

# INTERVIEWS - PRESENTING YOU

Joseph Britton

## Abstract

The conclusions drawn in this paper are based upon more than 30 years of personal research along with the findings of communication firms and media consultants whose business is to influence our opinions. To quantify the success rate of implementing particular methods of *interviewee presentations* is a most difficult challenge often wrought with the bias of the researcher. This author has instead drawn conclusions about successful interviews based upon the fundamental questions asked by leading executive search firms coupled with professional presentation responses coached by media consultants.

As so often is the case, in media interviews and job interviews, there are scores of interviewees who carry similar skills and qualifications. Those who rise to the occasion, exuding trust, confidence, likeability and intelligence, present an exceptional communication style. This paper will explore the challenges and obstacles that confront and confound each *interviewee* at the crucial moment of their presentation to the *interviewer*. What is required of us will first be examined, followed by powerful and effective means of giving an interview to the press, on radio, and before TV cameras. The second part of this paper will construct successful job interview communications.

## Introduction

The bright lights of fame frame the stage. Musicians in black tie sit with straight backs and fingers set. The audience stands; eyes wide open and breath held. In the waiting room, the starry-eyed writer stares, internally preparing, breathing slowly and deeply. The black door swings open. Light floods in. Within the center of this brilliance the life stage awaits. Will he, can he, cross the threshold?

In showing up to perform in a new life play, a gate keeper often awaits our arrival. She is the *interviewer*; the one who grants passage. Her eyes shine, but can we meet them? She will call upon us requesting our true self. What will we show? When these moments come upon us, are we prepared to walk towards a destiny filled with surprise and awaiting our forming?

## MEDIA INTERVIEWS

### Talking to the Press with confidence

Corporate executives and university professors worldwide often receive low marks for press relations according to a survey of senior executives reported in the Wall Street Journal. Executives are a symbol of their company. They form impressions of value, trustworthiness and quality in the minds of the

consumers. Why than their reticence in dealing with the press? Most ascribed it to "fear of being misquoted."

As an executive, professor, or writer do you avoid talking to reporters? If you do, you're missing great opportunities to:

- publicize your company, University or writings
- position yourself as a recognized expert in your field.

Though we have little control over what may be reported about us over the internet, along with a certain amount of inaccuracy inherent in the fast-paced, emotion driven news media of TV, radio and print you can **minimize the odds of being misquoted by following a few simple rules.** *As with professional speaking, you need to do some reporter/audience background checks.*

*1. Who is the authority? You need to know as much as possible about who is interviewing you. Be gracious in your query, for example, "There are so many facets to this topic and it would be easy to spend a lot of time covering background information. So that I don't waste your time, could you tell the areas that you are familiar with? We could then move on from there."*

*Also, never assume the reporter knows as much as you do about your business or subject. A reporter who's covered insider stock trading or high school student performance for 10 years is bound to know more about the subject (and likely to have some strong opinions about it) than a reporter new to the job or just out of Journalism school. A good reporter though, especially with strong subject credentials, will ask the right questions, thereby giving you the opportunity to fully convey your message. You are the authority.*

*2. Did you mean to say...? Clarification can be important for the reporter in properly framing your ideas, and an opportunity for you to more deeply define your message. An easy exchange of rapport building between the reporter and you, assures that the necessary questions of clarification or explanation will take place. Remember, reporters, like the rest of us, can be sensitive at times. Often we don't like to admit ignorance, therefore, to avoid having them lose face, make it easier for them to ask for clarification. Example: "In spending so much time on this subject on a daily basis I sometimes forget that others aren't living with this as I do. If I start getting too technical or I'm going too fast, please stop me." This leads to words that will more fully frame your message.*

*3. I understand what you said, I think? If in a live audience or print interview you throw into your message extravagant, specialized words that only a limited number of people understand, the listeners or readers get stuck in a void. They are put on mental hold while contemplating the meaning of that word/phrase as the next several sentences slip by beyond the net of their consciousness. Even if the reporter understands the technical or legal terms you're using to embellish your interview, the publication's readers, or those*

in the audience invited to participate, may not. *Simple language often is best.*

4. *Be concise in words and sentences.* Consider the merits of poetry, so much thought, feeling and possibility put into so few words. If you speak in long, rambling sentences with frequent stammering and side comments, the chances of being misquoted are almost assured. There is the possibility of the reporter enhancing what you said, but are you willing to take that risk? Print reporters have space limitations and broadcast reporters are looking for *sound bites*. If you don't say it succinctly, they may be forced to edit or paraphrase you, and may not do it to your liking. Judy Ford, author and frequent guest on TV talk shows suggests, "Memorize three points that you want to make. Give your points in short quotable phrases. All reporters are looking for good quotes or sound bites." Your main points can then be supported by colorful examples, illustrations and anecdotes.

