

Dating the Interviewer

By Melanie G. Lammers

Forgive me now for the comparison I am about to make, but interviews are, in a lot of ways, no different from blind dates. Think about it. Each person involved asks empty, detail-oriented questions in an attempt to gain as much information as possible about the other before their time together comes to an end.

In the midst of all of the preparations for the interview to ensure everybody looks nice or comes across as impressive and that all of the proper arrangements have been made for the first meeting, there is a twinge of that sweet hysteria that can only occur before a relationship begins. You can cut the uncertainty and nervousness with a butter knife.

Thousands of books have been written about dating and finding jobs, and most authors would agree that much of an initial positive impression is based on an initial connection of some kind—something that keeps the conversation going. In an interview, that is not necessarily your responsibility, but the job of being attentive and inquisitive rests entirely on your shoulders.

When shopping for a date, everyone has a list of qualities that he or she finds desirable or repulsive. There is a “things to look for” list and a

“things to avoid” list in every single person’s head. Similarly, as you begin to look for a position that is a good fit, you should have a mental compilation of the qualities you are seeking in a position and a work environment.

Yes, the environment is just as important as the job—anyone who has worked under difficult management can attest to this. You could be offered the dream job of a lifetime and come in the first day only to be bombarded with coworker sarcasm or pessimism and immediately caught up in the middle of office politics that you, personally, know nothing about.

For this reason, it is important that you get the best possible overview of your potential employer as you can. When visiting the office, see if you can talk to any other employees, and ask them how they feel about their treatment, workload, and the overall atmosphere. Of course there will always be a few disgruntled employees who are dissatisfied whenever they aren’t allowed to listen to their iPods and chat online all day without speaking to a single client. That is why getting a rounded perspective based on multiple opinions is so important. Ideally, you will want to find an office where the employees are as impassioned about their work as you are.

Please make a list of red flags to watch out for as you go through the job-hunt process. Some are obvious, and some won't appear to be as important to you; it all depends on your personal preferences and employment values. We all seek different things from our next positions.

The Big Talkers: These are the interviewers who talk about the tight-knit community within the office while their coworkers or underlings roll their eyes. Idealists can be blessings when they are working as parts of well-oiled machines, but struggles amongst staff can turn their ideals upside down and create constant friction.

The Love Hoarders: These are the supervisors whom every employee loves and who want to keep it that way. In a larger organization, this can lead to one of two things: either they will be complete people pleasers without any sense of dedication to assignments if it will make those above them unhappy, or they will one day retire and leave disgruntled staff members behind with no one to fill their gargantuan shoes. In a smaller office environment, this can promote a close-knit bond between employees and management, but it can be disastrous in a large-office situation.

The Stiffs: These are the interviewers who are extremely proud of their company's or department's work to date-so much so that they do not believe there is anything within the current structure that requires change or adjustment. Even if the office currently functions well, the presence of an employer who is flexible and willing to listen to suggestions for improvement speaks volumes in terms of the organization's potential longevity.

The bottom line is that finding the right environment is all about finding the right conglomeration of attitudes and purpose behind the work.

Lastly, when courting an employer, above all, do not be the one left pining and waiting by the phone. As long as you let them know that the decision is theirs to make, they are in the driver's seat. Just as the person who is less invested in a dating relationship carries more power, the person who expresses the most desperation in an interview loses all potential negotiation leverage.

Enthusiastic desire for the position is important, but keep it under control-don't wet your pants with excitement, or they may lowball you in a number of areas. And your contribution is too valuable to be pushed aside.