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How to Handle the Serial Job Applicant

By Jacquelynn A. Ruiz, Esq.

Every so often, I receive a telephone call from an employer in need of advice regarding an employee who utilizes the company's online job application system to apply for every opening under the sun. In one such case, a mail room clerk posted for over forty positions over a two month period, including an opening for a Director of Finance role for which he clearly was not qualified. While one may admire the mail clerk's ambition, his serial job posting behavior created a great deal of unnecessary work for the human resources team. The Human Resources Manager understood that she could not simply forbid the mail clerk from utilizing the company's internal job posting system, but she wanted to find a way to handle the situation so that she could avoid devoting unnecessary resources to reviewing and ultimately rejecting the mail clerk's numerous job applications. I was concerned about the administrative headache the company might face in the event the mail clerk were to file a claim of discrimination alleging that his

employer had failed to promote or hire him. Below are some steps employers can follow in dealing with serial job applicants.

Schedule a Meeting

First, schedule a meeting with the employee to inquire as to his or her reasoning for continuously posting for other positions. Try to determine whether there is some underlying issue causing the employee to be dissatisfied in his or her role. In the case of the employer above, my client learned through talking with the employee that he was not only bored in his role, but he truly lacked an understanding of the company's job posting process. It quickly became apparent that he was merely pointing and clicking on any job opening the company had posted on its intranet without fully understanding the minimum qualifications for the role. Further, this employee did not have a resumé that would have highlighted skill sets and coursework that may have helped the employer identify him as a viable candidate for other positions for which he had posted. During this meeting, the Human Resources Manager also took the opportunity to discuss the employee's skill sets and interests in order to help the employee hone in on potential areas of interest. She also advised him to pay close attention to the job descriptions in the job postings in the hope that he would avoid posting for positions for which he did not meet the minimum qualifications. She also determined that the employee did not have a true understanding of why he was not being selected for the jobs for which he was applying.

Place the Onus on the Employee

After setting up an initial meeting with the employee, consider offering the employee the opportunity to have his or her resumé critiqued by one of the members of the human resources team. In the case of my client, the Human Resources Manager considered the employee's current skill set in conjunction with some of the career goals he had articulated and suggested potential training courses offered by the company. She also suggested that the employee consider completing additional college level coursework to the extent he wished to be a viable candidate for higher level roles within the organization. She provided the employee with names and contact information for several individuals who worked in business units he was interested in so that the employee might set up job shadowing experiences. It was left to the employee to follow through with the suggestions.

The Payoff

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This serial job applicant situation has a variety of potential outcomes. First, providing employees with the opportunity to meet with human resources staff and helping them hone in on areas that are a true match for their skills and interests can help the employees focus on positioning themselves for success within the organization. Hopefully, it will result in happier, more productive employees and it will save the human resources department the time and effort of reviewing and rejecting numerous applications.

On the other hand, despite a company's best efforts to work with an employee, the employee can still choose to not follow the suggestions and ultimately file a charge of discrimination alleging failure to promote or failure to hire based on some discriminatory animus. In such a case, if the company has taken the steps above, it will have positioned itself well to defend such a claim. While the employer will likely still have to provide the state or federal agency with documentation supporting the company's decision not to offer the employee the positions for which he or she applied, the company will have the opportunity to describe its efforts to help the employee acquire the focus, training and skills necessary to obtain a more desirable position. It is likely that the company's efforts to assist this employee will go a long way in successfully defending a charge of discrimination.

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