



Paul Pompeo

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS month's Q&A include resumé length and how employers should conduct themselves during the interview process. If you have a question about the job market, hiring trends, the interviewing process, or if you have a topic in mind for a future "Careers & Hiring" column, drop a line to Question@pompeo.com. No names or companies will be used.

"We always have a problem finding good, skilled people. The only good candidates I find are people I've worked with in the past. Sometimes I resort to going to schools and hiring someone I have to train. Do you think it's getting harder to find good people?"—Product Development Manager, Lighting Fixture Manufacturer

Pompeo: Probably so. As the lighting business (like many other industries) continues to grow, so does the demand for talented performers. There are good people out there, but though the lighting industry continues to shrink in some ways (fixture conglomerates in a race to buy up independent lighting manufacturers, for example), these good people do seem harder to find. By "hiring someone you know," you sometimes risk not exposing yourself to other talented individuals who may bring new things to the table. So be creative—if you're a ballast manufacturer, for example, don't always go first to people working for a competitor or with ballast experience. You may end up looking at the same faces and "recycling" people. Take a look at important, but less obvious issues—like people who will fit with the culture of your team and your company.

Also, let's say you're a downlighting manufacturer seeking a national accounts manager; instead of just looking at your direct competitors, look for people who have excellent relationships and sales skills in the exact area of the national accounts channel that you are calling on or targeting.

"I was really amazed at LIGHT-FAIR by the number of changes in staff at lighting companies. I must say I'm a little concerned about our

industry. One of the people I met had lost a major sales management job at a bigger company—one of the biggest. The more I look at it, the more I think there's a problem with the major companies—more profit, more pressure. I hope that is a temporary trend, and I think it is, but what is your opinion?"—Marketing Manager, Independent Specification Fixture Manufacturer

Pompeo: Very astute observation. There does seem to be more pressure to perform in companies these days, but it doesn't pertain just to the lighting and electrical industry. While there does appear to be even more pressure in larger companies, I believe it also has to do with the fact that many public companies have a new team of managers to answer to: their shareholders. And, while employees of public and/or large lighting companies may feel that pressure from bottom to top, those in upper

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(and middle) management often feel the heat more than anyone else.

I doubt that it's a temporary trend, but brighter minds than mine have been unable to predict the future, so we'll just have to watch and see.

"When do you start deleting some of your early work on a resumé? And if something early in your career was so significant, is it reasonable to omit some chronology just to highlight it?"—Applications Engineering Manager, HID Manufacturer

Pompeo: To some degree, the answer depends on the length of your career (and/or number of jobs). If you have over 20 years experience and have worked for several companies, sometimes it can be difficult to summarize your career in two pages or less. In that case, I believe it is permissible to only go back 15 years or so, so as not to have your resumé be too

lengthy. You can always go over parts of your background prior to what you've shown on your resumé when you're having an actual interview.

As for your question about "omitting chronology," I would say absolutely not. Again, it's one thing to have a summary of the past 15 years or so of your professional background, but never omit a company/job experience from your resumé if you are listing the prior and subsequent job experience. Along these lines, you should never "fudge" dates to cover a period of time between jobs. Reference and background checks can quickly uncover this, and it can be grounds for dismissal.

"I often hear 'one page resumé,' but what if the sum total of your experiences is so compelling that a four-page resumé gives great insight to the depth of your experience in a particular field?"—Vice President, Market Development, Specialty Lighting Manufacturer

Pompeo: Unfortunately, we are in the era of the sound bite, where most people have very little time to glean and evaluate information. We all have to make frequent decisions within a matter of a minute (or less) as to whether a particular e-mail or phone call is where our time is best spent at that given moment. This also applies to a search firm, hiring manager or human resources professional reviewing your resumé. If a hiring professional receives a resumé that is very lengthy, he or she will often put it aside to look at it later. But, in today's world, what often happens is that they never get to it. And you don't want that happening to your resumé, do you?

Your resumé should be a concise summary of your background, indicating career highlights and achievements, but should be just that—a summary. A one-page resumé is ideal these days, two pages maximum. You can always go into more detail with your recruiter or interviewer during your actual meeting or phone conversation with them. The resumé should be your "brochure," not your "catalogue." Think of it as a trailer to an upcoming movie—a brief summary, hopefully enough to get the reader interested and wanting to find out more.

“What can an employer do to make a candidate more comfortable during the interview? Would you agree that the more at ease a candidate is, the better the chances are for each party to make the right decision about the available position?”—Vice President/General Manager, Specification Fixture Manufacturer

Pompeo: Yes, I very much would agree. Though we are engaged by the managers or hiring authorities of lighting manufacturers to conduct a search and ultimately schedule interviews with candidates, it's very important to realize that an interview really is a two-way street. While that point may be obvious to most readers, you might be surprised to

find that some employers just don't grasp this concept. I actually have been witness to a manager from a well-known lighting manufacturer, in an interview, asking the candidate to “sell me this pencil.” While that may have worked in the past, that era has come and gone. You certainly want to be able to see how candidates think on their feet, but there are other, better ways to do it.

It's an old cliché, but candidates also interview you and your company, so while you are the host and they the guests, the sharper the candidate, the more she or he will be thinking, “Would I really like working for this person?” While you, as the manager, need to determine if this candidate is a fit for your company, realize that making someone uncomfortable or treating them as the “applicant” is not the best way to go about it. Often having the initial in-person meeting off-site (provided both parties are in the same geographical area), as opposed to at your office, can create a neutral ground to better determine the amount of chemistry.

Regardless of where it takes place, a good, thorough, mutually informative meeting along with comprehensive, in-depth reference checks, meetings with other key managers or employees whom the candidate would work with and/or (in certain cases) personality profiles can help you during this process.

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