

Fighting the Overqualified Label

POD Best Practice Presentation

Overqualified Job Applicant

- Too many years of experience
- Too much education
- Too highly paid in current or previous positions

Perceptions of Overqualified

- You will be bored and unmotivated
- Your salary will be too low – you're too expensive
- Flight risk – you will leave the minute something better comes along
- Pose a variety of management challenges
 - You won't be able to step down from a leadership role
 - You will likely intimidate peers and supervisors
 - You'll resist direction from a younger or less experienced manager
 - You could possibly steal your prospective boss' job

Advantages to Hiring Overqualified Candidates

- Candidates can get up to speed and contribute quickly – saving time and training costs
- They bring a broader range of experience and greater depth of knowledge to the role
 - Unparalleled desire to excel
 - Elevate the rest of the staff by raising the bar for performance inside the organization
 - They can help others develop by mentoring employees who can later help fill future leadership needs
 - This can bolster successful planning
- They can be a hiring bargain
 - Make the manager look good
 - Meet goals sooner
 - Potentially contribute more to the company

Self Assessment

Why are you applying for a position you are overqualified for?

- **Be HONEST** with yourself.
 - How you address, and accept, the reasoning will greatly affect your attitude in pursuing the position, and chances of success.

- Potential reasons for pursuing a position you're overqualified for:
 - You want more or different experience
 - New field or industry
 - Potential for equity ownership
 - International experience
 - Opportunity to move into management

- You need the money – this a personal decision that we all must address
 - There is no shame in taking a job for less pay or prestige.
 - Find a way to reconcile yourself to the economic realities of today
 - Some money is better than no money
 - There is worth in all work
 - Be careful not to accept a position so far down the career ladder that it will hold you back in the future
- You're changing careers
 - Any change in career will almost definitely result in a “step down” the ladder. The goods news is that your life experience will allow you to move up the ranks more quickly than a more junior person.

Tactics for overcoming the Overqualified Label

1. **Let your network speak for you** – find someone you know within the organization to present your qualifications.
2. **Focus more on skills and accomplishments than job titles** – use the employers own words from the job description to show how your skills match perfectly while at the same time downplaying skills not required for the job.
3. **Take salary off the table** - make it clear from the beginning that you are completely flexible about salary – and that your previous salary is of no relevance to your current job search.
4. **Reveal financial advantages of hiring you** – if salary is an issue, use specific examples of how you increased revenues or decreased costs.
5. **Emphasize teamwork and personality** – demonstrate that you are a team player and the success of the team is more important than that of individual members.

6. **Showcase current or cutting edge knowledge** – discuss recent training or skill-building that shows that you are adaptable and up-to-date. Not stuck in the ways of old.
7. **Demonstrate loyalty** – overcome “flight risk” by pointing out longevity in previous employment history.
8. **Do what it takes to get the interview** – be prepared to deal with the overqualified issue when you call to follow up on your application. Sell the hiring manager to at least give you a “meeting”, if not an interview so you can make your case in person.
9. **Everything in moderation** – Illustrate how you are the perfect candidate without overwhelming the hiring manager with your experience – or ego. Avoid intimidating a younger hiring manager.
10. **Express interest, admiration, and enthusiasm** – nothing wins over a hiring manager more than a positive attitude and a passion for the job.

Cover Letter

- Cover letter should explain why you are interested in the company and position.
- If applying for a position at a lower level than you've previously worked, address why you are downshifting.
- Describe how your skills make you valuable
 - whether it is because you'll bring in money, new ideas, or specialized knowledge.

