

A Conversation with Noa Epstein Tennenhaus

Noa Epstein Tennenhaus

Hi everyone, my name is Noa Epstein Tennenhaus, and I'm the founder and CEO of Application Shine, which helps people apply to the most competitive academic and job opportunities out there. I founded Application Shine after many years of personally applying successfully to various programmes and opportunities, fellowships, my MBA at Cambridge and the Gates Scholarship, and various other things along the way; including being a former CEO of an organisation called MEET: Middle East Entrepreneurs of Tomorrow, which in partnership with MIT brings together Israeli and Palestinian youth to do entrepreneurship and, technology and impact together.

So, what I'm here to do today is tell you a little bit about the insights I've gained through my work with clients internationally and, then, this umbrella of carving out and claiming *your* place in the competitive job and University programme world. One of my missions in founding Application Shine was to make opportunities more accessible. And, I often find there's a gender bias, and women typically might find it harder to put themselves forward and apply successfully, because of certain, perhaps, biases, inhibitions they have. I'll talk about that during this talk. But, it's not just a gender issue, it's a personality issue. And what I'm going to do is give you a few tips to help you really claim your place in this competitive scene. They say that by the age of 60, we will have submitted an average of 14 applications. So there's an abundance of things to apply to today. And in order to live a life that you want to, full of opportunity, you really need to perfect the skill of applications. So hopefully, this talk will help you a little bit to do that.

So I'll talk about four insights with tips. The first is a prism – I find it very useful when you approach your application. And this is: ***Me plus you equals us***. By this, I mean that you have to do thorough research before you work on your application, whether it's an interview, or it's a personal statement or CV that you're writing. And this is to crystallise the *me* part of the story, i.e. your own goals, your own assets. What are the examples that showcase those assets? And why this opportunity and why now? So understand from your own story what are the key messages you want to put forward. Next up is the *you*, when *you* is the job itself, the University programme, the thing you're applying to. And then you have to really do research on the language they use, the kind of profile they're looking for, and read everything you can on social media and their website. Create a Word document with all the key information that you can then integrate into your own story – into your essay or whatever it is you're preparing— in the language of *us*, which communicates your own messages: the *me* part, but in light of what the *you* is after. So that's prism number one.

Point number two is: ***Show, don't tell***. Imagine I'm an applicant who is an environmentalist, and I'm very passionate about recycling, and the environment and global warming. And in my essay, I write all the right buzzwords around leadership and environmentalism and sustainability and the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). But at the end of the day, it doesn't say much about *me* and doesn't give much proof of what I can and have done. Perhaps a more impactful way to communicate this message is to talk about a story, a moment, in which for instance, last week, I ran 10 kilometres in my city, in a local mini marathon. And I

spent most of the time— I didn't score the score I wanted, because I spent most of the time picking up the plastic bottles of those other runners who were drinking a swig of water and then threw the bottle on the ground. And I think saying that – writing that— would be much more telling as to the kind of person you are: taking the initiative, really practising what you preach, caring about the environment and doing something about it in a way that leads by example. So such a small story is often much more impactful than writing the relevant buzzwords about yourself.

Tip number three is use **Active, not passive, language**. So often when we're nervous, especially in an interview, it's easy to hide behind phrases like, “Yes, this opportunity of getting into this programme is what will take me to the next level – or bring me to the next level”. No one is *taking* or *bringing* you anywhere – it's you. It's up to you and you're taking yourself and, therefore, I prefer language such as, “Through this opportunity, I will be able to take my next professional step and to make the impact I seek to make”. So it's nuanced, but make sure you're talking in the active and not the passive language.

Lastly, **Own your achievements, own your place**. So I often see women who have done incredible things in their career, apply to the next job, and then in the bullet points in their CV, write things like *contributed* to the project of blah, blah, blah, or *aided* the efforts of ta-da-da, *participated in...* When in fact, she *initiated, founded, led* and *managed* all of the above. So, make sure you use those strong verbs that take ownership and take credit when it's deserved. And don't shy away from that because other people will do that. Whether it's a gender bias or not.

So I hope these tips were helpful, and I hope you apply to the most competitive opportunities and carve out your place in the professional scene and in life in general.
What are you applying for?