

Chapter 1

The Three Questions You Must Be Able to Answer

I don't know you personally but since you have this book in your hand, I know you want to have meaning in your career.

You want a great job and to build a great career. You want to love your work so much that it really isn't "work." You want to wake up every morning and be excited about what you do. You want to get paid what you are worth. You want to feel valued and appreciated for what you bring to the job.

Two years after graduating from Michigan State University, I found myself in Atlanta, sitting in an office at a small sports agency where I had come seeking advice on how to start a career in the business of sports. Like most college students, I had come to this meeting with a well-written and concise resume that I thought captured my assets and highlighted the accomplishments of my academic, athletic, and short professional career. Like most twenty-something's, I sat down, made some small talk, scooted my resume across the desk, and waited for them to start asking questions about my degree, my background, and my GPA.

Instead of asking the usual questions I had been expecting, one gentleman briefly looked down at my resume, and then proceeded to crumple it up and shoot it into the trash can across the room. Then he asked me two simple but central questions:

Molly, who are you? And what do you want to do? (since this meeting I have added another – why?)

To make it to the big leagues in your field—whether that field is finance, science, medicine, education, or anything else—you have to ask and answer these questions of yourself. If you can answer these with clarity and confidence, finding your dream career will become much, much easier.

He didn't ask me this, but I would challenge you to also ask yourself, "why?" What is your why? Why do you want to do what you are articulating you want to do?

My Dream Job

Early in my college years, I knew that I wanted to work in the business of sports. I was an athlete and played tennis

at Michigan State University. But I had a limited understanding of the business of sports, what kinds of opportunities existed, and whether my own strengths, weaknesses, and background would help me succeed.

I began by thinking through my interests. On the most basic level, I knew that I enjoyed people and I enjoyed building relationships. I knew that I loved fixing problems and finding solutions. I knew that I wanted to help others be happy improve their lives. I wanted to help others unleash their potential. The Search Was On

At 22, I tried everything I could think of to get a job that would build toward a career in the sports business. I started just like everybody else. I polished my resume and wrote professional cover letters. I sent them to people that I didn't know and that didn't know me. I responded to ads in the paper (we didn't have the Internet then). I became the typical "college graduate without a job," putting lots of lines in the water and hoping someone would take notice of me and bite. I got some nibbles, but nobody would take the bait and start me on the road to the dream career I wanted.

As I came to the end of my college years, I began to realize that a direct-mail, mass-marketing approach wasn't working. I recognized that *people* hire *people*, and that my resume was probably one of hundreds, if not thousands, sent in response to any given ad. As I thought about it, I realized that I didn't have the relationships I needed to even get on the radar screen of anyone in the sports industry. I realized I would have to build more relationships and *more effective* relationships, with the right people. Although I didn't know it then, I made a decision that was the start of putting into practice what has become the philosophy behind this book. I realized that if I wanted my dream job, I couldn't expect for it to come to me. I had to pursue it—and pursue it daily.

The Big Step That Started It All

My pursuit started when I took my life savings of \$2,000 out of the bank and moved from East Lansing, Michigan, to Atlanta, Georgia. Atlanta was not a random choice. During the 1990s, Atlanta was becoming one of the centers of the sports universe. The Braves had completed their worst-to-first miracle season and the start of their unprecedented run of consecutive divisional titles. The Super Bowl was coming to town, and preparations for the 1996 Olympics were

consuming every corner of the city. The city was fast becoming a sports hub, and I hoped it would have a place for me. In 1993, I arrived in a little green Honda Accord packed to the brim with everything I owned—even my bike!

In and among all my worldly belongings, the most valuable possessions I brought to Atlanta were the names of three people I thought might be able to help me, even though I had never met them. When I got to Atlanta, I reached out to these three, met with them, and asked for advice. I was able to get them to introduce me to other people they knew who might be able to help me. This was the way I began taking my first steps toward meeting people in the business of sports. You have people like this in your life too, and later I'm going to show you how to identify and get in front of the people who can help you.

Before I moved to Atlanta, I started learning the names of all the important people in the Atlanta world of sports. Of course, there were the professional teams—the Braves, the Hawks, and the Falcons. I also found out about The Atlanta Sports Council, an organization that hosts monthly “networking” sessions. I attended my first meeting just days after I arrived in Atlanta. Because of my research, I knew that Leeman Bennett (former head coach of the Falcons) was the Executive Director of the Super Bowl Host Committee, and regularly attended ASC meetings.

