

Interview Tips for Communications Job Searchers

In the last few years, I've conducted many searches and dozens of interviews. As a result I've decided to share some tips that I've learned along the way. Here are some of the winning interview strategies (and those that are guaranteed losers too):

1. First impressions really DO matter! So:
 - Interact professionally and appropriately with the receptionist or whoever initially greets you. We may ask her/his thoughts.
 - Stand up and move confidently when approached to go to the interview.
 - Shake hands firmly and professionally with all the panelists.
 - Smile for goodness sake! Look like you're happy to be there.
 - Ask where the panel would like you to sit when you enter the interview room.
 - Initiate the conversation with a positive comment on being invited to the interview.
2. Be prepared:
 - Most organizations use some form of behavioral descriptive interviews. They want you to tell them what you have *done*, not what you would do. And, often that organized in the form of: *What was the situation you wanted to address? What action did you take? What was the result?*
 - Think about a number of key projects that you have completed and organize your thoughts and examples in the format above. Try to bring examples from various workplaces if you've moved around a bit. If you can provide examples particularly relevant to the industry you are being interviewed for, that's a bonus.
 - Think about examples of behaviors as well. Leadership, conflict management, initiative, time management, teamwork are all good bets for interview questions.
 - Not everyone would agree, but I'm a big fan of bringing notes to the interview so you can use specific numbers in your results examples or provide other details as required.
 - Some great candidates have handed out a short but excellent communications strategy document as a leave-behind and example.
 - Prepare your own questions to ask the interviewer.
3. Interactions in the interview:
 - Answer the questions! (Seems obvious but you'd be surprised at the number of people who don't!)
 - Be succinct. Get to the point. And if you're not sure if it is thorough enough, just ask.
 - Give credit to others as appropriate but focus on what you personally have contributed to the project.
 - Direct your answer to the person who asked the question. It's okay to make eye contact with others to include them, but rude to answer the question to someone other than the person who asked. Try to balance out your attention to all interview panelists through the course of the interview.

- Warmth and humor are totally appropriate in an interview. Don't worry about appearing so "buttoned down" and professional that you are not true to yourself. But, if that is who you are, so be it.
 - Be honest. If you don't have an appropriate example, say so. But, then bridge to a related skill or example to show that you understand. In these situations, I think it is appropriate to say "I haven't done that type of thing, but I did study it and have read lots so I know that this is what I *would* do." It's not behavioral descriptive but it tells the panel you know what you're talking about.
 - Relax! It isn't the inquisition. We really want to see who you are and if you are relaxed and comfortable it will shine through.
 - Ask your questions at the end of the interview. Keep it to a relatively short list and ask them with a positive framing. Make sure they show that you understand the job and the organization.
 - Interview killers include: depressing/defeatist attitudes, complete lack of energy, negative comments about others or your recent employers, whining, calling the interviews by wrong names, showing that you don't know anything about the organization that is interviewing you, inflated egos, excessive nervousness, rudeness of any sort, inappropriately challenging questions about the company or the interviewer...and many more!
4. Follow up:
- A quick thank you email or card is nice, particularly if you identify something specific that you appreciated in the interview.
 - If you haven't heard anything by the time the interviewer suggested you should, it is okay to call and find out the status. Things often go sideways and timelines are delayed.
 - Do ask for feedback if you don't get the job. Not everyone will provide it but most appreciate being asked. If I'm on the interview panel I will always provide you with detailed feedback to help you prepare for your next interview.
 - If the interview was very positive but you didn't get the job, ask the interviewer if you may keep in touch. You never know what might come up next...and when she or he might get asked if they know anyone suitable for another great opportunity.

I hope this is helpful to communications (and other) job searchers.