

What Employers Look for When Hiring in 2006

Introduction

Representatives from a diverse range of companies and government agencies at several focus groups and panel sessions offered the following information as to what employers look for when considering job candidates. Note: Although much of the following information may appear to be typical advice given to a job seeker, it confirms what employers look for when considering job candidates and in reviewing their job search documentation.

I. THE JOB APPLICATION PROCESS

- Employers report that job seekers often fail to fully complete application forms or at times provide inaccurate information. Consequently, be sure to complete the entire application form and proof read it to submitting the form to a potential employer.
- Provide all additional submissions requested on an application form. For example, employers may ask that supporting documents (such as credentials) are to be attached to an application.
- Employers are impressed by job seekers who submit an application in person and then ask to speak with someone in the company about potential work opportunities. In fact, one employer in a major retail hardware outlet indicated that only about 2 to 5% of those job seekers dropping off resumes asked to speak with a hiring manager and introduced themselves.
- Job seekers should also be prepared for such a discussion to turn into an informal job interview. Unless instructed otherwise, be persistent in speaking to someone with a company about working there.
- Informational interviews are highly regarded by employers as being of value to job seekers. Taking the time to contact a manager and finding out what it is like to work for an organization is seen by employers as an important component of the job search process. However, if you are going to conduct an information interview, be sure to come prepared with a short list of questions to ask a potential employer.



II. DESIRABLE PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES OF JOB SEEKERS

- In general, employers put considerable value on suitable personal attributes when making hiring decisions about potential job candidates. One employer indicated this preference with the phrase:
We hire for attitude and train for skills!
- Employers look for people that seem reliable, dependable and have a positive attitude.
- Employers also look for individuals who are clear about their passion for working in a specific field or industry.

III. COVER LETTERS AND RESUMES

- When asked about cover letters, most employers indicated their preference for inclusion of a cover letter when sending along a resume.
- In producing cover letters and seeking work, employers suggested that job seekers focus on "quality" rather than "quantity". For example, job seekers were thought to be better off spending more time in conducting research for creating targeted cover letters and resumes, rather than just sending out a large number of generic resumes to companies for which little or no research has been done by the job seeker.
- Doing some research about a posted position, company and industry sought shows an employer that the individual is serious about working for them.
- Job seekers should be quite focused in going after positions that they are really interested in obtaining. Employers can often sense when a person is looking for "just any



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job", as this attitude will come through in a cover letter, resume and interview. In other words, employers prefer people who are confident and clear in their desire to work for a specific company and not those simply satisfied with working "just" anywhere.

- For all of one's job search techniques and documents (including a cover letter, resume, and voice mail message), it makes a huge difference in presenting an image that they are serious about their job search.

Suggested Tips About Cover Letters and Resumes:

- ✓ Keep cover letters clear and to the point. To get a potential employer's attention in a cover letter, indicate specifically how your skills and qualifications can be used to benefit the employer and meet their needs.
- ✓ Ensure that your cover letter clearly indicates the type of work that you are looking for.
- ✓ Check and double-check your cover letter and resume for correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar.
- ✓ Remember that a good cover letter provides a great opportunity for you to stand out from the rest of the other applicants. It also can show that you understand something about the employer and their company.
- ✓ Know your resume. For example, be clear about the key information listed on your resume, such as the duration and dates of employment in previous positions. This is something that an employer may ask you about during a job interview.
- ✓ Create an effective resume by highlighting your achievements and provide a summary of the results accomplished in previous positions.
- ✓ Try to provide a real list of accomplishments, not just a simple list of your previous job duties. Show examples of such accomplishments or achievements, thereby enabling potential employers to better understand why you may be well suited for a position.



- ✓ Whenever possible, try to quantify statements regarding your achievements, accomplishments, and/or job responsibilities as clear examples of things that you have done.
- ✓ Tailor or customize your resume for different positions that you may be seeking. Avoid the use of just one generic resume for different types of job postings.
- ✓ Use a professional sounding email address for work search purposes.
- ✓ Be sure to check your email on a regular basis (at least daily) when looking for work.
- ✓ For most occupations, particularly entry to mid-level occupations, employers generally like to see a one to two page resume.
- ✓ Clearly state what you would like to do at a company when submitting a cover letter and resume (that is, provide a career profile or job objective).
- ✓ In a cover letter, communicate your interests and what you are looking for in a company from the employer's perspective.
- ✓ There is no one right or wrong way to prepare a cover letter. However, be careful when using a cover letter that is a template used for positions with other companies. Make sure all company references in a cover letter refer to the correct company.
- ✓ You can use a cover letter to explain major gaps in your work history or several recent changes in positions.
- ✓ In a cover letter, describe what it is in terms of the stated job requirements that you have in the way of matching or particularly relevant skills, knowledge and qualifications.
- ✓ Some companies only keep resumes on file for one to three months after receipt; therefore, be prepared to re-submit your resume.

IV. EDUCATION VERSUS EXPERIENCE IN THE SELECTION OF JOB CANDIDATES

- Whether priority is given to people with more education versus those with more experience depends on the hiring policies of the company, the type of position (for

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example, entry level versus senior professional position), and the duties associated with a job.

