

# I Your Career

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## Cut the puff when job hunting

**Just as you wouldn't use your mum as a referee don't make unsubstantiated statements about how good you are in a job application, writes SIMON PANCKHURST.**

Any keen job applicant will not only want to put their best foot forward but will make sure it carefully hides their bad one. It's a sales process, highly competitive and normally with just one winner. You would be crazy not to 'gel' up your attributes a little, add a bit of extra gloss. And how is anyone going to prove otherwise?

Who's to say you aren't a 'fantastic team player', with a 'can do' attitude? Surely there is no harm making such a claim? It's not like saying you can type 100 words per minute, a blatant lie and one quickly revealed if tested and touch typing is a foreign concept.

Beware.

Applicants that submit CV's with unjustified and woolly statements about difficult to measure soft skills might be doing themselves more harm than good. Writing "excellent communication skills" is the same as a café claiming it has "great coffee". What else are they going to say? They are trying to sell something, why would they say anything else? Even if they accepted their coffee wasn't that great they aren't going to say "average coffee". In search of decent coffee would you confidently choose a café making such a claim or dismiss it as unsubstantiated and worthless?

Put yourself in the employer's shoes when you read - "excellent interpersonal skills" or "team player". These responses are so biased, subjective and unsubstantiated that they become quite comical. Why not throw your Mum down as a referee while you are at it?

Furthermore even if applicants have totally honest intentions it is not realistic for you to be able to assess yourselves accurately. Big fish in little ponds will more than likely rate themselves higher than little fish in big ponds. Most people honestly think they are above average at driving but poor at remembering new names. You don't need to be a statistician to realize this doesn't add up.

Good applicants don't waste their or the employer's time with unsubstantiated claims. Just state facts and let them be the judge. "For 2 years I was a member of a three person team that worked on combined projects 12-15 hours per week."

At interview time the same applies.

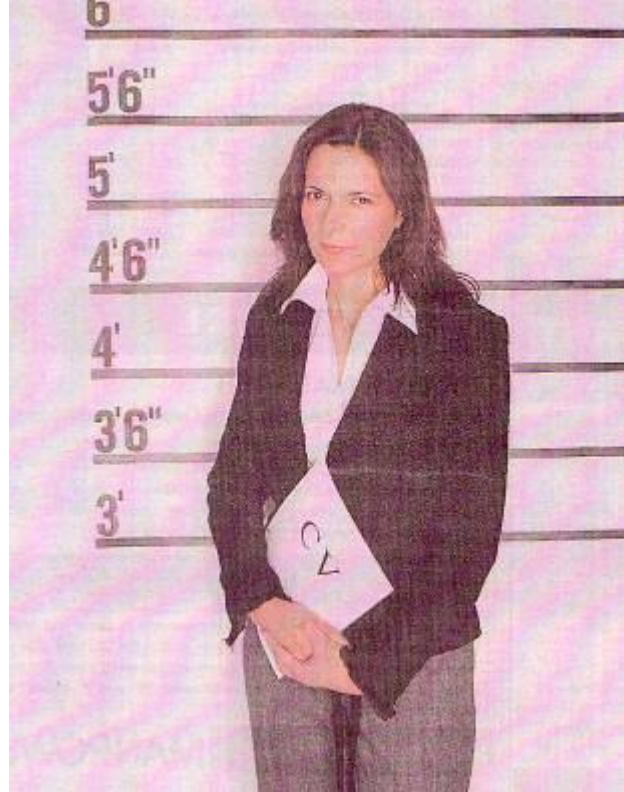
While you will be able to pull the wool over the eyes of some unwitting employers most can spot the truth twisters. The body language experts tell us that at least 65 percent of all our communication is nonverbal. Further, the nonverbal messages override the verbal ones. If two messages contradict each other, people will have a tendency to believe the nonverbal over the verbal.

Honesty might not always appear on 'skills required' lists but it is a highly valued attribute so underestimate at your peril. Applicants that appear bullet proof can come across as not only full of themselves, but too good to be true and more often than not for good reason. The irony is underselling yourself can be a winning strategy.

Those with real confidence in their ability see no reason to blow their own trumpet or sing from the roof tops. These applicants appreciate a modest factual summary and an open admission of weaknesses will actually impress. Concise answers will also create time for more in depth questions or a shorter interview, you'll smell of roses.

As an employer you suddenly realize most claims are unsubstantiated, what do you base selection decisions on? The secret is to place less emphasis on what applicants say, and more on what they do.

Dorothy Day (1897-1980) in recommending us to disregard people's talk and judge only their actions was not talking about recruitment but



Line up: do not jazz up your CV with woolly statements. They are likely to do more harm than good.

she could well have been.

If 'conscientiousness' is sought after, assess it from your interactions with the applicant. Did they return your phone calls within an appropriate timeframe? Submit their application on time? Did they follow instructions?

In assessing the applicant's 'interpersonal skills' the interview is a perfect opportunity for interviewees to demonstrate them. Place less emphasis on their accounts of forming relationships with others, what did they do to establish good relationships with the interview panel? Were they personable and friendly or tense and disagreeable?

If 'a willingness to learn' is paramount provide job relevant information and question their understanding. Start the interview with "what do you know about our company?" "Our line of business?" Those that have done their homework then have a genuine opportunity to prove it. Those that haven't can't rely on their gift of the gab.

Look for evidence of proactive or strategic thinking if this is important. Give the applicant ample time to ask questions and record them. Some questions will tell us more about the applicant than others. "If I was offered this position is the department I would join represented on the Board of Directors?" is a quite different question from - "how long does it take to be accredited with sick leave?"

Applicants - don't practice what you preach, leave the preaching out altogether. Employers - seek evidence not hearsay.

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Simon Panckhurst is managing director of recruitment specialists HR Direction Ltd, (03) 977 1972. [www.hrdirection.co.nz](http://www.hrdirection.co.nz)