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9 Things You Wish Job Candidates Knew

Sure, you'll consider their qualifications. But admit it: This is what you're really looking for during interviews.

Job candidates say a lot during an interview. As the interviewer, so do you.

But there's a lot you wish you could say to job candidates well before the interview ever takes place:

1. I want you to be likable.

Obvious, sure, but also critical. I want to work with people I like and who like me.

So I want you to smile. I want you to make eye contact, sit forward in your chair, and be enthusiastic. The employer-employee relationship truly is a relationship--and that relationship starts with the interview (if not before).

A candidate who makes a great first impression and sparks a real connection instantly becomes a big fish in a very small short-list pond.

You may have solid qualifications, but if I don't think I'll enjoy working with you, I'm probably not going to hire you.

Life is too short.

2. I'm taken aback when you say you want the job right away.

Oh, I do want you to want the job--but not before you really know what the job entails. I may need you to work 60-hour weeks, or travel 80% of the time, or report to someone with less experience than you... so hang in there.

No matter how much research you've done, you can't know you want the job until you know everything possible about the job.

3. I want you to stand out....

A sad truth of interviewing is that later I often don't recall, unless I refer to my notes, a significant amount about some of the candidates. (Unfair? Sure. Reality? Absolutely.)

The more people I interview for a job and the more spread out those interviews, the more likely I am to remember a candidate by impressions rather than by a long list of facts.

So when I meet with staff to discuss potential candidates I might initially refer to someone as, "the guy with the handcuff-ready stainless steel briefcase," or "the woman who does triathlons," or "the guy who grew up in Romania."

In short, I may remember you by "hooks"--whether flattering or unflattering--so use that to your advantage. Your hook could be your clothing, or an outside interest, or an unusual fact about your upbringing or career.

Better yet your hook could be the project you pulled off in half the expected time, or the huge sale you made.

Instead of letting me choose, give me one or two notable ways to remember you.

4. ...But not for being negative.

There's no way I can remember everything you say. But I will remember sound bites, especially negative ones.

Some candidates complain, without prompting, about their current employer, their coworkers, their customers.

So if, for example, you hate being micro-managed, instead say you're eager to earn more responsibility and authority. I get there are reasons you want a new job but I want to hear why you want my job instead of why you're desperate to to escape your old job.

And keep in mind I'm well aware our interview is like a first date. I know I'm getting the best possible version of "you." So if you whine and complain and grumble *now*... I know you'll be a total downer to be around in a few months.

5. I want you to ask lots of questions about what really matters to you...

I need to know whether I should hire you, but just as importantly I need you to make sure my job is a good fit for you.

So I want you to [ask lots of questions](#): What I expect you to accomplish early on, what attributes make our top performers so outstanding, what you can do to truly drive results, how you'll be evaluated--all the things that matter to you and to me and my business.

You know what makes work meaningful and enjoyable to you. I don't. There's no other way to really know whether you want the job unless you ask questions.

6. ...But only if the majority of those questions relate to work.

I know you want a positive work-life balance. Still, save all those questions about vacation sign-up policies and whether it's okay to take an extra half hour at lunch every day if you also stay a half hour late and whether I've considered setting up an in-house childcare facility because that would be really awesome for you and your family.

First let's find out if you're the right person for the job, and whether the tasks, responsibilities, duties, etc. are right for you.

Then we can talk about the rest.

7. I love when you bring a "project."

I expect you to do a little research about my company. That's not impressive; that's a given.

To really impress me, tell me how you will hit the ground running and contribute right away--the bigger the impact the better. If you bring a specific skill, show how I can leverage that skill immediately.

Remember how I see it: I have to pay you starting day one, so I'd love to see an immediate return starting day one.

8. I want you to ask for the job... and I want to know *why*.

By the end of the interview you should have a good sense of whether you want the job. If you need more information, say so. Let's figure out how to get you what you need to make a decision.

If you don't need more information, do what great salespeople do and ask for the job. I'll like the fact you asked. I want you to really want the job--but I also want to know *why* you want the job.

So tell me why: You thrive in an unsupervised role, or you love working with multiple teams, or you like frequent travel. Ask me for the job and prove to me, objectively, that it's a great fit for you.

9. I want you to follow up... especially if it's genuine.

Every interviewer appreciates a brief follow-up note. If nothing else, saying you enjoyed meeting me and are happy to answer any other questions, is nice.

But "nice" may not separate you from the pack.

What I really like is when you follow up based on something we discussed. Maybe we talked about data collection techniques, so you send me information about a set of tools you strongly recommend. Maybe we talked about quality, so you send me a process checklist you developed that I could adapt to use in my company.

Or maybe we both like cycling, so you send me a photo of you on your bike in front of the sign at the top of the [Col du Tourmalet](#) (and I'm totally jealous).

The more closely you listened during the interview, the easier it is to think of ways to follow up in a natural and unforced way.

Remember, we're starting a relationship--and even the most professional of relationships are based on genuine interactions.