

## WHAT DOES RECRUITMENT JARGON MEAN?

(Or, Little wonder the right man for the job is not always recruited)

The search for appropriate and meaningful employment, when you're out of work, is tough enough without having to run the weekly gauntlet of recruitment jargon in the appointment pages of newspapers and magazines and, increasingly, electronic recruitment sites. Why do companies appear to find it so difficult to say what it is they are looking for, in terms of background knowledge, experience and attitude, without resorting to gobbledegook?

Why do so many advertisements appear to demand or overstate the level of academic and vocational qualifications or the number of years experience necessary for many positions? How on earth do you find an organization that can make use of your skills and experience without having to de-cypher much of the inappropriate drivel in every advertisement? And, why over-egg the pudding by inflating titles, for example, calling a shop assistant a sales consultant or a data entry clerk a programme supervisor or manager? Is it simply a case of stupidity, not really understanding what is required or a particular position or a desire to over-recruit? Or, do they really do it on purpose?

Let us look at a typical expensive advertisement from a broadsheet newspaper and try to make sense of it. The bold italics is the supposed advertisement and the bit in brackets is my personal reading of the statement:

"***(Our client is a leading*** (in what area) ***and highly successful organization*** (they hope to be), ***an autonomous subsidiary*** (they might be sold off) ***of a major international*** (offices in London, Bradford and perhaps even the Channel Islands) ***company looking for a mature individual*** (maybe up to 40) ***in order to broaden their horizons*** (set up an office in Edinburgh) ***to optimize growth opportunities*** (sales are sluggish). ***Having gone through a process of re-engineering*** (the company is in turmoil) ***they are seeking to recruit*** (they went too far in removing layers of management) ***a self-motivated*** (there are no internal training programmes) ***and ambitious*** (probably only up to 35) ***individual*** (you are on your own) ***to develop*** (get out and sell) ***their services.***

***As a skilled communicator*** (you can read and write), ***you will support the organization*** (you will need to work flat out) ***and be decisive in the management of change*** (we have to downsize and re-structure even further). ***You will develop and implement*** (we have no marketing strategy) ***major areas of focus*** (we are myopic and have lost direction) ***with full responsibility and accountability*** (if you don't make it you are out) ***for critical path analysis and progress*** (we definitely have lost our way). ***On a personal level you must be an ambitious self-starter*** (you are definitely on your own), ***have a strong vision of the future*** (you are a cousin of Mystic Meg), ***with the ability to explore and consolidate new opportunities*** (you must be aggressive and will have to chase business wherever possible).

***First class communication and interpersonal skills*** (you can read, write and talk), ***with the ability to influence senior management*** (they cannot make up their mind) ***and respond to rapidly changing circumstances*** (we definitely have to downsize and delayer again and may go into receivership if sales don't increase). ***Of graduate calibre*** (? did you go to university or do you have professional and practical experience) ***with forward-looking ideas*** (you will need a crystal ball), ***but with the ability to focus*** (look for short-term solutions and profits) ***on immediate areas of interest*** (critical concern). ***Salary is negotiable*** (but only on their terms) ***but will relate to experience*** (you might want £40,000 - £50,000 but we will pay you as little as possible) ***and will include an attractive benefits package*** (the previous managers motorcar)".

Frankly, I have always found the bit about communication skills not only irritating but also downright ridiculous. If someone is applying for the sort of positions advertised in the broadsheet newspapers, and by that I mean middle if not senior management positions, does not have the personality, the experience and ability to manage or is unable to communicate with people effectively, verbally and on paper, then he or she has no right being a manager. I blame some of this

particular weakness on the desire to recruit or promote people to positions of power and responsibility without actual experience of work and of dealing with other human beings.

It may be difficult encapsulating the demands of a position, the academic and/or practical experience necessary and the personality required in a limited space but in order to attract the right responses it is essential. The question is do directors or line managers get to read through what is proposed before the advertisement is sent to print? And, is what has been produced value for money? If the client is not mentioned and there are no clear indications as to just who the company is then how on earth can you determine whether or not you will fit in with the culture, the management style or the products or services?

The object of an advertisement is, essentially, to attract a field of suitable candidates and, the first aim of the recruitment consultant or personnel manager should be to produce a clear word picture - a template – of the ideal candidate. Before it goes to press it should be studied from the point of view of the readers/ prospective employees, by checking to see if it answers the questions it raises. Honesty might not always be the best policy, well that seems to be the mantra in the world of business and commerce, but, in my view, being economical with the truth or dissembling with the content of a job advertisement can be very counter-productive. Of course it is also important to choose the right vehicle for the advertisement. Recruitment advertisements in, for example, a professional trade publication are clearly aimed at that profession, those in a particular broadsheet newspaper are aimed at some but not all of the readership and maybe those on electronic websites aimed at a particular age range or experience.

