



## Registrant Resources - Information Overload

Issue 36, August 2005

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### Welcome:

Welcome to this month's edition of IEA's registrant resources e-zine "Information Overload". I would just like to welcome our new subscribers and registrants to the Registrant Resources E-zine, I would also like to say thank you in advance for forwarding this edition onto friends and colleagues, your thoughtfulness is most appreciated. We hoped you found the last edition on job advertisements and close closing dates to be of interest and use to you in your search for that perfect position. Leading on from that, this month we try and give an answer to a common problem – how can I answer a question on the selection criteria, when I don't have the experience they say they want? We hope you enjoy reading.

If you still receive a hard copy edition of the newsletter and would like to help us save the environment, then please let us know your current email address, and we will move you over to the e-version. If you don't have a personal email address, you can obtain a free one from organisations such as YAHOO or Hotmail.

And remember, if there are any other topics you would like to see us cover we would love to hear from you, just send me an email to [training@iea.com.au](mailto:training@iea.com.au) - names will be changed to protect the innocent! Don't forget that all back issues of this edition, and our main newsletter can be read and/or downloaded from our web site – <http://www.iea.com.au>.

Lorraine Bradshaw  
Marketing Manager

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### In this issue we will look at:

- Short on experience? How to answer general selection criteria;
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- Short on experience? How to answer job specific questions;
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  - Police clearances
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**Information Enterprises Australia Pty Ltd**  
Unit 4, Upper Level, 201 High Street, FREMANTLE WA 6160  
Tel: 08 9335 2533 Fax: 08 9335 2544 e-mail: [training@iea.com.au](mailto:training@iea.com.au)

## **Short on experience? How to answer general selection criteria.**

One of the most common questions we get asked as an employment agency is how do I get around the fact that I don't have enough/any experience in ..... (you fill in the blank).

The answer surprisingly enough is **think laterally!**

Except for perhaps a few very job specific questions in an application (which we will cover further on in this newsletter), you do not have to have current experience in your chosen profession in order to answer the questions posed in the selection criteria. Instead you can use your knowledge and experience from other areas of your life to answer these questions.

Bear in mind that a prospective employer is looking for the best person they can find who most closely fits their job description and who has the right mix of skills and abilities. The fact that you are straight out of university won't be lost on them, and they will understand that you won't have much in the way of current and relevant experience. But you will have experience that you would have gained in other areas of your work and study life that are transferable. It's how you persuade them that you are the best person for the job that is the key to answering selection criteria.

**Customer Service** – We all know bad customer service when we see it, the surly person on the till at the store, the two giggling shop assistants who won't stop their conversation to serve you. However, customer service is not just about your telephone manner, and how you treat the general public (although both of those things are important), good customer service skills embrace all aspects of human interaction, from how you greet people in the office when you arrive (yes your colleagues are also customers), the way that you dress and present yourself, how fast you respond to an email message, and how long it takes you to supply a requested item. So unless you have been living in a darkened cave on the moon, everyone will have some sort of customer service experience they can draw upon to answer this question. The problem you should have is what to leave out. You should re-read your CV and pick out the one or two significant achievements, or items from your list of duties that highlight this point and use this as the basis for your answer.

When formulating your answer it is important to make sure that you don't simply make a statement that says "I have worked in the customer service industry for 2 years. I worked as a shop assistant from 1989 – 1990 and again from 1993-1994, where I dealt with inquiries from the public in an efficient manner." And then move on to answering the next question. This is really not what a prospective employer is looking for.

Go back to the job description – what are the main roles and responsibilities of the position? What are they expecting you to do on a daily basis? If you are applying for a position of records officer, chances are you will be delivering the mail in person to the people you work with. Therefore you will want to highlight a certain position that you have held where you had to work quickly, efficiently and to tight time lines in order to get the job done. If you are straight out of university and did not have to tend bar, serve coffee or work in "Mackers" to earn some money whilst you were studying, then you could pick a time when you had to work with a group of people in order to achieve a project outcome. Your student friends are also your customers, what part of the project did you have to deliver so they could do their part?

