

THE MANY HATS OF THE AUSTRALIAN JOB SEEKER

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Top Margin Résumés Online

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The career-savvy job seeker in Australia today needs to fulfill not one role—as he or she would in employment, but multiple roles.

The jobseeker needs to be an “Employment Technologist” savvy to the ways of the Internet, email, e-résumés and bulletin boards, and they need to understand the importance of key words in their career marketing materials to maintain top rankings in databank searches.

As well as needing to be an “Employment Technologist” the Australian jobseeker needs to be a “Communications Expert” able to persuade and influence and build a strong, articulate case that stresses their talents, and matches them to a prospective employer’s needs. Adopting these dual roles though is still not enough; the jobseeker also needs to be a Manager of Awareness, and Master of their Destiny.

In today’s competitive environment in Australia where unemployment hovers nationally at around six per cent, and hours of Australian workers are some of the longest worked worldwide, ignorance of process cannot be an option for the jobseeker. As the Manager of Awareness, the individual must research, investigate, probe and source information. Slavishly following a process that may be thirty years out of date and wondering why an application was rejected, cannot be a component of the modern jobseeker’s professional repertoire!

Today’s Australian employee needs to be aware of so many things. They need to know when the most jobs are advertised in newspapers (Saturday). They need to know where specific industries are located—for instance an individual seeking a position in the mining industry would be better suited to living in Western Australia than inner city Melbourne; they need to know that public service positions are based on merit (Public Service Act 1999); that cover letters should indicate their capacity to solve the employer’s problems, and not just stress their personal career aspirations.

Most of all job applicants in Australia need to keep their eyes and ears open for change in a constantly changing environment.

Government Applications

Hordes of jobseekers, through lack of awareness and research, find themselves the unfortunate recipient of a rejection letter, simply because they failed to read the job advertisement carefully, and failed to act on the not-so-subtle advice provided in each and every Government application.

Government applications can be defined as any job vacancy advertised for teachers, TAFE (Technical and Further Education) Colleges, public service employees, and any local, state or federally advertised position from receptionist to national management. Job advertisements typically disclose the position responsibilities, pay scale range, and position vacancy number. These advertisements will provide the most important part of the application to the job seeker; information that those unaware of the process will likely ignore—an invitation to contact an individual to receive a position description. This is an invitation where an RSVP is vital, as the position description will detail not only the job responsibilities, organizational hierarchy and expectations of the role, but the hidden “third component” of a Government job application (following the cover letter, and résumé); the *Key Selection Criteria*.

The *Key Selection Criteria* are a list of questions that test jobseekers on attitude, skills and specific knowledge. While many would perhaps correctly believe that the question content borders upon interview type questions and ponder what the panel could possibly have left to ask at interview, the process must be followed carefully. Questions can range anywhere between 6-8 standard bullet points quizzing

applicants on the breadth of their experience related to the job in terms of communication, technical knowledge, leadership, and attitude, up to several split components of each question for senior managers and teaching professionals designed to explore their particular brands of experience and match it to the position offered.

Job seekers in receipt of this position description detailing the *Key Selection Criteria*, now commence what will most likely be a grueling period of reflection and multiple document drafts as they list each question, and attempt to provide concrete examples of how their experience matches the needs of the prospective employer. Strong information that cites specific knowledge or experience needs to be explored and results of actions provided. Simply responding to a question on communication with warm and fuzzy phrasing on how it is one of your “greatest strengths” will simply fail to excite the application assessors. Depending upon the question asked, responses to questions can extend from a third of a page, to a full page, with the entire third component frequently reaching 4 pages or more.

Be aware of the government application process

So just how does the process of applying for Government applications in Australia work? Let's follow the process.

