**Comments on PVP Statements**

As I said I’d do in our August 14 Career Strategy class session, I read a good number of the near-term PVP papers and am providing comments here. These comments are not about anyone’s paper in particular. They are about the group of papers as a whole. Most of the papers were good starts on the PVP concept, a few were first class, and some were too vague or too general to be of much help to the individual.

Most people followed the outline I suggested, with a paragraph on each of the first three components of PVP. The students who did that – on average – produced clearer PVP statements. The clearest statements labelled each of the paragraphs, either with a direct title or by using the relevant word in the first sentence.

**Targets**

The best target unites your skills and your aspirations. It’s a position for which you’re well qualified and one that you’d like to have. Therefore, strong target statements include your rationale for picking the target. But some of the PVPs extended that aspirational thinking into the other categories. A lack of enthusiasm for what an employer does usually serves as a knock out factor for a job candidate, but stated enthusiasm seldom becomes a main reason to hire someone. The main reason to hire you is that you match the employer’s needs.

As I said in class, people with more specific targets had more persuasive PVPs. Specific targets set up the opportunity for specific needs and then specific skills to match the needs. In a few cases, I’d never heard of the target positions. Before you settle on a narrow target, be sure that employers really do offer that kind of position.

Several people described targets in ways that made me think that they really didn’t want the jobs. They sounded like stepping stones to something else later. While stepping stones can be a big part of career strategizing, people who emphasize stepping stones as near-term targets may be picking something that they don’t really want. They could end up with unhappy (and perhaps unaccomplished) years in those positions. If that attitude comes through in interviews, those people may not get offers.

**Target’s Needs**

Knowing the target’s needs is fundamental. The papers that showed a good understanding of those needs assessed their match far more effectively than the papers that had only a general knowledge of needs. It is, of course, hard to know employer needs – especially for people who are changing fields or functions. Whether the field/function you’re targeting is new or not, I suggest that you take full advantage of classmates with relevant experience and the company presentations the Rice career office manages to learn as much as you can about them.

People with specific needs wrote more persuasive PVPs. And people who identified several specific needs did better than those who had only one or two.

Most employers expect candidates to be willing to work hard, to be sociable, to be willing to learn, etc. However, it’s hard for an employer to judge which people meet their standards on personal characteristics like these and which don’t. PVP statements emphasizing personal characteristics were less persuasive than those that emphasized specific employer needs for knowledge and experience.

**Your Match to those Needs**

If you use PVP as your strategy diagnostic tool, you’ll likely find that you match some target employer needs well and other needs not so well. Knowing that should tell you what soft spots you need to strengthen during your two years at Rice.

When you use PVP to help make your best case to a potential employer, you’ll naturally emphasize your strong points. But if soft spots come up in meetings with a prospective employer, most people will do best if they acknowledge their need to learn and grow and express confidence they can cover any gaps. In fact, part of your thinking when you set your target is to test whether you can cover those gaps.

The more persuasive PVPs I saw claimed to match employer needs in ways that few other people could claim to do (or would even think of claiming). To do that, both the needs and the claimed skills had to be specific.

The best PVPs also provided specific facts about themselves to support those claims. To me, they looked like first drafts of persuasive cover letters.

In emphasizing needs and match, it might appear that the PVP is encouraging you to pursue positions like what you already have done. However, that’s not what I recommend. As mentioned above, I recommend that you pursue targets (1) that will meet your personal goals and (2) for which you’re well qualified (even if part of your qualification is your capability to learn and grow into the job).

Students who are excited about the field or function they came from will have a simpler path to getting that job offer or to securing a more senior position. They can make direct cases based on past experience. But that doesn’t mean everyone should pursue something close to their past. Many people come to B School hoping to reposition themselves – to change fields of work, to change functions, or to change both. (Having been a full scale career changer myself, I have a special empathy for them.) They must determine what aspects of their past work experience and education prepares them to meet the needs of their new target. The PVP tool can be especially helpful to them.

**Your Next Steps**

I hope that everyone will use PVP as a top career management tool while at Rice and thereafter. I suggest the following next steps:

* Reflect on the short-term PVP you wrote at the end of our class session and on the comments in this paper. Think about your capabilities and about targets you’ll find fulfilling.
* Prepare a new short-term PVP to guide your job searches while you’re at Rice. Chapters 8 to 11 of my book cover this topic.
* Develop the other PVP – the long-term, aspirational PVP we discussed in class – and use it to develop your long-term plan of initiatives. Chapters 6 and 7 of my book cover that.

I wish everyone a good near-term job search for next summer, a successful search for your full-time job in 2019, and good leverage of those searches as you develop the plan that can lead to your long-term aspirations.

Bill Barnett