

DEVIANT THINKING PODCAST

Episode 11: In The Mind Of A Hiring Manager with Celia Hurley



Transcript

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Jennifer: 00:00 Welcome back to The Deviant Thinking Podcast. I'm your host Jennifer Thompson. Today and always we will explore Career Advice that Breaks the Rules. Today, I have a very special episode. I have with me today, Celia Hurley, she's the vice president of advancement at the University of Technology in Sydney. Celia has been tasked with expanding fundraising there at the university, which has also meant building out a great team and over the past year she's added about 12 people to her team. So she's become really familiar with the recruiting and hiring process. So I'm excited to have her here today and share some tips and tricks and insights on what it's like to be on the hiring side and also give you some ideas of things that you can do to really stand out and be remarkably different. So let's start, and I'll let Celia do a little bit of an introduction for herself.

Celia Hurley: 01:00 Thank you Jennifer. It's really great to be here today with you. I just uh, I guess one of the first things to let you know is that obviously I'm from the Southern part of the United States, so I live in Australia and work with many Australians, but really internationally. It's a very international city, Sydney is, and so there's been a lot of learning for me in terms of building the team and working with a variety of cultures and people across from, across the world. The team as uh, as you mentioned, is growing and it is becoming a stronger and more visible part of UTS, and what we're trying to accomplish there. Philanthropy has not been a long standing tradition in Australia unlike in the United States. And although when we think about the United States as being a model or an example, reality is Australia is very different and therefore the team is very different.

Celia Hurley: 01:57 So I guess what I'd like to talk about today is some of the differences as well as maybe some of the things that I look for as I recruit and bring people onto the team. Because I consider that one of my biggest and most important jobs as the vice president.

Jennifer: 02:13 That sounds super Celia. What I love as I, I hear that is that you've really embraced the cultural differences between the U S and Australia. And for my, my clients, a lot of times they are going international. So some of that perspective's going to be a lot of fun to hear. I'm going to dive right in and, and I guess ask some, some of the tough questions. The first thing is, you've hired so many people this year, so I'm sure the process has evolved and changed as the year went on. So what are some of the learnings that you've had over this past year and how have you made things easier for yourself to hire really great people?

Celia Hurley: 02:53 Well, there have been a lot of people that have come on board and of course every job is different, levels or different responsibilities are different. But ultimately the culture of the team is across the board. So no matter whether you're at a lower level and you have no managing responsibilities or whether you are a top manager on the leadership team, the importance of understanding the cultural fit and what the team is trying to achieve - the shared vision - is probably one of the most critical things that I look for. I really want to, when I'm, when I'm talking with people and I do talk, I don't hire everyone directly. Oftentimes it's my manage hearing, my managerial team that does the hiring. However, I do speak with virtually everyone. And during that, sometimes only 30 minutes conversation, I ask them questions based on what kinds of things that they mentioned right up front.

Celia Hurley: 03:51 So for example. A young woman might come into my office and, and ask about how much leadership or how many things she can do to grow and to learn and to, to, to be maybe more than what the job that she's applying for offers. That to me is a big plus. That individual is looking ahead. She doesn't necessarily think that the job she's being hired for is the last job she will want to be a candidate for. So I look for that excitement about beyond just what the, the actual job is that's being recruited for at the time. The last thing I wanted to mention in this part is that it's very important that someone not only understand where we are, a lot of times people do their homework. I love that. I love it when people do homework and they know me and they know what we do and how we do it and what the university does.

Celia Hurley: 04:47 But what I really love to see is when someone says, not only are you doing this, but it looks like this is where you're headed. So the future as well as the present.

Jennifer: 04:56 That future focus is something that I preach all the time to my clients because right? If somebody is coming to you for a new position or, um and, and your hire, and from the opposite side, if, if you're hiring, right, it's always about the future. So what's some things that people can do to really show you that they're looking to the future?

