

What Makes a Candidate Stand Out?

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ABSTRACT

Curious how to move ahead or move on? Wondering how to make your resume stand out from others with equal experience? Wanting to find something that you can do or say that will keep you in the forefront of a hiring manager' mind? We will cover these questions and more to help you find a path to whatever you would like your future to look like.

INTRODUCTION

We all seek opportunity for growth. We seek it within role to gain additional knowledge. We seek it in professional advancement. We seek it in our compensation. The first step is to gain the personal confidence to take that leap and typically, when we start to consider taking that leap, we often find ourselves questioning the best way to go about it. Is my CV strong enough? Do I have enough experience? Are my interpersonal skills going to leave a positive impression? All of us consider these things. Some of us talk ourselves out of opportunity seeking because of the anxiety and even fear that these thoughts can generate. I speak from a platform of personal experience with all of the above. I have had the opportunity to engage in both professional and private settings with some great mentors who shared with me the information we will discuss here. The gems that I was able to take away from these mentors have led to positions in leadership, with expanded scope, financial gain and a broadening of my experience that has led me to present here today.

WHAT DO I NEED TO CONSIDER?

What state is your CV in? When was the last time you took a critical look at your resume? These are some of the first things to consider when you are debating a move and how to begin to differentiate yourself from the competition.

When you are in leadership and seeking a candidate, you are typically seeking specific skill sets, level of subject matter expertise, and that "something else". The first couple of items you can adjust quickly without a terrible amount of anxiety. The latter, that "something else", this is one that usually leads to the anxiety and even debate on whether or not to pursue a role of interest. Let me tell you, you have that "something else" in you. It is merely a matter of identification and communication. Many of us in clinical research settings are mission driven, focused on a common good, and seek out opportunity to just be a part of something bigger than ourselves by participating in roles that provide an outlet to contribute and not necessarily to shine.

However, as we mature in career and life, we realize the other things that working in this industry and field have to offer. The development a greater skill set, leading teams who share a common goal, financial growth, recognition and acknowledgement of expertise amongst peers, and so on. This then becomes a point of interest. So, how do I/you move forward into enjoying some of the gifts of our industry, take the leap.

Back to my earlier point, you can review and update your CV, you can fine-tune a cover letter based on what you know about the role that you want to obtain, but now it is about you. How do I make "me" stand out? How do I separate myself from the others that are sure to have the same or similar backgrounds and the same to similar time and tenure? On paper, that's tough, but can be done.

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

I have updated my CV in both content and formatting. I have taken a critical look at my background and experience and believe that I have more to offer than what the role is seeking. Now what?

Now is when you need to define what makes you tick? What interest you most about what you do and how does this fit into this new role that you have decided to pursue? What are the points of excitement

about the role that drew you to it? How do you affect those items with not only your experience, but also more importantly your direct interactions with those that receive either your product or guidance?

Defining who you are in a role even before you obtain it is a tremendous help. It will give you perspective of what the leadership/hiring manager for the role may be seeking. It will provide you answers to the questions of “how will you fit in this role and what do you bring to the table”, and most importantly it will provide you the basis of what makes you stand out. How is that you ask? When you know what you have to offer a role and hiring manager, are clear about what that is, and can speak to it readily, with a smile on your face, it demonstrates competence, confidence, and capability.

WHAT'S NEXT?

You've gone through the resume exercise, you've determined what you have to offer, you've prepared to answer questions during an interview. Where do I go from here, you wonder. Now you can focus more on the elements that will help you separate yourself from the pack.

Whether you're in a role and shooting for advancement within an organization or if you are seeking an opportunity in an outside organization you will want to demonstrate and/or present some key elements to be recognized and remembered.

