Applying Without the Requirements

Why Being Underqualified Doesn't Always Mean You're Out

Many job seekers see a promising job listing—only to scroll down, read the requirements and decide they're not qualified enough to apply. But here's the truth: most employers don't expect candidates to check every single box. If you meet the core qualifications and believe you can do the job, it may be worth throwing your hat in the ring and giving it a shot.

FOCUS ON THE MUST-HAVES

Job descriptions often include a blend of required and preferred qualifications. The required items are usually essential for the role, while the preferred ones describe the company's ideal candidate. Few people fit the entire list. Hiring managers know that and are often open to applicants who show potential.

If you meet 70 to 80 percent of the requirements — especially the ones listed first — it's reasonable to apply. Think about how your existing skills transfer to the new role. For example, customer service experience in retail may translate well to client-facing roles in other industries.

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LET YOUR COVER LETTER DO WORK

If there are gaps in your résumé, a strong cover letter can help fill them in. Use it to explain why you're excited about the role and how your background, attitude and work ethic make you a strong candidate, even if your path isn't traditional.

Focus on what you bring to the table rather than what's missing. Highlight your adaptability, eagerness to learn and past experiences that demonstrate growth and initiative. Employers often value potential and drive just as much as credentials.

THE WORST THEY CAN SAY IS NO

You miss every opportunity you don't go after. As long as you're honest and realistic about your capabilities, applying for a job you're slightly underqualified for is not a waste of time — it's a chance.

Applying boldly, while staying thoughtful and professional, could lead to a conversation, a connection or even a role that helps you grow into the next stage of your career.