

## **Can Your Name Impact Your Job Search?**

*By Vanessa Vidal*

In today's digital age, job hunting is usually reduced to a resume that includes a printed name. First impressions are everything, and often these impressions are formed according to the name that appears on the resume. Can your name impact your job search? Unfortunately, the answer is yes. Especially, if your name is on the exotic side of the spectrum. In other words, if your resume does not include a familiar Anglo-sounding name, chances are you may be getting short-changed when it comes to landing an interview.

### **Studies Show Bias in Names**

One study by researchers at MIT and the University of Chicago found that job applicants with names that sounded African-American got short shrift when it came to the hiring process. The researchers sent out 5,000 fake resumes, and it turned out that resumes with names such as Tyrone and Tamika were less likely to get calls from prospective employers than their Anglo-sounding counterparts, and qualifications seemed to have little impact.

Since 9/11, there seems to be more of a bias against Muslim/Arab sounding names. Job seekers from the Middle East and India sometimes complain that their job searches are taking longer than their Anglo Saxon named counterparts. Could the reverse also be true? Some job seekers with Asian sounding names sometimes claim that employers select them based on stereotypes that includes being 'smart,' 'hardworking,' and 'committed.'"

Are potential employers discriminating? Possibly, and this sort of bias might not even be deliberate. When all things are equal, individuals tend to gravitate towards the 'known' rather than the 'unknown,' and name recognition and familiarity is no exception. Whether or not it is deliberate, or the employer has some legitimate business reason for preferring certain names to others, this practice is very much alive, especially in a market where there are more qualified applicants per position than ever before.

### **Should You Change Your Name?**

To change or not to change your name is the real question. If you have an 'exotic' sounding name or one that reflects your ethnicity, should you change it to a name that will strike most people as 'familiar' or 'mainstream' rather than 'foreign' or 'confusing?'" That's a deeply personal question. If you chose to change your name, you may be catering to the ignorance and discrimination that prompted you to make the change in the first place. On the other hand, changing your name could have a positive impact on your resume selection and job search.

Whether you chose to change your name to an American-sounding or 'neutral' sounding name, you may want to simply consider following the national trend: name abbreviation. How many people do you know today who go by Alexander, Christopher, or Elizabeth? Whenever a name is more than two syllables, you can be sure that someone will try and find a short nickname to replace it. Adopting an abbreviated version of your names could allow you to retain part of your identity, but provide an easier or more memorable option for your colleagues to remember. While changing your names is a deeply personal choice, it may be worth exploring, especially if you've been hitting the pavement unsuccessfully.

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