



CareerXroads 2008 Mystery Job Seeker:
*How Are Job Seekers Really Treated by America's "Top"
Corporations?*

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Author's Forward

Since 2002 we (Gerry Crispin and Mark Mehler of CareerXroads) have annually created a mystery job seeker who applies to the *Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For* <http://www.greatplacetowork.com/best/list-bestusa.htm> .

We reason that firms who are publicly admired for creating a positive working environment might be expected to have some of that magic rub off in their recruiting process. We want to systematically capture information on how a job seeker is treated in the application process, and even beyond - when they are acknowledged, thanked and perhaps even informed of their status. In past years unemployed human resource executives have helped perform this task. In 2008, we undertook the adventure ourselves and, in this brief report, we aim to share a few of our experiences as job seekers.

Previous CareerXroads' mystery job seekers have included:

- Vinnie Boombotz who worked in credit and collections for the Bada Bing Corporation
- Gold E. Locks with a degree from the School of Made-Up Characters who once left breadcrumbs when giving a corporate tour
- Josh Randall a top gun recruiter from Dodge City, Kansas
- Ted E. Baer an unassuming but highly qualified administrative assistant

Do you sense a whimsical theme? In 2008 the mystery job seeker is James Knee Cricket who works in sales and is a Princeton graduate in entrepreneurial studies. He lives on Collodi Lane (Collodi was the original author of Pinocchio) and has worked for Maestro Geppetto. At the bottom of James' résumé each company is advised that this is a mystery job seeker and if found they should contact CareerXroads. (View Cricket's full résumé in Appendix A of this report.)

One (Special) Job Seeker’s Experience Applying for a Job

Why create a mystery character who applies online to 100 corporations?

CareerXroads analyzes several experience-related dimensions that influence candidates’ decisions in the hiring process and, while we’ve created a multi-item checklist we complete each time we apply, we are primarily interested in learning the answers to the following questions:

1. When I apply, am I the one this employer is looking for? (Am I your **Target** candidate or is someone else?)
2. Is it clear to me why I should come to (or stay at) this company? (**Engage** me. Tell me why you are a “100 Best” company. Some firms don’t even promote their award.)
3. Was I able to find the information I need to support my reasons for applying here? (Can you really **Inform** me?)
4. Was I thanked, offered next steps, promised feedback or status? (After I’ve applied, will you **Respect** me in the morning?)

Among the detailed results of our annual mystery job seeker initiative we typically highlight:

The time it takes a job seeker to apply.

7. When you applied online it took...		Response Percent	Response Count
Previously told you- couldn't apply		1.0%	1
under 5 minutes to apply.		33.0%	33
approximately 10-15 minutes to apply.		51.0%	51
closer to 30 minutes to apply.		14.0%	14
around 45 minutes.		0.0%	0
an hour or more to finish.		1.0%	1
Other (please specify)		0.0%	0
		<i>answered question</i>	100

How long should it take to apply once you’ve identified a position for which you want to compete? We believe no time at all. Under five minutes is doable if that time is spent usefully...but it’s often not. The frustrations that build up while completing a simple application tell the real tale.

The number of companies that respond back to the mystery job seeker. In most cases via email with a letter advising “Do not call us. We will only call you if the job matches the skills on your résumé.” 78 responded this way in 2008 which is the highest return we have ever received. Unfortunately this also means that 22 companies did not give James any sense at all of where he is in the process.

Eighteen companies sent our candidate an additional email advising when the position that he applied to was filled. This last statistic is the highest follow up response we have ever received since starting this survey.

A few companies sent James multiple emails (4-5 emails) advising of his status in the process. Each email was tailored to the position he had applied for and gave him updates on where his candidacy stood with the organization. This is a Best Practice but very few companies reach out in this manner. Several of the “don’t call us” letters did not even include the name of the company to which James applied. The only way James would know who sent the letter was to look at the email address of the sender. One company created their own password for James to return to update his résumé – something that is in reality little help as no job seeker will remember an automated password.

