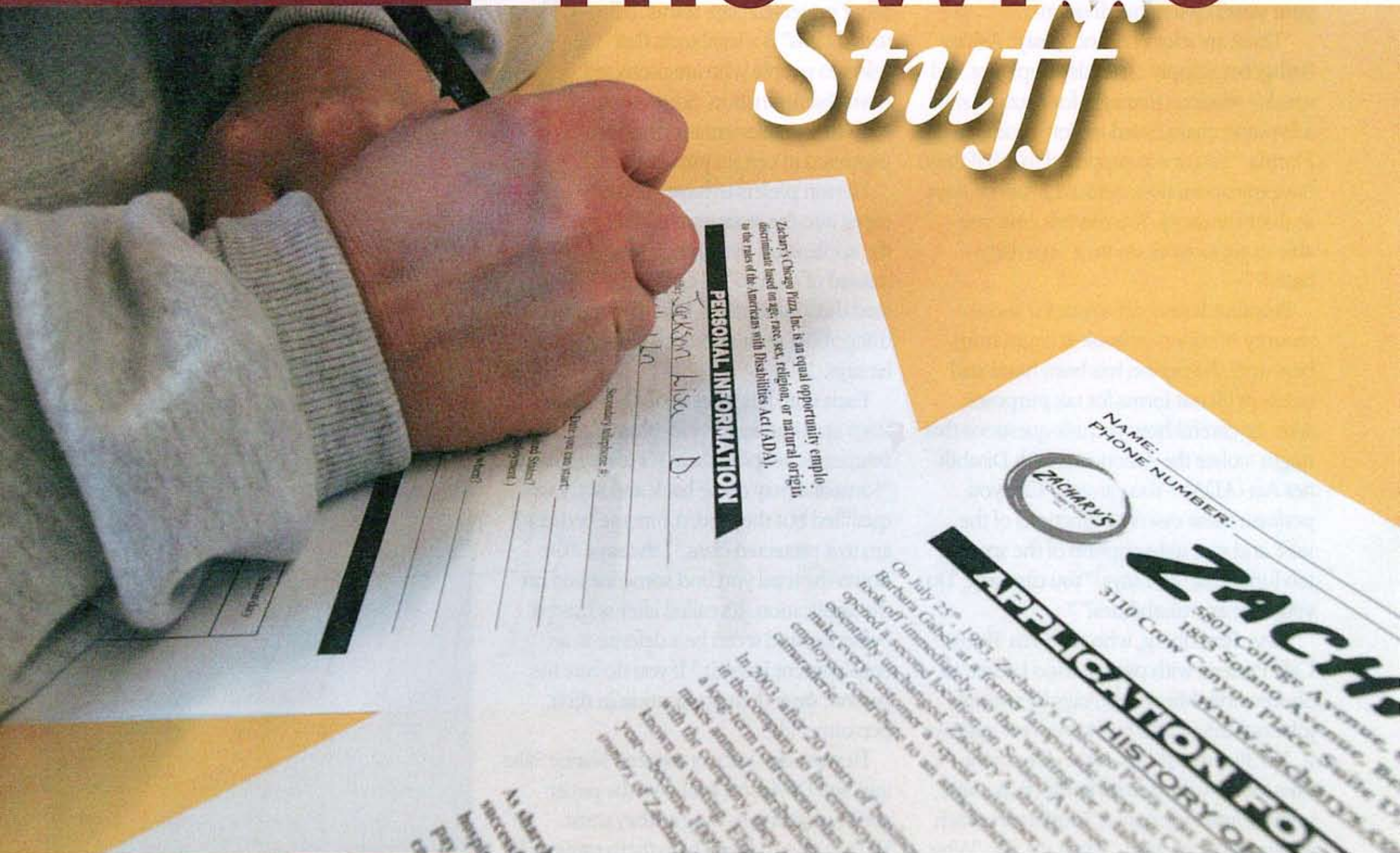


The Write Stuff



Writing job application helps foster good hiring

Story by Nora Caley
Photo by Josh Keown

Writing a job application can be complicated. You want the application to generate information that will help you decide whether to interview someone for a job. You don't want the application to ask questions that might get you into legal trouble with a person who didn't get the job. You might also wonder whether you need to have the application in writing if you're hiring your chef's cousin part time for the holidays. Finally, should you print the application and ask people to handwrite their answers, or provide your application on your Web site and buy software to sort the dozens of

applications you received for one delivery driver job?

