

Spotting and solving your CV disasters

By Rob Ridout

“You didn’t get the job”. Possibly the worst five words anybody can hear in 2009. And do you want to hear why? Not really. Nobody really wants to know why they didn’t get the job.

The truth is that most regrets are often for very simple reasons which often originate as an initial concern at the CV screening stage by the hirer or recruiter. Trying to identify these recurring regret reasons either from a post-interview or pre-interview (where your CV is not shortlisted) is often a career altering experience.

Recruiters and HR practitioners are actually trained to spot the negative before the positive when reading your CV - what a shock! Especially in 2009 as candidates have become desperate now to get work and will go to great lengths to lie in their CV’s and at interviews. This seems a bit of a poor way of representing recruiters and HR Practitioners but actually it is very realistic, especially because most people hide their poor work experiences very carefully and then lie in their interviews about their strengths and weaknesses.

In many respects the hiring manager has been forced to become very careful when hiring as firing is now even harder. It’s also very hard to fire somebody when they have lied on their CV.

It seems obvious that the first step before the interview is to provide a good CV that helps the reader understand these possible negative CV attributes. Here are a few of them and some solutions:

HOPPING

This is a very topical issue and very hotly debated, there is also a stigma attached to the fact that hopping is a black candidate thing only - wrong.

South Africans tend to still be very conservative regards moving too much, working for one lifetime company still remains the preferred option.

I see many CV's where if you read the CV the candidate may seem to be hopping. This is often cleared up very simply by portraying your various work experiences as clearly as possible.

Provide details for example if you have been retrenched, or the company has merged or even if you have moved between companies in a group. Depict the company on group level and make sure the reader knows that the companies depicted are all part of the same group. Clarity is the operative word here, think about the reader first.

I do not like seeing in a CV aspects such as "unfavourable working conditions" and "I moved due to poor management style ". There's being honest and the being just too blunt. This reason should rather be left to the interview as the reader may make a uniformed decision regards you hopping before providing you an opportunity to explain.

Simply portray your move in a softer format such as limited promotional opportunities or no career plan.

If you have hopped and your CV looks like the yellow pages now is the time to settle down, but expect no sympathy at your interview. Be honest about the mistakes you have made in your career and explain in your interview how this has benefited your career, this shows maturity.

GAPS

The first thing that any recruiter is taught is to look out for gaps in a CV. Any GAP of three months or more begs investigation. Make sure that in your CV you indicate what you were doing in your Gap periods, especially if pertaining to travel study or looking for work. I have never met a

candidate that told me at an interview they did nothing in a Gap period.

TO MUCH AMBITION

I see a lot of CV's where candidates provide reasons such as being "lack of career growth". Some of the companies that these candidate work with are major head office based environments where this so called lack of career growth is claimed - need I say more.

I always ask "why not seek an opportunity within the group, maybe another division or with a different manager?" I seldom get the right answer from these types of over ambitious candidates. Be careful not to depict yourself as over ambitious the last thing you want to portray is somebody who wants to move to aggressively. Rather make sure that the company you are moving to have the right type of credentials regards promoting talent and that the previous incumbents in the position that you are applying for have possibly been promoted. Too many candidates today put the emphasis on the new company and hiring manager to tell all at their interview regards potential career growth. This is ultimately your responsibility so ask the right questions and do your homework.

TO MONEY HUNGRY

A big problem with many candidates in South Africa. I deal with this topic in larger detail later in my book. I still feel many South African candidates just put too much emphasis on money as a move motivator.

You should always remember to look at the big picture no hiring manager wants to hire an incumbent that will simply just stick around for the next outside opportunity for a bigger paycheque. I get this more and more at my briefings - "the person must stick around for at least two years".

However let me just say if you have include a monetary expectation without doing adequate research do not put this in your CV. And by the adequate research I do not mean speak to a friend in another company doing what you are doing.

If you have applied for a role at a certain salary range don't bail at the last minute because the offer is not high enough rather don't consider the role at all if the salary is not within your expectation - remember all the hard work that goes into the recruitment process don't waste your recruiters time here.

NOT ENOUGH AMBITION

I have met many phenomenal candidates that have worked for one company for many years and never moved, not even once - why.

Most often than not, as a candidate you may have just worked for a company that simply has not developed you to your potential. Unfortunately this occurs in many entry level roles where the company has a loaded element of non promotion. Whether you the candidate excels or not.

Many candidates will move companies and then be promoted aggressively in a more forward thinking corporate culture environment.

There are also many candidates that are non-ambitions due to personal reasons such having to care for a young family. You should be clever and ensure your interviewer knows of these reasons. .

Ambition can be portrayed in your CV as education or hunger for knowledge instead of promotion. Think about this also when compiling your CV, if you have not been promoted as many times as you feel you would have liked to that the reader does not think you have just sat around and done nothing with your career.

Understanding balance from a recruiter's perspective

Good HR practitioners and recruiters should look at a CV and give the candidate the benefit of the doubt regards their background, but there should always be a balance when accessing your CV for both good and bad.

When compiling your CV you will need to identify the good and bad aspects within your CV honestly and realistically.

You will need to ensure that these are in some way balanced in your CV without lying. Remember nobody is perfect and you are allowed to make mistakes your mission with your CV is to get you into the interview. For me it is more important to see that a candidate has learnt something from their mistakes and put one step forward in their careers.

Finally - prepare your CV for the reader

The key to preparing your CV is to put yourself in the reader's position and then try providing the right details accordingly. If a sales manager is reading your CV for a sales role you should try understanding that reader will go through your CV quickly with an emphasis on results if your CV by comparison is being read by a CFO you will need to provide more detail as your reader will be more detail focused.