt about forms of

salutation, closing, etc. Put your address at the upper right-hand corner with the date underneath.

Try to find out the name of the employer and give her full name and title. Be sure the name of the company is correct. You would be surprised to know how often applicants confuse names, products, and people of competitive companies. You can imagine how the recipient of such a confused letter would estimate your qualifications for a position.

The content. Your opening sentence should state your reason for writing. Employers receive many letters in a day and have to read quickly. A glance is enough to encourage further reading or to prompt a note to the secretary to "give form reply." Think what you have to say. Plan how you will say it. Try several ways to express your thoughts, then decide which one gives the best picture of yourself. The simplest way to say something is often the best way. Use the personal *I* form. Do not undersell, yet avoid boastfulness such as, "I am sure I can bring many ideas to your department" or "I feel sure I am thoroughly qualified for the position."

Avoid a dramatic, flamboyant style or tricky sentences, yet make your letter sound as if you are interested in the company and the position. It is better to enclose a data sheet of your qualifications than to make the letter of application lengthy and involved. Avoid abbreviations of high school or college subjects and also avoid references to them by number rather than name.

State when you will be available for work and give any unusual qualification that you think would make your application noticeable among the many the employer receives.

Your letter of application should state your case so effectively that the employer recognizes your ability to succeed in the particular position for which you have applied.

If you have been recom-

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mended for a position, you may enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope and a business picture. But be sure the picture is a recent one taken especially for the purpose of securing a position. You, photographed in a beach costume, in a party dress, or with a group will not help your cause. A good picture may be the deciding factor in your selection or in the request for an interview.

Be sure to give your permanent as well as your temporary address. Your application may be kept on file for a year for future consideration by a placement agency, head of a department or someone else in the organization.

If you have been referred to the company, begin your letter by announcing this fact:

The placement service at _____ college has advised me of a vacancy in your _____ department. I wish to make application for this position. . . .

If you are sending an exploratory letter, you may begin your letter with a question about a vacancy, but it is better to state your case first.

In June, I shall be graduated from _____ with a major in _____. I should like to work for your company. . . .

(State your experience and specific interests. Keep the letter brief.)

Enclosed is a data sheet of my qualifications and references. I shall appreciate an opportunity for a personal interview at your convenience. Yours truly,

The close. In closing, type your full name. Omit *Miss* unless there is danger of confusing your first name with a man's name. Put *Mrs.* in parentheses before your name if you are married. Write your name above the typed signature.

One word of advice. Never ask an employer to write you about the kinds of positions available, the salaries, the hours of work. If you wish information of this kind, it is wiser to write to the employment office of a company requesting company booklets.

Here are copies of applications received by one employer. Which letters would interest you if you were an employer?

DEAR SIR:

I am interested in the positions ——— Company has to offer college graduates in its Research Laboratories.

Please send this information with a mention of the yearly remuneration that each position offers.

* * *

DEAR MADAM:

I am a senior science major and am interested in work in your company. I would like to know the type of work done, the experience required, the hours, salary, provisions for maintenance, if any, and other information that can be given.

Any information would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

* * *

(How could a busy employer find time to write a complete answer to these two unknown persons of unknown ability?)

DEAR MRS. ———:

Yesterday, Dr. ——— suggested that I write you concerning a position in your department. I have heard so much about the work your staff does and have had the privilege of hearing Miss ——— give a talk about her work. I would like to work toward such a position.

In June, I will be graduated from ——— University with a degree in Home Economics. My major has been Technical Journalism with a minor in Experimental Foods.

Last summer I was fortunate in securing an apprentice position in the Home Service Department of ——— Company in Kansas City. I enjoyed the work very much.

Enclosed is a data sheet of my qualifications and references. If you are interested in my application, I shall be glad to have my college records sent to you and to come for an interview at your convenience.

* * *

DEAR MISS ———:

Your talk given before the Business and Professional Women's Club last Thursday was so interesting and stimulating that I should like very much to work under your direction.

I have graduated from ——— and have taken evening courses in advertising at ——— for the past three years. During my school

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days I was a reporter for our school paper and won an honor for securing the greatest lineage of advertising for the paper.

In high school, I took an active part in the debating society and was captain of the girl's softball team.

