

The Two Golden Rules of Job Hunting

To conduct a successful job search it is essential that you get two things right. You need to find the right jobs to apply to and you need to sell yourself strongly. It sounds obvious doesn't it? But it is astonishing how many people overlook one or both of these principles. They either apply for jobs that they stand little chance of getting, or don't really want, or they fail to communicate their strengths effectively. Sometimes they do both.

We call these two principles *targeting* and *presentation*. Let's look in more detail at each:

Targeting

A client recently told us that he had applied for a job for which he knew he did not have the experience but which he hoped he would get. He knew he could do the job and he was pretty confident that the company to which he was applying would take him on once they had seen his CV and understood what his potential was.

Needless to say he did not get the job. He probably could have done it perfectly well. But he did not take into account the fact that employers do not recruit people who *could* do the job. They recruit people who can prove that they have done the job, or at a pinch those who demonstrate through their achievements and knowledge that even though they have never done the job, they *can* do it.

Unless you want to waste a lot of time sending off job applications for unsuitable roles, it is essential that you target the right jobs. This means finding jobs that you are not only qualified for, but which you have a reasonable chance of landing.

For example, you may see a job advertised in a national paper which is exactly what you are looking for. You know you can do the job and you have all the right experience and qualifications. But you can also be pretty sure that there will be scores, if not hundreds of applicants for the position, because it was advertised so prominently. Many of those applicants will have similar experience to yours. So your chances of landing the job, even though you are well qualified for it, are pretty slim.

How much better then to use a technique like networking, or carefully researched speculative approaches, to target jobs that have not been advertised, either because the employer feels they can recruit without spending the money, or because you have got in before the advert was placed? 50-70% of people get their jobs through word of mouth, or direct approaches to companies, compared to around 20% who land jobs through adverts. So the figures support the claim that careful targeting works.

An important element in targeting the right jobs is making sure that you carry out good research. In order to target well you need to know what companies are out there, and what you offer that they need. Whichever industry or sector you are seeking to work in, whether a private company, public body or voluntary organisation, you need to know who the decision makers are, what is happening in their business or activity at the moment, what weaknesses they have which you will be able to strengthen and who you should be talking to. Armed with this information you can identify the companies that are most likely to respond positively to your experience, and have successful conversations with them.

Targeting is also important when you approach recruitment consultancies. Most recruiters specialise in particular industries or job types, so make sure that you are talking to recruiters who operate in your field. Be very clear when talking to recruiters about what sort of job you are looking for. Don't expect a recruiter to suggest to you what you would be good at; that is not their job. If they have a position that matches your track record they will consider putting you forward. If they can't help you they will tell you. But unless you make your target positions clear to them you run the risk either that they will put you forward for jobs you don't want, or that they will overlook jobs for which you are suitable.

Presentation

It goes without saying that your job applications need to sell you well. But what does this mean in practice?

Getting a job is a marketing exercise; it is no different to any other. Think of it in exactly the same way as you would think about bringing a new product or service onto the market. You need to know what the new service offers, and where the market is for it. The only difference is that the service is you and the market is those organisations who could potentially be interested in obtaining your services.

So, in order to sell yourself well, whether in writing through your CV, letters and e-mails, or verbally, through your conversations and at interview, you need to deliver the messages that your market expects to hear, and you need to demonstrate why, out of all the candidates in the market, you are the best.

Most recruitment these days is competency based. This means that the company which is recruiting defines the competencies, or skills, that it wants the successful candidate to have. You will be expected to demonstrate in your application, or networking meetings, that you do indeed have those competencies.

For example, an old fashioned CV sets out the jobs you have done and describes your duties and responsibilities. A modern CV does not mention your responsibilities or what you should have done- after all the fact that it was in your job description does not mean that you did it well. Instead a competency based CV lists out your achievements, the things that you have done during the course of your career which demonstrate what you are capable of, and which prove that you have the right competencies for the job.

A common mistake made by many people, both on their CV and when they are talking about themselves, is to make claims about themselves that are both too general and not supported by evidence. Claims like "I am a hard working, enthusiastic, dynamic professional." You might well be. But what is that really telling the employer? Would they even look at your application if they didn't think you were hard working and dynamic. And can you back your claims up by evidence, or are they just the product of your imagination?

The job market at the moment is pretty tough. But people are getting jobs and you can be one of them. By observing the two golden rules of job hunting, you will be astonished just how much easier you can make things for yourself.