

your computer system. With my knowledge of systems design, I can take some of that worry off your mind."

It's a good technique to understand the needs of the buyer before attempting to make the sale. Begin by getting the interviewer to talk about the nature of the position, the reason for the opening and the strengths or weaknesses of previous students who have taken the job. As you listen, you can learn why you're being interviewed in the first place. Probe and zero in on what the customer really wants. Once the needs of the company—or better yet, the needs of the interviewer—are uncovered, a salesperson can introduce benefits to satisfy those needs. That's selling!

Good salespeople also try to get obstacles out on the table. They know that few sales actually happen unless the prospect has questions, concerns or objections. Too many candidates have left interviews smiling because not one concern was voiced by the interviewer. Rarely is such silence golden. Effective salespeople listen carefully for problems, negatives or disappointments subtly expressed by the interviewer.

Once an objection surfaces, you should restate it in your own words. Then, get the interviewer to discuss the concern by asking for clarification. For example, "That's interesting. Why do you feel I might be too inexperienced for this position?"

The more often the interviewer verbalizes the objection, the more likely you are to uncover concerns that may be even more important. Further, in re-explaining the difficulty to you, the problem often begins to become less important or even trivial to the interviewer.

When an objection is fully exposed, the salesperson can choose from a number of sales strategies. The first and best method is to bring up a benefit that directly addresses and dispels the objection. If such a benefit doesn't exist, remind the prospect of benefits she has already bought and related benefits from your arsenal.

Another effective technique to minimize the interviewer's concern is the "First Cousin" or "Next Best Thing" approach. That is, while you may not have done precisely the kind of work an employer is looking for, point to experiences that are somewhat similar.

For example, entry-level or lightweight candidates frequently want to enter "management," although they lack bona fide supervisory experience. What's the next best thing? Campus leadership or volunteer experience could be construed as a form of supervision. Outlining these experiences allays the interviewer's concern about not having a "direct hit."

Another method of addressing an experiential weakness is the "I learn fast" story. While you might have to concede that you lack directly related experience, suggest that you're a quick study, and support the statement with an anecdote showing how you rapidly mastered an arcane subject. Everyone should be armed with such a recollection.

Go for the close

Successful candidates don't leave the sales cycle incomplete. Whether selling computers, cat food or CAD/CAM experience, he who asks for the order receives. As a consultant for an outplacement consulting firm, I often receive calls from candidates who want to report on their excellent interviews.

"George, it's just what I've been looking for. The job sounds great and the people seem very nice."

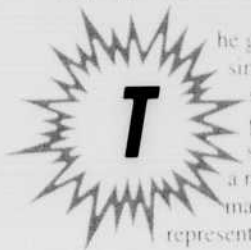
"Wonderful. Did you tell them that you like them?"

"Well, no, I didn't exactly say that."

"What's the next step? Where do we go from here?"

"Gee, I don't know. They said they would be getting back to me."

Ships passing in the night.



The goal in any interview is simply to get to the next step in the employment process. If you're successful in setting up a return visit, you've made the sale. Victory is represented by an invitation to return.

Frequently, interviewers say that they'll call candidates back in the near future. Unfortunately, that promised phone call often loses top billing on the employer's priority list. So when interviewers say they'll "let you know," imply that, because you'll be in-class or out interviewing, you might be difficult to reach. Ask if you can call them on an appointed day. In other words, take responsibility for future contact.

As marketing manager of your job campaign, you must define your product, analyze your market, determine an appropriate price and uncover target areas for your sales force. When it comes to sales, you must translate features into benefits, expose and address objections, and close the sale by clarifying future action. By using the sales and marketing approach, your product will be snatched off the shelf and quickly put to use.

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power and money, rather than self-satisfaction."

To guard against being dazzled by a promotion's external rewards, psychologist Cerkevich suggests a detailed, realistic examination of the new job. "Don't accept broad generalities when it comes to defining the position description," he says. "Get specifics. Try to assess any factor that will influence your ability to perform in a new role—no matter how subtle it may seem."

Just say no

Avoiding the Peter Principle often boils down to the ability to say no. When turning down an assignment, however, focus on the positive. "Say, 'That's really not where my interest lies,' rather than, 'I don't think I'm qualified,'" advises Dickson Dawson, a psychologist with outplacement consultants Right Associates in Cleveland. "Offer to help out. Maybe you could serve in an interim capacity until management can fill the office."

Prof. Hume at Virginia Tech suggests a similar strategy. "You might want to say, 'I feel I'm still growing in this area and I want to stay here.' This will have the effect of deferring your promotion until you are better prepared, not flatly turning it down, which could give you a negative image with upper management," he says.

This isn't to say ambition is a vice. "Most people have a need to progress through the ranks as they grow," says Wilson at George Washington. "It's ironic, though, that the very success people achieve all too often gets them into trouble."

If you know your environment and yourself, you can escape incremental incompetence. Don't be seduced by the trappings of success. Your career is too long to be viewed as a sprint. "The strongest advice I can give is to remember that money and prestige are great, but they will never be a long-term substitute for job satisfaction," says Vincent Yeo in Los Angeles. "Going just for the dollars and power is short-term thinking."

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