

The wow factor: Impressive job candidate qualities
By Rachel Farrell, Special to CareerBuilder.com
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The employment market is saturated with various resources for job seekers. While some of them offer consistent advice (always send a cover letter, tailor your résumé and wait for the employer to bring up salary), the truth is that conflicting information exists.

Especially when it comes to what employers are looking for in a new hire.

A recent survey from Express Employment Professionals, one of the nation's largest staffing firms, showed that the top three aspects that employers are looking for in a new hire are credible work history (97 percent), job experience (88 percent) and specific skills (87 percent). More than 15,000 current and former clients of Express were surveyed for the first quarter of 2011.

To get the story straight, we asked hiring managers to tell us the most impressive qualities they see in potential job candidates. Here's what they said (in no specific order):

1. Results

"Something I always ask anyone I interview is, 'what is something you do better than anyone else in the world?' with the follow-up of, 'what is the evidence of this gift?' I think that truly driven, passionate people leave behind them a wake of results wherever they go. Talking about measurable outcomes separates the contenders from pretenders." -- C. Daniel Crosby, corporate psychologist and president, Crosby Performance Consulting

"Candidates that can tell me an anecdote about how they got something done, against all odds, really impress me the most. Those who understand the rules and conduct of business but are not afraid to push the envelope a bit in the name of a job well done." -- Jennifer Prosek, author "Army of Entrepreneurs" and CEO, CJP Communications

2. Good fit

"There is no giant totem poll of qualities that makes one person more impressive or better than another. People who excel in one position are going to flounder in another if it doesn't fit their talents, interests and skills." -- Ann Latham, president of Uncommon Clarity

3. Preparation

"Showing that they have done their research by knowing something about me, and my business." -- Kenneth Sean Polley, president, Global Asset Management Group

"When a candidate asks really great questions it demonstrates not only their interest in our company and the issues we're facing, but also their research skills. Most impressive are those

who think about what they discovered in their research and then ask really great questions." -- Anita S. Fisher, marketing communications manager, Briggs & Stratton Corporation

4. Initiative

"I look for the ability to take a project and run with it, to function independently and creatively with a minimum of oversight." -- Kathryn Minshew, co-founder and editor-in-chief, Pretty Young Professional

"Proactivity -- the act of taking initiative, being able to operate independently and finding a way to get things done." -- Jordan Rayboy, recruiter, Rayboy Insider Search

5. Sense of humor

"Going over a recruitment cycle is long and very often annoying listening to the same pre-prepared answers. A candidate with faith and sense of humor de-dramatizes the atmosphere." -- Sarah Licha, owner, EspaceRH

6. Passion

"Typical candidates answer questions the way they believe they should. I want to see their passion for the company, the job opening and the industry. I want them to tell me why they are truly excited about the opportunity rather than every other opportunity out there. For me, passion is the ticket to a second round of interviews." -- Abby Kohut, staffing consultant, Staffing Symphony, LLC

"Passion is energy, drive, motivation and commitment. Candidates who are infused with this quality demonstrate an enthusiasm and aliveness that is contagious to their colleagues and clients. It can be harnessed to learn the job to be done and then to do it without having to be constantly encouraged, prompted or micromanaged. Such people are willing to 'go the extra mile' to assure that everything is done and done well. They demonstrate initiative and creative problem-solving skills." -- Betty Gilmore, program director, Lift-The Bronx

"Truly passionate candidates are not only likely to excel in their role, but, because they enjoy what they do, they will also remain engaged in their responsibilities and energize those around them. If an employee is not eager to learn, he or she will have difficulties accepting change and bringing innovative ideas to the table." -- Kathleen Dumlao, employment specialist, Rising Medical Solutions

"Passion and resourcefulness. You can see right through robotic folks who 'say the right thing.' It's those who come specifically prepared to tell you exactly why the position is right for them that impress me the most. Very few folks lean across the desk and tell you 'I really want this job, and here is why.'" -- Jennifer Prosek, author "Army of Entrepreneurs" and CEO, CJP Communications

7. Confidence

"I coin the most impressive quality in a job candidate 'humble confidence.' Humble confidence shines as knowledge, humility, skilled verbal and written communication, friendliness and appreciation." -- Stacey Hawley, principal and owner, Credo

8. Professionalism

"At the interview, it is all about how the candidate presents him or herself. Are they projecting an image of professionalism? Are they showing enthusiasm and motivation for the position? Are they really listening to the questions and answering them accordingly? These are the qualities that are not shown on a résumé and are near impossible to teach." -- Darlene Johnson, director of career services, PEAR Core Solutions

"Being a professional -- no matter what your industry or career -- demonstrates that you have the right blend of technical and soft skills, mixed with enthusiasm and dedication." -- Matthew Randall, director of the Center for Professional Excellence at York College of Pennsylvania

"Presentation, presence, energy -- how they carry their personal power. They need to be engaging and personable." -- Emma K. Viglucci, founder, director and supervisor, Metropolitan Marriage and Family Therapy

9. Body language

"The hand shake: it has got to be strong and firm from the get-go. Candidates usually come prepared to an interview, but I'm looking for people come to the interview telling me what they can do for the job and what they can add to the job. These are usually the ones I recommend for second interviews." -- Muriel Alloune, recruitment and training specialist, Federation CJA

"Body language, including a good handshake, confident shoulders, a smile [and] eye contact. I know it's cliché, but it really helps." -- Marissa Wright, hiring and training coordinator, Europe for International Studies Abroad

10. Longevity

"What will wow me about a candidate is a consistent job history. I like to see that people have been in a position for at least five years and that they have grown in the position. [A candidate with] lots of short stints [or who has] been in the same position for 10 years and their responsibilities have not changed is a big turn off." -- Carmel Napolitano, managing director and principal, CGN Associates

"People move around so much, that longevity says a lot about the stability of a candidate when they have been in a position for a long period of time." -- Sarah Cullins, president, Finesse Staffing

11. Communication

"Qualifications in the form of experience and tangible skills aren't enough to grab a hiring manager's attention these days. You need to be a creative, proactive problem solver. Hiring managers want to know how you (and only you) can solve the needs of their organization. Read between the job description lines. What are you bringing to the table that the next person with a similar background is not? If you educate yourself and build awareness around what keeps your next potential boss up at night, and you clearly communicate how you can help to solve that, chances are you've got their attention." -- Dana Leavy, career coach and founder of Aspyre Solutions

12. Attitude

"The most impressive quality is to be a 'high performer,' a package of the right attitude, a passion for doing the work and the skill. 'Attitude' may mean different things to different people, but it boils down to having an 'I can' attitude. Everyone thinks his or her attitude is fine, however, some of these same people think it's OK to blame, make excuses and declare something cannot be done. That's the attitude employers are looking to expose during the interview and avoid extending a job offer to." -- Carol Quinn, CEO and author, "Expert of Hiring High Performers"

"Someone who is enthusiastic about the company and has thoroughly done their research about the position. Open-mindedness, perseverance and a can-do attitude (someone who takes true ownership in the company) will get you the job." -- Heather Minsky Nottingham, owner, Nottingham Consulting Group

Rachel Farrell researches and writes about job search strategy, career management, hiring trends and workplace issues for CareerBuilder.com. Follow @CareerBuilder on Twitter. Copyright 2011 CareerBuilder.com. All rights reserved. The information contained in this article may not be published, broadcast or otherwise distributed without prior written authority. Story Filed Wednesday, March 02, 2011 - 4:55 PM