

Making Contact

Once you have decided to make contact with an organization, you must decide how to do it in a way that will make the organization receptive to you. Of the sources of job leads outlined in the previous chapter, unsolicited direct-mail campaigns and answering advertisements present the greatest difficulty, since usually the only introductions one has in those two cases are one's cover letter and résumé. In order to get an interview in which the employer is receptive to you, you must pass through an initial screening process.

Most employers have no more desire to waste their time in the labor market than you do. So they too set up some type of screening process. The key to success is to differentiate yourself from the masses and convince the decision maker that the time taken to interview you probably isn't going to be wasted.

It is not unusual for an organization to receive twenty to fifty inquiries for a job opening. Some jobs will attract hundreds of inquirers. Since simply hiring a single managerial or professional person can cost an organization as much as \$20,000, employers have a strong financial incentive to try to keep costs down. Interviewing everyone who inquires about a job opening can significantly increase costs.

Convincing some decision maker to take the time to interview you is not just an exercise, as many people seem to think, in making yourself look "impressive" in some ill-defined, abstract sense. What is "impressive," like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. The beholder is an employer with particular goals, values, problems, and needs. And here

lies the key not just to getting an initial interview, but to getting job offers.

The more you can put yourself in the position of the potential employer and understand that person's (or those people's) point of view, the more successful you will be in getting job offers. With respect to getting an initial interview, this means that it helps enormously to know something about the potential employer before you make your initial contact. Any person who has gone through the process of creating a rational focus for a job campaign, and who has done the little additional research necessary to screen leads, has probably learned enough about potential employers to make the type of initial contact that gets an interview. It doesn't require hours and hours of additional effort. Since so many job hunters do almost no research, doing just a little can be a real competitive advantage. Then, if you can somehow communicate to those making the screening decision that you may have the potential of meeting *their needs*, you will certainly get the interview.

You should not attempt to do this, of course, if it means ignoring parts of your self-assessment that are central to who you are. Remember that "fit" from both your and the employer's points of view is the essential factor. The point here is that what you say and how you say it will be more effective if you consider carefully the person who will be reading or listening to what you say than if you are concerned only about satisfying some personal needs.

Résumés

Consider, for example, your résumé. Most people, even those with no full-time job experience, could write a several-page résumé if coached. They could elaborate at length on their schooling, their part-time jobs, their hobbies, their health, their job objectives, and so on. Most people don't, of course. Instead, they ask someone what a résumé is supposed to look like, or for a sample résumé, and then semiconsciously select things to put into that format. The end result is seldom a great résumé.

A good résumé is nothing more than a tool that can convince employers you will be able to meet their particular needs, help with their problems, and share enough in common with them to "fit in." Creating a good résumé therefore depends on your understanding of what an employer's needs are, what the problems are, what the values are, and what you can contribute. Since books and volumes of articles have been written on how to prepare and compose résumés, we will not spend much time on the mechanics of this process. Rather, we refer you to the appendix at the end of the chapter. However, we would like to make a few comments with regard to the philosophy behind résumés and then give you a brief exercise to help you translate those philosophical comments into practical applications.

Format

Résumés have two fundamental dimensions—format and content. One might believe that the format of the résumé is unimportant. We have not found that to be the case. One recruiter, looking at a professionally composed and typeset résumé, remarked enthusiastically to the job candidate: "It really is nice to see such a well-done résumé. I could tell from the moment I saw it that you believed in high standards of professionalism in your work. We get so many résumés here that are poorly typed and photocopied or mimeographed, that it really is refreshing and reassuring to get one like this." That recruiter was responding to the format of the résumé he was looking at.

A résumé that looks as if it was typed on a cheap typewriter by a nontypist communicates a number of things about you. It says that you are a sloppy person (and who wants to hire a sloppy person?), or that you really don't care much about getting a job (and

who wants to hire someone who doesn't want to work?), or that you don't really care much about the person you sent the résumé to. It's worth the time and money to *look* professional and interested.

The way your résumé is laid out on a sheet of paper is extremely important in leaving an impression with the person who reads it. We encourage you to experiment with a variety of formats and to choose the one that leaves an impression consistent with who you are and what you are looking for in a corporation. You may have a terrific résumé in substance, but if the format is poor it may leave a poor impression.

There are several aspects to format we would encourage you to keep in mind. The first is the spacing on the page. Résumés with very small margins leave the impression of a great deal of activity. But they also leave the impression of disorganization. Although it is general practice to have résumés limited to one page, crowded margins may undo whatever benefit you may get from increasing the volume. One alternative if you have too much to put on one page is to type it on a longer page with wider margins and have the entire page photoreproduced and then duplicated on an 8 1/2 by 11 sheet.

