

SME experience is sexy

Many of my clients are not very confident about their professional experience in small or medium-sized companies. They think that experience with large, international brands is worth more. I'm happy to speak up for people with SME experience, and not just because I'm one of them.

Peter Näf

My client, with whom I did a personal and professional assessment, had worked for a small consultancy firm for many years after graduating. When discussing his career to date, he expressed his regret that he had stayed with the company for so long and - as it didn't have a famous name - had missed out on something in his career. He thought he would be in a better position today with a background at a major international company.

At first, I took his view. I had never heard of this company before and, based on his negative assessment, I assumed that he hadn't learnt too much there.

Storytelling brings it to light

When I asked him for examples of consulting projects as part of the storytelling process, my picture changed dramatically: He told me that the company had been involved in projects in which internationally renowned consultancies had also worked. So, his former employer had played in the top league. What was more important, however, was what he himself had contributed to the projects. He gave me an impressive picture of a project meeting: he took part with the partner of the consultancy firm and presented the results for which he was responsible. Another consulting firm involved was represented by a partner. He presented results that employees several

hierarchical levels below him had developed. In addition, my client had independently managed large projects early on in his career, from acquisition to analysis, solution finding and the final meeting.

However, he did not realise how much responsibility he had already taken on at a young age compared to someone who had joined a large consulting company after graduation.

The CV does not speak for itself

I had similar experiences as an employee of a smaller recruitment consultancy. Although I was convinced by the company and our performance, I had the feeling for a long time that my experience was not particularly presentable. Until I realised that at a so-called top headhunter I would probably have spent the first few years doing research and making appointments for the senior consultants.

But I was already approaching and meeting people in the first few weeks in direct search. During the first year I worked independently on search mandates and after a further three years I was jointly responsible for the company as a partner.

So, pay attention to your framing: the listeners take on your interpretation of the experiences you have had - after all, you need to know what they are worth.

Just as my client had a misconception about alternative careers, people from large companies can't properly assess his experience at an SME unless he explains it to them. The CV doesn't do that!

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