

CHAPTER 2

THE PURPOSE OF THE JOB INTERVIEW

Those intimidated by job interviews tend to feel as though they are being examined under a microscope. I can understand that perspective. You're sitting across from a manager who has studied your resume and is observing how you answer every single question. Maybe that person is wondering why you never did a summer internship. Maybe he is wondering why it took you six years to graduate from college. Maybe that person is looking at your beat-up shoes, wondering what you were thinking when you put them on this morning.

The problem with that perspective is that you, the job applicant, are at the mercy of the employers. I'm here to tell you that you have complete control over what the microscope reveals. The person asking you questions wants to see beyond the surface. When the interviewer asks a question, he is hoping for the answer to reveal deeper qualities and characteristics about you. This is the real purpose of the interview.

Instead of a microscope, visualize a camera. You can't change the object being photographed, but you have the ability to monitor the lighting, adjust the lens, zoom in or out, or focus on an area that produces the best image. You are responsible for making the

interviewer understand you. There are times when the lens will be pointed at an unattractive image. Still, the camera is in your hands and regardless of the types of questions coming at you, you are in control.

Your interviewing goal is to quickly and precisely convey the information an employer needs to know. The interview is not just an exchange of data. If employers simply wanted information about your skills and qualifications, they would save time and money by e-mailing you the questions and asking you to respond in writing. Or the decision might be based solely on how well you do on a test. Employers invite you for an interview because they want to observe you and engage in a conversation with you.

Have you ever watched *Charlie Brown*? I'm sure you're familiar with the scenes of him in class. The teacher might be saying something valuable, but her statements don't register in Charlie's mind. Charlie can only hear, "Womp, womp, womp." Unfortunately, this same scenario plays out in unfocused interviews. When you are sitting across from the interviewer, repeating the information in your resume by listing your education, past jobs, and mentioning that you are a hard worker, your interviewer is hearing, "Womp, womp, womp."

Your assets should be obvious when you tell your story during a job interview. The interviewer should not—and will not—pry it out of you!

Principle No. 3: Clarity is key. Make them understand. Don't make them guess.

You can approach an interview in two ways: reactive or proactive. Reactive is nothing more than responding to the specific question and simply providing an answer. Proactive is engaging in the

conversation. When asked a question, provide the answer, but also give examples that will draw the interviewer's focus without being asked to elaborate. In that interview room, you are your own agent, publicist, advertising, and marketing department. Work hard for yourself. Take advantage of every opportunity to show what an amazing addition you would make to the company.

To illustrate my point, I offer the hypothetical example of Rhonda Taylor. Notice that by limiting her response to a few basic facts, she misses the opportunity to illustrate her uncanny maturity and business savvy.

Employer: *So Miss Taylor, I see that you attended Smythe University.*

Interviewee: *Yes, I did. My mom and dad thought it would be a good place for me to attend because it was so close to home. It allowed me to live off-campus even in my freshman year. Oh and tuition was cheaper.*

So what did the employer hear? Let's journey into the mind of the employer: *Nice enough person, but . . .*

- *Mom and Dad chose where she went to college. They probably coddled her all her life.*
- *She needed to be close to home. She is not mature and can't venture far from Mommy and Daddy.*
- *She lived off-campus starting from freshman year. She must not have wanted to socialize with her peers.*
- *Saving money on tuition was more important than finding a high-quality educational institution. She puts no real value on education.*

The employer has heard all that he wants to hear, interpreted the information, and the rest is “Womp, womp, womp.” He is not impressed with Rhonda’s story, and from this point forward, nothing she adds to the conversation is going to change his mind. The interview ends with the employer saying that he will get back to her in a couple of weeks with a final decision.

News flash! The decision not to hire her has already been made. Rhonda leaves the interview frustrated, realizing that she didn’t connect with the employer.

It’s a sad story, but it didn’t need to be. Now let’s hear Rhonda’s real story:

After obtaining an SAT score of 1956 and being recognized for the groups she chaired including student body president, she received scholarship offers from several big, high-ranking universities. Her parents preferred that she attend one of those schools, but respected her decision to opt for a small liberal arts college. Rhonda’s father had been disabled in a car accident during her senior year of high school, preventing him from managing the family car wash business. By selecting a university close to home, Rhonda was able to work weekends and contribute to the family income. She purchased a fourplex during her freshman year, which she lived in and managed during college. Upon graduation, she put the fourplex up for sale and planned to use the profit to pay off her school loans.

Wow! What a drastically different version from what the employer heard.

Stating facts about yourself never captures anyone’s attention. Facts don’t convey what’s on the inside, and they certainly don’t make you stand out from your competition. I hope that you truly understand the wise axiom, “Facts tell, but stories sell.”

All too often, both the interviewer and the job applicant end up leaving the interview disappointed. Candidates answer the questions, but their real stories never see the light of day. In Rhonda's case, the employer was seeking a self-motivated, responsible individual whom he could train and mentor. He wasn't looking for particular skills. Instead, he was focused on finding certain character traits such as integrity, persistence, and courage. The employer knew that anyone with these traits could be trained and eventually develop into top performers at the company. Rhonda had all of those attributes, but she had no idea how to tell her story.

Now, imagine an alternative scenario in which Rhonda takes control of the interview. Here's what happened: She rehearsed her story in advance and in the process, became aware of how to tweak her story by rephrasing a few areas. For example, instead of saying she lived close to home, she said she lived close to her disabled father. Instead of saying she decided to live off-campus, she said she decided to manage a rental property. So in the revised happy ending, what did the employer hear? Let's journey into the mind of the employer again.

What she told me: *She had scholarships to attend top tier universities, but gave up those opportunities to help her family.*

What that means for the company: *She puts the needs of others before her own and is willing to sacrifice. She'll make a great team player.*

What she told me: *She worked nights and weekends while being a full-time student.*

What that means for the company: *She has a strong work ethic and understands the value of commitment.*

What she told me: *She figured out a way to live closer to home while building equity that would help her pay off student loans in the future.*

What that means for the company: *Smart girl. Coming out of high school, she was already thinking about how to get out of debt and make her living situation work for her. That's more than most teenagers would ever consider! She has foresight. She's conscientious, entrepreneurial, and has already learned the art of managing people and assets. She's not afraid of taking risks.*

I hope these theoretical examples drive home my point about the purpose of the job interview. Both you and the employer will benefit from having your story come out.