

Script:

Job Application Training

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Application

Application is actually an offer of performances with which the applicant is trying to convince the addressee that he or she is appropriate to carry out a particular task. In most cases this involves an application to a company regarding a working position, internship, part-time job or apprenticeship.

In a broader sense, the term also includes the request for admission to a college or university and the application of a city or country to host cultural or major sport events.

Occasion

Applications are often a response to a job posting or job advertisement in which the tasks and requirements of the future job holder are described. With an unsolicited application, however, the applicant makes the first move, because he believes that there is a job opening or because he wants to forestall a job opening and the expected competition. An unsolicited application is usually also a short job application.

If you ask three trainers who prepare people for job interviews what a good job application should look like, you will get at least five different answers... Application documents and procedures usually depend to a certain degree on current trends. In the end they also depend on the personal taste and preferences of the human resources manager and manager who will deal with your application documents.

Still, there are a couple of conditions that must always be kept in mind. I would like to explain them here briefly. An application consists of a cover letter and the application portfolio. Even after telephone applications, it is usually necessary to submit a written application as well. In case of online applications, you should also send your application papers the "normal way". People often forget that an application is actually a way of self-promotion and self-advertising.

Parts of an application

A complete application consists of a cover letter, a resume and enclosed documents. Some applicants opt for a third page in which they can present their motivation and qualifications in more detail.

Cover letter

Basics

The cover letter is usually short and concise, describing the applicant's qualifications and motivation regarding the desired job position. The cover letter intends to give the first impression of the applicant and it is usually of a DIN A4 page length. The cover letter should indicate the reasons why you would like to work at that position and why you are suitable for a certain task.

In case of technical occupations, you can present your qualifications in form of a technical resume. In this profile you can describe which tools you have a good command of (e.g. programming languages) and in which projects you have gained experience.

In your cover letter you should adapt your language to the company or job position that you are applying for. Language can vary, but it is generally advisable to avoid slang and pseudo-modern expressions. You should also avoid an excessive use of the conditional. Phrases such as "I would be happy to meet you in person in a job interview" are too frequent in job application. With clear statements such as "I look forward to the interview" maybe your application will stand from the crowd.

From the perspective of an employer

Cover letter statistics

As the owner of a computer company I constantly receive job applications. Based on the last 25 applications I received, I have created the following, saddening statistics:

- 100% of the applications had misspellings and grammatical errors in them.
- 92% of them contained three or more mistakes that were detected by the Microsoft Word Spell Checker. But almost all of the applicants took the opportunity to state that they have a very good command of Office programs (apparently they wanted to prove that by turning off or ignoring the Spell Checker).
- 56% of them had a strange formatting.
- 36% of them had not listed the number of their (current) cell phone, but they have stressed that they are flexible and devoted.
- 32% of them have not mentioned their (current) driver's license, which is very important in a repair service company
- 16% of them have misspelled their own address (zip code or typos)
- 16% of them have copied the name of the company or manager wrong
- 16% of them have used lined paper or paper quality of toilet paper
- 12% of the applications had curved corners
- 8% of them had attached their photo with a paper clip or just submitted it unattached

Would you like to receive a hundred thousand euros?

When you apply for a job position, you are actually trying to sell “your own labor” and expect to get a hundred thousand euros for it. How come? Even if your employer is paying you 1400 euros gross a month, he still has to pay social security contributions and payroll taxes. They cost him nearly 2000 euros a month. That is 24 000 euros per year and 120 000 euros in five years.

If you are offering this expensive commodity i.e. your labor, then the advertising for it should be outstanding.

- Print out the draft of your cover letter! It is easier to notice errors and mistakes on paper than on the screen.
- Let your relatives and friends proofread the text a couple of times! Find someone who has a perfect command of spelling!
- Work carefully and do not just say that!

Availability

Another candidate has lost an opportunity for an internship. The application seemed alright, but the applicant has not provided his cell phone number nor his e-mail address in the application – or, and this happens very often – the phone number or e-mail address was incorrect or incomplete. There is no reply to the e-mail, maybe because the candidate checks his mailbox every once in a while. Arranging an interview per regular mail would last too long, besides there are other candidates who are waiting for an answer. Twelve attempts in three days to arrange a job interview were unsuccessful. Answering machine? None. What do you think, how many times must the employer try to contact you?

Application picture

No other topic is being so controversially discussed as the importance and influence of photos in applications. In some countries it is uncommon or even forbidden to attach photos to your application, in order to ensure that the decision is made only based on facts. This shows how much a photo can influence the application. Nowadays employers in Germany are not allowed to require photos on applications. But think about it. If it were you who had to make a decision based on dozens of job application lying in front of you. Which ones are you going to look at first – the ones with or without a picture? My point exactly!