Celia Hurley: 05:20 I really look for the individuals who have a lot of curiosity. And curiosity to me is asking the right questions that will kind of help them get a footing and say, "Okay well if you're doing that, what about this or have you done that or have you thought about this or in my previous job this is one thing that I was hoping to do, maybe didn't get a chance to do." So I think showing the recruitment or rather the hiring manager that you have a curiosity and inquisitiveness and an interest in being again more than just what's on the face value of the position. That's exciting to me and that I'm, I'm keen to, to hear more from you.

Jennifer: 06:00 Love that. I absolutely love that. I hear over and over from hiring managers how important curiosity is because it shows not just the current solutions that you can offer, but then also how, how can you put things together and look forward and really again project that future. Because that's what we're all looking for is what's the future state for the organization. So Celia, how are you finding your candidates? How do they come to you? You know, are you getting, you know, resumes through a recruiter or are people contacting you directly? Tell me a little bit what it's like in Australia in that, that true recruiting side of things.

Celia Hurley: 06:45 It really depends on the level, Jennifer. So at a lower level for those mid-level candidates, then we often get quite a few resumes and applicants. We have an HR office at UTS that's highly sophisticated, and they do quite a bit of work with us. With that said, Australia struggles to have, especially executives, in the advancement area. And advancement of course, I haven't defined that, but that primarily involves philanthropy for the university as well as alumni and community relations. So those are engagement type things like our alumni volunteer or, they mentor or, they support us in other ways, both financially as well as, as volunteers. So, with that said, the individuals who are in Australia who are really strong in um, in fundraising or sometimes very scarce, as you can imagine, there are multiple universities across Australia. There are multiple charities.

Celia Hurley: 07:42 There are not for profits. And all of those organizations are competing for, for individuals who can advance through advancement. So the engagement and the fundraising component, particularly the fundraising, is really tricky. So we, we try to build networks. The team will, I'll have a coffee with anybody who calls and having a coffee or having a phone conversation - whether they're sitting in Missouri or whether they're in the UK or whether they're in Sydney - that oftentimes will help all of us understand whether or not there's a good fit. So that conversation for them, they learn a little more about what we do. And for me, it tells me a little bit about what they, what they really want to achieve.

Jennifer: 08:25 Interesting. I find many of my clients are nervous to pick up the phone or to send that email directly to the hiring manager, the VP, and, and ask for that time. And I love hearing that, that's really valuable to you and I, you know, I guess my gut says it, it probably really helps them stand out and be different and be memorable. So Celia, in our offline conversation, you were telling me how much you enjoyed getting some of the calls from folks and, and emails and kind of doing that pre-connect, 'cause you, you know,

it's a little bit lower stakes that way. So maybe you can tell me a little bit about that and, and maybe about how some of the people approach you so that you want to take that call from them.

Celia Hurley: 09:11 That's a great question, Jennifer. Yes, so I have had quite a few conversations via phone that have led to a face to face interview. When I speak with people over the phone, I really get a good feel for who, who they are, their warmth, I'm always looking for people who are good at engaging people. I look for their inquisitiveness. I look for their experience and their skills certainly. And it does make them much more memorable. Obviously, if I'm looking at five resumes or five applications and I've spoken with one individual by phone, that person I'm going to remember and, and many times when I do have those experiences and they're very positive by phone, that person will get the face to face interview with the selection panel.

Jennifer: 09:58 You know, one other thing that comes to mind is, is I know that you've talked to me as well, that sometimes you'll bring in more than one candidate, when you go to, to interview. And in some cases you've actually ended up hiring multiple candidates to fill different roles. So maybe a little bit of discussion of, of how does a candidate stay open to possibilities? Because I think sometimes we get married to the first role that we apply for. But when you, you know, they don't always, you know, we as individuals don't always know where the organization is heading overall. So you as the hiring manager have that opportunity to say, "Uh-huh, I know in six months I'm hiring. This person could be a great fit. Maybe I need to fit them in now." So how does a candidate position themselves to be authoritative and, and know what they're doing for this role but still leave themselves open? What, what do you see in them that, that allows you to do that?