Here is a simple list of some of those elements:

1. **Enthusiasm.** As we grow in tenure and experience, some tasks become menial and our enthusiasm to manage those tasks wanes. Demonstrate and display enthusiasm in all that you do and seek out a means to make those menial tasks of more interest.
2. **Initiative.** Playing off of creating the means to be enthusiastic even during mundane tasks, seek out ways to be more productive or efficient in tasks that will help your day to day productivity, attitude and enthusiasm.
3. **Honesty.** Yes it can be a little painful and unsettling when you think/feel that this could expose an area of weakness, but be honest in your experience and responses. It actually does go a long way to making a connection with the individual(s) that will manage and/or work with you.
4. **Character.** Speak from the heart. Again this can be discomforting for some, but it carries a lot of weight. Hiring managers want and need to know how the individual they are speaking with will fit into their team culture and what they potentially add. They are also ultimately concerned with how will this person collaborate with me and can I trust them, their judgement and decision-making.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO MAKE AN IMPRESSION?

You've done your best to highlight your top qualities in your CV presentation, your knowledge of the role and how you fit, and provided insight into you as a person. Now you need to do something special to leave that lasting impression. Below are some of the things that can truly set you apart from others. Not all will be possible and this is by no means exhaustive as over the years you will hear and come up with other ideas when properly motivated to market yourself.

1. **Connect with an insider.** With the amount of social networking, movement of personnel from location to location and the desire to have an inside track, folks are more willing to connect and to create mutual pathways for introduction.
2. **Showcase your skills.** Unless you are going for a technical position this is not typically something afforded to the masses. However, find a way to introduce your skills. Create an online profile, or a simple, short presentation, or bring a sample of a report you created that demonstrates some complexity and can be associated to something expected in the role you are applying. Maybe you create a video of you mentoring or leading a team through an exercise. These are things that you can

add your own flare to and even identify other options.

3. Demonstrate your effort, value, and enthusiasm. Most organizations have a wrap up session with the hiring manager to field any final questions the candidate or hiring manager may have. Use this time to your advantage. As you go throughout your day/time in interviews, piece together points that team members are taking. Interview candidates are typically seen as 'safe' and tend to get insight into information that managers may not even be aware of via staff, but see the impact of the cause. You can identify a proposal to resolve the issue, or a tactic that would increase productivity or quality, or increase staff morale. This creates an opportunity to show your understanding, ability to think on your feet, and displays both effort and enthusiasm for the role.
4. Stand out in your close out. This is the one that will tell you all you need to know and most certainly leave an impression. It can be risky, but if you really want the role, you want to leave nothing undone. Ask the question(s) that others may not, specifically in your close out.
 - "Were there any points discussed today that leave you feeling that I am not the right candidate for the position?" – Yes, it takes guts to ask, but if you have a good feel for the appropriateness of the ask to the hiring manager, this gives you another opportunity to demonstrate your capabilities and skills. Furthermore, this demonstrates your comfort with direct feedback and professionalism.
 - "What can I do to convince you I am the right person for the role?" – Dependent on how you feel post interviews/discussion there may still be a little something you feel is left to be answered. If this is the case, being direct will provide you an opportunity to address this concern. You may find that the hiring manager will define a shortcoming in your CV or discussed experience versus your CV that you can then respond to on the spot, or they may request that you provide additional materials that will take some time post interview (e.g. coding sample, report sample, certification). This would also create an opportunity for you to volunteer a project that you feel would help you and would give you an opportunity to gain contact information and show initiative and interest.

CONCLUSION

The information presented in this session and discussed is intended to get the creative juices flowing, to provide some ideas that you can apply as you venture out, and to create a desire to consider all aspects of the information you will develop, share, and communicate throughout the lifecycle of your search.

Ultimately, I hope that pieces of what we discuss and share will stick with you, much like the words and guidance from my mentors have with me and that you too may impart wisdom on those that you mentor.

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The content, ideas, recommendations, successes and failures, are all developed from experiences throughout my career. These experiences through past management, various industry leaders, colleagues and mentors, conferences, and direct experience.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Your comments and questions are valued and encouraged. Contact the author at:

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