

Job interviews are about marketing and selling

The beginnings of this Post lie in some discussions that I had with several colleagues a while ago on the subject of our experiences at job interviews. A common thread in all of these was some rather poor behaviour on the part of an interviewer. I will recount some of these stories later in the Post.

First, let's go inside the job interview process, to see what is actually going on. Here we have two parties, each considering whether the applicant is a good 'fit' for the job:

- the 'employer side' is assessing the applicant against the requirements of the job
- the applicant (You or me) is assessing whether we want to take the job and work for the employer

Essentially, the job interview process is a marketing and selling event. The employer has marketed a job opportunity in the hope of attracting suitable applicants. As an applicant, we need to market our ability to deliver such services. During this marketing stage, both parties will have an idea about the type of compensation (salary, benefits, etc.) that will be involved.

The selling stage is about closing the deal, when the employer selects an applicant (hopefully us), and makes an offer of compensation in exchange for our services. From there, we have the option to accept, negotiate, or decline the employer's offer. Well - that might be the theory, but what is the reality?

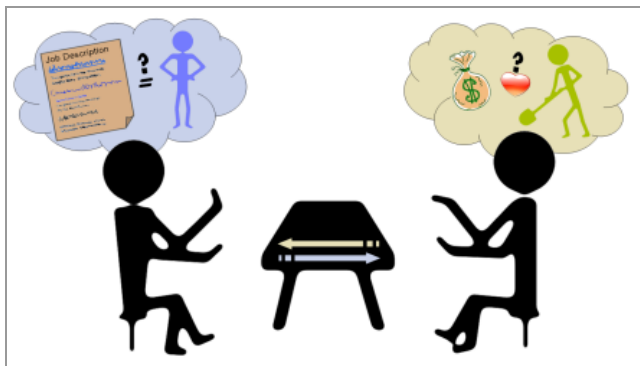
In my experience, from being on both sides of the interview process, the 'employer side' seldom (if ever) considers that this might be a two-way transaction, or that they could be under the same sort of scrutiny as they are applying to the applicant. Indeed, except for specialised roles, it is usually taken as a given that any offer made to an applicant

will be accepted. That said, negotiation is not impossible.

The job interview process

Most employers use an interview process which begins with screening interviews for applicants, and concludes with a final interview for the preferred candidates. In between, we may have one or more interviews before reaching the final interview. Four common models for job interviews are:

- Behavioural (based on our previous experience)
- Situational (based on hypothetical examples)
- Structured
- Unstructured



Your job interview is a two-way street: You are being assessed against the requirements of the job, and you are assessing whether the job is a good fit for you

The main problem with preparing for any job interview is that most interviews are actually quite subjective. It is my experience that job interviews are often conducted by line managers, sometimes with an HR person present. The point here is that line managers are not necessarily highly skilled at conducting job interviews (Note: there is a difference between experience and skill).

Every job interview that we attend is likely to be unique (apart from those conducted by recruitment

agencies). There are few universal 'rules', and each employer (or each interviewer) will apply their own 'style' – even when they are following a company process and may be using scripted questions.

Essentially, this means that it is like any other human-to-human transaction – personality plays a big part (See: [People Styles – what are they and how do they work?](#)). What is important in the interview is to quickly make a connection with the interviewer/s – in this regard, some knowledge of how personal learning styles work can be a benefit (*Yes – I did mean 'learning styles'*; See: [How to use learning styles to make a connection](#)). A familiarity with the basics of body language will also be helpful (See: [Body Language – non-verbal communication](#)).

'Must do' preparations

There is a massive amount of material available on the World Wide Web about how to prepare for a job interview. As with anything on the Web, the quality of some offerings is much better than others (See: [Information Literacy – who needs it?](#)). I have noted some useful resources in the **Worth a look** section below.

At a job interview, we can expect to be questioned by the interviewer (or interview panel) about a number of things. While the nature of any questions will depend on the particular interview model that is being used, there are some common 'favourites' that are often used. We should anticipate these, and prepare (and rehearse) our responses – see **Worth a look** below.

