

How to Stand out When Applying for a Job

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by *Miriam Salpeter*

If you want to be in the top 20 percent of job applicants who get noticed and win interviews, you should be thinking about how to incorporate sales secrets into your job search strategy. John Kalusa is a nationally recognized writer who speaks about corporate sales, recruiting, and personal career management. With over 25 years of experience as a strategic recruiting, human resources, and sales and marketing management leader in start-ups and Fortune 250 companies, he's well qualified to comment on what the hiring manager wants to see.

"80 percent of candidates don't have a real chance of landing an interview because they don't do anything to set themselves apart from the crowd," says Kalusa. "After reviewing thousands of resumes and conducting nearly as many interviews, I'm amazed at how many people take an unfocused approach and send the same tired resume to every posting."

Kalusa reminds job seekers to identify their best, most unique qualities and to hone in on how they can solve the employer's problems. Do you need an incentive to make the extra effort to stand out? "Even though some statistics suggest there are 4.5 applicants per job, my own experience and that of my colleagues suggests the actual average is closer to 50-60 applicants per position, with some climbing into the hundreds," he says.

A forward-thinking job seeker needs to think like a sales person. Just as a company trains its sales and marketing people to identify and qualify prospects in order to argue why their company or product is the best suited to solve problems, "job candidates should view postings as a public bid for services and develop and execute their interview strategies like a sales process," he says.

Kalusa refers to this thinking as the "company of 1" approach, which he uses to coach job seekers. "I advise job seekers to think about the customer--the potential employer. Companies aren't in business to hire people. They are in business to provide value to their customer and seek to find people with the talent, skills, and motivation they can leverage to provide that value," he says.

One important part of selling yourself as a "company of 1" is knowing how to research your target organizations. "I'm constantly amazed at how little candidates (at all levels) actually know about the companies they are applying to when they sit down for an interview. Instead of being really prepared, they can only offer a snapshot of what they learned by visiting the company website. It's usually about a three-second quote, in the form of: "I know that _____ is in the _____ industry and makes/provides _____ to its customers," he says.

This sometimes comes across as: "I learned just enough to know that you are still in business, but other than that I didn't think enough of the opportunity to see if my experiences were really a fit, because I was just focused really on what was in it for me."

Whether you are applying for a position on the front line in a manufacturing facility or as the chief operating officer in the front office, Kalusa advises taking the following steps to set yourself apart:

Read about the company and the industry. Nearly everyone who applies will know something about the company. Go a step further and find out the details about the company and about the industry. Ask yourself what challenges the company is facing, and, more importantly, how will the role you are applying for affect those challenges or provide value?

You might be asking, "Why does it matter?" For example, if you know the company is in warehousing, and they have a reputation for having the best and most sophisticated distribution systems, think about the things that are probably important to them. Perhaps it is speed, reliability, and accuracy? During the interview, because you know a little bit more than the next guy, you could talk about your proven ability to get the job done and done right, or talk about your reliability or the different types of distribution systems you've used and how it will be easy for you to learn theirs.

Take a peek inside. Just like companies check their prospective customers out to make sure they are financially stable and not "hard cases with an attitude," so should you. If they are a public company, read about their finances and see how their stock is doing. Or go to [Glassdoor](#) and see if there are any postings from current or former employees. Do they talk about the company being a hard place to work or a collaborative environment where employees are valued? Do people feel like "cogs in the wheel," or do they feel like their contributions matter? Check out Twitter and Facebook, and see if they have a presence. What's being said? What's not being said? Are there articles about the company and their community involvement? Articles about less than positive activities? Better to know, so you can say no.

Find out who's who in the zoo. Go to their company website to learn about the top people. Follow up by visiting LinkedIn to investigate them and anyone else at the company. For most professionals, LinkedIn has become the de facto standard for posting a professional profile. You may be able to find valuable common connections or common professional or social interests of the people who will be interviewing or working with you. You may learn where they went to school and what books they are reading. You can also find and check industry or professional groups that they belong to, and see if there is any useful or interesting information available for you there.

Do your due diligence to stand out in a crowd, because it is a very big crowd. You'll likely be rewarded with interview opportunities.

Miriam Salpeter is a job search and social media consultant, career coach, author, speaker, resume writer and owner of Keppie Careers.