

Surviving a Challenging Job Market or “Scaling the job selection pyramid”

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Summary

It's tough out there! During a recent recruitment campaign one of my clients received over 30 applicants for a PV Associate role, with every candidate having some degree of relevant experience. At the end of the process it was down to just two people vying for the position which says it all about how fierce the competition is nowadays!

The aim of this article is to help you improve your chances of succeeding at every stage of the application process. View the process as a pyramid, 30 good applicants at the bottom, with the successful candidate coming out at the top. And with so many good candidates, employers are looking for reasons to exclude you just as much as to consider you. So these tips are not a guarantee to success of course, but they will certainly help you to avoid any common mistakes and ultimately give you a chance of reaching the top of the pyramid!

The CV

The first stage is to ensure that you have a clear and concise CV which portrays the image you want potential employers to have of you. Therefore, proof read your CV and use spelling and grammar checks as you want to come across as having a keen eye for detail and strong written communication skills.

You should also ask yourself, “Does this sell my skills and experience to the potential employer in the right way”? For example, most individuals in PV process cases and most Medical Information professionals answer enquiries. Think about any achievements in your current role. Have you been involved in or coordinated any particular projects within your team? Is there any specialist training you have undertaken that would give you an advantage?

You want the potential employer to come away with a clear idea of your main Unique Selling Points (USPs) or

competencies, so take time to draw up a list of these and make sure they stand out to the person reading your CV. Avoid generic and long winded personal profiles, it is better to target these for the specific role you are going for as it shows more focus. Avoid using any funny or quirky email addresses; every part of your CV needs to remain professional including your contact details!

Communication with Agencies/Hirers

Regardless of whether you are going through an agency or making a direct application, your initial contact with Recruitment Consultants or HR staff could make all the difference. The market is tough, no question, there are some experienced people out there who have been out of work for a while now. The tendency is to get impatient with HR/consultants but they can exclude you from the process so it is important to always portray a positive and patient attitude.

Make sure you are targeted with your applications and apply for roles you feel are certainly within your remit; it is no good applying for positions which you know requires more experience. If anything it reduces your credibility in the eyes of potential hirers and duplicate applications also give a negative impression; sometimes this is not necessarily the fault of the applicant! Make sure consultants understand that they need to come to you first before sending your application to a client and then make a running list of those

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companies so you know for future reference.

If feasible, make the effort to meet with the people who are going to be representing you. There are many factors behind getting a job offer and "team fit" is certainly one of them. After an initial interview, a good consultant should be able to suggest a client where the personalities in the team match yours. Personally, the people I meet with are the individuals I feel more confident about representing to my clients.

Professional Media

Professional networking sites are all the rage at the moment, with more and more using sites such as Linked In to boost our profiles. Just like your CV, it is important that your internet profile gives potential employers the right impression about you. Having a professional photo, getting recommendations from former colleagues, making valid contributions to discussions within groups are all important factors.

It also pays to be mindful of content and avoid posting anything you would not want potential or current employers to see. This also goes for non-professional networking sites such as Facebook so make sure your security settings are water tight or avoid any controversial photos or postings.

The Interview

Finally, this is your moment to shine! Make the most of this opportunity to showcase your skills, experience and professionalism. Make sure you research the company beforehand, it is better to over prepare than under prepare. Understand what you are looking for and what drew you to the role, which helps to ensure you come across as having the right focus.

You must concentrate on your main competencies and USPs again as mentioned earlier in this article. The majority of interviews will involve a series of competency based questions which are founded on the idea that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. This allows all candidates an equal opportunity to present their past experiences in line with the criteria for the position being sought. Different companies look for different competencies when they recruit for their positions; refer back to the job description to remind you of

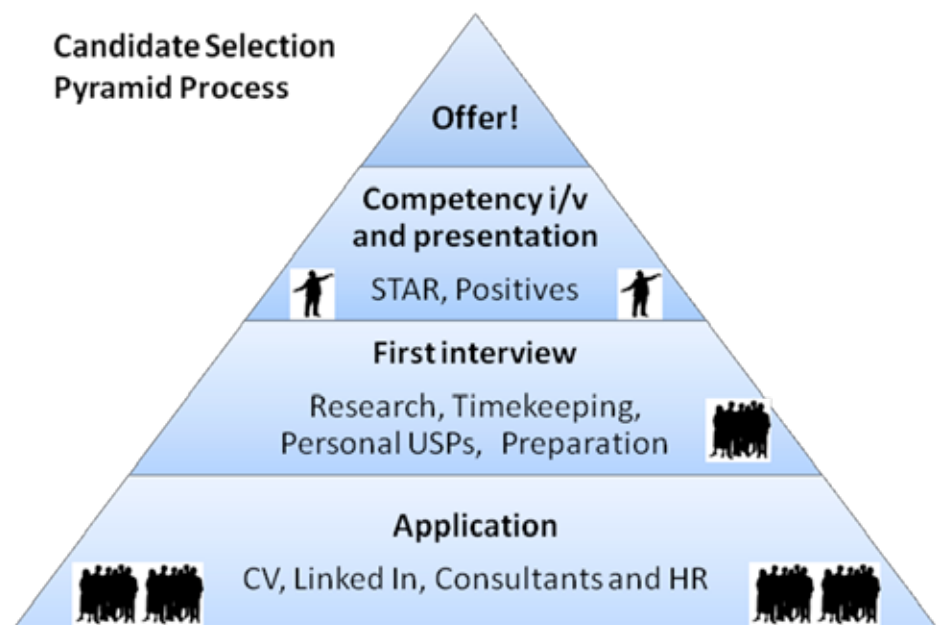
which competencies are required for that specific job.

The most popular technique to keep in mind is one often called the STAR method. This is the Situation or Task that you have encountered, the Actions you took in light of that situation and the Results of your actions. To prepare, identify two job related examples which will demonstrate that you possess the particular competency the interviewer is looking for. Listen carefully to the question to understand what competencies the interviewer wants to explore, try to avoid making vague statements and always provide concrete examples.

Conclusion

It is important to assess your performance after each interview. Think to yourself, "Could I have done anything differently or better"? If you are unsuccessful then take the criticism on board instead of being defeatist. Use it as a tool to better yourself in the future and learning from your mistakes will make sure you get it right over time.

For further information or to discuss any of the points raised in this article, please feel free to contact Christian Simon at christian.simon@axess.co.uk



Time keeping is very important during this process, don't be late, make sure you plan your journey in advance and take into consideration traffic, train delays etc. When the market is tight and the competition is strong, it would be a shame that you fall down due to something like this which is completely avoidable. Present yourself professionally, make sure you are dressed for the occasion which gives the impression that you care about the job and respect the company. You may be asked to prepare a presentation; this has been the Achilles heel for many candidates I have worked with in the past. Small details like sitting down during your presentation or not maintaining eye contact can all be deciding factors when interviewers are faced with candidates who are equally as strong as each other.