5. *Sound bites.* For TV, "Being a good guest means preparing *catchy sound bites* ahead of time. Know exactly how long it takes you to elaborate a point," suggests Diana Booher.

"Remember too, if you are not being interviewed live, the reporter may talk with you on camera for 30 minutes, but edit your remarks so that you appear (for each question) for less than 15 seconds. Brevity is king," states Lorrie Allen, media consultant. To illustrate this, I (Britton) had been asked to appear on a popular Japanese NHK talk show, nationally televised and shown on Sunday mornings. The topic, "Presentation skills for the Japanese executive woman." The week before broadcasting, for an entire day in Tokyo, the camera crew filmed my coaching some business executives followed by appearing with a group of TV commentators for a round of questions and answers. The program directors then wove together 15 minutes of active, short burst, high content clips that were fit into the 30 minute program format. These 15 minutes were a series of many points distilled from 8 hours of filming.

In researching media personalities, Lorrie Allen notes a warning by TV anchor Jeff Brady, "You may have the greatest point in the world, but if it takes you five minutes to say it, it won't work." He notes that the standard length of sound bites has gotten shorter since he entered the business more than a decade ago. "Ten seconds is my favorite length to use these days," says Brady.

6. *Bridge back.* Often reporters will have an agenda or angle on a particular topic and would like you to provide back-ground information to support that position. With difficult, controversial topics state briefly and honestly your opinion then bridge back to why *you* are giving the interview i.e. highlighting your area of expertise, outlining your business focus, or promoting your plan of action.

If at times, negative or controversial statements or questions are directed towards you, do not repeat the negative comment. Instead, rephrase the question in a way that is more appropriately aligned with your

message, e.g. Comment – “Recently, you seem to have lost touch with the modern reader.” Response – “Though what is popular each year is fascinating to follow, my focus is on the word crafting of our most basic moods – despair, longing, searching...”

7. *Is that humor?* Avoid *sarcasm*. It’s defensive and negative in tone. Keep *tongue-in-cheek* humor to yourself. Readers become confused, not knowing if you are being witty or stupid. Eliminate *puns* with reporters. All too often they are misunderstood and require an additional explanation. If we read these quips in print, and don’t know your facial expression and tone of voice at the time, we tend to take the comment as a fact, however bizarre. Avoid them in broadcast interviews, too. It’s frequently the *clever* remark, taken out of context, that comes back to trouble you and has been the demise of many high profile personalities.

Being a humorist is a great skill. Including humor with finesse, sensitivity and an awareness of its implications can prove to be the most valuable part of an interview. As the former humorist and adept US Congressman Morris Udall once said, “May the words I say today be tender and sweet for tomorrow I may have to eat them.” Not fully understanding the relationship of puns and satire to other cultures, business environments and present day political climates can be devastating for creating your positive image and message.

8. *Are you always angry?* As in most relationships, when asked an irritating question, and you respond with anger, you are more likely to say things you would regret later when reading it in *print*, along with losing *credibility*. Reporters, fans, students, and the public may ask the same simplistic or negatively inferred question over and over again. Maybe you’ve had enough of this question, but the reporter or public hasn’t. Though some questions may continue to be asked without end, sometimes they need to be answered again and again. The questions may seem illogical, worthless, and even diabolical at times, but reporters will ask because they believe there is an interest in the subject, and *you* have the answer. Be gracious, be patient, be creative. An interview is a relationship that can be fun and, at times, needs extra effort to maintain harmony, and achieve your purpose of having you and your message clearly understood.

During the *live action interviews* of radio, TV, internet streaming or press conferences *stay composed*. When training and consulting for the Chief Cabinet Secretary of the ruling Japanese political party I played the role of a tough foreign reporter based in Tokyo. As the Chief Cabinet Secretary was being video-recorded, I rapidly fired off a series of politically and personally sensitive questions. My respected client reacted with heated frustration during this role playing. Upon offering a reminder of what was at stake, along with a bit of practice, during later live press conferences, my client’s professional demeanor, composure, and clarity in articulating the views of the Japanese government were often well noted by the press. This leads to:

9. *Control the atmosphere* You are the one being interviewed. Not all questions have to be answered. With this choice, be frank and state that you don't know, or re-frame the question in a way that allows you to respond truthfully while appropriately maintaining your integrity. As an interviewee, you can pick up or slow the pace, inspire, persuade, inform or entertain at the right moment. Judy Ford adds, "If you want to come across as intelligent make sure your three quotes sound intelligent. If you want to come across as funny, make sure your points are funny. If you want to be hip, be sure that what you say is hip...and above all else, be friendly and have fun."

