

Large mistakes point at overarching problems, but these problems are often the type that can be seen from other viewpoints. The small mistakes reveal layers of complexity that I would not have considered.

Last November my resume listed the year I intended to graduate instead of the year I was eligible to graduate. I figured this transparency would demonstrate my academic plan, and wouldn't reflect negatively on my applications for jobs. My first round interview with Microsoft went stunningly well, so I was shocked when a couple months later, with no other explanation, I received a flat out "sorry, no jobs available" email. I thought it might be based in the economy, so I immediately emailed recruiting to ask where the process had gone awry. Apparently, they have a policy of filling all positions with seniors, and then rejecting everyone else without further discussion- regardless of qualifications, or interest level.

I emailed my recruiter, explained I was eligible to graduate (though didn't intend to) and she immediately found me a position in the PowerPoint group. Reaching PowerPoint, I learned that they did not care at all what year a student was- and instead looked for specific traits in specific people. I was hired for being "crazy, non-traditional, and likely to shake things up" with the long shot of hiring me full time. Their process was to find the best people, regardless of year in school, as the timescale of Microsoft products is far longer than a year.

Due to my experience, I became far more aware of learning why product groups choose to hire individuals- for long or short term, experience, potential, or influence. Yet, this process was being hindered by some filters unrelated to interviews. It became clear that this same problem plagued the company- groups were unaware of what the others were doing, and it was difficult to coordinate between large initiatives.

From this knowledge, I created two initiatives. An intern version of the side project group- designed to allow employees to work on products they weren't directly responsible for. This group helped people better understand the holistic product visions. Additionally, I launched an intern version of the internal discussion mailing list for ideas- in order to provide external perspective on the company. From a very small initial mistake, I found a niche trying to shake the foundations that silo Microsoft's teams apart from each other.