

# KNOW THYSELF

*No matter where you are in your career, it pays to study the field—and think about what you want from it.* BY LINDSAY SCOTT

**Q** I'm due to graduate this year and worry about the lack of opportunities for recent grads in project management. What can I do?

**A** You're at a crucial moment. You need to begin setting a direction for your career, and that means being able to answer some stock questions:

What do I want to achieve?

Why should a company employ me?

Thinking about why you want to be a project manager helps you figure out what you're trying to accomplish once you finish your education. And it's bound to be an interview question at some point in your life, so give it careful consideration and rehearse your answer.

You'll also need an understanding of what makes a great project manager. Consider what employers are actually looking for and what you need to do to come across as having "the right stuff." Remember, in most instances, if you don't have work experience, a prospective employer will—or won't—hire you based on your potential. Ask yourself, "What do I bring to the table?" And make sure you have a good response.

Even before you graduate, try to find ways to gain project management experience. Qualifications and degrees are useful—but some good, solid experience is what gets your foot in the door. This may be anything from planning an event for a volunteer group to building a website—anything that lets you pick up some real-world experience and shows potential employers your initiative.

Another way to gain valuable insight is to get involved with professional groups, which let you meet other project management students and practitioners. Learning from your competitors (i.e., other candidates graduating at the same time as you) will help you form your own plan of action.

No matter how your efforts to gain experience and contacts unfold, don't wait until graduation to work on your CV. Start looking at how you can present a project management focus based on your experience, skills, capability, education and training.

Now is also the time to figure out which sectors and domains interest you. That doesn't mean narrowing it



*If 2009 was the year of gaining project management qualifications, 2010 is going to be the year when project management competence takes center stage.*

down to, say, IT or government. It's more about getting a feel for how diverse the project management marketplace truly is.

Being familiar with the market helps you stand out from the crowd, too. If you have little or no work experience, you need to start planning your career rather than just waiting for an opportunity to fall into your lap. You probably won't enter the workplace at the project manager level, so if you understand the other roles in program and project management, you can contemplate which ones might be a good first step into the profession. There are various positions in the project management

