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THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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SECTION L

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QuickTip

AT THE BARGAINING TABLE

Executive Perks Less Popular in Down Economy, Survey Finds

Provided by Robert Half Management Resources

Company cars and country-club memberships are showing up in fewer and fewer employment offers today, a new survey shows. When asked which benefits they were least likely to offer in the current business environment, 29 percent of chief financial officers cited executive perks. Stock options followed, with 17 percent of the response.

"Making unrealistic demands of prospective employers can backfire," said Paul McDonald, executive director of Robert Half Management Resources. "In today's era of cost-cutting, it's difficult to justify luxury items as part of a new hire's employment package. Salary negotiations today are more likely to focus on results-driven incentives, such as bonuses for meeting agreed-upon performance objectives."

Below are the five most common mistakes job candidates make when negotiating job offers and McDonald's tips for avoiding them:

- **Not knowing what you want**
Have a clear notion of what you consider "must-haves" – a minimum base salary, for example – and what they're willing to sacrifice, such as NBA season tickets.
- **Failing to do your homework**
Go into the negotiation process having thoroughly researched the market, including salary and benefits for similar positions.
- **Playing hardball**
Being inflexible during negotiations will put the hiring manager on the defensive. Showing confidence in your abilities is appealing, but displaying arrogance is considerably less attractive.
- **Being shortsighted**
Before turning down an offer, evaluate the long-term rewards of the position such as career advancement or company-growth potential.
- **Not calculating the total costs**
Make sure you can afford to accept the position. If relocation is involved, be sure the salary covers the cost of living in the new city. Also, factor in moving-related expenses, particularly if they are not part of the offer.

Rock band's story offers lessons to job seekers

By Bill Quinnan, For O.C. Register Special Sections

It was New Year's Day, 1962. Decca producer Mike Smith was scheduled to give an audition to a local rock 'n' roll band. Smith showed up late for the audition, much to the dismay of the band's manager, but the band recorded 15 songs in a few hours.

Unfortunately, this particular recording session would not lead to anything remarkable. Smith's boss, Dick Rowe, called the band's manager and told him that Decca was not interested in recording the band's music. Apparently, another band had auditioned on the same day and had given a better performance. Although Smith was impressed with both bands, Rowe had told him he had to choose between the two.

So, the band's manager took the tapes from the recording session to a few other major labels, none of whom were interested in recording the group.

None of this would be memorable if it were not for what eventually became of the group. Later that year, the band made a record that did win it a recording contract with EMI. The band then went on to become what many consider the greatest rock 'n' roll band ever – the Beatles.

This may seem like an odd story to tell in a job-seeking article. However, I believe this story contains a few important lessons for job seekers.

Employers can only see what you show them

This story has become legendary as one of the great blunders in rock 'n' roll history. To think that someone in the music-recording industry turned down an opportunity to sign the Beatles is mind-boggling.

Personally, I'm not convinced that the error was as egregious as some imagine. For starters, one must first consider the recordings made at the Decca session. While the recordings aren't bad, the Beatles don't yet sound like the greatest rock band in history. John Lennon sounds nervous, and Paul McCartney and George Harrison don't seem to be giving it their all.

On June 6 of the same year, the Beatles had another audition, this time for EMI. That audition won them further consideration from and eventually a contract with the label.

Had the Beatles sounded on Jan. 1 the way they sounded on June 6, Smith and Rowe might have decided differently. As it was, there was no way Smith or Rowe could have known what the Beatles were capable of – all they had to go on was what the Beatles did in the session.

Like an audition, a job interview is your chance to show employers what you have to offer. Unless the employer is able to see in the interview how you can further the goals of the company, you aren't likely to get the job.

Mock or practice interviews can help you become a more effective interviewer. Have someone you know ask you typical interview questions. If you know someone who has

experience interviewing job candidates, that's even better. If you have the means, make a video or audio recording of the mock interview so you can assess how you come across after the fact. Mock interviews can make you more comfortable during real interviews and more effective at articulating your qualifications.

Find out what the objections are

Hiring decisions can sometimes seem to be based on the most arbitrary things – especially if it is a choice between two candidates who are both qualified for the job.

