



Stand out from the crowd when job hunting

Is finding a new job and furthering your career on your list of New Year's Resolutions?

Although salary is a main area to focus on, location, work-life balance and development opportunities all have a major input. Research suggests that the average British employee will spend around 81,000 hours (or 9 full years of your life) at work so your job needs to work for you.

So, if a new job is your priority – how do you make yourself stand out from the crowd? It is important to identify your USP (unique selling point) – what skills, experience and knowledge can you offer which differentiates you from other applicants. Try to steer away from the normal clichés and common attributes that everyone else uses such as 'dynamic, hardworking and motivated' and use your covering letter and CV to showcase your specific talents and the unique value you can bring to the position.

If you find this difficult, write down a list – what you are good at, what qualifications you have gained, what courses you have attended, what you have learned on the job, any voluntary work and all of your experience including skills you've acquired both inside and outside of work. Now take a close look at the details you have for the job you are applying for and see what relevant information stands out from the list you have created. Combine this information to construct your USP.

The interview can be a daunting process for many - preparation is key. Research the company thoroughly, from products and competitors to their values, ethics and workplace culture. Think about how you can 'fit' in.

Recent research on interview preparation techniques showed that nearly 80% of applicants prepare questions in advance and over 92% try to ask a question in every interview. Rather than asking questions which could jeopardise your chances such as "What does your company do" or ones involving pay, sick pay and working hours – ask about the culture of the company, what it's like to work there and whether the position has room for development. Aim to ask between 3 to 5 questions. Ideally write the questions down and bring them with you, just in case your mind goes blank. If you do want to ask about the package being offered make sure that you phrase it in the right way. Try to keep a professional demeanour but also let your personality and enthusiasm for the role shine through. It is also important to give the right impression by wearing smart clothing, maintaining eye contact and don't forget to turn off your mobile phone!

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