

At Work: Job seeker has passion but not enough experience

by Lindsey_Novak

Q: I want a job in emergency management at a fire department, at an organization or company, or with the government. I have one certificate in emergency management and one year of experience, but many of the job ads for such positions require much more experience and other certifications. Should I apply for these jobs despite the fact that I don't possess the requirements? I have a passion for helping people, and I absolutely want a career in this area.

A: If you apply for a position that demands a certain amount of experience and a certain number of certifications that you are missing, your résumé won't even be considered. If you think this field is your calling, make a list of all the qualifications these jobs are requiring. Then send a cover letter explaining your passion for the field and interest in applying for any job openings at any level. You may receive rejection letters, but you will have gotten your name in front of the hiring people and contact names to call for informational interviews. You never will impress everyone who receives your letter, but you only need one person who admires your goals enough to champion you in the field.

Informational interviews serve many purposes. They introduce potential job candidates to professionals in the field, which helps with future networking. They offer a wealth of inside information on the jobs in the field, and they give the job candidates interviewing experience. Just as you have a passion for helping people, the chances are good that you will connect with a professional who wants to help you advance in that field.

Job Applicant Likely More Qualified Than Group's Director

Q: I encountered a greater problem than not getting the job, when I applied for a job at a foundation that has after-school and weekend programs for inner-city youth. The ad said they wanted talented professionals to teach art to kids. I have a bachelor's in fine arts, a master's in special education, six years of teaching experience, one year of experience in finance, a Web page with my fine arts portfolio, and a history of doing public art projects on micro-budgets. The director of the organization e-mailed me saying that based on my résumé, I am not the kind of person they were looking for. I e-mailed her and asked what my résumé is lacking. Her reply was they wanted someone who can make "leaders" out of the kids so they become leaders in their community. I am familiar with this organization, and they have a history of hiring foulmouthed women and men who spew venom every time they talk. I used to work with an organization that had a staff person with a master's and a 26-year-old boss who had no degree or work experience but was "from the streets." I think these groups are severely misguided. What can I do about this?

A: The organization's director likely felt inferior when comparing her background with yours and certainly wasn't going to admit it to you. It would have been better for her not to respond than to e-mail you her poorly reasoned rejection. If you want to make a positive contribution to an inner-city organization you feel is misguided, contact its board of directors or head and explain your thoughts on the subject. Better yet, find investors and create your own community organization that hires passionate and qualified teachers and volunteers.

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