

How to avoid standing out for the wrong reasons

Standing out as a job seeker is key, but you don't want it to be for the wrong reasons. Watch out for these pitfalls when you're going for a job.

If you're trying to land a new job, it's important to stand out – but you want it to be for the right reasons.

Here's how to avoid standing out for the wrong reasons.

Standing out is key when you're going for a job – you want to show the employer how your unique skills or experience set you apart.

But it's important to make sure you don't stand out in the wrong ways, by avoiding slip-ups that could stop you from making a great impression.

Here's how to avoid standing out for the wrong reasons.

1. Stick to the facts and be consistent

Always assume facts and figures you provide when you apply will be cross-checked. Kerri O'Connor, Founder of Saunders Lynn & Co, gives the example of a job seeker whose profiles and resumes didn't match up, and who quoted their current salary at \$100K.

"The role they were applying for was up to \$25K less in salary," O'Connor says. "I knew the type of role he was in doesn't pay six figures, and never has. In addition, his online profile only mentioned a TAFE qualification, when he spoke of completing several degrees. Then I checked the resumes he had sent two years apart to our business and there were discrepancies in his work experience."

The takeaway: Giving wrong or inconsistent information is a sure way to stand out for the wrong reason. Most employers and recruiters will know the market rates for the role you work in. What you can do is be prepared and informed so you're ready to discuss money – [this salary guide can help](#). Also, it's okay to say you got halfway through a qualification, things changed, and you didn't complete it.

Likewise, don't feel you have to hide [gaps or career breaks](#) in your resume. Focus on what skills and experience you do have, and your ability to adapt and take on new challenges. Finally, inconsistencies could be alarm bells for employers, even if you're not aware of them. Make sure your resume, [SEEK Profile](#), and any other accounts or application documents all match up and tell the same story.

2. Make sure your referee is ready to back you up

If your referee doesn't know you've put their name forward, they probably won't be ready to vouch for you – and worse, they could hinder your chances. Eva Grabner, Managing Director at Elite Executive, said she'd narrowed down a role to two great candidates who both seemed a great fit.

"It came down to their referees. One candidate had excellent references, however, the other had not advised an ex-employer that they were on their resume as a referee, despite us checking they had done so and letting them know we would be calling them," Grabner says.

"I called a very disgruntled ex-employer and was nearly hung up on! This particular candidate missed out on the opportunity to join a great organisation because they didn't take the time to speak with their referees and ask them if they were happy to speak with future employers."

The takeaway: Standing out as someone whose referee isn't ready to vouch for them will only hold you back. Always ensure you have at least two professional referees. It's best to include people you've reported to – not just a colleague. Speak with them before you start applying, even if they agreed to be your referee years before, to make sure they're happy to do so. Then consider getting in touch again once you're in the running for a particular role.

3. Don't send out a stack of generic cover letter

Sending out a bunch of the same cover letter can be a big red flag for employers. According to Samantha Miklos, CEO of Cornerstone Medical Recruitment, carelessly firing off multiple cover letters might signal that you've "just applied to everything and anything."

"It makes [the hirer] go: 'Do you actually want this job or do you just want a job?'" says Miklos.

Sending out bulk cover letters can lead to mistakes. The most obvious one Miklos sees are cover letters with "wrong information" on them – be it incorrectly addressed, with the wrong job title listed, or all of the above.

"They've [created] the cover letter for the first job and then pumped out six more applications. Sometimes the cover letter is for a totally different job. A cover letter should bridge the gaps in your CV – where you might have had some time out or you've changed between different industries, whatever it might be," she says.

The takeaway: A well-crafted cover letter is often key to a successful job application. Of course, no one expects you to rewrite it from scratch every time, particularly when you're exploring multiple opportunities. Instead, Miklos suggests, you can tailor or adjust each cover letter to highlight why "you would be suitable for a particular role."

Miklos believes that candidates who are upfront about their skillsets are more likely to move up the application process and get shortlisted. “The ones that acknowledge: ‘I don’t have these skills, but these are the skills I do have and this is why I want you to give me a chance,’” she says.

4. Don’t present yourself inappropriately at interviews

This one might seem like a no-brainer, but Miklos has seen her share of job seekers turning up to interviews in inappropriate ways.

Lateness is key here – in fact, 77% of hirers say a candidate arriving late for an interview is an instant put-off for them, research for SEEK shows. A further 72% say that they are put off when a candidate uses their phone during an interview and 55% similarly cite inappropriate dress.

The takeaway: Making the right impression at interviews goes a long way. According to Miklos, this doesn’t mean you need to turn up to an interview in a suit if the dress code doesn’t call for it. “But there is a standard.”

“Don’t forget that you’re there to make an impact,” she says. This includes things like turning up on time and dressing in job-specific attire. And then avoiding things that might negatively impact a hirer’s impression of you, from reading messages mid-interview to bringing your pets along. If you’re interviewing from home, check out this [list of tips for preparing for video interviews](#).

How to stand out for the right reasons

By avoiding these pitfalls, you can focus on standing out in the right way. Start with getting the basics just right: [a clear, well-structured resume](#), [a great cover letter](#), and an up-to-date SEEK Profile. And, especially [when you need to stand out in a crowded job market](#), it can help to find a unique selling point that sums up why you’re the best person for the job, plus examples of how you’ve used your skills in previous jobs.

That way, you’ll be ready to make a great impression to a potential employer, and one step closer to landing the job.