

When an outstanding resume isn't enough

Tom Hannemann



Many people think that a powerful, well written resume is sufficient to give them the edge needed to secure a job interview. While an outstanding resume is absolutely necessary, it may not always be enough. Consider which of the following factors apply to you in determining whether you will be amongst the chosen few.

Your fit with the job and organisation

No matter how "good" your resume is, if you don't match the requirements of the jobs for which you are applying, you won't get an interview. If employers or recruitment consultants are looking for certain attributes, skills, expertise and types of experience which you don't have to the required level, it does not matter how good your resume is. A resume is a tool that enables an employer to link your experience and skills to the requirements of the job. There is no point complaining that you can do the job and that your skills and expertise are transferable: if you don't have what they are seeking, the result is obvious. You might have experience in an industry different to the employer's which you think you can transfer to the employer's industry. While this might be true, if there are already 20 good quality applicants who do have experience in the employer's industry and you don't, and it was your money you were investing in the person's salary, who would you select?



The level of competition in your industry or sector

Even though the demand for executives and professionals in certain industries has increased dramatically in recent times, competition for the best positions in high calibre organisations is still as intense as ever. The number of employers in almost every industry or sector will continue to shrink as a result of industry shake-ups and consolidations, mergers and acquisitions, corporate collapses, international or multi-national companies closing or downsizing their Australian operations, companies outsourcing or contracting out many non-core or even core activities to lower cost offshore suppliers, the impact of technologies on the requirement for people, cost cutting measures and so on. Therefore, expect intense competition for the best jobs in the best companies. If you are finding the competition too intense, a solution favoured by those willing to leave their egos out of the equation is to identify niches, sectors, organisations or roles where you have a distinct competitive advantage and where the competition is less intense. The fun of bashing your head against the wall soon diminishes. Seeking to work for a high profile, blue chip organisation without a strong competitive advantage is a recipe for frustration and disenchantment.



The conservatism of many large employers

Employers tend to favour candidates with experience within their industry or arena. Many employers who had previously been convinced to take on employees from outside their industry only to find out that these employees lacked sufficient industry know-how and expertise have taken the safer route of employing people with specific industry experience. We frequently hear the argument that employers should be prepared to take people on the basis of their more enduring and transferable qualities and attributes. However, it's not an argument that finds

favour amongst many employers. In addition, recruitment consultants are reluctant to forward applications from candidates outside their clients' industries because they will inevitably receive a terse reaction such as: "Why did you send me someone who is clueless about my industry. I can't afford to give them six months to get up to speed. They have to hit the ground running." If you want to move into a different industry, there are two partial solutions. First, patiently seek out employers who have a reputation for employing people with qualities and attributes not linked to industry experience. Second, explicitly demonstrate how your skills and experience can be an advantage in a different industry or sector.

The bias of many employers against people from other countries

Even if you have experience in the same industry or sector as the employer, if that experience is from another country, expect the employer to prefer people with local experience. Of course, the logic from the candidates' perspective is whether the experience has been gained in the US or the UK or India or Indonesia or Iceland should not matter. If you pursue that argument, many employers will tell you that there is no way you can possibly be as productive as quickly as a local who understands the idiosyncrasies of the industry, market and culture and the way business is conducted. Whether you think it's fair or not, it's what happens to many overseas candidates. Compared to a local, overseas job seekers can expect to wait 2 – 4 or more times as long to get a job as a local and might have only 20% as many interviews for the same types of jobs as locals. Of course, if you do strike an organisation which has managers from your country in influential or decision making positions, you will be better off. There are also employers who are more enlightened. Potential solutions are to identify employers with people from your country in decision making positions, make sure you have sufficient funds to mount an extended campaign, work for free to get local experience or identify employers where experience in your home country could be an advantage.



Applying below or above your "level"

Many people are surprised that they don't get interviews for jobs they could do blind folded with one hand tied behind their backs, standing on their heads. We are not sure why they are surprised that employers favour employees who are more likely to stick around, see the job as a forward career move and will be challenged by the opportunity. Employers think that people who apply for jobs 2 – 3 or more levels below their most recent position will want to leave as soon as something better comes along. Why do they think that? Because that's what often happens. It's very difficult for someone who has been a Director of Finance in a \$500m corporate for the past 5 years to convince an employer they would be willing to take a job as an Assistant Accountant in a \$5m business. In addition, there is always the totally irrational and unreasonable fear that they might want "my" job!

