

STEP IV:

The Interview

By ROBERT B. NELSON

Playing the numbers game and networking will "net" you numerous formal and informal interviews. During the interview, the fourth step in the successful job hunt, prospective employers match the image they have of you on paper against how you come across in person.

During the interview, the employer will not only be noting your qualifications and past experience, but will be looking closely at your personal qualifications and how you handle yourself in person. These past and present indicators will be the best clues of your future success on the job.

Personality Plus

Technical qualifications aside, the face-to-face communication during the interview is probably the best way for the employer to determine how you will fit into the position. The interviewer knows the people in the work group and will try to determine if you will interact with the group favorably. This personality mix can be essential to having an effective team.

Minor details such as a firm handshake and direct eye contact can help demonstrate the message of confidence you have. Speak up and show an interest in the questions being asked. Positive, direct answers will help communicate that you are the right person for the position.

The interview also gives you a chance to demonstrate many of the skills that you should claim to have. For example, show your communication skills by effectively communicating, indicate that you are a good listener by actively listening and "playing back" what you hear, show you have initiative by taking initiative throughout your conversation.

Telegraphing Answers

An interviewer who has been trained in interviewing skills will try to tell you as little as possible about a position until they get all the information they need about you. By doing this the interviewer avoids telling you the answers to questions he might ask.

For example, if an interviewer says: "This job requires excellent customer relation skills" and then asks, "What skills do you consider to be your strongest?" you would

probably be alerted to the correct answer.

The best way to counteract having the interviewer control the discussion is to rebound questions back to the person. After you have answered a question, ask one. Make it open-ended so it can not be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." This technique also will make the interview seem more like a natural conversation and will serve to relax you both.

Ask the interviewer about your criteria for selection of the position. Give the impression that you are also discriminating. The interview does not have to be one-way street, and to the extent that it is not, you will look better and get the information you need.

Funneling for Facts

Another technique that the interviewer might use is to "funnel" questions from the general to the specific. This is a way to get the interviewee to describe a situation as if it were actually happening to you, thus allowing the interviewer to see how you think and how you would react. For example, consider this series of questions:

Did you deal with customers on your last job?

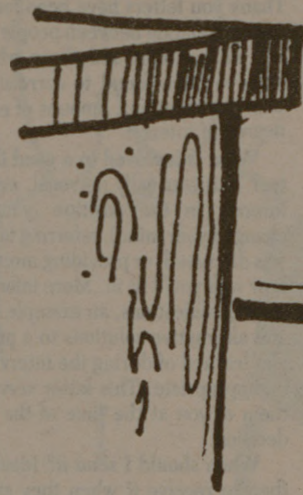
Did you ever deal with a negative customer?

How did you handle that person?

What if they did not respond to your approach? And if that did not work?

The belief is that you would probably handle a similar situation in a like fashion once you were hired. As you describe your actions and thoughts, be aware of what values you are also exposing to the interviewer. Try to show that you carefully consider numerous factors before acting in a situation.

asked any "trick" questions or be given a "pressure" interview. To best prepare for an interview, write out a wide variety of questions that think you might be asked. These questions may come from gaps or ambiguities in your resume, your qualifications as they relate to the job, or your expectations for the position. Then write out an answer for each question or role-play the interview with a friend.



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