

Six Tips for Following Up on Your Resume

Dear Liz,

I spotted what looks like the perfect job for me and I sent a résumé in to the company's online application system, as was required. But it has been a week and I haven't heard anything. Now I'm wondering whether I should have done more research to find an alternate conduit to the hiring manager, and wondering whether there are additional steps I can take to boost my chances of getting an interview. Any suggestions?

Thanks,
Beth

Business Week - August 31, 2009 - Don't worry, sending a resume into the Black Hole, also known as lobbing a resume into the HR pipeline, is almost always a requirement these days, even if you have a more promising entrée to the organization.

You'd need to have that resume on file in order to get an interview, so you haven't wasted any effort. Still, there are lots of steps you can still take to increase the probability of getting an interview for the job. Here are six of my favorites:

- Start with LinkedIn to see whether one of your first degree connections is connected to a relevant person, that is, someone who works in the department where there's an opening, a peer in another department, or best of all, the hiring manager in the hiring department. If you do have a two or three step relationship to that inside person, ask your first degree connection to make an introduction for you.
- Next, I'd e-mail a group of your friends and colleagues (using bcc: all) to ask whether anyone has a lead on a person inside the employer and your target department, if possible and might be able to make an introduction for you. Not everyone checks his or her LinkedIn in-box and not everyone belongs to LinkedIn, so sending an e-mail blast is a great backup step.
- If you can make contact with a person inside the company, your aim is a five minute phone call to learn more about the organization and the open position. You won't ask your brand new acquaintance to pass along your resume. That's forward and presumptuous, since the person doesn't even know you yet. But you'll ask smart questions about the role. With luck, your new contact will offer to help or, at least, to keep you posted as resumes are reviewed and interviews are scheduled.
- Check the employer's Web site and use the research site ZoomInfo to see if you can locate the hiring manager's name. Of course, you should Google the hiring manager, but in a really smart way: Search the company name plus the hiring manager's most likely title, like this: Director Marketing ABC Products.

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- If the hiring manager in your sights has made any speeches, published any articles, given any interviews or been in the news for any reason lately, you may pull up his or her name this way as well as find out something a little more about him or her. Be sure to search using Google News, not just Google.
- If you find the hiring manager's name, send a hard copy of your resume and a customized cover letter to him or her directly. I suggest old-fashioned U.S. mail, as an uninvited e-mail message in someone's in-box isn't typically viewed as welcome and is also easily overlooked.
- It's easy to get the organization's snail mail address from its Web site. All you need is the hiring manager's name, title, and that street address to send off a resume and cover letter packet directly to the decision maker.
- As you write your customized cover letter for the presumed hiring manager, be sure to focus more on the organization and its needs than on your own background and skills. Of course, you should do this any time you are corresponding or speaking with someone about a job. Superior to the standard "I saw your opening for a Marketing Research Manager" is "Congratulations on the launch of your Tastylocks edible hair gel line. That should be a sensation at HairExpo this fall!"

There is an element of luck in getting an interview, but you can do more than toss a resume into the hopper and wait for a phone call.

You can work assiduously to find contacts who can put in a good word for you, make introductions for you, and fill you in on the issues that are top of mind for the employer you're targeting.

When you spot a job you know you'd love and would thrive at, don't hesitate to call on your network to help make it happen.

That's what your network is there for!

Liz Ryan is an expert on the new-millennium workplace and a former Fortune 500 HR executive.

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