

Don't Talk in an Interview

A hiring interview is a sales call. Don't talk or tell. Answer, ask, listen, and sell. You are the salesperson, you are the product, and your customer is the interviewer. Because the job interview is a sales call it must be planned, practiced, and conducted as a sales call. Every sales call must have a written objective. Your objective on your first interview is to get a second interview or extend the first interview past what was planned, or both. The most successful salespeople understand that during a sales call the customer should be talking 80 percent of the time, and the salesperson should be listening 80 percent of the time. The successful salesperson allocates his or her 20 percent of "talking time" to answer the interviewers' questions, and to ask questions.

On the first interview you must conduct a needs analysis. A needs analysis is when you ask questions to find out what the customer needs and wants. A proper needs analysis gets the customer—the hirer—talking and allows you to take notes. Your questions must be crafted before the interview. They must be based on homework.

When the interviewer asks you a question, answer the question and stop talking. You should try to anticipate possible interviewer questions in your precall planning before the interview. (Precall planning is the time spent preparing for your sales call, your interview). You must answer the question directly, honestly, briefly, and fully. Because you may have anticipated the question, your answer should highlight your skills and good qualities. When you have answered the question precisely, stop talking. Do not embellish, stray from the point, or volunteer new information. Be quiet. Wait for the interviewer to finish the line of inquiry. If the

interviewer is finished, it may be appropriate for you to ask one of your pre-planned needs-analysis questions. If you do ask one of your questions, be quiet after asking, and let the customer answer. Intelligent questions are rare. Asking intelligent questions signals intelligence. Intelligence is a quality good companies want. Compelling questions cause good answers, elevating the content of the interview. Good interviews elevate the interviewer, the hirer. When you ask a good question, let the interviewer answer, and let the interviewer answer fully. Don't say something while the interviewer is thinking. Don't retract the question because she has not responded quickly enough for you. If the customer understands your question, then to speak before she does is an interruption. Unless she nods off and falls on the floor after you ask a question, be quiet and listen.

Asking thoughtful questions is a point of difference, and will separate you from the other talk, talk, talk candidates.

Douglas MacArthur, the legendary World War II army general, was looking to hire a new aide. After a staff review of candidates, MacArthur interviewed the "short list." One of the potential aides was a young lieutenant. At the beginning of the interview the general asked the lieutenant, "Did you have any trouble finding the place?" "No, sir," answered the lieutenant, who then asked, "Sir, what is your view of the role of the army in winning the war here in the Pacific?" For one hour, interrupted only by the lieutenant's occasional "uh-huh," and "Could you elaborate?" the great general talked.

At the end of the "interview," the lieutenant was offered the job. Later, Douglas MacArthur told one of his colonels that the young lieutenant was one of the most intelligent officers he had met, and asked great questions. The lieutenant was a sell guy, not a tell guy. So you should be.