How easy it is to find the Careers/Jobs button on a corporate website. 55 companies have the button prominently displayed with 15 having an additional menu of options displayed.

How easy it is to reach the actual job description of a similar position to Sales Representative. 88 of the 100 Best Companies to Work For made it very easy to find a matching job description for James. Five companies did not have any job descriptions posted nor could we send in James’ résumé to have it held for future openings.

Special features that companies provide to enhance their job application experience. This year 18% of the companies are using video to illustrate “a day in the life” of an employee. In our 2007 Fortune 500 study, only 13% of the companies provided this feature. Video usage in corporate sites has dramatically increased and it offers enormous advantages (when done well) in providing realistic expectations, realistic previews, virtual job shadowing, enhanced job descriptions, richer case studies, simulations and even improving the face validity of assessments.

Frustrations in Applying Online

We wonder how someone serious about getting a new job keeps their frustrations in check when applying to numerous companies online. In many cases, corporate sites asked James to upload or cut and paste his résumé into their system which on the surface is an easy, great feature. Then comes the parsing of that résumé.

Parsing, or automatically placing words in related fields of the online application, is in theory an enhancement but in reality has created more headache than it is worth. We did not measure the actual numbers of applications that utilized this technology but the job seeker frustration level of having to correct data over and over again made for a very poor application experience. Name, address and phone number were always correctly parsed. Beyond that point almost all of the systems broke down. Our résumé listed James’ title first instead of the name of his last employer and every system placed this information in the incorrect box. Educational institution in the right place? Forget about it. Some systems picked up James middle name “knee” as his last name so it was almost impossible for the recruiter to find his resume. Parsing is a great idea that should make the job seeker’s application process less time consuming – the reality, in almost all cases unfortunately, is the technology is not ready for primetime.

Here are some examples of actions job seekers are asked to perform again and again which indicate a lack of concern for the applicants' time:

- Fifty-six of the 100 companies we applied to asked us to complete a profile or application form...and then required us to paste/upload our résumé into the system.
- Forty-two companies allowed the job seeker to see a job description and hit the apply button but then required that he register before going any further (usually by providing an email address and creating a login). In a few instances, after registering, the link to the job we originally wanted to apply to was lost.
- Two companies out of the 100 Best did not even let job seekers apply online.
- Three would only allow our mystery character, Jim, to email his résumé in for consideration.
- Forty-seven companies asked generic questions such as: "Are you legally able to work in the US?" The good news is that this was often asked in the beginning of the application process. The bad news is that in no case did answering in the negative actually stop the application process - this despite the fact that most of the vendor software can be configured to politely stop the job seeker from going any further. We tested both ways.
- Only eight firms asked specific questions related to the jobs to which James was applying.
- Two firms made him take personality tests that were 144 questions in length.
- Several firms requested social security numbers as part of the initial application.

Can I please speak to James Cricket?

Three corporations called asking to interview James. One of the three stated that James would be interviewed based on his pre-employment questions. His résumé was never reviewed - the company's policy is to never read the résumés but go strictly by the responses to their application questions to decide who to interview. (Why did we have to submit the resume you might ask?)

Only three companies found James' résumé and advised they knew he was not a real job seeker. We suspect others might have discovered our character as well but very few recruiters read for content and instead tend to scan "buzzwords" in their first screen. Understandable. In fact, we count on it. In many applicant tracking systems the critical skills, knowledge and experience are built into an algorithm, weighting the résumés to make the recruiter's job easier, floating the "better" ones to the top with the keywords highlighted.

Conclusion

Job seekers need to be treated as if they were customers and not just a commodity. As the war for talent continues to heat up in 2008 the better job seekers will have options. Those who are treated like customers will respond in kind. Those who are not treated well on corporate websites will decide to work for other employers.

Corporate recruiters need to periodically apply to their own firm. Links break, videos don't always work as well as planned and tools that seem to be time-saving are anything but when put into practice. Staffing professionals need to re-examine their corporate job pages as if they were seeing themselves in a mirror. 'Why would I work for this firm' and 'why would I stay' are questions that need to be answered when reviewing corporate job pages.

