10 Guaranteed Steps to Nailing that Interview

Sure, you could read a whole book on the subject, but with the endless demands on you in school, time is too precious. Here are ten manageable steps that you can take to sharpen your interviewing skills.

Are you ready? Your competition has read about the job and the organization, too. Here's a trick that will separate you from them. Visit the company’s web site and read its brochure. Every time it refers to employees or the type of job candidates it seeks, highlight any adjectives used to describe these folks. When you are done, make a list of these words. Consider them carefully. Understand that the employer chose them deliberately to convey a message. These words give you insight into the core values that are important to the employer. How do you match them? How can you demonstrate this match in an interview?

What Makes You Rock?
Each of us is "special" in some way. What do you have? Figure out one trait that distinguishes you from others. This is what you want to spend a lot of interview time talking about. Of course, it will sound like a hollow claim if you can’t back it up with specifics. Whatever you think your main strength is, you have reasons for feeling that way. What are they? Prepare for this as you would if you were a trial lawyer. Prove your point. The more specific evidence you can cite, the more likely you are to successfully make your case.

Looks Can Kill
Dressing for success nowadays means looking like everyone else. Do better than that. Nothing gaudy, just professional. Pick out that one terrific tie or brooch that will make you feel good about the way you look and will put a little swagger in your step. Well-shined shoes also help.

Jump on the First Question
No matter how safe and harmless the first question sounds - "Tell me a little bit about yourself?" - make the most of it. Trot out your best stuff, your main strength and all the proof you've prepared. "I'd like to call attention to my...(whatever it is - skill, ability, experience, etc.). For example, I..." This is your strongest possible beginning and as research shows, the beginning is the most important part of the interview.

Think Before You Talk
Silence is not the enemy. You don't have to rush answers to questions you don't understand. Ask for clarification. You shouldn't start jabbering at the first available instant. Remember your preparation, collect your thoughts and organize them. Then begin to talk. Taking a few seconds to get your act together will give more weight to your words.

Be Your Own John Grisham
The cold, harsh truth of the matter is that most interviews are boring. Spice yours up by telling stories about your experience, stories that explain and magnify your sterling qualities. Not only will your interview become entertaining and memorable, it will also be more convincing.

Don't Just Sit There. Do Something.
Remember to follow four behaviors that will keep the interview lively. First, smile. You already knew that, didn't you? The second one may be less familiar to you: elevate your eyebrows. When you raise your eyebrows, your inflection follows suit becoming upbeat and cheery. If you are skeptical about this, try it. Once you do, you will pay a lot more attention to this most underestimated region of your face. Third, assume an attentive posture. You don't need military rigidity, but don't slouch or look like you're preparing for a nap. Finally, in moderation, use hand gestures a form of punctuation, embellishing and underscoring your words.
Translate Inappropriate Questions
It doesn't happen all the time but sometimes an employer, maybe unwittingly, asks a question that shouldn't have been raised. You know the kind, about gender or race or disability or another factor that doesn't belong in the hiring formula. If this happens, what are you going to do? A strategy for nearly any improper question is to reduce it to appropriate content and answer it. For example, if you are a woman asked about your willingness to travel with members of the opposite sex, you can translate this into a very legitimate question: "This job requires travel. Do you have any problems with that?" That's one you can answer.

Don't Be Afraid to Talk Bank
You know that you shouldn't initiate the salary discussion, but what do you do when the employer does? In 15 minutes you can prepare the perfect answer to any question about your salary expectations. Visit one or more of the many great web sites offering salary information and get a clear understanding of a $3,000 to $5,000 salary range that typically goes with the kind of position you are seeking. Then, when asked about salary, you can give the perfect reply. "I know that the typical range for this kind of position is between $32,000 and $35,000 and naturally I'd prefer to be at the high end." Make it clear that you are human and prefer high to low, but show that you have not drawn a line in the sand that might scare away the employer.

Finish Strong
You don't have to wait until the end of the interview to show some enthusiasm, but make sure it shines through at this point. It's the lasting impression that you want to leave. Employers are attracted to people who are attracted to them. They know - even if only intuitively - that those who are enthusiastic about a job are far more likely to succeed at it - and stick around - than those who are void of that special quality. How do you show enthusiasm? Say it out loud. Tell the employer that your are excited about this position and why. Don't forget to weave in one last, brief reference to your main strength.

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