According to some accounts, one of the reasons Smith chose another band over the Beatles was that the members of the other band lived in Essex, while the Beatles lived in Merseyside. Essex was much closer to Decca's studio in London, and Smith's traveling expenses would be substantially less.

Had the Beatles or their manager, Brian Epstein, known about this objection, they might have been able to work something out – perhaps they could have relocated to London. Unfortunately, they apparently weren't aware of this concern.

Employers won't always tell you their concerns are about hiring you. One great question to ask toward the end of the job interview is, "Do you have any questions or concerns about my ability to do the job?" Once you know what the decision maker's objections are, you can address them.

Be open to improvement

The Beatles that the world would come to know and love were not exactly the same band that auditioned for Decca. By the time they were cutting records for release, they sounded a lot more comfortable in the recording studio. They also had a new drummer, having replaced Pete Best with Ringo Starr.

The point is that the Beatles who would become legends did not sound like that group that Smith had recorded on Jan. 1, 1962. One can only speculate, but it is quite possible that they became a better band because of rejection. Had Smith and Rowe decided to sign them, they might have merely maintained the sound they had, perhaps producing a few hits before fading off into obscurity.

If you are finding it difficult to get the job you want, find out if you are lacking any skills that employers consider important to the job. Then, find out what you have to do to attain those skills. For example, you may be able to take some classes to learn a particular computer program.

'No' isn't always the final answer

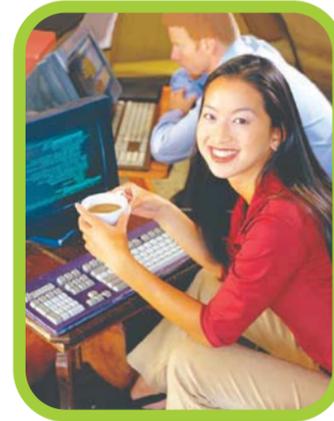
Although EMI eventually signed the Beatles, it initially rejected them. Fortunately, Epstein didn't give up. One way or another, he managed to get the rejected Decca recordings into the hands of producer George Martin in June 1962, who heard something he thought deserved closer examination.

Martin remained the Beatles' producer for most of their career together and receives much credit for putting the finishing touches on the Beatles' recordings.

Job seekers sometimes give up on companies that have rejected them. If a company really interests you, it is worth pursuing even after an initial rejection. Try to find out who the other decision-makers are at the company and arrange to meet with them. One hiring manager may see something in you that another did not.

Also, keep the doors open with managers who initially turn you down. A manager who didn't need your skills a month ago might feel differently today. A staff member may have left, creating an opening. The department's goals may have shifted, making your particular skill more valuable.

Besides, persistence is a valuable quality in the eyes of many employers. The fact that you didn't give up on the first try may impress the decision-makers at the company in question.



Don't try to be all things to all people

When Epstein presented the Beatles to Decca, he had them record 15 songs that he had selected, trying to show the band's versatility. The songs were not necessarily the Beatles' best numbers, or even their favorites. They were merely a cross-section of the various styles the Beatles had covered in their performances.

Epstein may have hoped that if he covered enough styles, someone would hear something they liked. Job seekers often make the mistake of being too general in presenting their skills. This sometimes sends the message that the job seeker isn't focused on what he or she wants to do.

Such generalists may be brushed aside in favor of candidates who appear to be experts in the areas the employer is concerned about.

A better approach is to highlight the qualities that are most appropriate to the job in question or best address the employer's concerns.