Celia Hurley: 11:00 Ah, that's a great question and it's probably not one I've thought about a whole lot. I'll give you one example. Recently I had a position that was open for an experienced alumni relations - really a director level - and I had two very strong candidates and the one candidate did win out. The other candidate who was quite strong, she came across as being extremely sharp, intelligent, her answers were very well. Her, her explanations and her descriptions were very clean and crisp and she really just answered questions really well. Now that left an impression on me. She didn't, she did not herself I'm sure, think, 'Oh, maybe there's another role for me and maybe I can respond to that in just a moment'. But what she showed me was she was versatile and she had experience in a lot of different places and a lot of different areas, that even though she was applying for this one job, she also had the skills that could go into other jobs that could apply to other jobs.

Celia Hurley: 12:07 So I ended up hiring her and it's been a great success. It's been a great learning for her. What she basically left herself open for was, I want this role. However, if there's another role, I'm happy to learn that role. Because I think that's one thing that we all have, have got, have gotten tripped up on from time to time. You take a position, it has a certain list of responsibilities and roles, and the one thing I learned -

even back in my twenties and thirties - is my role is not, it's not in the lines. My role can be outside the lines and by doing things outside the lines, you actually build your resume and you build your experience. So the next job may be, you may get that job because you've done other things well beyond the role you've actually taken.

Jennifer: 12:56 I love that because I think again, you know, it sounds like she was passionate about your organization and showed that was interested in working in any capacity that she could for you and really willing to look at saying, "You know, okay, yes I applied for a role one, but yeah, role two, that, that's interesting too. And I'm willing to learn and grow and, and adapt myself for that." Just out of curiosity, what was the timeline between when she interviewed for, for that first role and you were able to offer the second?

Celia Hurley: 13:27 It was pretty quick. It was pretty quick. So yes, I think, I mean I think your points are excellent that she did show passion. She, I ask HR to follow up with her to let her know that she did not get the first role and, but to also just put it out there, just say we've got another role. We might be interested if you are interested, we'd like to talk further about it. So her immediate response was, "Okay, I'll talk about that." And so she and I had a conversation. And what I found was the main thing she was looking for was the right culture.

Celia Hurley: 14:04 She wanted to be sure that when she came into the organization at whatever role, that she could do what she felt like needed to be done. She could take risks. And of course I tell my team all the time, take risks, not a problem, don't worry about failure. We can fix most things, but continually look for ways to improve and to innovate. And so she found that to be exactly what she was looking for. So it was less about the role, although she's excelled beautifully and, and she and I've worked beautifully together, but she also just saw that culture as being, 'This is where I can thrive'.

Jennifer: 14:39 That makes total sense because so often it is the culture that I find people leaving, or the manager, and not actually the tasks. The tasks are important and we all want to get to do the things that we're good at, and so, but we really are pretty versatile as, as human beings. So definitely looking for that culture fit and that, that connection with a great manager is a super important part of the process. Well, Celia, your career has been a little interesting as well. So maybe I'm going to switch over to that. You took off and moved to Australia from the United States and, at first I think had, had some opportunities and finding a role that, that matched kind of where you wanted to be long-term. So maybe you can tell us a little bit about your path, 'cause you know, this is all about Deviant Thinking. So what did, what did you have to do to set yourself up for success as you went and worked in a new culture?

Celia Hurley: 15:39 I did lots of applications. And those applications did not go through and I realized very quickly that although I had skills, I just was not part of an experienced Australian market. So I, I struggled. So I left here in October and arrived mid October. And my first job in Australia wasn't until early April. So I had a very long period of time,

during that time, obviously I got a chance to enjoy Perth where I was living in Western Australia. My husband was working at a museum and so there was there was a lot of enjoyment in that, but I was very keen to get a new role. And I left my role in North Carolina, somewhat hesitant, I was kind of hesitant about doing that but of course I'm glad that I did now because it gave me a lot of opportunity.