"... I took an active part in the debating society. . ."



I have traveled extensively with my family throughout the United States and have kept a scrapbook of interesting experiences on these travels.

I should be grateful if you could find time to talk with me even if you do not have a vacancy in your department.

Enclosed is my data sheet and a self-addressed stamped envelope.

* * *

(Both of these letters give a clear picture of a promising young woman. An employer finds time to answer such letters.)

Application Blanks

Many companies have application blanks which will be sent on request. These vary in form from a single sheet of basic questions to a detailed form requesting personal, physical, social, and family history. Fill out these application blanks carefully and completely. Don't forget to mention all the extracurricular activities that indicate leadership, special capabilities, and characteristics.

Data Sheet

The data sheet is a tabulated list of facts, which are easy to read. On this sheet give a complete, truthful account of your personality, education, and experience. Type these — and do a professional job. The accompanying sample is typical.

DATA SHEET

Name:

Age:

Weight:

Height:

Birthplace:

Health:

Married or single:

Nationality:

Religion:

Education:

High School:

University:

Degree:

Date:

Major:

Minor:

Special courses:

Experience:

Positions — kind, where, employers, dates.

Summer work:

Organization activities:

Personal characteristics and qualifications
applicable to work:

Reference by permission:*

Credentials may be secured at _____.

Character references:

Business references:

* Always ask permission to use a person's name as reference, just as you would ask permission for any other favor.

Letter of Introduction or Recommendation

A letter of introduction or recommendation from a friend should be mailed directly to an employer. It should be written for a specific position. General or open letters of recommendation are of little value. Only in unusual cases should you present a letter of introduction at the time you go for an interview.

Application Photograph

A good application photograph is an important part of getting your records in order before you start to look for a position.

Styles of photographs change, as you will know when you look at your family album. The picture you liked three years ago looks old fashioned now. And besides, you've changed, too!

This application photograph should show you as a well-groomed, alert young woman. You don't have to be a glamour queen. In fact, many employers hesitate to hire the young woman who looks like a movie aspirant. They fear she will be too conscious of her appeal to be attentive to her work, or she will be married before the training period is over. But every young woman has something distinctive about her.

Play up your best features, and minimize the unphotogenic features. Tell the photographer if you know your jaw looks square, your eyes are apt to squint, your mouth is too small, or your nose and chin form similar angles. A good photographer will pose you and arrange the lights to avoid accentuating these bad features. Look your best.

Do wear your hair in a soft flattering style. Don't try an extreme (too short, too long, too straight, or too curled) style. Your hair must look well groomed and neat. It is best to avoid going from hair dresser to photographer because your hair will look too set. A soft wave is preferred.

Wear light lipstick rather than dark shades which photograph dark. Keep the line soft and natural. Use eye shadow sparingly. Accentuate a natural eyebrow line. Some photographers suggest no rouge and very little powder. Some professional photographers have an assistant who advises on make-up.

Now for the clothes. Wear no hat, of course. Choose a semi-

tailored suit or dress. Avoid prints and designs which detract from the face. Usually a V-shaped neckline or a soft collar photographs well. A white blouse with a dark suit is good. Pearls may be worn, but avoid extreme costume jewelry (especially dangling earrings).

When you pose, look at the camera, think of a funny story, and relax. One suggestion is to think how funny it is that you are all dressed up and sitting for a picture. Don't be afraid to smile. A good way to relax the face in a natural smile is to say "cheese." Try it before a mirror and see if you have a pleasing smile. Of course, a grinning or laughing pose isn't apt to bring you a request for an interview!

Do not use a Hollywood pose, a severe expression or any little-girl effect.

Do give the impression of a successful young business woman, well groomed, intelligent, and friendly.

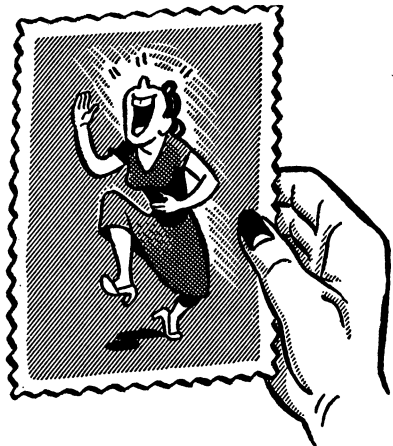
Have about twelve small prints made. Three-by-four inches is a good size. Write your name on the back, and do practice that signature. Even those who don't pretend to read character by handwriting will judge your neatness and straight thinking by the way you sign your name.

