

Dealing with rejection



Most people experience job applications and interview rejections. Whether it's the first time you've experienced rejection or one of many, it can leave you with negative feelings and thoughts which can impact on your motivation and mindset when approaching the next opportunity.

It's important to acknowledge that numerous factors contribute to the outcome of an interview, some of which are beyond your control. Exploring these will provide perspective and help to maintain your motivation and resilience whilst looking for another job opportunity.

Job rejection is a universal experience that almost everyone encounters in their professional journey. This setback can feel deeply personal, stirring up a whirlwind of self-doubt, disappointment, and frustration that might seem overwhelming in the moment. However, it's crucial to understand that an interview outcome is a complex tapestry woven from countless threads, many of which have nothing to do with your individual worth or capabilities.

The emotional impact of rejection can be profound, potentially casting a shadow over your confidence and dampening your enthusiasm for future opportunities. Although it can be difficult, it's important to see this as a stepping stone to success. Reframing how you feel about the outcome will help you to turn a potentially demoralising experience, into a powerful moment for insight and growth.

Once you've given time to process your feelings, exploring factors that contribute to decision making at interviews can help you gain a more balanced perspective. Factors outside your control, such as company culture or budget constraints, could have played a large part in the outcome. Remaining resilient and motivated is key, so that you can confidently grasp the next opportunity.



Factors outside your control

Fluctuating job market: The state of the job market at the time of applying can impact the number of applicants, with high demand for jobs potentially creating tough competition. Economic factors such as recessions may also affect hiring decisions.

Other candidates: Some roles attract a large number of applicants, making the competition intense. You may be competing against candidates recommended by internal staff or trustees, which can give them an edge. Additionally, an internal candidate might be considered a better fit due to their familiarity with the company's culture, expectations, or specific skills.

Organisational considerations: The company may have other factors influencing the hiring decision that you are unaware of. For example, a recent restructure could have resulted in internal employees seeking redeployment, or changes in the company's strategic direction might alter the scope or skills required for the role. Financial constraints or recruitment freezes may also impact hiring, along with recruitment policies that affect decision-making.

Subjective opinions: An interviewer's personal preferences, based on their beliefs or perceptions, may consciously or subconsciously affect their judgment and result in a biased decision.

Unconscious bias: Even when interviews are scored against the job specification, unconscious biases can subtly influence the interview panel's scores and ultimate decision. These often relate to age, gender, race, or other factors.

Factors within your control

Application quality: The content and structure of your application play a crucial role in whether you're shortlisted. Tailoring your CV and cover letter to highlight your relevant skills, experience, and alignment with the role increases your chances of being noticed. Ensuring that your application is free of errors, clear, and professional also demonstrates attention to detail.

Gaps or frequent job change in CV:

Employment history can be an area evaluated by potential employers as an indicator of reliability, commitment, and stability. To ensure it isn't detrimental, it's important to explain the reasons if possible. Providing context will help to reduce the chances of negative assumptions being made. For example, you could have been pursuing further education, taking on caring duties, relocating, or seeking new opportunities. Whatever the reason might be emphasising the skills, experience, or knowledge gained can help reinforce your value as a candidate.

Preparation: Lack of researching the company or understanding the role can make a significant impact on your interview performance. It may give the impression that you're not fully committed or serious about the position. Preparing thoughtful questions can demonstrate your interest and enthusiasm.

Resilience and attitude: How you handle setbacks and rejections is also crucial to your long-term success. Maintaining a positive, resilient attitude and viewing challenges as opportunities to grow can help you stay motivated throughout the job search process. Being persistent and proactive in your approach, will ultimately lead to eventual success.



Factors within your control

Performance: It's common to gravitate towards analysing what didn't go well in interviews. You might feel you didn't answer a question effectively or complete a work test as fully as you wanted, which could influence the overall impression of your abilities.

Overqualified: Consider how you could improve your answers, perhaps by practicing them beforehand or preparing more in advance. Whilst being overqualified isn't necessarily an issue, it can sometimes work against you. Employers might worry the role won't be challenging enough or that you could become dissatisfied and not commit to staying long-term. Or their concerns could relate to the potential disruption to team dynamics if someone with greater experience or higher qualifications joined.

