

Seven Things You Must Do in an Interview

When "interviewing up" there are certain things you want to communicate. Here's how to ace those key conversations

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When you are looking to make the Big Leap—the one that puts you closer to the power centers of a business or organization—the interview process will likely be different from what you've experienced before. The more senior the person or people you're interviewing with, the more definite their ideas are likely to be about what they're looking for. They know that their own continued success depends on hiring the best people.

So how do you prove your readiness for the big leagues? By thinking like a big-league player. This interview will be different from others, but it will be your best chance to impress the decisionmakers, so there are some key points you want to be certain you get across. Here are tips to help you succeed:

Show you get the "big picture"

Any number of interview candidates may possess specific subject-knowledge valuable to a business. But the candidate who goes beyond mere information and displays an ability to use it well is more likely to get the job. Senior executives and managers generally want people who pay attention to and understand the broader view.

TIP: Demonstrate you recognize patterns and understand their importance; that you know how to use and synthesize information.

Find out what keeps the boss up at night

Do your homework so you understand not only the job or promotion for which you are applying, but also the job of the senior executive above it. Do you know to whom this person reports, and what the top issues are for your boss's boss?

TIP: Make that knowledge part of your interview conversation. Show an interest not only in the specifics of the job, but in the product and markets for that company. Ask broad questions: "What do you think the potential growth in the Indian market is?"

Look for answers

Senior managers are looking for candidates who are creative thinkers focused on finding solutions. It is less important that you show you know the details of the problems the organization faces than that you're able to demonstrate readiness to look for options and find solutions.

TIP: Think about problems in the past you've identified and managed to solve. Show readiness to tackle the tough issues.

Show some guts

Chances are whoever you're interviewing with got where he is by showing some moxie, and you should too. Top people need and want folks around them who are not afraid to speak up and will confidently assert their ideas. It is the only way to be part of the process.

TIP: Be ready with an example of a time when you weren't afraid to go out on a limb and your actions helped bring about real change.

Show your softer side, too

Yes, you should speak up and assert your ideas. But there will be times when the folks at the top will want—will even need—for you to go along once a decision has been made, even if you don't agree with it.

TIP: Think about past experiences you can discuss to demonstrate you're comfortable with the challenges of a dynamic environment.

Listen

Just as you want to make it plain in an interview that you are not too timid to speak up, you want to make it clear you are not over-confident or intent on dominating the process. Demonstrate you are able to listen without being too eager to cut off dialog.

TIP: Ask questions that reflect the concerns of the questioner in a constructive way. For instance, if you are asked what you would do in a certain situation, resist the temptation to answer before you've asked some questions of your own.

Keep it positive

If there's one thing senior managers have a universal distaste for, it's whining. Remember, every hiring manager wants to hire a team player who will bring positive energy and real initiative to the job. Be ready with examples of positive suggestions about problems or issues that you took initiative on in order to demonstrate your people skills.

TIP: Steer clear of any criticism of prior managers, even if invited to offer it.