

Placement Center Employers' Concerns¹

The members of the Placement Committee have experienced first-hand and heard from others about candidate behavior that reflects either particularly well or poorly on job seekers. We recently polled employers who used the service at the conference to get their input from both fronts. Experienced and inexperienced job seekers alike have been known to make mistakes. Some of these errors may appear to be minor and yet leave a lasting negative impression on employers. Others may seem a bit hard to believe or appear to reflect a lack of common sense; however, we assure you that these errors are common enough that employers are looking to inform future applicants about how to better present themselves.

What Employer's Don't Like

	Employer Concerns	How to Avoid Raising a Concern
Job Search	<p>Employers have limited time to interview many candidates during the conference. It is very important to them to be able to use this time effectively. Therefore, it concerns employers when they interview candidates who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are not really looking for a job, but just practicing interviewing skills through the Placement Center or are just "shopping." • Are looking only for a full-time job but apply for an internship. • Place a form letter or form resume in the employer's mailbox at the conference when the available job clearly has no relation to their experience or qualifications. • Apply for a position within an organization they would never accept working for. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only go through the job search process if you're seriously looking for a job. At the very least, make your intentions clear. • Find a coach or mentor to help develop your interviewing skills; don't use an employer's limited time at the conference to practice your skills. • If you are interested in a job for which your qualifications/ experience do not match, address this in your cover letter/note to the employer. State what other compensating skills/experience you have that make you a good candidate. • Conduct preliminary research about an organization before expressing your interest in a position. Also ask yourself if this is an organization you could be proud to say you work for and if their ethics and values are aligned with yours.

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Cover Letter/ Resume	<p>Employers need someone qualified to do the job at the location it is in and in the timeframe that has been established. They are also interested in hiring employees who are passionate about their work and who have a strong interest in the specific job being offered. It concerns employers when candidates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misrepresent their degree status to get an interview. • Submit resumes without particular interests (e.g., selection, training, research) noted. • Submit resumes and letters with typos, poor grammar, or addressed to the wrong contact person or wrong organization. • Apply for positions that are not consistent with their geographic restrictions or are unwilling to relocate but do not list geographic restrictions on their resume. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be honest when describing your degree status. Talk to others to determine if your timeline is unrealistic. Employers want to hire people who make realistic commitments and deliver on them. • Read through the job descriptions and target only those you are qualified for, interested in, and in locations where you want to live. • If you don't meet the requirements of the position, make a compelling case for why you should be considered. • List geographic restrictions if you have any (e.g., South, Midwest, Northern California, etc.). • If you apply for a job that is outside of your geographic preference, state in the cover letter that you are submitting your credentials in case some flexibility exists over work location. • Take time to review all letters and resumes and have someone else proofread and give you feedback.

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Interview	<p>Interview etiquette is an important part of the hiring process. It is important to respect a potential employer's time by being prompt to scheduled interviews, and by answering interview questions appropriately. Employers are concerned when candidates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fail to show up for a scheduled interview because they received a "better" interview offer or found something more interesting to do. • Ask bold questions early in the process (e.g., in an initial phone screen). Examples would be questions that reflect unrealistic expectations (e.g., will I have a month of vacation) and questions that get at status types of issues (e.g., will I have a private office). • Fail to give specific examples to behavioral questions (e.g., the response, "It happens all the time. I just prioritize," to the question, "Tell me about a time when you've had more to do than time allowed. What did you do?"). • Refuse to answer the more difficult questions, saying that these situations have never happened to them (e.g., tell me about a time when you have had a conflict with someone else). • Don't ask questions in the interview. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not overbook your schedule. • Agree to interviews only if you have some interest in the position. • Come to the interview prepared with questions about the organization or job. This lets the employer know that you are interested in the position they are offering. Save the questions about vacation and office space for discussion <u>after</u> you have been offered the job. • Read through lists of common behavioral interview questions and come prepared with some examples in mind. Talk to others who have recently been interviewed and find out what types of questions were asked or consult books and articles on interviewing for lists of common questions. • In order to generate a good list of examples to draw from, list the competencies for the job (e.g., leadership, communication, problem solving) and jot down examples from previous jobs to best describe your strength in these areas. This information lets the employer know that you are a good candidate.

