Changing leaves and a chill in the air makes us think of school, and if you're searching for a job, you may be wondering if you should hit the books again. Before you make the commitment, here are some questions to consider.

Why go back to school? If you plan to enter a new career field, or if there have been significant changes or advancements in your field, you may need further education to gain new technical skills required to complete in the industry. For a new field, you may need a degree (or at least a certificate) in that area, to show your knowledge and expertise.

How do I know what I'll need? Do extensive research on your field, and talk to professionals in the field, to see what's needed. Find professionals through LinkedIn, the RIT Professional Network on Job Zone, and through professional associations.

What are my education options? RIT has many options, from single courses, to certificate programs and degrees, both online and on campus. Community colleges offer skills-focused programs, and there may be online course options for your field.

How will I pay for school? There are many options for financial aid, including tax credits such as the lifetime learning credit. Low-interest Stafford loans may be an option. There are scholarships available specifically for older students; here are some - http://www.scholarshipworkshop.com/adult-scholarships.html. The RIT Office of Part-time and Graduate Enrollment has information on the PREP program, a grant-sponsored program that gives qualified individuals up to 60% of their tuition for a year - http://www.rit.edu/emcs/partgrad/dislocated.php3.

Moonlighters for Mobile Apps

Here's an interesting opportunity to earn a little money on the side, using your smartphone.

EasyShift and Gigwalk, two free apps, offer simple one-time work assignments that you submit through the apps, and get paid through your PayPal account.

EasyShift offers jobs for manufacturers or competing stores that want to check things like prices and product placement. Gigwalk matches businesses with people, and its jobs, like taking menu photos or testing a mobile app, vary.

The average Gigwalker makes between $40 and $800 per month, while EasyShift users make about $100-$200 per month. Both apps have instructions for applying to posted jobs, and pay promptly for completed work.
Blogging to Increase Your Presence

One key to job search success is to increase your professional presence; recruiters will be able to best find you if you make it easy to be found!

Blogging is one tool that can help you increase your online presence, while demonstrating your industry expertise and your technical savvy.

A blog is a frequently updated online journal, or log. There are many free blog hosting sites, including Google, and they are easily set up.

Blogs allow you to take the expertise that you have acquired through your years of being successful on the job, and share this information with people in your field. Think of your niche areas, and accomplishments. What would you like to be known for? Do you have a unique take on an industry concept or product that could help other people? Turn this information into a series of blog entries, and distribute your blog widely.

Put a link on your LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, and Facebook profiles, and refer to your blog when you comment on LinkedIn groups and connect with professional associations.

Over time, as you provide consistent, relevant and high quality information, you’ll become known as a subject matter expert. This will increase your network of contacts, as well as increase your chance of being found by recruiters using keywords to search for candidates. And you’ll be a prime candidate, as you’ve already demonstrated your expert knowledge and skills through your blog!

Highlighting Your Personal Value Proposition

Your value proposition is a summary of your key selling points, that will convince an employer that you’re the best candidate. The focus is on what you have to offer an employer – how will you add value, solve a problem, prove your worth - in a very persuasive way.

Once you determine your value proposition, you can put together a persuasive value proposition letter that you can use in place of a cover letter. This letter should be very action oriented, identifying what you will do when you’re hired.

To put together your value proposition, research the company to which you’re applying, and determine their needs. Then ask yourself:
- How will the company benefit financially from hiring me?
- What experience can I offer that will provide value to the company?
- What additional skills do I have that set me apart from other candidates?

In considering the above questions, don’t limit yourself to big tasks or accomplishments; day to day activities and achievements are equally important, and may give you an edge over the competition.

Some tips in writing your value proposition letter:
- Begin with a question like “Do you need”
- Address a problem they are having
- Use short sentences to keep the reader’s interest
- Keep it short – 100-150 words
- Use specific numbers and facts to build credibility

Once you have your letter, you can use it for snail mail or email. You should also showcase your value proposition in your LinkedIn profile headline.
Abby Kohut, known nationally as Absolutely Abby, an expert on LinkedIn and job search, recently presented a workshop at RIT on maximizing your social media presence. Here she shares her top tips for becoming a red-hot candidate on LinkedIn.

LinkedIn has more than 175 million members with a new person joining every second. There are 130,000 recruiters on LinkedIn with 93 percent actively using it to fill positions.

Tip #1: Include keywords throughout your profile. Applicants at the top of the list had these keywords listed three to five times in their profiles. The easiest way to find key words is to look over job descriptions and the profiles of people competing for similar jobs to see what words are used most often. Make sure that these words are listed throughout your profile.

Tip #2: Make sure that your profile is filled out 100 percent. Many people are reluctant to put up a photo on LinkedIn for fear of discrimination. But recruiters want to see candidates. Applicants must include a photo to have a completed profile on LinkedIn.

Tip #3: Use box.net and slideshare to show examples of your work. LinkedIn is a place to show off professionally, but most people only fill out their profiles and leave it at that. With box.net and slideshare applicants can upload:

- A copy of their resume
- Articles they wrote or articles written about them
- Awards/recognitions
- Pictures of yourself getting awards
- Copies of degrees or certifications
- Letters of recommendations
- Projects (please note that care should be used when posting proprietary items.)

Tip #4: Create a current job title that does not have an end date. Many recruiters will screen out applicants in their search by only selecting applicants who are currently employed. Red Hot candidates research job titles they are looking to fill, then include them as job titles, using the term Free Agent as the company name. Using this tactic will help them get to the top of the list.

Tip #5: Connect to other LinkedIn members and join groups whenever possible. The more connections an applicant has, the more likely they will appear in the first few pages of a search. Applicants with fewer than 200 connections rarely get to the top of job search lists. Red Hot candidates join and become active in groups to seek out members to connect with, and network with recruiters in the field they want to pursue.

Bonus Tip:

Kohut provided this bonus tip to further separate your profile from the masses. She advises Red Hot candidates to include an email address and contact number on their profile— which very few people do—so that when a recruiter or hiring manager finds you, they can immediately reach you. She suggests setting up a separate job search email account on Gmail and using Google Voice (both FREE) to screen these communications.

A recruiter for 16 years and author of “Absolutely Abby’s 101 Job Search Secrets: A Corporate Recruiter Hands You the Keys to Your Job Search Success,” Abby Kohut has hired, by her count, more than 10,000 people. In 2009 she started AbsolutelyAbby.com where she shares job tips. She can be reached at: http://www.absolutelyabby.com/
Encore Career Resources

Encore careers refer to the different directions some people choose to go into at mid-life, instead of retiring. As people live longer and stay healthier and more energized, many want to use their skills and experiences in new, meaningful ways. Here are some resources to help you get started with this process.

- **Encore Careers** – has assessment tools, information on education, training, and careers, and a job board.
  - Join the Encore Careers group on LinkedIn for more connections and information.
- **Retirement Jobs.com** – free job search tool for older workers; identifies companies that are older-worker friendly, matches your skills with available opportunities.
- **AARP** – provides resources, articles and information for older workers, including finding a job and retirement planning.
- **Next Avenue** – resources and information on career growth and education, finding a job, launching a business, starting a new career and work transitions.
- **iRelaunch.com** – information and resources for mid-career professionals. Provides career reentry programs, events, and content.