

Interviewing for success: Sell yourself and not just your resume

By Kevin Steele
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Much of the advice I see today concerning interviewing focuses on the "mechanics" of an effective interview. Experts offer important tips such as appropriate dress, thoroughly researching the firm before the interview, carefully matching your related skills and experience with the job requirements, being prepared and practicing answers to typical questions.

While all of these are important components of a successful interview, they tend to focus primarily on presenting only the skills and experience reflected on your resume.

Another critical factor of a winning meeting is centered on your personality and attitude.

In most cases, it is not the most qualified candidate that gets the job. It is the candidate who, with the right skills, builds the best rapport with the interviewer.

During interviews, you are a sales person - and the product you are selling is you. The success of any top sales generator is a delicate balance between product knowledge, asking the right questions, honesty and likeability.

During the interview, there are two distinct evaluation processes taking place.

One is the obvious - do you have the necessary education, skills and experience to effectively do the job and do you know your audience and market and how to address their needs?

The other revolves around you as a person. Do you bring compatible personality traits to the job that will help to ensure you will thrive in the new position as well as the culture of the company? Are you going to be an effective and positive influence on your new team?

Start your preparation process by looking at yourself from the interviewer's perspective. Put together a job description that ignores the technical requirements and instead only includes the personal attributes you would look for if you were the hiring manager. What kind of person would you like to see walk through the door?

Let's say the position is for an accountant. Traits like bright, analytical, approachable, dedicated and trustworthy immediately come to mind. Look at yourself honestly and look at your previous life (and not just work) experiences. Incorporate evidence of these traits into the interview.

Don't just focus on your skills and experiences with general ledgers, financial statements, taxes and payroll. You must also give the interviewer a picture of who you are, how you operate and what makes you unique. Draw from all your experiences to give real-life examples that give the interviewer a fuller picture of what you bring to the table as a total person.

For example, our accountant could speak to the fact she worked three concurrent jobs while attending night school to receive her degree. This not only demonstrates her dedication and work ethic, but also shows an ability to juggle many responsibilities and projects at the same time.

Once you have demonstrated your skills and personality traits, make sure you have established a connection with everyone you have met - especially the person for whom you will be working. Be energetic and don't be afraid to show your sense of humor (to some extent, of course!). Smiling and laughter are easy ways to put yourself and others in the interview at ease.

Also, search for areas of common ground to establish deeper connections. It could be taking note of the weather, or commenting about the ages of your children and theirs, or even remarking about last night's Red Sox game (there is always plenty of conversational material there!).

Every hiring manager wants to ensure the person he or she hires can do the job, but they are looking for more than a talking resume. Take the time to review the obvious personal traits that would make someone successful and make sure you are willing to sell the whole you.

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