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Why hospitality employers are poor at replying to job applications

"Why do hospitality employers not respond to job applications?" – This is a question that I often get asked by young hospitality students and alumni. A fair question if this is indeed the case, and seemingly it is. Just this month I visited 3 hotel schools in Switzerland and during the question and answer session at the end of my presentation, I asked if anyone had directly experienced this scenario. Approximately 70% of the students indicated that they had submitted job applications in response to an advertisement, and they had never received a response from the prospective employer.

There are of course two sides to every coin, and one can empathise with both parties. On the one hand, from an employer's perspective, the volume of applications (especially via email) to a job posting can be extremely high and consequently very time consuming to process. This in itself, of course, is no excuse not to reply. Quality and relevance of job applications are perhaps the biggest factors behind lack of employer response, and the feedback we have received from certain hospitality employers is that if the applicant cannot make the effort to produce an error-free cover letter (or email) and CV, then they are not prepared to invest time in any response to the applicant. Harsh words, but understandable to an extent in situations where an application has clearly been sent without thought or suitability to the job posting. The moral issue remains however, whether every applicant is entitled to a response and some feedback about their job application. In an ideal world, yes indeed!

On the other hand, from an applicant's perspective, the consensus is clear. All applicants want and expect a response to every application they make, even if it is a simple regret from the employer.

What can be done therefore to narrow this expectation gap? Applicants should:

- make more effort to tailor their applications (via a cover letter or cover email) to the advertised position, rather than using a generic template that is obviously standardised and often inappropriate;
- more critically self-evaluate their suitability for a role before applying;
- make the effort to find out the correct contact person and details when sending speculative applications;
- undertake greater research on the employer, and utilise some of this learning within their application specifically;
- and
- not be afraid to follow up with the employer within a reasonable time frame, in a professional manner, if they have not received a response.

Employers should:

- implement (or revisit) Human Resources policy on this theme, regulating standards for replying to all applications;
- consider specifying the above policy within the job posting; and
- make as much effort as possible to clearly define the application criteria and requirements for every job posting.

Hospitality employers are increasingly seeking technological assistance to manage the burden of application responses. International hotel chains are in particular going down this route at considerable expense. Clearly

therefore there is recognition within the industry that there is room for improvement, and that there are benefits in managing application responses more effectively. Certainly such technological systems will increase their ability to maintain a CV database, to aid organisational succession planning, and, importantly, to automate application responses and to control the physical format of applications. On the negative side, such technology can be highly impersonal (to the applicant), and of course what you get out of it is only as good as what goes in, so such systems can be administratively burdensome and can become high maintenance processes.

There is no easy solution for managing and responding to applications, and ultimately each employer must evaluate the impact that their response processes have upon the applicant, and future recruitment needs. General innovation in recruitment strategy and methods are becoming a clearer priority for many of the world's leading employers, and rightly so.

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