

The Application Two-Step

Here's a common scenario that's playing out on the Internet today: you spend hours surfing the Web and visiting job boards; you search through hundreds of job postings in their job databases; and finally, you find what you've been looking for. There, right in front of you, is an opening that matches your qualifications perfectly. So, what do you do? Send in your resume, right? Well, not exactly. If that's all it took, a lot more people would be getting offers and starting out at new jobs.

In today's Mad Hatter job market, you can't get a job by applying for it. You have to do more. You have to apply not once, but twice in a process I call the Application Two-Step.

- Step 1 is a test.
- Step 2 is the answer.

Perform the first step, and you will be considered an applicant; perform the second, and you will be noticed. Perform both steps, and you will likely move to the head of the applicant line.

Step 1: The Test

A job posting is a test. Its purpose is to determine whether or not you paid attention in Mrs. Murphy's kindergarten class. What was the first lesson you were taught there? That's right: you must follow directions. So, a job posting is, first and foremost, a test to determine whether you can submit your application according to the employer's instructions. It might tell you to do:

- Cut and paste your resume into an online application form,
- Cut and paste your resume into a regular, old e-mail message,
- Send your resume as an attachment to an e-mail message, or
- Send your resume to the employer by old fashioned postal mail.

Whatever the method that's specified, the key to being considered a bona fide applicant is to do exactly as you are instructed. It doesn't matter if it's easier or more convenient for you to do something else. Step 1 is pass or fail; either you follow the employer's directions and are thus worthy of consideration or you don't and are considered a "graffiti applicant" and tossed into the reject pile.

Step 2: The Answer

If Step 1 enables you to pass the test; Step 2 provides the answer that will ace it. As soon as you have positioned yourself as a bona fide applicant, you must reposition your resume to make sure you get priority attention.

Recruiters are inundated with applicant resumes these days, so it's very hard for any single person—even one who is extremely qualified for an opening—to get noticed. To overcome that disadvantage, therefore, you must help your resume stand out. And, the best way to do that is by networking.

You have plenty of resources at your disposal, including your connections on LinkedIn and other social media sites, your college or university alumni organization, and the discussion forum on

the Web-site of your professional or trade association. Use every single one of them to find one (or both) of two kinds of contacts:

- Employees of the organization whom you know
- Employees whom you don't know, but with whom you share an affinity (e.g., you have the same professional affiliation or a common alma mater).

Once you've made a connection, ask them to pass your resume along to the appropriate recruiter in their HR Department. If that happens—and you'll be surprised at how willing most people are to help out—your resume will move from being just one more among the hundreds or thousands in the organization's resume database to being one of a handful or less on the recruiter's desktop. At that point, the odds are far, far greater that it and you will get the consideration you deserve.

Applying for a job online, then, isn't as simple as it might at first seem. In fact, the process is actually both the first assessment an employer will make of your capabilities as a prospective employee and the single best way to make sure that your resume gets looked at first by recruiters. And, the secret to success is to practice the Application Two-Step.

Thanks for reading,
Peter
Visit me at Weddles.com

Peter Weddle is the author of over two dozen employment-related books, including *Recognizing Richard Rabbit*, a fable of self-discovery for working adults, and *Work Strong, Your Personal Career Fitness System*.

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