

Handling Interviewer Concerns

Because the economic and personal costs of a mis-hire are so high, hirers are cautious. They will always be concerned that they are making the correct hiring decision. Hirers may worry about the candidate's work ethic, experience level, enthusiasm, smarts, integrity, people skills, sexual orientation, age, gender, marital situation, background, competency, ability to get the job done, and morals. These worries may be trivial, unwarranted, illegal, important or unimportant. But they are always real—and for various reasons, these issues may be hidden concerns.

You must uncover as many hidden concerns as possible. You must provide some type of assurance to allay the interviewer's concerns. Handling the company's concerns starts in pre-interview planning, by anticipating any objections to hiring you. Once you determine possible objections, you can begin to develop strategies to handle the objections.

For example, some job seekers may believe the following situations could be barriers to getting hired:

- At 50 years of age, too old
- At 21 years of age, no experience
- 6 jobs in 10 years, job hopper

It is easier to handle a hirer's concern if he or she voices the concern; however, there are discrimination laws that prevent people from asking certain questions. Interviewers will try to get to their issues in indirect ways. Code phrases are used to get answers to

questions that may be prohibited to ask by law or convention. In a phone screening interview, a hirer might ask, “What are the ages of your children?” This is a clue that the hirer is concerned about age. An interviewer might ask, “What values did your parents try to instill in you?” This is a code phrase designed to learn about your background, and what are, or were, your parents’ occupations. If the interviewer asks, “Is there anything that might prevent you from, say, going on a trip for two weeks?” the interviewer may be concerned about your health, your marital situation (single parent), or your work ethic. It is the burden of the candidate to listen carefully for any question that is an interviewer’s code phrase for approaching an area of concern. At such point, the candidate must answer the question with a preplanned response that satisfies the hirer’s possible objection.

For example, the candidate who thinks that being fifty-five may be a problem is asked, “How do you go about making decisions?” This question, or any question that provides a segue into a preplanned response is the candidate’s cue. The prepared candidate who has anticipated that his age may be a concern answers as follows: “My decision-making approach has been developed over years of hands-on experience working with all kinds of people, on all kinds of problems, with varying amounts of facts and data. Today I know a lot more than I did even ten years ago about listening to other people, sifting fact from fiction, and then deciding. It took me—and I dare say it takes others—lots of battles to make seasoned, reasoned, sound decisions. Does that answer your question, and are there other areas of my extensive experience that you may want to ask about?”

Ronald Reagan, then in his late sixties, was running against a much younger Walter Mondale for president of the US. Mr. Reagan knew that the public had some concerns about his age. In a masterful stroke, on a nationally televised debate, Mr. Reagan stole the issue by saying, “I promise not to make my opponent’s youth and inexperience an issue in this campaign.” Clearly preplanned and practiced, this humorous rejoinder deflated a potentially thorny

issue. Mondale said in a subsequent interview that he was convinced that he had lost the election then and there. Conversely, Ronald Reagan won the job then and there. Precall planning and practice closed the sale.

Knowing the answer to the question, Why should the company hire you? gives you a bedrock position to make your case. If you know how the company will benefit from hiring you, then with planning and creativity, any hiring concern can be handled.