

Swarm about the job – not the job environment!

When asked about their motivation for a position, many candidates lavish praise on the company in their motivation letters and job interviews – often using phrases lifted straight from the corporate website. What frequently falls by the wayside is the motivation for the specific role. Sometimes it is missing altogether – a risky strategy.

Peter Näf

A friend once asked me for feedback on her motivation letter for a position with a foundation working in child welfare. She enthused at length about how close the topic of children was to her heart and how motivated she therefore was to work for the organisation. By contrast, there was hardly anything about her motivation for the actual tasks.

My somewhat flippant comment was: “Brigitte (name changed), even if you couldn’t stand children, the foundation would still be interested in you – because you won’t see a single child all day long. They are not looking for a nanny, but for a finance specialist – with exactly your skills.”

Companies need problems solved

Why is it problematic to overemphasise your interest in the company? One client once described the situation to me from the employer’s perspective. She was a senior manager in an international corporation. The company enjoys an excellent reputation – not only for its products. It is also highly popular as an employer and regularly tops graduate employer rankings.

Her challenge in recruitment was to identify candidates who were primarily attracted by the

company – rather than by the role itself. She wanted to avoid hiring someone who merely wanted to get their foot in the door to move on internally as quickly as possible.

I observe in my coaching work time and again that some candidates do indeed pursue this strategy. I always warn against it, because the calculation is unlikely to work out: those who start with false expectations often end up in a position that does not genuinely interest them. When attractive internal opportunities arise, these individuals are frequently passed over – precisely because they were deliberately hired for a longer-term role. The new position is then filled externally.

Employer branding and personal branding

A better approach is to wait until your target employer advertises a role that truly fits.

There is another reason why excessive flattery is unwise: recruiters and hiring managers often barely recognise their own company in such idealised descriptions. The gap between the image portrayed on the website and the lived reality is not infrequently wide. The same applies to candidates: there can also be a considerable discrepancy between self-description and actual personality.

After all, both sides of the labour market tend to dress up the bride.

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