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EVERYTHING COVERED:
Job candidates should know their strengths and weaknesses
Picture: THINKSTOCK

How to stand out in a crowded jobs market

HEIDI SOHOLT

EDINBURGH-BASED organisational psychologist Katie Banham knows exactly what it takes for a candidate to stand out in today's competitive job market.

Two decades of working with business leaders has shown her that when it comes to selecting new talent, employers are looking beyond qualifications and experience for evidence of "soft" skills such as self-awareness, resilience and relationship-building ability.

The Talent Manager of Dia-geo's manufacturing and supply chain business in Europe, Gary Merrylees, says candidates need to be able to demonstrate a clear understanding of personal strengths, particularly if "they can show real evidence of this through experience and achievements and can talk about these with genuine confidence and humility."

He says: "For those who are joining us at very early stages of their career, it's more about 'find the athlete, teach the game'. Personal skills and attributes are as important as or more so than job-specific skills. We want people in our business who can show strong personal initiative and drive."

Banham is now using her ex-

pertise to equip youngsters with the tools to meet such demands through her school-based programme, Building Resilience for Success Beyond School.

"The businesses I worked with were doing a good job of creating cultures of spotting potential and bringing out the best in employees, and I realised that this could be taken into schools," she says. "Businesses that receive 500

"Businesses that receive 500 job applications are looking for something that stands out in an interview or CV" KATIE BANHAM

job applications are looking for something that stands out in an interview or CV. This might mean showing that you know yourself and how you've used that knowledge, not only in situations where you are comfortable but in challenging ones too.

Some one may, for exam-

ple, say they've done a Duke of Edinburgh Award – that's their 'external' achievement – but it's also important to talk about what skills were needed, to describe how they did it in their own way – to bring their own personality to life. It's about being able to bring your authentic self to an interview."

Banham adds: "Through the programme we focus on individual strengths – I help pupils look at what makes them distinctive and how to confidently speak about things they're good at.

"There's pressure on kids to be well-rounded, to be good at everything, and I think this squashes what they naturally love, which leads to mediocrity. I teach children that if they pull up and push certain strengths, then they stand out.

"We do exercises where they look back at achievements – how they accomplished them and what was unique about how they did it.

It's a real confidence boost, and they learn that everyone does things in their own way. It's about finding what naturally energises them.

Strengths are about what you love to do and care about, whereas skills are what you've learned."

Banham has recently worked with girls in Lower Sixth at Kilgraston School in Perthshire. A school spokesperson said they were attracted by her unique approach to leadership and building resilience, and that the programme had been inspirational.

"Katie's down-to-earth approach with the girls, and giving them time to reflect and think things through for themselves were key strengths," the spokesperson added.

Co-founder of successful Edinburgh bakery business Peter's Yard, Wendy Wilson Bett has worked with Banham before and is clear about what makes a candidate stand out. "We look for individuals who are keen to learn and have clear views of their strengths and weaknesses," she says.

"We're not a 'cookie-cutter' recruiter looking for the same people with the same skills. We may be on the look-out for a passionate baker or a brand manager who can see potential in our small but growing business. The only common trait we look for is genuine passion and a desire to do something really well."



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