

Do you put all your assets on the scale pan?

A successful job application requires that you have the necessary professional experience and knowledge. However, many applicants neglect in their communication experiences from their private life that can also be professionally interesting. William Bridges refers to them as «assets» in his book «Creating You & Co.».

Peter Näf

I experienced an impressive example of this with a client whom I advised when he was on an expatriate assignment for a Swiss company in Hong Kong. He had a varied and, in the truest sense of the word, international personal and professional background.

He grew up in a Latin American country, where he completed his basic education. For his studies he went to the USA. He then worked for many years for well-known companies in Switzerland, finally for the company that sent him to Asia.

Show your whole story

He wanted to go back to Switzerland, so I advised him on his application via Skype. I knew from the person who had recommended me to him that he had Latin American roots. But I couldn't find anything about this in his CV. When I asked him about it, he reacted somewhat sensitively. He said that it was not relevant where he had spent his youth; after all, it was his professional experience that mattered and that was evident in his resume.

I did not agree with this view. From my experience as a headhunter, I knew that CVs say the

most when they are complete and give a well-rounded picture. And I found his international background very interesting; having successfully asserted oneself in four different cultural environments is what I call an «asset» in the sense of William Bridges.

We gain experience not only on the job

Such a personal background is unlikely to ever be asked for in a job requirement profile. And yet the complete picture gives me unspoken information about the applicant, because I can assume that he has the following strengths: understanding of cultural diversity, adaptability, flexibility, courage and the ability to quickly find his way in new situations. He had acquired all this quite incidentally in his extraordinary career.

Showing his whole picture communicates personal competences far more successfully than if he had described himself as flexible, multicultural, courageous, etc. under the heading «personal strengths» in his CV.

At the end of the session, he was still a bit sceptical. At our next meeting three weeks later, he told me that he had finally taken my advice. In the meantime, he was talking to a company that was interested in him specifically because of his Latin American background.

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