Of course, it is obvious that if you apply for a job above your current level in a different employer, you are less likely to get interviews because you are likely to be competing with people who have already been operating at that level for years. Why would an employer consider you if there are a dozen applicants who can demonstrate that they can operate at that level. If you are applying for roles in organisations other than your current employer,



consider applying for positions at around the same level of responsibility, proving yourself in the new organisation and then applying for internal promotions. Although it will take longer to get to the level you want, it may prove to be a more successful strategy than consistently missing out on opportunities because you are up against people who can prove they are capable at that level.

The bias of employers against entrepreneurs

People who want to or need to "get a real job" after running their own business for a decade or more face problems because employers believe that they will not fit into the culture, won't take direction, won't sit still, will want to change things the minute they arrive and will see how

the organisation can be managed much more effectively. Of course, the employers are right! Entrepreneurs and independent business people can make poor employees because they won't be told, can't take direction, have no patience and are always looking to change things. Why do you think they went into business for themselves in the first place? Although not impossible, it is more difficult for someone who has been in the self-employed workforce for many years to get interviews than people who have in the employed workforce. Many employers ask: "If they are so good at running a business, why are they looking for a job with my company? They should be out there making squillions or sitting on the beach with all the money they've made." Potential solutions include identifying organisations who employ former self-employed people in decision making roles, identifying organisations who value independent thinking and entrepreneurial approaches, identifying start-ups and smaller firms who don't want conservative employees, find ways to get a seat on the board of a smaller firm or invest in a business where you can have a substantive impact.

Recruitment consultants who lack imagination

At the risk of alienating colleagues, as a rule, most recruitment consultants do what their clients tell them, do it efficiently and don't deviate from the brief. It's safer that way. Many do not influence the brief. They just accept what their client tells them they should look for. Many recruitment consultants do not see it as their place to advise employers about the type of person who would be best and rarely suggest people who do not fit the typical mould. This is because it isn't their role. It's not what they get paid for. It's much easier to earn a commission by suggesting candidates who meet precisely the requirements and specifications set out by their clients.

Theirs is not to reason why, but to do or not get paid. It's riskier recommending candidates from outside the square. In addition, recruitment consultants generally haven't got much of a clue about analysing an organisation's human resource needs to the level of sophistication required to make meaningful recommendations about the type of person best suited to the role. It's not what they get paid to do and most don't



have the expertise or experience to do it. Many recruitment consultants don't have much management experience, are not qualified in organisation development and are not lateral thinkers. They are typically linear thinkers who prefer logic and are happiest when they can fit a candidate neatly into a box. If you don't fit what they interpret as their client's specifications you don't get into the box. You can argue till you are blue in the face, but it's what typically happens. There are many recruitment consultants who have come unstuck because they recommended candidates from outside the square. Whatever their limitations, recruitment consultants are fast learners about what matters most to them – keeping their clients happy. You therefore have to show them how to present you to their clients in a way that will make them look good.

Tom Hannemann

Executive Resume Specialist, Resume Australia Executive Search & Coaching



Tom Hannemann is one of Australia's foremost Executive Resume Writers & Interview Coaches. He has been helping senior executives, managers and professionals across all industries advance their careers since 1993. Resume Australia is delighted to partner and work with Tom, who leads our Executive Resume Writing Service in Australia and across the globe. He focuses on helping our senior executive candidates develop cutting edge Executive Profiles, CV's and Director Profiles. Tom has over 20 years experience in Human Resources, senior management, business development and senior management consulting roles. He is SEEK's resume writing expert and has worked with one of the world's largest recruitment firms. Tom Hannemann is a specialist in providing career advancement services, with strong business acumen supported by an MBA from Australia's top two business schools. Having reviewed thousands of resumes & interviewed hundreds of candidates, Tom brings his unique experience to the resume writing process and works closely with our clients to develop a resume that secures interviews!