

SENDING GENERIC RESUMES WILL GET YOU NOWHERE FAST. YOUR TASK IS TO GET A COMPANY'S ATTENTION BY CUSTOMIZING.

You're about to start your job hunt, and you've come up with what you believe to be a masterful plan: you'll put together the best resume you can, then fire it off to as many companies as you can, in the hopes it will be a good match for at least one job in one organization. It's the classic "throw a bunch of mud against the wall and see if any of it sticks" approach.

It's a strategy that's great for helping you feel like you're really doing something in your job search. Problem is, it's far more likely to be a waste of your time, energy and perhaps money than anything else. The one-size-fits-all resume (and its cousin, the one-size-fits-all cover letter) just doesn't work in most cases. Put yourself in the employer's shoes, and it's easy to pinpoint the reasons why.

The Swamp Factor

Most employers dread going through resume piles (or the online resumes they've received) in the first place. They would rather be doing almost anything else, especially after they've seen too many of these types of resumes.

So when your one-size-fits-all resume shows up, along with dozens of others, the employer will likely spot it immediately, and put it in the circular file (aka the recycle bin) or the delete box, never to be considered again.

Customize Your Resume to the Position

Managers trying to fill positions in their organizations don't want to hear from applicants who are merely taking a shot at a job. They want to hear from people who really, truly want the job. The people who do are generally the ones who invest the time and energy necessary to customize their resumes and cover letters to the job and company at hand. If you were the employer, who would you be more interested in: the person who sent you the same resume he or she has sent everyone else, or the person who sent you a resume tailored to your specific wants and needs?

Watch for the Clues

Every job listing you'll ever see contains clues about the specific experiences, skills and/or educational background the employer is seeking in the person it will hire. If you take the time to identify those characteristics and then highlight them on your resume (and in your cover letter), you'll have the chance to present your potential in the best light possible. In other words, you give the organization what it's looking for instead of trying to (usually unsuccessfully) impose your agenda on the company.

Does customizing your resumes and cover letters take more time than the one-size-fits-all approach? Definitely. Does it involve more research, more energy, more work? Absolutely. But your chances for positive payoff are much greater. As corporate recruiter Nancy Bernardi told the Sacramento Bee recently: "Unfortunately, I don't think a lot of people even read the job descriptions of the positions they apply for. So often they send us resumes that have nothing to do with the job they're applying for. We never call people like that."

