



ITS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

Dog cath-er

By Stuart White
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I was sitting in an interview this week where at the end the candidate was asked if he wanted to ask any questions. The answer, and this is practically verbatim, was "Although I have not appeared to answer the questions the way you may have liked, I would like to assure you that if I was given this job I will do it very well, to the best of my ability and I will make sure I deliver on your objectives."

I swear I felt like giving him the job there and then. He hadn't perhaps answered all the questions conventionally and I think he sensed this – but there was an honesty about his comment; a frankness and realness about his intention that left me thinking 'I could work with this.' You see, intention is one of the greatest predictors of work success – far more than competence - and this is because a person may well be competent, but if they are too lazy or unwilling to apply themselves, regardless of managerial talent they will have no impact whatsoever. Meredith Belbin the father of Team Roles at work alluded to this many times when he spoke about recruiting high performing teams. Belbin maintained that suitability (i.e the person's level of 'fit' with the job or how suited they were to it) should weigh far more heavily in the selection process even beyond technical competence, educational qualifications and managerial capability.

Unfortunately the wunderkind interviewee who had pledged allegiance to the workplace cause managed to fall off the pedestal I had placed him on a minute later when he proceeded to ask about the benefits that would be offered in the role. How many times have you heard the message – don't bring up salary and benefits in the job interview – leave that for the offer or negotiation stage. It's amazing how people continue to make such obvious faux pas during interviews.

I swear some people walk in not having done any research in terms of the do's and don'ts so if you haven't read Interviews for Dummies here are some of the blunders I have witnessed fairly recently - embarrassingly at high level selection interviews - and some tips for your next experience:

- Don't take a call. I had one senior manager whose phone actually rang and instead of blushing and switching it off, asked the panel to hold on while he "got this". That was the only thing he got cos it certainly wasn't the job offer
- Never say 'I probably shouldn't say this...' then say it. That's bad judgement. We all know what constitutes a company secret and the need to keep insider knowledge exactly that - 'inside' the organisation. An interview panel is more likely to respect your failure to divulge confidential information than appreciate taking them into your confidence. If you show that you are less than careful with confidential information with your current employer, how can your new employer expect you to keep their secrets?
- Don't be long winded. This for me is the kiss of death for any interviewee. When a candidate goes on and on it just switches the panel off. If you do have a tendency to be verbose for goodness sake make sure that you watch the engagement level of your audience. When your panel starts looking out the window, texting under the table or doodling on their exam pad – you know you have lost them so stop. If you are unsure if you've given enough information simply ask the panel "Have I said enough or would you like me to elaborate more?" In this instance, less is way better!
- It's annoying when candidates laugh each time a difficult question is asked. Candidates will snigger and then grin implying they knew the question was coming. Well duh, most questions ARE pretty predictable. But when you laugh and have that silly smirk on your face it says 'knew it' and makes out that you are smarter than the panel which comes across pretty patronising and as talking down to people.
- Listen to the questions. Don't listen to just the words but listen for what is being asked. Sense, intuit and feel what the panel is getting at. If need be, clarify your understanding of the question if you aren't sure. There is nothing more disheartening than listening to an answer that has nothing to do with the question asked because they can't score it and it's meaningless. Sometimes candidates are so busy preparing to speak that they stop listening. And don't assume that the interviewer is necessarily a good communicator – so it makes sense to sometimes clarify your understanding before replying.
- It's not unusual for candidates to have prepared answers to questions and then when they aren't asked them – try to throw them in. Don't do that. If the panel had wanted that answer they would have asked an appropriate question.

But none of these even compare to my all time favorite, when one candidate arrived with her lap dog (yes ,not lap top) as it was too hot to keep her Maltese poodle in the car and "would I mind...She's no bother. " The dog proceeded to jump on my lap and sat there for the duration of the interview. The story gets even weirder – she got the job. And no, she wasn't Reece Witherspoon, nor was she legally blonde. Moral – there are exceptions to every rule but watch out for Catch 22 which, as the book says, 'is the best catch of all'.

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