

How to Sell Yourself on Interviews, Part One

By Elinor Stutz

Your resume was posted among thousands of competing resumes, and to your surprise, you were chosen for an in-person interview. Congratulations! But wait...what are those voices in your head saying? Are you *really* going to be able to compete against the top candidates?

The interview process begins with your mindset. You must believe you can succeed in order to succeed. In my experience, it isn't necessarily the best and the brightest who are chosen for employment but, rather, the "best fit" for the organization. The questions become "How can I appear credible in portraying I am the best fit?" and "How can I work on believing I will get the job?"

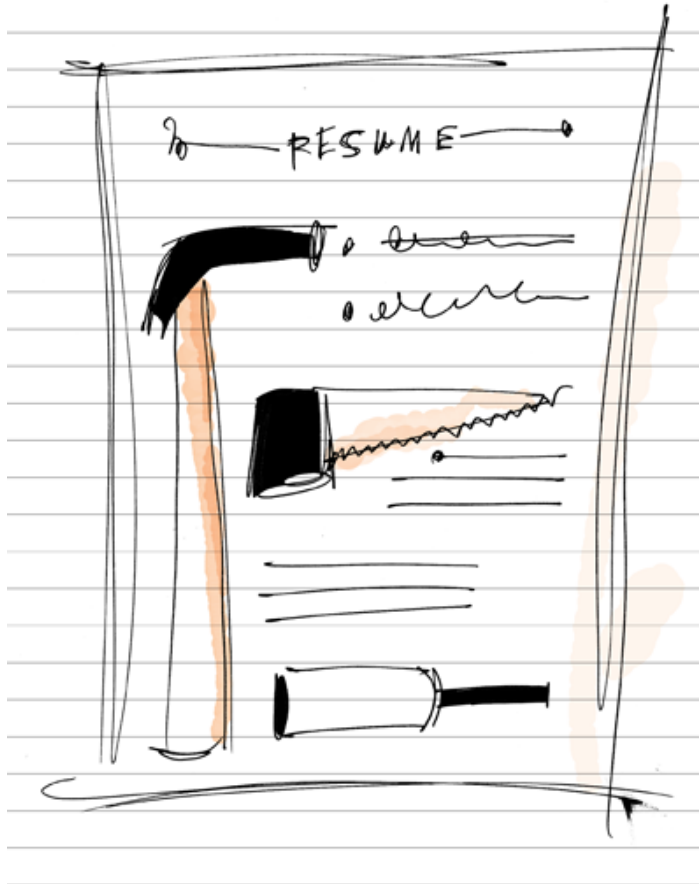
The first step is to review your past accomplishments. What made you different from your counterparts? Which unique skills do you possess that will allow you to succeed in your work? Once you realize how you are different, be able to put the message into one or two succinct sentences. Run your message by your friends, family, or associates and ask them how it sounds. When your message is in its final form and you have practiced saying it with conviction, you will begin believing in your stated strengths.

In addition to developing a short message playing up your strengths, in case you are asked, you will want to create a short (two-minute) explanation in story form of how you use(d) your strengths to accomplish solutions for your manager, client, etc. Learn to become a friendly storyteller when describing your accomplishments.

People buy from people they like. The storytelling will make you far more likeable as long as it is appropriate and concise. Statistics show that people buy based 7% upon what you say, 35% upon how you say it, and 58% upon how you look. Understand that you are selling yourself when you interview; undoubtedly, the same statistics apply when it comes to getting hired.

You must concentrate on building relationships with the people who interview you. Here are three tips for doing just that:

1. Throw the script away. Be prepared to listen, ask questions, clarify, and answer coherently.
2. Begin every communication (voice, voice mail, email, mail, appointments) from the other person's point of view.



3. Follow up. 95% of people fall down on the follow-up.

Referrals are the best method for securing interviews and, ultimately, jobs. Prescreening has already taken place by word of the referring party. When you are the beneficiary of a referral, ask the referring party to share as much as possible about the recommended person who is to interview you. Find out as much as you can about the person behind the title as well as the corporate person and the company.

Next, you will need to research the company website thoroughly. Read the pages while thinking about what you may bring to the table, what you have in common, and how you may offer improvement to the company's services; also, note messaging that specifically catches your attention. These topics will be your talking points during the interview.

While still reading the website, also note if there is a company mission statement, the officers and where they went to school, if the company is publicly traded, and, if the company is publicly traded, where its stock is trading. You may have the same alma mater as the CEO—let it be known. Everyone shares the dream of one day getting rich. So whether the stock is up or down, it is also a very good talking point toward the end of the conversation.

Webpages are built upon keywords, and these relay what is of most importance to the company. So if you detect a repetitive vocabulary, you will know this is the subject matter on which you should focus. For example, years ago, I represented a Fortune 100 company and was calling on a credit union. Every page of its website spoke of "financial soundness." I asked my contact if my Fortune 100 company held enough financial soundness to warrant doing business. My contact laughed and said, "Of course." She then added, "I have no idea how you know that is of great importance to us." The detective work pursued upfront furthered the process.

The next step is to read who the company's clients are, what they say about the company, and how their problems were solved. Perform an Internet search on the company's competitors and on the industry. In general, consider what all of these companies have in common in terms of their mission statements, clients, services, and challenges. Newcomers to sales or in new companies will use this vertical marketing strategy to quickly become experts in one industry in order to jumpstart their sales activity. Then they expand to other industries once confidence has been built.

Let's frame this concept in terms of securing a new job. If you have a very important interview and high income at stake, you will do well to practice interviewing with the company's main competitor. Ask for an informational interview. Learn who the competitor's clients are, in which areas the competing company excels, and what its challenges are. Two things will happen when you do this:

1. You may unexpectedly develop a second job possibility.
2. You will become highly informed about the industry and will give a superior interview at the original company of interest.

Becoming knowledgeable about the intended company's industry and having a succinct message as to why you are different will contribute to increased confidence on your interview. Practice speaking in front of a mirror. Observe whether you are smiling as you speak. Smiling makes you more likeable. Watch your body language. Do you look very stiff and unapproachable, or do you appear open and friendly? Do you use exaggerated gestures, none at all, or gestures simply to emphasize the point you are trying to make?

The next time you are out with friends or colleagues, determine whether you try too hard to get your point across, engage in one-upmanship, or listen to understand others' points of view. On interviews, it is mandatory to listen more than you speak and to ask enough questions—both open-ended and specific—to determine if, in fact, you will enjoy working at the company.

“Dress for success” has been a long-time motto. The rule of thumb is to dress a notch or two above the company policy. So if employees are known to wear jeans, the suggestion is to wear nice slacks; if they wear high-end sportswear, then consider a sporty suit. Dress includes a leather binder and a good-looking pen for taking notes.

When you have the name of the party who is to interview you, try conducting an Internet search for the person's name. You might find names of associations to which the person belongs and hobbies in which he or she participates. These are icebreakers for conversation.

It is a very good idea to arrive at your appointment 10 minutes early to “play detective.” Do not arrive more than 10 minutes early, or people will think you have nothing better to do with your time. Upon arriving, greet the receptionist with a big smile. Introduce yourself and ask his or her name. Make note of his or her name on your notepad so that you may address that person correctly in the future and thank him or her for helping you.

If the receptionist appears to have a few minutes, ask how s/he likes working at the company. Perhaps s/he can shed some light on the process and the benefits. Most people do not realize that in smaller companies, the receptionist, at times, is actually the CEO or the CEO's spouse because the real receptionist is out ill. People routinely treat the receptionist rudely, thus diminishing their chances for success.

Remember, once you set foot on a company's premises, there are no totem poles for decision making. By treating everyone equally, you will be putting your best foot forward in every instance.

Medium- to large-sized companies will display their awards, laudatory letters from clients, and their financial information. By quickly reviewing these materials, you will get a sense of the company and have more talking points for your interview.

One time, I discovered an intended company had won the Baldrige Award. The company's winning of this award was the basis of my opening remark upon meeting my client. It turned out to be my lucky day; she was the one responsible for getting the entire corporation on the same page to qualify for the prestigious award.

Suppose the person with whom you are to interview is running late. Don't just stare into space. Instead, begin reading an interesting magazine lying nearby. For instance, if you are meeting with a CFO and there happens to be a CFO magazine on a table near you, pick it up and read it. This magazine will tell you the challenges people in this position face on a daily basis. Upon my doing just this, a CFO with whom I was to meet greeted me with a huge smile. Our appointment went extremely well.

If you are interviewing at a smaller company, scan the posters hanging on the wall. Many such posters have captions such as “teamwork” or “goal setting.” These captions are perfect starting points for small talk when you first greet your contact.

When someone escorts you down the hallway to your contact's office, ask that person how s/he likes working at the company, what his or her duties are, and if s/he can lend any insight. Be gracious by thanking everyone who shares information and/or helps you along the way.

Upon entering the contact's office, find something nice to say. The office or cubicle is his or her home away from home. It is rude to say nothing. If the cubicle is dreary, look for pictures of family, a pet, hobbies, or travel—and state something nice about what you see. It puts the conversation on a friendly note. Show proper respect for the person interviewing you by thanking him or her for taking the time to meet with you when you first greet each other. This will be greatly appreciated and will serve to put you on a better path.

Once you are about to begin the business portion of your conversation, convey that you are aware the interviewer must have received so many resumes and that you are curious as to why he or she picked you to interview. This is

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a surefire method for beginning an excellent interview. Be quiet, listen carefully, and ask for permission to take notes. You cannot sell yourself as the best person for the job until you know why you are sitting in the chair!

To be continued...

About the Author:

Elinor Stutz, CEO of Smooth Sale and author, has transformed her highly successful sales career into a career training entrepreneurs, network marketers, and beginning salespeople. Her company states, "We help you turn stormy sales cycles into a Smooth Sale." Community service is of great importance to Ms. Stutz. Periodically, she counsels job seekers on how to gain employment. Several people have written to say that her tips helped them to secure job offers.

Ms. Stutz has been a guest on many radio shows. Her book, *Nice Girls*, was highlighted in the November 6, 2006, *TIME* magazine business supplement, and she mentors entrepreneurs at The Learning Café. For more information, call 800-704-1499 or visit www.smoothsale.net. Smooth Sale delivers original work in the forms of professional sales training, licensing of programs, speaking engagements, and the *Smooth Sale Tips* e-zine. Smooth Sale also offers the following resources: *Nice Girls DO Get the Sale: Relationship Building That Gets Results*, published by Sourcebooks; *The Smooth Sale Toolkit*; the Smooth Selling four-CD training seminar; and *How to GROW Your Business: The Entrepreneur's Handbook—Mindset, Strategy, and Implementation*.