

Translating your PhD

Marketing yourself for non-academic employers · WASP Conference · Elena Hoffer, CEO, Alma.Me

FIVE STEPS

1

Know your story

Get clear on what energizes you and where to go.

2

Learn their language

See what industry values and how it differs.

3

Learn it from people

Use informational interviews to hear how industry talks.

4

Write it down

Turn your experience into impact-based CV statements.

5

Say it out loud

Practice a 20-second pitch you can use anywhere.

STEP 1 · CLARITY

Ask yourself

- What tasks energize me?
- What am I good at?
- What values matter most to me?

Values + skills + what energizes you = your career compass.

STEP 2 · MINDSET

Academia vs. industry

Academia	Industry	What it means for you
Creates knowledge	Delivers results	Focus on outcomes
Depth & proof	Speed & persuasion	Decide with incomplete data
Independence	Collaboration	Show teamwork

STEP 3 · NETWORKING

Why it matters

6%

of applicants came through a referral

29%

of everyone hired came through a referral

Networking isn't asking for a job. It's research: gather information, be curious about people's work, and build relationships over time.

Data from one large US company. Brown, Setren & Topa, Federal Reserve Bank of New York Staff Report No. 568 (2012).

STEP 3 · INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Four questions to ask

- What does a typical week look like in your role?
- Which skills matter most in your team?
- How did you move into this role?
- Who else should I talk to?

Ask for 20 minutes, not a job. Say thank you within a day.

STEP 3 · OUTREACH TEMPLATE

Your first message

Hi **[name]**, I'm a PhD student in **[field]** at **[university]**, working on **[your topic in one line]**. I saw that you **[something specific about them]**. Would you be open to a 20-minute chat about how you made that move? I'd really value your perspective. Best, **[your name]**

STEP 5 · YOUR 20-SECOND PITCH

Who you are → what you bring → what you're looking for

"I'm finishing my PhD in autonomous systems, where I develop methods that help robots move safely around people. I'm now looking for roles where I can bring that into real products, in robotics or autonomous vehicles, and I'd love to hear how your team works." (Illustrative example)

STEP 4 · YOUR CV

Impact-based statements

Action

What you did

Metric

How much, how many

Impact

What changed

BEFORE Supervised undergraduate students in the lab

AFTER Mentored and trained 3 undergraduate researchers, streamlining onboarding by creating clear protocols. Improved experiment success rate by 30% and enabled students to present at departmental conferences.

Impact isn't limited to measurable outcomes. It's what changed, improved, or became possible because of your work.

You already have what employers want. Now it's about communicating it in their language.

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