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## ROBERT HALF PODCAST SERIES

**Interviewee: Andrew Brushfield, Director, Robert Half**

**Interviewer: Stuart Cameron**

**Stuart:** Hello and welcome to the Robert Half podcast series. I'm Stuart Cameron. Now that the effects of the global financial crisis are starting to wane, many companies are hiring again but candidates often make mistakes while seeking a new job that can seriously reduce their chances of success. In this podcast I speak with Andrew Brushfield, Director of Robert Half Victoria and Queensland, about how to avoid common mistakes and increase your chances of success as you seek a new job.

Andrew Brushfield, recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics has indicated that jobs in the financial services sector, amongst many others, are on the up. Does this mean that now is a good time for people to be looking for new roles?

**Andrew:** Yes, it does Stuart. I mean we're finding at the moment that there's a renewed optimism in the employment market. You specifically mentioned the financial service sector. I'd be broader than that and say that other industries including professional services, manufacturing, hospitality etcetera are all experiencing an increase in demand for good candidates which is a natural extension from what we've seen over the last two years where the opportunities have been tighter and fewer and far between and with the renewed optimism, the desire for clients to claw back ground that they may have lost over the last 12 to 24 months, they're finding that now is the right time to go back out to the market to finalise and secure the best talent in the finance market.

**Stuart:** Has the GFC changed what employers are looking for from potential staff?

**Andrew:** Yes and no. At its core, finance staff are always in demand and they're always in demand for regulatory and financial requirements that companies need to meet. What we've found recently is that has extended beyond typical boundaries to include more operational and commercial involvement of finance people. So the GFC across the board has meant that employees have to put a little bit more in, push themselves a little bit harder. What we're finding now as a result of, sort of, coming out of the GFC is that candidates and ... and, in particular, finance candidates have more strings to their bow, a deeper skill set and a greater involvement in business.

**Stuart:** With so much opportunity available to the candidate market, what are some of the key things that candidates should focus on when making initial contact with a potential employer?

**Andrew:** Well this is a very important point. We always advise potential candidates to take candidate interviews and ... and client interviews very seriously. So some of the things that you need to be sure of when you are making initial contact with your potential employer is put your best foot forward first. So don't assume anything.

Make sure you prepare properly, you know your resume, you give yourself some time the night before, the morning of or whenever it is that you're meeting the potential employer to make sure you completely remember all the skills that you've gained over the time. It may sound like a minor comment and a strange comment to make but if you have a resume of five plus, ten plus years experience, if you get asked a question in your first interview or your first contact, be that face to face or a telephone call, about a skill that you may have developed in your first year of employment, sometimes you can get caught out but by doing the appropriate preparation the day before you minimise your chances of getting caught out and maximise your chances of answering the question very well.

The other point I'd like to make, Stuart, is make sure that the role that you're applying for is appropriate for you. So you have a match to the skills and the background that they have asked for in the ad that you have seen. So that your initial contact is relevant, your preparation is good, your presentation and your best foot forward is there which will enhance your chances of getting the role.

**Stuart:** Andrew, how important is the resume? What are some of the key mistakes that candidates make on their resumes?

**Andrew:** In answer to the first part of the question, resume's massively important. So resume is, more or less, a selling tool for you or an extension of you. If you put yourself in the employer's position, they may receive a number of resumes and it will create a competitive environment and the way the employer decides who he or she will meet is based on their resume. So it's a vitally important tool for you to create that first impression.

Some of the key mistakes we see are spelling mistakes, which are almost unforgiveable, badly structured, badly formatted resumes. You need to make sure that there's enough white space on your resume for an employer to read easily. You need to make sure that your resume reflects your skills. And finally remember that it is a competitive scenario so you need to have something in your resume that will make you compare favourably to the competition.

**Stuart:** Many candidates believe that the interview process is just a formality. Is this a fair way to approach the interview?

**Andrew:** No, not at all. That's ... in fact it's a very dangerous way to approach the interview. My advice to any aspiring candidates there is don't ever make the mistake of thinking that ... that the interview is just a formality. If all the preliminary interviews, your resume, everything else has gone well to that point, please maintain that sense of urgency and professionalism through to the final contract. Don't ever be cavalier, too relaxed, let your guard down or start daydreaming about walking into work on

your first day or spending your new salary. The biggest fault or error that we see is for people to assume that, because you've got to the last round interview, you've got the job. Inevitably, when that happens something goes wrong in the last instance. So my advice is to make sure that you push through to the last bell or the last hurdle. Make sure that you maintain your professionalism, maintain your preparation and presentation the whole way through to the point that you get a contract.

**Stuart:** The level to which a candidate should sell themselves in the market is often a contentious issue. To overt and you might appear arrogant and if you're too modest you might not demonstrate your true ability. What approach should a job seeker take?

**Andrew:** Yeah, and ... and this is a ... a balancing item. And what we find with finance people is generally they're not as comfortable in talking themselves up as potentially other areas of the workforce. What I would say to ... to ... or what I do say to candidates always is to make sure that they put their best foot forward. So you do have to highlight why you are the best choice. And you can do that in a very modest way by talking through your skills and your achievements and why you feel as though you're good for the role without appearing to be arrogant or without appearing to be big noting yourself.

