

Is The Résumé Overrated?

BY PAUL POMPEO

My last column (LD+A, April) talked about how a candidate can put together an effective résumé. In this column, I'll discuss the résumé from the hiring manager's perspective. The issues raised apply whether you're a Fortune 500 lighting or electrical manufacturer, a 10-person design firm, a rep agency for a major lighting company or a regional distributor chain.

There is always a danger of relying too much on a résumé when evaluating candidates and choosing whom to interview. Take the search I once conducted for a human resources manager for a major lighting fixture manufacturer. The two main requirements (besides a background in HR management) were experience working for a manufacturer and working in a union environment. We presented about six candidates, all of whom had the requisite background. All except one. This one candidate had a background working in human resources for retail chains but had absolutely no experience working with unions. The company initially balked at us presenting this candidate, thinking an interview would be a waste of time. But guess who eventually got the job?

DIGGING DEEP

While the résumé is certainly important, it doesn't paint a complete picture of a candidate's suitability for a position. Mary Lindenmuth, our recruiting director for Finance, Manufacturing & Supply Chain, says, "If someone has 20 years' experience, it's hard to put that all on one page." Reading between the lines,

you don't want to make assumptions on what candidates truly can do or have done, or what they can't or haven't done. Another factor to consider: Many times résumés are written by someone else. So the very résumé you're impressed with may not have been created by the candidate in question.

What follows are four things hiring managers should look for that may not exactly jump out from the résumé in hand.

Chemistry. One of the most important criteria for a good match between candidate and company is a candidate's personality and potential chemistry—how she would fit in with your company. This is particularly true in the case of sales positions, where good chemistry can play a large part in a successful fit of a new employee on your team.

Sales managers in our industry put much more emphasis on chemistry for sales positions than manufacturing and engineering managers may for technical positions. In those disciplines, the hiring decision is more frequently based on certain skill sets, manufacturing processes, specific software knowledge and other criteria. But chemistry counts here, as well. You can get the brightest 4.0 grad out of a highly regarded school but if he's not the right fit for your organization—let's say non-collaborative or overly arrogant—he can become a cancer that can destroy your department. And if you're a small company—say a 20-person rep agency or design firm—having the right personality that fits in with your existing

team is even more critical.

Relevant Experience. Some candidates will make changes to their résumés based on the position for which they are interviewing. In this age of keyword searches, many savvy candidates have learned to "load" their résumés with all the key words and phrases (e.g., products, customer channels, software knowledge) that your position may require, but their résumés may actually be very misleading as to the depth of their experience in these areas. Remember, on a résumé (as opposed to an interview, where an employer can ask the candidate to expound on points), a person can say anything. With some candidates, the goal is to get the interview and then hope that they can somehow overcome any overstatement in their résumé to get the job.

Intelligence. Conducting a search for a regional vice president for a lighting fixture manufacturer, we presented several candidates. Our client put great weight on someone who had worked for a key competitor. After our client's phone interviews with all the candidates, the only one immediately ruled out was the person from the direct competitor. On paper he looked like a good fit, but after the interview, our client said, "Paul, he wasn't that bright." Remember, just because someone works for your competitor doesn't mean he's a strong candidate. You may just end up hiring their dead wood.

Reasons For Leaving. The reason a candidate gives for leaving a current or past position can be an important element when evaluating whether she is a

fit. A résumé that may look impressive on the surface loses a bit of its luster if, during an interview, you learn that the applicant has been let go more than twice (especially if it's a candidate with a sales management or sales background).

WATCH THE MOVIE

In some ways, a candidate's résumé is a "trailer" for an upcoming movie—a summary of the film to follow. The best trailers are ones that accurately depict the movie they represent. Have you ever seen a great trailer and then later saw the actual film and felt that all of the good elements were contained in the trailer, and the film itself was actually a let down? Or that the trailer emphasized certain elements of the film that gave you quite a different impression of how the actual film turned out? Résumés can be similarly misleading (either accidentally or sometimes deliberately, unfortunately), either positively or negatively.

All too often, companies put more weight on a review of a candidate's résumé than the actual interview; the résumé, though an important initial tool, is not the be-all and end-all. As a recruiting firm, our experience is sometimes the opposite. We interview candidates before we see their résumés much more frequently than most hiring managers.

There's a saying in sports that goes "that's why they play the game." This refers to the fact that the experts are frequently wrong in predicting the outcome of a contest. The team whose statistics are stronger is not always the victor. Another sports cliché—"they don't play the game on paper"—refers to the same thing: You can only base so

much on statistics and background—the human factor is something you won't be able to determine until the game is actually played.

The same lesson holds for hiring managers who may over-rely on résumés. After all, you're hiring a human being, not a piece of paper.



Paul Pompeo is principal with The Pompeo Group, an executive recruiting firm in the lighting and electrical industry working on a global basis with both lighting companies and design firms. He is past president of the IES Rio Grande section. He can be reached at paul@pompeo.com or through the TPG website, www.pompeo.com.