

Making the cut

Avoid flubs that will send your résumé to the bottom of the stack.

By SUE STOCK
STAFF WRITER

Connie Hall lost her job at Stock Building Supply in March. A month later she was offered an accounts payable job with another company.

Then came the mandatory credit check showing she'd had a car repossessed eight years before and some unpaid hospital bills from when she had been unemployed. The job offer was retracted.

"I understand from their point of view," Hall says, "but the way I saw it was, just because my credit score doesn't meet your requirements doesn't mean I wouldn't do a good job."

Back when employers were hurting for workers, Hall might have had a chance to explain her situation. Not now.

There are more than half a million unemployed people in North Carolina and most are looking for work. Even the lowest-paying positions get 200 or 300 applications.

With that kind of competition, any bad reference, blip on your credit report or typo could be enough to send your resume to the bottom of the stack.

We talked to some hiring managers and business owners to find out what disqualifies a job applicant in their eyes and how they manage the hiring process.



Steve Murphy from Youngsville picks up a Job Finder paper as he enters the job fair Thursday at RTP.

Quintiles Transnational, a Durham company that does testing for drug companies, has accepted 86,000 applications so far this year — well above the 48,000 it had received at this point in 2008.

Red Hat has seen a 25 percent increase in applications.

And for Family Dollar, the discount store chain, the number has quadrupled in the last six months.

All three have turned to technology to handle the volume. They use online systems that evaluate whether the applicant meets certain basic criteria for the job for which he or she is applying.

At Red Hat, the automated system assigns a score from 0 to 100. Those who achieve the highest scores are passed on to the Raleigh software company's recruiters.

What's one disqualifier? Where you live. "We've gotten a lot of people who have been applying from Detroit or other areas," said LJ Brock, Red Hat's senior director of talent acquisition. "And we're just not offering relocation packages for most of our roles."

Large companies can be the hardest to penetrate — whether they're offering high-paying desk jobs or simply need someone on the sales floor at a local store. Such businesses have policies on background checks and drug screening. Some require that workers be bonded and pass lie detector tests.

Channel Advisor is a Morrisville company that makes software to help retailers sell products on the Web. Anyone who is offered a job there is screened via a seven-year criminal background check. A few employees who deal with financial information are also subject to a credit check.

Recruiting manager Eileen Gates said before they

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'If they ask us for a pen to fill out the application, they're done right there.'

JOBS

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even do those checks there's an initial weeding-out process. Call it the "are they serious" test.

"I see a lot of applications for people who are on unemployment and are required to submit an application for a job [to receive benefits]," she said.

Small but mighty

Job applicants who might have some little smudge in their past — or whose current unemployment could be affecting their creditworthiness — might have better luck with a small company.

It's impractical for smaller businesses to run full credit checks and background checks on every person they hire, since there is so much turnover and since many employees in fast-food places, restaurants and bars are students, said Aaron Van De Mark, whose company has been expanding the Papa Murphy's pizza chain in the Triangle.

"We just don't have the time," he said. "Plus the cost involved with doing something like that for someone who's going to work three hours for you, it's just not worth it."

But that doesn't mean those businesses don't have their own screening process.

Brian Amra runs both Amra's and the Tobacco Road Sports Café on Glenwood South in Raleigh with his brothers.

A recent ad for servers got 47 responses in just half an hour.

"And 60 percent of them have college degrees," he said.

In all, the ad generated roughly 200 applications in three days, Amra said. With that many people wanting a job that pays \$2.13 an hour plus tips, he tried his best to speed up the process.

"People who bounced from job to job we automatically disqualified," he said. "Then we took everyone else, and whoever answered the phone, we set interviews."

Simple things matter, added Amra. One of his simplest tests of an applicant: he walks them by a trash can where he's left a piece of trash on the floor.

"It says something about someone's personality if they do pick it up," he said. "If they don't, it

DON'T CALL US, WE'LL CALL YOU

We're not going to name names, but here are some things area recruiters said they've seen — and would be happy never to see again.

