

Don't Sell Yourself; Make Them Want You

By Andrea Kay, Gannett News Service

How do you sell yourself in an interview or letter? If you're smart, you don't. You persuade.

This is not just semantics. It's the difference between trying to get someone to do what you want and motivating someone to take action. The latter is much more powerful.

I see people trying to sell themselves all the time, blabbing on and on about where they worked, job responsibilities and degrees. This might be interesting to you, and important, but it will not get the decision maker's attention. It could even put them to sleep if you focus on it at the wrong time.

If you want to motivate someone, reveal information in a way that not only influences how that person sees you but also gets him sitting on the edge of his chair waiting to hear more.

There are several key steps to persuading, says Tom Sant, author of *Persuasive Business Proposals* (Amacom). Although his focus is on how to win customers, clients and contracts, the principles are the same as you present yourself to employers in writing and in person.

The first step addresses the customer's needs. Your customer is a potential employer. So, in this step, "you demonstrate you understand the customer's needs, issues or problems," says Sant.

Obviously, you have to know what those are. You can figure this out to some degree by thinking about why the position you're applying for exists. What problems would a job like this solve? What types of problems or issues does this industry or this kind of company face today?

If you don't have a clue, you're not thinking this through. Research the industry. Sure, in the interview you can ask: What problems does this position address? How does this position make a difference in the company? But there's no excuse for going into an interview clueless about the problems of the industry and how the job you do makes a dent in them.

"Focus on your customers' pain to get their attention," says Sant.

When you understand their needs, you're reducing their anxiety, he says. By showing them that you get "it" - what they need - it shows them that you listened and understood what they told you (or what you researched), which raises their level of confidence that what you propose will be appropriate for them, he says. As a job hunter, you're proposing that your skills and expertise are what they need to solve their problem.

The next step is to focus on the outcomes or results your potential boss wants to achieve. You need to explain how he will see results by investing in your services. For example, you can help him expand the company's sales territory, which could result in so many millions of dollars. As Sant says, focus on their gain to get their commitment.

Another important step in persuasion is to prove you can do what you say you can do. This is where you talk about your skills, knowledge and relevant examples from experience.

If you're in project management in information technology, you could tell about the time you created dozens of manuals documenting technical processes, creating consistent policies and allowing someone else to jump in and take over a process if the other person was ill.

You'll be tempted to rattle off your employment history. But if it doesn't address the most important issue that motivates someone to buy - resolving a problem - you're wasting your breath.