



June 2009

LEADERS TO FOLLOW

International Leadership Institute: Providing Leadership Development Services and Programs in the US and Europe since 1985

Volume 18, #6

By Sara Tusek

OVERQUALIFIED, UNDEQUALIFIED OR JUST RIGHT

Looking for a job is not for the faint-hearted. Laying yourself open for evaluation by a potential employer can be daunting. You need to prepare well, so that you can gain interviews and job offers. You need to be the candidate who's "just right" for the job.

It's a little like the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears: too much, too little or just right. If you remember the story, you know that Goldilocks was snooping around the bears' house while they were away. She tried their chairs, porridge and beds, with the same result each time: Papa Bear's were too big (overqualified), Mama Bears' were too small (underqualified), and Baby Bear's were just right.

The job hunter is like Goldilocks, trying out job scenarios to find one that fits. This is exciting, but remember that the employer is also looking for the best fit. What you want is for the employer to see you as "just right."

OVERQUALIFIED

When an employer is hiring a person for a particular job, he or she probably already knows what's needed to do that job well. Sometimes the "perfect candidate" will resemble a former satisfactory employee in terms of qualifications; sometimes, the job needs revising and the qualifications are not quite as clear.

In either case, the employer often wants to know exactly and only what's needed for the job being filled. This means that you, the job hunter, must weed out everything in your resume and interview process that is not required for the job.

This goes against common sense, as you would expect the employer to be thrilled to get an employee who can

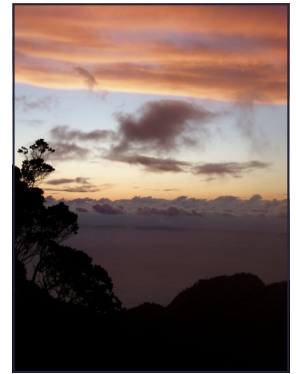
do more than the basics. If you have more than the minimum, then why not say so?

Let's imagine that an employer wants to hire a salesperson to sell office machines. You have an extensive background in sales, have won awards for selling, and have sold everything from cars to appliances to insurance policies. In fact, you're such a good salesperson that you've been tapped as a sales trainer and supervisor in two previous jobs. This is all good, right?

Not necessarily. It all depends on the employer, his or her plans for the future and the people already working in the company. Here are a few possible objections:

- *You're so skilled that you'll quickly get bored and quit*
- *You'll intimidate the other salespeople and cause friction in the sales force.*
- *You'll expect special treatment because of your abilities*
- *You'll steal customers from other employees*
- *You'll demand a higher salary to match your success*
- *You will get promoted over the head of your boss.*

It takes an employer with vision and confidence in the company's future to hire someone with more skills, abilities and accomplishments than are needed for the job as it exists. If you're being interviewed by the person who would supervise you, your extensive qualifications might be seen as a threat to that person's job security. The polite way to say "I'm scared that you might make me look bad by comparison to your talents" is "you're so well-qualified that we are sure you'll have no problem finding a wonderful job"...with another company. *To p. 2*



Hawaiian sunset , by Bruce Bassity

The International Leadership Institute

- WAS FOUNDED IN 1985 IN PRINCETON, NJ
- REMAINS DEDICATED TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
- HAS RUN MORE THAN 70 EXECUTIVE EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN THE US, FOR EUROPEAN CLIENTS
- HAS PARTNERED WITH THE US DEPARTMENT OF STATE, THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA, THE JACKSONVILLE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND MORE THAN 700 OTHER BUSINESSES, UNIVERSITIES, RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS, PRIVATE CITIZENS AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES



OVERQUALIFIED, UNDERQUALIFIED OR JUST RIGHT

FROM P. 1

UNDERQUALIFIED

This scenario is perhaps more familiar to most people. While it seems to make little sense that a person can be passed over by an employer for being overqualified, it seems all too possible that you won't get a job because you're underqualified.

Being underqualified for a job means that you seemingly don't meet all the stated requirements. For example, a company wants to hire a human resources specialist. This job is primarily in the training area; the employee spends about 65% of his or her time as a trainer, running sessions for employees to help them improve their 1) interpersonal communications, 2) time-management skills, and 3) work-related performance. The remaining 30% of the employee's time is spent assisting the Director of Human Resources as needed.

You apply for the job, bringing a solid record of training experience in the three areas mentioned in the job description. But you can't quite pinpoint the 35% of the job where you would be assisting the Director.

This is not surprising. The Director, logically, wants some leeway for selecting a candidate with whom he or she has "good chemistry." He or she also needs to know how much the new employee can be trusted to do well, and will then adjust the job duties to fit the employee's abilities.

Since the employer can't put this in a job description (it's too vague and possibly discriminatory), the 35% is used instead. In an interview, the Director can discover the candidate's strengths and decide if the overall mix of skills, attitude and knowledge offered by the candidate will be useful in the job.

In this regard, then, being "underqualified" is a way to express that the match between employer and employee isn't as good as it could be. Maybe another candidate is not so strong as you are on the 65%, but is a better fit on the 35%.

The official reason may be that the other candidate had stronger qualifications, but the truth is that the other

INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE PUBLISHING HOUSE announces July 2009 publication of 21ST CENTURY JOBS

Written as a basic handbook for the job seeker (or job changer) in the 21st century, this book offers everything you need to find the job you can enjoy and do best. From self-analysis exercises, through finding out "where the jobs are" right now (and will be in the near future), 21st Century Jobs can help you get your first job, overcome career obstacles or enter an entirely new career.

The skills and strategies taught in 21st Century Jobs will last you for a lifetime.

Don't forget that the other job candidates all have their own sets of competencies, advantages and disadvantages. Every hiring decision is influenced not only by each candidate's qualifications individually, but also by how they compare to each other in the interview process. Thus "underqualification" is a relative term.

JUST RIGHT

By now you can probably see that being "just right" is not simply a matter of your qualifications. In some settings, you'll be overqualified by virtue of

- *the quality (competence, education, experience and attitude) of the company's current employees*
- *your competitors for the job in question (the applicant pool)*
- *your own experience (both what you choose to tell them and what they will infer).*

In other settings, you'll be underqualified for exactly the same three reasons. So how can you be just right?

The only way I know to find the job where you're just right, the job you love and can do best, is by hard work on your part. You need to be able to look at yourself with an unbiased eye, correctly discerning your strengths and weaknesses, your dreams and failures, your potential and your actual accomplishments to date. You then need to find organizations that can use someone like you; present yourself honestly to the organizations so that they understand your capabilities and interests; assess their needs and resources; and, finally, decide which organization is a good match for you.

This is a nutshell description of the career development process. As you can see, this process never ends, as long as you want to make a contribution to your society. As the economy changes, so must you! And as you develop as a human being, you owe it to yourself to keep reassessing your career-related potential, so you can always have the job that is "just right" for you, the job you'll like and do best.