So... Did I Get The Job?

by Anna Wells, Editor, IMPO

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When I saw the CNN.com headline "43 Weird Things Said in Job Interviews [1]," I had to click. Throughout my career, I've enjoyed the odd task of interviewing dozens of prospective job candidates for positions within our publication group, and I'm always up for a disastrous tale of inappropriate behavior. Some of the highlights:

Why should we hire you?
"I would be a great asset to the events team because I party all the time."
Do you have any questions?
"What is your company's policy on Monday absences?"
Why are you leaving your current job?
"Because I (expletive) my pants every time I enter the building."

Personally, my favorite interview scenario is the one where we spend 20 positive minutes communicating before the interviewee—in one spastic moment of verbal negligence—shoots him or herself in the foot. Sometimes we both realize it; other times, it's only me, while the candidate jabbers on, blissfully unaware of the faux pas.

It's this situation I find most interesting, because it leads me to believe that many of us are somewhat oblivious as to how we present ourselves to others.

Maybe I'm taking this too far, but perhaps our reality-TV culture has placed too high a value on displaying frank, candid portraits of ourselves. What happened to the concept of putting forth your *best* face? Just because you're not a morning person doesn't make you not qualified for certain positions; I'd just rather not know.

Considering that right now we sit in the toughest job market in decades, it seems reasonable to expect a basic level of preparation and aptitude during a job interview. Perhaps I'm the youngest "old school-er" around, but I'm a piranha in there; don't drop a curse word or forget your necktie, or you probably won't make it out alive.

I joke about the "rules," but ultimately, it's not about a set of arbitrary guidelines of professionalism. Really, it's about finding the right people for the job, a task that's not as easy as it sounds. Can you decipher, beyond a good resume, who might function best in a team environment? Are you asking the right questions in order to find that out?

When it comes to the few jobs that *are* available: What are you looking for in a candidate once they sit down in front of you? Heck, I'd even like to hear about your interview horror stories. Email me at *anna.wells@advantagemedia.com*.

Comments:

Anonymous:

Several years back, I learned a great question to ask when conducting an interview: "Tell me something about yourself that we haven't discussed today, but that I'll know about you 6 months after you start here." It's an open question, and the best answers are always something unusual and interesting: "I'm a die-hard sky-diver," or "I sing jazz on the weekends" or "My sister is going up in the Space Shuttle this fall" (really, that was someone's answer). However, it's also a chance for people to shoot themselves in the foot, and it's amazing how often people take that opportunity.

The worst answer I ever got to that question as: "I'm leaving my current company because I had an affair with a woman that I work with. She's suing the company, and my wife and I are trying to work things out, but it doesn't look good." Wow! I didn't know what to say to that one

Melinda

You are absolutely right. The last thing companies and employees need are extra stress. It's especially crucial right now for employees to maintain balance in their lives and as you suggest there are other ways to be a valuable team player:

1. Play nice: To move the company forward requires all departments working together like a well-oiled machine.
2. Think about the big picture: It's your company too, think like you are the owner and let that drive your decisions.
3. Go beyond: We're not talking about vacuuming up coffee grounds. When asked to provide information, take the time to understand the request and more importantly the "why" behind it. The why allows you to give the requestor what they really need, which might be something completely different.

Bruce

You mentioned being an "old-schooler" and a "piranha" in interviews. I am certainly an older old-schooler than you, and perhaps more like a shark, and so I somewhat disagree with your comment that "it's not about a set of arbitrary guidelines of professionalism." I believe it is. I realize society in general is becoming more relaxed and casual, but I think that an interview is so crucial that it deserves extra effort (after all, landing one is a major feat nowadays). If a person won't make any extra effort to impress their prospective employer, what does that say about how well they will perform on the job? The interview is not everything (there is an interesting article in a recent issue of Fast Company about that), but presenting oneself as well-groomed, articulate, intelligent, and interested is a critical component of a successful job search.

Now, how about an interview experience? I was interviewing for an internal position many years ago at a former employer, and during the interview with the HR guy, he had his feet up on the desk the entire time, arms behind his head. "What a pompous idiot," I thought. It goes both ways.

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