You are ready now to send a good photograph with an application letter, to leave one as a reminder of you when you apply, or to supply a photograph for any need that arises.

Personal Interview

A personal interview to apply for a position can be a very pleasant experience *if* you have laid your plans, rehearsed your lines, and dressed for the part.

You want to secure the right position, while the employer is just as anxious to secure the right employee. You are trying to sell your qualifications. The interviewer is trying to get the facts about your personality, training, experience, and general ability to do the work required by the company.



... look at the camera, think of a funny story, and relax.

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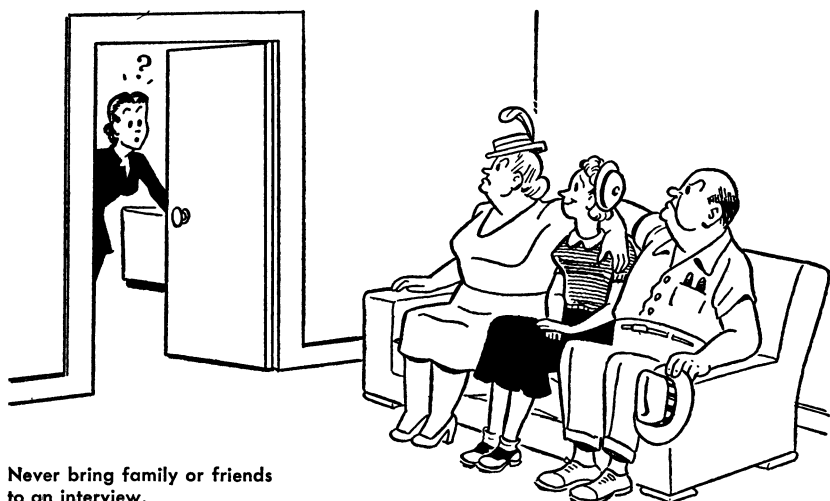
In many companies all applicants are referred to a personnel office where trained workers make every effort to help the applicant feel welcome and at ease. Think of your interview as a visit, not an ordeal.

In smaller companies and for some specialized positions, the head of the department where the vacancy occurs will interview the applicant. This person may not be skilled in interviewing but she usually is interested in people and friendly in manner.

If you are applying for specialized work, write to ask for an interview at a time that is convenient for the employer. Then you will be more apt to see the head of the department. You can imagine that such a person is very busy with department work. Therefore, an interview with an applicant is extra work, especially if there is no vacancy. Even though this employer wants to help you, her schedule may be filled at the time you drop in at her office.

If you receive an appointment for a specific time — *be there on time!* In cities where distances and transportation facilities may cause delays, allow plenty of time to get to the appointment. If someone must wait, it should be you and not the employer who has scheduled her time to see you.

If you have something to read while you wait, you will be less nervous and impatient at the delay. Even the best-run office schedules get snarled at times. *Never bring a member of your family or a friend with you to an interview.* Show that you are mature enough for the job. Do not smoke, chew gum, apply make-up, or prowl around the office while waiting.



Never bring family or friends to an interview.

Your personal appearance is your first introduction. If you are well groomed and suitably clothed, you can forget your appearance and give your full attention to the interview.

Magazines for women and for the career girl have taught the modern young woman how important personal appearance is in any business position. Department stores have trained saleswomen to help in the selection of clothes for business wear. In fact, there is little excuse for any young woman to appear at an interview unsuitably dressed. Here's a quick review on personal appearance:

HAIR: clean, neat, not extremely styled. A conservative, easily-cared-for style is preferred for business.

MAKE-UP: carefully applied, not extreme.

NAILS: well manicured, with or without colored polish. If polish is used, it should be carefully applied.

PERFUME: very little, if any.

CLEANLINESS: use of a deodorant very desirable. Excitement may make this essential.

DRESS: a suit or tailored dress in a becoming color always a safe choice. A coat should be tailored, not dressy. Clothes need not be in the latest fashion but should be clean, pressed, and neat. White accessories must be spotless.