So how do you do that? You make sure that the comments that you make are in line with the skills and the requirements of the role, you tie your achievements and skills into what the client is looking for as you know it from the job description and you make sure that they, in turn, tie into what the company is looking for and the direction of the company. When you do that you will make complete sense to the client, you will buy into their strategy, they will buy into your skill set and you will come across in a very professional manner without sounding arrogant at all.

**Stuart:** The very nature of an interview assumes that the employer should be asking the candidate all the questions. Is this the case and what approach should candidates take and what are interviewers actually expecting?

**Andrew:** As we talked about earlier, Stuart, preparation is vitally important. So when you're preparing for the interview also prepare questions to ask at the end. Inevitably you as the candidate will be asked a load of questions about your skills and your background and your relevance for the job but employers are also expecting you show a healthy degree of interest in the company and the role and the direction of the company. So making sure that you have at your disposal a handful of questions that you can ask at the end of the interview or as and when it's appropriate during the course of the interview is very relevant. What it will do, once again, is it'll separate you from the other candidates interviewing for the role. Particularly if the questions you ask are very relevant about growth plans or how they got through the global financial crisis or whatever the question may be. So it's very relevant for you to be prepared with a handful of questions to ask at the end. It will separate you from the competition and shed a very favourable light upon yourself.

**Stuart:** One of the effects of the GFC is that many employees have not received a pay rise in over 18 months. Is it acceptable to bring up the topic of remuneration in the interview environment and, if so, how should a candidate go about it?

**Andrew:** The short answer is it is. It is a topic that you need to talk about. The long answer is don't talk about it too early. Okay? So if we assume the course of an interview process is two or maybe three interviews, my advice to candidates is don't bring up salary discussions in the first interview definitely.

Take the lead of the client. If the client brings it up by all means discuss salary but you do not want to put clients off by you bringing up salary too early because what they will inevitably think is that you're only interested in the salary and not necessarily the role. So don't talk about the money too soon in the interview. Generally you should follow the lead of the client and have the discussion on salary when it comes up which it inevitably will but, if it comes up as a result of the client's initiation, that is what we want. You do need to be comfortable about discussing the topic and the global financial crisis has meant over the last 18 months a lot of people have not received pay increases. So clients are aware of that and certainly (10:57) client's desire to retain and attract the best staff possible, they are aware that there are certainly salary pressures in the market at the moment so that the conversation will come up, there may well be an opportunity for candidates out there to receive a pay rise but you do not want to jeopardise that by bringing it up too early in the interview process.

**Stuart:** After a candidate leaves the interview what should they do next?

**Andrew:** You always need to follow up. Most people forget this, we do our best to educate our candidate population to buck the trend and make sure they do follow up with clients because the impact can be very beneficial. Be sure to send a handwritten thank you note or a polite email. You most likely get the business card of the person that you're meeting so you'll have the contact details. So, by all means, send a thank you note or a quick email thanking them for their time and their consideration and also, if you're very interested in the role, expressing your interest in the role. It always goes over very well. Don't overdo that. If you don't hear back immediately, don't call the company every day, don't speak to the client or pester the client but you certainly could check in a week or so later to make sure that they did receive the email and/or received the phone call.

**Stuart:** Are there any other key mistakes that candidates make through the interview process?

**Andrew:** Yeah, there are. One of the dynamics of an interview scenario is that the candidate population and quite possibly the client or the interviewer aren't necessarily experienced in the process and therefore are a little bit nervous. One of the side effects of that is people talk too much. My advice to any candidate going into interview is answer the question that's put in front of you and then don't be scared of silence. Don't over answer the question because inevitably what happens when you over answer the question is you get yourself into a position that you're not necessarily doing anything other than filling in time. So be careful not to talk too much, be careful not to talk over the interviewer. The purpose of an interview is a

two-way conversation. Let's make it a two-way conversation and make sure that each person has the opportunity to speak and not be spoken over. Make it very relevant and answer the questions after listening carefully to the question's that being asked.

In addition to that, you will always get questioned around the environment that you're in at the moment or that you're coming from, your relationship with previous people that you've worked with.

You do not want to come across as bitter towards previous employers or disenchanted by previous employers. Always treat previous employers and talk about previous employers with respect. An interview process is not the position or the time to speak ill of previous employers or previous colleagues. If in the instance that you were made redundant or laid off by a previous employer, be prepared for the explanation. You're not on your own, it has happened to other people in the past and it's not a bad sign. So just be prepared for an explanation, talk through it calmly and then move onto the next question.

**Stuart:** Andrew Brushfield, thanks for your time today.

**Andrew:** Thanks Stuart.

**Stuart:** Thank you for listening to the Robert Half podcast series. For more information on global employment opportunities and career advice visit [www.roberthalf.net](http://www.roberthalf.net)

**End of interview.**