

A job interview is like a joke

What do you have to do to ensure that a joke - assuming it's a good one - is guaranteed to fail to make an impact? You could tell it badly but explain the punchline to make sure everyone gets it. Not funny? But many applicants do the same thing in job interviews - no kidding!

Peter Näf

My client, with whom I did job interview training, had a complex CV. It alternated phases in academia, including a doctoral thesis, with international research and work stays. He had written scientific papers on topics that he would have to deal with in the job in question. He also had experience in related fields, which was not obvious at first glance. So, communicating his background was quite a challenge.

We simulated the interview, and I asked him in the role of the recruiter to tell me about his career to date.

If you're in a hurry, slow down

As if shot out of a cannon, he told me about his career at what felt like twice the speed of speech. He was obviously trying to give me as much information as possible in 3-5 minutes. He explained to me what I was looking for according to the job advertisement and that he could offer exactly that. I learned little about how he had acquired his knowledge and where he had gained his experience. In addition, he seemed stressed - and so was I.

I was unable to listen as quickly as he spoke. And because I had missed his flash start, I was behind in listening and was rushing after him with my attention.

This problem was easy to solve: I asked him to

wait two seconds after each question before he started speaking. He was also able to slow down his pace of speech after he realized that if he spoke quickly, the recruiter wouldn't even get half of the information anyway.

Describe, don't assess!

Above all, however, he should stop explaining to me what I was looking for and instead trust me to recognize the match between his knowledge and my requirements. I made the comparison that, as a recruiter, I grabbed like a hungry dog for all the information that was relevant to the position. All he had to do was put the nuggets of information in front of me.

And that's where the problem was: he evaluated himself but gave me little information with which I could have assessed his background in relation to the position. His conclusions were based on information that was not available to me. Or to stay in our image: He explained the punchline to me but didn't tell the joke properly.

We then clarified the roles in the job interview: as the recruiter, I assess his suitability for the job because I know it; he provides me with information. If he wants to assess for himself whether the job interests him, the roles are reversed: he assesses because he knows his needs and I give him information about the job and the environment.

The aim of the interview is for the recruiters to find you suitable and not for you to find yourself suitable. Or as the saying goes: it's the hunger that must enjoy the bite, not the cook.

#jobinterview #application #storytelling

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