



# Information Overload

Issue 32, April 2005

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## Welcome:

Welcome to this month's edition of Information Overload. As a follow up to last month's newsletter on the nations skills shortage, otherwise known as "where are all the good people?" The answer to that one is of course "working", we take a look at some of the dilemmas organisations face as they try and find the best person(s) for the job on offer, and ask the question – is finding someone who best fits the organisational culture a form of discrimination in and of itself?

We also take a look at the other side and what candidates should do as they search and maybe find that perfect job. As an employment agency looking after the needs of both employers and employees (as well as fixed-term contract positions), we are fortunate to see both sides of the employment process, making sure the needs and requirements of the employer are matched to the skills and abilities of the candidates, which can be a time consuming and often interesting process. We hope you enjoy reading.

As always, if you have any suggestions or would like to see us cover any other topics, we would love to hear from you. Just send an e-mail to [training@iea.com.au](mailto:training@iea.com.au).

Lorraine Bradshaw  
Marketing & Training Coordinator

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## In this Issue we will be looking at:

- Do you have any questions?
- Turning a job offer down;
- The new super choice;
- A Thought to ponder.

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For employers everywhere it seems that finding the right person for the job appears to be harder than ever. As demand for people far outweighs ability to supply in some areas, people are getting more selective in the roles that they are willing to take and the remuneration they are hoping to receive. But is money the only factor an employer should take into consideration?

The answer has to be no. Whilst it may play a part in attracting a range of suitably qualified people, if those people do not "fit" the organisational culture, then it is likely that further changes to the organisation, its staff and productivity will occur.

But how do you determine a good "fit"?

There are numerous schools of thought, all of which have been used by organisations to determine the so-called right qualities in their employees. One of those is the use of online interviews or behavioural testing, otherwise known as Psychometric Testing. These can take one of two forms, either Cognitive Intelligence Tests or IQ, or Emotional Intelligence Tests

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or EQ. Whilst IQ tests a candidates skill in the areas of verbal reasoning and numerical skills, testing for EQ means assessing candidates in areas such as how a person copes with stress, behaviours and interpersonal situations. These are rarely if ever used in isolation, but can be used as a way to pre-screen or even screen out what the organisation considers to be "unsuitable" candidates.

Then there are those organisations who use computers and software to weed out candidates who have not used the correct keywords or mix of keywords and phrases in their online applications. This is a common practice for organisations who routinely receive hundreds of applications for each position advertised. Whilst other organisations prefer to do the initial "cull" the old fashioned way – by simply reading the applications. And most if not all organisations use the candidate's own written applications to test whether or not you really do have "good written communication skills". So it stands to reason that if you cannot market yourself on paper, there is a good chance you won't be doing it in person.

But perhaps the most widely used screening process is the interview itself. Where emotional intelligence, "gut feel" and "intuition" can play a huge part in selecting the "best" candidate. One of the questions that should be asked – is selecting a candidate based on the best cultural fit - a form of discrimination in and of itself? Whilst this can be argued for both sides, it is interesting to note that a prospective employee does not utilise the many techniques employed by those doing the hiring to their own advantage. After all, you have to decide if you want to work with them too.

## **Do you have any questions?**

I would hope so. How are you going to find out if you are the right person for the job if you don't ask a few pertinent questions? Whilst an interview is designed to find out if you would fit the employers idea of the organisations culture, you don't have to wait until you reach the interview stage before you discover whether or not you feel you would fit or not.

Most job advertisements will give you a telephone number to call for more information. The person listed in the job advertisement will have detailed, "inside" information regarding the position on offer. The person chosen to pass on this important information is usually the direct supervisor of the position and therefore will play a vital role in the choice of person.

Whilst the organisation may have a narrow range of things that they have been instructed to pass on, you must remember that it is you who initiated the phone call and therefore you should be the one leading the interview (yes that is exactly what it is – do you want to spend time and effort applying for something that may not fit your needs).

To make sure that you aren't sidetracked from finding out the information that you want, you should have a list of pre-determined questions written down. If the organisation sidesteps any of your questions, you may decide to ask the question again, just in case they misheard you, or to press on. It may be something that can be answered at another time.

