



## S, M, L: How does your job fit?

By [Lynellen D. S. Perry](#)

*Any job is a good job, right? Isn't having a job better than being broke and unemployed? Unfortunately this simply isn't true. Being in the wrong job can steal all the joy from your life. So what can you, a poor student, do to educate yourself about finding the RIGHT job instead of just ANY job? Read on! ACM Crossroads interviews Kathleen Davis, Director of the Center for Student Professional Development (CSPD) at the Fox School of Business and Management at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*

### **ACM Crossroads: In what ways is the CSPD at Temple University different from the typical Career Services Center?**

**Davis:** "Career Services" is traditionally defined as providing career counseling and then job placement. That is, providing students the opportunity to work with companies by soliciting internships and permanent jobs with those companies. The CSPD performs these functions, but the typical "career services" approach tends to be more passive than we're comfortable with in our business school. When I was asked to take this job, my challenge was to build relationships between the corporate world and the business school community. So we take a more active approach. Part of what we're trying to do, for example, is involve the corporate community in our business school curriculum. They are the customers of the business school, after all. I would say that we are 1/3 corporate-relations, 1/3 professional development, and 1/3 placement assistance.

### **Crossroads: How does the CSPD fit into student life at Temple University?**

**Davis:** Marketing any services to students is an intense and difficult task. We make a lot of efforts to be real and relevant because it's so tempting for students to think, "If it's not real then it's not worthwhile, so forget it." We work with student organizations to co-host events such as interviewing workshops. We have to actively reach out to

students early in their educational career and work to convince them that professional development is important and worthwhile, that it will add to your group of qualifications.

Professional development is not something to simply suffer through. We believe you should not even be in an internship until you've had some training in professional development. For example, look at [InRoads](#), the most successful minority recruiting organization in the country. Over the last 30 years, they have done a good job of identifying high school students and working with them on professional skills immediately after high school graduation. They do this because they are asking corporations to take their students for employment beginning in the college freshman year. You can't go into an internship with no clue about what it means to interact with people in a business environment. You need some training about what to expect, how to handle yourself, how to ask your supervisor a clarifying question. If you don't ask that question, then you'll likely go and do something your supervisor didn't need, and that's a no-win situation.

### **Crossroads: What kinds of curriculum input does the corporate community provide?**

**Davis:** We've had an Industry Advisory Board in our Computer Information Science department for a long time. We also are involved with Greater Philadelphia First, which is an organization of local CEOs, to build a coalition of organizations (both from Temple University and the business world) that work together. Businesses thus have a way to influence the creation of classes and the components included in the curriculum. They can point out areas that seem to be missing, for example. One thing that was clear from working with the technology companies in Greater Philadelphia First is that there is a "soft side" component that they are very interested in ensuring that our students have.

This includes everything from working well on a team, to enjoying learning new things, and having a continuing curiosity to learn. They don't want employees who become complacent, who forget that there is always something new to learn and that technology is not a dead end. There is nothing that will substitute for good, solid technical knowledge. The question is, "How do you take those skills and apply them best in an environment where you're trying to make users happy and also to satisfy managers who have a need for good information and good data?" As we get a PC into every office and data into everyone's life, that means constant interaction with people.

You very much need the good technical grounding, but you also need this other piece. This 'other piece' is professional development and it is very important.

**Crossroads: How can one teach these types of soft side skills without being on-the-job?**

**Davis:** There is no substitute for what you learn on the job. There is nothing like getting cold water thrown in your face. But just as we do management development training inside of a corporate organization, we can do very interactive, very experiential kinds of workshops and seminars. You can wrap these seminars into the coursework. For example, our seniors are required to go out to an actual company and perform a requirements analysis, including a final report, or to go out and actually program a project for a client company. Process-orientation is part of the curriculum.

**Crossroads: Is it difficult to get business to be involved in this program?**

**Davis:** Not really. Because the market has been tight for so long, they are anxious to build a relationship with us. We've worked closely with many nationally-known companies. They are often willing to come to campus and perform mock interviews, do a curriculum review, or sit on a long-standing committee. They also have taken some of our professors for a summer to work on a project at their company. This builds relationships, benefits the company, and sharpens the skills of the professors.

**Crossroads: This reminds me of the "Cisco-schools" where Cisco is getting involved at the high school level to train kids on their products.**

**Davis:** I think that you have to reach into the high school level to start training people. For example, take a look at the education system in Germany or other European countries. People go to university when they want to teach or for some professional accreditation. But you usually have these 2 or 3 year programs that are very intense, very good, and they are connected to the high schools not the universities. This gives people a tremendous chance for technical training especially since a college education seems to be getting more and more financially daunting. It provides different paths for different people's needs.

**Crossroads: I've heard you talk about "job fit." What exactly is this?**

**Davis:** "Job fit" is a traditional human resources concept that says that you are trying to find the best match or fit between a job opening and a candidate. It's not enough to just go down a checklist and match up keywords like "four year degree in computer science, internship in a large company, experience in XML, HTML, and other web technologies." It might look like a great fit, but it doesn't take into account the culture

of the company. Is this the type of company that is very competitive, but the candidate prefers to work in a more cooperative environment? Or maybe everyone is expected to dress up everyday, instead of wearing business casual.

**Crossroads: Is job fit something that is merely nice to have?**

**Davis:** No. Job fit is a very critical concept. If you don't have good job fit, then at some point in the job, you and your boss will look at each other and you may not say it out loud, but instead just think it in a balloon like in a Dilbert (TM) cartoon, "This is not the person I thought I hired!" and "This is not the job I thought I signed on for!" For example, you go to a job and you never thought to ask a question about the culture because you were all excited about the job and you thought the boss was neat and the project was neat. After you've started working, you find out that it's very important in the culture of that company to have a lot of face time: everyone stays at the office until at least 7pm, every day. And that doesn't suit your lifestyle or your way of doing things. But you didn't ask the question and now it's really a problem. Or maybe you slowly learn that your boss is not a great communicator. You got along fine in the interview, but once you're hired it's very difficult to get any information out of him/her.

**Crossroads: Can anything be done, once you're in an ill-fitting job, to improve the fit?**

**Davis:** Sure! The easiest thing and at the same time, the hardest thing to do is have a frank conversation between the manager and the employee. No one blames anyone, but you say "We find ourselves in this situation, what can we do?" Maybe the company has a good relationship with its human resources department so that an HR member can help facilitate the conversation. But the longer you put off talking about it, the worse it gets. Sometimes it's just a matter of clarifying expectations. But sometimes you have to come to an understanding of the situation and evaluate whether you can live with it. If the answer is no, then maybe there is someplace else in the company to transfer to. In the worst case, maybe you have to look for a job at another company.

**Crossroads: Can job fit be evaluated well during the interview process?**

**Davis:** Almost every interviewer will ask if you have any questions at the end of the interview. I am wary of situations that happened a few years ago on campus when employers were so desperate for technology employees that they would look at someone's resume, talk to them for 20 minutes and offer them a job immediately. That is not enough time to interact! If the employer is committed to the interview process and cares a lot about good fit, you can ask "Can I talk to a current employee about

their job?" or "Can I come for a day and shadow somebody?" and the employer will say yes. You're looking for the work style, the norms, and the rituals. Have some faith in yourself and ask!