Going back to the point I made about the way that you dress and present yourself. This may not seem like a necessary point when dealing with a customer service question, but it is extremely important when you go to the interview, and when you are working. Few people would be willing to work with someone who can't be bothered to iron a shirt, or have a

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shower in the morning. The way that you present yourself is a good indication of the state of the rest of your work ethic. If you can't be bothered to get up in a morning, this probably means you won't be bothered to answer the phones in a timely manner, or respond to a job request. Everything that you do, say and present to the world should present you in the best possible light.

So what is your current appearance saying about you right now?

And on this point – if you have left your application to the last minute and are going to have to hand deliver the application to the organisation, make sure you dress in an appropriate manner. The person on reception may not be the receptionist, it may be their day off and the person you were just rude to was the person who had the power to hire you or not.

**Team work** – This one can be worked in the same way as the last one. It doesn't have to refer to a sporting team, although if you were the captain of the baseball team that would give you a lot of experience to use in your application. Team work: your organisation is a team, the department that you belong to is a team, your tutorial group is a team, your project group is a team. What a prospective employer is looking for is what part of the task were "you" expected to perform? Did you perform your duties in such a manner that allowed your colleagues to perform their roles and responsibilities more efficiently? Or not?

It could be that you were asked to project manage a document management system roll out – in this case, it is extremely hard because you may be tempted to write an essay. Make every word count for you. Remove anything that is superfluous, repeated, said in two different ways.

When formulating your answers – remember the **STAR** principle. State the **Situation** or **Task** that you faced, the **Actions** that you took and the **Results** that you achieved. In the case of team work and an EDMS roll out. Your answer could include, the reason the roll out was needed (situation), how you chose the team members, what happened with the interactions during the roll out and how you managed them, and what happened as a direct result. Were you successful or not. Oh and one final point when it comes to writing about team work – please don't take credit for someone else's part in the project/team – whilst it may seem innocuous to upskill your own role in the team in order to get the new job – your references will be checked and your new employer will be asking your previous employers just what they thought about you and the duties you performed.

### **Short on experience? How to answer job specific questions**

Obviously these will be dependent on your particular industry. But in the library and records management industry, the questions are usually related to particular types of software, knowledge of certain standards and eligibility for an organisation associated with the profession.

**Associations** - starting with the last point first. In most cases, you do not have to be a member of the organisation at the time of your application, you just have to say that you would be willing to become one should you be successful in your application, assuming that you are eligible to become a member of the association of course.

**Police clearances** – please bear in mind, these are only valid for the moment that you receive it, after all you may decide to hijack a car to get home from the police station. Again, it is worth mentioning that whilst you may not have a current police clearance, you can mention that you have applied for one, and/or be willing to apply for one should you be successful in your application.

**Standards** – this includes occupational health and safety, and those standards that are associated with your industry. For example ISO15489: Records Management. With regards to knowledge of the OH&S legislation, all organisations should adhere to this legislation regardless of the industry they are in. Some industries will have stricter requirements than others including the mining industry and health care workers for example. If you are currently working it is a good idea to re-check your letter of appointment, this should include all terms and conditions of employment including OH&S requirements. If you have been given an employee handbook, there should be a section on the subject, and there may be documents you can read that are available via the corporate intranet, or shared drives. If you cannot find one, then it is worth speaking to a member of the HR department, to see if they have a copy. Whilst reading about something is a good start, you may also want to mention in your response, whether you have undergone any formal induction training at your current or previous places of work, and how you incorporate good occupational health and safety practices in your day-to-day activities, for example proper lifting techniques.

**Software** – This is an example where an organisation may require you to have previous experience with a certain piece of software. The reason can be as simple as that they do not have the time or the people to train you in its use, or as complicated as – you will be the systems manager, and not having the intimate knowledge of the software would mean that you would not be able to do the job that you had applied for. Therefore, depending on the role that you are about to apply for will determine whether or not you will be able “wing” it with regards to your answer. With some library management software, it may be possible to outline the software knowledge that you do have, noting that most library software packages do have some similarities and you are willing to learn.

Of course there isn't anything that can beat hands on experience with a piece of software, especially when it comes to job applications and answering selection criteria. So what do you do when you don't know anyone using it? One solution would be to ask your network to see if someone would be willing to let you loose on their software for a couple of hours in return for doing some voluntary work within the organisation. Or you could ask if your practicum could be with an organisation that uses the software. Again, it is important to think laterally when it comes to this kind of question – and answer.

