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Turning Opportunity In To Interviews

What is the most critical skill to one's CAREER success - yet also the most elusive? Time management? Strategic thinking? Discipline? Decision making? No. While these are important, they pale in comparison to communication skills, BOTH personal and professional: Attentive listening, asking relevant questions, showing empathy, and knowing how to handle difficult communications are the most critical to career success.

They are vital to building healthy relationships, exchanging ideas, sharing feelings, gaining buy-in, setting clear expectations, and working collaboratively. The lack of these skills is at the root of most conflicts, employee performance issues, failed projects, and lost opportunities...JOBS????

You can be a subject matter expert, but if you can't communicate your ideas, your ideas are of little value. You can have a great value proposition, branding, for the future, but if you can't get people to buy into it, your vision doesn't matter. You can be a masterful manager, but if you can't reassure or empathize with your clients, they will seek help elsewhere.

You might have a skill set/experience to sell, but if you can't articulate a compelling value proposition, you won't find many takers. Your ability to communicate determines your success at work or home.

How do you rate your current communication's skills? And, more importantly, how do you improve them to enhance job search or career transition SUCCESS?



A famous coach, of **Green Bay Packer** fame, spoke frankly when he said, "Perfect practice makes perfect." Mr. Lombardi's intent was CLEAR. He wanted his players to concentrate on PRACTICE, drilling on the "little things", the basics, so that they became instinct during the heat of real life.

Such is productive mindset during any career transition, specifically related to your ability to relate your well positioned "story" to others, answer questions effectively, conduct productive negotiations, and, in general, fine tune your personal salesmanship skills.

THE BASICS

So what are those basics that will allow you to effectively network to identify appropriate opportunities, and then secure the requisite INTERVIEWS in order to "close the deal?"

1. Practice your two minute drill every chance you get.... it's the fundamental building material of your communication strategy--your verbal collaterals!

2. Practice your exit and qualification statements... most all potential employers and networking contacts will want to know your current situation and why you are available.

3. Practice answering both common and tough questions... including pre-offer negotiation tactics. The most asked question during career transition is, "Tell me about yourself." Appropriate use of your two-minute drill and related verbal strategies, your "verbal collaterals," is a key ingredient to personal salesmanship...

- A verbal resume... A tightly focused, upbeat telling of "your story" told in a high impact two minute format. With practice, can be easily personalized to your listener.
- An "elevator pitch"... A succinct summary of your qualifications for a specifically positioned function or opportunity. With practice, can become quite spontaneous.
- A qualification statement that can be used in introducing yourself

Let's not forget a couple of additional 'collaterals' that will help you round out your ability to 'get the word out' and serve as evidence of your qualifications.

4. Brag bytes... Wordcraft various collections of words, phrases and sentences to capture memorable moments or accomplishments--the best you have to offer. "...saved 80% cost-perhire..." Used in MSWord, 'Quick Parts' can be quite efficient when building high impact correspondence as well.

5. Personal Portfolio... Your collection of certificates, examples of work, reference letters, etc that can bring life and interest (not to mention PROOF) to your story.

Understanding Interview Process

Every step in the job search process is aimed at identifying appropriate opportunities (your next right employment) and obtaining interviews to secure employment. The interview process allows a potential hiring manager to decide if you are right for the job, and, just as important, it is your time to evaluate whether the job is right for you.

Most interviews follow a predictable format, with logical steps that both the interviewer and applicant follow to decide if both will benefit from working together. The best interviews are ones in which both participants are equal and have a mutually beneficial, interactive conversation regarding the opportunity at hand. Think of an interview as the natural extension, the successful result of your effective networking. In fact, many networking conversations actually become screening interviews, where influential contacts are assessing your qualifications, skill sets and experience relative to an opportunity at hand.

“Perfect practice” of the basics builds the confidence necessary to perform well in formal job interviews. Let’s break down the basics into four areas...

1. Pre-contact preparation/ research,
2. Greeting and rapport,
3. Questions/answers, and ...
4. Meeting closure. All four stages are equally important and deserve your consideration and preparation.

