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How to Ask Why You Didn't Get The Job

By Suzanne Lucas



Dear Evil HR Lady,

Is it considered poor taste to call an interviewer to ask why you weren't selected for a job?

That depends entirely on how you do it.

Here's an example of an "in poor taste" call:

Candidate: Could you tell me why you didn't hire me? Because I'm awesome, and I can't figure out why you guys were so stupid as to not hire me. I mean, do you like a mediocre work force? Because that can be the only reason why you didn't hire me.

Exaggerated, right? Maybe. The problem with asking for feedback is that few candidates really want "feedback." What they want is the job, and if that's not available, further justification for why this company was stupid not to hire them in the first place. So, when a rejected candidate calls and asks for feedback, it generally goes something like this:

Candidate: Hi! I'd like to thank you for interviewing me for the analyst job. I was wondering if you could give me some feedback on why I didn't get hired.

Recruiter/Hiring manager: We went with someone who had more experience.

Candidate: But the job posting said 5 years. I have 6 years of experience in that area.

Recruiter/Hiring manager: Yes, but we went with someone more qualified.

Candidate: But I met everything on the job description!

Recruiter: Yes, but the person we hired can do handstands while talking on the telephone.

Candidate: But you didn't say that you wanted someone who could do handstands! I can do handstands. I didn't know you wanted someone who could do them.

et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. There's never going to be a right answer. Remember, [everyone who makes it to the interview stage is qualified](#). The candidate will always have an objection and a reason why the hiring manager made the wrong decision. It's tiring, it's old, and people really, really, really don't like to do it.

This is why companies don't volunteer information. (Well, that and the ever present fear of lawsuits. What if I tell you, "We didn't hire you because you didn't have X skill." And in reality, we didn't hire anyone because we couldn't find anyone with X skill. Then 3 months later, we decide we can train in X and we hire someone who is a different race/gender/age than you are, who also doesn't have X skill. You say, "hey, they said they needed X and didn't hire me because of that, but they hired that white male/black female/young whippersnapper and he/she doesn't have that skill either! They are racists/sexists/ageists!")

So, companies aren't likely to tell you what you want to know, and they are especially not likely to do it over the phone, where it can become a whine fest, where the hiring manager feels like she's forced to defend her choices.

If you really want to get feedback, you have to make it clear that you are only listening. I recommend email for this. Here's a sample.

Dear Janet Doe,

Thank you so much for interviewing me for the analyst job last month. I really enjoyed meeting with you and Steve Jones. I was, of course, disappointed that I didn't receive a job offer.

I'm writing to ask a favor. I am working on improving my interviewing skills and am also interested in finding out areas that I'm lacking, so I can work to improve those as well. Could I ask you to tell me three areas that you think I could improve? I would really appreciate the feedback.

Thanks again for your time,

Walter Usner

Then when you get a reply, no matter what they said, the proper response, is, "Thank you so much for taking the time to do this for me. I really appreciate it." Full Stop. No objections. No, |"I did not focus too much on X. You weren't paying attention!" Just, "Thanks, I really appreciate it."

The advantage of this method is that email can be less defense inducing than a phone call. You don't feel put on the spot with an email. An email can be ignored or responded to quickly with an "I'm so sorry, but I don't provide feedback like that." It's much more difficult to say, "Ummm, no, I don't want to, umm, say anything." It's uncomfortable.

You're asking people to do you a favor, so for heavens sake, make it as easy on them as possible. The three things suggestion also makes the interviewer feel like they have to come up with three, so you'll get more than just a "we hired someone with more experience" line. It also limits them

to three, so if you were a terrible candidate, they don't get carried away and write 1000 words about how you picked your nose during the interview.

Even with this method, I can't guarantee a response. People really don't like doing this. But, if you do and they respond, be grateful. And seriously consider incorporating their feedback into your job searching protocol.

For further reading:

- [I'm Clearly the Best Candidate--So Why Am I Not Getting the Job?](#)
- [The Interviewer Said I Have the Job, But No Offer Has Appeared](#)
- [Why is the Hiring Process So Slow](#)
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Have a workplace dilemma? Email your question to EvilHRLady@gmail.com

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