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TALKING TOO MUCH IN A JOB INTERVIEW MAY KILL YOUR CHANCE

By Joann S. Lublin, January 23, 2008
From The Wall Street Journal Online
(Reprinted with the permission of WSJ)

You can blow a promising opportunity by talking too much during a job interview.

That's how one facilities administrator ruined her employment chances at Clark Nuber, a small accounting firm in Bellevue, Wash. Asked to describe her strengths, the applicant delivered a long-winded reply focused on her cleaning of every cabinet in her home. "She probably went on for three to four minutes," recalls Tracy White, the firm's human-resources director. "I doubted she could get the job done in an eight-hour day."

Many nervous job seekers blabber endlessly about irrelevant information. They create a poor impression and cut short the hiring manager's time for further questions. "That official won't pay any attention to you unless you prove you're sharp during the first five minutes," cautions Robin Ryan, a career counselor, author and speaker in Newcastle, Wash. "Oversharing in an interview is the most dangerous thing you can do," concurs Annie Stevens, a managing partner at ClearRock, a Boston executive-coaching and outplacement concern.

Don't despair. Here are four ways to steer clear of verbosity during a job hunt:

- Prepare short statements on how your background matches the job. Rehearse.

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*"None of us will ever
accomplish anything
excellent or commanding
except when he listens to this
whisper which is heard
by him alone."*

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

When a hiring manager says, "Tell me about yourself," you can offer a few war stories that recount a work problem, your corrective action and the measurable result. "The stories have to be powerful as well as engaging," lasting no longer than two minutes apiece, says Rich Gee, an executive coach in Stamford, Conn.

He helped Ward Smith, a talkative golf pro and instructor, to win a marketing spot with Black & Decker. During practice sessions with the coach, Mr. Smith supplied elaborate detail about the golf irons that he recommended to students. A hiring manager "doesn't need to know this," Mr. Gee interjected.

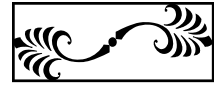
Mr. Smith soon realized he should translate "what I was doing into what Black & Decker was looking for," and keep it succinct. During his job interview, he used marketing lingo to describe briefly his teaching methods, explaining how he identified students' objectives, forged a rapport and enabled them to reach solutions. He now is an Atlanta field-marketing coordinator for a Black & Decker unit.

Embracing a similar approach, a jobless organizational-development consultant recently landed follow-up interviews with three possible employers. Callbacks rarely occurred when I "was running off at the mouth," he remembers. Defining yourself concisely also "builds an enormous amount of confidence for the next interview," he notes.

- Make sure you understand a question. Stop every couple of sentences to check. If the interviewer requests your career history, you might inquire, "Do you want me to start with my present situation or at the beginning?" This type of response

"You can develop good judgment as you do the muscles of your body - by judicious, daily exercise. "

- Grenville Kleiser



demonstrates a candidate "is preparing mentally for what's he's going to give me," says Peter D. Crist, head of recruiters Crist Associates in Hinsdale, Ill.

Pausing after you speak lets you collect your thoughts -- and seek permission to continue. Before you resume, Ms. White suggests asking, "Did I answer your question enough? Do you want more examples?"

- Watch the interviewer's body language for hints that your answers are getting boring. He may stop taking notes, check his watch or glance at his computer. A loquacious middle manager ignored such warning signals after spending 15 minutes telling a West Coast recruiter about several extraneous issues, including her husband's problems with his boss.

"I was rolling my eyes and tapping my pen on her resume to indicate we should get back to work here," the exasperated recruiter says. He finally cut her off because he had many more questions to pose.

- Solicit feedback following an interview.

The West Coast recruiter decided against referring the middle manager to a client. "You had a number of stories to tell but they weren't relevant," he told her. "Use each minute to its best advantage to sell your background."

With practice, you'll be able to polish your pitch, adjusting the length of your re-

sponses until someone says, "You're hired!"

"Success is often the result of taking a misstep in the right direction."

- Al Bernstein



ASSESSING CORPORATE CULTURE

By Randi Bussin, February 27, 2008
Published in AspireForSuccess.com
(Reprinted with permission)

As a career coach, I've occasionally had clients come back to me for redirection after several months on the job. Often the all-too-perfect role turns sour because of the corporate culture and/or internal politics.

Most ask how they can assess these factors ahead of time. Although culture is intangible, there are a few things potential candidates can do to get a read on the environment before they say 'yes'.

Before we begin, let's just step back for a minute and discuss what culture is and why it's important. What is corporate culture? At its most basic, corporate culture can be described as an organization's personality and the shared idea of 'how things are done around here'.

Corporate culture is a broad term and guides how employees think, act, feel, and behave. It describes the unique beliefs and behavior of a company and includes the organization's core values, mission, ethics, and rules of behavior.

