



How To Control The Job Interview and *Stand Out* From The Competition



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Being a job seeker is challenging! Employers are bombarded with resumes from applicants who don't come close to filling the requirements, but are desperate to get noticed.

To cut through the clutter, focus on driving the interview and helping the interviewer see that you ARE the best-qualified candidate for the job.

Whether you're changing companies or seeking a promotion at your current employer – now's the time to take control!

To be an effective job seeker means you are focused, strategic, and clear about your value proposition.

If you can't communicate your personal brand and value, then how can the interviewer appreciate what you have to offer?

Take control over your job search, be proactive, and use these tips to achieve a more meaningful and rewarding career!

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Chapter 1 Your Personal Brand



Does Your Brand *Stand Out* In a Job Search?

Without a doubt, your most critical asset when launching into a job search is your personal brand. In a market as competitive as today's, your skills and knowledge are most likely replaceable. It is the personal collection of accomplishments, attitudes, and unique attributes that will likely land you (or your competitor) the job.

Here are just a few reasons to make sure your personal brand is clearly defined and communicated in a job search:



When you're clear about
who you are,
what you offer,
and what you want,
you can clearly articulate
that to others.



It's what separates you from the crowd.

Keywords may help get your resume to human eyes, and your experience might get you to the interview, but it's your personal brand – those qualities, values, and reputation that make you unique – that separates you from the other candidates in order to get you hired.



It helps get you out of the resume rut.

Your resume is but one tool for communicating your skills and expertise – and every other candidate will have one. When you put intention into building a personal brand, you branch out to other creative outlets (i.e. portfolios, profiles, websites, events) to communicate your expertise both on and offline.



It targets your efforts.

The process of personal branding is all about strategy – with a clear goal in mind, you put intention and effort into getting there. It's not about fate or chance or luck, but rather about the work and creativity you put into your search and communicating how you can add value to target employers.



It helps others connect with you.

When you're clear about who you are, what you offer, and what you want, you can clearly articulate that to others who may be in a position to connect you. If you're not clear about what you want, your networking efforts get watered down and others don't know how to help you.

The ability to articulate your personal brand is so critical to the job search in a market like this one – to know who you are, what you want and what you do best, and how to communicate what makes you unique and compelling to potential employers.

Chapter 2

Controlling The Interview



You Have More
Power
Than You Believe.

Taking control of the interview means you are clear about why this company is the right place for you. You understand how your values align with the company's mission; you have researched the opportunities they offer; you are focused on how your value and experience can benefit them. You feel empowered with information, confidence, and a clear game plan to get on board.

AT THE INTERVIEW

Of course, the interviewer has a great deal of power in this situation. They can decide they don't like you, feel you are a good fit, or understand how you will assimilate into their company. We can only control ourselves and certain aspects of situations; we cannot control other people.



Make your case for

WHY

you are the right candidate.



Be prepared for small talk.

Some interviewers like to chat before the interview starts to calm the candidate down. Use this as a focused time to build rapport and set the tone for the interview. Think about what you will and won't talk about before you arrive at the interview, so you don't misunderstand the casualness and say something inappropriate. Consider current events as good icebreakers, provided they are not controversial (political and religious). For instance, you might talk about the upcoming holiday season but not your position on the rise in gun violence in schools.



Focus on what AND why.

Don't ignore that the interviewer not only needs to understand your background and how it's relevant for the open position, but they also need to feel something about you. We call this, their "emotional needs," and it drives purchasing decisions. If the hiring manager feels you are too pushy, standoffish, or rigid, they might not feel you are a good fit. Focus on what this person needs to feel about you in order to see you as a fit for the company and the position. Make your case for WHY you are the right candidate.



Relate your experience as value-add.

For each question asked, relate your previous job or work experience to show how you are qualified for the position. You need to bridge between what you have done in the past and what you can do in the future. The interviewer won't have time to make this connection. You can take control by showing patterns of success and results, and direct their attention to forward-looking goals.



Ask focused questions.

Interviewers expect you to ask questions. Take control of the interview by having these questions developed before you even arrive at the meeting. Be prepared to change the questions up if they are answered during the interview. You should have at least five questions prepared around the company's vision and business goals, culture and work environment, onboarding process, and employee successes. This shows you are focused on finding the right fit for yourself, not just fitting your offer into any company that will have you.



