I didn't hire you for a reason

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If only bosses could talk!

We'd be able to find out why it was that we didn't get the call back, didn't get the interview, didn't get that sweet job we thought we were just perfect for. There must be a reason, right?

One of the biggest frustrations of the modern job hunt is "the black hole" — that super-gravitational mass that sucks in resumes and applications and emits no feedback, no light, no rhyme or reason.

So this week and next week, I'm going to let the boss "talk." I'll be doing an interview with a hypothetical, that is, imaginary, hiring manager, and sharing with you all the "reasons why" the boss didn't hire you. And then two weeks from now, I'll follow up with practical advice as to what you can do about it.

This week we'll focus our "interview" on those things you can control: your resume, your interview, and your application. And then next week, we'll look at those things that are out of your control, and what that means for you ...

So taking those things you can control as to why that boss didn't hire you, let's get started with our interview with a hypothetical hiring manager — we'll call her Betty Boss ...

Me: Betty, thanks for taking the time to talk with us.

Betty Boss: You're quite welcome.

Me: Now, you joined an American Fortune 500 company in the UK, eventually rose to lead that division, and then transferred here to run the same group stateside about seven years ago, is that correct?

Betty: Yes, indeed.

Me: What did you think of the soccer match Saturday night? As the Spokesman reported: "America wins 1-1".

Betty: Please, call it by its proper name — it's football — and the outcome of the match was quite a disappointment to all English fans. Now, I'm very busy and I have to get the revised budget done for Q3, so I hope you'll understand that I have to be brief.

Me: Sure, sure, totally understand, Betty, sorry about that. You must be very pressed for time.

Betty: Excellent. First question?

Me: OK, Betty, you say you didn't hire this candidate "for a reason." If that candidate was sitting here today, what would you tell him or her that reason was?

Betty: Well, the most important thing is, **I never saw your resume**.

If your resume never made it past the HR admin that screens resumes, or never gets selected by the computer technology to be show n to me, I obviously can't hire you.

What candidates in 2010 have to realize is that they need to write their resume for four audiences: the Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) that most corporations, including ours, use to manage their recruiting process, the HR admin that sorts through the piles of resumes and selects a couple dozen to show, the recruiter or HR person that reviews and presents the resumes to me, and, then, of course, me.

Writing one resume that meets these four needs is a challenge, but it can be learned, or you can hire a professional to do it for you.

But if for any reason at any point in that four-stage process, your resume is not selected or reviewed, I obviously will not be hiring you.

Me: Thanks Betty, what's another reason you might not have hired a candidate?

Betty: I think this should also be obvious to people, but it's not: **I didn't understand why you were applying for my job**.

It's rather easy in the internet era to hit "apply" and submit your credentials, but far too often, I have no idea why you think you'd be a good fit. If the job lists "CPA a must" and you don't have a CPA, or the job description makes it clear that it's a sales manager role, and you've only been an individual contributor, why are you wasting my time and yours?

Those are the obvious ones, but let's take it a bit further, shall we? The Great Recession has caused many, many great people to come onto the market. It's also caused them to think about "expanding their horizons" and switching to a different field or industry.

If it is not **crystal clear** to me as to why you want to fill the role for which I'm hiring, I'm not going to select your resume; I'll select one of the outstanding people currently available who fit the bill exactly.

I'd be open to hiring someone who doesn't have the exact experience or background I'd envisioned for the role, but I need to see some evidence that they've thought through the transition and have already taken steps to become the person who deserves the job — they've taken classes, attended conferences, added additional responsibilities in their present position, etc.

If you're asking me to take a flyer on you, I'll do that sometimes, but you have to earn that right and show that you're worthy of it.

Me: Thanks, Betty, I don't think a lot of people think of it that way. What's another reason?

Betty: **Your resume didn't grab me**.

Most of my jobs these days get dozens, or even hundreds, of applications. One of the reasons I post my jobs on TheLadders is that I don't see a lot of the nonsense applicants that I'd get if I posted it elsewhere.

On average, a job that I post (or anyone else posts) with TheLadders gets 21 applications.

But that's still almost two dozen candidates, and I'm only hiring one person for the job.

The typical hiring manager wants to interview six candidates to make a hire, and I'm no different. So your resume needs to stand out to grab my attention.

I can't tell you how many resumes I see that say really daft things like "Hired to be Vice President, Western Region" or "Responsible for a $17 mm budget." I have news for your candidates, Marc: everybody gets hired for some job, and everybody manages a budget!

I don't want to know that you have a pulse and you collected a paycheck for a pretty title. What I want to know is this: what did you **do** in that role and what did you accomplish? And **how** did you manage that budget more wisely, more cleverly, or more thriftily than anybody else I am considering for my job?

