

How to interview effectively

People are always asking me how to prepare for an interview and, honestly, I wish there was a standard answer. However in today's tricky environment, nothing is standard. Unfortunately, more people are not good interviewees.

By [Kate Benson](#) 2 Jul 2012

For most people, talking about themselves is not a natural inclination. Interviewing, too, is an art. There is no guarantee that the person meeting you knows how to make the most of the 60 minutes. Often, my candidates tell me that they did less than half of the talking. So how do you make an impression on someone who either isn't a good interviewer, talks too much, or has a list of prepared questions?

Here are some things to be ready for:

- **Open-ended questions** - Tell me about yourself? Where do you shop? What brands interest you? Who's winning in our industry? These can be tricky. In a perfect world this is a way to demonstrate your knowledge of the world around you; however, many people have a tendency to "monologue" to the point of boring the interviewer.

It's okay to take a moment to gather your thoughts before speaking. Be informative, but concise. If it's the "tell me about you" question, don't get into too much detail on any particular aspect of your life. If they don't ask you about high-school - please don't talk about it!

Limit yourself to 60 seconds maximum. Remember the term "elevator speech" - this is it! Practice this over and over again. Do it in front of a mirror and watch your facial expressions as you speak.

- **How did you choose this industry?** - This question provides an ability to show off all that research you've done on the company you hope to join, the industry it serves, its competitors, and your take on their opportunities.
- **Describe your ideal job** - Now is the time to be creative. You have always loved XYZ, you wanted to follow your passion, or you fell into it with good luck and decent timing. Either way, you must tailor your answer to your audience and relate it to them, their company and this particular opening. Do not tell the good folks at Apple that you always wanted to be a music teacher, but, alas, are tone deaf. They want to hear that you have lived for technology and fast-moving consumer goods ever since you were a child.
- **Be prepared to give - and don't be stingy** - It's no longer enough for people to connect the dots between what they need and what you've got. You have to help - or even do it for them. Use specific examples in your conversation - critique past advertising campaigns - compare and contrast things you have done that are similar, inspired by or completely different - and why.
- **Be likeable** - How many times do you hear: "I didn't like them but they have the skill sets so let's hire them!"? Never. It's the other way round - the skill sets become less important for people who seem to be a better cultural fit.
- **Cultural nuances** - These are what really make or break success - both short-term and long-term.

Really study what they are as an organisation - not only the job you are interviewing for but the entire company. What do they stand for? How have they evolved? What kind of people do they hire? These are critical keys to success that are as important as your skills and experience.

- **Get rid of those nerves** - Somehow, whatever works for you - but really try to be yourself. Show who you are. If the person has negative energy make it your job to give them your energy - do not take theirs.
- **You are the product** - Even if you aren't a marketer by trade, think back to college - we all had to take those classes. Product, price, place, promotion, and I will add packaging.

Now think of yourself as the product and you will realise that packaging counts. How you dress is almost as important as what you say. Really do your due diligence and, hopefully, you will have an astute headhunter guiding you. Do not go into an interview wearing a three-piece suit if you are meeting with the hottest digital agency in the country. The package is as important as the content.

- **Body Language counts** - When you sit with your arms crossed across your chest you are signalling that you are not an open person. When you finish people's sentences it indicates you aren't a good listener. If I see someone jiggling his foot - I think nervous. Maintain eye contact at all times. Think about you - how do you sit when you are interested in something? Legs crossed, hands on the table, or on your lap, slightly leaning forward.
- **Companies are interviewing the whole person** - Think of this as an audition. Do what you need to do to get the part.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kate Benson is the founding managing partner at Martens & Heads.

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