

The 2 Great Job Search Anomalies

January 23, 2012; Bruce Hurwitz



As we enter a new year, it may be worthwhile to confront two job search realities most people either don't know about or ignore. I call them "the two great job search anomalies."

The first anomaly is your job search is not about you. You are incidental to the process. You do not matter. The employer does not have to meet your needs, you have to meet hers. (Granted, this will change when the negotiations begin, but we're not there yet!) Here is an actual opening to a resume which I received:

Hands-on, motivational leader and manager with years of progressively challenging experience achieving or exceeding desired outcomes. Exceptional ability to clearly translate complex issues into actionable plans aligned to short and long-term requirements...

You get the idea. No need to continue. It's really quite simple. This person is highlighting how great he is. Of course, reading that first paragraph I have absolutely no idea what his profession is. So what do I know about him? He can't market himself effectively so he will not be able to represent my client effectively. So what do I do? I move on to the next resume and hope it begins with a few salient bullet points:

- Identified weaknesses in internal network ending hacking attempts and saving company in excess of \$1 million in IT-related costs; or
- Successfully launched an average of two new product lines per year resulting in increased revenue per line of between \$2 and \$3 million; or
- Lowered average annual grievances from 50 to zero while successfully defeating attempts at unionization.

If I am looking to fill an IT, sales or HR position I don't want to read about how great the candidate thinks he is, *I want to read about what he has actually done*. See the difference? In the quoted paragraph the person is focused on himself, while in the bullet points the candidates are focused on the employers and their needs.

The second anomaly deals with time. This is how I present it:

Days/Weeks/Minutes vs. Seconds/Seconds/Hours

What I am referring to here is the amount of time candidates spend on the three key components of the job application process (ignoring networking and research which are unique to the candidate): cover letters, resumes and interviews.

Candidates will spend days writing, tweaking and fine tuning their cover letters. Employers spend no more than 10 seconds reading a cover letter, if they read them at all.

Candidates will spend days and weeks writing, tweaking and fine tuning their resumes. Employers spend about five seconds reading resumes. If they don't catch their eye, excite them, get their attention, employers move on to the next resume.

Now here's the interesting thing: Most candidates will spend minutes, usually less than an hour, researching an employer in preparation for an interview and will spend minutes, usually on the way to the interview, thinking about answers to questions that they think they are going to be asked. Yet employers spend hours interviewing clients. Here's the employer's math:

The candidate spends 20 minutes meeting with the HR director. Next, she's with the hiring manager for 45 minutes. That's followed by a half hour with, for sake of argument, three team members. Finally there's a 15 minute meeting with the owner/CEO/what-have-you.

This works out to 20 minutes + 45 minutes + (3 x 30 minutes) + 15 minutes, for a total of three hours and 20 minutes face time with the candidate. Then everyone gets together for a good 10 minutes to discuss the candidate. That's an additional hour. And the process repeats itself for each candidate. So let's say the employer is willing to devote four hours per candidate and there are three candidates being considered. And then there's the time devoted to negotiations. For sake of argument, to hire someone, not including resume review time and an initial phone conversation, the employer is willing to devote two full days of staff time. And the candidate? She's devoted one full hour!

What this all comes down to is your priorities should be the employer's priorities. The employer does not care about you; she cares about herself. "What can you do for me?" is the question the employer wants answered immediately in both the cover letter and resume. If you are able to get the answer to that question across to the employer in seconds, you should get the interview. And since the employer is willing to spend hours on the interview process, you should do the same.

Remember, it's all about the employer, not you!