

To Get a Job You Need to Get the Employer's Attention and Be a Safe Choice

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When an employer has an open position, they are generally faced with two issues: (1) it is difficult for them to focus attention on all of the applications they are receiving, and (2) they are nervous about making a good decision among the various applicants that are applying. Your objective when applying for any job is (1) to be seen, and (2) to be a safe choice for the company.

You Need to be Seen When Applying to Jobs.

Several years ago, a very talented professional couple invited my wife and me to their home for dinner. We had a really nice evening sitting by their pool, eating dinner, and socializing. Over the course of the next several months, we spent additional time with this couple and really liked them a lot and considered them pretty good friends.

After having had several good visits with the couple, one day I was extremely surprised when the husband acted extremely strange towards me and was a bit hostile at a social gathering. I really had no idea what was going on and blew it off. The next time I saw the couple at a social gathering and the man was hostile towards me I decided to find out what was wrong. "Is there something wrong?" I asked him.

"Yes. My wife and I thought it was very rude that you did not even respond to my emails about your finance opening in your company. I sent you my resume three times and you never even responded. I was under the impression that we were friends and would have at least appreciated a response."

In all honesty, I did not even remember seeing the man's application for the job. In fact, I had received so many applications for the job he was referring to, that after a day or so I had stopped even opening the applications. I remember that this particular job I had advertised had received hundreds of applications. Had I opened all of the applications I received, I would have spent probably 10+ hours in front of my computer clicking on "open" as each application arrived. I simply did not have the time for this.

Instead, I opened around the first 50 to 100 or so applications I received and by that point, felt I had a good pool of applicants to choose from and interview. After that the applications simply went into a folder on my computer and were never reviewed.

"I probably did not review your application. I'm sorry," I told the man. He did not believe me. To my astonishment and disappointment, the relationship my wife and I had with this couple was never the same and has been uncomfortable ever since.

If you really want the job you are going after, you need to get the employer's attention. Nothing is more important than making sure your application gets seen. Had I seen this man's application I probably would have hired him. He was perfect for the job and had great experience in all respects. However, I never saw his application.

Depending on the sort of job an employer has available, they are likely to receive a good number of resumes for it.

- In some cases the employer may receive 50 applications.
- In other cases, the employer may receive 500 or more applications.

Have you ever received 500 email job applications over the course of a few days? I have. Let me tell you something: *It is impossible to review all these emails and get through them.* Once you start reviewing these emails your objective is to find a few good applicants to interview as rapidly as possible. Unless an employer has all the time in the world, they cannot possibly review every resume. The process just becomes too random.

Several months ago I was at a seminar presentation being given by a professor at Stanford University who also serves on the admissions committee there. He said that the school received applicants from hundreds of class presidents, people who were first in their class, and more. He said that when confronted with so many outstanding candidates, the school often puts all of the best applicants who share similar backgrounds in one pile, and if it has 10 spaces for a certain type of candidate, will just randomly pick 10 candidates out of a pile of a few hundred candidates. The professor said there is no other way to distinguish between similarly situated candidates with similar backgrounds.

It is similar with filling positions inside of companies. When an employer has a position, they receive so many qualified applicants that they will generally pick the applicants to interview randomly out of piles of similarly situated candidates.

How many jobs have you applied to where your application was not seen?

I bet it is a lot more than you think. In fact, it is safe to bet that you have missed out on numerous jobs you are qualified for because the employer never reviewed your application. Had the employer reviewed your application you would have been hired.

I run a recruiting company named BCG Attorney Search for attorneys. Most legal recruiters simply email a candidate's resume with a short note to employers. In contrast, our company always emails, faxes, and sends a letter to the employer. This may sound like "overkill" but our objective is to insure that the candidate's resume is always seen. I want to give you a few pointers on this.

First, when you email your resume to an employer it is going to an HR person in most respects. As part of their job, many HR people are supposed to put each resume in a database and send out a formal rejection letter. This sort of thing takes time. Accordingly, a large number of HR directors simply delete a lot of these resumes or do not do the work. Is this fair? No. Is this honest? No. But it happens, and it happens all the time.

Second, if you fax your resume to the employer it is likely going to be delivered to someone's desk and they are going to see

it. I think faxing is "old school" but it certainly is effective in making sure your resume gets seen. You should always do everything you can to insure your resume gets seen. Faxing your resume helps get it seen.

Third, a letter also insures your resume gets seen. Hardly anyone sends letters anymore. The great thing about sending a letter is that your resume has already been printed for the employer and has a "physical presence" like a fax. The employer can tell a lot about you by you sending a letter—from the sort of stationery you use, to your actual signature on the paper. In addition, many organizations treat letters far differently than they treat emails. For example, in law firms, letters are recorded when they come in and generally sent to certain files.

Sending a letter and fax in addition to an email is a good idea in my opinion. You need to be seen.