At my first ASC meeting, I sought out Leeman in a room full of people. Leeman is a tall, broad-shouldered, and powerful-looking man who has the confident appearance of a professional athlete and a successful coach. It would have been easy to be intimidated. I wasn't. I went up to him and introduced myself to him. I said “Coach, you must be enjoying preparing for Super Bowl XXVIII. Congrats on bringing this to Atlanta. What an honor for the city. I just graduated from Michigan State and would love to spend 15 minutes with you to get your thoughts and advice on breaking into the sports marketing business in Atlanta.” When I finished, I found he was welcoming and encouraging, and he agreed. We made plans to meet later that week at his office.

What a productive meeting! After I spent time asking him for advice and learning as much as I could about the sports business industry, Leeman asked me if I would be interested in an entry-level opportunity with him. “Yes, of course I would,” I said! At that, he offered me a job with the Super Bowl Host Committee. Now, don't get too excited yet. This

job was definitely *not* in the big leagues. I answered phones in the office of the Super Bowl Host Committee. But I knew it was a great opportunity for me to get a taste of sports marketing for one of the biggest events on the planet. I also knew that it was a great opportunity for me to meet the key sports executives in town. When Leeman offered me the job he said, "Molly can pay you \$800 dollars a month." I paused and said, "Leeman, you mean a week." I thought I was clever, not so much, he meant a month. I took the job.

Early Career Moves

Although you might say I only answered the phones, I had the chance to speak with the commissioner of the NFL—Paul Tagliabue, the Vice President of Marketing for Coke, and key executives at Home Depot to name a few. What this job really offered me was the chance to create a dialogue with key sports businesspeople in Atlanta. I realized that if I could form relationships with these people, that I would be much closer to starting my career.

After the Super Bowl, I was out of work again. Because I knew that relationships were more powerful than resumes, I realized that I needed to meet people with connections. I took a part-time position with a company called Executive Adventures, taking corporate executives through team-building exercises. Even though I was afraid of heights, I started working high rope courses. This wasn't because I thought ropes courses were relevant to getting into sports management. I did it in order to gain valuable team-building experiences and also to meet people who could help me. All the major corporations in town were sending executives through the program, and I knew I would be able to expand my network of contacts in Atlanta.

As I got to know the executives who came through our program, I waited for the appropriate time and then asked whether I could meet with them outside the ropes course to gain their advice on my career goals. At the same time, I was continuing to tap into relationships I had made during my time at the Super Bowl. Between my relationships from the Super Bowl and Executive Adventures, I secured informational meetings with executives from Chick-fil-A, Coca-Cola, and UPS. I used these meetings to seek advice on building a career I was passionate about, but also to gain referrals for other "advice meetings". I'll tell you more about how you can capitalize and leverage meetings like this in later chapters. But for now, you should know that

asking one executive for advice often led me to an introduction to another executive.

Eventually I uncovered awesome job opportunities. Some were in sports and some weren't. For example, at UPS they wanted me to join their management training program. On the other hand, the executives at Chick-fil-A wanted me to consider working in the sponsorship side of the business. I was tempted to take the position at Chick-fil-A, but the day-to-day duties of the position were not ones I could be passionate about. I let it pass.

Over time, my money began to run out. Eventually, it became the bottom of the ninth for me. The pressure was on. Each and every day, I woke up and followed my game plan that I knew would help me work toward my goal. I carefully maintained the relationships I had built and continued to find ways to build new relationships. Day after day, I did research, read about the sports business, made phone calls, and respectfully tapped into my contacts. I created great reasons to call people I had met with, and I ensured that the people I was networking with knew my commitment. As a result, my database of names kept growing.

I aggressively attended sports-management conferences to expand my relationship base. I scoured the Atlanta market for executives in sports marketing. I listened carefully to any advice I was given. But most of all, I continued to believe in myself and embrace my dream.

Another Step Closer

One of my informal meetings was with the CEO of Intellimedia Sports, Inc., a licensee of ESPN. Ben Dyer, the CEO, had started the company by creating and selling instruction CD-ROMs. Intellimedia was in the early stages of distributing these instructional CD-ROMs across the country.

I remember sitting on the edge of my seat in a one-on-one meeting with Mr. Dyer. I was prepared; I knew the CD-ROMs they had produced so far and I had worked to gather information on their plans for future CD-ROMs. I had done my research. And although this was "just an informational meeting," I wanted to work for Mr. Dyer and be a part of growing Intellimedia. My gut told me to try for a role on their sales side.

