
OPINION

Smart Questions Are the Answer

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A small bead of sweat rolled down the candidate's forehead. As we waited in the lobby of the Akasaka hotel, this late-40s man shyly admitted the obvious. For more than 25 years he worked at the same company and had always been on the other side of the desk asking the questions. The tables had turned and he was afraid. Was this really the same confident director I had met a week previously in my office? A man who had impressed me with his depth and knowledge, charm and excellent questions? He explained that once a year his performance would be reviewed and evaluated, but he never had to really explain his experience, knowledge and accomplishments. This was going to be a first.

Title or position matters little when it comes to the interview. We can all suffer from a case of the tingles, jitters or nervous anticipation when the spotlight is shone on our careers. Interviewing skills, like most things, improve with practice. Unless we are new grad or a 'job hopper', we will not get they chance to practice. However, by mentally preparing and understanding the questions most probably asked, we can be in a position to impress.

A useful exercise is to imagine that you are the interviewer. What questions would you ask? What attributes would you be looking for and how would you judge the person in terms of dress and punctuality? All companies want to know a few of the basics.

1. What have you accomplished in your current position in the past five years?
2. Why are you interested in their company?
3. An explanation your function clearly and passionately

Information is power in an interview situation and the company's website is major source of information when preparing for an interview. Read about the company's history, about its goals and its people. Take note of the words used to describe the company's direction. The buzz words and phrases

are normally carefully crafted and approved from the highest levels before they go online. They should be noted and can be used in the interview. The company's latest press releases will keep up to date. Google news is also a useful tool and you may mention the company in the context of the industry.

By gaining as much information on the prospective company as possible you will be able to ask interesting and insightful questions. You will not be just offering just lip service. You will be genuine and sincere and will make that strong first impression. Remember, you only get one chance to make a first impression.

It may be useful to prepare your answers beforehand. Some people like to write the answers out in full while others mentally rehearse the desired response. It might be helpful to ask a friend to play the interviewer. By saying the answers out loud to another person, and not just inside your own mind, you will hear how you will sound. These exercises allow our brain to tap into more creative answers and hopefully we can avoid the dreaded thought of walking out after the and thinking of "Oh, darn I should have said ..."

If you are going to be interviewed by a westerner, it is important to remember that many westerners judge intelligence and interest by the questions that are asked. The golden rule of building rapport according to Michael Brooks (Instant Rapport) is that 'people like people who are like themselves'. By preparing questions and being knowledgeable about the prospective company we are demonstrating that we are 'one of them'.

Some points to remember when being interviewed

1. Look your best. First impressions count
2. Prepare mentally by listing your accomplishments and quantifiable results
3. Be passionate about your company and position
4. Research the new company
5. Prepare questions based on the latest news
6. Show you are able to be one of them