



Paul Pompeo

THIS MONTH'S COLUMN is a departure from our usual format and takes the form of a Q&A. Whether you're an employer or a candidate who has a question about the interview process, the job market, hiring trends or recruiters and search firms, I'd like to hear from you. Drop us a line at paul@pompeo.com and your question may be featured in a future column. No names will be used to protect your confidentiality.

"In following up with an employer after an interview, when is too late in the evening to call?"—National Account Manager (lamp manufacturer), Atlanta, GA

Pompeo: The general rule of thumb has always been calling after 9 p.m. is too late for business, though changes in business and technology have made this rule much more complicated. I'll confine this answer to the post-interview process. Ten to 15 years ago, it would not be inappropriate to leave a message for a potential employer after an interview even late into the night on her or his office phone, because it was most assuredly a phone at a corporate (or possibly regional) office. Three things have changed this: the home office, the cell phone and call forwarding. Now, calling a potential employer's "office" number doesn't assure you of reaching his or her office. An office number is now often a home office number; a cell-phone is often worn by your potential employer; and call forwarding now means the call you are placing to your future employer's office can actually have been forwarded anywhere! So a word to the wise: if it's after 9:00 p.m. make the call first thing the following day.

"When I see a posting for a position, it sometimes asks you to send your resume and your desired compensation. Should I put it in my desired salary or not?"—Eastern

Regional Manager (specification fixture manufacturer), New York, NY

Pompeo: No. The old negotiation axiom, "He/she who names the first number loses," certainly applies here. If you name a number too high, you might just get yourself ruled out, never getting a call or an opportunity to be considered for the position. (Compare it to making an unrealistically below-market offer on a house.) If you name a number too low, you've just low-balled yourself...and it's hard, if not impossible, to ever recover from this gaffe in a particular negotiation. So our recommendation is either 1) To omit any compensation (if you're really a fit, a Human Resources professional or hiring manager will rarely not call you just because you haven't listed your income) or 2) List your current income. Sharing your current income is not the same thing as stating what income you are seeking. This strategy is much less likely to have you ruled out than if you throw out a number.

"How do you make sure your resume will float to the top of the corporate 'ivory tower?' How will you not get lost in the shuffle?"—National Accounts Manager, Texas

Pompeo: With a lot of very large companies, getting through to the hiring manager can be very daunting. There is no magic answer and there are too many strategies to go into here. Some general tips, though: the Internet is the obvious way to try and research whom you should speak with. Both through a company website as well as various search engines, you can determine either the hiring manager for your desired position or at least get to the right department (if it is a very large organization). It's better to try and get through live to a person than leaving a message. You may get a call back with a cleverly worded voicemail, but often reaching the person live is the best way to actually make contact.

Similarly, a cleverly worded e-mail can often get the attention of your desired manager. The drawbacks are with the proliferation of spam mail and some elaborate virus-screening system software, your e-mail may be deleted (either manually or through a server's software) before it ever reaches the intended recipient.

Sending your resume to HR is not always the best option in this instance either. Even in the most esteemed HR department, part of their job is to protect the hiring manager(s) from unwanted candidate solicitations, so your resume will be going through an additional filter. That is not to your advantage. Plus, HR will often be screening your resume quite literally to see if it matches up to all (or most) of the job specifications. If you're able to reach the manager in charge of hiring for the position you're interested in, sometimes that direct contact can overcome you not having a letter-for-letter match with the position description. Desire, ambition and chemistry are just some of the things that can't be found when screening a resume, no matter how much time and how sophisticated a company's computer system.

"I don't feel that we are seeing the good up and coming regional guys out there today that were once out there—the ones you'd take note of. I'm wondering what's going on the industry that causes us not to see those types of people."—General Manager (specification lighting manufacturer), Texas

Pompeo: It seems regional managers don't always stay in our industry as long as they might have in the past. I'm noticing more regionals move out of that role than perhaps they did 10 years ago. This can be due to quality of life issues and people not wishing to travel the 50-70 percent often required for a regional manager position. In addition, I regret to say that more sharp regional managers are often recruited completely out of lighting by other industries.

This is a question that might result in a different opinion from every person you ask and more than one person asked this question this month.

“As a recruiter have you seen any decline in hiring due to efficiencies with sales force automation software? I know the economy in the last 48 months may have played a factor, but in your opinion are manufacturers trying to cover more territory with less people because of sales force automation?”—Regional Manager (specification fixture manufacturer), Illinois

A **Pompeo:** I don't know if I've seen a decline in hiring due to efficiencies with sales automation software, but we do see more items packed in the backpack of sales professionals in our industry than every before. With “downsizing,” “rightsizing,” or whatever the current PC term is for eliminating head count, we have seen some of the biggest manufacturers seemingly combining channels and product lines so the breadth of product the sales person is responsible for, as well as the number and variety of channels they are assigned to call on, borders or crosses into the humorous. Or it would be humorous if there wasn't a human being involved trying to actually carry that weight.

The only problem is one individual is assigned to do this, and I have to wonder—other than the obvious savings in bottom line at headquarters—does this method really allow you to capture sales in a market effectively? And how many opportunities slip through the cracks with this? Not only that, the employee dissatisfaction and/or burnout in these types of roles is extremely high, causing a company to keep that person for a shorter period of time before the employee has had enough or is easily attracted to a better, more fulfilling (and less taxing) opportunity with another company.

The search for a new person, the

cost and time of their training and the time it takes in bringing this hire up to a level of productivity of their predecessor could be a good argument for challenging the true effectiveness of dumping too many product lines and market channels onto one individual in a given geographical area.

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