Resume

- Leave off college dates
 - unless within the last 5 years
- Only included work history of the past 10 to 15 years
 - (don't include "I initiated the use of computers")
- Leave off job titles or minimize importance
 - insert departments in their place
- Use a performance based resume
 - skills/accomplishments highlighted first
 - then chronological work history
- Tweak resume to the specific requirements of the position
 - especially in the skills/accomplishment section

Interview

Tips that can get you past the “overqualified” label in an interview:

- **Address the situation directly** – if there is a specific reason why you are in the market for a lower-level position, it may help to state the reason upfront.
 - looking to get into a new career
 - looking to reduce your workload or stress*
 - have a desire to get back to the basics of your profession
- **Put your skill set front and center** – take the focus off your career path and emphasize your skill set as it applies to the specific job description.
- **Signal your flexibility on salary** – if you are willing to come down on salary to get your foot in the door, let the hiring manager know from the get-go. Emphasize the value that your experience brings to the company.
 - If possible, try to avoid the “salary” issue – but if it does come up, explain that salary is not the primary motivation or key factor in pursuing this position.

- **Make it clear that personality won't be a problem**
 - to address concerns that you may not be able to work effectively alongside less-experienced peers or take direction from a younger supervisor, provide answers that cast you as a humble team player who is not above learning new things from anyone. And enjoys mentoring less experienced co-workers.
- **Let them know you're in it for the long haul**
 - leave no doubt that you intend to dedicate yourself to long-term success in your new role.
 - If you have a history of long-term employment in previous positions, emphasize it.
 - Stress that you look at the position and company as a “partnership” and you wish to grow with the company.
 - Explain how the position fits into your long-term career goals.
- **Turn the tables**
 - if asked if you think you're overqualified, ask the interviewer what their ideal candidate looks like, and show that you fit the description.

Interview Questions

Possible interview questions addressing “overqualified”:

- **What will motivate you in a job that won't make use of many of your qualifications?**

Try saying that “you can never be overqualified in your thirst for learning or desire to mentor”.

- **Given our company's sluggish near-term outlook, you can't expect a promotion anytime soon. Is that OK with you? Why is it OK?**

Clearly you don't want to say, “It's OK. I'm happy to languish in a job that rarely challenges me, for however long.” Better to say: “I'm excited to learn as much as possible about your organization while I do my job every day. I'm confident that after the economy turns around, your company will offer further opportunities for me.”

- **Frankly, I'm concerned with this organization's ability to keep you here. Aren't you going to get bored or frustrated?**

Counter this fear by offering examples of how you found opportunities for professional growth in previous positions you held for considerable periods.

➤ **Why should I believe that you're going to stay with our company?**

Savvy interviewers are likely to challenge you on your contention that you'll stick with the company even if you're "underemployed" for an extended time. The trick, again, is to demonstrate you have a professional history of sticking with it. "Point out how long you were at your last job, and say that what matters to you is fitting in."

➤ **Starting out at the level of this position, what future do you see for yourself with our company?**

When you talk about the future, keep talking about yourself and your prospective employer as business partners. "Emphasize that you are excited about the company and see good opportunities that can keep you there for a long time," The trick here is convince the interviewer that you're looking for steady advancement in the long run, not a rapid series of promotions.

➤ **What would you tell an employer in five years about why you took this job? How would you justify it?**

This is a tough question, because you've got to portray yourself as ambitious and yet realistic about your prospects. Work to persuade the interviewer that you've got a talent for making the most of any professional opportunity, and that you're confident that after five years you will have notched substantial achievements with the company.

Summary

- Be **VERY ENTHUSIASTIC** about the job
- Explain how you can meet their needs now and in the future as the company grows
- Convince them that you will not quit as soon as something comes along
- Overqualified? Answer: “**Some would say ‘fully qualified’**”!!
- Hiring people with more skills, education and experience that a job requires is a **WIN-WIN** for workers and employers
- Show that you have a strong work ethic

Things Not to Do:

- Don't be quick to blame age – you begin to give up using age as an excuse.
- Don't say in an interview – “I'm looking for a less stressful job” or “want to spend more time with my family”. This implies that you won't be as committed or available.
- Don't sign a one year contract to remain in the position
- Avoid obvious cosmetic changes – hair dye or plastic surgery.

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