



AVOIDING APPLICATION PITFALLS

SHELL'S HR PROFESSIONALS
SHARE THEIR VIEWS ON
THE COMMON MISTAKES TO
AVOID WHEN APPLYING FOR
A JOB, AND BY EXTENSION
HOW YOU CAN STAND OUT IN
THE PROCESS.

LET'S put your engineering skills to the side and consider for just a moment that when you apply for your first job you'll be judged on your non-technical talents too. To this end, it makes sense that there's a team of non-engineers who also have a say on whether your application continues through the process - or finds its way onto the rejected pile.

Chloe Huckstep studied politics and economics at university, and now works for oil giant Shell meeting prospective engineering students and studying their online applications. Her colleague Dan Costello studied psychology and now works downstream of Chloe, looking at an applicant's scores from earlier tests and helping to decide who should be invited to a final

assessment.

Both have been through Shell's graduate interview process so have experienced it from both sides.

CHLOE, WHAT ARE THE COMMON MISTAKES APPLICANTS SHOULD AVOID?

CHLOE: Firstly, don't miss out essential information. You'd be surprised at how many CVs I see where the applicant hasn't explained what degree they are studying or what year they are in.

Secondly, don't bury really good experience in a single sentence. 'I set up the chemical engineering society and was president' doesn't give enough context. When we talk to them, they add 'Oh yes, I managed to get 50 people to our

first meeting and I got £1,000 sponsorship from four companies! Don't forget to sell yourself and the experience you've gained.

Thirdly, I get frustrated when I see that a cover letter has been copy-and-pasted, and the applicant hasn't changed the company's name to Shell.

You'd be surprised at how many I see like that and I think it's a big mistake. I appreciate that you don't write a tailored cover letter for every application but you should double check. Get your housemate to check it. A fresh pair of eyes is always useful.

Finally, a lot of students forget to use the resources they have on campus. Every university has a careers service and they really know their stuff. They work with us and many other companies, and really know what we look for in graduates. Take time to meet them. Those students that do tend to be a lot stronger and more informed about the process. Your careers service is often desperate to help you.

DAN, WHAT ABOUT FURTHER INTO THE PROCESS? WHAT ARE THE COMMON PITFALLS?

DAN: The first is answering the question you want to answer rather than the one you're asked. Big companies typically have well defined criteria against which to mark what you say. The more conceptual questions such as 'why do you think you're fit for this role' are not asked in interview anymore. It's more about how you behave because the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour. So interviewers ask questions for a particular reason because they want to hear you say a particular thing or give them a

particular piece of evidence. So answer the questions you're asked.

Another is failing to give specific examples. Students struggle with this – and I did too when I was going through the process. If the question is 'give me an example of a time when you've had to persuade or influence someone' quite often I get the reply 'I do that all the time as chairman of this group'. Well that didn't give me evidence. I want a specific example.

YOU'VE BOTH BEEN THROUGH THE PROCESS YOU NOW HELP TO ASSESS. CHLOE, IF YOU COULD GO BACK IN TIME, WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR PAST SELF?

CHLOE: Make sure you have investigated the company you're applying for and come up with some really good questions that you want to know the answers to. And don't be afraid to ask them. I think sometimes it's easier to ask the typical ones like 'what's the graduate training programme like' but actually I'm always impressed by interview candidates who ask questions that make me think about what our company's culture is, or what we think about xyz. I think that's a really great way to make yourself stand out because it shows you take the time to have a think about the company.

DAN, IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WISH YOU'D DONE DIFFERENTLY? WHAT WOULD YOU TELL YOUNGER DAN?

DAN: Be proud of what you've done and recognise your

achievements. It links back to my earlier point on giving specific examples. When I was going through all the graduate application processes, I was thinking 'I'm speaking to Shell here who deal in billions of dollars worth of projects. They don't want to hear how I set up a five person committee to establish a little psychology society. That was nothing.' But actually it is important. You're 21 or 22; we don't expect you to have changed the world. What we want to see is that you can demonstrate the behaviours we look for. And there are many, many examples that might seem quite small but we want to hear them.

CHLOE, ANY FINAL SUGGESTIONS ON REALLY STANDING OUT? PERHAPS FOR THOSE JUST EMBARKING ON THEIR UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE?

CHLOE: We are big on leadership. It's fantastic that a graduate was a member of the university petroleum society but even better if you were the society's treasurer or the company liaison officer.

We want to see evidence that you can work with others. There's group work on the degree course, but all students have to do that, so what we really like to see are those students who have pushed themselves and made the most of the opportunities on campus.

Placement years are always great to see – as is a semester abroad – which shows a real determination and motivation. We are, after all, recruiting future leaders – that's what we say our graduates are. We look for those students that have been driven at university.