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## Introduction

If you want to do something you should either do it properly or not at all. The same goes for job applications. Whether you are applying for a job that you have seen advertised, or whether you are letting your employer know that you are interested in another position or whether you hope to find a job through a job agency: in all of these cases the success of your application really depends for a large part on your preparation and presentation.

An employer will only be convinced that you are in fact the right man or woman for the job in a particular organisation if you make the effort to carefully prepare yourself and present yourself well. Applying for a job is in fact nothing more and nothing less than presenting yourself, emphasising your relevant knowledge and experience for the new position.

## Applying for a job is sales

The starting point of applying for jobs is having to 'sell' yourself. Don't think that you have to boast or brag, because no recruiter will fall for that. What you need to do is to highlight your strengths for this position and explain why you are motivated to work for this particular organisation.

### *Step 1: Knowing your product: What do you have to offer?*

When you apply for a job, you need to do the same as a good sales person. A good sales person really knows their products, knows what they have to offer, knows what the strengths of a product are as opposed to other products on the market and knows which product fits best in each situation. As a job applicant the first thing you need to know is what you have to offer: what are your strengths and weaknesses, what are your qualities? In addition, you need to know where you would like to work, which environment and which activities suit you best, what you find important in your job and what is valuable to you.

### Qualities

Your strengths are also called qualities. A quality is something that you can do (skills), something you know (knowledge) or something you are (personal characteristics).

- *Personal characteristics* can be 'innate'. You may have a natural talent to work precisely and accurately or you may have a natural talent to deal with all sorts of people. You can emphasise these qualities in job interviews. Even though you are born with these talents and it doesn't require a large effort on your part to use them, they are still qualities that may well be important in performing your job. It is important to mention these qualities.

- *Skills* usually refer to skills that you have acquired through experience. This can either be work experience (fast and correct keyboard skills), volunteer work (chairing a meeting), skills acquired during your studies (presentation skills) or other practical experience such as selling second hand cars on a small scale or looking after an elderly person (organisation, commercial, caring and planning skills). Skills can also be inborn, for example social or interpersonal skills. The point is that skills are not only gained by doing paid work. It is important that you have certain required skills and that you can prove it.
- Qualities in terms of *knowledge* are usually something you acquired at school, during your studies, additional courses etc. However, you may also have acquired knowledge by doing practical work (knowledge of software).

### ***Step 2: Knowing the demand: What is the organisation looking for?***

Let's go back to the sales person with his excellent product knowledge. Product knowledge alone is not enough to become a good sales person. Which product should he sell to which customer? The second important thing a good sales person needs to do is to find out what a customer is looking for. He will do so by asking questions. Only when a sales person has a good impression of what a customer wants, will he sell his product. A good sales person will not offer his whole range of products. He will only present those products that may be what the customer is looking for. This will increase the chance that a customer will find something he really likes and will actually decide to buy his product.

It is exactly the same with applying for a job. First of all you need to know that you have to offer (product knowledge). And secondly, you need to understand the customer's needs (the employer, the organisation). What is the organisation looking for exactly, what does the organisation consider to be valuable? A job advertisement may offer you some insight into what an organisation wants, but will never be complete, if only because of the limited space available. That's why phoning the organisation is essential when you decide to apply for a job. Useful tools at this stage of the application process are a job vacancy analysis and a telephonescript.

During a conversation on the phone you can ask specific questions about what an employer is actually looking for. (To prepare yourself for this phonecall you can ask the organisation to send you information, or look on the internet to find out all about a company). Once you have a clear picture of what the employer is looking for you can assess properly if what you have to offer is sufficient and whether it is still attractive for you to work for this organisation. In short: only then do you decide if it is worth your while applying for the job. If this is all positive, you can start writing your letter of application.

### ***Step 3: Letter of application: Matching supply and demand***

requirements and needs. So don't bore the reader with information they didn't ask for. Make sure that you answer the employer's questions (so don't write about your entire career, only about the experiences that the employer is likely to be interested in). This is similar to the way you, as a customer, would like to receive specific answers to your questions rather than hear a standard, general sales pitch or details about a product you are not interested in. For that very reason, standard application letters will not be appreciated and will not be successful.

## **Conclusion**

'Applying for a job = Sales' doesn't just apply to applications in response to specific job postings. You should also use this golden rule for open application procedures, for networking, for making your CV (standard CVs don't work either) and when you are preparing yourself for a job interview and/or a psychological test / assessment centre.

**'Applying for a job = Sales' is the golden rule underpinning all your application activities.**

\* this course material was first written in 2001 by and for the Mobility Bureau of Wageningen University and Research centre and it was further developed and adapted in 2003 by and for LABEUR, the Career Centre of Erasmus University Rotterdam