

Ask the Career Coach: Interviewing by Storytelling

How can you be comfortable in an interview and show the best picture of you?

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Dear Career Coach Lisa,

I struggle when interviewing as I am not comfortable in this setting. How can I be more effective in my responses?

GD
Short Hills

Interviewing can be stressful if you are not prepared. Although you cannot prepare for every question or situation encountered, practice can reduce the anxiety you may feel going into an interview setting.

A certain amount of stress or anxiety can serve to elevate your performance during the interview. If the stress or anxiety is too much, then it can have a negative impact on your presentation.

The key during an interview is to shift ever so gently the interview from a question grilling situation into a conversation. You can achieve this by answering the questions concisely and asking clarifying questions as you close your response. For example, for the "tell me about yourself" you can say "based on my understanding of the position, I have the knowledge to help the company leverage itself in this new market with experience in..." Then close your answer with "please share with me what some of the initial projects you see this role taking on." Closing in this manner will allow you to gain insight for the questions that follow and you are gently shifting the interview into a conversation style.

The key is to know the job, the company and potential issues the company is facing—compliance, regulatory, globalization, environmental and social concerns prior to your interview meeting. If you can gain intelligence on the individuals you will be meeting with is very important as well. Ask about their process, next steps and when you can connect with them to follow up.

Learn yoga breathing so you can calm yourself prior to interviewing. Clear your mind and focus to get the conversation flowing. Wrap your answers in stories after you provide a concise technical answer by saying, "May I elaborate by sharing a work situation?" It allows the interviewer to respond and then you are able to engage in a story. Keep the story brief, emphasizing the point you want to make and do not go off on a tangent. It's a powerful way of sharing your strengths while weaving a story.

Remember it is your responsibility to tell an accurate story about yourself, stressing your strengths and abilities. If you are scheduled for an interview, then you have passed the initial match or competency screen. Now it is up to you to show your personality. People like to hire individuals that they like and get along with, so chemistry is important. Watch for work style, approach and engage so you can begin to build a relationship. Typically the hiring manager selects the candidate they believe will perform well and that feels comfortable within the company culture and department's style.

About this column: "Ask the Career Coach" is a column dedicated to those who may be in transition or wrestling with a career dilemma by providing a forum for advice. We welcome your questions. Please send them to CareerCoachLisa@gmail.com. Lisa Chenofsky Singer is a Millburn-Short Hills resident and the founder of Chenofsky Singer & Associates LLC. She offers Executive and Career Management Coaching and Human Resources Consulting, writes and speaks on job search and career-related topics. Her web site is www.ChenofskySinger.com.