

First impressions are vital

Kate Southam / Courier Mail / November 13, 2009

THE biggest turn-off by far for employers looking for staff is candidates who haven't done their research.

Candidates who spend time learning and targeting where they want to work are the ones that impress, explains Chris Gildersleeve, who is one of the 25 hiring managers interviewed for a new book, *What do Employers Really Want?*

The director of human resources for Chubb Australasia says he hates application spam: the same resume or application letter for every job a candidate goes for.

Nearly every employer that outplacement consultants James Evangelidis and Karalyn Brown interviewed for the book comment on the need for candidates to research prospective employers.

"What we learned from these employers is that they only want to hear from candidates who know what their company is about and who really want to work for their organisation in particular," says Brown.

"It seems like such basic advice but from our conversations with employers there are still many candidates who don't get this."

The 25 interviews also show that many of the employers expect a candidate to draw on their real life experience when answering questions – not just talk about what they might do, talk about what they have already achieved in a past job.

Other qualities most employers look for in candidates include passion, honesty, punctuality, teamwork and good personal presentation.

Banabelle Group managing director Kevin Clark says he even looks to see if the candidate has cleaned their fingernails.

Clark likes to interview all employees who join his company, which provides electrical, communications and engineering services.

"Regardless of their qualifications, they have got to have the right attitude, a bit of a sparkle in their eye," he says.

For Angela Wakenshaw, human resources manager of insurance company Munich Re Group, the job interview starts the moment she meets a candidate – even if that is as they step off the elevator.

An ability to make small talk and build rapport is important.

As an experienced interviewer, Wakenshaw understands people get nervous in interviews.

But she still looks for confidence, particularly for client-related roles.

"(Confidence) comes through when they talk about the things they are good at – the things they are passionate about," she says.

Turn-offs for Dale Cohen, the general manager of BigPond Online Network, include people who give closed answers during the course of a job interview.

Cohen rates people who can keep up their end of the conversation.

“The idea that you would walk in, answer a bunch of questions staccato style and walk out as the successful candidate has never worked for any job I’ve hired for,” Cohen says.

There also are some great tales of candidates turning around a decision not to hire them.

Bonita Croft, a group executive (HR) for property and finance organisation Investa, recalls a candidate who called a sales manager on his mobile to find out why she didn’t get the job.

The manager couldn’t talk as he was driving to the airport. The candidate jumped in a taxi, figured out the right airport lounge and had the sales manager paged.

Her persistence paid off and she got the job.

Brown says the idea of the book was to plug an information gap.

“We found there were a lot of books around that provided a view from the outside looking in . . . experts giving their perspective on what employers really wanted when they were hiring staff,” she says. “We thought it would be a good idea to go straight to the employer.

“What we found is that, while there were common themes, hiring is a personal decision and employers’ views differ from person to person.”

So the lesson from *What do Employers Really Want?* is for job candidates to develop and use good research skills. They also must be prepared to ask relevant questions during the interview so they can tailor their approach to each employer.

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