

Stimulating Interview Rapport - - Quick Guide

Use an Other-Centred Approach to Create a Positive Impression

It is human nature that if an interviewer doesn't like either you or your approach, you will be 'fighting an uphill battle' to get the job. The easiest way to blow an interview is to be pushy, act desperate, use a muddled approach, or treat it as just an 'off-the-cuff' exercise. The hiring representative at an in-person interview expects much more, especially in today's highly competitive job market. It becomes your task as a job seeker to properly prepare yourself physically, emotionally and professionally so that your presentation will help you establish rapport early on. In short, this means arriving at the interview prepared, in the most self-confident frame of mind so that you can create an all-around favourable impression with the interviewer from the onset.

PATIENCE

Within the first two or three weeks of losing a job, most people have finalized their resume and begin contacting their social & professional networks and applying for jobs on-line. Some may become discouraged and question: "It's been a whole week since I sent my resume. Why don't they get back to me? This may be my best and only shot at this job. It's a perfect fit. Can't they see that?"

This is one of the more difficult aspects of the job search - "hurry up and wait".

SET THE STAGE

Then the first interview finally comes along. A range of emotions is raised ranging from joy to trepidation. Joy because 'Now I have a chance,' and the other because 'Now I have to complete an unusual and uncomfortable task'. So much of your effort is 'doing what you HAVE to - not necessarily what you WANT to do'. **Focusing on the needs of the interviewer** helps you overcome whatever negativity is experienced and increases your positive frame of mind. This mindset sets the stage for building a favourable opinion of you at an interview.

THE FIT

Success in an interview is dependent on many factors including experience at the function, professional qualifications, educational credentials, knowledge base, and ability to articulate responses. Another aspect, "**organizational fit**" between you and the job/the organization is explicitly important to an interviewer. The need for the interviewer to feel **positive 'chemistry'** is not so obvious. Yet these two factors are why it is also essential in an interview to make every effort to **cultivate authentic common understanding** and begin working toward establishing a relationship with the interviewer.

START BY BEING OTHER-CENTRED

At your first meeting, remember to offer your four-part polite and professional greeting: - - - genuine smile - - - direct eye contact - - - "Hello, I'm (full name); it's a pleasure to meet you" - - - and a firm handshake. (Avoid sweaty palms.)

Following the protocol of introductions and welcoming comments to make you feel comfortable, an interviewer will want to get your reaction to relevant 'qualifying' questions. Remember that your 'self' issues are not of particular concern to the interviewer. So, where you want to live, how much money you want to make or that you want a permanent, secure job with a great pension are topics best left until much further on in the process - after you have made that positive, selfless first impression - and have a job offer in hand. Your first order of business is therefore to be '**other-centred**' - more concerned about another's needs than your own. That means keeping the following questions top of mind as you interact:

- *How can I help the interviewer run a good interview?*
- *What kind of person does the interviewer want to hire? Am I that person?*
- *How can I serve the organization?*
- *Where can I make a contribution? and*
- *What 'monkeys' can I take off the boss's back?*

PREPARE FOR TOUGH QUESTIONS

Denial and avoidance of a potential problem question will not serve you well. Human resources personnel, recruiters and professional interviewers are trained to seek out sensitive issues or areas of concern - sometimes called "red flags". Prepare for each interview first by creating and reviewing responses to what you consider will be the most difficult or uncomfortable questions. What you think of as a "fatal flaw" is really just a challenge to be met. Design legitimate, positive, succinct and convincing responses that you feel would be well-received by the interviewer and help you progress to the next phase. **Present with confidence.** Some of the more common initial interview questions are:

1. *How do you fit the requirements for this job?*
2. *Which of your past jobs did you enjoy the most?*
3. *What qualities do you have that would make me choose you over other candidates?*
4. *What are your most important wants in a job?*
5. *What are your goals over the next five years?*
6. *Why did you leave your previous position?*
7. *How and where did you develop the skills required for this position?*
8. *What kinds of accomplishments have you had during the past few years?*
9. *How did you learn about this job opening?*
10. *What do you think you can learn from this job?*



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ESTABLISH RAPPORT

Understanding the company's corporate Vision and Mission statements offers the opportunity to incorporate your thoughts about them into your conversation and responses. One of the goals of your presentation and approach to answering questions is to impress the interviewer with your competence, maturity and knowledge. Use friendliness, politeness and well-focused responses to create the best impression possible and to establish rapport. **Be yourself** / be natural / be patient with yourself as you try to get to know the interviewer as a person.