Life goes on

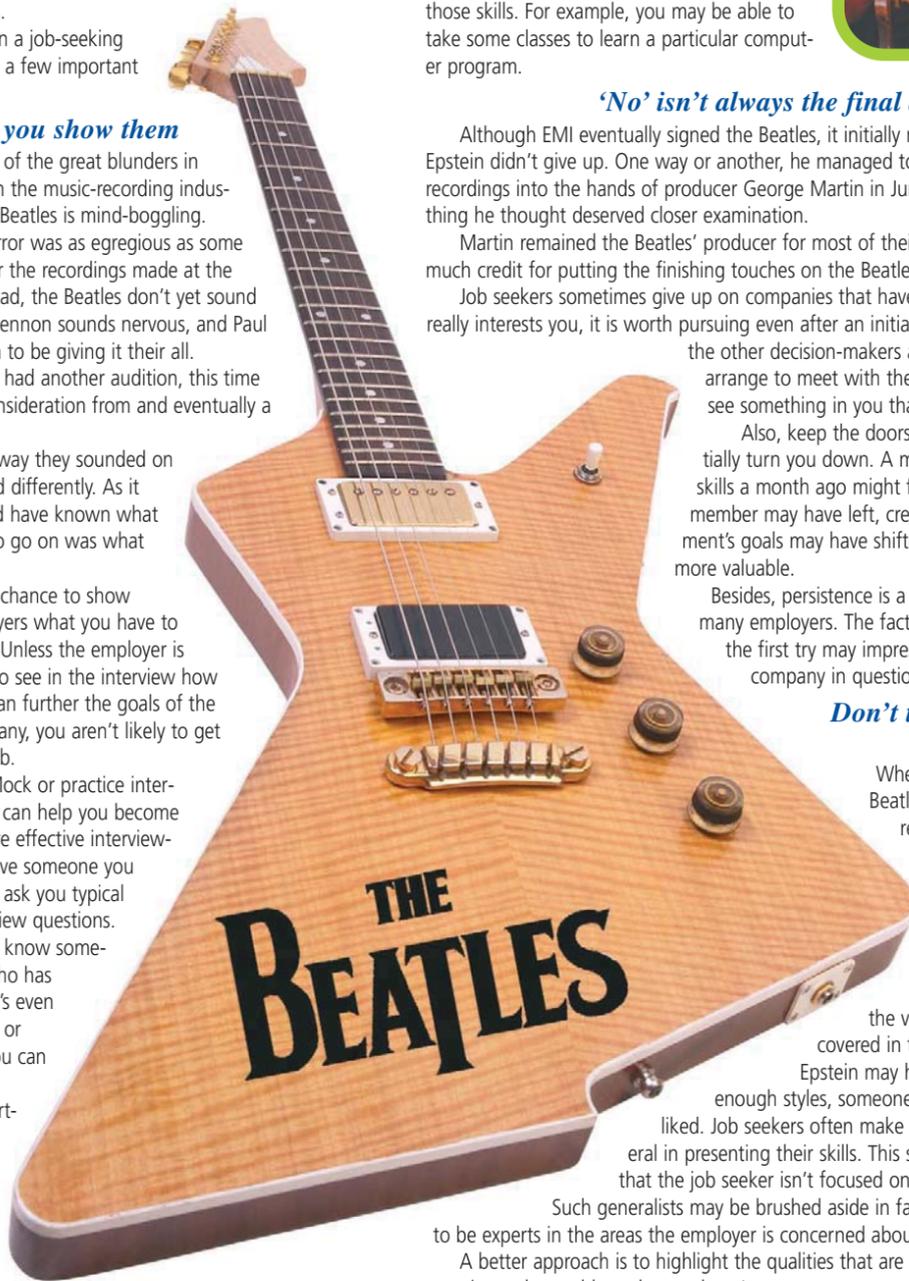
We know what happened with the Beatles after Decca turned them down. Life went on for everyone else, too. Decca didn't go out of business. Rowe didn't lose his job – in fact, he later signed another legendary rock band, the Rolling Stones. The band that Smith chose over the Beatles, Brian Poole and the Tremeloes, was at least a moderate success, even if it never approached the level of the Beatles' fame.

The point is, if you don't get the job, life will go on – for you and the employer. Some candidates hurt their chances by appearing desperate for a job. Others go to the other extreme, giving the impression that they think the company will go out of business if it doesn't hire them.

The correct approach is to view the company as a potential customer with specific needs. If this customer is persuaded that you can and will fulfill those needs, there is a good chance you'll be hired.

Remember, the question isn't whether you're the best at what you do. The question is whether the decision maker feels that you are the best person to meet the company's needs.

Bill Quinnan is a freelance writer who lives in Orange County. Readers can send e-mail to him at bquinnan@sbcglobal.net. Bill cannot provide job leads.



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