In Germany it is still very common to attach a photo to your job application. Given the fact that the picture is the first impression your employer or human resources manager is going to make of you, it is important not to economize here. You should always, always avoid photo booth pictures (“four times the same grin for five euros”), photos from your vacation, badly scanned thumbs and full body shots. That looks cheap and leads to the conclusion that the application is not important to you, and that is not a good impression!

Therefore keep in mind the following:

- Let a professional photographer take the picture. This is initially a little more expensive, but it pays off. A good photographer knows his stuff and he will get the best out of you. And when you order more photos afterwards they are actually quite cheap.
- Application photos have a unique format; they are bigger than passport photos. Usually 4.5 x 6 cm up to 5 X 7 cm. A portrait layout works always, a landscape layout works sometimes, even square formats 6 x 6 cm work. If you want the picture to look particularly “fancy”, you can develop it in black and white.
- The best you can do is to take multiple shots, treat yourself with a photo session. Try out different clothes, backgrounds and maybe different hairstyles. Of course, you need to look rested and neat. Everyone looks good after an appointment at the hairstylist and men look good freshly shaved. Real professionals suggest that you do not choose the picture yourself. Sometimes the way you perceive yourself and how others see you can vary. Let your relatives and friends make the decision for you.
- The photo should be usually attached to the cover or resume. The best option is double-sided adhesive tapes for photos. Whatever you choose, keep your work tidy and clean and avoid “crooked” positions of the photo. Do not, under any circumstances, attach the good picture with paper clips or a stapler!
- Use only current, unfolded and clean photos!

Resume

The resume contains biographical data of the candidate. In addition to the personal information, a resume provides information about your education and professional career. Here you can also present your special qualifications (such as foreign languages or computer skills) as well as personal interests.

If you use a third page, this is where you can describe your special qualifications and social skills.

A resume is usually constructed in tabular form, displaying the educational and occupational stations in chronological order or the other way around. In special cases the employer can require a hand-written resume and/or an essay type resume.

A company owner, who wrote here, noted that approximately one in four resumes has time gaps in the timeline. Even if this statement cannot be generalized, the question arises - are time gaps a sign of lack of care or did the applicant spend that time in prison?

The classic resume is usually divided into blocks education/school, (vocational) education, activities, hobbies and other.

In contrast to the classic resume, the so called innovative resume is constructed strictly chronologically from the newest date, including all activities, regardless of the block it would usually belong to (education or school, work, internship, hobbies, other). In this way it shows in a logical order which functions and duties as well as other activities you have been carrying out so far. Correct dates, usually in the format MM/YYYY, the activity and duty descriptions constitute the main points, the company and location are less important.

The main difference between the "classic" resume and the "innovative" is the temporal allocation of training and job experiences in each main time period. Descriptions of activities, skills and other things are part of the skills profile. Given that the cover letter already contains the date and signature, there is no need to put them in the resume as well.

The structure of the innovative resume (CV)

- put your name as the title
- name of the desired function or duty from the job ad or unsolicited application
- highest professional qualification with degree and years of working and how all of that would be useful for this position or task
- personal information such as date of birth, marital status, contact
- a professional photo in passport format; it should be placed in the top right corner
- time period of your last job, including e.g. data on the company, turnover, subordinates etc.
- time period of the job before the last one; e.g. a longer training in this period is listed as a sub-item
- military service, alternative service, voluntary social year
- period of study or vocational training and level of degree; internships and jobs are listed as sub-items
- highest school degree

Third page

The term third page is listed as a formal bullet in the following order: cover letter, resume, third page and Appendix. It is also an independent content unit.

Third page (2)

The third page is a new concept, which is finding its way to applications more and more since the 90s. Next to the cover letter and resume, the third page is another page where you can present yourself, your motivation, qualification and other personal characteristics. You can use headings such as “What you should also know about me” or “My motivation”.

The use of the third page is somewhat controversial. Some recruiters do not like it, because it allows the applicant to elaborately present his or her advantages beyond the usual conventions, which can be seen as an unfair advantage in relation to other candidates. Others see the third page as a chance to learn more about the candidate.

Skills Profile

The skills profile, also called qualifications profile, has a different approach than the so-called third page. The skills profile presents your know-how, skills, also called key qualifications, your personal successes and duties in the context of the requirements from the job ad. Therefore it is necessary to create one for each application.

The order of the structure is determined by the importance of terms or by the structure of the job offer. The main structural points are professional, methodological, social and personal skills. This should show that you will be able to adapt to the company and job position. If you opt for the skills profile, you can create the (innovative) resume in a classical, strictly chronological order again.

Appendix

In the appendix the candidates submit all of their certificates which are relevant for their qualifications. This is especially true for certificates regarding the completion of an education, especially diplomas and training certificates. Candidates with a working experience should submit all (or only relevant) work references. Finally, you can also submit additional evidence such as your driving license or a language diploma if this is important for the desired position.