Try engaging the interviewer with a common interest. Many candidates still add "Interests" and "Volunteer" sections to the resume hoping to suggest some **common ground**; others comment on paintings, photos or memorabilia in the interviewer's office to break the ice. It's important to be sincere as you try to establish a solid positive impression and build an understanding with the interviewer.

BE POSITIVE

It's normal to be a bit nervous before an interview. Try slow, deep breathing if you need to calm yourself. Most people experience a degree of anxiety before an interview - this is natural and expected. In fact, in a positive light, the feeling shows your high regard for the opportunity, heightens the need for composure, and can enhance a positive presentation. As well, verbalizing it briefly may reduce nervousness and may evoke empathy of the interviewer.

You can increase your **comfort level** by first establishing your own pleasant / friendly attitude for the interview, then genuinely feeling enthusiasm for the prospective position, and reviewing your successes. Show your interest in the job and in the company by maintaining this enthusiasm throughout the interview. Modulate your voice to convey interest and energy. Ask relevant questions at appropriate times. Also there are usually times for light-heartedness and fun during an interview - keep your sense of humour.

LISTEN - OBSERVE

Be attentive; actively listen. As the interview progresses, allow the interviewer to finish a statement or question before you begin your response. By listening intently to the interviewer, you can gain clear insight into their needs and the requirements of the job. Stay consistent and on topic. **Project your voice** with confidence and poise. Keep comfortable eye contact throughout the interview. You will want to favour an upbeat, confident, convincing tone. It is obvious that projecting a boring monotone, confused muttering, or bragging blustering can be off-putting and will not serve you well.

STYLE AND GESTURES

There is more to communication than words. Your reactions and expressions also contribute to the meaning of your statements. Monitor the interviewer's tone of voice and body language (conventions, cues and signals) to interpret when he/she has heard enough, when a new topic is introduced, or when more information is called for.

Consider how you are going to deal with a question for which the answer has been clearly mentioned in your resume. The expression on your face can speak volumes. This is part of non-verbal communication. Pay attention to your facial expressions and hand and body movements. **SMILE!** Lean forward to make a point, avoid fidgeting. **Use positive, natural gestures.** Maintain enthusiasm and show interest in the job and in the company. Be aware of the possibility of pauses in the conversation and decide how you choose to react when the interviewer pauses creating an awkward silence. Pauses are natural. You do not have to fill every void in the conversation.

STAY ON TOPIC

Because of the varied styles, abilities and experience of interviewers, some questions may not seem as clearly presented as you would like. You must, however, have some response to give for every question. Try to keep the interview on track. Ask for clarification when unsure of a question (but don't overdo it). Listen to each question intently. Ask politely that vague questions be repeated, or, occasionally reframe a question before answering.

Ensure that you promote your skills, abilities and experience at appropriate times. This is a chance to sell you. Be concise, clear, organized and positive when responding. Avoid answering with a simple "Yes" or "No". To add interest, use your power stories (descriptive situations with a beginning, middle, and an ending where you concisely and genuinely combine an attribute with a success).

Help maintain the flow of the interview but allow the interviewer to set the pace. You still need to follow their lead. For specialized functions where specific skills are required, a series of questions related to knowledge of technical aspects of the job will be asked. Have knowledgeable, reasonably authoritative responses prepared for these and think clearly before responding to tricky questions.

NEXT MEETING

In general, 'just the right' employee is hard to find. The interviewer knows this and is looking for the **trifecta** - an intelligent worker who can fulfill the duties of the job, a cooperative team player who will fit into the social and political environment, and a responsible person who is helpful to and supportive of the boss. Leave with a definite impression about whether or not you are suited to these aspects of the job.

Express appreciation for the time spent interviewing. Depart comfortably with a firm handshake and a thank-you. Mention an interest in meeting again to pursue the position. If appropriate, clarify the procedure for arranging a further meeting.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

After the interview, accurately record the interviewer's name and title along with a summary of relevant points that were discussed. This will be a benefit when you compose and send your 'Thank you' letter - yet another opportunity for you to **build rapport**, show how comfortably you will fit in, AND how you can meet their needs.

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