Typical questions that can be asked at this stage are:

Is someone currently "acting" in the position or is it a new role?

If you do decide to apply for the position and you reach the interview stage, it is important to remember that it is a two way process and you should be prepared to ask some questions of your own. Do not leave the interview with a feeling that you did not get your chance to speak.

Whilst most of the questions you may consider asking will be based on the job description, and the specific industry and/or position that you are applying for, there are a number of questions that you can ask regardless of the job you are going for, or the organisation that you will be working in. For instance "What do you like most about this company?", and of course its opposite, "and what do you like least about working for the company." The answers are always interesting and can tell you a lot about the organisation, its culture and the people it employs.

The following is a selection of questions that are suitable for you to ask during the interview stage, assuming you haven't already been told of course.

- Who would my co-workers be, and what are their functions?
- How many people would I be managing?
- What are the goals of the department?
- What makes this company different from its competitors?
- What can you tell me about the culture and the environment?
- What do you like most about working for this company?
- What do you like the least?
- What is (your) the department head's leadership style?
- Is someone currently "acting" in the position or is it a new role?
- What are the company's objectives for this year? Have you managed to meet them?
- What are the company's objectives for next year? What plans do you have in place to meet those goals and objectives?
- What will be my primary role on the project?
- What is the time frame for completion? Do you think this is realistic?
- What other resources (people and equipment) have been allocated to it?
- Does the project have a budget allocated to it?
- What would be the first aspect required and by when?
- What would be the deliverables?
- What does the client expect at the end of the project?
- How will success be measured?
- Have similar projects been completed in the past? Were they successful?
- Will there be other opportunities within the company once this particular project has been completed?
- Are there additional opportunities to expand my responsibilities if I meet or exceed the company's expectations?

Don't worry if some of these questions sound a little presumptuous on your part. It shows that you have taken the interview process seriously and are looking at ways that you can help the organisation achieve its aims and objectives by becoming a member of the team. Thank them for their time when you have finished.

### **Don't Ask This**

- Anything that requires a simple yes or no answer. You want to find out as much as you can about the organisation you are hoping to work for.
- Anything that is already written on the application package or job description, as this just proves that you haven't bothered to read the material that they have sent to you.
- Anything that has already been covered during the interview. This will seem like you haven't been paying attention.

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- Anything to do with salary or salary packaging. Whilst this seems to be one of the most important questions currently being bandied around, this tends to be discussed at a later date with the successful candidate, and could be argued to be irrelevant to anyone else.
- Anything to do with benefits and conditions of service. For instance, asking about vacation and sick leave will make the interviewer(s) question whether you were going to bother turning up for work on a daily basis or not.

*This extract was taken from IEA's e-book – The first 4 minutes: Understanding the selection and interview process. For more information on this title please visit our web site – [www.iea.com.au](http://www.iea.com.au).*

## **T**urning a job offer down

There will be occasions where you will have to turn down a job offer. It may be that the job was simply not what you thought it was; You have been offered something else, you have decided that you are going to stay where you are after all, besides when you told your present employer you were going for an interview, they immediately offered you more money, better conditions, a company car or other perks that makes your current position slightly more attractive.

However, there may also be a time where you turn down a job offer simply because it didn't "feel right." You leave the organisation with a nagging feeling that there was something that just didn't add up, and you begin to worry. What happens if they offer you the job? Do you really want to take something that on the outside looks fantastic, they're even willing to pay you the money that you want, but for all of that, you just don't feel like you would "fit in"? Should you take the job as an interim step to something else, after all the experience would be valuable? The money would certainly be useful, and you would be able to use the skills and knowledge that you have gained in a new environment. But even after checking off all the positives, you are still not convinced that you would be doing the right thing.

What do you do?

Do you turn the job offer down and then worry whether you are doing the right thing or not? After all the job looked great on paper, the money is fabulous. OK so your new boss couldn't look you in the eye, maybe he was just shy. So what if they were evasive about what projects you would be working on, and what the rate of staff turnover was. You are not sure what to do and your internal voice is very insistent – that by turning the job down you are going to be making the worst mistake of your entire life.

