

How not to show your personality in a job interview

Text During a job interview training a few years ago, I asked a client to «tell me about yourself.» He launched into a detailed account of his upcoming wedding, his passion for wind-surfing, and his demanding mountain tours in summer. Only then did he briefly mention his professional background. When I asked why, he explained that it was important for him to come across as a person in the interview.

Peter Näf

At first glance, there seems to be nothing wrong with that, does there? I regularly encourage my clients to show themselves and to have the courage to be visible as a person. The crucial point, however, is to bring in one's personality in an appropriate way.

The drawback of his chosen approach was obvious to me: I could not help but wonder how important his work really was to him and how much time he would have left for it alongside all his private commitments. What is more, the information was too personal – especially regarding his relationship. After all, one would hardly start a conversation with strangers – except perhaps in online dating – by announcing one's relationship status.

Show your personality...

This example illustrates that many people define their distinctiveness primarily through hobbies and lifestyle. This is arguably a consequence of

social media self-presentation, where people stage themselves within their worlds of leisure. Yet true uniqueness often remains invisible there.

That strikes me as superficial. As I described in my article «Diversity? Yes – but for real!», reflection on difference often stops at visible or easily distinguishable traits such as gender, background, or sexual orientation – or at lifestyle attributes. Real individuality goes deeper: it is revealed in how people think and act.

...in the right context

Later in the conversation, I asked my client about specific professional experiences and challenges he had mastered. As so often, the answers were very general – almost like those of a job-application avatar: in the «we» form, sometimes even in the impersonal «one» form. As if there were no differences at all in how people tackle their tasks. That was precisely where I would have liked to see his personality – in the professional context, where it truly matters to future colleagues.

So, show yourself in the interview as your personality expresses itself at work. Recruiters are not looking to marry you – at least in almost all cases – but to determine whether you are a good fit for the role.

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