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Employer Hot Buttons: Focus on the Needs of the Decision Maker

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All too often the job seeker is focused on what he or she is looking for in a job (i.e. income, benefits, location, function, responsibilities, title, stature, drive time, industry, and corporate culture). On the other hand, hiring executives have an entirely different set of standards for what they are seeking in candidates. If you, as a job seeker, fail to recognize the difference, you will be history in terms of being the candidate of choice.

Let's explore the minds of decision makers and find their hot buttons. When you focus your search on these factors through your résumé (or résumé portfolio; see my CareerBuilder.com article, [Burn Your Résumé](#)) and through your interviews, you are more likely to become the standard by which all other candidates will be measured.

Employer hot buttons:

1. Ability to do the Job. Sounds simple enough, but you would be amazed how many people apply for jobs for which they are not qualified. Before the decision makers dig deep into a candidate's background or invite him or her in for an interview, they must first confirm this very basic criterion. Establish your ability through your résumé or résumé portfolio by placing your emphasis on accomplishments, results, performance, and insights into emerging trends, opportunities, and challenges.

2. Initiative. Unless you are entry level, most decision makers are looking for someone who can "hit the ground running." They do not want a long learning curve that requires costly training and where the new hire cannot produce quick results. Today's decision makers have very little patience. Demonstrate how you quickly identified a problem or need project, initiated an action plan, and produced bottom-line results.

3. Job Growth. Decision makers look for people who go beyond their defined "job description." Show that you are adaptive and willing to take on additional responsibility and that you will go the extra mile to achieve success. You don't want to be perceived as someone who is stuck in their comfort zone and always content with the status quo.

4. Self-Confidence. Decision makers want to know that they can totally put their trust in you to perform the job and produce the desired results. They develop this trust by seeing your confidence. Confidence can be displayed in numerous ways. Here are just a few of the things that decision makers look for:

A) Speak with authority. Use phrases like "I can," "I will," and "I know." Avoid phrases like "I think," "In my opinion," and "I feel that."

B) Demonstrate a commanding presence by your appearance, posture, eye contact, and body language.

C) Show your track record of ongoing success. Decision makers will not have confidence in you if they can only see a few accomplishments scattered over several years.

5. Leadership. Leadership is not reserved for senior executives or managers. For example, a janitor can show leadership by finding a better way to do his/her job, by setting a great example for his/her peers, or by finding ways to cut costs through more effective cleaning equipment or a new supplier for less expensive cleaning materials. Leadership is a rare commodity. Show decision makers that you have the courage to take a leadership role, regardless of your level or function.

6. Compatibility. Much to the regret of some people, decision makers look for a certain amount of conformity. This does not mean you must be the quintessential "Dilbert." Rather, organizations seek people whose personality style and behavior match the requirements of the job and the corporate culture. For example, we all know about the employee who is never happy with anything, is a continual whiner, and always finds fault with everyone else. During your interviews, avoid criticizing your former employer or placing blame on others for why things didn't get done. Always demonstrate your positive mental attitude (PMA).

7. Attitude. Okay, we wrapped up number six by mentioning your PMA. Let's build on that. If you want to be the standard by which all others are measured, then walk in the door with a high energy level, tons of enthusiasm, a zest for living, and the determination to be the very best at whatever you do. Enthusiasm is infectious. Others feed on it. It is motivating and drives others to higher levels of productivity and success. Show your enthusiasm every chance you get and you dramatically increase your chances of being hired.

8. Social Skills/Interests/Involvement. In today's business world, it seems that professional courtesy and conduct are from another era. You can never say please and thank you enough. Give credit and praise to others. During your interview talk about the team's performance and the contribution that everyone else brought to your projects or your job. Show your interest in what others were working on and how you were willing to help. Show your involvement in organization activities - both social and professional.

9. Integrity. Over the past few years we have witnessed the tragic abuse of authority and total lack of integrity by many of our nation's top senior level executives. Many have gone to jail and others will probably soon follow. Needless to say, this is a powerful message to everyone. Demonstrate your uncompromising integrity, professional ethics, and personal morals. If a decision maker wants you to "wink" at laws or professional conduct, you don't want to work for that company.

10. Communication Skills. We can't ever communicate too much. I admit that companies often have too many meetings, but I don't equate those meetings to communication. A good communicator possesses outstanding written and oral skills and knows how to use them effectively. Demonstrate to the decision maker how you continually use communication skills to achieve your goals.

There is a lot of information here to absorb and it is difficult to hit all of these hot buttons through your résumé and interviews. But by being aware of these hot buttons you can consciously try to touch on as

many as possible. Instead of focusing on what you want, focus on what the employer wants, and you will land that next job.

Don Straits, CEO and Dragon Slayer of Corporate Warriors, is recognized as a nationwide authority on contemporary job-search strategies for senior-level executives. His organization provides world-class outplacement and individual job-search-marketing services. Corporate Warriors has earned industry acclaim for its high-impact multimedia résumé portfolios. You are welcome to personally [Contact Don](#), read his blog, and participate in his free career-search Webinars.