Do you take the job even though you know you will be looking for something else the day after tomorrow? Would you feel guilty because of the time, effort and money that has already been spent interviewing you, and you know you are going to have to do some on-the-job training, which is going to cost the organisation even more, especially in terms of staff time.

If you are ever faced with this situation, then it is important that you weigh up both sides of the equation. Ask yourself some questions, and be as honest as you can with your answers.

- What are the benefits of taking the position? Is it for the prestige, better money, closer to home, new challenges, better hours or any job is better than no job at all.
- What are the benefits of staying where you are? It's comfortable - you know the people, you know the job, there is a possibility you can take on other duties or take on project work, you are close to retirement and don't want the hassle of learning something totally new if you are going to be leaving the work force in a few years,

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you did it to prompt the organisation you work for that you are indispensable and as a ploy to offer you more money (please note this tactic can backfire).

- Do you have any other job prospects that would suit you better than the one on offer?
- Have you spoken to your network? What do they think/know about the organisation and/or the people? Be careful with this one though, as you will get a mixture of opinion, bias and hearsay.
- Have you spoken to the organisation? Can you arrange to meet your new colleagues, or your new boss to discuss the role in detail? Whilst you should have taken the opportunity to contact the organisation for more information before attending the interview, and asked some pointed questions during the interview process, post interview gathering of information can be a valuable tool to help you make up your mind.
- Do you worry about what people will think?
- Are you afraid to say "NO" this job isn't for me after all?
- Will this new position take you further down your chosen career path, or will it take you away from where you want to ultimately end up? Of course if you don't know where you want to end up at the end of your career, bear in mind that any road will get you there.

If after you have weighed up all the possibilities, options and information, you are still not sure, remember that there are no right or wrong answers to this dilemma. Whichever decision you take will simply give you a different set of experiences to take with you as you move through your professional life. It's how you handle the experiences that really matter.

## **A Super Choice**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2005 changes to the superannuation legislation will be brought into effect. Called "Superannuation Choice", you will have the legal right to say which fund you would like your "super" paid into.

"Super" I can hear you cry. Whilst some organisations have given you the choice of which fund your superannuation is paid into (Information Enterprises Australia have always offered this service to its on-hire contractors) most organisations do not. It should be noted that not all super funds will take money on your behalf from your current employer (especially if your current employer uses a different fund to the one that you have had set up in the past). If this is the case, then you will have to open another superannuation fund.

Of course as with all things, there are potential downsides to these changes. Concerns have already been raised by the Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia (ASFA) about the use of unlicensed financial advisors (remember if something sounds too good to be true, it usually is) miss-selling of self-managed superannuation funds – if you don't have the time, skills or adequate savings, you may not be doing yourself or your retirement savings any good by going down this route, and moving money between accounts thinking that a new fund will perform better, charge less, give you more "services" than your old one, when in some cases that is not the case at all.

The advice offered by the ASFA is a simple one, weigh up all the options before you switch funds. A case of "caveat emptor" – let the buyer beware.

Whilst there are 5.7 million people who will be able to exercise the right to choose which fund they would like their monies paid into, there are some people who will still not be able

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to do so. These include most public sector employees and many employees in large organisations covered by industrial agreements.

For those people who are eligible for this change to the superannuation legislation, you will be sent a letter and a "standard choice form" before the 29<sup>th</sup> of July. You will also be asked to supply written evidence from your superannuation fund that they will accept contributions made by your employer on your behalf.

As with all things there will be some sort of government advertising campaign highlighting the changes. But if you want to know the ins and outs, not to mention the real answers to all the questions you may have, then it is worth going to [http://www.superannuation.asn.au/choiceemp/rpm.cfm?page=choice\\_employer\\_factsheets](http://www.superannuation.asn.au/choiceemp/rpm.cfm?page=choice_employer_factsheets)

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### **A Thought to Ponder:**

"Do or do not. There is no "try"  
**Yoda (The Empire Strikes Back)**

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Your comments and suggestions on the subject of this newsletter are most welcome. Or if you would like to see other issues covered in future editions, please email me at [training@iea.com.au](mailto:training@iea.com.au)

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