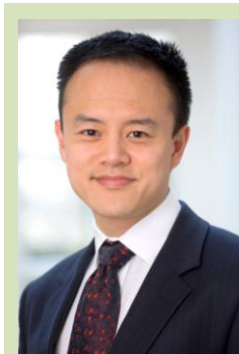


How to present yourself in a job interview



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A big chunk of my work is training managers on how to interview candidates. I also interview senior candidates on behalf of organizations when the stakes are high and the organization wants to make the very best hiring decision. And I see a lot of candidates who simply don't present themselves well.

So how can you present yourself well if you're on the lookout for a new job?

For starters, don't worry about your body language.

You may have heard it said that most of the impact we have on other people comes down to body language and tone of voice. A commonly quoted statistic says that 55% of what we communicate is through our posture, movements and facial expressions. 38% of our impact is supposed to come through tone of voice and only 7% from our actual words.

However, the statistics are wrong. They come from research conducted back in the 1960s that has been widely misinterpreted; more recent studies prove that body language matters little. For example, University of Southern Mississippi researcher James Hollandsworth used a statistical technique known as discriminant analysis to examine the relative importance of seven factors on interview performance. They looked at candidate behaviours such as eye contact, body posture, loudness of speech, and content of what people said.

Their findings?

The single most important factor was the appropriateness of people's content, i.e. the answers that candidates gave. The next most important factor was fluency of speech (which was defined as speaking without too much hesitation) followed by composure (i.e. coming across as calm and confident).

Body language hardly mattered. So don't worry about whether you're sitting with your arms or legs crossed or uncrossed. Don't overthink whether you're giving enough or too much eye contact. Instead, prepare to win the job by thinking about examples – short stories – to demonstrate your skills and experience.

Suppose an interviewer asks you “Are you a good manager?” Be sure to give an example of a situation in which you demonstrated great leadership skills. Perhaps you discovered that a project was in danger of missing its deadline but you managed to work out how to get it all done on time anyway. Maybe you uncovered a conflict between colleagues and helped them to resolve it. The point is to construct a short story demonstrating how your actions led directly to benefits for your team, customers or organisation.

Finally, allow time to prepare for an interview by not only thinking about the answers you might give but also rehearsing them. After all, actors preparing to go on stage don't merely read through their scripts over and over; no, they rehearse their lines out loud while thinking about their pacing, volume and intonation. And they do it multiple times until they know they can repeat the performance under pressure.

Good candidates don't just have the right skills and experience; they also think about how best to present their skills and experience. So help yourself to be one of those stronger candidates.