- Employers suggest that job seekers should consider applying for the position even if they do not have the exact educational requirements specified, but are reasonably close. You may at least get an interview and then can try to impress the interviewer(s) in person.
- Some employers are very open to hiring people without experience in a particular field or industry. These employers are often quite willing to train the right candidates for work in an industry. Such companies look for people with transferable skills and a good attitude. Moreover, the ability to provide excellent customer service is often a key factor in considering whether to employ someone who will have to provide customer service, such as in the retail sector.
- For many companies, a job candidate's ability to demonstrate motivation and enthusiasm in applying for a job is a key factor in the hiring decision.

V. THE INTERVIEW PROCESS: WHAT IMPRESSES POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS

- The interview process varies among different companies. The type of job interview depends on the type and size of hiring company, and can range from a one-on-one interview with the company owner to a structured panel interview with three to four interviewers, including a representative from the Human Resource Department.

Suggested Tips About the Job Interview Process:

- ✓ When looking for work, remove any phone blocks (that is, devices used to reduce telemarketing calls) or provide an alternate direct line number, such as a cell phone. Potential employers are quite busy, so make it as convenient and easy as possible for them to contact you.
- ✓ Allow at least a couple of free hours when dropping off a resume and/or job application in the event that the manager asks to conduct an interview immediately. You may be required to meet a department and store

manager and will have to be flexible to follow their schedule for the interview(s).

- ✓ It is extremely important that job seekers are well prepared for job interviews. Knowing something about the potential employment company and the expected job duties will impress employers.
- ✓ Three main keys for preparing for an interview are: research, research, research. It is important to take the time to investigate the company that one is wanting to work for (for example, in a retail environment, what are the store hours of operation, what departments do you wish to work in, etc). By doing this research, you will demonstrate to the potential employer that you have invested some time in finding out information about the company.
- ✓ Employers look for genuine openness and honesty when interviewing candidates. Consequently, make sure you can back-up or substantiate every thing that you have said during an interview or indicated in your application, resume, and cover letter.
- ✓ Be open to asking a potential employer questions about the job and their company. Prepare such questions ahead of time. A job candidate who asks good questions during an interview will likely impress potential employers and increase their confidence in the candidate.
- ✓ Don't be shy during a job interview. Be prepared to talk about your accomplishments in relation to what you can do for the potential employer.
- ✓ Arrive on time for an interview, but don't get there too early. As a general rule, arrive in the office no more than 10 minutes prior to start of an interview.
- ✓ Be sure to dress appropriately for an interview. In addition, take care to have good personal hygiene and good grooming for an interview. Employers indicate that this can make a big difference in the hiring process.
- ✓ Show the interviewer that you are focused regarding your career and that you know



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exactly what you are looking for in a position with their company.

- ✓ Be prepared to outline your career action plan: that is, explain what you want to do in the next three to five years; specify what education (or other form of professional development) you have taken and will take to help reach your goals; and, what volunteer work you plan to undertake.
- ✓ Know your career goals, as well as your strengths and weaknesses. If asked to discuss your weakness(es) indicate how you are working on a particular item and how you have succeeded in dealing with this weakness from a positive perspective.
- ✓ Show confidence in answering questions and be sure to keep your answers brief. Avoid saying too much as you can talk yourself out of a potential job. Employers suggest that answers 20 to 30 seconds in length are fine. The interviewer will ask if they want more information.
- ✓ Prior to an interview, be sure to practice answering a range of questions, including questions designed to catch you off guard or surprise you.
- ✓ Try to obtain suitable interview coaching advice or assistance in practicing for a job interview. In particular, people with challenges in speaking and understanding English should practice by role-playing or conducting a mock job interview.
- ✓ During the interview, display good body language to encourage back and forth dialog and to create suitable interaction with the interviewer.
- ✓ Some questions are common to most job interviews. Be prepared to respond to such questions, particularly those related to motivation, knowledge of the position for which you have applied, your interpersonal communication skills, and examples of your work that is relevant to the job you are being interviewed for.
- ✓ It is far better to say "I don't know" as a response to a job interview



question rather than trying to make up an answer.

- ✓ It is also helpful at times to take 30 seconds or so before responding to a question, particularly one that is complex. Tell the interviewer or panel that you would like to take a moment to think of an example of what is being asked.
- ✓ For people who have been out of the job market for five years or more, there are things that you can use to impress a potential employer, such as volunteer work, personal development work, and transferable skills used in raising a family. Employers are looking for people that can demonstrate structure and discipline, either in a previous paid position or other form of work.
- ✓ At the end of the interview, be sure to tell the interviewer(s) how much you appreciated their time in meeting with them and that you are quite interested in this opportunity.

VI. EMPLOYMENT REFERENCES

Suggested Tips for Using References

- ✓ Contact your references ahead of time and keep them posted about your job search activities, particularly about where you have applied and when you will be interviewed for a job. Be sure to have suitable references arranged and available before attending a job interview.
- ✓ After a job interview, let your references know when to anticipate a call from an interviewer.
- ✓ Send a recent copy of your resume to your references. This will help them prepare for a potential call from employers when checking out one's references.
- ✓ Employers will often agree to contact references from elsewhere in Canada and outside the country. So, where appropriate include such contacts.
- ✓ Include your references' email addresses on the list of contacts as some employers find this a convenient way to initially contact references.