2025

Within the next five years, the data science analytics sector in India is estimated to grow eightfold, reaching $16 billion.

Submit First, Ask Questions Later

The hardest step to take toward our goals is often the first one. We all have professional aspirations and want to work with impressive mentors, but most of us end up standing on the sidelines watching the few who took action. I'm frequently asked how I find and apply for professional opportunities; many believe it to be a process requiring a breadth of sources. This column intends to sketch out a brief roadmap for identifying professional opportunities, especially those that will positively impact your career. There are many different views on how this process should work, but I believe in an apply first and decide later approach to seeking out tech opportunities.

DROPPING VESTIGIAL OBLIGATIONS

Many of us continue to carry out professional obligations when they're clearly not providing satisfaction. The sunken cost fallacy is a trap that forces us to cling to things that are no longer beneficial, for example a dead-end degree program or struggling in one's research area. Rather than view your past work as a waste, objectively identify the value it once provided. Sometimes, accepting it and moving on is the best path you can take. Others cling to workplaces out of loyalty for a particular boss or a feeling of obligation. However these are ties are to a person, rather than a company.

It's important to remember satisfaction is up to you to define. Perhaps it's meaningful work, or perhaps it's financial gain. Clearing out your calendar of obligations that aren't pushing your career where you want it is the first step to finding time for new opportunities.

BECOMING A YES-MAN (OR YES-WOMAN)

There's a balance between biting off more than you can chew and idling, but being on the idle side is easier. I've

> **There are many factors to consider when taking on new professional opportunities, and it's up to you to decide what things are a good use of your limited time.**

come up with excuses to avoid events up to the day before, yet I never feel regretful when I follow through and show up. Attending that conference or networking event may seem like a logistical inconvenience, but you could end up meeting a mentor who will pass on a nice referral to your dream company. Don't be afraid to apply for a workshop or conference scholarship, and try not to discount yourself from an opportunity without applying first.

FINDING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

So, how do you discover new opportunities? The answer lies in building a network. This doesn't necessarily require actively asking about open positions; try signing up for some mailing lists. There might be some fantastic recruiting events on your campus only promoted through specific software or student clubs. I've received multiple conference scholarship opportunities, including attending the Grace Hopper Celebration, through unexpected

1.1 B

The approximate number of instant messaging IDs or accounts worldwide.

mailing lists after submitting applications to different programs years ago. Occasionally check LinkedIn and closed Facebook groups that focus on your university's computer science students. Many companies and professors share opportunities within invite-only groups or with specific student organizations to reduce applicant and/or attendance quantity, so find the places where they post. Connect with recruiters over time, and reach out every now and then.

APPLYING SUCCESSFULLY

Be genuine above all else when writing essays or interviewing. However what does this mean? To me, being genuine means being in your comfort zone. Trying to act like the candidate you believe your interviewer wants means a skilled interviewer will likely be capable of identifying this ploy. You appear more confident when being yourself. Authenticity will give you the best odds at winning the position.

Don't forget to prepare for your interviews. Even if you believe you're incredibly qualified for the position, that isn't an excuse for not researching a given opportunity in advance. In tech, programming interviews are common, though by no means the only form of interviewing. There are many free resources available for solving technical questions online, and speaking through these problems out loud will likely prove more productive than working on them silently. For behavioral interviews, identify a clear and consistent sense of self. Practice answering questions such as your greatest weaknesses and strengths.

One part of successfully applying for new opportunities is mindset. Being disappointed about rejections is mentally unproductive, as is being angry at those who do receive the positions you were rejected from. Unfortunately, an increasing number of companies are seeing a surge of job applicants and now vet through algorithms rather than human eyes. Accept this fact of life and move forward. Many companies believe in the mantra of avoiding bad hires above any other candidate goals, even if this means skipping out on great candidates by mistake.

SORTING THE MEANINGFUL FROM THE MEANINGLESS

Once you've cleared out stagnant opportunities, the hardest part is avoiding them in the future. Ask tough questions up front, rather than keeping your doubts silent and learning something you don't like later. Communicate your expectations clearly, whether it's getting published, receiving a letter of recommendation, or learning a specific subject of interest. If these expectations are not met, don't feel any guilt in discussing this with the person who you report to as often as possible. Of course, part of this is being proactive in certain positions. If dissatisfied, ask for more or different work.

PARTING THOUGHTS

Some believe we are defined through the decisions we make. There are many factors to consider when taking on new professional opportunities. It's up to you to decide what things are a good use of your limited time. Define your personal priorities, and question all professional advice you receive before following it (this article included). Try carefully to distinguish clever marketing campaigns and kind words from opportunities that truly benefit you. I wish you luck in your search for meaning through new jobs, extracurriculars, events, and anything else that may interest you.

—*Daniela Zieba*

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