Pay attention to your body language.

In the in-person interview, keep your hands relaxed and in front of you. If you are seated in a chair, facing a desk, hold your notepad or portfolio on your lap. At a conference table? It's permissible to lean on the table and take notes. Relax your shoulders, but remain professional in posture. Make good eye contact, validating the interviewer by paying attention to their questions and comments. When you get up to leave, extend a confident and assuring handshake. Watch the interviewer. If they are relaxed and casual, then don't sit "at attention." You also can't be too relaxed or it can appear disrespectful. Take your cues from the interviewer, but realize they work there, so they can act how they want. You want to work there; show you will fit in but also be mindful of the formality of the interview process.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

After the interview, if there are things you need to follow up on (e.g. a list of references), send that email as soon as possible. Be sure to thank the interviewer for the meeting, and confirm your interest in the position. Don't hesitate to include a bullet point list of highlights from the interview that reinforce you are the right candidate for the job.

Then — send a handwritten thank you note to everyone you interviewed with. Be specific about points in the discussion, and reinforce how you are a great fit for the company.

Interviews are one step in the hiring process, but they are critical. You might have a series of interviews with multiple people at the company before an offer is made. Be prepared to show up consistently and authentically in each case to prove you are the person they believe you are!

Chapter 3

Tips for a Successful Phone Interview



Preparation and
Passion
are Key.

More and more, employers are requesting phone interviews with job candidates before they bring them in to meet in person or on a video call. This allows employers to ask pertinent questions, assess behavioral temperament, and evaluate personality and character before they commit to a face-to-face meeting.

While it might seem easier to do a phone interview – you don't have to dress up! – applicants often find the challenges of not meeting in person and getting real-time feedback to be unsettling.

Follow these tips to make your next phone interview a success:

BEFORE THE CALL

- ✓ Do your homework. Research the company, industry, and each of the people who will be on the call. If you are unsure of who could be on the call, ask the interviewer in advance if they can provide the names. Still, there could be people lurking in the background of your phone call. Never assume you're just talking to one interviewer.
- ✓ Write your notes on index cards. You might organize them by topics such as company and industry, hiring managers, and questions you'll ask. Index cards allow you to move your notes in front of you on the call, instead of searching for information on a sheet of long paper.
- ✓ Have your top three to four key messages written out. What are the main points you want to make? What are your supporting points?
- ✓ Think about the questions you'll ask. Be sure they are not questions you could easily find the answers to online (i.e. "When was the company founded?") Instead, consider questions that show you've done your research, are interested in the position, and connect your background to the work you'd be doing if hired. For instance, you might ask, "I see that your company is expanding into the MidWest. My experience growing up in Oklahoma, and then leading a team in the Middle East, taught me that being sensitive to the local community is an asset for a leader. Would my passion and background make me a good candidate for a management role as you grow the company?"



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DURING THE CALL

- ✓ On the call, you will not have the advantage of visual cues, including body language. Neither will they. They will be relying on how you express yourself, vocally. Be sure to enunciate your words and animate your responses.
- ✓ Dress and act the part. Even though they can't see you, dress for an in-person interview. This will ensure you keep professional as you answer their questions.
- ✓ Place your index cards, with your notes, in front of you where you can move them around and see them clearly. It will be important to refer to them, but not read them. You want to sound natural and confident.
- ✓ Don't rush to answer. Take your time responding. This will feel awkward because they can't see that you are considering a response. Better to give a good response rather than a rushed one.
- ✓ Thank the speakers for their questions. Not every time, but periodically acknowledge and show appreciation for their questions. This will reassure them and buys you a few seconds to consider your response.

AFTER THE CALL

- ✓ Immediately after the call, send an email thanking the host and anyone else you know who was on the call. Reinforce your key messages and points in the email.
- ✓ If there are any follow-up items due to them from you, be sure to get this done soon after the call.
- ✓ Send a handwritten thank-you note to the people on the call. Even though you sent an email, a handwritten note is a nice touch. It will arrive a few days after your interview. Reinforce your key points, your desire for the position, and how you can add value to the company.

