

How to conquer Pre-Interview Nerves

You just picked up your good suit at the cleaner's; it's as wrinkle-free as a Beverly Hills housewife's new face. Your dress shoes are gleaming; you've got them so well shined. Your watchband matches your belt, and your hair is perfectly coiffed. Take a look in the mirror: You're ready for that interview.

Make Your Nervousness Work for You

Or are you? Notice those beads of sweat racing down your temples? Feel that catch at the back of your throat? Those things are there to tell you you're nervous. Which can be a fine thing. Nervousness can make you concentrate harder, after all. It can sharpen your senses and improve your mental agility.

Nervousness becomes problematic only when it crosses an invisible line and starts diminishing rather than enhancing your performance. If you feel yourself becoming overwhelmed by the pressures of the job search - you're irritable, say, or can't concentrate, or find yourself getting tired for no good reason - then sorry, you're *not* ready for that interview.

Preparation

One good way to overcome pre-interview nervousness, of course, is to spend time preparing. Check out the website of the company you're interviewing with; canvass newspapers and magazines for relevant articles; speak with any contacts you have who can help you get a better understanding of the company; look into the various websites that might help you out.

But what if you've already done your homework? What if you know more about the company than the Managing Director, but are still nervous going into your interview? The answer: Your nervousness is the result of *caring too much*. It's blasphemous for me to say this, of course. After all, according to most career gurus, the job search is a matter of life and death, a sacred ritual requiring precisely the correct chants and offerings. If the job search is not approached with the utmost seriousness, then, surely, the job seeker will . . .

Will *what*? Be condemned for all eternity? Be turned into a frog?

Time to Have Fun?

As far as I can tell, the only result of approaching your job search less seriously is that it can suddenly become a whole lot more fun. The job search is not a life and death matter. Putting on your helmet, picking up your rifle and marching into battle - that's a life and death matter. So is contracting the Ebola virus. Those are things that merit real nervousness- not a lousy interview.

I'm not saying you should slack in your job search, or once you get your new job. What I am saying is that it's possible to be passionate, eager, willing to learn, and responsible - all without taking career matters too seriously.

Get Perspective

Start by trying to give yourself some perspective. Take a step back and try to see the big picture. So what if you flail in your interview? If you don't get that dream job? It's not going to matter an iota to the future of *Homo sapiens*. And after you get over the initial shock that accompanies failure, it's probably not going to matter much to you, either. You're going to wake up the day after the interview. You're going to eat your meals, and play your games, and feel the ache of new crushes, and live your life.

You're going to continue your job search. If you're smart, of course, you'll have learned something

from your failure. Like, how you should never talk about your addiction to bungee jumping in an insurance-company interview. Not getting that job won't be a crushing memory.

If you're lucky, caring less about the job search won't just ease your pre-interview jitters - it'll also give you a new full-time perspective. You'll approach each interview the way interviews are meant to be approached: as an equal partner taking part in an exchange of information -not as a supplicant pleading for his life with the Career Executioner.

If you're *really* lucky, caring less about the job search will prevent you from being lemming-like in your career choices - from blindly choosing jobs just because all the cool kids are choosing them too, and leave you free to pursue the career you truly want. But that's a subject for another column.

So, then. Go back to your mirror. Look yourself in the eye. Say, "I don't care whether I get this job."

Now you're ready for that interview.