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An Employer's Open Letter to Anyone Who is Applying for a Job

Not too long ago my small company decided that we'd like to add a marketing exec to our team. So we decided to do a bit of analysis into what we'd really like to have done by the person we choose. We came up with a list of six marketing duties that we thought would basically cover almost everything we wanted done to market the company. So we wrote up an ad, which included these duties and the skills we thought would be required to successfully perform these duties, and posted the advert on a popular recruitment website. We also asked that applicants send a CV that it not more than 2 pages long, and a covering letter explaining which of the above skills they have and how they could use these skills to add value to the company.

In total we received 32 applications, of which only five (yes that is less than one in six) had the three pre-requisites, that is, they were relevant to our needs, had a CV that was not longer than 2 pages, and a cover letter that "sold". Approximately half the CVs were longer than 2 pages, and a third of the applications had no covering letter (unless you count (attached please find resume as a covering letter). On this latter one we tend to be quite lenient, since we have had repeated experiences over the years that have taught us that applicants really do not know how to shift their focus from themselves and onto the needs of the company that they want to join. So we would have accepted covering letters that spoke about themselves as long as they told us something about their marketing experience and skills. And written in good English (not to be taken for granted).

But the CV, that should have been a no brainer. Not so. In some cases ten pages long. In some of these cases (5 of them), their covering letter was, well, acceptable, and their skills seemed to

make them a possible match. So we half forgave them and sent them an email asking them to revise their CV and cut it down to 2 pages. Two complied and were called in for an interview with the other right-first-time five. Two did not respond, continuing to confirm our suspicion that their level of interest or their IQ gravitate towards the lower end of the scale, and one candidate who went through the effort – this second time round – to reduce her CV from 10 pages to 3, and insisting that she cannot reduce it further, claiming that she has too much experience and qualifications to fit into 2 pages. We were not sure whether to laugh or cry.

So, following this all too common experience, I wanted to share with any job applicant some very easy tips on how to increase your chances to get through the first interview door multiple times, considering that the bar for most people seems to be very, very low. Here are some easy-to-apply pointers that will make a huge difference to the impression your prospective employers get of you before they have even met you:

1. Actually read the advert

Sounds like an obvious one, doesn't it? And yet, how would you explain how people just write "attached please find CV" as their covering letter, when there are specific instructions on what to write about. Or the 2 page CV issue?

2. Follow the instructions faithfully

Again, the other alternative on not reading the advert in its entirety is the possibility that you did read it, but decided, in your infinite wisdom, to ignore the instructions because either (a) you know better or (b) you don't really care. Please, oh please, why waste your time and mine?

3. Adapt your CV to fit the post

If you are applying for a marketing post, why is your CV harping on and on about your HR competencies, and almost nothing about your Marketing skills? Because you have a one-size-fits-all CV and you do not bother to make a bit of effort and adapt your CV. That's how much interest you are showing in our post. Ideally, you would tweak your CV to actually highlight the skills and experiences that would be most relevant for our post. And if you happen not to have

some or all of those skills, then the next point becomes even more vital.

4. Write a cover letter that sells

In the very rare instances where applicants wrote a really good covering letter, and by good I mean one that exposed their interest in our company, enthusiasm and passion for the role they applied for, they gained a number of brownie points that compensated for any shortcomings in skills or experience that the CV would show. Nowadays most applications are digital anyway, but I still shudder when I remember receiving badly torn out notebook paper used as covering letters.

So for anyone out there who has ever grumbled that their applications were rejected or ignored, please do take a serious look at what you are sending to prospective employers, and heed some – preferably all – of the above pointers. Most employers would have taken the trouble of constructing a call for applications, and would be very interested in having serious candidates. In many cases, the applications being sent are insults to the employer's intelligence, and a waste of their time, so why should they be wasting more time on you?

This is not rocket science. It is more an issue of attitude than skill to make the adjustments suggested. However, if you really want to go for broke, Malta Business School and other educational or HR organisations provide courses as well as individual coaching sessions on how to gain a competitive advantage when applying for jobs and during interviews.