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Thank You Letters	<p>Although employers welcome thank you notes to indicate that candidates appreciated their time and still have interest in the position, they are busy during the SIOP conference. They do not have the time or resources to manage extra paperwork. Therefore, it is best to wait to send thank you notes after the conference.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not hand thank you notes out during the conference. • Send a thank you email or letter when you return home - it's a great way to remind the employer about you! • Gather business cards to keep track of your interviews. Write notes on the back of the cards to help jog your memory about the interview and use them to personalize the thank you letter.
Salary	<p>Always a touchy subject. Understand that some employers do not have the latitude to increase the salary being offered. Employers are concerned when candidates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't commit to a salary range when repeatedly asked. • Give a range that is overly broad (e.g., \$40,000 to \$75,000). • Give an expected salary, but then say the same amount isn't sufficient when it is offered. • Interview for a position that is significantly below their salary range. 	<p>Be realistic with your salary range by understanding what is being offered in the marketplace:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit the SIOP web site and review the salary survey data. If needed, adjust according to current economic conditions. • Look at other job postings or advertisements for different types of positions and experience levels. • Talk to friends and determine what a reasonable starting salary is given your degree, experience, geography, and other relevant factors. • Be sure to consider the salary in light of the total compensation plan

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Unprofessional Behavior	<p>Employers are not just looking for candidates with technical skills. They are looking for individuals who conduct themselves professionally. Therefore, it concerns employers when candidates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make multiple phone calls after sending their resume, not giving the employer enough time to review it. • Act unprofessionally during the conference, even during "off times" (e.g., overindulging in alcohol at the conference social hour, dressing inappropriately, being loud and unruly, etc.). • Openly state they are looking for a couple of years of experience so they can move to bigger and better things or start their own firms. 	<p>Act as though you "are on" at all times. Your behavior at social events and in off hours can be seen and evaluated by employers. In addition, you may be attending the conference next year as a representative of their organization. They want to know that you will reflect well on them.</p>
Lack of Knowledge about Company	<p>Employers are looking for people with initiative who are genuinely interested in working with their organizations. Employers are concerned when candidates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not know basic information about the organization. • Have only a superficial grasp of what it takes to accomplish work in organizations. • Make comments about other positions or employers. (SIOP is a small community and employers may be sharing notes and leads on candidates.) 	<p>Demonstrate that you have taken the initiative to learn about the organization you are interviewing with by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visiting their web site. • Obtaining a copy of the organization's annual report if it is publicly traded. • Talking with friends who may be knowledgeable about the organization. These may be former/current interns, employees, clients, etc. • Talking with friends or alumni who work in the field and learn what they do in their jobs to get things done.

What Impresses Employers

Beyond addressing employers' concerns, it is important to know what behaviors impress them. Here are some things that have made a positive impression on Placement Center employers:

- Candidates who are organized and prepared for the interview. If they have scheduled an interview prior to the conference, having some knowledge of the organization is impressive. Using this information to clearly state why they have an interest in the job and what about their skills and experiences makes them well-qualified. Being prepared with thoughtful questions about the organization and about the job. Reading through a list of "form" questions is not impressive.
- Candidates who are able to seamlessly shift between technical topics and business issues related to them. While this often comes with experience, wide skill differences do exist among entry-level candidates. Related to this, employers are impressed by candidates who are able to briefly and articulately explain their research, and put it into real world context. While their research may be the most fascinating topic to the candidate, avoid extremely lengthy responses about this research. Interview time is limited, and employers will appreciate getting a more comprehensive look at a candidate's skills and experiences.
- Candidates who are poised and display confidence even when they are faced with technical/other questions for which they do not know the answer. Employers know that candidates will not have all the answers when they are on the job. Knowing the approach that candidates will use to get answers, however, can tell an employer a lot about a person, their initiative, and their critical thinking skills.
- Candidates who make clear links between their skills and experiences and the requirement of the position. Thinking about the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for a position in advance, and preparing behavioral examples drawn from class projects, one's research, internships, and other employment helps a candidate to stand out.

We hope this information will help job candidates make a good impression to obtain a position and at the same time improve the hiring experience of the SIOP employer.

¹. This document was prepared by:

Irene Sasaki, The Dow Chemical Company

Karen Barbera, Personnel Research Associates, Inc.

Jennifer Frame, The Dow Chemical Company

Vicki Crawshaw, Sears Roebuck and Company

For contact information for the current Placement Center Chair go to the SIOP website at www.siop.org