

Why motivation makes the difference in job applications

Many job seekers believe that the main purpose of a job application is simply to demonstrate that they can do the job well. As a result, they have plenty of answers prepared when it comes to questions about their professional qualifications. However, when asked about their motivation, they are often unprepared or respond too superficially. This can prove to be a fatal mistake.

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You might be thinking: Isn't a job all about getting the work done well - so why is motivation so important?

Let's imagine a company hires a candidate who is clearly qualified for the role. She has the necessary experience and skills - perhaps she's even overqualified. Her motivation never comes up during the interviews. A few months into the job, she realizes she's not truly interested in it and decides to quit. What do you think such a hiring mistake costs the company?

Hiring mistakes are expensive

A common estimate suggests that turnover in highly qualified roles can cost a company up to one year's salary. These costs include, among others, recruitment expenses (job ads, headhunters), the time invested by employees involved in the hiring process, and productivity losses due to the vacancy. During her brief tenure, the employee receives a full salary, even though she is not yet fully productive. The search, recruitment, and onboarding of her replacement adds another round of expenses - roughly equivalent to a full year's salary.

Given these substantial costs, it makes sense for companies to evaluate not just a candidate's

qualifications but also whether the job and work environment are truly appealing to the candidate - as I've discussed in the article «Double the work for recruiters or for applicants».

In addition to these costs, we can reasonably assume that employees with low motivation will perform less effectively than highly motivated ones. And finally, in the case of an overqualified employee, there's also the risk of burnout - possibly leading to health-related absences.

It's about genuine motivation

So, prepare for questions about your motivation just as thoroughly as you do for questions about your qualifications. And most importantly: It's about genuine motivation - not just saying what you think recruiters want to hear. Many applicants respond with clichés like: «I'm looking for a new challenge,» or «I want to grow professionally and contribute my experience,» and so on.

Just as with questions about your strengths, experienced recruiters won't be satisfied with generic answers. Your motivation needs to be believable. Ideally, recruiters should be able to see that the position genuinely makes sense for you. That's why it's helpful if you can refer to similar professional experiences that support your motivation.

With a convincing and authentic sense of motivation, you'll stand out from the potentially large pool of qualified applicants - as someone who wants to make a difference, not just land the next job.

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