

GETTING NOTICED

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In today's tight job market, the first and often the hardest challenge is to get employers to actually read your resume and to call you to explore the possibility of a job match. Too often, it seems the odds of getting your resume to the top of the recruiter's in-basket are about the same as your chances of winning the lottery.

Let me give you a piece of good news. It doesn't have to be that difficult. In those instances where you clearly possess all of the required qualifications described in the advertisement or job posting, there are just three things you need to do to significantly enhance your chances of getting noticed and receiving a call from the recruiter.

First, revise your resume to emphasize the aspects of your background that most closely align to the requirements of the position. Instead of using your one-size-fits-all resume to respond to every job you are interested in, modify your resume each time to reveal only the skills and experiences that are relevant to the position of interest. It would be smart to begin your resume with a job objective specifically stating the title of the position for which you are applying. Also, there is no need to tell your whole life's story. Your resume should only say enough to convince the reader that you have the relevant and requested qualifications. So, take out the extraneous details, and just tell them what they want to hear. If it takes more than two pages to sell your attributes, you are probably saying too much.

Next, prepare a cover letter that concisely aligns your qualifications to the requirements. For ease of reading, I would suggest two side-by-side columns—one listing their key requirements, the other showing your relevant qualifications. Be careful not to present yourself as being overqualified. For example, if the job requires a minimum of 3 years of experience, it is better to say that you have more than 3 years experience rather than 15 years of experience.

Sample Advertisement

Here is a sample advertisement and an appropriate response using this approach:

WANTED: Contracts Specialist to provide acquisition guidance and contract management support to multiple customers . . . conduct acquisitions . . . implement performance-based contracting vehicles . . . assist customers with IDIQ contracts . . . and guide customers in federal acquisition laws.

REQUIREMENTS:

- Bachelor's degree or equivalent experience in the acquisition and contracts management field
- A minimum of eight years experience in acquisitions and contracts management
- Several years experience in the program management field
- Experience with one of the SEI Capability Maturity Models

Resume Response

The cover letter accompanying your resume should read like this:

In response to your recent advertisement in the *Washington Times* for a Contracts Specialist, I submit my resume and these qualifications for your consideration:

(in two columns)

Your Requirements

Eight years of contracts experience

Bachelors degree

Program management experience

SEI-CMM Experience

My Qualifications

More than eight years in contracts management supporting federal acquisitions

B.S. Business with Procurement emphasis

More than six years experience as a program manager with XYZ Corp on IDIQ contracts

Managed requirements on several CMM SEI Level 3 projects

I would welcome the opportunity to speak to you or any member of your team. You can reach me at . . .

If I were the recruiter responsible for this position, I would be on the phone trying to reach this candidate as soon as I received this letter and resume.

The third step is to submit your resume and cover letter electronically via email or fax, then follow up with a hard copy via "snail mail." Since approximately 50 percent of employers are now using automated resume processing systems, the hard copy will increase the probability that someone other than a computer will actually view your resume.

These steps are intended to make the recruiter's job as easy as possible. Rather than hoping they will read between the lines, show them exactly why you are qualified. Believe me—they will appreciate it and, hopefully, give you the attention you deserve.