ASK ELLEN – silence following job interview

1/24/12

Q: I graduated a little over 2 years ago, work part-time, and I’m searching for a full-time or additional part-time job. I have a question about the post-interview process:

Is it becoming increasingly common after all interviews have been conducted for an institution to contact only the candidate they are interested in hiring? After waiting a decent interval, I try to speak directly to the hiring manager to learn if a decision has been reached. I don’t want to be a nag, but I’ve found that leaving a phone or email message often is ignored. I realize HR staff are busy, but sending a one sentence email to the interview pool that another candidate got the job doesn’t seem terribly difficult.

A: This is a question that, unfortunately, comes up often. You are right that sending an e-mail would not take much effort, especially if we’re talking about contacting only people who have been interviewed, which is usually a far smaller number of people than all those who applied.

As you have experienced, though, some employers don’t respond or give any information, even after an interview. It *is* common, it *is* inconsiderate, and this can be extremely frustrating for the job hunter. I don’t know how much time has passed since the interview you refer to, but there may be a number of scenarios going on, including: hiring may be stalled for one reason or another and there is nothing to report at the moment, a hiring freeze was put into effect after your interview, they are still conducting interviews, or possibly the reason you think it is – they have decided to hire someone else.

It is always a good idea to ask at the end of an interview about what the next step is and if they have any idea of a timeline for when a decision will be made. Of course, timelines can change and the fact that the employer gave you a timeline doesn’t guarantee they will contact you. Asking, though, can help you, to know, for instance, if yours is one of the first interviews, and it will be a while before you can expect to hear anything, or one of the last ones and they are expecting to make the hiring decision within a few days.

*Slight detour into “don’t” territory:*

You are very smart to want to avoid being a “nag”. What you definitely *don’t* want to do is pester the hiring manager with repeated calls and e-mails, demanding to know why you have not heard back from them, etc. Many many job applicants do this. If you contact the employer again and again, they may label you as demanding, inappropriate, unprofessional, immature, unreasonable, high-maintenance, and/or otherwise difficult. Some people do this as a matter of course in their daily lives, and have no idea it will be a deal-breaker if they behave this
way when applying for a job no matter how well-qualified they are or how well they interviewed.

If you are a problem applicant, the employer will fear that you’ll be a problem employee, and will hire someone else. Word may also spread to others, making it even more difficult for you to get hired. The field of library and info science, even across the large New York metropolitan area, can be much like a small town, with only two or three degrees of separation between most info pros, and if word gets around that you behaved badly it can have a strong and long-lasting negative impact. Any interaction with anyone connected with the field of library science, whether face-to-face or online, is an opportunity to build a positive reputation or a negative one. You must nurture and guard your reputation; people tend to have long memories for any kind of negative behavior.

Aside from sending a ‘thank you’ right away, and following up once, a week or two later, to reiterate your interest and ask about the status, there is not much more you can do. I would advise you to put it out of your mind (that is not easy, I know), figure that you won’t hear from them and focus on finding other jobs to apply to. If they do get back in touch with you later on, you can always turn your attention back to that position at that time.

If it is any consolation, this exact thing makes Alison at “Ask A Manager” furious!: [http://www.askamanager.org/2009/08/you-suck-interviewer.html](http://www.askamanager.org/2009/08/you-suck-interviewer.html) (and she *does* have a link on her blog to a site where you can send an anonymous message to an interviewer!)

Thank you and good luck!

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