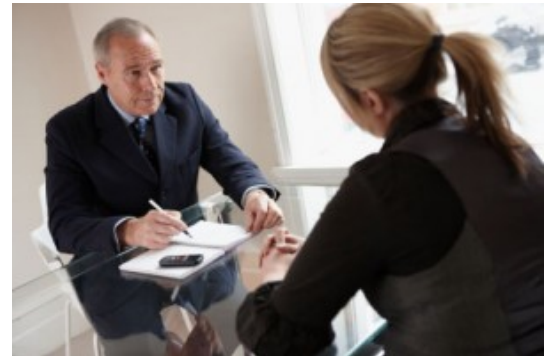


ARE YOUR INTERVIEW SKILLS IN TUNE WITH THE TIMES?

BY KIM VILLENEUVE

Part of any effective job search includes preparing for that all-important interview, but are your interviewing skills up-to-date? What were considered correct responses in the 1990s could actually prevent you from getting a job these days. Why? Because the job climate has shifted and employers have different expectations of a prospective employee than they did even five years ago.

So how do you demonstrate that you're in touch with the business needs of today and aren't a throwback to former times? The following describes the major shifts occurring in the interviewing process and suggests ways to help you respond. You'll gain insight into the mind of today's typical interviewer and ensure that the questions you're asked don't catch you by surprise.



DON'T WORRY ABOUT YOUR CAREER ASPIRATIONS FIVE YEARS FROM NOW; SHOW WHAT YOU ARE CAPABLE OF DOING NOW.

Just a few years ago, you walked into an interview nearly certain that you'd be asked the question: "What would you like to be doing five years from now?" The anticipated answer demonstrated a combination of loyalty and ambition — you expressed a desire to remain with the same organization over a period of time and to step into roles of ever increasing responsibility.

Once a standard part of the interview process, this query is fading from use. Given today's tumultuous economic and social climate, employer concerns about longevity have been replaced with a desire to see rapid results. Three-year plans are practically unheard of, which means you need to show that you're capable of getting up to speed immediately and that you have the skills and experience to solve complex problems effectively and without hesitation. Instead of discussing where you plan to be five years from now, be prepared to answer something like: "How would you characterize a 90-day plan to meet the objectives of this position?"

DEMONSTRATE YOUR ABILITY TO CREATE SYNERGY.



Five years ago, when asked to describe your management style, you could impress an interviewer by talking about using performance-management techniques, setting expectations, measuring feedback and rewarding performance — evidence that you knew how to manage. Now the situation is more complicated — and more urgent. In addition to showing that you’re a capable leader, you must prove that you know how to encourage individuals to work together to accelerate problem-solving. In the past, team-building was recognized primarily for its ability to shape culture. However, given today’s accelerated pace, you must show that you understand how to navigate in a complex environment, where how well you work with other parts of the organization is what ultimately produces results.

SHOW THAT YOU’RE A DECISIVE LEADER WHO’S LEARNED FROM PAST MISTAKES.

“How have you solved problems in the past?” Once, this question was best answered by demonstrating that you operated by a model, something like: “I solve problems in a linear fashion. I gather facts, I consider all approaches for solving the problem, I make recommendations, I implement them and I follow up.” Several years ago, there was value in being right 100% of the time, but employers are beginning to recognize the importance of having failed and subsequently learned from your mistakes. Your ability to articulate the reasons for your choices, the circumstances contributing to the failure and the lessons learned to eliminate a repeat performance will help you to outshine an equally qualified executive, who lacks experience in dealing with adversity. In addition, the executive who gets ahead can demonstrate decisiveness, the courage to take a stand and the ability to adjust to change and forge ahead to produce results.

USE STORYTELLING TO CONVINC AN INTERVIEWER THAT YOU’RE THE PERFECT PERSON FOR THE JOB.

“Why are you the ideal candidate for this position?” In the past, when asked this question, you were expected to simply regurgitate your resume. You proved you had the necessary ability by referring back to prior roles. However, showing that you’re experienced is no longer enough. Now, you need to provide a detailed account of relevant experiences you’ve encountered in your career and how they relate to your skills. In other words, you need to show real-life problem-solving in action — which is probably the most valuable interviewing skill. How do you do this?

Before an interview, think about the skills you want to showcase and prepare an example of how you’ve put these skills to use. For instance, if you’re a chief information officer and you want to display your technical ability, talk about your former company’s out-of-date point-of-service system and how you devised an innovative solution to speed checkout and increase profits.

Use this same approach for each skill you want to highlight. Remember to:



1. Lay out the problem you faced;
2. Explain your solution; and
3. Discuss the results.

While doing this, take the interviewer into your world. Paint a vivid picture. In other words, “show, don’t tell” that you’re the ideal person for the job.

SHOW THAT YOU’D FIT INTO THE COMPANY CULTURE.

Having the technical skills to do the job is just the price of entry. What really determines whether you’ll get the offer is fit. An interviewer gauges this by listening not only to what is said, but also to the way it’s said. Being articulate shows you’re credible and aren’t making things up as you go along. Speaking passionately shows you’re discussing concepts you’ve spent time pondering. Asking thoughtful questions means you’re naturally curious and a good listener who takes others’ views into consideration.

In the end, all interviewing boils down to one simple query, whether it’s asked overtly or simply implied: “Will this person make the company a better place?” Show that the answer is yes and you’ll ensure that you’re the one who gets the nod.