Another item is the question of parallelism in format. Recruiters read hundreds, perhaps thousands of résumés in the recruiting season. They get in a rhythm as they read, using whatever framework they have personally developed to help them quickly get the pertinent information. Some of this is conscious; some of this is subconscious. Every time a résumé format interrupts or jars that rhythm, the recruiter's impression is also interrupted or jarred. An effective résumé will pique the recruiter's attention at the places *you* want to emphasize and not at unintended or inappropriate places.

A lack of parallel construction is one way to jar or interrupt a recruiter's reading rhythm. Most résumés, for instance, begin paragraphs with a noun describing the previous job title and then the activities that it included in the lines that follow. However, a lot of people under the "Education" sections of their résumés begin those paragraphs with verbs like "Graduated" or "Received." It is our preference to maintain parallel construction by beginning the descriptive paragraphs under each job or educational experience in the same way. If, for example, you wanted to begin each paragraph with a noun, you could begin your educational paragraphs with the word "Graduate" followed by

your degree and the honors and activities associated with your experience there.

Content

Format alone, of course, will not ensure a good impression. Content is also extremely important. A well laid out format that has no substance will not get you very far. As you think about the content of your résumé, keep in mind that résumés are very much like short stories. They are designed to leave a particular impression with the reader in a minimum of space. Because of their brevity, every word or phrase in a short story and a résumé counts. You cannot afford to waste space or words when you are trying to create a favorable impression on one page.

Remember that you are creating an impression. The impression must be an accurate one; it must reflect who you are and what you've done, but it is indeed an impression. The words you choose, the sentences you frame, and the format in which you package this content will create impressions in the minds of the people who read the résumé. Try to create the impression that *you want* to leave; one that accurately reflects the results of your self-assessment.

Perhaps the major feature of the content part of a résumé is the repetition with which patterns or themes appear in the material. A person who writes a résumé that includes a degree in education, teaching in an elementary school, teaching in a secondary school, a masters degree in higher education, and work for an education foundation has created a pattern that sends the signal they have selected a career in education. Applying for jobs in noneducational areas will require some additional impression-creating and selling.

In some cases, students who have not developed a focus in their job search have attempted to list all their activities and in some cases to fluff up or expand their résumés by including activities and memberships that were only marginal experiences. We find this to be more harmful than helpful. If, for instance, in the business educational section of your résumé you list membership in the Management Consultant Club, the General Management Club, the Small Business Club, the International Finance Club, and the Marketing Club, in the belief that the range and diversity of your interests will be an attractive feature to a recruiter, we believe you are mistaken. A person with a focused job search who wants a job in marketing would eliminate the other club activities from the résumé so that the impression left

is that of a person who knows what he or she wants to do. Recruiters in marketing-oriented companies who read the résumé are more likely to be left with the impression that here is a person whose interests seem to match our own.

Another common characteristic of poorly written résumés is that their writers tend to use very general words to describe the activities and responsibilities of each experience or position. A well-written résumé will always contain nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs which pinpoint the job focus that person is trying to create. Again, a person seeking a position in marketing will look for the words that accurately describe his or her activities and experience but that also have immediate and relevant application to careers and positions in marketing.

Summary

The point of what we have been trying to say is that like a short story, a résumé is basically an impression-creating document. When you write your résumé, you should be sensitive to this feature. Be careful with every word you use. Ask yourself if it helps to create the kind of impression you want to leave and if it is relevant to the kind of recruiter who will be reading your résumé. If you are uncertain about the impression that is being left or of how it will be received, leave the word out.

Assignment 1

Consider Kathleen Johnson's résumé (case, p. 300). What impressions does it leave with you? What do you think Kathleen's job search focus is? What inferences can you draw about Kathleen?

Cover Letters

The cover letter is a means of contacting an organization, presenting your résumé and your job focus, and of asking for a response. You may in fact write several different kinds of cover letters if you are deciding to pursue more than one focus in a particular job search. Most people write cover letters with the idea that they must sell themselves to the reader. While this is an important part of the cover letter's purpose, a more effective cover letter is one that also provides the writer with an opportunity to learn from the responses it generates.

RÉSUMÉ OF KATHLEEN JOHNSON

Chase Hall B-11
 Harvard Business School
 Boston, MA 02163
 Phone: (617) 498-0000

Home Address:
 33 Upland Road
 Summit, N.J. 07901
 Phone (201) 273-0000

education
 1978-1980

HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
 Candidate for the degree of Master in Business Administration in June, 1980. General management curriculum with emphasis on marketing and production. Member of Management Consulting, Marketing and Real Estate Clubs.

