

Candidates Who Do Homework Get Jobs

Source: Knight Ridder Newspapers

For the serious job seeker, doing homework on a company before you go into an interview isn't optional. It's a necessary part of positioning yourself to get the job.

"We don't want just a warm body. We don't want someone who's here just to get a check," said Bea Ludwig, human-resource coordinator for Kaiser Permanente. "Why would we hire someone to provide care to patients if they don't even care enough to do some research before coming in to talk me?"

Ludwig suggests some ways to do homework:

- Visit the company's Web site.
- Check out the library.
- Network. Ask your friends whether they know anyone who works there.
- Call the human-resources department to request benefit or recruiting brochures.

The amount or type of information you know isn't even the top priority, Ludwig said.

"It's just impressive if their knowledge of something about the company shows why they want to be here. If they say 'I believe in this company because I know you're involved in these charities,' then fine. The motivation is often different, but it's good to know that something about us is important to them.

John Rice, personnel relations Burns & McDonnell International, recruits professionals such as architects, engineers, and scientists.

"Part of initiative is doing homework. And when you're hiring, you're looking for one who has some initiative," Rice said.

"You're also looking for a certain level of confidence. Having done your homework builds confidence and reduces the fear of the interview."

In a similar vein, well-researched interviews also tend to be more "in a selling mode," Rice said. "I had one say 'I know Joe. He worked with you on the Kansas City airport.' To me, that's just a little tidbit, but a tidbit that shows he's interested. And that helps sell him."

According to Alana Estes, senior recruiter at Sprint, the potential employees doing research "the smart way" are those who use a three-pronged approach. "They know not only about the company and the job, but also the industry. Showing me you're interested

in my industry and able to converse intelligently about it produces a better candidate for me."

Estes adds two suggestions to the homework list:

- Contact college placement offices.
- Read the newspaper for company industry information.

Estes, one of about 25 Sprint recruiters in the Kansas City area, also recommends not being shy about calling the company to have information sent to you.

If you're still having trouble getting past the embarrassment of placing such a call, remember you always have the option of remaining anonymous, said Anne Ramey human-resources representative at Gear Sports.

"It's hard to find stuff on us since we're a private company, and we don't send stuff out for the same reason," Ramey said. "But we're glad to answer questions without making you tell us your name.

Another point to remember is that preparation starts with the cover letter. "If a person says they've seen the research we're doing and they want to be a part of that, or they share some other knowledge they have about us, I'm inclined to put that at the top of my pile," said Valerie Bani-Nasur, employment coordinator for the University of Kansas Medical Center.

"Those who've done some serious research weigh really heavy," Bani-Nasur said. "I'd be amazed if someone had no clues as to what do here, but if they've taken the time to really check things out, then that's impressive."

Recently, Jeff Rogers, a NationsBank assistant vice president and personnel marketer, interviewed several people for the same position. When it came time to make an offer, a review showed three candidates had near identical educational backgrounds and experience.

"One rose above the others because of knowledge he already had of the job," Rogers said. "That was the one who got it."

If you've answered a lot of classified ads jobs lately, part of your homework should include keeping a spiral notebook with notes about the job description, company name and the date you sent a resume or application, said Ludwig of Kaiser Permanente. That kind of preparation can help you avoid asking Ludwig's favorite question from the ill-prepared:

"Now, what's this job?"

