

The Job-Search Impediment: They won't Hire you until they Know you and Like you

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They won't hire you until they know you and not even then unless they like you. And in all probability they won't like you unless you like them. Herein lies the number one challenge in getting a job. So the 'Catch 22' springs from the conundrum: to know me they have to see me and if I can't get to see them, how can they ever get to know me, much less discover if we like each other? There is a clear answer to this problem; but be ready to throw your normal job-search methods out the window in order to find success.

1. The Normal Job-Search Scenario

A company places an ad in the newspaper or online. Many people respond. Welcome to the resume lottery! Always there's a winner but usually it will not be you. Just as you cannot be the winner of every financial lottery, you cannot be the winner of every job-search lottery. The odds of 50 qualified responses to 1 job are not very promising, regardless of your capabilities. The numbers at this level simply work against you. Odds of 2:1 are bad enough, (how many time have you come #2 in a job search?) but 50:1 is horrendous. If you had 50:1 odds in a poker game, you would fold your hand and walk away. And this predictably bad gamble manifests itself by a 'no response' from employers even when you know you are fully qualified; a don't-call-us, we'll-call-you-attitude; 'no-you-cannot-talk-to-the-hiring-engineer or a warning in the ad to not even expect a response unless the employer chooses to do so. How do these options make you feel? No answer is needed.

2. The Uselessness of the Normal Job-Search Scenario

How can you get noticed if you submit your resume along with fifty or a hundred other qualified individuals? Do you really think

your skills will stand above the mob? Whatever degree you have, probably some applicant will have a higher one. Your ten years relevant experience can be topped by somebody else with twelve years. Your ability in two languages may be bettered by someone fluent in five idioms. And so it goes.

It would be nice if that is all there was to it; in fact it gets worse. The employer, overwhelmed by 50 or 100 replies to the ad decides that the number of resumes have to be whittled down to five or ten in the next three days. Since most applicants are qualified the only way to reduce the thick sheaf of boring¹ resumes is to look for disqualifiers. So instead of looking at your wonderful assets they look at your not-so-wonderful liabilities, which could include minor issues quite unrelated to your sterling capabilities, such as: funny sounding name, lack of Canadian experience, not a familiar university degree, poor spelling, resume too long or too short, poor format, too young or too old, etc. That is, to weed out the first batch they look at the unimportant 2% of your resume contents and ignore the important 98% of it. Even if the 2/98 ratio is not quite that bad, anything near it is bad enough – a focus on the wrong end of things for the sake of expediency.

Perhaps this first selection process gets the list down to 10 names. Now they will look the remaining resumes over carefully and judge whom the final five will be. Let us, for the sake of argument, assume this will be a practical and objective assessment.

What's next? "Well let's find out who these final five people really are", they say. By the way, if you are not in the final five but in the

¹ While your beautiful, painfully written, CV may be an inspiration to you, someone looking at 50 of them in the space of an hour has quite a different viewpoint: 'boring' is a nice word to describe it.

larger group of ten, they will leave you in abeyance, even if you phone to ask your status (assuming that they will even take your call) just to keep you in reserve in case the final five don't work out. So they march people in one at a time and ask embarrassing questions in a vain attempt to figure out who each really is in the space of one hour, under confrontational conditions. Even if the conditions were pleasant, the most highly trained psychologist could not likely figure out personality in one hour. As a check, let us ask you how have you felt at most interviews? Did you feel that they asked you about what really mattered to you about things and you were particularly adept at? Statistics tell us otherwise: 47% of new hires leave the job in 12 to 18 months. Since every one of the finalists has the skills, the rejection is not about skills; it is about personality fit – or lack thereof.

3. What you Really Must Do

You have to have a resume that captures employers' attention, which can only be done by (a) telling employers that you fit their requirements and (b) by your solving the major problem above – figuring out the personality portion for yourself since the employer has no trouble with the skill portion (because all the finalists have the skills). (c) And you need to tell the employer what kind of person you really are, that is, your personality, before you enter the interview. If you do that the interview becomes a formality for hiring you. However, let us not get too far ahead of ourselves.

You capture employers' attention if your first statement coincides with the needs of the employer. So you must state the opportunity you are suited for in words that are quite clear and precise. Generalities will have your resume thrown into the pile with the others. If you define your job need successfully (not talking about what you offer, but by describing what you want), then the employers will read one line more of your resume. That is all you need to do – move the reader to the next line of your resume. However if your job statement does not coincide with the employer's openings then you will be tossed out – which is a good thing. Rejection for the right reason is just as important as selection for

the right reason. If the job doesn't fit you, you don't want it; you don't want to be locked into a job you don't like. You can get on with looking for a better opportunity for you.

Assuming, say, that you fit the need, the next line of the resume must show beyond a shadow of a doubt, with irrefutable proof, that you actually have the skills to handle the job. By doing so, you will have captured the employers' imaginations. Now the employers will begin to read the rest of your resume, and to do so with interest instead of skimming it in a bored semi-detached fashion – as with most other resumes.

I hope you realize that this paper would have to be many pages longer if we were to describe the details of the above two paragraphs. Our intent here is to focus on one aspect only – describing who you really are, which follows.

4. And then, Phase II

So, where are we? The employer has decided that you are looking for a job that coincides with a job opportunity in that person's company. As a result, the reader has moved onto the second part of your resume that briefly shows how well qualified you are (using about 5 factual [numerical proof] bullets that correspond precisely with your job-sought definition).

