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How to Reject a Job Applicant

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By: [Michael Mercer, Ph.D.](#)

Many years ago, when I worked as a manager at a major corporation, I received a call from a headhunter about a magnificent job opening. It sounded like the perfect job for me. So, I went and was interviewed by the vice-president I would report to, if hired. He told me I was one of two finalists for the position.

A week later, I got on an elevator with a person who looked totally elated. I asked her why she felt so jubilant. She proudly told me she was offered a fantastic job. She described the job to me.

Lo-and-behold, she got the job I applied for! Of the two finalists, she was the other candidate - and she got the job!

The next day, I called the vice-president who interviewed me. I asked if we could meet to discuss why he did not offer me the job. He agreed. When we met, he told me the only reason he did not hire me was because of one thing I said in the interview that he did not like. He told me what it was. I felt horrified. The vice-president grossly misinterpreted what I meant! So, I did not get offered the job because he misinterpreted one comment I made.

I told him how he misinterpreted that one remark. It was useless. We argued for two hours. It was quite unpleasant. I am sure that was the last time that executive told any applicant why he or she did not receive a job offer.

Valuable Lesson

When you reject a job applicant -- and the applicant asks you why -- remember to do only the following:

1. Act politely vague about why you rejected the applicant
2. Just say "No!!"

Act Politely Vague

If an applicant asks you why you did not hire him or her, say something politely vague. Examples:

- ◆ "As you can imagine, we had a number of applicants for this job. We will keep your application on file. Thanks for applying."

Article Summary:

how to smoothly and easily reject job applicants.

◆ "We had to choose among a number of applicants. Thanks for applying. We'll keep your application on file."

If the applicant asks (or begs) you for "feedback" or advice to become a better applicant in the future, BEWARE! Such requests are disguised ways to squeeze out of you the reasons you rejected the person. Despite your humanistic urge to help the applicant "grow" or "develop skills," never tell the applicant reasons for the rejection. If you tell the applicant the real reasons, you most likely will get yourself into an uncomfortable disagreement. The applicant will take great glee in trying to find fault with your reasons for rejection. Just Say "No!"

Many companies use pre-employment tests. The company tests an applicant, and then gets computerized scores to quickly compare the applicant to productive employees who work in the particular job. Often, managers ask me, "Dr. Mercer, can I show the applicant his or her test scores?"

I answer as follows: "Would you show the applicant the notes you took when you interviewed him or her?" The manager always responds, "Of course not!"

Then, I ask, "Would you show the applicant the notes you took when you called the applicant's references?" Again, the manager answers, "Of course not!"

I then explain to the manager to treat the test scores the same way the manager treats the interview notes or reference check notes: Do not show any hiring materials to the applicant.

Take This Quiz

Answer these questions to assess your skill at rejecting an applicant - and staying out of hot water with applicants you reject.

1. Should you tell the applicant why you did not hire him/her? Yes / No
2. Should you show the applicant materials you have about him/her, such as
 - a. Test scores? Yes / No
 - b. Notes you took while interviewing applicant? Yes / No
 - c. Notes you took during reference checks? Yes / No
 - d. Applicant rating sheet? Yes / No
3. Should you tell the applicant details of discussions you and other managers had about him/her? Yes / No
4. If an applicant asks for "feedback" or "advice" about how to do better in future job interviews, which answer is best - for you and your company?
 - a. "We rejected you because you have quirks, your work experience is unimpressive, you lack certain skills, and your communications skills need improvement."
 - b. "As you can imagine, we had a number of applicants for this job. Thank you for applying. We will keep your application on file."

Answers: = For Questions 1, 2 and 3, all answers are "No." For Question 4, the answer is "b."

Remember - Or You Pay the Price

When hiring, your goal is to hire productive employees. Your goal is not to

◆ get into a heated discussion with a rejected applicant nor

- ◆ help a rejected applicant "develop skills" and improve.

So, remember two rules when you reject an applicant:

1. Act politely vague about why you rejected the applicant
2. Just say "No!!"

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Michael Mercer, Ph.D., is America's Hire the Best Expert™. Dr. Mercer authored 5 books, including "Hire the Best - & Avoid the Rest™" and also "Turning Your Human Resources Department into a Profit Center™". Many companies rely on his pre-employment test, "Abilities & Behavior Forecaster™ Test," to help hire the best. You can subscribe to his free Management e-Newsletter at www.DrMercer.com or call him at (847)3...

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