

How to get hired: advice from two savvy employers

A WORLD LEADER in providing quality service solutions for daily life for clients in virtually all major industry sectors, Sodexo knows a few things about recruiting and hiring the right person for the job. Similar to other large employers, Sodexo uses an online application to start the process. Unique to Sodexo is John Fik, CSFM, CGM, and his counterpart Greg Fear, LEED AP, who provide service solutions for sports fields, and grounds and landscape management at colleges and universities and private K-12 schools. A portion of that management includes hiring high level managers and supervisors and providing continuing education.

Sodexo uses a comprehensive selection process to assess a candidate's qualifications, experience and competencies. After the initial review of the online applications by a Sodexo recruiting team in Human Resources, candidates whose background and experience appear to be a close fit for the position receive an initial phone screen by the recruiter. Next, the candidate undergoes a competency interview to assess the candidate against the key competencies for the specific position. Based on the application, phone screen and competency interview results, Sodexo's recruiter will present Fik with the candidate slate to conduct formal interviews.

"After I complete the interviews, I introduce the top two candidates to our client, as their feedback is helpful," says Fik. During his review process and interviews he hones in on three areas. "I seek applicants who are strong in managing people, have the right technical skills, and a solid track record in financial management," he says. He also puts stock in STMA certification. "I know if someone has CSFM after their name, that tells me that he or she has taken that extra step in professional development," says Fik. Sodexo also strives to identify current employees who are eligible to become certified and help them achieve certification.

Fik has seen an increasing number of job openings that require both grounds and sports fields management experience. He believes that broad experience is the key to a successful career. "If you put yourself in the turf management-only box, you'll miss out on the many opportunities that offer career progression," he says. He advises,

"Know your weaknesses, and then go after the education and experience to overcome them."

Chris Calcaterra, M.Ed, CSFM, CPRP also likes to see diversity in work experience for those he hires. "I like to see experience from different facility types, managing different types of turfgrass, and a mix of high-use and low-use fields," says Calcaterra. The City of Peoria, Calcaterra's employer, hires approximately 75 people annually for sports field work, which includes full-time and seasonal. Although Calcaterra does not participate in the screening of all of these candidates, he has hiring responsibilities, like Fik, for high level managers and supervisors. The City of Peoria also uses an online application process that is multi-leveled and thorough. He says that the online system does help to streamline the process, but advises job seekers to focus on relevancy when applying. "It's really important that the applicants exhibit the work experience and other qualifications requested in the job description," says Calcaterra. He also specifically develops in-depth questions for the online process for the second level of applicant review. "The answers to these questions further define our pool of candidates," he says.

When it gets to the interview stage, Calcaterra uses interviewing techniques and HR tools to find the right fit for the open position. "We call it a 'visual résumé.' Interviews are provided markers and paper and asked to illustrate answers to various questions," he says. Throughout the hiring process, Calcaterra encourages applicants to personally follow up. "Although my name is not listed in the online information, I have received personal emails from candidates who researched our facility hierarchy, and let me know that they applied for a job in my department. I can't and wouldn't override the online system, but if they make the cut, they now have some name recognition with me," says Calcaterra. For those candidates who are being considered for supervisory and above positions, the City also conducts a personality trait test. For Calcaterra, personality is a huge factor in hiring the right fit. "We can teach anyone the technical skills required," he says, "but, flexibility, creativity and being personable can't be taught." ■

12 tips to make your résumé stand out

By Career Expert Tory Johnson

- Search job boards and the websites of employers that appeal to you. Print out the job postings that you're interested in pursuing before you apply.
- Use a highlighter to mark the keywords and industry language used to describe the requirements and responsibilities of each position.
- Compare those words and phrases to the language that appears in your current resume.
- Figure out how and where to add the most relevant keywords to your resume, assuming you have the specific knowledge, skills and experience. Applicant tracking systems will search for keyword matches; the more matches, the better, which often determines if a recruiter opts to view your resume.
- Once you're confident that your resume reflects a strong match, go ahead and submit that targeted resume online.
- If the system requests a cover letter, write a short one that expresses why you're a strong match and why you'd like to join the organization. This is a chance to tout your research on the role.
- Never submit a generic, one-size-fits-all resume or cover letter. If you really want the position, you'll customize all documents for each job.
- Once you apply, get to work to find an internal referral to make a personal introduction. Here's how:
 - a) Make a list of 50 people you know and ask each one if they know someone who works (or has worked) at that employer.
 - b) Attend job fairs to meet face-to-face with employers and other professionals.
 - c) Create a free profile and become active on LinkedIn.com or Facebook.com, which boast a combined 60 million users. Surely you can find someone who knows someone to make that connection.
 - d) Create a free Twitter.com account and "follow" friends and post requests for help. (You can follow Tory Johnson at Twitter.com/ToryJohnson where she posts job leads and where followers can help with contacts.
 - e) Join an association in your field and network with like-minded peers.
 - f) Connect with your high school and college alumni groups. Old pals could be new connectors.
 - g) Talk to your unlikely network. For example, look at the class list of the parents of your kids' friends. Anytime my kids hear about a friend's mom or dad who's lost a job, they tell them to call me. Even though we don't know each other, we have a common connection that can sometimes lead to a contact.
- Follow up with a call or email to the recruiter responsible for filling the position. Never say, "Did you get my resume?" Instead be ready to reiterate your strong qualifications and interest in the role. You'll have just a brief moment to sell yourself, so rehearse before making the call or sending the email.
- Don't know the name of the right person? Cold-call the company and ask an operator to put you through. If that doesn't work, Google the term "recruiter" or "human resource director" along with the name of your employer of choice. The results may reveal the name you're trying to find. LinkedIn is another resource to find the correct name.
- Stay top of mind. Every recruiter is different, which makes this a challenge. Some say you're welcome to follow up weekly. Others say every other week is enough. And then there are some who'll tell you to never call. Find the right balance so you're politely persistent without crossing over to a pest.
- Ask directly for advice on how and when to follow up. A simple question, "What's the best way to keep in touch?" will give you the details you need to stay ahead of the pack.