

What Overqualification *Might* Mean

By: Jaedyn A. Neimanis

“Overqualification,” a common term used to deny career applications, a state in which the individual is beyond the necessary or required education for a business position. Why would employers not want a worker who exceeds expectations? Why do companies get to decide what’s best for the applicant and whether or not they want the job? What are some possible aspects that make individuals worth more than their application environments?

There are hiring managers for a reason, they’re the ones who know what to look for and how to determine an employee's best fit for a position. The most common reason companies will claim overqualification is due to flight risk. Companies will view higher qualified individuals as unreliable, not in a work sense, but rather a loyalty one; worried they’ll lose their employee due to dissatisfaction with the job. The risk of losing someone within a five year time span isn’t the best suggestion, especially when training is required, which involves large investments of time and money that is likely to be wasted in a short order for a replacement.

There are times when companies can’t afford an individual’s skills either, leading to their early dismissal, so someone with less experience can fill the position. A main reason for this tactic is that less experienced workers are more likely to agree with salaries of a lower range than what’s deserved. Plus, it’s likely that the employer already planned to hire under qualified employees, meaning there wasn’t a dissent against the individual or their credibility.

There are also common cases of employed workers - hiring managers - feeling inferior by an “overqualified” applicant. Nobody wants to experience the fear of being easily replaced, and if an applicant's credentials and experience are close or even surpass the potential of their

boss, high chances are that resume is denied. However, there is an exception, only when the company is intentionally searching to hire someone into a higher role within short notice. The difficulty of this is that applicants don't know in advance what hiring managers need exceptional candidates, and who are intimidated by commendable professional backgrounds. Regardless, those searching for jobs should always express their fullest capabilities because in the best case scenario it sets the ground for quick promotions; however, in the worst case it is a missed opportunity to work for a boss who views others as competing, being likely to create an uncomfortable work environment.

Another issue, and the most ugly, is the probability of experiencing age discrimination, especially applying to an environment that requires the use of a majority if not all professional skillsets: communication skills, time management, problem-solving skills, etc. Simply having more years of employment than the minimum requirements is an invalid disqualification of a candidate: age discrimination. Often a hiring manager may view an ideal candidate in a particular age demographic and that individual is ruled out by sugarcoating the truth of not fitting that image. This practice of excuses is overused to justify poor work cultures and management customs. While there are methods of avoiding job search mistakes that catch the attention of age, there isn't much to overcome a company's bias and discriminatory practices, instead it's best to look for options that value their procured skillsets.

Now there are a few ways to overcome the possibility of being denied for overqualification. First the applicant should explain themselves, when individuals apply for jobs that are considered a "step backwards" employers begin to wonder. If this "why" is left unanswered then hiring managers will imagine a reason - often negative explanations. So in

order to avoid this, it's best to be direct, explicitly telling the hiring manager about seeking such a direction in their career.

It's best to also show enthusiasm, explaining the situation won't be enough, so it's best to be clear what aspects drew them to the company in which they are applying. It's advised to all job seekers — particularly for candidates appearing overqualified. It's also best to clarify how such extra skill would be helpful to the company. Don't assume that hiring managers or employers can immediately see the value of an individual's experience, so it must be direct if the applicant has a diverse background. The better the communication, the better chances there are of being accepted.

Another way to avoid “overqualification” labeling, is to be clear and reasonable about salary expectations. People who have more advanced skills often expect higher pay, but companies often can't comply. It also takes immense amounts of money for company training, which takes more from a possible paycheck. So, if the employer doesn't think the candidate is affordable, the application will never receive a fair consideration. If the individual is strategically “downgrading” their job, they need to be reasonable, expecting a downgrade in salary as well. Be clear in the cover letter so employers aren't left assuming expectancy. Although, pegging a specific salary number is unnecessary, instead, consider an obvious understanding that salary is commensurate with the commitments of the job.

Lastly and one of the best ways is to network, all previous methods have only addressed the business objections to overqualified candidates, but it doesn't solve personal concerns hiring managers may have. If hiring managers retain bias-based fears, it's going to be difficult to mitigate them in just a cover letter or resume. Networking allows the connection of getting recognition as a person and professional, becoming the best way to overcome nearly any

objection an employer may have to candidacy. Having connections with hiring managers - doesn't even need to be first-degree - provides social evidence behind an application, as it can then be judged on its own merit, rather than assumptions of what overqualification *might* mean.

Referenced Works

Forstag, Ben. "What Employers Really Mean When They Say You're Overqualified (and What You Can Do about It)." *Mac's List*, 15 Feb. 2018,
<https://www.macslislist.org/older-professionals/employers-really-mean-say-youre-overqualified>.

Whitehead, Kourtney. "What It Really Means When a Company Says You're Overqualified for the Job." *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 26 Jan. 2020,
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kourtneywhitehead/2020/01/26/what-it-really-means-when-a-company-says-youre-overqualified-for-the-job/?sh=610c0cb065b2>.

