

## **How to Prepare and Perform at an Interview**

Ronda Cambell March 17th, 2009

We often assume that everyone knows how to prepare and perform at an interview.

But all too often, this is where candidates are weak and need some direction. Many candidates are fresh out of college and don't know the protocol, while others have been in the same position with the same company for many years and are "rusty" in their interview techniques.

How thoroughly do you prepare your candidates? You may feel that it would be insulting to cover such basics as how to dress and what not to say during the interview. But I assure you, there are times that this can make or break your success.

### Just Say No to Hot-Pink Cowboy Boots

When I first started out, a recruiter in the firm that I worked with shared a story that has stuck with me through the years.

She had a candidate who was borderline genius. He had been at his company for several years in a position deep in the belly of the organization. He never interacted with the public or upper management. He stayed in his world of analytics that had a powerful impact on the company's bottom line but never really interacted with anyone outside of his small, internal network. He was well-spoken in the telephone interview and showed all the markings of a TROPHY candidate.

He accepted an offer to interview for a prestigious position for which he was probably over-qualified, in another state. When he stepped off the plane, he was greeted by the CEO's assistant who had rushed to the private airport to pick him up for his early morning interview. The assistant left out no detail in describing to the recruiter the candidate she had so highly recommended.

His hot-pink-and-yellow leather cowboy boots were only overshadowed by the white leather pants that he had tucked inside the boots. His shirt was a blousy yellow button-down with balloon sleeves, which he had unbuttoned down to his rather hairy navel area.

His hair, while a beautiful shade of silver and white, somewhat resembled the result of a Tina Turner wig gone bad. Needless to say, he didn't get the job.

We owe it to our clients and our candidates to include information on dress

code and other things that should be avoided or included in the interview process. I usually tell my candidates that I realize they probably already know most of the things I will cover, but I have the same process for every candidate just to be safe. I have never offended anyone, if anything they usually laugh and offer stories that they've heard of or witnessed where someone was obviously not briefed so thoroughly.

The following are things that seem basic or elementary, but it is wise to include them in your interview prep:

### Interview Preparation

- \* Research company's background, philosophies, and goals. Be able to incorporate some information on them into your answers as far as what you're looking for in your career path, etc.
- \* Know location (make practice-run prior) and be 10 minutes early if possible.
- \* Get enough rest the night before and be sure that you eat something prior to the interview so that your stomach isn't growling.
- \* Rehearse interview and have responses prepared but do NOT read them.
  
- \* Have all necessary stationeries ready in hand, pen, pencil, notebook, calculator, business cards.
- \* Have a list of questions for the interviewer prepared.

### Dress for Success

- \* Navy/black suit men/women; no flashy ties or blouses.
- \* Studies have shown that RED is a power color but not appropriate for interviewing as it tends to be aggressive and overpowering.
- \* Modest matching stockings/socks, matching shoes.
- \* Hair neatly groomed, up-do for women.
- \* ONE set of earrings for women, none for men.
- \* Nails manicured and clean - no bright nail polishes.

### During the Interview

- \* Greet all staff - be courteous and smile at the receptionist.
- \* Make sure that you don't look nervous in front of the receptionist.
- \* Always look busy and try not to talk to other candidates in order to be focused.
- \* REMEMBER the interview session consists of 2-way communication.
- \* Know what you want and what you can offer; always remember what kind of environment, culture, and atmosphere you want to be and know your strengths to offer to the employer.
- \* Don't accept any refreshment during the interview to avoid an

unnecessary spill.

- \* Firm handshake, direct eye contact (though not intimidating); project a positive attitude and smile.
- \* LISTEN.be attentive and show interest in what's being said.
- \* Be specific; it's not enough to say you like people or like to work with figures, show examples of how you have used these skills.
- \* Speak clearly and do not over-answer the question; keep answers under 1-2 minutes in length.
- \* End interview when you see signs that the interviewer is drawing to a close. Recognize those signals and depart in a professional manner.
- \* Shake hands, indicating that you look forward to hearing from him/her soon.
- \* DO NOT say anything negative about current OR previous employer.
- \* Make sure that your grammar is professional; do not use slang.
- \* DO NOT discuss things like benefits or pay range, but answer honestly if these questions are prompted of you. If asked compensation expectations, indicate you are looking for a fair offer.
- \* Do not hand in a sloppy or incomplete application.
- \* Do not smoke or chew gum.
- \* Do not look sloppy, sleepy, or sexy.

#### After the Interview

- \* Be sure to THANK the interviewer.
- \* Always anticipate the next interview session.
- \* CALL RECRUITER IMMEDIATELY to give feedback!
- \* Send THANK YOU letter or card to the interviewer.
- \* Smile and thank the staff involved in the interview process (secretaries, personal assistant, HR officers, receptionists, etc.).
- \* Telephone follow-up three days after the interview (if you have heard nothing).but ALWAYS call recruiter BEFORE and AFTER this process to be sure that it is the wisest thing to do.
- \* Learn the secretary or interviewer's names to show that you've done your homework and respect them.

Ronda P. Campbell is the president of The Campbell Group. She is a member of the National Association of Personnel Consultants; Society for Human Resource Management; and National Association=2 0for Female Executives. Her email is [ronda@thecampbellgroup.net](mailto:ronda@thecampbellgroup.net).