

Dealing with the Chatty One-Sided Interviewer

By Roger Manning

Every now and then you are going to experience an interview with an employer where you walk out and wonder what just happened. The interviewer talked and talked and told you all about themselves, the company, the opportunity and then closes the interview by saying, "we will be making a decision in a couple of weeks and we will let you know." Has this ever happened to you? Your first impression is that things went very well because the employer opened up so much to you. But there is really more to this kind of interview. Let's look at the possibilities:

- A. The employer had already made up their mind about you prior to the interview and was just going through the motions to be nice to you.
- B. The employer had already found the right candidate prior to your interview and was not giving you the time that you deserved.
- C. The employer is a very poor interviewer and talks too much.
- D. The employer has no formal interview format and makes decisions based on casual conversations.

The Caveats

- 1. You never have a chance to present your strengths and assets for this position.
- 2. You never have a chance to correct any misconceptions about your background that perhaps were pre-conceived by just looking at your resume.
- 3. You never have a chance to see if there can be a bonding relationship between the employer and you.
- 4. You never have the chance to ask the career oriented questions that you prepared in advance.

The Strategy

When the interviewer does most of the talking, there is not a lot you can do to change the behavior. But, there are a few things you must try to do to assist this person in learning about you and what you have to offer this company.

- 1. **Make a good first impression.** Although important in any interview, it is especially important when you get an opportunity to sell yourself. Watch for an opening in the employer's conversation to make a point about your past experience and how it will be an asset in that situation.
- 2. **Watch for an opening to make the conversation more interactive.** Show an interest in the company, product or person. Again, be ready with examples of how you had similar experiences; related knowledge or skills; accomplishments in similar situations. Then ask for clarification from the employer as to a fit between what he/she was referencing and to your background. You must strive for confirmation of fit whenever possible. The

employer must come to the realization that even though they are talking so much that you are matching up to their needs.

3. **Listen to the information being given.** The information given may be a key to whether you want to work for this company. Have you heard the old adage, "Loose lips sink ships"? Also, you will want to assess whether or not this person, acting as your future employer/boss, will listen to you and your suggestions? Can you have a respectful relationship or even mentor relationship? Is this person wise or they just chatty?
4. **Listen for clues about the company's problems.** A chatty employer may be a very specific strategy on his/her part to see how you will respond, either positively or negatively. Some interviewers take the approach of giving negative stories or information during the interview to see if the candidate is a positive, proactive, problem-solver or will they walk away from the opportunity. Be prepared to offer some suggestions based upon your past experience or research. Demonstrate that you are a problem-solver and not afraid of a strong challenge.
5. **Be prepared.** Prepare a two-minute summary of your background and what you are looking for. It would even be a good idea to have a summary sheet made up in advance as to what your strengths and assets are for this position. Hand it to the employer. Tell the employer that you wanted to be sure that they saw these traits, attributes and accomplishments in you. After the interview, a Thank You letter outlining similar information would be proper supportive strategy. Sometimes you have to lead "the horse to the water"!
6. **Let the interviewer know why you think you are a good match for the job.** Say something like, "I'd like to share my experiences and projects I've worked on that are similar to some of the duties you've mentioned." This is actually a proactive version of responding to a behavioral interview question. You say something like, " When I was at the XYZ COMPANY in 1995, I had a situation where I had to, I presented a plan to management that consisted of, it was approved and I implemented the plan within 30 days. The results of the implemented plan yielded and management told me that they were quite impressed. I receivedas a result of this successful program." Be specific, be objective and focus on painting mental pictures that the employer can see you doing similar things for him/her at their company.
7. **Don't take it personally or become defensive.** Wait it out, and ask questions as appropriate. Again, pre-planning a list of career-focused questions is a must. When given the chance, interject a career-focused question that is appropriate for the time. This tactic looks like a conversational dialogue in response to what the employer is talking about. Check off your question upon the list when it is answered. Let the employer see that you have a list and that you were prepared for this interview. Make it clear that you have more questions so that the interviewer may turn the reigns over to you some time soon.
8. **Ask a Direction Question "Have you already found that person that you are wanting to hire for this position"?** If so, probe as to what characteristics about this person has made them the number one choice. You will want to have an opportunity to make a direct comparison of your assets to those of the number one contender. If possible, try to pin down what other assets or background experience is on the employer's wish list that this person does not have. Hopefully, you can again point out some background experience and accomplishments that will complete this

- deficiency. If they have found that person that they are interested in hiring, why are they spending time with you right now? The reason is for you to sell them that you are better, that's why! Another key statement/question could be, "***I am most enthused about what you are telling me regarding this opportunity! From the way you are speaking, I am getting the impression that you have concluded that my background is an ideal fit for this position***"? You obviously want to stop them in their tracks and gain some confirmation that they are indeed interested in you. If not, you must get them to express some reservation or concern so that you can sell yourself to those concerns.
9. **Resign yourself.** This interview is just not going to be interactive. Stay cool, calm and collected though. Do not lose your temper or do anything other than remaining a professional. You never know who knows who within this company and perhaps within your specific industry. Informal references have been known to stop candidates from advancing and this interviewer could someday be an informal reference against you. Be respectful to the end.
 10. **Consider yourself lucky.** You've been given insight into the company. If this person were to be your boss, would you want to work for someone who seems to never stop talking and unwilling to listen to you or ask for your opinion?
 11. **Continue your job search.** For whatever reason, this interview didn't work. Move on.

Bottom-line, each interview is an opportunity to be in front of an employer and an opportunity to practice your interviewing skills. If this kind of employer does not have strong interviewing skills, then you must look at it as a special challenge to sell yourself regardless. You may have to "manage the manager" just a little by offering information to assist the process at the same time of being respectful and professional. Each interview is a building process that helps you do better on the next interview.