

10 Ways to Score a Job Offer

By Rachel Zupke, CareerBuilder.com writer

Job seekers are continually bombarded with advice when it comes to landing a job. "Get an internship!" says one expert. "Network, network, network!" says another. "Research the company!" "Ask questions!" "Follow up!"

No one has a problem telling applicants to do this or that – but no one tells job hunters what they really need to know: what employers are looking for in a candidate.

Most job seekers assume companies are looking for the contender with the best education, the most experience and a well-written cover letter. They think their résumé will speak for itself, says Dave Sanford, executive vice president of client services for Winter, Wyman, a staffing firm. While these things are important, none of them is at the top of an employer's list.

Fit, above all else, is what piques (and keeps) an employer's interest, Sanford says.

"It's not strictly within the position, as many candidates have sufficient technical skills to perform within the job. Rather, fit within the corporate culture and within the business as a whole," Sanford says. "Those 'soft' interpersonal skills are very important."

Employers are also looking for a skill set match, says Jack Manning, president of Manning Associates, an executive recruiting firm. "Candidates should expect to be asked pointed questions concerning their skills and their applicability to the position being interviewed for."

The biggest setback job seekers face is not articulating exactly what they bring to the table, Sanford says. They can't clearly express their value and what sets them apart from other candidates. If the job seeker doesn't seem interested, or there's no "spark," many times the candidate won't be offered the job.

Now that you know what employers are looking for when you interview and what's been holding you back this far, here are 10 ways to score a job offer, according to our experts.

1. Sell yourself

You've worked hard in school and in your career; don't be afraid to share your accomplishments. A great way to sell yourself is in your cover letter, says Kevin Donlin, creator of TheSimpleJobSearch.com. Include a "P.S." at the end of your cover letter, Donlin suggests. Why? The "P.S." always gets read. The trick is including one so intriguing, employers won't have any choice but to call you to learn more.

2. Have a goal before you apply

"Always have a clear job search goal in mind, preferably, a specific job title at a specific company," Donlin says. "Embarking on your search without a specific destination is like going to the airport without a ticket, walking up to the gate agent and saying, 'I'd like to take a vacation, please.' You won't get far that way."

3. Put a figure to it

Figure out how much you're worth by looking into salary resources like CBSalary.com, Sanford says. You'll be able to negotiate pay, benefits and other perks much better if you know what others in your field earn.

4. Prove the claims in your résumé

Testimonials are incredibly effective sales tools, Donlin says. In your résumé, include two or three brief quotes from clients or managers. For extra credibility, include the year each comment was made – the more recent, the better.

5. Know the company

With all the information available on the Internet today, no job seeker should go into an interview without a thorough understanding of the company, Manning says. If you know nothing, it will show in the interview.

6. Give employers a reason to hire you

When you follow up after the interview, include something that shows the employer how great you are for the job, Donlin says. For example, one of Donlin's clients researched the company's Web site and found a press release announcing the hiring of a new employee for the same job she wanted. His client wrote a letter referencing the release, pointing out the ways in which she was similar to the type of person they had hired before. Not only did it keep her name fresh in the employers' minds, it was another reason to hire her.

7. Be prepared

Bring a résumé and a list of references, Manning says. Be early, be bright, be professionally aggressive and thankful for the interview.

8. Think for the employer

Never assume the employer will know what job is best suited for you, the specific value of what you've done before or how much salary you're worth, Donlin says. You have to figure that out for them.

9. Use an angle

"If the company is a competitor to a company you worked for, try to get an insider to recommend you to the hiring manager," Manning says. If you know someone there, use your knowledge to open a door. Having someone else champion your candidacy is the hook that is needed to get you the job.

10. Plan for a disaster

If you're prepared for disaster – such as a job loss – you're in a much better position to get a new job quickly, Sanford says. Make sure your résumé is up-to-date and that you can reach your network of contacts as soon as possible. Then, have a draft of speaking points that outline your accomplishments and the kind of opportunity for which you're in the market.

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