

# STERLING | MARTIN

a s s o c i a t e s

## WHY WASN'T I CONSIDERED FOR THE JOB? | TOP REASONS YOUR RESUME WAS SET ASIDE

*By Virginia O'Brien Record*

As executive recruiters, we review literally hundreds of candidate portfolios for every search we undertake. In addition to posting our clients' positions on various websites, we reach out directly to candidates and referral sources in order to find what we like to call "non-candidates" – people who are not engaged in an active search.

Several of our recent searches have yielded in the range of 200 candidates each, and while we want to give our time and attention equally to every person who comes our way, some of the submissions will hit the "TNT" ("Thanks but No Thanks") pile in a nanosecond. Why? Here are some of the top reasons candidates aren't considered – real situations derived from searches we have conducted over the past few years. We have also included some advice on how to get yourself noticed – in a good way.

1. You applied to the title, not the position, i.e., you didn't read the section on minimum qualifications. (Example: You presented 20 years of very good IT experience in the for-profit sector, but we were actually looking for 15+ years of executive-level management experience in the nonprofit sector.

*(Read the position description very carefully, and be certain that your experience matches what our clients are seeking.)*

2. You didn't bother to prepare a cover letter telling us how your experience and background were a good fit for the position.

*(A well-crafted cover letter that marries your experience to the specifics of the position will get you noticed every time, as will a resume that lays out your achievements in relation to the position.)*

3. You sent a cover letter for another position.

*(Oops! – Enough said.)*

4. You sent applications for three positions which we were handling – all very different in nature – and you used the same cover letter and resume for all three.

*(Double-oops!)*

5. You used a generic salutation (e.g., “Dear Hiring Manager”) when the specific names and contact information were included in the posting as well as in the position description.

*(An automatic TNT.)*

6. Your cover letter or resume (or both) contained typographical errors.

*(Before hitting the “Send” button, read and re-read what you are about to send, and consider having someone else proofread your documents. Spell check and grammar check are not always accurate.)*

7. Your cover letter (a) told us nothing about you, (b) was incorrectly addressed, and (c) was horribly written and – frankly – painful to read. Actual example from a recent search:

“To S. Martin - Appended hereto is my CV which I wish submit as a candidate for the position of \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_. I eagerly await the opportunity to commence a dialogue with you are your colleagues regarding the significant contributions that I can prospectively allocate to the extraordinary efforts of which your organization is currently undertaking.”

*(Ouch!)*

8. Your resume was presented in a functional format rather than chronologically which made it difficult for us to figure out how your “unique qualifications,” “visionary leadership,” and “extraordinary management skills” (with multiple bullet points under each) related to what you have actually done in your career progression.

*(We far prefer the chronological resume with accomplishments bulleted under each organization for the position you held.)*

9. Your resume was 22 pages long, contained a Table of Contents to guide the reader, listed every publication and presentation you have ever made, and presented a full list of references with complete contact information.

*(To the extent possible, keep the resume to two or three pages, and don't include references until and unless you are specifically asked for them. We'll get to those as you move through the search process. If you come with a higher education or scientific background, please have a traditional resume available, and hold off on the full curriculum vitae until asked for one.)*

10. Your resume contained bold colors or had moving parts because you wanted to get our attention.

*(You sure did!)*

11. You did not include the year(s) of your degree(s).

*(We will ask you about this, so it's better to include it in the first place.)<sup>1</sup>*

12. You did not include any information on what you did early in your career.

*(We need to see your entire career progression, even if your early positions do not relate to what you have done in the recent past. We're looking to understand the steps that brought you to your current situation.)<sup>2</sup>*

13. You have not stayed in any of your positions for more than a year or two.

*(Unless you have been a contractor throughout your career, this throws up a BIG red flag.)*

14. You had a three-year gap in the middle of your career that you didn't explain.

*(In many instances, gaps are perfectly understandable, but we need to know why they occurred because our clients will ask, and we need to be able to provide an answer.)*

15. Your "independent consulting firm" has been re-activated three times during your 15-year career.

*(This tells us quite a bit.)*

16. On four separate occasions during your career, an incoming executive has caused a restructuring of the senior management team, and your positions have been eliminated.

*(We know that this happens from time to time, but four times???)*

There are, of course, other reasons that you might not have been considered for a particular position, but the correctable errors listed above stand out for us. We want you to succeed in your job search, and there are so many positive ways you can present yourself for

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<sup>1</sup> Many candidates have been told to leave out dates and/or early positions held, but when working with an executive recruiter, this information is crucial to our understanding of your career progression. It would be wise to have two versions of your resume at the ready – a version that captures your last 15 or so years of experience and another that goes all the way back when you earned your first degree. The latter is better when you are working with a search firm.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

consideration. First, take the time to look at the position requirements carefully to be certain that your background and experience are relevant to what we are seeking. Then, take the time to be thoughtful and truthful in both your cover letter and resume. Try your cover letter out on a friend or family member to see what they think. Read and then re-read what you are going to submit before you hit the "Send" button. Make your presentation relevant to the position for which you are applying. Above all, apply only for positions that are related to your experience and background.

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