

The Interviewer - A Source Of Apprehension

One of the main factors causing apprehension in the job selection process is our fear of the interviewer's relative power in comparison to ours in an interview situation. Many job applicants see in the interviewer a powerful figure that has the ability to influence our future. The knowledge that the interviewer influences our chances of obtaining a sought after position, transforms him/her into a powerful and at times threatening figure. In addition, if the interviewer is also a trained psychologist our feelings of stress and concern increase even more. As a psychologist, we assume that the interviewer has the ability to spot our weaknesses and 'read our mind and soul' like an x-ray machine. This assumption often causes stress and creates an emotional reaction that jeopardizes our ability to handle the situation in a practical manner.

Certain job seekers in an interview situation tend to be introverted, defensive, avoid eye contact, speak softly and quite often are overly modest as if trying to prevent the interviewer from 'revealing' their weaknesses. Deep down they hope that the interviewer will appreciate their modesty, subtlety, gentleness and humane side and view these traits positively. This model of behavior is commonly practiced by job applicants who assume the interviewer will avoid recommending applicants that are too dominant (or perhaps even have the potential of threatening their own status were they to be colleagues).

On the other side of the spectrum there are job applicants that adopt an opposing stance. To overcome their stress, anticipation and the knowledge that the interviewer can influence their future career, they are often disrespectful and try to undermine the interviewer.

They often think along the lines of:

"Who do they think they are anyway?"

"How can they possibly know how suitable I am for this position?"

Some job applicants even go as far as adopting an aggressive approach. They tend to repeat the interviewers' questions, be sarcastic and are often defiant as if the interviewer's questions are illegitimate. They are skeptical of the interviewer's ability to assess their suitability for the position. Such job applicants presume that if they fail to obtain the required position it is due to the interviewer's inability to assess their skills rather than genuine lack of skills on their part. They often do not comprehend that their emotional reactions are a direct result of the power they attribute to the interviewer over themselves and their future.

The patterns of behavior on both sides of this spectrum, introvert vs. dominant and controlling, are typical of job applicants who feel lack of confidence and insecurity in an interview situation.

For example, a sales & marketing executive currently working at a big firm, 43 years old, with an MBA is applying for a new post and is invited for an interview at a recruitment agency acting on behalf of the recruiting organization. Upon arrival he is informed that he will be interviewed by a 24 year old woman. His gut reaction (which he kept to himself!) was "what does she know?! I find it odd that such a young woman can interview such an experienced person like my self"

This initial reaction resulted in critical, sarcastic and disrespectful behavior demonstrated on his part. The interviewer felt his hostile attitude and concluded that the job applicant is aggressive. She may also conclude that his reaction is a direct result of his inability at dealing with her authority as an interviewer. In conclusion, his behavior reduces his chances of succeeding at the interview. His demeaning attitude is interpreted as inadequate and as a reflection of his lack of self-confidence.

Remember! - an interview is an opportunity for you to exhibit your qualifications and skills rather than an opportunity to engage in friendly conversation and gain sympathy. Just as there is no reason for you to be offended or defensive when meeting a hostile interviewer, you must not celebrate and 'let your guard down' when meeting a friendly and informal interviewer. In both cases you must be concise, well mannered and answer adequately to the questions asked – nothing more or less.

One of the main purposes of preparing for an interview is to learn how to deal with the power the interviewer exerts – to let yourself, the interviewee, feel confident and secure when facing the interviewer, regardless of who that interview may be and the type of behavior they demonstrate.

About the Author

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