Celia Hurley: 16:44 But interestingly I finally, I just, I just applied for a role because I just was going to apply for the role. I didn't have any, I mean, I was putting out applications, I had things out there and nobody was really that interested. So I decided, 'Well, let me just go ahead and send this on to Curtin University, Curtin University. And I did. And when I got the call, the call was something like, "Now you understand," (after I'd interviewed and had been like now offered the job), I was, I was asked, "Now you understand this job is much less than what you've done in the past, that you are overqualified for this job, that this job is pretty much, you know, a lower level job." And I said, "I understand that, I get that. I'm, I'm happy with that." "Okay, so you understand?"

Celia Hurley: 17:36 And so I had, I had at least twice, I was twice asked, "Now you understand that this is not . . ." I said, "I understand." So I took the job and it was really the best thing that I could have ever done because, one, I'd never worked in a university for any length of time. I worked a little bit at the University of Florida earlier, but no, not in advancement. And I didn't know anything about Australia, higher education. I mean, I just was not knowledgeable. So as I told one recruiter, when I was moved to UTS, I put my pride in my pocket and did not worry about what it looked like. I was going to learn. I was going to be the best person in this role that I possibly could be. And as I had in my twenties and thirties, I was going to go outside the lines. So anything that was going to be available to me, if it was a, an event and somebody couldn't go, I would take their place. So it started very much at a low level.

Jennifer: 18:35 I love that. So really you had to back up to move forward. You had to decide that it was okay to show up at that lower level, but I'm going to guess there were a lot of learnings that happened there. You know, what, what was the major learning that you had to have so that you could kind of move forward? 'Cause you kind of skyrocketed from that you, so I, I don't want to leave, leave everyone believing that you, you came in at a lower role 'cause now you're vice president of that advancement for the one of the larger universities in Australia. So, so really again, that step back to move forward and, and that's really a, I guess a deviant way of thinking of it, of, you know, it's worth taking that step back. So, so again, what was the lesson that you, you had to learn?

Celia Hurley: 19:21 Oh, goodness. Well I think, I think the main lesson is that every job is important in a team. And if you do it really well, people do notice. And you can take it a lower level, you can be at the higher level but do it well and do it with enthusiasm. Do it with passion. Enjoy it and, and bring people on board. Know that you can lead at any level, know that you can manage at any level. I recall distinctly in one of the team meetings - this was a small team it was an advancement services team - I had virtually taken over in the nicest of ways, but I would applaud people's successes. I would let

people know that they were doing a great job, this, on this or that.

Celia Hurley: 20:07 Basically I became the leader of a team at the lowest level. And there's, you know, people respected that. They admired it, they were okay with it. No one said, "Oh my goodness you shouldn't be saying those things." They actually, began, began to consider me a leader even at that low level. And so then a job came open. I applied, I got it, another job came open, I applied, I got it. And then the chief advancement officer position came open, which was the highest position in advancement at Curtin. I applied and I got it. So that was, I applied for four different jobs and I got them all and I was learning all the way.

Jennifer: 20:50 Wonderful. And you know, what I love is, is that in a way that humbleness but also that knowledge that you didn't wait for permission to be a leader. You didn't wait for the title to be a great leader. You decided that even at a low level you could show up and be that leader and it really sets you up for success. You know, I often tell clients, you know, show up and be the type of person you would want to hire. And it sounds like you really showed up and were able to do that. So, so Celia kind of one, one last question. You know, a lot of the focus that, that my clients put is on their resume. So I'm just kind of curious when you're looking at a resume, you know, there's that myth out there, I guess, or maybe that statement that most people only take six seconds to look at a resume. So at that first glance, what catches your eye? Or you can, you can dispel that myth and say that you actually take the time to read it - either way - but what catches your eye in a resume and, and, and what, what gets you to want to read a little bit further?

