



Business Basics

When They Don't Call To Offer You The Job

Susan Adams, 01.26.10, 4:18 PM ET

A friend of mine, we'll call her Jane, is looking for a job in online media. She's lively, razor sharp and bursting with ideas. The boss at the up-and-coming new Web site where she wants to work seemed thrilled at the prospect of hiring her. In their last of a series of meetings in December he said he had to have just one more conversation with a higher-up before the job would be Jane's. He'd give her a call after New Year's.

In mid-January Jane and I had lunch. She was feeling down. "I thought I had the job," she moaned over her chicken salad. Her husband had persuaded her to send an e-mail but she'd heard zip. How hard should she push at this point? Should she send another e-mail? Long or short? Should she call? If so, at what time of day? What sort of message should she leave? How many messages? Or should she write the whole thing off and start pounding the pavement for something else?

In Pictures: When They Don't Call To Offer You The Job

Career coaches say Jane's situation is incredibly common among job seekers. "It happens all the time," says Eileen Wolkstein. One of Wolkstein's coaching clients went back for 14 interviews and didn't get the job.

Sometimes the hiring manager fails to call because he decided to hire a competing candidate or promote someone internally. Often the person with whom you're interviewing has just gotten so busy she hasn't yet made the final decision. "Work life intervenes," points out Win Sheffield, also a career coach.

What should Jane do? First, say the experts, follow up without appearing desperate. Ideally, Jane would have a competing job offer in the works, says coach Roy Cohen, author of the upcoming *Wall Street Professional's Survival Guide*. That way she could call and share that information with her prospective employers. "Instead of being aggressive, you should be providing information," Cohen advises. "Say, 'I want to let you know where things stand for me.' You have to establish boundaries and make yourself desirable."

If Jane has no other prospects in the wings, she should offer to collaborate with the hiring manager on getting the higher-ups to agree to her new post. "She should say, 'I was so excited by our conversations, I just wanted to get a sense of where things stand,'" Cohen suggests. "If it's helpful, I could strategize about what we should do to move forward." Jane's tone should be collaborative, he says, not needy.

Cohen's approach assumes that Jane can get the hiring manager on the phone. But how do you do that? And should Jane presume that new media folks even use their telephones? "E-mail is the only way to go with them," says Wolkstein. "That's the way they live." If you do go the e-mail route, don't send more than one a week, Wolkstein suggests. "More than that gets pesky."

Career coach Anita Attridge suggests another tactic: Keep calling until the hiring manager picks up. Just don't leave any message on voicemail or with an assistant, she advises. "You can tell the assistant, 'I'm going to be in and out, so I'll just keep trying.'" Ask the assistant when a good time would be to reach the manager. If the hiring manager has promised to phone on a Friday and doesn't, it's fine to call first thing Monday morning, Attridge adds.

Before you get to the point of waiting for that final call, there are things you can do along the job search path to make it easier to handle the final stage, coaches suggest. Make sure to ask the interviewer where he is in the search process, Sheffield advises. Another helpful question: How do I compare to your ideal candidate? Attridge suggests asking how many other candidates are competing against you. Another tip: Develop a rapport with the hiring manager's assistant, who may be able to give you insight into the hiring process as it proceeds. After each interview, send what Attridge calls an "influence letter" or e-mail, where you talk concretely about what you would want to accomplish in your first six months on the job.

The most important thing you can do in the final stages of job interviewing: Keep looking for another job. "I always tell people to accelerate their search when they think they're about to get an offer," says Wolkstein. "You should never give up."

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