Interviewing skills for upcoming graduates

by Debra Fine

What if you could instant message potential decision makers and determine their interest or lack of interest immediately? Or even betterâ€¦ text message the director of human resources and conduct the job interview. Just like making plans for Friday night! Someone texts asking if you want to get together, you respond with a thanks but no thanks. No need to say why not or offer an explanation. No direct rejection. Wouldnâ€™t it be great if a job search required such minimal interaction? It would be a luxury to not concern ourselves with body language, tone of voice, face to face contact with decision makers. Fortunately or unfortunately, technology has not changed the reasons a candidate is chosen for employment. The primary two reasons a candidate is selected has remained the same for decades.

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One reason is that the candidate can solve a problem or fill a slot. The other reason, equally important, is that the candidate is the source of good feelings. Two candidates with comparable academic credentials and abilities will be compared based on the comfort level developed with the interviewer(s). If the decision maker feels ill at ease or uncomfortable during the interview or lunch meeting, walking down the hall or waiting for others to make their way to join the interview, she will not choose that candidate. Instead, the candidate that creates those â€œgood feelingsâ€• is selected. Conversation and rapport building skills are useful in providing that intangible â€œgood feelingâ€• that decision makers are looking for. Candidates can help decision makers feel good during the interview process with the following tips and techniques: â€¢ Greet people warmly, give eye contact and smile. Be the first to say hello. Be careful, you might be viewed as a snob or lacking in confidence if you are not the first to say hello. â€¢ Use small talk as a picture frame around business conversations. Begin and end with small talk before and after the interview. Approach interviews prepared to talk about the industry, current events, the weekend and even the weather to prevent awkward moments and playing with your food.â€¢ Use the person's name in conversation. You are more likely to get develop rapport by using the person's name you are talking with. If you don't know someone's name, take a moment to ask, and then repeat it. Be sure to pronounce it correctly. And never presume a nickname. My name is Debra, not Debbie. I do not think positively of those that call me Debbie. It's a little thing that has big importance. Ben Roethlisberger, the Pittsburgh Steelers Super Bowl winning quarterback, passed on Ohio State because the coach and his assistants did not make the effort to pronounce his name correctly. Instead he attended and played for Miami of Ohio, they took the time to get his name right. â€¢ Show an interest in others. In response to our high tech environment filled with e-mail, conference calls and text messaging, we need high touch more than ever. That's what you create when you show an interest in the person that is interviewing you. Inquire about how the decision maker got interested in marketing, how the Internet has impacted their work or what has been keeping them busy.â€¢ Be a good listener. That means giving eye contact and responding with verbal cues to show you are staying on top of what the speaker says. Verbal cues include these phrases: â€œTell me moreâ€¦â€• â€œWhat happened first?â€•, â€œWhat happened next?â€•, â€œgive me an example of what you mean by thatâ€¦â€•, â€œHow did you come up with that idea?â€•, â€œThat must have been difficultâ€•, and so on. Using these and similar cues shows you are an â€œactiveâ€• listener.â€¢ Play the conversation â€œgameâ€•. When someone asks, â€œHowâ€™s school?â€• or â€œWhatâ€™s going on?â€• Answer with more than â€œPretty good!â€• or â€œNot muchâ€•. Tell more about yourself so that others can learn more about you.â€¢ Be aware of body language. Come across as relaxed and at ease. Smile and appear approachable.Pay attention to the "feel good" factor and enjoy the success that follows.