





Around the Coffee Table with Dale Jodoin

The Unsung Heroes With a Toolbox

By Dale Jodoin
Columnist

My knees made a decision for me recently. I needed some trees trimmed around my Oshawa home. A few years ago, I probably would have grabbed the tools and tried doing it myself. Not this time. I called someone local. He showed up, did the work, cleaned everything up and headed to his next job. That should have been the end of the story. Instead, I wondered how many handymen and handywomen work around Oshawa every day without most of us noticing. Look around Oshawa's older neighbourhoods. There are people living in homes where they raised their children 30, 40 or even 50 years ago. Many want to stay there.

Houses age along with the people inside them. Steps crack. Railings loosen. Faucets leak. Doors stick. Trees need trimming. For a handyman with the right tools, it might be a twenty minute job. For an older person with bad knees, it could sit there for months. These local handymen and handy women are not simply fixing houses. Sometimes they are helping people remain independent.

It is not only seniors. People with disabilities may need help with ordinary repairs. Single parents are balancing work, children, bills and a home where something always seems to need fixing. Widows and widowers may suddenly face jobs their spouse once handled. Sometimes you just need a trustworthy handyman who knows what to do and is willing to take the smaller job.

There is another part worth thinking about. We hear a lot about buying Canadian. But supporting Canadians does not stop at the checkout counter. Hiring Canadians counts too. Hire a handyman, handywoman or small tradesperson from Oshawa or Durham Region and you support a Canadian worker and local business at the same time. They buy fuel, tools and supplies and spend money at other local businesses. Money paid to repair a railing or trim a tree can continue moving through the community. That small job helps more than one person.

There is a caution here. A few years ago, I was ripped off because I failed to properly check references. I am normally pretty hard nosed about checking people out, but I let my guard down.

That should not make us afraid to hire a local handyman. It should remind us to be sensible. Ask neighbours who they trust. Check references. Get the price and work in writing when appropriate. Good handymen and handywomen understand reasonable questions. Be especially careful when someone unexpectedly comes to your door offering work and pressures you for an immediate decision or payment. If you believe you have been the victim of fraud, theft or another crime, contact police.

But dishonest operators should not define the many honest handymen and handywomen doing good work. Find someone reliable, keep the number and tell a neighbour. Reputation remains one of the best advertisements a small business can have. There are also people, young and old, who were simply never taught household repairs. There is no shame in not knowing something nobody taught you. A good handyman or handywoman can fill that gap and sometimes pass along a little knowledge too. Now think beyond Oshawa. Handymen and handywomen are everywhere. Across Canada and around the world, they move from one job to another, helping people they may never see again. They help seniors remain independent. They help families. They keep homes from falling into disrepair. They spend locally and help keep community economies moving. Here is the question I keep coming back to. What would happen if they all stopped showing up tomorrow? Who fixes the elderly neighbour's steps? Who repairs the single mother's gate? Who changes the light for someone who cannot climb a ladder? Who takes the small job nobody else wants? Maybe we would finally notice how much our local handymen and handywomen actually do. They rarely make headlines. Nobody puts their name on a plaque. They finish the job, put the tools away and move on. Yet somewhere tonight, an older person can safely use the front steps because a handyman fixed them. Somewhere a family can close its gate again. Somewhere a person can remain in the home they love because somebody took care of those little jobs.

Little jobs?

Maybe we have been calling them that for too long.

Look around your own community and think about the handyman or handywoman quietly keeping things working.

You might be surprised by just how much we need them.



The Art of Finding Work

WHAT BEING 'QUALIFIED' MEANS TO AN EMPLOYER

By Nick Kossovian

A recurring grievance among job seekers is, "I'm qualified, so why are employers not contacting me?" Asking this reveals a lack of understanding of what being "qualified" means from an employer's perspective. Being qualified involves more than just degrees and experience; it includes both tangible and intangible qualities.

