

## Are you experienced?

**J**imi Hendrix asked this question in song and many others ask it before hiring someone to do a job. At first glance it almost seems like faulty logic. To the job seeker, it can be totally exasperating. “How can I gain experience, if no one will hire me?” they might ask. There are clearly several ways to look at this conundrum.

In some situations, experience is valuable, sometimes extremely valuable. In medicine for example, it is desirable to seek help from a physician who has seen many patients with the same condition. We would feel that our chances for a successful outcome are greatest in that person’s care. After all, he or she has seen most of the possible complications and knows how to handle them. The same might be said for a financial advisor or in situations where safety is paramount. There is comfort in knowing that someone has successfully handled many similar cases.

In that regard, experience can be used like a formal credential, like a degree, diploma or certificate. Experience in the long-term may be a way to demonstrate competence in a subject or activity, with or without other tangible data. As shown above, this is a useful outlook, if used with care, but can be abused.

Demanding experience is a quick and easy way to prevent people from doing something new and different, even when they are otherwise qualified. It was used successfully for many years as a way to prevent citizens from voting in elections, for example. And in this context is discriminatory and just plain wrong.

But the demand for experience is more often driven by less sinister motives, such as lethargy or ignorance. Demanding experience is a simple way to automatically include or exclude someone from consideration, especially if the hiring party may lack the time or knowledge to judge an applicant’s other credentials. It becomes an easy way to say “yes” or “no”, in a seemingly objective manner. This method is used frequently and seems to work. As long as there are experienced people, someone will appear qualified. So what is wrong with demanding experience? Unfortunately, many well-qualified people are overlooked in this process. There is no guarantee that the experienced person will do the best job, just hope. Here, insisting on experience is a questionable practice.

Of course there are situations when there is no previous experience, or experience is unavailable. It would be silly to demand, before July 20, 1969, that any person going to the moon must have previous experience on the lunar surface. Nobody had it. Demanding experience is not the way to find pioneers, trailblazers or innovators. A broader review of someone’s background would be necessary and the decision becomes more subjective and difficult.

Clearly there are situations when it is appropriate to seek experience and others when it is inappropriate or unrealistic. How to tell the difference? A consultant can often supply an independent and objective view, possibly filling in the missing pieces of information, allowing you to analyze a problem in a new way to find a better solution. Please contact us to discuss your question in detail.