Nowadays the documents are almost never sent as originals or certified copies. In an electronic application this is not even possible, and in a written application the candidates usually send plain copies, unless stated differently.

In a short job application the appendix is omitted.

Types of applications

Written application

If a “written application” is required, that means that the application needs to be in paper form, put together in an application portfolio. This type of application is the most expensive and demanding way of applying; you have to think about the appropriate paper type (weight, quality), the layout (in Germany it is usually DIN 5008), the print quality (laser, inkjet) and the cover (a costly application portfolio or a plastic cover). Finally you have to make sure that the documents do not give the impression of multiple uses, which can easily happen through usage (folds in paper or portfolio). This can supposedly often lead to the rejection of the application for technical reasons.

E-mail application

Application per e-mail is a simple and fast alternative to written applications. Due to the electronic transmission of the application, certain formalities are unnecessary. The cover letter can be written as an ordinary e-mail text, but then you have to keep in mind the rules for writing e-mails. The rest of the application is usually sent as a file attachment. Here you have to make sure that your files are free of viruses. The files are usually sent as PDF files, because it secures the graphically appealing and uniform design of the documents and they are easily opened on practically any computer with the help of free programs.

Some candidates send also the cover letter as a PDF attachment. In this case it is necessary to send an additional greeting text in the actual e-mail regarding the content of the attachment. The attachment should be compact and not larger than 2 MB.

For compatibility reasons, the actual e-mail text is usually sent as plain text format. For attachments that the candidate created (resume, third page) the rules of written applications apply here. Other attachments (certificates) are made electronically available as scanned documents.

You should make sure that you are using a legitimate e-mail address and you should completely avoid using internet abbreviations and smileys. Keep in mind that an application

per e-mail is still a form of written application, with which the candidate is trying to present himself in a serious manner.

In contrast to written applications, applications per e-mail are not readily accepted, so candidates should clarify in advance if and in what form an e-mail application is desired.

An interesting way of applying via e-mail is not to send the attachment without the employer asking for it, but rather to put it on your own internet homepage, possibly password protected, and to provide a link of the homepage address in the e-mail. Since this type of application is more demanding for the human resources manager, you should opt for this solution only in special cases such as when applying for positions in the IT sector.

[Applying via e-mail - an overview](#)

When applying via e-mail, keep in mind the following guidelines:

- Accurateness, accurateness, accurateness: you cannot have misspellings and grammatical errors. Do not use internet abbreviations (incl. IMHO) and smileys.
- Specify in the subject field: "Application for..."
- Address the recipient personally – the name of the responsible person is listed in the job ad or can be found on the company's website or per phone.
- Do not use standard phrases. The application should always be "tailored" for each individual company.
- Use a legitimate e-mail address. Addresses such as "superhacker@online.com" or "superhero@free.uk" are absolutely inappropriate.
- If you are putting attachments in the mail, make sure they are in PDF format, as PDF files look the same on every computer. You can also combine various files in one large file. In this way the application documents will be easier to read. The attachment should be as small as possible. Attachments up to a size of 2 MB are acceptable.

Online applications

Online applications include documents that a candidate has put on an application website and in this way made it permanently available. Online applications differ from conventional applications because they can be edited electronically, they are permanently available worldwide and they offer various multimedia presentation options.

Online applications are now widely accepted. A market study conducted by Easyquest (2005) has reached this conclusion. The study included companies from European states Denmark, Italy, Sweden, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. Out of 1635 human resource managers from various companies of all sizes, 50% of them preferred applications in digital form. They have stressed the fact that such applications are easily processed for internal use.

The term online application also refers to a form provided by employers on their homepage. However, this is not an online application in the real sense of the term, because the candidates' data are sent via the form only to the employer. They are thus not permanently available for other employers to see. Data obtained in such a way make the analysis of data considerably easier. The disadvantage of such applications is the fact that the candidate does not have the space to present himself in a more creative way. Also, online application forms must be filled out each time you want to apply for a position which requires a considerable amount of time.

Online applications are becoming more and more popular among applicants and employers, because this form of applications is saving money. Candidates looking for a job will have a hard time avoiding online applications because large employers and employers with a high personnel demand (temporary staff, recruiters, head-hunters) are now only accepting applications via their own application portal.

Each job, for which the applicant intends to submit an application, requires filling out the whole application profile. This is a great way for the human resource department to "control" the flood of applications. The applicant has to invest 1 to 3 hours to apply for a position. There is software that simplifies this task (see WebLinks).

The interview

After applying, the company may invite the candidate for an interview. This is usually the case with companies, but it is becoming more popular at universities as well.

If you have been invited for an interview, this is a good sign. This means that your application was good and that the people making the decision found you interesting enough to want to meet you in person.

Now you have to confirm that good first impression or even improve it if possible. How can you do that the best possible way?