Turning Opportunities In To Interviews... This topic represents what most people call ‘active job search, but, as you can learn, the HOW –TO is what creates your success in networking. It professes strategies and tactics that will generate more effective networking. In your ‘first wave’ of networking you had the opportunity to:

1. Reconnect with people you already know or have cause to know...
2. In a non-threatening environment, confirm your positioning and get valuable input to your assessment and objective setting...
3. Broaden your networking base, and gaining confidence in the process—a neat by-product that will serve you well for the rest of your career...
4. Identify attractive opportunities, and targeted organization!

You'll be the first to know when you're ready for 'wave 2' of networking... which, simply put, is networking your way in to attractive opportunities. You will focus your activity and time management to the business of creating INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION with employees, customers, and vendors—the "stakeholders"—within and surrounding any targeted organization.

RESEARCHING TARGET Organizations and Attractive Positions

Step six in our 12-step Process, first level research, will help you to identify attractive trends and targeted companies. But, in THIS context, I suggest digging a bit deeper in order to help secure an interview... Learn as much as possible about the company, the potential opportunity, and the hiring authority—This is usually your next boss, but could be even higher in the chain of command.

Your research goals ought to include developing information about the company's products, people, organizational structure, successes (and failures), profits (and losses), capital spending, strategic plans, philosophy and labor climate. Showing your knowledge of some of this information can give you added credibility over other candidates networking to, and actually interviewing for the job.

- Research the company web site, looking for information relative to your function and level... a company's financial and annual reports can provide clues to their stability and market share. Don't forget directories, trade journals, the "business press," and databases of articles and other news.
- As part of your 'second wave of networking,' ask a friendly recruiter, business acquaintance or stockbroker what they know about the company... and by extension, call people with whom you have networked and ask what they know about the company
- Check with the local Chamber of Commerce or Better Business Bureau.
- Call the company directly; request a sales brochure, annual report or other company information. Companies have to market themselves, too, you know!

Telephone and Networking Skills

On a scale of passive to assertive => to aggressive, let's take a look at how we could communicate direct to contacts in and surrounding a targeted organization...

Email...safe, but too easy to be deleted before a relationship is established. Requires follow-up.

LETTER of introduction... also safe, but read more often. Paves the way for a first call to a referral... creates dialog. Requires phone follow-up.

Phone call...direct... often a cold call... requires risk. Establishes contact, interaction and, worst case, VISIBILITY.

There's only two reasons to be on the phone during active job search...

1. Reconnecting with valid contacts, seeking their advice and information, sharing your communication strategy, and seeking referral activity...
2. Securing actual interviews

Cover NOTE and resume... Rather than mindlessly applying to countless jobs, playing the numbers game; develop your networking style to motivate a person to request your resume. When requested, resume gets read more often. Establishes relationship. Requires follow-through. Face2face office visit!



ABOUT DFWCareerpilot... A FREE, WEEKLY WORKSHOP event with a regular rotation of topical material covering a 12-Step Process **M.A.P. (MAHER Associates Process)** that will accelerate your job search success. Bob's presentation style is highly engaging and interactive, so never be shy with questions and/or supportive anecdotes.

BE PREPARED for Bob's two philosophies: Learn to Embrace The OTHER Job Market... and, fully optimize your efforts with a high tech/high touch approach!

1. His public Group on LinkedIn: **DFWCareerpilot**
2. **GO TO: www.dfwcareerpilot.com** and **FOLLOW** (register for) it to receive regular updates
3. Follow **DFWCareerpilot** on Twitter!



Bob Maher created his online presence, www.careerpilot.com, in 1994. He has over thirty years of successful experience in Corporate Recruitment, performance management and Career Management Services. He is an entrepreneur and innovator in the use of information technology in the recruitment and employment process.

On the Founder's Council of the Association of Career Professionals - International and quite active in their Professional Development, Technology and Chapter Growth initiatives--a frequent speaker at industry conferences and seminars. The Institute of Career Certification-International has him reviewing the portfolios of incoming applicants. Bob was presented with the prestigious LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT award by The Association in 2006.