ASK ELLEN – how to get more information about a posted position

1/2/12

Q: I am interested in applying for a position I saw posted recently, but I have some questions about the employer and the position. Should I contact the employer to get more info, so I can tailor my resume and write a cover letter that will really impress them?

A: I wouldn’t. It is not a hiring manager’s job to assist YOU in applying for an open position at his/her workplace(!) Requesting further information beyond what is in the job description is presumptuous and shows a disregard for the hiring manager’s time, preferences, and goals. This is why some job postings say “No calls”.

Some applicants think such contact will show the employer that they are very motivated and assertive and interested in the job, and that they will have an edge over other applicants by referring to their contact in the cover letter. The actual result is likely to be just the opposite. They’d still be a stranger to the hiring manager, and a pushy one at that, who has already wasted some of his/her time before even applying!

The information in the job posting is all the information the employer wants potential applicants to have at that time. Think about it: what if 50 applicants for that job contacted the hiring manager with even one question each?

Try to find the information you seek yourself, and write your cover letter and edit your resume with the info from the position description in mind. You should do some research before writing each cover letter so you can convey specifically how you could contribute in that position for that employer, and once you get called for an interview, you should do more research. If there is someone already in your network who may know more about that workplace, it is a good idea to make a gentle, respectful inquiry to try to find out more about that employer. If your own research doesn’t answer your questions, you can ask those questions of the interviewer when you are in the interview (you should not be asking about salary, benefits, or perks though, especially in a first interview). Be sure your research is carefully done and thorough; you definitely don’t want to ask for information in an interview that can be found easily on the employer’s website, for example, especially as you are an information professional!

Some tips on doing employer research: http://www.careerleak.com/how-to-research-employers.html

Good luck!

Thank you,