

Recruiters and hiring managers are often insecure too

Anyone who has ever attended a job interview as a candidate knows the feeling: nervousness, doubt, that uneasy question about one's own performance. It is easy to assume that, for recruiters and hiring managers, the conversation is merely routine. Yet there is pressure on the company's side as well – not only since the skills shortage, but certainly more noticeably since then.

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Candidates frequently experience a job interview as an examination. Fear of failure surfaces, sometimes despite clearly demonstrable achievements. The so-called impostor syndrome – doubts about one's own competence – is far more widespread than many assume.

That the other side is by no means entirely composed and unaffected in such conversations is something I have experienced myself. As a young recruitment consultant in my early thirties, I was often very nervous when interviewing specialists or executives who were significantly older and highly experienced in their field.

Both sides are applying

They were, in fact, the very same anxieties that candidates know all too well. This becomes clear once we remind ourselves that companies, too, are applying – especially when it comes to attractive candidates.

I found myself facing questions such as: Can I, as a representative of my client, genuinely convince this candidate of the role and the working environment? After all, strong candidates have alternatives, and I was under pressure to deliver.

In addition, in my role I possessed only limited

knowledge of the position and its context. I therefore had to fear being exposed as an impostor myself if a candidate asked particularly astute questions. Only with growing experience did I realise that my role – combined with a certain poker face – offered me a degree of protection.

No company is perfect

Companies sometimes manage to present themselves as flawless through excellent branding. This can be intimidating for applicants, who are well aware of their own limitations. Yet I have often observed that recruiters and hiring managers are acutely conscious of the shortcomings within their own organisations.

One example: a client of mine worked at a small private bank in Zurich at a time when many such institutions still existed – names that have long since disappeared today. In a conversation with the hiring manager of another bank, the latter openly wondered whether his institution could offer enough to someone coming from a “Zurich private bank”. As I knew both organisations well and could assess their quality realistically, I had to smile inwardly. In this case, it was not the candidate who doubted himself, but the company that doubted its own attractiveness.

Perhaps this knowledge eases some of the pressure. More importantly, it changes one's mindset: a job interview is not a one-sided examination. Both sides are courting each other. Enter the conversation as equals.

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