



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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10 Secrets to Landing Your Dream Job

PART 4

by John West Hadley

Editor's Note: Catch up on Parts 1-3 of "10 Secrets to Landing Your Dream Job" in the January, April and July 2008 issues of The Stepping Stone.

9. AVOID THE Q&A INTERVIEW

One of your primary goals in an interview is to build rapport with the interviewer. You want me as the interviewer to think of you as someone I would like to have on my team, someone I want in the next office partnering with me in achieving my goals. This doesn't happen by simply waiting for me to ask you questions, and then answering them. That approach makes you look very passive, like someone who isn't cut out for a leadership role, and really doesn't impress hiring managers.

If you save your insightful questions for the end, when the interviewer asks if you have any questions, you've missed the boat. The interviewer has already made up his or her mind, and the impact those questions might have had is lost. Ask questions throughout the interview, and focus on turning it into a natural conversation that builds rapport and

makes me believe you are someone I would enjoy working with, who I want on my team supporting me in achieving my goals.

I'm not advocating answering every single question with a question, as that would get tedious for both parties. What I *am* suggesting is that you **follow up every second or third question with your own question, in a way that fits the flow of the conversation.** And this can be as simple as a clarifying question, such as:

Q. Tell me about your strengths.

A: I would have to say that my greatest strengths are my ability to consistently deliver projects on time, my focus on the big picture, and my persuasive presentation skills. Which would you like me to tell you about first?

Answering with a question like this lets you keep the interviewer more engaged, turning the Q&A into more of a conversation, and at the same time gives you valuable insight into what's most important by the answer you receive.

Don't over-think the questions you want to ask, putting a lot of energy into worrying about what questions an employer expects you to ask—think instead about what information YOU NEED to judge whether it's a position / company / boss / culture you want to work in. More important than the specific questions is the fact that you ask questions during the interview and turn it into a comfortable conversation that makes hiring managers feel they would enjoy working with you.

10. FOCUS ON THE CHALLENGES

In an interview, it is critical to get very focused on challenges:

- The challenges you've dealt with in the past,
- The problems you've solved or will be able to solve for the organization, and
- The challenges the organization or hiring manager faces for which you are the solution.

Why is that?

Hiring managers aren't excited about bringing you on board just because there are routine tasks that should be done, and you happen to be experienced doing those tasks. They **WILL** get excited about hiring you if they are facing a challenge, and see you as a strong solution to



that challenge. **And they are ALWAYS facing some challenge, or they wouldn't be looking to hire anyone in the first place.** The better you understand their challenges, the more likely you will be able to communicate clearly how you are the solution.

This applies equally to creating visibility and influence on the job. People are most impressed not by the routine work you do, but by the challenges you overcome to get the work done. The paradox is that if you truly do an outstanding job of dealing with challenges as they arise, make them go away and leave the impression that it was easy, will people every fully recognize the outstanding contribution you are making?

This is why it is vital that your “accomplishment stories” draw a laser beam on the challenges. I've observed that most people don't do a good job of setting the stage in their stories and miss opportunities as a result.

Let me give you an example:

“I created the platform to launch our newest application for commercial loans, including all market research, viability studies and client buy-in. This has been recognized by our CEO as our top avenue for large scale growth in the coming years, and has already produced \$2 million in advance commitments.”

This is a pretty impressive story, isn't it? It clearly lays out what this person did, what he accomplished, and impressive, measurable results. But it could be even more powerful if he backed up a bit and introduced the challenge that caused him to even receive this assignment in the first place:

“XYZ wanted to go public. They were a young, successful company, but with a limited revenue stream that made this difficult—they needed to diversify quickly. They brought me in to create the platform to launch their newest application for commercial loans, including all market research, viability studies and client buy-in. This has been recognized by our CEO as our top avenue

for large-scale growth in the coming years, and has already produced \$2 million in advance commitments.”

See how the addition of the challenge at the beginning improves the story and makes the results seem even that much more impressive? It increases the contrast between the situation before the project and the results achieved.

With every project you complete, with every accomplishment you want to highlight in a status report, cover letter, résumé, marketing brochure, networking meeting, interview, etc., **take some time to think about the key challenges you had to overcome to make it happen. Then make sure that comes across in your story!**

Don't assume you know what my problems are as the hiring manager because you read the job description. Probe deeply into the challenges that this position will help me solve. Ask why those are such a problem, what that means to my operation and what those are costing me. Make me truly believe that hiring you is going to be a powerful solution.

CONCLUSION

I met “Jane” when she had been out of work for two years. By diligently applying these principles, within a few months she was back to an actuarial officer position within an easy commute from home! Her comment six months later:

“The company's great, my boss is super, my colleagues are bright and energetic, and my projects and responsibilities are fun and challenging. I'm so glad that I held out for the right job!”

If you follow the 10 Secrets I've laid out in this four-part article, you too can focus and accelerate your career search to land your dream job! ●



John West Hadley is a career counselor who works with job seekers frustrated with their search, and professionals struggling to increase their visibility and influence at work. He can be reached at John@JHACareers.com or 908.725.2437. His free Career Tips newsletter and other career resources are available at www.JHACareers.com.

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