

## (Plan Your Career) Adapting to a changing economy: Focus on your strengths

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Sheila is having trouble moving forward to the second interview. She writes, "I think it ends up that I am strong in several of the skill sets but don't have a background in one of the skill sets. For example, the Hiring Manager at one of the interviews wanted someone with big 4 CPA firm experience and I do not have that background. I was really strong in the other areas so that is why I had a phone interview."

The two things Sheila needs to remember are first, there is a lot of competition out there, and second, focus on your strengths.

With 14 million Americans out of work right now, companies have the luxury of hiring talented candidates who closely match their ideal for each position. This means a candidate who has most but not all of the qualifications has to do a stellar sales job to convince a hiring manager that his or her skills will add value to the organization. Which brings us to the second point.

Preparing for an interview, learn as much as possible about the company's past as well as its plans for the future. Find out about their products, mission and objectives. Then identify ways that your skills align with the needs of the company. If a company wants Big 4 experience, you either have that or you don't. However, you may have significant related experience. Maybe the company wants to grow through acquisitions. Sheila, for example, had led her prior employer company through six acquisitions in ten years. Her experience would have been extremely valuable to the next organization if that's what they needed.

A catch-phrase such as "previous management experience" or "Big 4 CPA experience" presents an ideal and provides knock-out criteria that allows a Human Resources assistant to weed through several hundred resumes efficiently. If your resume is lucky enough to slip past the knock-out criteria, it suggests that someone saw enough in your background to consider flexing on their requirements. This is your open window; climb in feet first by preparing and selling the talents that got you this far.

Send your career planning questions to [julie@insightnews.com](mailto:julie@insightnews.com).