

Don't Rush Off: Making a Good Impression on Job Applicants

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As a daughter of the south, I was raised with a revolving door of guests in my parents' home. From the moment a visitor walked through our den door, my mom or dad would focus every ounce of attention on making that person feel comfortable and welcome. The air conditioning was turned on (which made me love visitors). My mom made sweet tea and my dad made cream cheese dip served with Ruffles.

And when guests started to leave, one of my parents would always say, "Don't rush off", even if was very late. This ritual sought to make guests feel cherished and connected. (And no one could accuse the DeHart's of shoddy hospitality.)

I got those same feelings two years ago when I interviewed for a faculty position at the School of Government (SOG). [Willow Jacobson](#) picked me up at the airport, where I had flown from Kansas City. During a particularly long group interview, [Lydian Altman](#) offered me a Diet Mountain Dew (how she read my mind, I'll never know).

[Jonathan Morgan](#) retrieved my coat from the room where I'd left it and returned it to me at lunch the next day. And when SOG made me the offer, [Mike Smith](#) met me face-to-face to seal the deal. I knew that the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Government was where I belonged.

You have the same opportunity to make an impression with people who interview for jobs in your organization. From the moment a job applicant walks through your door, they are wondering what type of employer you will be. Will you treat them like a cog in a wheel, replaceable at a moment's notice? Or will you invest time and resources in them, viewing them as a valuable person who is now part of the family? Will you be fair and just or oppressive and stifling?

The impression you make on job applicants is important whether you are hiring an administrative assistant or city manager. A recent [study](#) of job applicant experiences in *Academy of Management Journal* supports the argument: in three different study settings, things like perceived politeness, candor and timeliness influenced whether job applicants thought the organization would be a great place to work. Applicant perceptions are no small matter when you've invested time and effort in finding the ideal candidate, only to lose them for lackluster courtship on your part.

Here are three tips for putting your best recruitment foot forward:

Make Every Communication Count. Whether it's an email saying "We are excited that you have chosen to apply!" or a job advertisement that sells the opportunity for meaningful public service, the frequency and quality of communications with job applicants goes along way towards recruiting the best people for the job.

Stay in Touch. Two UNC-MPA students recently shared with me their frustration applying for local government jobs. Both stellar students and great people, they were scooped up by other employers because the local governments to which they applied took too long to act. Their slowness of communication made our MPA graduates feel unimportant and made them look like sluggish bureaucracies. Even for those applicants who don't get the job, letting them know their status promptly (or better yet, allowing them to check their status online) communicates respect and trustworthiness.

Think of Job Applicants as Customers. Job applicants form impressions of your organization whether you select them or not. And unlike my job search twenty-plus years ago, job applicants today can tweet and post their experiences with your organization on social media outlets, guaranteeing that their experiences will be heard. So think of every job applicant as a customer and every interaction with applicants as an opportunity to sell your organization.

You can apply the "*Don't Rush Off*" philosophy to your job applicants. View them as members of the community and important guests to your organization and you will build a reputation for being an employer of choice.