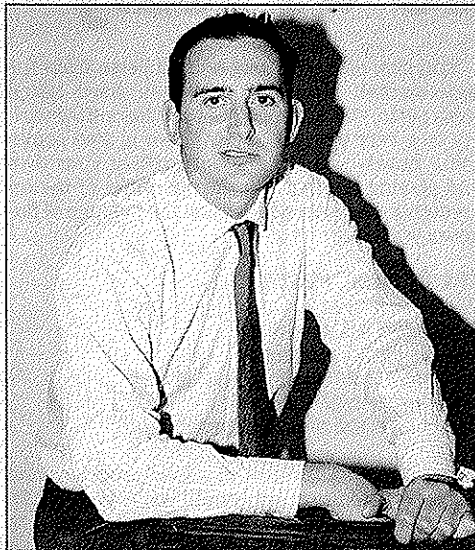


July 7, 2004

Crème

I feel that employers might be discriminating against me

CAREER CLINIC



This week's expert is David Morel, head of Tiger Recruitment.

Q: I am writing to you with tears in my eyes. I am the only black woman at my organisation. I feel stared at, singled out and some of my colleagues have been unkind and unhelpful. I have reported them to my boss but the situation has not improved. I have therefore been looking for a job for months, but I have not found anything.

Companies and agencies are very keen to see me once they've read my CV, but six times out of ten, I never hear back, or they say things like, "Nothing has come on to our books which suits or meets your skills". I feel that am being ignored and sometimes lied to.

I registered at one agency and gave a friend my contacts. She has not had half of the executive assistant experience I have. She was found a temp-to-perm job and is now permanent. Although registered after me, she was called more times than I was. I found this to be one of the most unfair and upsetting times of my career-seeking life.

I am a very hard-working PA, I have first-

class secretarial skills, and want to utilise them in whatever organisation I go to. Please can you advise.

A: I totally sympathise with your predicament and can understand how difficult this must be for you. You do have a good CV and the first thing I would say is that you are not the only person finding it difficult to find a new permanent position at the senior level.

You have raised a couple of points and I will do my best to touch upon them briefly. First, there is the issue of equal opportunities. There is a firm set of guidelines and policies which every UK company must adhere to and there are serious penalties for any company that is discriminatory.

I would urge you to take a look at the relevant pages on the Department of Trade and Industry website at www.dti.gov.uk/er/equality/index.htm.

In answer to the second point you raised, I realise that you have been looking for a new position for some time and have been taken aback by the way your application for new vacancies has been initially well received with very little positive feedback afterwards. The worst thing to do is take these situations to heart.

Remember, even in a good market, there are

still several highly qualified applicants applying for each vacancy and many will not even make it to an interview.

Look on the positive side — you have a good CV and good track record and you seem to be consistently making it beyond the first hurdle, so how can you make it to the final step and land that dream position? Perhaps you can brush up on your interview technique? Maybe, spend more time researching the position and company you are visiting? When you are registering with agencies, it might be an idea to be as open as possible, so look at all industry sectors and locations, and perhaps look at working for a team, rather than concentrating on a one-to-one role.

The key point here is to be proactive, not in terms of calling your agencies every day (this can often have the opposite effect), but by making yourself more marketable to employers and making yourself stick out from the competition.

You are obviously a very capable PA/executive assistant. My advice is to concentrate on the positives, make yourself stand out by being open-minded, work on your interview style and tailor-make the way you come across, depending on the agency/company you are visiting.