Besides, what happens when the recruitment consultants send you a group of applicants for consideration and you actually choose someone from that group? Then he or she decides, when they start the job, that what they are required to do is either not what they are capable of doing or, worse, at a far lower level than they wanted or does not offer the career prospects or is not as challenging as they expected? It is not unreasonable for them to realise, sometimes in a very short space of time, that what they have been recruited to do is not what they wanted or even hoped for. The quicker and smarter ones will beat a hasty retreat and try and find something more appropriate and that leaves the company back to expensive recruitment plans.

If the advertisement is not clear how can you expect to receive a CV that covers the firm's major requirements? The real danger, for company and prospective employees, is that the right person for the job has not applied simply because the information is unfocused, the position and level of responsibility unclear or the qualifications and membership of professional institutes aimed far too high. Importantly, the requirement for clarity applies the higher up the corporate structure the position to be filled is because the more complex the role usually is. So when drafting any kind of job description it is important to consider the answers you require from questions addressing:

- Past experience of candidates. Have they worked at the same or a similar level?
- General understanding of the company culture – do they know who you are and what you do and whether they have worked in a similar field. Have they dealt with your company before?
- Interpersonal skills – the ability to interact and communicate internally and externally with customers, colleagues and employees.
- Do candidates actually have experience of managing people, if the position requires day-to-day management of employees?
- Motivation - what response do you want from questions about motivation and commitment?
- Is there a need to show an ability to solve problems?

Oh, and if you are over a certain age - 45 if not 40 is deemed to be too old these days - you will undoubtedly have noticed the increasing use of discriminatory phrases designed to discourage older applicants? Because many professional institutes, and even some companies, have openly discouraged the use of age brackets recruitment consultants have resorted to the use of such phrases as, "**you will be a recent graduate**", "**don't respond unless you want to join a young, dynamic team**", "**this will be your first or second career move**", or even more boldly, "**older applicants need not apply.**" It is most unfortunate that many companies, and I am applying this

statement to much of UK Plc, do not appear to have any plans about future recruitment and, given the increasing age of the population, just how stupid it is to discriminate.

It is because of the lack of clarity in recruitment advertisements, probably done deliberately, and the verbiage that perhaps the best person for a job is not actually interviewed and selected. That is why I get the impression that recruitment in UK Plc is poorly led, poorly managed and leads to a process of recruitment by default, that is, applying age parameters of between 25 and 49, depending on the position or positions needed to be filled, whether or not someone is perceived to fit the company culture and image and decisions taken as to whether there is no clash of personality between interviewer and interviewee. In other words, is he or she one of us!

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All this when it has been recognized and accepted that there are shortages in many specialist category areas such as Information Technology (IT), that there are, allegedly, more jobs available than there are out-of-work applicants (I find that assumption somewhat nebulous) and that pension schemes are unlikely to provide the level of pension that we thought we might receive on retirement and that unless more people continue to work until 65 and over pension schemes are likely to suffer from increasing pressure to deliver the levels of retirement pensions envisaged 20 years ago.

All this when companies and organizations, including such bodies and the CBI and IOD, keep repeating the same tired old mantra that young people are leaving school and even university unable to read, write and spell correctly let alone communicate and deal with other human beings. All this at a time when managers say that there are not enough applicants with knowledge and experience of the work place and yet they deliberately choose not to consider let alone employ people over the age of 50 and when 37 per cent of males over 55 are economically inactive. All this when there is, allegedly, increasing pressure on pension funds and the UK state pension is, basically, 'peanuts'.

Or, let me put it another way that might sharpen the minds and focus the attention of politicians, economist and employers; according to OECD statistics, from 2003, employment rates among the over 55's in UK is approximately 40 per cent and the average among European Union countries is 42 per cent compared to 65 per cent in America and 60 per cent in Japan. That means 60 per cent of the over 55's in UK are unemployed and that is an enormous waste of knowledge, talent and ability; and, it seems to me that America and Japan are making some effort to redress the balance and deal with unemployment among older people but the UK is stuck in some kind of warp factor that suggests things will work out.

What I cannot understand is that if there are shortages in specific areas then why does Government, supported by companies in those particular areas, not provide appropriate training or re-skilling courses at colleges of further and higher education in order to meet the demand? Why do we, I mean politicians and employers, appear to have enormously difficulty in understanding and accepting that people over 50, and 55, still have much to contribute?

I have been round this particular buoy once before and it seems that attitudes and abilities have not changed during the last decade and companies are still looking for people between the ages of 25 and 40 with years of experience. Ah well, back to the broadsheets and the electronic recruitment sites!

(2130 words)

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