HAT: a small, tailored hat desirable, especially in a large city. It should go with your suit and become you. A felt hat is a good year-round choice.

GLOVES: plain, tailored gloves, especially if a hat is worn. If they are light, have them clean. In a large city, gloves are a *must*. Business women wear them to protect their hands against wind, rain, and especially the grime of subways and streetcars.

PURSE: tailored and neat. Some employers, especially men, may judge your orderliness by the appearance of your purse when you open it to get a pencil or handkerchief.

SHOES: street-wear type (not play or party shoes) to go with tailored clothes. Be sure they are well cared for.

HOSE: selected to complement street-wear shoes. No bare legs or bobby socks!

Perhaps, in plays or pictures, you have seen over-dressed, disheveled, or awkward girls applying for a position. You may have thought these were over-

Some employers may judge your orderliness
by the appearance of your purse . . .



drawn. It can happen in real life. Anyone who has interviewed young women for any length of time will tell you that some of them do not understand the importance of a good personal appearance for the interview.

You may have to borrow a hat or a coat for the occasion, but do look like a business woman. If you look the part, your self-confidence will get a lift. Don't worry about how you should act. *Be your best self.* Your attitude and manner during an interview should be the same as when visiting with any older person whom you have just met.

When you are called into the office, take a few deep breaths and *smile!* Walk in without haste, so that you are at ease. Do not offer to shake hands. If an employer offers to shake hands, then be prompt to extend your hand and give a firm clasp. The *dead fish* handshake is enough to disqualify you as a spineless individual. Of course, the *bone crusher* handshake and the *pump handle* movement are never used! In business concerns you shake hands and mean it (even though some books on etiquette insist that the well-bred woman does not indulge in this greeting).



In a large city, gloves are a "must."

If you are in doubt about the personality of your handclasp, test yourself with your family to see how expressive you are.

If you are wearing gloves and someone offers to shake hands, do you stop, fumble, and take off your gloves? No. To do so emphasizes an otherwise routine gesture. You need not remove your gloves during an interview until you are asked to write something, or are invited to remove your coat or to have an informal chat with a junior member of the department.

Unless you have been announced by a secretary, state your name and that you have come for an interview. (The employer may not remember you even though you wrote a letter.) Wait to be seated until you are invited to do so. Sit naturally but do not lounge or lean on the desk. It is not necessary to move your chair close to the employer's desk unless you are asked to do so.

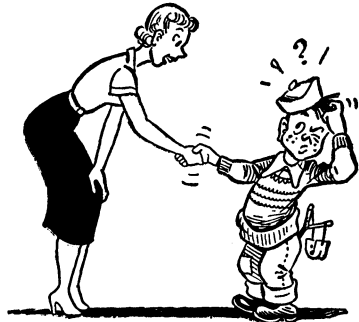
Wait for the employer to begin the conversation, then listen attentively and answer questions promptly. Look at the employer. Keep your hands still. Relax. Speak distinctly, naturally, and confidently. (If you have rehearsed your answers, you are ready for questions about your training, experience, and abilities.) If you have not sent a data sheet, you may wish to have one with you to hand to the employer.

Give complete answers to the questions but do not give too much detail. Avoid family histories and any attempt to be humorous or worldly wise. Avoid slang and high school or college chatter. Do not refer to subjects you had in school as *Math*, *Psych*, *Home Ec*, or *Chem*. If you feel you are mature enough for the position, remember that you should talk like an adult.

Good manners are of first importance. Affectation will show that you are not certain of yourself.

When you speak of your training and experience, avoid criticism of persons, schools, or companies.

Have a notebook and pencil ready to use if instructions, references, or names are given. If you have a folio of writings, drawings, or examples of your work, you



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may offer to leave it with the employer or send it later if she is interested.

Do not ask to use a personal telephone. If you must make a call, ask if there is a pay telephone.

Do not mention your influential friends in the company or infer that you can bring pressure to secure that particular position.

Do not ask about salary, working hours, or vacations. If the employer is interested in your ability, these questions will be discussed in their proper time.

