
Turning a "No" Into a "Maybe"



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How value negotiation techniques turned a job rejection into a maybe.

A job rejection letter can be hard to take but it doesn't have to mean no. With the right value negotiations skills it's possible to convince potential employers that you deserve a second chance.

Recently a student came asking for advice after being rejected for a job. The candidate had applied at a company he really loved, he had a great profile, had successfully completed an internship with an almost identical company and had two offers from other recognised firms with a heavy focus on analytics. Unfortunately when he sat the analytics test for his dream company nerves overcame him.

After receiving the rejection letter the applicant sent the company's HR officer a message requesting 10 minutes of her time to ask a few questions about the recruitment procedure. He received a short but very definite response.

"I'm sorry but the analytics test is a big part of our evaluation process. I won't really be able to give you much insight at this point other than we

didn't see a lot of the right analysis from the exercise. I really did enjoy our chat and am disappointed this didn't work out, but would be happy to keep in touch down the road. Let me know if you still have questions!"

The recruiter was making a strong point that she didn't see any value in prolonging the discussion. As a result, the student came to me asking if: 1. – he should push harder to be considered back into the recruiting process; and 2. – if so, how should he go about it?

Indeed, the HR officer made clear that to continue the dialogue would be quite pushy. If the candidate were in a situation where he wanted a continuing relationship with the HR officer or the company, now might be a good time to pull back. But in this situation the reputational risk, and chance he would have future interactions with the company were small. He had little-to-nothing to lose and the option of persevering – even to the point of risking coming across as pestering – seemed a low-risk option when compared with the potential reward of getting back in the recruitment process.

On top of this, while the HR officer did not share much in the email, some invaluable information was shared in that they liked the student, but *"we didn't see a lot of the right analysis from the exercise"* and *"the analytics test is a big part of our evaluation process"*. This in return showed us "how/where to push". Fortunately, the applicant had enough data (legitimacy) on his analytics for us to work with and yet nothing was guaranteed at this stage.

Keep the conversation moving

What the applicant had to do now was to keep the conversation going, to ask questions which would allow him to show the value he could bring to the company. There was a chance the recruiter would repeat what she said in the email, noting the importance of the analytics test to the evaluation process.

In which case, a good response could be *"Could you tell me what the right analysis would be so I can learn from it"*. This would open the way for the candidate to explain where his analysis came from, and maybe show his poor result had been the result of just one wrong assumption.

The candidate could mention the fact he had been having technical problems with the internet, which increased his anxiety and reduced his time when sitting the test, before asking, quite reasonably whether he could sit a second one.

This is the opportunity for the candidate to share, to tell the recruiter he appreciates the inconvenience and is only asking because, as they already know, he has successful experiences in the industry and seems to fulfill all the other requirements needed for the job.

By following this plan, the HR officer agreed to talk. But nothing much happened.

Assessing the risk

This called for another risk assessment. If the candidate were to take the matter forward he would have to go beyond the HR department and speak with the business side of the firm, to the person who would potentially be his new boss, someone who may not be so stringent about adhering to process and perceive more of the potential value the student may bring to the table.

When doing this it's important not to be seen to be going over the HR officer's head, so I recommended he let HR know he "planned to share" the same information with the business executive involved, and ask if she would have any objections. The applicant should be seen to be involving HR in making this decision. This was a delicate move, since "planning to share" is still going over the head, but in this case the move's potential adverse effect was mitigated by the advance consultation with the HR officer and her concerns and/or advice. This aimed to show respect and get some buy-in from her.

He followed the plan, got the "go-ahead" from the firm's HR and contacted the department head, giving him the same information he had the HR recruiter, noting his past experience in the industry, and the fact he had two job offers from other recognised analytics-heavy companies. The email included a comprehensive revised answer for the analytics problem he had failed.

In other words he identified where the gap in his original application was and he provided elements to feed into that so as to make the recruiter's decision to re-interview him easier. He also navigated the company's decision-making

process to increase the chances of re-engaging while attempting to minimise damage to any relevant relationship.

And importantly he gave it ONE good shot. He didn't give 20. It's not about quantity; it's about quality of persistence. It is not about begging or showing your passion, it is about demonstrating the value in it for them (their interest) to review their decision.

The move was successful and the manager set up another interview.

Respecting processes

At this time, the candidate is still waiting to hear whether he got the position but as he noted to me he's "happier with the fact that they reconsidered me more than the offer itself. I don't think I have the job but they got to know me more and I think that I did my best."

Sometimes you have to accept no for an answer. You have to show respect for a company's processes.

While there is a value to well-planned and implemented negotiation, you need to be careful. There's a point where persistence goes beyond pestering, and becomes annoyance. Candidates must assess the risk of walking close to this point and the rewards for doing it successfully. Sometimes not taking no for an answer can be very damaging, there's always the risk you will annoy the recruiter and perhaps harm future job opportunities with the company.

In this case it paid off. Maybe it will work for you as well!

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