As we talked, I remember telling him, "I am a former student-athlete who knows how to work hard, who knows how

to do a little more to be a little better. I understand discipline. I want to win; I understand teamwork because I've been a part of teams all my life. And, certainly, I have a passion to work in the business of sports. But, Mr. Dyer, what does that all mean and really matter to you and Intellimedia?"

"I want to and will have (said softly with a humble smile) an impact on revenue for a company. I want to be a part of a growing company beside great people who have tremendous passion. Most of all, I want to work for a company with a CEO with a great reputation. I've done my research. Intellimedia is all of those things and more."

He would have to bet on me. And, he did. I started in 1994 selling the CD-ROMs all over the country. But Intellimedia was suffocating because of the Internet boom. It was soon time for me to move on. Because of my few years of relentless scouring, good meetings, and appropriate follow-up, I had a fairly expansive stack of business cards. I had met someone at a sports-marketing conference a few years back that I thought could help me. I reached out to her and asked whether I could buy her a cup of coffee and get her advice as I looked to transition into another area of the sports business.

After years of informational interviews, I had gotten pretty good at advice meetings. During the meeting, I felt we connected, so toward the end of the meeting I asked her whether there were other people she thought would be helpful for me to meet. She referred me to three more people she knew, which ultimately led me to a small Atlanta based sports agency.

Answering the Critical Questions

As I watched my resume be tossed into the trash can, I thought about how no book I had read on finding a career had prepared me for this. I had come in expecting to give my typical speech about my three strengths and my three weaknesses (which I would cleverly reveal to actually be strengths). I was caught off guard when he asked me who I was and what I wanted to do because he was asking me a much deeper, more important and fundamental set of questions. Today, I know that his questions are where you must start when working toward your own dream career. "Who are you? What do you want to do? And, why?" are *the* critical questions you must be able to answer.

When he asked me these questions, a nervous shock ran through me, but I quickly embraced the heart of his questions. On one level, I tried to answer in a way that showed him my passion. I told him, "I want to work in the business of sports for a well-respected and reputable company. I want to work in an environment that encourages growth for its employees and welcomes creative thinking. I want to work with a group of people who get excited about today's success but more excited about how that success translates into tomorrow's opportunities for growth. I want to be rewarded appropriately for my contributions to that growth. And I want to be a part of building something very, very special."

On a more subtle level, I also tried to communicate what I believed would be important to him, saying "It is important to me to align with a company that has an outstanding reputation." I had done my research, and the company had an outstanding reputation. That was and is important to me. At some point in the meeting, I said with a humbly respectful but confident tone, "You have an impressive client list, but there is a lot more business out there. The competition locally is irrelevant and it seems this agency can be the leader in the Southeast and the nation."

As you will find is often the case with many successful businesspeople, the fact that I had *created* this opportunity to get a meeting at this successful sports agency communicated quite a bit to him about me. He indicated that he was intrigued with my ability to contribute to the agency on the representation side of the business and asked me to follow up 60 days later with his "right-hand person." So exactly 60 days later—and at exactly nine in the morning on day 60—I called and set up a second meeting. This second meeting was scheduled for just 30 minutes, but three and a half hours later, I came out of what had been an incredibly positive discussion. Just hours later, I was offered a job—a chance—with this growing sports agency. I finally had secured my chance to play in the big leagues.

I have made the most of this opportunity and was part of building that business into something unique and well respected. Now, I'm going to ask you those three vital questions that were asked of me:

Who are you? What do you want to do? And, why (he didn't ask me this last question, but you should speak to this as well)?

These are the most important questions. Once you can answer them, you are ready to begin applying the rest of my approach for getting your own chance in the big leagues. This will require hard work, but it is not impossible. As you read, you will see that my philosophy is that you must pay close attention to two things:

- [lb] What you are doing in your job search

- [lb] How you are doing it

What to do?

- [lb] First, use your relationships, not your resume.

- [lb] Second, get people to like and respect you enough to want to help you or hire you.

How do you do this?

By asking for advice, not for a job.

This simple philosophy—although it's hard work to implement—is how you will close the relationship gap that stands between you and your dream career.

Wrapping Up and Moving On

Now you've heard the basics of my story and the most important questions you must be able to answer. Are you prepared to answer the three most important questions?