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Job Search

SHOW EMPLOYERS PROFIT IN HIRING APPLICANT, CONSULTANT ADVISES

In the current labor market slump, none of the jobseeking tricks from before the recession work. Employers see skilled applicants aplenty, according to an employment specialist with decades of experience, so they want more: moneymaking.

“Throw out what you did before the recession,” said Larry Robbin, a consultant to the workforce development system. “The job candidate that gets hired comes in with some notion of how to make the employer money.”

Robbin proceeded to tell the story of a jobseeker being interviewed by a janitorial firm. The candidate asked why, unlike other firms in the Yellow Pages, this one didn’t offer forensic janitorial services, referring to the cleanup after a crime scene has been released by police.

“It’s hard to find people who can handle the work. It’s disgusting,” the employer said.

“I was a medic in the war. There’s nothing I haven’t seen. I’m the guy to help you open a whole new line of services,” the jobseeker said.

The man was hired on the spot.

“I bet you have a lot of plate breakage,” said a homeless individual at the back door of a restaurant where he had gone to beg for leftover scraps. He pointed out to the manager that the shelves in the kitchen were too close to one another. He was hired.

At an office furniture firm, a would-be employee points out that the fastest-growing segment in the business is the small office or home office of the kind many Hispanics in the employer’s area are starting up.

“You have no Hispanic market share,” said the Hispanic applicant, having observed that no one in the company’s stores spoke Spanish. “You’re missing an entire market. I can help you get in.”

These hiring employers, Robbin said, had in common that they saw in the person they hired “somebody who is going to look at my whole business,” not just the one job assigned.

Robbin, who said he sits in on many job interviews a year for his private sector clients, advised workforce development job search preparers to get the customers focused on “seeing the cash register

ring.” To an employer, a hire is a “cost center,” he added, making it imperative in tight economic times for the successful job applicant to supply the income stream to justify it.

Profit-Making

Jobseekers have to be taught to stop thinking in terms of the job title or description: “I’m not just a carpenter, I’m a profit-making carpenter.”

Can anyone do this, given that it involves a management perspective? Yes, Robbin argued. Everybody has very likely noticed in previous jobs aspects of the work that could be more efficient and less costly, he added.

The postrecession job search isn’t just about that one clever idea at the interview, according to the California-based consultant. It also involves preparing for being out of work six months rather than six weeks.

Today’s jobseeker must be able to survive rejection first of all. The next item is to learn ways to manage stress by acquiring new hobbies, learning new sports and volunteering as much as possible.

“A job search can be filled with frustration,” Robbin said. At one-stop career centers where Robbin has counseled, mock interviews take place in front of everyone, and the group votes on who should be hired. “We want to make everybody happy, but the reality is that not everybody will be,” he said.

The exercise is a safe way to experience rejection without taking the sharp edges of labor market competition.

“Today’s workforce development frontline staff are seeing an entirely different temperament in customers,” said Robbin, trying to paint the picture of postrecession unemployment. “They’re losing their homes; marriages are dissolving. They are experiencing drug and alcohol abuse and considering suicide. Their neighbors are angry because they aren’t tending to their lawns.”

In this context, the one-stop career center has to clarify expectations.

“The first question has to be, ‘What do you think we do?’” Robbin warned. “Most customers will reply, ‘You’re going to get me a job.’ But that’s not how this works. A one-stop is a library plus a school for job search.”

The role of workforce development staff is to be

“the librarian.” Yet there’s a new kind of librarian — in public schools they are often called “media specialists.”

“Break with the past job readiness, interview preparation, boilerplate resumes and stock answers for interviews,” Robbin advised workforce development professionals. “Customers go out and say things such as that their worst trait is ‘I like to work too hard.’ Employers aren’t stupid.”

To avoid some of these pitfalls, he said, the workforce development system has to draw in business people who are involved in hiring. Yet in dealing with business, the professionals in what is a not-for-profit system need to pick up the business way of doing things.

How Fast?

“In the private sector speed is of very high value. How fast? How fast? How fast?” Robbin said. Asked when they can send someone to interview, the for-profit agencies like to reply “in two hours.”

The entire period of unemployment requires all-around management of time, Robbin said.

“A jobseeker has to plan each day and get out of the house first thing. The worst thing is to stay in to

read the newspaper or get on the Internet,” Robbin advised.

Robbin once asked a roomful of former jobseekers if they had ever stayed in bed until noon when they were unemployed. Out of a room of 200 only 10 never had.

“They stayed in bed to feel safe,” he explained. “They needed to go to the library, anything, to learn being safe out of bed.”

A job searcher also has to find time for exercise at the end of the day, something that works out the stress physically and ensures better, deeper sleep. Then the next day starts with energy.

When Robbin consults with a one-stop career center, he ends the week with a Friday panel of former jobseekers who are now employed. They come back to tell how they got the job and it cheers everyone up.

“It’s energy for the weekend,” Robbin said. “It’s a ritual of celebration of people who get jobs.”

Some unemployed individuals need to see someone who got out of the jobless slump. Others want to learn tricks of the trade. Most need hope.

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—Cecilio Morales

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