Why is corporate culture important? Cul-

ture is important because it affects the hours you work, how people interact with each other (or don't), how people dress, benefits offered to employees (flextime, telecommuting, etc), office layout, training, and professional development. As you can see, culture affects just about everything that relates to your work.

So how do you assess the true culture of a potential employer?

The first step toward determining whether you will be a good match for a company is to know yourself and know what matters most to you (your values). You have to be crystal clear about what you are seeking from each role and each company. Are you seeking intellectual stimulation, a family-friendly environment, a social outlet, or work-life balance?

The next step is to use the job interview – and your networking interviews – to determine if the employer's work environment is aligned with your core values. Working at a company whose value system does not match your own (understaffed, unethical, non-philanthropic) can leave you feeling unfulfilled.

During your networking and/or interviewing, be sure to ask demanding questions of the prospective employer. Here are some sample questions:

What three words or phrases would you use to describe the company/department culture?

Pay attention to the adjectives that are used to see if they fit with your values. Does the company have a stated set of cultural values?

Often, a mission statement is a good place to start to gather insights in this area.

Can you describe the environment here? Pay attention to the words used and the aspects of the work environment the employer mentions, such as camaraderie, career-development opportunities, and work-life initiatives.

What is the company's attitude toward educational and professional development?

Does the company place a value on life-long learning and advancement?

What type of employee achievements are recognized by the employer?

Pay attention to what the company values, and whether any special awards are given for outstanding customer service, sales, etc.

What type of sponsorships or philanthropic activities does the company participate in? Does the company partner with United Way, or support programs such as Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day? Do company employees volunteer for local charities?

Another great way to assess corporate culture is to pay attention to details as you walk around the office during your interviews. Reflect on things you notice, including:

How were you treated during the interviews? Were people on time? Were there key phrases the interviewers used frequently that would give you a clue as to what the company values/does not value? How prepared were the interviewers? Had

they seen your resume?

Do people look happy and appear to be having fun?

Do senior management members sit with everyone else or do they have fancy lush offices?

Does the office layout promote collaboration between departments?

Are people eating lunch at their desk alone, or in groups in a cafeteria?

Finding the right culture is key to your career success. Think about your impressions of the corporate culture during your networking and interviewing, and capture your thoughts afterward. Pay attention to your intuition: if you have a bad feeling, it might be best to decline further interviews and/or an offer.

[Randi Bussin](#) founder and president of [Aspire!](#), is a career coach and counselor with 25 years of business, entrepreneurial, and career coaching expertise.



EDITOR'S NOTES

The Career Transition Center completed another Job Search Program workshop on Friday, March 28. 56 participants, including former U/S Nick Burns and A/S Maura Harty participated in the program. A job fair was held as a part of the program, which included 37 private and public sector employers and about 150 employees, former and current JSP attendees.

TOP SECRET SALARIES

Defense-industry workers with security clearances earn \$72,803 in average annual pay, according to a recent survey of 4,200 job seekers registered on ClearanceJobs.com. Conducted between March 2007 and February 2008, the results show a 6% increase from last year's survey during the same period. Salaries for security-cleared professionals in Crystal City, Va., which is in close proximity to the Pentagon, rose 19% -- the greatest year-over-year pay increase. Among the 20 highest paid job categories in the survey, security-cleared workers reported earning an average of \$19,138 - or 22% -- more than their closest non-cleared peers. (Source Clearance.jobs)

VOLUNTEER LEADS

National Volunteer Week April 27 – May 3, 2008

A service of the Points of Light & Hands On Network and again sponsored by Target, the 2008 National Volunteer Week is fast approaching. From April 27 to May 3, this special week offers opportunities to thank some of America's most valuable assets — our volunteers — and to recognize the myriad of ways they improve our communities.

National Volunteer Week reflects the power that volunteers have to “inspire by example” — volunteers both encourage those they help and motivate others to serve! Find out how you, too, can participate in the week's many offerings. This year's theme is "Volunteer to Change the World".

If you are interested in volunteering, check out <http://www.pointsoflight.org/programs/seasons/nvw/>

ATTENTION, JSP GRADS!

JSP FOLLOW-UP MEETINGS

All JSP graduates of the March 2008 and previous classes are invited to attend follow-up meetings in Room E-2118 to discuss progress on your job search, share experiences and advice, and enjoy each other's company.

Dates:

- Tuesday, April 8, 10:00 am
- Tuesday, April 22, 10:00 am

Mark your calendars! The next Job Fair will be held on Tuesday, August 26, 2008.



Would you like to speak with future JSP participants about life after U.S. government service? The JSP includes several panels comprised of JSP graduates. They include: the JSP graduates panel; small business owners panel; independent consulting panel; the education, NGO/Nonprofit, writing and publishing, volunteer, part-time, association speakers and WAE panels.

Sharing your experiences can be very helpful and reassuring to your colleagues! If you are interested, send me an email at HayesP@state.gov.



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