

Positivity and preparation open doors

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In the worst job market in decades, you've landed an interview! Now all you have to do is turn that meeting into an employment offer. No stress, right?

"Preparation and knowledge have always been the keys to interview success," said Deena Takata, career counselor with Jewish Family & Career Services (JF&CS). "In a tight market, they are more important than ever."

JF&CS offers free job search, résumé skills and interviewing techniques, workshops and counseling.

"We're seeing people improve their techniques and find jobs," she said. Here's how:

Step one: Check negative emotions at the door. Takata begins her workshops by handing out a worksheet listing emotions, like hurt, depressed, angry, scared or excited, and asking job seekers to circle all that apply.

"Most say they could circle them all. A job search is an emotional rollercoaster," she said, "but you don't want negative emotions bleeding through in an interview. You want to be positive and forward-thinking."

Find one supportive person. Share your negative emotions with that person; then mentally put them away in a box in the closet, she suggests.

"You don't want to share negativity with your friends and neighbors, because that's your potential network. People won't recommend anyone who is bitter or angry," Takata said.

Step two: Do your homework. Research the company and industry, practice the experiences you want to share and know the questions you want to ask.

"A little adrenalin will keep you sharp, but when you've done your homework, your anxiety level goes down and your confidence level up," Takata said.

Step three: Understand the process. The interviewer's agenda is to make sure you meet the qualifications on your résumé; to see how you fit with the team and to see if he can afford you, Takata said. Your agenda is to make sure that you get what you have to offer (skills and strengths) on the table, establish a rapport, and find out if this company/boss/job meets your goals. Remembering that the interview is a two-way street can help you shift your mental attitude from "begger" to "valuable contributor," she said.

"You wouldn't have been called if your qualifications didn't match the job description. Your job is to confirm your résumé and help the interviewer visualize you in the position," Takata said. You can do that best by showing how you've succeeded in similar types of circumstances.

Step four: Focus on who you're talking to. **Leadership and career coach Tamara O'Neill** just helped a client land a high-level position that doubled his salary by coaching him through 13 interviews with the same company in 11 weeks. Each interviewer had different expectations.

"You've got to be strategic about matching your experience and strengths to that manager or unit's needs," said O'Neill, president of Careers on Course. Use the Internet, your network, associations, recruiter and other resources to gain a better understanding of company structure and challenges. A coach can help you gain insight into what you do best.

"When you show interest in the interviewer's needs, she may open up what she really wants in a candidate, and you can target your responses. Use your unique experiences and skills to show how you can solve their problems — that's the real connection," O'Neill said.

Step five: Establish rapport and build trust. "This is your job in an interview. The interviewer wants to see how you communicate and whether you'll work well with the team," Takata said. "You don't have to be someone you're not. Be sincere and genuine, but present your best self."

When asked a negative question, such as "What happened to your last job?" use the sandwich technique, she said. "Place the negative news/comment between two positive ones, such as 'I had a great five years at XYZ company, but unfortunately they had a downsizing, which is why I'm so excited to be here talking about your opportunity,'" Takata said.

Deflect early salary requirement questions that could eliminate you from consideration by suggesting that you discuss the job and fit first. Or ask what range the interviewer had in mind.

"As the interview is wrapping up, offer to answer anything that hasn't been asked yet," O'Neill said.

Step six: Ask for the job. Don't just hope you're chosen; show your enthusiasm.

http://www.ajc.com/hotjobs/content/hotjobs/careercenter/articles/2009/07/05/job_search_strategies.html?cxntlid=inform_sr