Celia Hurley: 22:04 As far as resumes, I usually skim the titles. I look for people's positions in the organization that I think align because a resume only says so much about an individual. Obviously, if it's a creative role, let's say I'm hiring for advancement communications, then I might expect to see someone who has a, a more clever approach, which I think is fabulous. I'm, I'm a very visual person, so that would certainly stand out to me as a, as a hiring manager. But I look for those roles that seem to say, this is what I love to do. This is the level that I have been at. And particularly, I compare, this is the job they're applying for, this is the position they've been in, how are they going to make that leap? Or is this a lateral move? So I look for roles and levels to just determine whether or not this is something that they have had experience with.

Celia Hurley: 23:00 With that said, if I see anything that gets me excited, like you know, a person who's done maybe some volunteer work that shows that they care about the environment or they care about you know, going to Africa and helping clean, you know, generate some clean water and in villages. Then that also that is very exciting to me because I feel like they've, they've not just done what they have to do or what they're kind of expected to do, but they've actually gone beyond that and they've done things that either they're passionate, probably, and they want to make a difference because one of the things that I look for are people who really want to make a difference. With that said, if somebody walks into my office and says I asked the question oftentimes, "Why do

you want to work here?”

Celia Hurley: 23:53 And oftentimes that answer is, “Well, you know, I really like UTS and you know, my grandmother used to work here or I, I used to come through here when I was going to the uni of Sydney . . .” Those, those aren’t the answers I’m looking for. I’m looking for an excitement about being part of the team, about being part of the university team, about being part of the advancement team. I’m looking for some excitement and curiosity. I guess I want more than the pat answers. And so I think anybody who is going to apply for a job needs to make sure that they do stand out and they do need to be ready for a question that even sounds like kind of a boring, “So why do you want to work here?” You’ve got to be ready with a good answer. I, I, this is the one chance you’re going to get to make an impression. And if I spend 30 minutes with you, that impression better be a good one. Because if it’s not, if it kind of fell flat, I may not be able to even consider you because somebody else maybe had some really exciting answers.


Jennifer: 24:57 It’s not bad to stand out and be a little bit different. I love that you talked about the volunteering and that’s something I encourage people to put on their resume because it is that above and beyond. And if you’re volunteering, that is a job. It truly is. And it’s a job where you don’t get paid. So any contribution you make there, I always think it, it really, it’s, it’s it’s by a multiple factor. You know, it’s, if you are doing a job and you’re being paid for it, okay, that’s even, but if you’re doing the job and, and you’re doing it as a volunteer, like kudos to you. It really does show that extra passion. So I love hearing about that, but I love what you said about that answer to that question of why do you want to work here? And you know, giving that that safe answer doesn’t get you hired. You know, really being daring and giving that answer of passion is really what goes and gets you hired. Well, Celia, I think we’re about ready to wrap up. Is there one more piece of advice that you want to give to job seekers to give them, you know, kind of that extra Ommph to push them over the finish line?

Celia Hurley: 26:08 Be curious, ask questions and ask questions that are really good. Don’t ask what time do I show up or what the dress code is. Ask questions about where do you want to go? Where do you want to take this? This unit, where do you, where does UTS excited about, what’s going on with the strategy? What is the university’s position across Australia? Ask big questions, think big questions, and then you’re going to have a hiring manager really take notice. Don’t, don’t be in the small stuff, not for this. Think big. Think Beyond your role and that hiring manager will see you as more than just that role.

Jennifer: 26:50 Awesome. That is great final advice of that, think big, be remarkable, put yourself out there and that is really how you land a great role. Well, Celia, I am so happy that you took the time to hang out with me today and we really appreciate it and I know my clients have learned some great things. So thank you so much.

Celia Hurley: 27:14 Thanks Jennifer.

Jennifer: 27:16 Well, that’s a wrap for another deviant thinking podcast. Thanks so much for taking time to hang out with me today. Be sure to head on over to iTunes and



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