I don't have all the requirements, should I apply?

Have you ever looked at a job ad and thought it seemed like a good fit for you – until you saw a requirement you couldn't quite tick? Did you apply anyway?

Research for SEEK shows that 43% of job seekers would not apply for a job if they didn't meet all the selection criteria. And that figure is even higher among women, with 68% saying they'd feel uncomfortable about applying, compared with just 50% of men.

You might be surprised to know the truth is that most employers are open to hearing from you, even if you don't tick all the boxes. In fact, almost three-quarters (71%) say they'd still consider hiring someone who didn't meet the minimum requirements.

Why list minimum requirements if they're not actually required?

Why would an employer list those 'minimum requirements' if they'd consider hiring someone who can't meet them all? Relaunch Me Career and Interview Coach, Leah Lambart says this is because employers are often looking for a 'unicorn'.

"They list an extraordinary number of criteria that would be impossible for any job seeker to satisfy," she says. "However, in most hiring situations, candidates [only] need to meet the most important criteria, and often these are at the top of the list."

When applications start to roll in and the short-listing process begins, an employer or recruiter might start to feel differently about what they need, says Lambart.

"There are other factors that come into play when a recruiter is shortlisting candidates for an interview," she says. "For example, if they don't satisfy criteria that they could learn on the job reasonably quickly, then a recruiter may overlook this." For instance, someone who doesn't have experience with particular software, but can show that they've worked with similar systems, Lambart adds.

Lambart says the volume and quality of applications is also a factor. If no applications are coming in that quite fit, the recruiter or employer will "need to reassess and realise they are aiming too high".

This will lead them to start to look at those who come close, or who show they can learn quickly and tick the most important selection criteria boxes.

"Hiring managers may also overlook the fact that a job seeker doesn't meet all the criteria if they apply with an impressive resumé and a cover letter that conveys their enthusiasm and willingness to learn any criteria that they are not able to satisfy," adds Lambart.

"If a hiring manager can see that an applicant has thought about the strategies that they would use to upskill quickly, then they may be willing to still include them in a shortlist."

How to feel more confident to throw your hat into the ring

If you're keen to apply for a job that you don't meet all the criteria for, it's important to remember that many other applicants might be in the same situation, Lambart says. What's important to think about is whether you could learn or grow your skills to meet the other criteria, and how you would go about this.

"I would suggest still applying if you meet 70% or more of the criteria," says Lambart. "And that includes the requirements listed towards the top of the list.

"A good test is to consider whether you could provide a specific example from your current or past roles that would satisfy when you have demonstrated this particular capability."

If the job requires specific experience you don't have – for example control room experience for an air traffic controller – it could be a sign to leave that job for someone more qualified, says Lambart.

"But another job advertisement might instead be seeking applicants with a 'mechanical aptitude' or 'demonstrated problem-solving skills'. This suggests that someone with this transferable skill could satisfy the requirements of the role."

Lambart says it's particularly important for women to overcome their doubts.

"Women tend to underplay their abilities across the board, often due to imposter syndrome and not wanting to over-sell their abilities," she says, "while men think they might as well give it a go."

Avoiding the frustration of constant rejection

Nobody likes rejection, especially when you've spent hours, or days, drafting a job application and addressing selection criteria.

Lambart's advice is to not be afraid to ask questions, or to show your enthusiasm.

"Applying for jobs can be time-consuming and frustrating if you are receiving constant rejections," she says.

Lambart says if you're finding it difficult to work out whether it's worth applying for the role when you don't meet a particular requirement, try and get in touch with the employer or recruiter by phone or email to find out how important that requirement is.

"If you can build good rapport with them over the phone and can demonstrate how you satisfy the other key requirements, then they may well still encourage you to apply."

There's more than one way to win that job. Showing that you're proactive and enthusiastic can help a recruiter or employer overcome any doubts if you're not quite what they thought they needed. If you don't meet every single requirement, have a go and apply anyway – you might be pleasantly surprised.

Source: Independent research conducted by Nature on behalf of SEEK. Interviewing 4800 Australians annually. Published March 2024.

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