It's good to have the application in writing, so you have the person's information on file. If you're not sure how to write an application, start with an online search for "job application" or "employment application." Read the samples, but be careful before you use anything you found on the Web.

"The only problem in downloading something is making sure it's specific to your needs, and making sure it doesn't have any improper questions," says Kristi Blumhardt, an attorney with McElroy, Deutsch, Mulvaney & Carpenter LLP in Denver.

States have differing rules about what questions are allowed on a job application. For example, in some states, you cannot ask a person if they have been arrested, but you may ask if they have been convicted of a crime. Blumhardt recommends checking with a lawyer, or with your state's civil rights division.

"There are a lot of no-no's," says Ashley Rathgeber, supply chain development and vendor relations manager for Pizza Fusion, a five-unit chain based in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. "You're not supposed to ask if they have transportation, because it can be seen as discriminatory. You can ask, 'Are you able to get to work on time on a daily basis?'"

Blumhardt says not to ask for social security numbers or bank account numbers until the person has been hired and needs to fill out forms for tax purposes. Also, be careful how you ask questions that might violate the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). "You can ask, 'Can you perform these essential functions of the job?' and give a description of the specific job functions," she says. "You can't ask, 'Do you have any disabilities?'"

Steve Rosenberg, who co-owns Tino's Café Pizzeria with partner Tino Lettieri in Shorewood, Minnesota, says he wrote a job application and had his lawyer approve it. The first two thirds of the document asks for factual information such as name, address and experience. People can attach a resume if they wish. "Then we ask, 'What makes you want to work for someone like us?' and 'What are your salary requirements?'" Rosenberg says.

The two-page application also asks about goals. "We are expanding, and I need new managers," Rosenberg says. "I want to know if they have that ambition." Also, the application asks how the person heard about Tino's, so Rosenberg can see if the ads on Craigslist reach more people than word of mouth or print ads.

Sean Herron, a consultant whose company is called Big Idea Group, recently helped a client open Lucca Restaurant in Portland, Oregon. He says the application he wrote is four pages. "It's fairly standard," he says. "It asks which position are you applying for, what are your expectations for the job, what days and hours you are available to work."

At the end there's a blank half page and

the request, "Please use this space to elaborate on your qualifications, hobbies, volunteer work, anything you feel is relevant..." but to refrain from including information that might disclose gender, race, religion or other protected class status. ("Protected class" is a legal term that refers to people who are protected from discrimination. Some classes, such as sexual orientation, are not protected in certain jurisdictions.) Herron prefers to have people come into the restaurant and fill out the application by hand, instead of online. "If I can't even read their application, that shows me something about their approach to their work," he says.