Now the employer is excited by your resume. Guess where you really are presently? You have neatly bypassed the pouring over hundreds of resumes and reducing the pile down to five or six resumes for interview. You are in that short-list of five; you have done it irrespective of how many resumes have been read so far and will be read over the next few days. This employer wants to consider you; now this employer wants to read the next line of your resume. So far, you appear to be the answer to the hiring manager's prayers – all with only 4 lines of your resume and a few appropriate bullets.

You know that the next stage is the interview where the employer hopes within one hour to do what trained psychologists cannot do in less than 10 hours – figure out who you

really are. Please remember that the job candidate selection no longer is about skills – it's about you and your character. And remember we are trying to bypass the normal process with its endemic lottery aspect and built-in humiliation features.

At this point the readers don't know that their mental switches have turned onto your personality and away from skills – but you and I do. Therefore the next section of your resume has to describe the behavioral you. Here is how.

a. With or without outside assistance, sit down and describe who you really are in five words – the five most important words that describe you. Mine are: determined, innovative, caring, result-oriented, insightful. Everyone who knows me well knows that those words capture at least 80% of who I really am.

b. Pass those five words in front of your spouse, family member, or best friend and get their confirmation. If you are off base, go back to the drawing board. **YOU MUST GET THIS PART RIGHT.**

c. Think of a work event that illustrates the first characteristic of yours.

d. Write a brief paragraph that describes it. Example, using my own word 'determination': *While a junior engineer, at Electronics Materiels International, Ottawa, was given an assignment to design a rotary joint for GCA radar that had proven hopeless to resolve because of huge power levels. Worked night and day for two months with both conventional and new approaches with a **determination** to get an answer.*

e. Ensure the description includes facts, because facts create credibility. In the example above fact words include: junior engineer, Electronics Materiels International, Ottawa, GCA radar, two months.

f. Now show a numerical result. This proves credibility beyond a doubt. Example: *The result was a circular shaped wave-guide slit along its length, an oversized non-contacting directional coupler that could handle 500 kilowatts of power without breaking down.* Note that the description shows show

technical material that might be hard to understand, but even if you do not understand it, the reader can sense the achievement – and that is what is important. The numerical result might have been a simple binary 1 or 0 – it worked or it didn't work. *"The joint met all the performance specifications."* The numerical result might have been the reaction to it. *"Two managers praised it as the most innovative idea in the company in the past year."* But always have a description with real numbers.

g. Do this for all five of your characteristics.

What you will have done is to illustrate to the readers that you are, in this case, a 'determined' person. And that is the point – not the tasks or events themselves but the display of your human character. The events and the numbers associated with the events provide credibility. You will have given a portrait to the reader of who you really are; the reader will not only understand who you are but will also believe that it is really you.

More importantly you have just bypassed the interview – without having met the interviewer. Not only that, you have done a better job than the interviewer would have in the one hour allocated. To write these five paragraphs will probably take you one or two days. You are summarizing your own psychological (behavioral) assessment of yourself to the reader with clear proof of those characteristics.

h. Complete the resume with a brief chronological listing of your past jobs, education and contact information. Form a resume of no more than two pages, sacrificing this latter part to keep within two pages not the former part (a to g above).

5. Rejection is as Important as Selection

Now something very interesting will happen. The reader will like you or dislike you. Of course this is what happens at any interview. Within minutes the interviewer decides if you are the right 'kind' or not, if your character appears better than or worse than the other candidates. Unfortunately,

there is very little you can do about it; it's just part of life. But this piece of paper – this new style of resume – will have done it for you in advance. It will get you accepted or rejected without your having ever set foot within the doors of the prospective company, and for all the same reasons except for one important difference: your piece of paper provides an accurate assessment of your character and most one-hour interviews do not. The reaction of the reader to you will be the right reaction for the right reasons.

If the person reacts by not liking you, you will have been relieved of the humility of a poor interview and the worse agony of a job you would eventually hate – even though you have the skills to do it. This rejection is every bit as important as being selected. You don't want to be part of the 47% statistic of Section 2 above. Please realize that if the person doesn't like you, you will probably not like that individual who will likely turn out to be one of those bosses 'from hell' for you and at the very least, locate you in the antithesis of your dream job.

If you are accepted, it will be an emotional acceptance – which is what happens in most interviews anyway ("You know, I really like that Charlie guy", say one interviewer to another.) Because they value 'determination' and your other words, they will call you in BEFORE anyone else, even before they have arrived at their short list of five candidates. It has been our experience that often the other five are not even interviewed because the employers will have found who they want and BELIEVE that you are whom they need. (Remember the credibility portion?) And they will be right! Not only that, you will end up in a job that fits into your comfort zone. It is easy for you to be 'determined' because it is a leading characteristic of yours and the employer esteems that characteristic of yours. All you have to do on the job is behave naturally and you should start to excel. Everybody wins.

6. Finally, Phase III

Using this approach you should be more selective yourself. Send your new resume out to the right job opportunities, not any job opportunity. You can now afford the rifle

approach rather than the shotgun approach. Better still go into the unseen job market – but that is another story.

7. Summary

Work on your resume with the needs of the reader-employer in mind, not your own needs. Then let the job-search scenario develop to your advantage.

Good luck.

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