Lack of experience: Even if you have relevant experience, it may not align directly with the requirements of the position. This often becomes apparent during an interview and can make you look a lesser fit against others who may have the experience they are looking for.

Personal presentation: How you present yourself in an interview — including attire (clothing, outfit), body language, and overall demeanour (attitude, mood, personality) — can leave a lasting impression. Dressing appropriately for the company culture, maintaining good posture, and projecting confidence through body language, eye contact, etc., can positively influence the interviewer's perception.

Communication skills: Clear, concise, and effective communication is key during interviews. Being able to articulate your experiences, qualifications, and thoughts with confidence and clarity can set you apart from other candidates. Listening attentively and responding thoughtfully can also provide a good impression, demonstrating personal qualities important to collaborating effectively in a team.



Time management: Your punctuality and ability to utilise time effectively can significantly shape an interviewer's perception. Arriving late or struggling to complete work tests within allocated time frames might cause them to doubt your organisational skills and reliability. If circumstances beyond your control affected your performance, it's important to be open and honest about it. Explain any challenges that affected your time management, such as unexpected transport issues or specific needs that could require reasonable adjustments to test time. It's important to show that you understand the importance of time management and can take responsible, proactive steps to address it.

Composure and calm: Interviews and work tests can be stressful and challenging, which ultimately is a test of your ability to stay calm under pressure. Some interviewers throw curve ball or unexpected questions to ascertain how capable you are at coping. Staying calm and responding thoughtfully shows emotional maturity and flexibility.

Over-confidence: Getting the balance right between appearing confident but also self-aware can be tricky. Whilst you don't want to be modest, a willingness to share areas for improvement, alongside your strengths, will ensure you present yourself authentically during the hiring process.

Factors within your control

Negative attitude: Speaking poorly about previous employers or colleagues can create the perception that you may be difficult to work with or not a team player, which could hurt your chances of being hired.

Appreciation: Simple gestures demonstrating professionalism and appreciation for being selected and interviewed can also reinforce the impression an interviewer is left with.

Salary expectations: If your salary expectations exceed the amount the employer is willing to offer, it may result in them not extending an offer. Whilst negotiation might be expected, if your expectations exceed the market value of the post and your experience then it could call into question your attitude and motivation.

Remember

Navigating the job application and interview process is a complex journey influenced by both controllable and uncontrollable factors. While external circumstances can impact on your success, your personal approach and resilience remain powerful tools in securing your employment.

Rejection is not a reflection of your ultimate worth: By focusing on the aspects within your control, continuously improving your skills, preparing thoroughly, and maintaining a positive attitude, you can remain resilient.

If you regard each interview and application as a learning experience, you can approach new opportunities with greater self-awareness, confidence, and empowerment.

Success is rarely linear: Persistence, continuous learning, and commitment to growth are your most valuable assets to achieving your career goals.

Remain true to yourself and view each interaction as a stepping stone towards your professional aspirations. With the right approach, preparation, and mindset, you'll be able to seize the right opportunity for you. All your hard work and perseverance will pay off eventually.



Whilst being kind to yourself, look at the factors within and outside of your control, you'll gain valuable insights that can boost your confidence and approach to future applications and interviews.

The goal isn't to criticize or undermine your efforts, but to provide a constructive way to process your experiences. Overthinking and self-criticism rarely serve us well – instead, this worksheet aims to help you develop a balanced perspective so that you are better equipped to navigate future opportunities with increased self-awareness, resilience, and insight.

About the job

Organisation applied to:

Role applied for:

Application stage reached:

List the factors **outside of your control that could have contributed to the outcome:**

List the factors **inside your control that could have influenced the outcome:**

What aspects did you handle well?

(i.e., Completed the work test on time, handling a difficult question, etc.)

What aspects did you struggle with?

(i.e., Explaining the gaps in cv, specific questions asked, etc.)

Thinking about future opportunities — what have you learned about yourself and/or the process and what do you need to do to be more confident about your performance? (i.e., I should prepare some questions for the interviewer, I need to take my time in responding, I need to explain the gaps in my CV more openly, etc.)