So if your resume doesn't tell me those things and grab my attention, I'm not going to be able to guess and frankly, I'm just not going to be that interested.

Me: But Betty, not too many people are accomplished writers, and it sounds like you're judging them based on the packaging rather than what's inside.

Betty: Business isn't about being fair. It's about getting the best results possible given the time and resource constraints that we all face. And it's no surprise that in a modern economy, how you package, present, and sell any product — whether it's ice cream, enterprise software, or yourself — makes a big difference in how well that product is received by its target audience, whether that's the consumer, a corporate purchaser, or a hiring manager like me.

Now my time is running out here and I've got a meeting in five minutes with the CEO, so can we please move things along?

Me: You're a tough cookie, Betty, but sure, sure. Can you tell me why you didn't hire this other candidate because of their interview?

Betty: Well, I do have to admit it was an agreeable interview, the candidate was rather pleasant and professional, and we had a nice chat. But that's the problem: **the interview was a nice chat**.

We covered the fact that we both moved here from someplace else, the candidates' interest in camping and hiking, we discussed the amazing phenomenon that is the iPad, and we talked about the challenges we both face in raising teenagers. So we had a really enjoyable time together.

But the candidate never got around to making the case as to why I should hire them to fill this position.

You know, I'm obviously busy, and I obviously have a need for somebody to do this work for me, and I obviously have a lot of other candidates with whom I'm speaking. So why didn't this applicant persuade me in our face-to-face interview as to their ability to make a unique contribution, or produce a more effective end-result, for me and for this business in the role?

It was a wasted opportunity to convince me of his ability to make me look smart for hiring him.

Me: That's interesting, which ...

Betty: Which leads me to my next pet peeve with candidates, if I may be perfectly candid with you. Even if we've had a nice interview, **you never said you wanted this job**.

I understand that you're at a stage in your career where you're looking to branch out from the narrow box which you've been in before. And you shared with me the wide variety of opportunities you're reviewing. Some of them involve changing your industry, changing your function, or even moving across country.

I didn't hire you for my job because I couldn't tell why you were interviewing for it — was it for fun, out of a curious interest, or because you actually really wanted this job? I'm glad you're considering starting a consulting practice with some former colleagues, and it is certainly intriguing that you're considering joining that hot new startup that made the cover of BusinessWeek last week, but it didn't really convince me that you were interested in, and excited about, this job.

And I know how much hard work is ahead in this role. It's going to be a real grind for the next couple years, and I need somebody who is going to be enthralled with, appreciate, and make a big success out of this role. So compared to other applicants for whom this is a perfect job, your motivation and your ambition didn't set you apart.

Now, if you don't mind, I'll need to be going off to my meeting, so ...

Me: Aww, Betty, how about just one more?

Betty: No, really, I'm afraid ...

Me: Betty, c'mon, these are the top professionals in the United States you're speaking with, how about just one more?

Betty: Well ... [scowling] ... OK, just one more.

I didn't hire you because **I heard back from somebody else first**.

Your audience should know that getting headcount approved these days is a nightmare. And because budgets have been squeezed all through the recession, fighting for a particular role to be opened is a real battle, and by the time you win, it's already two months past what you had in the budget. So once I get a job open, I need people fast. So your resume and application were fine, and the interview went quite well, actually, and I was interested in proceeding.

But then we got to the part where we were interested in discussing an offer and you slowed to a snail's pace in your responsiveness, while another candidate didn't.

He networked his way in, had two of my colleagues call me, and followed up with a gracious, but deadly effective, thank-you note. He also returned my HR person's calls the same day so we were able to move much more quickly with him.

I heard from you that you had a couple other interesting opportunities that you were certain were going to

come through, and that's why you slowed things down here. It's entirely understandable.

But you have to understand that I have a business to run, and the gentleman who seemed more enthusiastic and did more legwork while you were hoping to land your dream job is the gentleman who is now employed here.

So whilst I know it's disappointing for you that this opportunity has passed you by, and now you're calling hoping to get momentum going again, I'm afraid it's too late for you for this job.

And speaking of too late, I find myself in similar circumstances. I'll really need to get going, so thank you very much.

Me: Well, thank you very much, Betty, for sharing your insights.

Well, folks, that's a composite look at why hiring managers "didn't hire you for a reason." Next week, we'll look at the things that are out of your control, and then two weeks from now, I'll tell you what to do about it!

So have great week, Readers, and remember: "Go USA!"

http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2010/jun/13/us-wins-1-1/
Warmest regards,



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