If an employer asks what salary you expect, you may say you do not know about living costs and comparative expense, or you may state a fair range of salary. The salary paid by one company for a type of work is usually about the same as that paid by another company in the city for the same type of work. Salaries are based on the importance of the position to the company and, in some degree, on the supply of qualified applicants. The cost of living in different cities influences salaries. Some companies have a scale of salaries within the organization, although allowance may be made for unusual experience and education.

If a salary is unusually high, you should be aware of the insecurity of the position or the company, unusual features about the work, or demands for experience greater than is indicated.

If a salary is lower than standard, the position may be less than it seems, or the company may place a low value on that type of work and may not encourage advancement.

If the telephone rings or someone comes to see the interviewer, you should try to busy yourself with notes, or at least appear to be disinterested in the interruption. If the message seems urgent, you may ask if the employer would like to have you leave the office. Usually, however, the employer is adroit at handling these situations.

Some employers will keep you only ten to fifteen minutes. Others will visit with you and try to help you even when there is no vacancy. And you may be invited to meet other members in the department or in another department where there is a vacancy.

Some companies require all applicants to take a physical

examination at the company medical center before a position is offered. This may be a very simple test but it can be time-consuming. For that reason, do not schedule your interviews too close together.

Avoid making dates with family or friends which might interfere with a complete interview. If you want the position, give your attention, your time, and your best effort to securing the right answer to your request for work.

If the employer says there is no vacancy or says you are not qualified for the position, do not show impatience or defeatism. You may wish to ask for suggestions of other business concerns where you could look for work. Show your appreciation for these suggestions and for any other guidance or help, even though you may not see the value of some of the advice at the time. Make the most of every scrap of information and experience gained at every interview, even if you do not get an offer of a position.

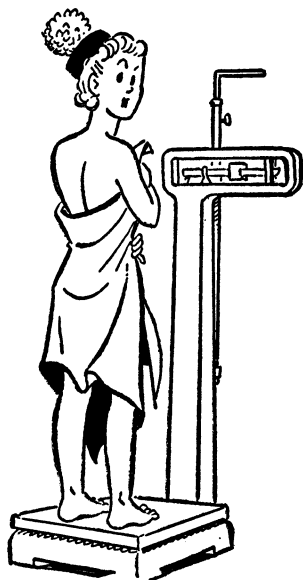
Watch for an indication that the interview is finished. Do not show haste to end the interview, but if the employer looks at the clock, rises, or suggests that you fill out the application blank and mail it in, do not prolong the meeting. Thank the employer for the courtesy of an interview and then leave.

After you have left, think back over the interview. Decide if you have given a good performance and a true picture of your personality, education, training, experience, interests, and abilities.

Expense-Paid Interviews

An interview at a company's expense is often suggested by an employer. This must be answered within 24 hours, either by wire or letter. State the day and time of your arrival. Keep an accurate account of your expenses: transportation, meals, tips, and other essential expenses. Do not take a plane if train fare is cheaper. Do not count magazines or other personal expenses as business expenses. See Chapter 12 for travel information.

Some companies require all applicants to take a physical examination . . .



On arrival in the city, you may telephone the employer to set a definite time for the interview unless a time has been set previously. *Be prompt.*

Wait for the employer to ask for the expense account. Some may ask you to send it in after your return home. Others may have you estimate your return expenses. You may discuss the expenses listed to be sure these are in line with company policies.

Payment may be made at the time of the interview or it may be mailed to you later, so be prepared to finance your return, if necessary.

The ethics of an interview at the expense of a company demand that you give your full time to the company. Do not show impatience at delays. Do not express a wish to go shopping or visit a friend. Above all, do not make appointments for interviews with other employers unless the paying company gives you permission to do so. Incredible as it may seem, some young women have used a free trip to the city as a means of making other contacts!

Do not charge overnight expenses if you could leave at an earlier time.

In other words, *your conduct on an expense-paid trip will show how you would spend company money if you were employed.*

In some cases, a company will pay expenses of an interview trip only if the position is not offered to the interviewee. In this case, if the position is offered, no expenses are paid even though the position is not accepted.

Always write a note expressing your appreciation for the courtesy of the interview. If no offer has been made to you, you may again indicate your wish to be considered for the position.