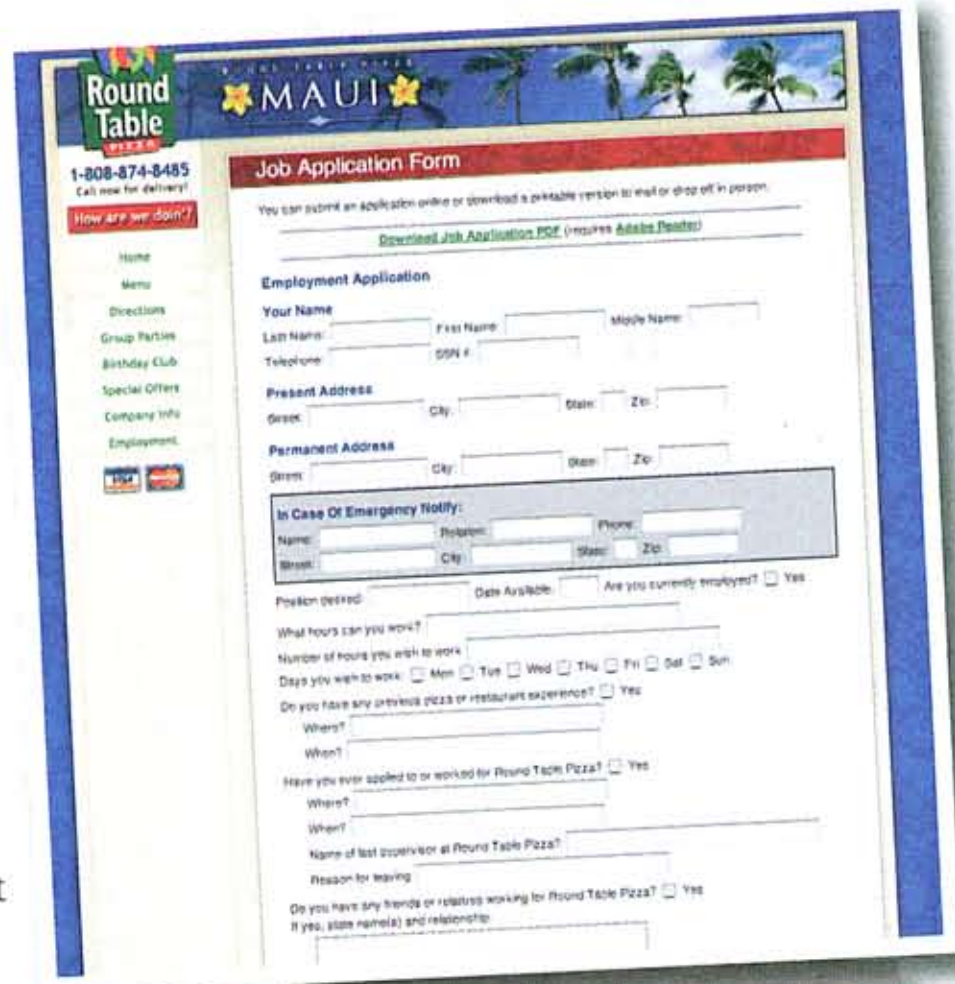
Each state has rules about how long to keep applications on file. Blumhardt recommends keeping them for a long time. "Someone may come back and say, 'I was qualified but they didn't hire me because I am in a protected class,'" she says. "Or down the road you find someone lied on the application. It's called after-acquired evidence, and it can be a defense in an employment lawsuit." If you do hire the person, store their application in their personnel file.

Herron says Lucca's owners, Nancy Salta and Sue Davidson, will save the paper applications for as long as they must. Herron says that will help them prevent "I told you I couldn't work Fridays" arguments later.

Pizza Fusion offers English and Spanish language versions of its online application. "We have a big Hispanic population, and people feel more comfortable taking the application in their native language," Rathgeber says. The Spanish version is for back of the house workers who won't have customer contact.

Rosenberg agrees that it's important to make applicants feel comfortable. "Put yourself in the applicant's shoes," he says. "We want hard workers who are responsible. We also want applicants to come out saying, 'Hey, I want to work there.'" ♦

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High Tech Personality Tests

There's more to a job application than name, address, and hours available. Some employers work with third party software companies to help them match a job with certain personality traits.

Fort Lauderdale-based Pizza Fusion positions itself as fresh, organic and earth friendly. "We look at integrity, work ethic, and customer service skills," says Ashley Rathgeber, supply chain development and vendor relations manager. "We also want to see if they believe in our mission." The company works with Ann Arbor, Michigan-based HRGems, Inc. whose online assessment tool is called TraitSet.

Chelmsford, Massachusetts-based Kronos makes a hiring automation program that asks job applicants to agree or disagree with statements such as, "I rarely act without thinking," and "I rarely change my mind."

Steve Earl, director of marketing for the talent management division, says the personality tests have 50 to 75 questions and take 45 minutes to complete. Louisville, Colorado-based Rock Bottom Restaurants (which includes Old Chicago Pizza) uses the Kronos system. "You can ask not just what they have done, but what they will do," Earl says.