■ A handwritten resume on a ripped-out piece of spiral-bound notebook paper.

■ A woman who applied for a sales job at small hardware store and listed her salary requirement as \$40,000 a year.

■ A woman who, after interviewing for a job at a local restaurant, proceeded to sit at the bar and get drunk.

doesn't mean they will be a bad employee. But if they do pick it up, it probably means they will be a good employee."

Read into rejections

With so many applicants for every job, business owners and hiring managers rarely have the time to call those who didn't make the cut.

"A lot of places, they're like, 'We've got more interviews to do,' and nine times out of 10 I don't even get a call back," said Ryan Donahue, 32, who has been looking for a job for seven months.

"That to me is kind of disheartening," said Donahue, who was laid off from his job as the delivery route manager for a dry cleaner. "Not only did I not get the job, but I don't even know why I didn't get the job."

Career counselors suggest that whenever possible the job hunter do the follow-up — for a learning opportunity.

Sometimes people find a simple reason: not qualified.

"We used to get a lot of applica-

tions that were pretty direct [fits]," said Kevin Jennings, who with his wife, Stacey, owns Raleigh's Urban Food Group. The company is behind several area restaurants, including Frazier's and Porter's City Tavern.

"We would say we need a general manager and we'd get people who were general managers or who had been general managers," Jennings said. "Now we get double or triple the amount, but it's like, 'I ran a retail store, I was a pilot, I worked for IBM.' We wouldn't even consider that."

Gone but not forgotten

For some companies, that initial rejection could be it. For others, it doesn't necessarily mean you're out for good.

Many businesses hold onto some applications in case they have a future opening.

Family Dollar places an emphasis on maintaining contact with applicants, even if they are not hired, said recruiting consultant Lindsay Graham.

"There are a lot of really talented people out there," she said. "We definitely want to keep positive and encourage people to keep checking with Family Dollar."

Red Hat's Brock said the Raleigh company is in the process of formalizing a "silver medal" program where the company stays in touch with its second choice for a job in case a similar role opens up.

"The idea is how can we get to a world where we have candidates as screened as possible before we even have a role open up," Brock said.

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Kerry Pratt talks with Marine Staff Sgt. Jose Martins, left, and Cpl. Angel Velasquez about civilian positions.

TIPS FROM THE TOP

Some of the area's hiring recruiters offered their advice to job seekers:

Read the job requirements. Go through the trouble of clearly stating how your experience meets the requirements for the specific job you want.

Christy Deogny, iContact

Details, details. "If you've helped with a transition or project plan, give the details from the onset of what you did to the closure. If it's generic, then it's hard for somebody to read into what you specifically brought to the project."

Lisa van Capelle, Quintiles

Make it look professional. "We've gotten resumes and cover letters handwritten to us in pen with terrible handwriting."

LJ Brock, Red Hat

Don't get too fancy. "There's a lot of resume formats out there. There are even some video resumes. With those, I'm entertained more so than impressed."

Andy Goodman, Aaron's

Proofread. "It's kind of mind-boggling. We've developed this system where this piece of paper is the first opportunity you have to get someone's attention."

Eileen Gates, Channel Advisor

Do your research and make your letter and resume specific to the company and the job for which you're applying. "I'm still blown away by the number of people who don't address that. It's like, 'Here's my vanilla resume. Here you go.'"

Michael Jones, Channel Advisor

WHAT'S IN YOUR PAST?

Employers nowadays are careful, checking applicants' criminal backgrounds and sometimes their credit.

If you are applying, here are some things you should know.

■ If the employer checks your credit, bankruptcies stay on your credit report for 10 years. Missed payments, lawsuits, judgments and tax liens can stay on your credit report for seven years.

■ If they check your criminal history, they could check with the state only or on a national level. Those reports can contain felony charges, misdemeanors, custody information and checks against the national wanted persons database. There is no time period after which information on such reports expires.

SOURCE: BANKRATE.COM,
N.C. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE