

Selling Yourself: Let Mental Recordings Prepare You to Get that Job

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Abstract

As a job seeker, your product is *you*. To be an effective salesperson of your most valuable product, you must develop a set of *mental recordings* to play during the whole job search process. Three effective recordings include:

- **Interview the company**
- **Define your terms**
- **Leave the interview when it's not a good fit**

These recordings help you to understand you are the one in charge of the entire job search process.

Introduction

Are you interested in getting a job? Well, whether you like it or not, you are now a salesperson.

From the first correspondence with a potential hiring authority until you get the offer letter, you are being interviewed. Until recently I'd considered the relationship between the company and me to be an adversarial one. I hated the idea of sitting in front of people and trying to convince them I was the best person for the job. Couldn't they just see it already? Wasn't it easily apparent from my resume? What mistake will I make, ultimately costing me the job? Like Linus Van Pelt said, "Why should I be put through such agony?"

But I've learned otherwise. **You are selling your most important product: yourself.** You have tremendous value. There are rules governing the interaction between job hunter and employer. If you can internalize them, you will be way ahead of your competitors.

Job Hunter as Salesperson

I have a friend who in almost every interview ends up being offered the job. It isn't manipulation. And such an assessment would detract from the fact that she is a talented, capable person. Yet we all have those kinds of talents. We all have experience any company would benefit from. So what made her so attractive to employers? They almost could not help but give her the job!

I went about trying to understand what attributes these attractive people had. What gave them the edge in the whole job search game? It had to be something they projected to these employers, something they kept in mind as they prepared to sell their product. Mind! That was the key! It was the recordings they played in their minds in preparation to be the best possible salesperson.

Don't let the cliché of the loud, overbearing salesperson get in the way of you becoming one. Salespeople come in all sorts of personality types. The successful ones are convinced of the worth of their product. Anyone can do that, and that's all it takes.

Playing the Recordings

So I collected some mental recordings that can help. I've tried to make them as concrete as possible for your mind to latch onto. I have used them all successfully.

I'M INTERVIEWING YOU; YOU AREN'T INTERVIEWING ME

We spend a minimum of 40 hours per week at our jobs. In the technology field, it can go much higher. Who ends up getting the most benefit for the investment? If you think it's you, you need some education. If that was the case, no company would ever make a profit. So, you are going to be giving the company you work for way more than they will ever give you.

It is important to **align yourself with a company you can work for**, one you can believe in as much as you can believe in a company, and one where the environment meets your approval.

It is important to **prepare your interview questions** just like your interviewer prepares. These questions are based initially on the research you do on the company you are interviewing with. I don't like researching all that much, but you'll find it doesn't take long to get to know a company with just a little time spent in the library or online.

Don't be afraid to **have reference materials with you**. It shows preparation and sincerity. It's better to refer to notes than to the fickleness of memory.

NOTE: Also important and often overlooked: **Don't forget to bring copies of your resume** with you. You aren't always asked for one, but if you are, the last thing you want to say is that you didn't bring it with you.

I normally go in with at least **20 questions** divided into four or five categories:

- **Job Responsibilities** (for example, Expectations, Hours, Activities)
- **Team Information** (for example, Structure, Accessibility, Tribal Knowledge)
- **Management Styles and Reporting** (for example, Chain of Command)
- **Company Information** (for example, Stability, Future Directions, and Philosophy)
- Create your own categories as well; whatever you are intrigued to know about the company and those you will be working with.

Some questions from another job site that got a "Gee, that's a great question!" response in interviews are:

- How are you measured as a manager?
- What can I do to make you successful?
- How would you describe your management style? How would your staff describe it? You may get some evasiveness on this one, but that can be telling when asked of the person you're reporting to.
- What are the company/department/line-of-business objectives for the coming year?

Consider thinking about your answers and questions from the **point of view of the person interviewing you**. For example, use your *crib sheets* prepared for each person who will be

interviewing you. In most cases, you'll have some kind of idea who these people are going to be. For one position, I knew I'd be interviewed by the head of development. If you don't know, then *ask*. You can then supplement your information using sources like LinkedIn. Remember, this is *your interview*.

On your crib sheet, include **questions to ask targeting his or her concerns**—the VP is concerned with strategic thinking and wants me to build credibility; the Program Manager is going to be concerned with productivity, schedule, and cost. If you're interviewing with more than one person, have questions prepared that are strategically thought out for that person.

Be proactive. Don't hesitate to **partially answer a question**. Then turn the question back to the interviewer and ask how this thing/task/concept is done at his or her company. This can prevent you from coming across as a know-it-all. Nothing gives the wrong impression as much as being thought of as the one with all the answers.

Another strategy is to **get people talking about themselves and their company**. In this way, you'll be seen as brilliant conversationalist and perhaps a great fit for the job.

Your questions should not be outlandish; they should show you have researched the company and are interested in their take on it. Be cordial, and keep your own answers straight-forward and succinct. If your interviewers are talking, do not interrupt. Let them do the talking. As one Human Resources friend of mine says, "**The one who does the most talking has the greatest chance of making a mistake.**" If they make a mistake, it is not a big deal.

The result of this in most situations is your interviewers will feel a tremendous weight lifted off their shoulders. Most people do not like performing interviews. It takes time away from the real work of running a business. If you can take the lead (not the control), they will appreciate it. The interview then becomes collaboration and not a confrontation.

I can't stress this enough: **conducting a successful interview takes planning** on your part. Do not go in cold unless the outcome doesn't matter to you.

LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO MY JESUS

Every once in a while, usually on a Saturday, a couple of folks will knock on my door and politely ask me if I know Jesus. Well, yes, I say. And then we may continue on with our discussion until I motion for my wife to let the dogs loose. I came to the conclusion that my *Jesus* and their *Jesus* were not the same. We both had a concept in our heads, but until we spent some time explaining ourselves, we really weren't communicating.

This is a concept that does work in interviews but is most powerful in your resume. The idea in a resume is to **communicate your skills to a future employer**. Sometimes you end up working in the same sector of the work force. You can go from one financial institution to another. It happens all the time. But if you don't want to limit your focus, you may be forced to define your terms to people who have no concept of what you are talking about.

For example, I know a number of business analysts. Some really do have a tremendous amount of analytics background, and they spend their days reviewing information on how the business is doing and forecast possible trends and directions. However, I also know a technical writer who was given the title of business analyst because the department didn't have an opening for a tech writer, but they still wanted her. She did some analytics work but primarily was in charge of the department's documentation.

Define your *Jesus* so everyone knows upfront who you're talking about.

There are normally two types of major entries in resumes: **skills** and **achievements**. These two types are often misunderstood. Basically:

- A **skill** is an ability you take with you and use in any job you do.

An example of that would be the ability to organize and manage a large group of people to accomplish a task. Now there are a great number of sub-tasks associated with such a skill—interpersonal, time-accounting, possible even budgetary skills. You may want to split those out to further define your terms. But that skill can be used in any company.

You may even be able to adjust it so you can manage small groups of people as well, even though the two skill levels may not always overlap.

A skill tends to be an *abstract* concept until used to accomplish a task.

- An **achievement** is a task you accomplished for a particular company using your skills.

This is an important aspect of your resume. Briefly, you are showing, with as much quantifiable information you have, how you were able to use your skills to accomplish something concrete. This is where we see what the *product* can really do.

An example would be I used my organization and management skills to bring 100% of my projects in on time and under budget. The task resulted in an identifiable product or outcome, and accounting information would show the numbers behind the achievement.

In your resume, it may be worthwhile to arrange all your skills together in a single, easily-identified list for the hiring authority. Achievements tend to be placed with the job they are associated with.

IF THEY AREN'T THE RIGHT FIT, I LEAVE

If your interviewers don't consider you to be the correct fit, whatever that means, what do they do? Sometimes nothing. They don't send you a note to say you didn't get the job. And in this economy, it could be very expensive to spend the time to call or write to all these people.

So what do you do if the company you're interviewing isn't the right one for you? I recommend at least once in your employment career you stop the interview (be polite, of course) and say, "From my perspective, I can see that though your company is most likely a good fit for your current employees, it just wouldn't be a good one for me. Thank you for your time." Shake hands, and walk out. Yes, I have done it. One job would have resulted in me working late nights and weekends. It could have had the potential to be quite lucrative, but it didn't fit in with what I wanted to be doing. So I said thanks and left. The interviewer was confused but understood.

Let me say this, if you cannot do this in an interview, then you are too needy and probably won't get the job anyway. A bad job can be horrible. We've all had them. It's not worth it. If you can't do this, it also means you are not interviewing the company. It is important that you value your product. If you do not value yourself, you will not be much good to a company.

Conclusion

In an interview with James Lipton on his program, *Inside the Actor's Studio*, he talks about the “art of seduction.” He was undoubtedly discussing the relationship between the genders, but I realized that image could be taken into the whole job search process. It is a type of salesmanship with a product and a consumer. By Lipton’s definition, the art of seduction is a game two people consciously, voluntarily play. If only one of the parties is playing, then it isn’t a game at all but merely a cruel trick. They understand the stakes and are cognizant of their worth. With both parties fully engaged, the game begins. You must first recognize whether or not the game is worth playing. If it is, then it is up to you to convince the other party that you are the most attractive of all the suitors. Keep these thoughts in your head, and you will have a good chance of being the last one standing.

To sell that most valuable of your possessions—yourself—consider interviewing the company, defining your terms, and be willing to know when it’s not a good fit. These concepts show any potential employer that you consider yourself to be worthwhile, and your worth is not based on what others say but what you say about yourself.

[Special thanks to Tom Wahl and Deb McDaniel]

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