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HR's Diary – After the interview



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The sultry humid weather takes its toll on one's energy; on top, the sudden stuffiness before the rain is notoriously good at bringing down the mood to its lower ebb. Zahid is just another victim of this weather. After his performance in the interview, Zahid was in no mood to think about the weather, let alone predicting the interview outcome at the outset. He shrugged off the whole episode of the past weeks of series of interviews, and came back to his daily realities. He decided to put an end to his dream-like thoughts. Then came the unforgettable moment! A simple white envelope with his name and address on it giving away a certain touch of sophistication arrived and changed his professional life for good. After so many years, he does not remember now exactly what the time of the day it was, but no doubt, it was the turning point of his life, which dazzled out with a flashing indication of a broad daylight. He was simply happy, more because of the sense of achievement which radiated in him with the arrival of the letter. With renewed hope, he tore it open to find his long awaited appointment letter. The few neatly typed pages detailed out all the terms and conditions with the request for putting his signature, should he accept them. Wordings of the letter bore the mark of bureaucracy, point by point, as though it was kind of a quasi-legal document; it was actually a contract - an employment contract. Zahid was overwhelmed, no doubt, but he had already made his decision without any hesitation.

After so many years, when Zahid himself is drafting similar documents for others, he meticulously thinks of making each appointment letter more inviting, but making sure that certain points are made clear in an unambiguous way, considering the adverse consequences it may bring otherwise for the person or to the organization. For Zahid, the appointment letter from this prestigious multi-national company was the starting of a long journey only; looking back at the whole process from the beginning to the end, he could still vividly track the pattern of the selection process and 'after-the-interview' stage, frame by frame.

A social evening ...

A few days after the last interview, Zahid and his wife received a dinner invitation from one of the Directors of the company. He could guess that the event was not only to introduce the couple to the colleagues, but also to assess their social skills with the whole crowd. Both of them enjoyed the evening with a few other couples whose spouses were working for the company - a good occasion to know each other and to get inducted into a bigger 'family' with a different 'work place culture'. Both of them could sense that they were under microscopic eyes, especially Zahid. So, he eased himself to demonstrate what he was, not trying to be a crowd pleaser or, posing for what he actually was not; this honest gesture was definitely the likeable one that was picked up by others as well as by the host of the evening.

Reference Checking

Zahid had a hunch that there was some kind of 'reference check' going on while he had been longing to hear some positive nod from the hiring person of the MNC. Zahid knew, checking of references was usually done at the very end of the interview process, if things would turn positive. After all these years, he has come to know from his HR practices that too often it is not done well or thoroughly enough. Zahid remembered that when they reached the last stage of the interviews, one of the interviewers asked for references from the last two jobs that he held. In addition to professional references, they also told him that he might provide a reference letter from a former professor or colleague if he wished.

Who was doing it

Zahid knew that the company had professional human resources specialists, who carried out the reference checking related tasks. However, now-a-days, there are HR consulting houses that do this kind of reference checking. Ideally, reference checking should not be done only in writing, because one will get little in the way of verification. Because of the potential liability, companies are reluctant to put anything in writing and mostly provide the job title, employee number or years of employment of the candidate. He has learnt through his experience that by the final stage, the hiring manager should call at least one reference, if he happens to be the direct supervisor. Zahid was expecting the same would be carried out by the MNC for his recruitment.

Checking over phone

Zahid now advocates to other HR practitioners that when the HR specialist calls up a reference, s/he should prepare to spend some time on the phone. This is important to build rapport and get the person (on the other side of the phone) to feel comfortable. One should be assured that the conversation would be in the strictest confidence, which is not deterrent to the company's reputation; in fact professionally giving advice on the candidate's employability is not taken adversely.

Negotiating Salary and Benefits

This had been a tricky part of the whole process for Zahid. He was not sure about the going rate in the job market neither did he want to 'bargain'. He did not want himself to be traded at all as 'commodity'. Nevertheless, he also did not want to devalue the worth of his own 'human capital'. Being in the government job, he did never think about this as the public pay structure is a well disclosed one; therefore, no option was left for any negotiation and the situation that prevailed was - some kind of take-it-or-leave-it. But in the MNC job, this is treated as a confidential element of the job, like any other private company. He felt awkward when the matter was broached, but at the same time he was of the opinion that there should be relative differentiation in terms of ability and responsibility.

His expectation

Indication of the offer was in the offing; he was sure when the MNC wanted to have a concrete idea of his expectations in terms of both salary and benefits. Now as an HR practitioner Zahid executes this process quite tediously as he would like to find out the real expectations of the candidates; whether or not the candidate is also looking for a bonus structure that is consistent with Company's or departmental plan; for example, when interviewing for a sales position, he has to keep in mind that the candidate's ideas of commission plan may differ from what he has to offer. It is a good idea to get this out on the table as soon as possible.

Fair and reasonableness

Zahid felt that they extended the offer to him that had been both 'fair and reasonable'. This means to Zahid now - he does not want to get someone too cheaply, or the candidate would most likely bolt at the next best offer. In his case the MNC also did not want to over pay and disrupt his own salary structure that existed; he found that later after joining. Zahid believes now that the offer should be in a range that makes sense for both the Company and the candidate. That had been the case for Zahid also.

Confrontations to be avoided

Zahid also believes now that in the process of salary negotiation, confrontations should be avoided. If the candidate balks at the offer, he/she should be heard out. The interviewer should not become confrontational or emotional as it is always better to listen to the reasons why the candidate feels he or she is worth more than the offer made and consider the reasons before passing the judgment.

Confirming the offer

Zahid felt that the MNC negotiated in good faith and stood by the offer which was confirmed and reflected in writing as he found in the appointment letter. They also decided to give the timeline as to when the offer would expire and made sure that Zahid understood the time limit and knew when he must respond to the offer.

Zahid also thinks now that if circumstances desire, an offer letter may also be given before issuing the final appointment letter. This is also a practice among some of the companies in the wake of competitive job market. If the offer would be accepted by the candidate only then could the final appointment letter be issued to avoid undesired consequences.

Salient points for preparing the appointment letter

The following are his own ideas Zahid has now formed as to what would be the salient points that need to be heeded while drafting out a good appointment letter.

After extending the offer, an appointment letter should be prepared having two copies and sent to the candidate with the request for sending back one with the signature as the token of acceptance. The appointment letter should be as brief as possible - preferably not more than a page and a half in length incorporating the important facts, such as starting date, job title, compensation, and conditions or expected duties of the position. Benefits should be summarized, and a benefits brochure (along with terms and conditions) should be attached. The candidate should be invited to talk to a nominated HR person (benefits specialist) if he or she has any questions. The time limit of the appointment letter can vary depending on the level. Maximum deadline should be given for starting work, to allow the candidate ample time to give notice at his or her old job.

Legalities

Because the hiring process is so time consuming, it is often easy for today's managers to overlook the legalities of the hiring process. This is indeed an extremely critical area. Depending upon the level, the appointment letter should be made with the existing laws relating to employment being complied with. It has to be remembered that the person who is hiring is responsible for all of the hiring practices of the organization. It is needed to make sure that the person understands the relevant laws thoroughly and is absolutely careful to comply with those throughout the hiring process.

(This is sequence 4: to be continued)

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