

Interviewing for a PR Job

Written by Business News

One of two things is going on.

Either a lot of people are interested in PR jobs, or a lot of people are unhappy with their current PR jobs. Alternatively, it could simple be that the end of the year is coming up and people have a hankering for a change.

Regardless of the cause, I've been getting a lot of emails from readers regarding the job search and interview process. This week, I decided to concentrate on the latter with some helpful tips for interviewees.



1. Your resume should, first and foremost, be accurate. I won't comment on embellishing a little bit, but if you put outright lies on your resume, there's a good chance that you will be caught. Not only will you not get the job, but word may spread through the PR community that you've lied on your resume. Plus, if you need to lie on your resume, you're probably not qualified for the job to begin with.

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2. Research the company where you are interviewing. Know who the company's clients are, or what the company's business is if it's an internal PR job. Spend some time looking at the press they've gotten and think about ways to improve upon their media coverage. Be prepared to discuss the business or the business of the clients, as well as the PR angles related to the company.

3. Arrive a few minutes early and be dressed to impress. Most importantly, understand the culture of the place where you are interviewing. If it's a Fortune 500 company, proper business attire should be worn. For a boutique firm, however, you may be able to go a more business-casual route. Regardless of how formal the setting is, be well-groomed. I generally have a beard or some sort of facial hair. It's OK for me to bounce around my Brooklyn neighborhood looking like a wolf-man, but when I have meetings I make sure to groom myself appropriately.

4. Be pleasant to everyone you encounter before, during and after the interview. I once rescinded a job offer to someone because they treated our office manager like dirt while they were waiting to be interviewed. (The office manager told me about the incident after the interview.) If you're a jerk, at least wait until after you've got the job nailed down before everyone knows it.

5. Speak clearly, exhibit positive body language and don't fiddle about. Your body language says a lot about you. People who slouch tend to lack confidence, while people who use excessive hand motions tend to be nuts. (Just kidding.) Mumblerers are the worse, especially in the PR industry where talking is an important skill.

6. Explain why you want the job and why you want to leave your current job. As a young idiot, I once told a prospective employer that all I cared about was money. This may have worked on Wall Street, but I was interviewing at a tech company, and it was a stupid thing to say. Come up with a better explanation of "I want a new challenge" and direct the answer towards the company/firm itself. ("I was impressed by your client roster and excited about the possibilities of working with some of them.")

7. When speaking about your prior experience, highlight your accomplishments, but also note when you worked as a team. Most PR jobs involved teamwork, and portraying yourself as the single best PR person ever probably won't fly.

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8. Consider talking about an experience where you learned something due to failure. You don't want to tell the story about how you forgot to call the reporter before deadline with that statement which never ran, but it may be worth your while to explain how the group failed or made a mistake and what you learned from it.

9. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know." Not every question is designed to have a right, wrong or any answer. Admitting that you don't know something is better than saying something stupid. It also tells the interviewer that you're not a know-it-all.

10. Ask questions. When I interviewed a crop of prospective employees recently, I was amazed at how few questions I was asked. I got the typical questions about the job, its pay, benefits and such, but I did not get many questions about our company's operations, culture, history or goals. If you want to be viewed as a valuable asset, show the interviewer that information is a two-way street and that you want as much information as they do.

11. Talk about your strengths and weaknesses, emphasizing the former, of course. Unless you're interviewing for an executive position, you're not expected to know everything about anything. Personally, I like candidates who express a want and willingness to learn, as opposed to someone who feels that they're an expert in virtually everything related to the job.

12. Speak about what you would like accomplish at the company or firm. Few interviewers will be interested in hearing that you want to make vice president by a certain age. They are more likely to respond to someone who talks about helping to grow and better a business, the assumption being that you will eventually be promoted for your hard work. Do, however, ask about upward movement within the ranks.

13. Be grateful for the time the interviewer spends with you, and express thanks at the end of the interview and in a follow-up communication. (Email is best.)

Good luck, and remember that finding a new job and interviewing is a process. If at first you don't succeed, just keep trying. The right fit will come along.

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