Firstly, you should be yourself and stay calm. You should dress appropriately when you show up at the interview. You should be punctual, or even a little bit early, but not too early. If you arrive 10 to 15 minutes too early, you may come off as very nervous and that is not good, because you want to seem relatively cool and sovereign. Within a large company building, where you may have to report to the porter, where someone will pick you up and where you even have to walk to the administration building, it is appropriate to arrive 10 to 15 minutes early.

In a job interview the human resources manager wants to get to know the candidate personally, their motivation regarding the company they want to work for.

After a couple of harmless questions regarding the way to the building or the weather, the interview continues with specific questions about your resume and personal situation. Therefore it is important that the candidate himself takes a good look at his resume and gets acquainted with it really well. In case of time periods or sections in your CV that seem a bit vague or in which you have abruptly terminated your education or job, it is important to prepare and provide good and justified explanations and reasons.

Especially with female candidates, employers like to ask questions regarding your current partner and if you would like to have children. At first glance it may seem that the best way to answer that is to say that you want to focus on this position and that you do not want children at this point. However, if two weeks later you apply for maternity leave, this will deeply impact the trust your employers has had in you. But not only that, this could make the employer so terribly angry that he does not want to employ women again. This is why you should stick to the following: always be honest no matter what! A position where you cannot balance work and family life is usually not worth the sacrifice in the first place.

Questions regarding your religion are usually asked in denominational companies, in every other case you do not have to answer the question. However, refusing to answer the question could be more of a disadvantage, so it would be best to give a relatively neutral answer.

Another common occurrence are political or religious comments, but this depends on the context. It is best not to enter conversations on these aspects because they can lead to discussions on facts that you cannot deny because the employer can find data about the candidate on the internet. You should never be the one to start this topic. And if they ask you, make sure your answer is uncontroversial.

As the candidate, you can also ask questions and you should definitely take this opportunity to do so. You can ask questions about the production, company development or about the working environment and area that you are being interviewed for. You should also ask if this is a new position or if someone was let go. If someone was let go from this position, it would be smart to ask why. If the employer cannot give you a conclusive answer this could mean that there is a catch regarding that position. It is possible that the position involves unreasonable tasks or a choleric superior. At this point you should really think hard if this is something that you really want to do to yourself.

Interesting fact: A company that invites a candidate for a job interview is generally obliged to cover the travel expenses, unless stated differently in the invitation letter. The reactions are quite different. Asking for reimbursement of travel expenses is perceived both as positive and negative, depending on the job position. Basically, the higher the demands of the job, the more you have to prove your assertiveness, so asking for reimbursement of travel expenses can be an advantage to get the job. In some countries this issue is regulated differently or not at all. In Switzerland for example, reimbursement of travel expenses is not common.

Selection procedure

Sometimes special selection procedures, in so called Assessment-Centers, are carried out to obtain specific characteristics from and about the applicants. Some companies also conduct aptitude tests.

At the Assessment-Center, all participants go through more or less the same tasks, for example the so called mailbox exercise (who deals how with which mail – this is how your organizational skills are being assessed) or a presentation exercise (how will each of the candidates present a topic of their own choice?). With Assessment-Centers that are well-organized, each participant will get a feedback. In this case, the eliminated candidates will not only get a standard rejection letter, but they will also get a feedback on what they could still work on.

However, participating in so called group interviews is not recommended. In group interviews only the loudest and pushiest people are going to be heard. Even in positions where such an approach would be interesting (e.g. sales), in the long run such behavior will seem unattractive to sophisticated customers.

Other

A human resource manager who does not inquire about prospective candidates at their former human resource manager is actually almost committing a breach of duty in Germany.

However, what you may hear from the former HR manager is seldom really an apt description of an employee. On the one hand, the previous employer maybe does not want to let go of the employee so he talks badly about him or he wants to get rid of him so he praises him to the sky.

The banking crisis has also shown that the power structures are not always based on objective qualification, but rather on relationships of trust established during time spent together in pubs. And these kinds of relationships of trust are not necessarily a proof of the managers' correctness; they rather indicate the exact opposite and point to problems with alcohol.

We are not saying that a company's management has assessed you rightfully, because in many companies there are people feeling envy and resentment towards more intelligent and hard-working colleagues. Harassment at work and slander are quite common. If your last employment did not end on good terms, it does not mean that the previous employer is always right and that he has an objective image of the employee.

With all the time that an employee has to invest trying to "sell" his performance to the boss despite their envy and resentment, in cases of poor leadership the employee's performance is usually the one that suffers.

Therefore, when dealing with a new employment, statements made by previous human resource managers should not be taken for granted. You might even discard them completely.

An inquiry to the previous employer usually provides protection regarding unpleasant surprises such as fraud and serious crime on the part of the new employee. One should at least be able to protect oneself from such things.