**Qualifications** – Do not say that you have a certain qualification when you don't. If you are studying then say so. However, if you have worked within an industry for a considerable length of time, and you do not have any formal qualifications, you may be able to get around this requirement based on the experience that you have, and any other courses that you have been on.

**Length of experience** – There are some occasions where a selection criteria will insist on applicants having a certain amount of experience at a certain level. Bear in mind that relevant experience in a related field may be enough to get you to the interview stage, especially if you have managed to answer the remaining selection criteria. Always highlight the positive,

and try not to dwell on the negative. Remember an organisation will try and get their ideal person, one who has been there and done that. However, in the real world, they will accept those people who have shown the right amount of knowledge, skill, and have convinced the selection panel that they are worthy of getting to the next stage of the employment process.

If you can convince someone on paper that you can do the job, chances are excellent that you will be asked to attend an interview, so you can tell them in person.

### **Some final points to consider:**

**Re-using old answers** – why re-use work that did not give you the results that you wanted? Do not base your new application on a previous application, without considering whether or not the last application got you the results that you wanted i.e., an interview. If you repeat the same things in the same way, chances are excellent you will get the same result. By all means re-read previous applications, this will tell you where you went wrong. But do not rely on your old applications as the basis for the new one.

**Job titles** – do not “upskill” your job titles to try and make your work history sound more exciting than it was. For example, an “underground extraction engineer” is a “miner”, a “vision enhancer” could be an optometrist or a window cleaner. The reason being, your references will be checked, so it will be very clear very quickly what your job title and your roles were within a particular organisation.

**Do not leave any questions blank** - please understand that the short list for the interview stage of the application process will be drawn from those people who have answered all the essential criteria, and most if not all of the desirable questions as well. Whilst leaving a question blank may seem to be sensible, after all you really don't have any experience with a, b or c criteria. To a prospective employer it may just seem that you are careless, and have demonstrated that you do not have “good attention to detail” after all.

**Do you have good written communication skills?** One of the best ways to determine the answer to this question is a simple one. A prospective employer looks at your application. The short list of interviewees will have demonstrated their “good written communication skills” with their answers to the selection criteria, how well their CV has been written, and the general presentation of the application. If you cannot prove on paper that you are the best person for the job, then you will not be doing it in person. So make every word count for you.

**Who do you work for?** - If you have worked for or are currently working for an employment agency, it is essential that you say so on your CV. Your employment agency is your employer for the duration of the contract. Not stating this could make you look like you are a “job hopper” never satisfied with the job you have and are always looking for something new and exciting. Make sure you state that you worked for the host employer, but always, always, always write underneath that this was a contract position and name the employment agency. For example:

**May 2004 – April 2005**

**Librarian**

**XYZ Organisation**

**Contract position through abc employers.**

**Referring back to other documents or parts of your application** – Please bear in mind that the prospective employer will have already read your CV and covering letter, so please do not repeat the same information, “as I mentioned in my CV when I worked at such and such an organisation I...” nor should you refer them to a particular section. Always give a different example to the ones you have used before. You can tighten your writing and prove to the prospective employer that you have good experience and you can articulate your responses well and in such a way that the prospective employer will insist that you go for an interview.

**Checking your application before sending.** Have you re-read the instructions for filling in your application form and the submission guidelines? You may have missed the point that said, please send us 3 copies of your entire application, copy 1 on blue paper, copy 2 has to be on yellow paper and copy three has to be on black paper with white writing. OK this is a little frivolous – but there are some organisations who insist on electronic copies of all applications, some insist that all applications have to be submitted via their web site, or hand delivered, and please supply 3 copies, unbound.

Check for spelling and grammatical errors – and fix them. If you cannot proof read your own document (and not everyone can) then get someone you trust to do it for you.

Make sure all your documents use the same font and font size. Do not use fancy script – use something simple and easy to read - for example Arial, Verdana and Times New Roman.

Unless stated otherwise, print out your application on white paper using black text. This makes it easy to reproduce. Coloured paper may make your application stand out for the wrong reason.

Do not include anything other than what you have been asked for within your application as you may not get them back. Therefore do not send original copies of certificates, and do not send anything they have not asked for, after all you may not get it back.

To your success.

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## A Thought to Ponder

“I have often regretted my speech, never my silence”  
**Xenocrates (396-314BC)**

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