On one hand, you have tangible qualifications—degrees, certifications, hard skills, and quantifiable results. These are your baseline requirements. They're what get you interviews, hence the importance of showcasing them properly, throughout your résumé and LinkedIn profile, especially using numbers that demonstrate the impact you made on previous employers. On the other hand, you have intangible qualities, such as communication skills, adaptability, teamwork, problem-solving skills, time management skills, leadership skills, and creativity, to name a few, that make you truly qualified. When you don't consider these intangible qualities as part of being actually qualified, you fail to recognize what "being qualified" means to an employer; therefore, you might not be as qualified as you believe. Employers will not view you as being qualified when...

Your written and verbal communication skills are substandard.

All workplaces require effective communication.

An all-too-common scenario is a candidate with an impressive résumé, which they have paid to have written, making it seem they have strong writing skills. However, when they interview, they struggle to articulate their career story and effectively sell themselves. Your communication skills are the most important factor influencing your job search and career. If you can't express yourself confidently, you're not qualified.

An aside: Communication is primarily about word choice. When selecting words, less is more. The key to powerful and persuasive communication, whether written or spoken, is clarity and, whenever possible, brevity.

You don't provide numerical proof of how you impacted your employers. Numbers, the language of business, provide tangible proof of your contributions. When a job seeker fails to support their claims with specific numbers, they're simply boasting. Making unsubstantiated claims about yourself doesn't make you qualified.

Your digital footprint is controversial.

Employers will Google you and review your LinkedIn activity when assessing your candidacy. Don't cross your fingers hoping they won't. If they find inappropriate comments or questionable behaviour, you're not qualified. I can't emphasize enough how crucial it is to align your online presence with the professional image you want to project.

You're unwilling to work on-site.

If you want to prolong your job search, insist on working from home. Companies are enforcing a return-to-office mandate, which is well within their right to do so. A candidate who tries to negotiate working from home when the job description states the job is on-site shows a sense of entitlement and, regardless of their skills, isn't qualified.

Failing to consider these aspects, along with many others I haven't listed, explains why many job seekers meet the skills and experience requirements in the job posting, secure an interview, and then receive a rejection email. When you get the standard "We decided to go with another candidate" response, it's not about your qualifications on your résumé and LinkedIn profile; you wouldn't have been invited for an interview if you didn't appear to be qualified. Essentially, the employer is saying, "The candidate we hired has your education and experience, more or less; in addition, they have attributes and evidence that make us want to work with them."

From speaking with hiring managers, it would be safe to say that employers don't have a hard time finding tangible, qualified candidates, which in today's job market are 'a dime a dozen.' The challenge employers are facing is finding candidates who meet the intangible, non-measurable aspects of being genuinely qualified.

While there's no guaranteed method of getting hired, being a candidate that the employer and those who'd be your colleagues want to work with is as close to a guarantee as you can get, since, from an employer's point of view, this is the essence of being "qualified."

Every day, job seekers share with me, or on LinkedIn, which isn't a good look, as it shows employers that they can't manage their emotions, their "woe is me" story. They claim they're an accomplished professional who's following all the job search advice given by self-proclaiming career experts. Yet, they can't figure out why they're missing out on opportunities for which they believe they're qualified. They naively assume their track record, which isn't unique, will speak for itself.

Most job seekers lead with their skills and experience, believing this is what makes them "qualified." Savvy job seekers, those getting hired, show employers how they'll fit into the company's culture and be a value-add employee. Since no one achieves corporate goals alone, they understand the importance of demonstrating interpersonal skills. Above all, they come across as someone who'd be easy to manage and not a headache for the business or their colleagues.

The truth is, employers don't focus solely on hiring the "most qualified" candidate; their priority is to hire the safest one, who'll make the hiring manager's life easier. Therefore, getting hired involves demonstrating not only that you have the qualifications that secured you the interview, but also that you possess the other qualities employers consider when deciding if you're truly qualified.

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