1. The selection documentation is prepared, and the position description is created—complete with position responsibilities, key selection criteria, pay scale and contact details.
2. A selection panel is formed to evaluate applications, and shortlist candidates for interviews.
3. A vacancy appears in newspapers and government gazettes, detailing an overview of the position, a contact number to call for a position description, and details of where to send the completed application. Some individuals fail to see the prompt to call for a position description, and in order to get their applications in quickly, send a résumé and a cover letter immediately only to find they have eliminated themselves from the race through their lack of compliance to the procedures stated!
4. The process of handling government applications continues as the final date approaches, and the applications officially close.
5. Next comes the short listing of candidates. Each panel member will separately assess the application paying particular attention to the key selection criteria as listed on the position description. This is where many applicants are eliminated. Failing to call the contact person for the all-important position description, many applicants are unaware of the need to address the “Key Selection Criteria” for the role, and ignore the specific requirements for submitting their application. These individuals have now missed the opportunity for consideration, and each panel member during this process will assess responses to each criteria question based upon the concrete evidence provided by the candidate of how their skills and experience match the role they seek. Once evaluation is complete, the panel will unite and compare their assessments. Those candidates scoring the highest will progress to the next phase.
6. Interviews are held and the candidate is further quizzed via a series of behavioral questions.
7. Candidates designated to progress to the next stage, will undergo a reference check with references frequently requested to submit reports similar to the key selection criteria that questions them on the candidates skills, attitude and knowledge.
8. The panel prepares and submits a selection report.
9. The hiring decision is made.
10. Notifications to all job candidates are distributed.
11. An appeals process will commence should any candidate decide to appeal the decision.
12. A feedback session is organized.

Education & Training Awareness

Education in Australia has rapidly become a “must have” for the jobseeker. Of course, there are exceptions to every rule and most Australians can cite an individual who has risen to the top despite lack of a completed high school education.

Successive governments since the mid '70s have placed increasingly greater emphasis on the value of education; seen by most as the way to “cure” unemployment by instilling the concept of a multi-skilled workforce with the versatility to quickly adapt to a new industry or work discipline.

While this is of course good in theory, in practice the push for training has not been entirely successful with many unemployed individuals disheartened and resistant to being trained in an area they have no interest in or aptitude for.

Whether today's jobseeker holds a degree or not, it is important that the résumé cite several examples of recent training courses and indicate an interest in continuous learning.

Students leaving high school, having completed the two final and most arduous years of their education, can see their hopes dashed and their future career plans disappear in the blink of an eye when receiving their T.E.R. score at the conclusion of their year-end examinations. The VCE (Victorian Certificate of Education), or HSC (Higher School Certificate) for other states, are awarded with a T.E.R.

The T.E.R. or tertiary entrance ranking, is the sum total of a student's tasks and examinations over the previous two years and the score on which their University acceptance is assessed. Out of a possible 100, scores greater than 99% will have choice of the best universities and popular law and medical courses, while those with lesser scores will have to realign their hopes to the realities of their situation. Those with scores of 80 or less frequently need to adjust their hopes for University, and attend the excellent TAFE (Technical and Further Education) facilities, many of which can act as transitional phase to University at a later stage.

D.E.T.Y.A. or the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs at <http://www.detya.gov.au/> can provide extensive assistance to young Australians, with publications and information on training and education and career options available.

Summary

Awareness is the key. Common mistakes—particularly with government applications, can easily be overcome by reading the requirements of each and every job, following each step completely, communicating with contact personnel, and keeping your eyes and ears open. Add Master of Your Destiny, and Manager of Awareness to your talent bank and you will stay ahead of your competitors.

Gayle Howard was the first Australian to be awarded three resume writing certifications as a Certified Professional Resume Writer (CPRW), Certified Resume Writer (CRW), and Certified Expert Resume Writer. She is also a Credentialed Career Master (CCM) and a Certified Web Portfolio Practitioner. Her work has been featured in more than 20 career books internationally and she is the author of the e-Book "PS You Need a Resume!". You can contact her via email at getinterviews@topmargin.com or by phone at 61 3 9726 6694.