

Had a Job Interview but No Callback? Here's What to Do Next Time

By Christopher Mele

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Days have passed since your job interview, and no one's called or emailed.

Later, you learn someone else was hired for the position. You were sure you aced the interview and would advance to the next round, but obviously the interviewer saw it differently.

Here's where things may have gone wrong and how to improve your performance for the next time:

Be Authentic

Jonathan Alpert, a psychotherapist and executive coach in Manhattan, said some job seekers rely too much on articles and books to get through interviews. Human resource managers are well aware of these guides and can easily spot manufactured or canned replies.

"They want to know what sets a candidate apart from others and not looking for a corporate drone," he said.

Practice what you want to say so you can be comfortable and flexible, but don't rehearse so much that you end up sounding stilted and unnatural. Applicants see an interview as a "big bad monster" and get overwhelmed, he said, adding, "The interview is simply a conversation."

Be your true self, said Dan Cable, a professor of organizational behavior at the London Business School. You can promote trust by revealing vulnerabilities or discussing times when things did not go well.

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Know the Workplace Culture

Mr. Cable emphasized the importance of "cultural congruence" — sharing similar values and passions as the place you want to work.

Before an interview, if possible, contact people in your network to learn more about the company culture, said Blair Decembrele, a career expert at LinkedIn, the professional networking site.

Be Confident

"You can't underestimate the art of the humble-brag," Ms. Decembrele said.

People find it difficult to talk about their professional successes. A survey sponsored by LinkedIn of more than 11,000 workers in 19 countries last year found that only 35 percent felt confident talking about their achievements.

John Malloy, president of the recruiting firm Sanford Rose Associates in Santee, S.C., said in an email that job candidates should be able to quickly and precisely answer questions about their accomplishments.

He wrote: “The answer must be something like: ‘I saved the company \$300,000 during a three-week project. Our team created a new process that is now used throughout the corporation. Let me tell you how I did it.’”

Too many candidates will answer with a one-minute introduction and lose the interviewer’s attention, he wrote.

If you are stumped by a question, acknowledge it and tell the interviewer you’d like to return to it later.

Prepare to Be on Screen

Some companies, particularly start-ups, conduct first interviews via video-chat services like Skype. Preparing for them is crucial, April Masini, who writes about relationships and etiquette for her website Ask April, said in an email.

Practice in front of a mirror and choose a secure location to avoid having unexpected visitors, she wrote. (Remember the political science professor whose wife and two toddlers crashed his BBC interview?)

“And wear real pants, just in case there’s a mirror behind you and you realize too late that the hiring people will see your waist-up-at-the-desk attire, as well as your waist-down sweatpants and bare feet that you thought were hidden,” she added.

Be Inquisitive

Always ask questions but leave inquiries about vacation time, perks and benefits for a later time.

Some specific questions you can ask: Who was a good hire, and how did that person fit in? What employee achievements are celebrated? Where do you see the company in five years?

Develop a Rapport

Job interviews, even when they are unsuccessful, can be a springboard to other opportunities.

Michelle Davies of Sweet Valley, Pa., who is an information technology engineer at a television station in Moosic, Pa., had started to look for a new job two years ago. In February she interviewed for a job at a television production company in Pittsburgh but did not get it.

Ms. Davies said an assistant in human resources called and said the managers liked her and encouraged her to apply for other jobs at the company. When she applied for a different job a month later, she was interviewed by phone.

She said she believed she established her credentials and built a rapport with the managers during the first interview and the phone interview was merely a “formality.” She starts her new job on Monday.

Don’t be afraid to convince people about your value, she said.

“What is it that you’re trying to accomplish here?” she said. “You have goals and you have to sell people on those goals.”

What to Avoid

Saying in an interview that you have no weaknesses will surely ruin your chances of making the cut, Nate Regier, an executive coach and chief executive of Next Element, a company that specializes in leadership communication, said in an email.

Also avoid saying you have great people skills. “While it’s important, it can’t be measured,” he wrote. “Only results matter, not qualities.”

Don’t use language that is too tepid or full of bravado, Lois Barth, a business and career coach, said in an email. Using words like “maybe” and “possibly” can make you look insecure and undermine your credibility, and being too full of yourself can raise questions about how you will get along with others.

Be careful about making excuses for past failures, overexplaining or being honest to a fault, said Michael Klein, a psychologist in Northampton, Mass.

“Your goal in that first interview is to give that person no reason to exclude you from the second round of interviews,” he said.