If you are offered the position, you may accept at once or, if you have a definite reason for delay, you may ask for a few days to give an answer. It is more gracious to give the reason for the delay. But be sure to say *yes* or *no* within the time limit you have set. Do not keep an employer waiting, for that employer might be able to hire someone else in that time. It is not complimentary to infer by your delay that you are taking the offer lightly or that you will accept the position only because this is your last hope.

If you accept the position, let the employer see you are pleased. An employer appreciates an enthusiastic response rather than a half-hearted acceptance as if you think, "I might as well take this and give it a try for awhile."

Before you leave, be sure you understand when and where to report for work, what equipment is needed, and any special arrangements that must be made before beginning the position.

Chances are that you will be inquiring about more than one position, and will be contacting more than one potential employer. If you receive one offer but still are interested in another company you have contacted, it is perfectly proper for you to check by letter to see whether the second company is considering you. Don't try to hurry the employer, and always be perfectly honest in your inquiry. You may spoil your chances at either place by sending an inquiry which is only a bluff.

If you accept the offer made to you and do not send an inquiry to the other company in which you have been interested, or even if you may have sent the inquiry but have accepted the first offer before a reply came to you, stick with your decision. Have faith in that decision — even though you later receive the other offer. Never play fast and loose with an offered position. Aside from the ethics involved, you also want the reputation for being stable and fair with any employer.

At that point, however, immediately notify the other company so that your credentials may be removed from their active file. Also notify the employment office or the person who told you of the position. It is especially important to keep any placement office you are using informed about your employment.

Remember that each contact you make in your campaign to get the right position builds up a record of your character and ability. Sometimes employers exchange information on applicants. You might be recommended to a position by one of the employers who had no vacancy in her own department but was interested in you and your ability.

You can learn a great deal through each contact and you will become more proficient in stating your case effectively and in evaluating the opportunities offered by a company.

A New Start

When you have had some experience in business and wish to change positions, your letters of application will be easier to write and your personal interviews will be more interesting. You will probably have some definite ideas about what kind of work you want and what you can do most successfully.

If you are employed but want to change your work, you should give your reasons for wishing to make a change when you apply for new work. Use good judgement and do not show a critical attitude of your present employer. Even in a personal interview, you will be wise to avoid comments about your former or present work that might make you sound temperamental or difficult. Of course, you should be very careful not to put into writing any criticism of an employer.

There are many good reasons for wanting to change positions after you have worked long enough in one place to know more about yourself and to understand the requirements of the work.

With the many kinds of people and the many kinds of positions, it isn't surprising that some people get into the wrong position. You may find you didn't know what you really wanted. Have you been unable to produce the work required? Does your personality conflict with your co-workers or your supervisor? Is your health such that you can't do the work? Do family demands interfere with your work?

If you have not found the right work, you should recognize the reason and accept your share of the responsibility. But one mistake need not ruin your career! Even a failure is experience which can prove valuable if you learn by it.

Perhaps you are in the wrong company, in the wrong field of work, or in a position requiring too much for your present ability.

If you find yourself in the wrong position, how do you make a new start?

Talk with the head of your department to help locate the reason for your trouble. Ask advice about how and where you can start again. If you leave the company, be sure to have an understanding about using the employer as a future reference.

Many times, the best procedure after being in the wrong position is to take a course of study to gain a new skill or greater proficiency in your present skill. If your health needs attention, take care of that first. If family conditions are at fault, try to adjust them so that these will not interfere in a new position. Perhaps a new start in a different part of the country will be best. But you can't run away from mistakes. The only way to success is to face the cause of your mistakes and build a future on what you have learned by this experience.

Now more than ever, it is important for you to decide what you have to sell an employer and what kind of work you are really able to do.

When you apply for the new position, you will gain the respect of the employer if you give a fair statement of the reason for your desire to change positions. Do not place the entire blame on the former employer. Admit that you erred, but never admit that you are beaten.

Any employer who has had experience with many employees will understand that a person may not succeed in one position yet be very successful in another position.

It is up to you not to dramatize your ill luck but to take a new look at yourself and get the position that is right for you.

If you are looking for your first position, do not be disturbed by this discussion of how to make a fresh start. No doubt, you will be one of the 99 per cent who find that first position both stimulating and challenging. A year from now, you, too, can look at yourself and recognize a successful business woman.

