

THREE "MUST" STRATEGIES TO PREPARE FOR ANY INTERVIEW: "How to Get Psyched"

Clients regularly contact me, most of the time days in advance, though sometimes several hours or even minutes before an interview, for some last minute advice. Many of us probably recognize that the career management process, particularly this "personal marketing" piece—after all, the ability to sell and market ourselves is key to effective interviewing—is a delicate balance of psychology, attitude, and of course, skills and abilities. With this in mind, I'm careful not to push the wrong buttons right before a client's interview, in a last minute coaching session. So, rather than dwell on a quick review of questions that they should have prepared to both respond to and ask, or dwell on the research, networking and homework that they should do, I focus on three key thoughts or strategies to prepare them for the "psychology" of this interview/communications process. These simple strategies "to get psyched" are crucial to shifting our thinking and building confidence prior to any interview. I encourage you to review them as you prepare for every interview situation.

1. The interview is a "two-way" discussion between "professionals."

Regardless of our education and experience levels or our current position as a manager, entry-level manufacturing, engineering, administrative professional or student intern, we all bring certain talents and skills, experiences, and attitudes to our work and an interview, which make us different and "unique." It's understanding our "uniqueness" through self-evaluation, and being able to sell it (using our own personality and communications skills) that gives us an edge in the career and interview process.

We have to recognize that in our own right, we are all "professionals" (regardless of our position levels/status, and the levels/status of the interviewers), and that the interview is nothing more than an opportunity for both sides to better understand each other. Remember, we bring a great deal to the interview table; we wouldn't be called for the interview if we didn't meet the position requirements in the eyes of the interview team. The interviewer looks at this "two-way" discussion as an opportunity to assess the candidate's skills, behaviors, experiences, attitude and confidence. Are they serious, just shopping around or "tire kicking," as I call it? Can they help me and my group to improve quality, customer service, save money or generate revenues? Do I like them?

As the interviewee, we're likewise thinking: Is this the right boss or team and work environment for me? Is it a good match for my career direction, interests, skills and "unique" strengths? Can I contribute? Even if you get the offer, you don't have to take it if it is not the right fit or move. Both sides want a "win-win" opportunity. So you see, the interview is a "two-way discussion between professionals." Let's view it that way.

Early in my career, I remember preparing for interviews always "on the defensive," thinking about how the interviewers were going to trick me or trip me up. The interviewer or team had all the answers; they were the experts or professionals. They had the control over my destiny. Many times I discounted my own hard work and accomplishments, both while preparing for and during the interview. I wasn't able to look at the interview as a two-way discussion between professionals, thereby giving away much of my stake or positioning and "personal power" in this communication process. Why should someone less qualified and interested than you and I get the job offer we want and deserve because they understand this principle?

2. The Interviewer is my Customer.

And so rather than to approach the interview as a potential "ambush" or negative, defensive experience, let's prepare by viewing the interviewer as our customer, which I believe they are. Look at the interview as an important meeting with your customer. You and I do it every day: meet, effectively communicate and negotiate with internal and external stakeholders. We want to go into this meeting with the idea of ensuring that we better

understand the interviewer’s needs, challenges, problem areas and concerns, both through our own research and by asking positive, yet probing questions in the interview. In my own mind, in the heat of the interview, I’m constantly thinking, “*How can I serve? How can I support you and your team? What are your needs, challenges and concerns?*” as I’m responding to, for example, behavioral questions with “Here is a specific example of how I can contribute to your group and support your needs.” We need to be confident in our work background and uniqueness and be able to identify ways in which we can support and meet the interviewer’s needs and help solve their problems.

Therefore, our focus is not so much on the defense—“*What are they going to ask me? How should I respond?*” (although, we’re going to prepare and study the tough interview questions)—but using “active listening,” asking the right questions to better understand our customer needs, and then responding with specific accomplishments, behaviors and skills that we possess to support their position requirements. After all, that’s really what the interviewer is hoping for. Of course, we won’t forget that all the while, as the interviewee, we’re also evaluating our customer and this work opportunity, looking for a “win-win.”

3. I know more about myself than any interviewer.

It’s clear to me that no one understands or knows what we are good at, our skills, behaviors, contributions, interests and aptitudes, like we know ourselves, regardless of whether we’ve been through any kind of formal self-assessment or evaluation process. If we sat down for an hour or two and I asked you every tough interview question that I can muster up, and gave you all the time to think it through and respond—no pressure—there is no doubt in my mind that you would have an answer for nearly every question. You know your skills and contributions better than anyone, including any interviewer; you’re the only one who has been there and done it. So, we have those answers, though sometimes it’s in the heat of the interview – because of our lack of preparation and study of some of the tough questions, or our lack of confidence (we all go through those cycles)—that we’re unable or uncomfortable to talk about ourselves and “blow our own horn” in our own way, using our personality. Still, no one knows us like we know ourselves.

As we put all of this together and as you prepare for any interview, keep in mind the importance of this delicate balance of attitude and psychology. How we view the psychology of the interview process affects our confidence, how we sell ourselves, our skills and abilities, and how our customers or interviewers receive us. Understanding that the interview is a two-way discussion between two professionals, that the interviewer is really one of our customers, and that we know ourselves, our skills and strengths far better than any interviewer, are three “must” keys to “getting psyched” to win any interview. Using these strategies, along with thorough research, preparation and practice, we come to the interview knowing that at the very least we are on a level playing field with our interviewers, if not at a distinct advantage, and that’s where we want to be.

To learn more about successful interview and personal career marketing and communications strategies, check out our **Personal Career Leadership**[™] series of workshops, including “Create a Laser-Focused Resume,” “Developing Awesome Interview Skills,” “The Power of Networking: Building Relationships and Connecting With People,” and “Mastering Change—‘Who Moved My Cheese?’.”

To find out more about these and other workshops, click on Training Programs.