This short review of the *Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For* list is the first half of our annual review of online corporate job pages. In June of 2008, CareerXroads will once again research and review the complete Fortune 500's online job pages. In that study we will name our annual Top 25 Corporate Job Sites and those we feel just do not "get it." Stay tuned...

Appendix A: Mystery Job Seeker's Résumé

James Knee Cricket

143 Collodi Lane - Woodstown, NJ 08098
732-821-6652 - jcricket08@yahoo.com

Seeking a sales position where I can use my entrepreneurial experience to enhance a corporation's bottom line.

Education

Princeton University GPA 3.8 Spring 2008

- Major: Entrepreneurial Studies. Minor: Theatre
- Honors: Phi Beta Kappa, Vice President Thespian Society, Chair-Person Student Entertainment Committee, Board Member NJ Habitat for Humanity.

Experience

Sales Team Member Co-Op 2007-2008
Carpenter Studios Div. New Lane Cinema Pleasure Island, FL
Called on Fortune 500 accounts to solicit advertising programs and product promotions for future Carpenter film productions. Achieved \$200 million in sales using a team approach for Pinocchio II project. Rated #1 co-op in sales out of 100 participants.

Sales/Marketing/Founder 2006-Present
Cricket Enterprises Cleo, NJ
Started company that acquired license for Carpenter Studio characters which developed video games sold online. Hired and managed staff of 10 Princeton students who are partners in the firm. Company to be sold prior to graduation.

Additional Experience/Awards

- Habitat for Humanity 2005 – Present
Volunteer time building homes in inner cities in the Northeast. Learned the use of power tools, electrical wiring and plumbing. In 2007 managed the building of three homes in Trenton, NJ obtaining donated materials from major corporations.
- When You Wish Upon a Star Theatre Summers 2004-2006
Worked in children's theatre programs writing and acting in puppet shows for Maestro Geppetto. Gained woodworking experience creating specialized marionettes for Pinocchio productions.
- Winner National Thespian Award for "Consequences of When You Tell A Lie"
- Official Conscience Award given by the Blue Fairy Group
- Grew up in Abu Dhabi and Florence Italy as parents are in the US Military.
- Languages Spoken: Italian and Urdu.
- US Citizen – willing to relocate to far, far away.

This is a CareerXroads Mystery Job Seeker. If you would like to know why we created this resume please contact us at 732-821-6652 mmc@careerxroads.com

About CareerXroads: The Staffing Strategy Connection

Gerry Crispin and Mark Mehler, co-founders of CareerXroads®, work with corporations to better understand and adopt cutting-edge, recruiting technology solutions for their staffing strategy and process. They are also the personalities behind the CareerXroads Colloquium – a forum for recruiting professionals to learn, share and develop new strategies.

Gerry and Mark are committed to writing, researching and sharing their adventures, opinions and data about evolving staffing models with members of the HR profession, CareerXroads Colloquium members, clients and friends. Passionate about how firms design and build staffing processes, the technology to enhance them and the systems to manage them, Gerry and Mark strive to observe and influence new and evolving models that aspire to world-class, measurable standards and satisfy every stakeholder.

We are always on the lookout for stories about staffing challenges, benchmarks, and results as well as the people who live the stories they tell. You can reach us at 732-821-6652 or mmc@careerXroads.com

More about the CareerXroads Colloquium

The CareerXroads® Colloquium was founded in 2002 to bring together recruiting professionals who share a passion for critical analysis and sharing what really works (and what really doesn't) in recruiting. The group has evolved into a forum for some of America's top recruiting professionals and involves six meetings each year, regularly scheduled webinars on hot topics, and a variety of research, camaraderie and networking that can't be found anywhere else.

For more on CareerXroads and CareerXroads Colloquium go to <http://www.careerxroads.com> or <http://www.careerxroads.com/colloquium/colloquium.asp>