

## **Interviewing Skills for Techies** **Presentation #61**

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Today we're going to discuss interviewing skills and how they are unique for those of you "techies" in the audience. Today's "technical interview" varies substantially from one for a sales representative, for example. Whereas sales candidates focus on quotas, production and sales skills, a technical interview focuses on how the candidate can help a company with its technical I/T issues. The typical technical interview is geared towards the accomplishment of certain technologies, yet personalities and chemistry are still very important. I don't like to give a presentation from the "negative" point of view, but after 25 years in the technical recruiting business, I have found that sometimes people learn best by hearing what not to do. Therefore, this presentation will focus on the mistakes commonly made by techies on an interview, and also give solutions or suggestions. Here are the "7 deadly sins".

1. **Poor body language...speaks volumes on an interview.** Even "techie" candidates are expected to have good body language and statistics indicate that people pay attention 75% of the time to body language versus 5% to words. Some examples of poor body language are poor eye contact, being fidgety, nervous, sweaty hands, and sloppy appearance. Remember the basics: good night's sleep, arrive early to relax, practice smiling and showing enthusiasm. Even if the workplace is casual dress attire, you want your first impression to count so wearing a suit is still recommended. You may think the interview should be based on what you know and can do for the company rather than how you look, but this is the world we live in.

**Paying attention to your body language will put the focus on what truly is important in the interview, rather than have the interviewer distracted by what they're seeing.**

- 2. Building a clock when asked the time... is a common complaint about techies. Learn how to read your audience and then describe your experience in the language that the listener can understand.**
  - a. For the Human Resources representative, stick with the buzz words that they are familiar with, and stay focused on answering their questions**
  - b. For the Technical Mgr (who may not be technical), stay on the surface describing overall experience and accomplishments.**
  - c. For the Sr Technical interviewer, it's OK to be techie. Share your stories, examples, the how-to's. They may love to hear how you built that clock.**
  
- 3. "I know more than you know" is a trap you don't want to get into. The interview will degrade into a competition about who's right, and you can only come out as the loser in this situation. You may prove yourself right, but not get the job because you've offended the interviewer. Arrogant attitudes turn off interviewers faster than anything, and arrogance is a common complaint about "techies". Be honest about things you need to learn and what you want to develop in yourself. You can't know it all and you'll impress the interviewer with your eagerness to learn and grow.**
  
- 4. Poor listening skills... will destroy an otherwise positive interview. Complaints heard are:**
  - a. "they talked too much and wandered off track in the interview"**
  - b. "they talked too little and didn't answer my questions, no elaboration"**
  - c. "they weren't focused and didn't hear what I was saying"**
  - d. "they gave vague rather than specific answers"**

**These are all results of poor listening skills and can be overcome with intentional practice and study of better listening skills**
  
- 5. Weak "people skills" are commonly found in techies. Today's technical jobs require people skills more than ever because of the close working relationships with end users. What are good "people"**

skills? They are: patience with stupid users, clear communication, talking in language users can understand, having good listening skills, being cooperative rather than combative. Come prepared to discuss examples of your “people skills” and the successes you’ve had.

6. Techies can be “too narrow in focus”. Interviewers want to see how you’ve taken the broader view, seen other points of view or a 3<sup>rd</sup> alternative. Demonstrate how you’ve used the WIFM rule when talking to those impacted by a project, and interfaced well with end-users. If you have the “my way or the highway” attitude, the interview will not be successful for you.
7. Don’t know how to ask for what you want. It’s important to know how to do this and here are the positive and negative methods of making requests during interviews.

**Positive:**

- a. Communicating your goals respectfully to the listener (mirroring his/her personality may be effective)
- b. Contacting decision-makers or designated representatives directly
- c. Being clear and precise
- d. Being flexible (always prepare alternative solutions to desired goals)
- e. Being creative about negotiating
- f. Stating your accomplishments in relation to the listener’s needs
- g. Proving your “committed” interest in the company and outlining what you can contribute.

**Negative:**

- a. Demanding what you want
- b. Going around the decision-maker, thereby underestimating his/her authority
- c. Being indecisive and vague
- d. Being rigid and demanding
- e. Being myopic about negotiating
- f. Exaggerating and overstating your accomplishments (especially out of context)
- g. Asking why you should be interested in working for the company (proving only self-interest)

**Avoiding these common mistakes in your next interview may be all you need to capture the job you really want. Good luck!**