We do need to be very familiar with the contents of our CV/Résumé, especially where our previous experience and our skills have relevance to the job we are seeking. We should also make ourselves familiar with the contents of the job advertisement, and the position description (if we have it). A matrix of

'matches' and 'gaps' of our skills and experience can be useful as a memory aid.

Our preparation must also include conducting research into the employer – the more the better. This should cover things like: their products and services; ranking in the industry; financial situation; main locations; number of employees; key personalities (CEO, Board Chair). It can also be useful to have some knowledge of the employer's culture and also it's major competitors.

Questions we should ask

At some stage during the interview we should expect to be invited to ask questions. When this opportunity comes, if we have not prepared well, it can easily turn into a virtual 'minefield'. The types of questions that we ask are likely to have a telling effect on how we are seen by the interviewer/s.

The main purpose for our questions should be to seek, clarify and confirm information which will help us assess whether we really do want the job (assuming that it is eventually offered). But our questions will also indicate our level of interest in the job/employer, e.g. it will not look good if we ask simplistic questions that could be answered by visiting the employer's website – see **Worth a look** below.

Stories from my colleagues (aka 'red flag' moments)

"I was asked during a job interview about the age of my children, and also my intentions about having more children. The result was a complaint to the Fair Work Commission!"

"During my first interview, I was advised of the salary band for the position. Some weeks later, I was offered the position, at the lowest salary level. When I pointed out my relevant experience and current salary, and I asked for a review, I was told that it was policy to start people at the lowest salary level, and then to review this after 3 months. I

refused the offer, and the employer had to re-advertise the position."

"The job advertisement noted that a certain type of experience would be 'highly regarded'. During the initial interview, as I did not have the particular experience, I queried this and was told that it was actually 'not necessary'. At the next interview, the interviewer (an executive manager) announced that this experience was mandatory! We all wasted a lot of time up until that moment!"

"My interviewer turned up 10-minutes late for a 30-minute interview. I was then asked to 'talk' the interviewer through my 1-page résumé – which had obviously not been read. Next, it was indicated that the interview would finish at the original time, rather than allow me a full 30 minutes. Clearly I was nothing more than a number!"

Job Interview Checklist

1. confirm interview time, place
2. prepare for likely questions
3. familiarise resume, job details
4. matrix of skills and experience - 'matches' and 'gaps'
5. research employer
6. questions (for me) to ask
7. decide what to wear
8. practice smiling (naturally)!

Each item on the job interview checklist is a "must do"

Dealing with red flags

Along with my colleagues' stories, in my time I have certainly experienced occasions when an interviewer or panel has given off some 'red flags'. How we react to red flags, either during or after an interview, may depend on how much we might need a particular job, e.g. to 'keep the wolf from the door' (so to speak).

My take on most 'red flag' moments is that they are an indicator of what is to come, should we accept the job offer. The first of my colleague's stories shows

either gross insensitivity, or discrimination; the second shows stupidity (*imho*); the third is stupidity again, perhaps with some arrogance thrown in; and the final one is either ignorance or arrogance, or both. *Would You want to work for a boss like any of these?*

For most employers (or their staff who are conducting interviews), the immediate consequences of causing a 'red flag' are usually relatively minor. Here is why (to borrow a quote from a Forbes post): ["Unemployment is still relatively high, and many companies are deluged with candidates"](#) (Source: Lynn Taylor, a US workplace expert and author). That said, there can be damage to the employer's 'brand'.

Although the above statement is about the US situation, recent data from the [International Labour Organisation \(ILO\)](#) shows that the global job market is struggling with weak job growth and rising unemployment. For many people around the globe, this is why it is important to seize ANY job opportunity.

The 'bottom line'

If we have prepared well for the job interview, connected well with the interviewer/s, given sound, reasoned answers to their questions, and asked well-thought out, intelligent questions, then we should have made a strong, positive impression. After receiving the job offer, we can then consider whether or not this job is for us, and also whether we might wish to negotiate over the compensation offered.

Worth a look

Video: [A Two-Way Street - Interview Skills In Action](#) by The School Co. (uploaded Jul 27, 2010 - 4min:23sec)

Coming next: Body Language and Appearance - your secret messages

<http://freezapnuggets.com/wordpress/?p=1022>