In addition, one of the most effective things you can do to be seen is to follow up your application with a phone call. A phone call is "an annoyance" to many employers but it does insure that your application gets seen. Personally, if you call an employer and express your interest in a job that they have, you are simply showing that you want the job. I do not think there is anything at all wrong with this. Who would not want to hire someone who is excited about the job?

When an employer has an open position, their objective is generally to fill it as quickly as possible. Some employers may "mull over" multiple applicants and spend a lot of time paring down applicants; however, this is the exception and not the rule. The reason employers tend not to spend a ton of time on the employee selection game is because if they need someone, they are losing money by not hiring someone—or, there is too much work to do, and the company needs help. You need to stick out.

You need to be considered a "safe choice" for the company to get the job.

A few years ago our company was in the process of hiring various writers for some jobs we had in our company. A very talented writer came across the desk of our human resources manager and he interviewed very well. His previous position had been as an English teacher at a large high school in Los Angeles and prior to that he had gotten a masters degree from a prestigious university. We were excited about having hired him.

One of the people who interviewed him said to our human resources manager in our company quite a few times: "I could swear I saw this guy somewhere but I do not remember where ..."

The particular girl who said this was an avid reader of the morning newspaper. A few days before the writer was going to start she dashed into our HR manager's office: "This guy is a sex offender!" she exclaimed. The writer we had hired (who did not start yet) was going to be going on trial shortly for sexually abusing numerous girls at the high school he had taught at and had been fired from. We had no idea about any of this when we were interviewing him. We had almost hired a sex offender.

In large cities, the employment process can often be incredibly impersonal. When an employer has a job ...

- The resumes will be from people all over the world.
- The resumes may contain convicted felons.
- The resumes may contain people who were fired from their last job for stealing.
- The resumes may contain people with the skills to be the next President of the organization.
- The resumes may contain people who will hurt the organization through negativity.
- The resumes may contain people who will lift up the organization through their positive attitude.

In fact, the resumes will contain an incredible variety of people with skills (and weaknesses) that will never be seen—either by reviewing the resume, or through interviews. Employers are faced with tons of resumes from candidates of all sorts of talent levels, backgrounds and more. For an employer, picking a safe choice when they are interviewing is never easy. Discerning human nature, delving into someone's past, understanding their work history, and more, is never an easy thing to do.

Employers want to hire people who will do the job well. They are always faced with difficult decisions when they are hiring people and understanding who is likely to fit in. When looking for people, employers always want to hire "the safe choice" and not take risks.

In order to make "safe" hires, employers look at things like your previous employer, your background, and your work stability. Someone who has been at their previous job a long period of time is generally a good risk for employers. Someone who has worked for a well-respected employer and advanced there is generally a good risk for employers. These are the sorts of things that employer look for when hiring in order to make the best decisions. These are also the things that I believe are the most important for most employers to consider when making hiring decisions.

However, beyond these factors which come across on a resume, a referral to an employer can carry a ton of weight. The English essayist and poet Charles Lamb once said, "Don't introduce me to that man. I want to go on hating him, and I can't hate a man whom I know." If someone you know refers you to an employer, you are suddenly tapping into the power of a social relationship in order to become a "safer" hire for the employer. When we have a social sort of connect to an employer, or are recommended by someone, we are more likely to be considered a "safer" hire.

On a personal level, a simple introduction by a respected colleague, business associate, or so forth can have the same effect as an endorsement. Your odds of getting a job are probably at least 4x better when you are referred by someone to the company. When someone meets you through a referral, the "evidence" is already high. It is as if the referral source has testified on your behalf. Employers would rather meet you through a referral. The endorsement and testimony of others makes employers feel much more comfortable hiring you.

On television you always see endorsements from celebrities and others for given products. The reason for these endorsements is that people feel more comfortable doing business with companies and others who receive endorsements. Determine who already has a good relationship with the employer you are interested in—and who has their respect, trust, and goodwill—the moment you identify who these people are, you are almost always on the way home.

When you are applying for jobs, it is always important to consider if you know of anyone who can provide a reference for you to the organization:

- Friends
- Relatives
- Former co-workers

- Customers
- Neighbors
- Members of your religious group
- Association members (fraternal, social, charity, or interest-based)
- Leaders or celebrities you know

Each of these people can potentially provide useful references for you to the company. Having a reference for the job you are applying to is one of the smartest things you can do because it insures you are a safe choice and get the employer's attention.

Conclusions

When you are applying to jobs, it is crucial that you insure you (1) get the employer's attention, and (2) are a safe choice for the company. Many people fail to get jobs based on not doing these two things correctly.

THE LESSON

If you really want the job you are going after, you need to get your prospective employer's attention. The most important thing for you to do is ensure that said employer sees your resume; following up with a phone call is also an effective strategy.

While many employers consider a phone call an annoyance, it does help ensure that your resume gets viewed. Set yourself forth as a safe choice for the company.

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