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THE WORK PLACE

Prepped for success: overcoming interview fears

BY KATE BOEMEKE



LAST WEEK, we posted another installment of recruitment news from the writers at Yahoo! HotJobs on STLToday.com/hotjobs. One particular headline made me laugh, "When Interviewers Attack! 10 tips to handle a hostile interviewer." I recalled one particular interview when the executive director I was interviewing with told me, "You know, you don't have to like me to be able to do your job." Up to that point I had no idea that I shouldn't or wouldn't like him. Perhaps I should have. While waiting to meet the him, the company's HR director had stepped out to greet me. "Don't let him scare you," she said.

I assured her I don't scare easily. But that's not exactly true. If I'm completely honest with myself, and if you are completely honest with yourself, I

suspect we'd both have to admit that interviews are scary—especially in this economy. And, we have been scared.

Admit it. How often have you worried so much about saying the wrong things in an interview that you forgot to say the right things or ask the right questions?

"It happens all the time," said Alan Ludmer, president of The Voyager Group, a nationally recognized career consulting firm headquartered in St. Louis (online at voyagercareers.com). "That's why it's important for job seekers to do their research and prepare thoroughly before going into a job interview."

"The only reason anyone would ever hire someone is if the potential employee can solve the employer's problem or problems," Ludmer said.

The challenge for the job seeker is fully understanding the company needs.

"It takes a great deal of intelligence," Ludmer said. "I tell clients to think of themselves as doctors or detectives trying to get at the root of the problem. Before the interview, job seekers should thoroughly investigate the company's

ADVICE FROM THE PROS:

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— Alan Ludmer, (shown at left with client), president of The Voyager Group

website, network with employees if possible, and read up on the challenges facing the company and its industry?"

Because most interviewers rely heavily on situational questions, Ludmer said he advises his jobs seeking clients to carefully review the following questions and develop answers that best showcase their skills and abilities.

- Tell me about a time when your strong attention to detail really paid off for you or your employer.
- What would you say your proudest career accomplishment?
- Tell me about some of the steps you have taken to establish long term collaborative relationships with groups or individuals.
- Tell me about a particularly boring or dull task you had to endure. What made it boring or dull? What did you do to ensure the task was completed?
- Tell me about a time in which you had to handle a sensitive situation with a customer/co-worker. What was the situation? How did you handle it? What was the result?
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
- Tell me about a time when you came up with an innovative solution to a challenge you were facing. What was the result?
- Have you ever worked in an environment where you had to work on multiple projects simultaneously? How did you keep organized?
- What is your weakness? What are you doing to improve your weakness?

• Tell me about a time when you had to persuade someone on an idea or product that wasn't favorable to them. What was the idea or product? What objections did you have to overcome?

"These questions require careful thought," Ludmer explained. "In asking them, the employer is trying to determine your skills, motivation, thought process and cultural fit." Ludmer also stressed that the interviewer should **not** be the only one asking questions.

"You (the job seeker) are interviewing the company, too. So ask intelligent questions. You're there to discover everything you can. Why are they hiring for the position? What are the three biggest challenges facing the company today? How was the last person to have the job successful and unsuccessful? These are the types of questions you want to ask," Ludmer said.

Ultimately, people who are successful in interviews are the ones who go in confident, prepared and in control.

Kate Boemeke is the employment writer for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch advertising department. E-mail Kate at kboemeke@post-dispatch.com.

STORY UPDATE: Liberty National featured in The Work Place (May 10, 2009) is hosting a "We're Hiring" event on Aug. 19 from 9 a.m.-6 p.m. at the Doubletree Hotel - Westport. Fifty positions are available. For more information send an e-mail to stlouisnorth@gmail.com or call 636-447-3835.



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