Phone interviews are tricky, but if you follow these tips, you will be more focused and impactful in your preparation, during the interview, and with your follow-up.

This will set you apart from all the other “voices” the employer talks to!

Chapter 4

11 Mistakes Candidates Make in Job Interviews



Interviewers Notice

Everything

With all the training, coaching, and resources available for job seekers, hiring managers remain astounded by the missteps candidates make in interviews. When interviewing for a job or promotion, your goal as the candidate is to highlight your offer as a benefit for the company, show a direct correlation between your experience and the goals of the company, and demonstrate how your values align with the company's belief system.

Yet, when interviewing, so many applicants make these mistakes:



It is 100% your job to connect all the dots between who you are and what they need.

- ✓ **Appearing unfocused about what you offer.** It is NOT the responsibility of the interviewer to discover what you stand for, what you are good at, and why you are the ideal fit for the position they are hiring for. It is 100% your job to connect all the dots between who you are and what they need.
- ✓ **Saying, "Sorry I was late. I had an important call to finish."** This can leave the interviewer thinking: What am I? Chopped liver?
- ✓ **Wearing a business suit to an interview at a tech company in Silicon Valley.** It's critical to know how people dress in the industry, company, and community that you're pursuing. While I'd always advise dressing up for an interview — it shows respect for the interviewer and the occasion — if you dress 10 notches above everyone else, you might give the impression you won't fit in in that job or company.
- ✓ **Looking at your watch, cell phone, tablet, etc. too often.** If you are using your tablet to take notes on, tell the interviewer in advance. Otherwise, it can appear that you are impatient, bored, or both.
- ✓ **Not being prepared.** In today's information world, it is unacceptable for a candidate to arrive at an interview without having done research: Have questions for the interviewer, know what the company does and who they serve, look at the LinkedIn profiles of key stakeholders, and come to the interview prepared.
- ✓ **Disparaging a former employer or competitor.** It never works to try to make yourself look better by making someone else look worse. The interviewer might worry how you will describe this interview to the next one you'll be on.
- ✓ **Speaking in negatives.** Instead of saying, "I'm not the best at details," focus the conversation on your assets, "I'm a great big-picture thinker!" If the conversation has too many negatives, even if you are refuting misconceptions, the negatives might be what the interviewer remembers about the meeting.



- ✓ **Downplaying your successes.** An interview is not the time for modesty. Humility is always great, but when someone asks you about your talents, skills, passions, and goals, it's critical that you are clear, focused, and can connect your offer to the opportunity for which you are being considered.
- ✓ **Forgetting to say "thank you" at the end.** It might feel like a small step to the candidate, but the interviewer spent time reviewing the resume, preparing for the meeting, and asking probing questions. Before you leave, a verbal, "thank you for spending time with me today" is very important.
- ✓ **No follow-up.** The end of the first interview meeting is the start of the interview conversation. Immediately after the meeting, write a handwritten note to the interviewer(s) thanking them for their time, referencing something that was discussed, and reminding them of your interest in the position. If there is a good reason, then a quick email thank you can occur as the handwritten note is in the mail. Email should never replace handwritten notes completely.

Interviews are a stressful part of the job search. With these tips, you can maximize the chances of getting the offer — then YOU get to decide if you want the job!



About The Author

What do you get when you combine passion, credibility, and intention?

A powerful personal brand that gets results!

Lida Citroën is an award-winning executive branding and reputation management authority based in Englewood, Colorado. A TEDx, Talks at Google, and keynote speaker, instructor on LinkedIn Learning, and consultant to global business leaders, executives, entrepreneurs, and military veterans, Citroën helps individuals enhance their position and reputation in complex strategic markets.

She is the author of

- Reputation 360: Jumpstart Your Career By Building a Positive Personal Brand (Palisades Publishing, 2022)
- Control The Narrative: The Executive's Guide to Building, Pivoting and Repairing Your Reputation (Kogan Page, 2021)
- Success After Service: How to Take Control of Your Job Search and Career After Military Duty (Kogan Page, 2020)
- Engaging with Veteran Talent: A quick and practical guide to sourcing, hiring, onboarding, and developing Veteran employees (Palisades Publishing 2017)
- Your Next Mission: A personal branding guide for the military-to-civilian transition (Palisades Publishing, 2014).

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