1977

AMERICAN MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION **NEW YORK, NEW YORK**
 Seminars in sales management.

1969-1973

FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON UNIVERSITY **RUTHERFORD, NEW JERSEY**
 Received Bachelor of Science degree in Experimental Psychology, January 1973. Dean's List. New Jersey Scholar and Travelli Grant recipient. University Administrative Intern, Residential Advisor, and Counselor at a medium security prison. Extracurricular activities in sports and music.

work
experience
 summer
 1979

NEW JERSEY BANK & TRUST **NEWARK, NEW JERSEY**
 Credit Analyst. Analyzed financial position of potential corporate customers and made loan development calls.

1973-1978
 1977-1978

BABBITT PHARMACEUTICAL CORPORATION **WHITE PLAINS, NEW YORK**
 Midwest Regional Sales Manager. Brought region from last to first place with respect to quota attainment while reducing the proportion of selling expense to sales by 25%. Developed and implemented a management by objectives plan and supervised field work for a major test market. Handled all recruitment, conducted sales seminars, trained sales representatives, provided expense budgets, coordinated cooperative advertising programs, and developed key accounts for a 9 state area.

1973-1977

Sales Representative. Sales and service of a vitamin and health care product line to pharmacies. Designated 1975 "Sales Representative of the Year" for highest attainment of quota.

1973

PUBLISHERS GUILD **MORRISTOWN, NEW JERSEY**
 Sales Representative. Personal contact sales of dictionaries and magazines.

other
experience

United States Representative to a Swiss Girl Guide International Conference. Financed college education through various part-time and summer jobs.

references

Personal references available upon request.

This case was prepared by Ellen Porter Honnet, research assistant, under the direction of Assistant Professor James G. Clawson as a basis for class discussion. Copyright © 1980 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Harvard Business School case 9-481-016.

JIM LYDON: COVER LETTER

Dear Mr. _____:

I shall receive an M.B.A. in June 1978 and plan a career in the real estate field with a leading properties firm. My survey of the industry indicates that your firm has established an outstanding record and, therefore, it would be advantageous for me to learn more about the specific opportunities it offers and to discuss with you my objectives and capabilities.

My highest priority is to find a challenging, fulfilling environment in which to learn and work. Pursuant to this objective, I seek a firm which: (1) recognizes the need for professional management of M.B.A. caliber in this rapidly growing field, (2) gives a broad exposure to real estate and discourages overspecialization, (3) operates in an informal structure with close personal relationships among employees, (4) allows new M.B.A.'s to contribute immediately and to assume early responsibilities, and (5) measures performance and allocates compensation and advancement accordingly without regard for seniority. I would like to know more about your firm with respect to these criteria.

The enclosed resume gives you a brief outline of my background but does not deal with relevant personal qualities. I have an entrepreneurial spirit, the ability to coordinate several projects simultaneously with proven results, and a "knack" for working successfully with diverse groups of people eliciting their trust and confidence. I am performance-oriented, mature, willing to travel, able to communicate effectively, and confident that the pattern of success that has characterized my past will lead me to greater achievements in the near future.

Mr. _____, if you feel that my objectives and qualifications may be compatible with your firm's opportunities and needs, please contact me to arrange a meeting that could be to our mutual benefit. I shall hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

James L. Lydon

JLL/lmm

Enclosure

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Assignment 2

Jim Lydon, for example, after going through an extensive self-assessment process, decided to focus his job search on real estate and banking. He signed up for twelve interviews offered by his campus placement office, and in addition decided to write to thirteen banks and twelve real estate firms.

Assume that you are Jim Lydon's roommate and that before sending out his letters, he has asked you to critique his cover letter (see above). What is the paragraph by paragraph structure he has used? How would you respond to Jim? What suggestions would you make? What predictions would you make?

Sources of Information on Developing Job Opportunities

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EXECUTIVE RECRUITING SEARCH FIRMS

These selected sources provide information about executive recruiting search firms, commonly called recruiters or headhunters. They are frequently retained and paid by employers. Their job is to find qualified candidates for specific positions their clients have available. Recruiters do not hire people; they only recommend them to their clients. The two professional associations to which recruiters belong are:

Association of Executive Search Consultants (AESC), 17 Sherwood Place, Greenwich, CT 06830. (203) 661-6606.

Association of Consulting Management Engineers (ACME), 230 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10169. (212) 697-9693

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