

Certified – so I am...

«I can't apply for a comprehensive leadership role because I don't have a higher education degree». An often-heard statement - and this from people with extensive practical experience and an impressive track record. Why is it that practical experience is often so undervalued compared to academic achievement?

Peter Näf

The statement in the introduction was made by a businesswoman at the beginning of our job interview training. In the course of the interview, I learned that 30 years ago she was a pioneer in her field and had been running a consulting company with up to ten external employees for 18 years. She advised well-known companies and was responsible for large projects, some of which she implemented as interim manager at the client. When I asked her, she confirmed that there were probably not 20 people in Switzerland with comparable expertise in her field.

Overvaluing education

This client is just one example of people who take themselves out of the running for higher management positions because they do not have an academic education. Where does this misjudgement of the relevance of experience come from?

One reason is probably that people without an academic background overestimate what is taught at a university or technical college. Of course, you can only become a lawyer, architect or medical doctor if you have a degree. In the case of business functions, on the other hand, studies are only one possible way of acquiring the necessary specialist knowledge.

Of course, I recommend good education and ongoing training to all young people in this field as well. Lifelong learning is an absolute

requirement and the increasing academisation has increased the importance of education for a successful career. But we do not only learn at the school desk, but also and above all in our everyday professional lives.

Against the certification mania

Through specific further training, we can reflect on these experiences, put them into a theoretical framework and bring rapidly outdated specialist knowledge up to date.

I often hear the objection that companies pre-select applicants based on their education and training. The bad habit of always mentioning education first in the job advertisement may reinforce this impression. And it is indeed true to some extent, especially when it comes to jobs for younger employees. If experienced applicants are wanted, education becomes less and less important. The focus is on relevant professional experience.

What can applicants without an academic background do to improve their chances? They would first have to know their own experience, value it and communicate it in a comprehensible way. With education, the diploma speaks for itself; communicating practical experience is more time-consuming. In many CVs, it is difficult to comprehend, and in job interviews, too, applicants are often underprepared. But the most important thing is: practitioners should not take themselves out of the running for higher management positions.

As the example of the entrepreneur shows, we not only have a shortage of skilled workers, but also a shortage of skilled worker self-confidence

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