

Seeking Attention, Not Jobs

By

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Exasperated recruiters say the trend of job applicants showing up to interviews, only to turn down resultant offers, is not limited to Centrelink patrons looking to keep welfare payments flowing in.

Link Recruitment business manager Monica Aleksander says some highly paid applicants keep fronting up to interviews without accepting any of the positions offered to them.

“It’s almost like people think the grass is greener somewhere else and they keep chasing it.”

And it’s not as though such applicants are generation Ys fresh out of university and too big for their boots, she says. “These people normally are highly paid, they are young people in their 30s who hold quite high positions,”

In his book *The Paradox of Choice: Why Less is More*, psychology professor Barry Schwartz argues that some people in Western society (choice “maximisers”, he calls them) become overwhelmed by choice – and the search for the perfect job, partner or consumer purchase – to the point of decision-making paralysis.

Excuses offered by hard-to-please candidates include disliking the office decor, its location or the personality of the interviewer; or else discovering the job contained unexpected demands in terms of working hours or tasks, Aleksander says.

And, just as Groucho Marx famously declared he was not interested in joining any club that would accept him as a member, some job applicants dismiss employers who show interest, she says.

“All of a sudden, the candidate goes, ‘Well, I’m pretty good, let’s see what else I can get.’ You just want to kill these people.”

Many such candidates enjoy the attention and acclaim that go with the interview process, organisational psychologist Christopher Shen says. “Someone who engages in that sort of behaviour is somebody who is reasonably demanding, is quite possibly narcissistic, enjoys the actual process of going through job interviews, being feted [and] having interviewers and representatives from that business demonstrate their delight and how impressed they are with the candidate’s knowledge, skills and experience.”

Other serial interviewees solicit offers from other firms solely to use “as ammunition” in the leadup to salary reviews, says Adecco’s general manager of permanent recruitment, Amber Burgess.

But attending multiple interviews in order to play employers off against each other is not always a successful tactic, Aleksander says.

“We’ve seen it time and time again, where people hang off, trying to compare and push all the prices up and they end up with nothing.”

And ending up with nothing is likely to be increasingly common as economic conditions worsen.

Investment bank JPMorgan this week predicted unemployment will reach 9 per cent by the end of 2010, meaning the power balance is tilting back towards employers.

Fussy job applicants might need to recalibrate their expectations – and maybe just accept that offer.

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