Lorrie Allen notes, "Broadcast journalists consider a good quote or sound bite as one that expresses opinion or emotion. Reporters appreciate it when you use phrases such as *I feel*, *I believe*, *In my opinion* or *This is great* because those words signal to a journalist that the real story is about to be told."

10. *Bring along your new hi-tech digital recorder.* Your recorder, alongside the reporter's, sets the tone for you taking control of your destiny. The audio feedback could prove to be invaluable for sharpening your interview skills. Were your answers crisp, to the point, thought provoking? Let the reporter know that, as a professional, you are working on clarifying your message, and recording interviews is a powerful tool to support you in this process.

Reporters, often with good intentions, will stretch or modify what you have said. To assure your ideas are printed accurately don't enter the interview without your mini-recorder in hand. The chances are greater that reporters will be more careful in putting into print what you have conveyed to them.

11. *Be available for later follow-up or clarification.* It would be so nice to proof read the interview article before it's printed, or view your answering performance before screening! Sorry, not this time. Most likely you will be given a very formal response having to do with journalistic integrity, personal writing style and professionalism. To encourage accuracy in the reporting of your message, and the possibility of providing further input into how your interview will be reported, you *can* say something like this, "We talked of many things, some simple and some fairly complicated. If, when you sit down to write your story (or edit your filming), you find anything I've said is confusing or unclear, give me a call and I'll be happy to clarify it or answer any follow-up questions."

12. *Prepare.* Though the last point to remember, it's the most important. You may know your topic, issue, or idea better than anyone, but *if you aren't prepared* to transform what may sometimes be complex ideas into simple and easy to understand words, along with providing problem related solutions, you might appear in print as having a *less than flattering personality*.

In Tokyo, at an international conference of scientists, I was critiquing the speech and follow-up Q & A session of a world renowned Japanese information technology inventor and author, well versed in Japanese and

English. When speaking of his data storage breakthroughs, he was brilliant and inspiring. When asked a series of personal questions along with ethical questions pertaining to his research, he stumbled not being sure of how to respond. This highly regarded man, self-assured in his work, then looked like a person not knowing why and where he was going in life.

Prepare and practice answering the most difficult questions that you and maybe your colleagues can construct. Remember, have your 3 or 4 main points well formed in your mind before the interview. Regardless of the question asked bridge back to one of your main points. Your *obligation* is to reasonably answer the reporter's or panel's questions to the best of your ability, and your *goal* is to fully and clearly convey your message. Feel free to tell inspiring, spontaneous anecdotes and short stories, but always come back to your point(s) so that the reporter or audience will not forget your message. George W. Bush and John Kerry told many stories conveying their conviction and courage during the 2004 presidential campaign. Bush's main point was "make America safe and secure." John Kerry's point, "help is on the way." Our main point influences people.

### **I said that?**

All has been planned, prepared and well carried out in your interview, but you are still *misquoted in the press*. What should you do?

First, listen to your recorded tape again, carefully. Is the misquote serious? If so, don't get angry. Often in national publications, the reporter's article is rewritten by editors. In speaking with the reporter, state your clarification and why it's important to you. Second, if face saving is needed by the reporter, claim partial responsibility. Be friendly, cordial and professional. Usually there will be a way to correct the misstatement and bring all things back to order. And last, if the necessary steps are not taken to your satisfaction by the news source, your choice of last resort is legal action. But solving it in an amicable way certainly works to the benefit of all.

Walk through the gateway. The audience is applauding and welcoming your arrival.

### **YOU HAVE BEEN CHOSEN!**

In researching the following ***Interviewing For Your Job*** I looked at 2 sections of society: 1. the *high end of the job market* - executives, managers and professionals and, in turn, what communication and public relation firms do, such as WWP, and Young & Rubicam, in creating executive image, and also 2. the *starter end* - by working directly with recovering drug addicts, alcoholics and multiple crime offenders preparing to enter the job market.

In the *higher end* of the job market, the vast multinational communication services company, WPP, looks for the person who

- takes a rigorous and creative approach to problem-solving
- is intellectually curious and
- functions well in a flexible loosely structured work environment.

Landor, the multinational branding and design consultancy creates corporate identities as WWP might create personal identities for highly visible

professionals. For Landor, creating a *Brand Driver* is the key to success. A *brand driver* is the unique concept that unites all aspects of a company's image, message and public awareness. For Landor, the *brand driver* powers and enhances how a company is perceived. Today, for professionals seeking the high end job position, the same methods apply to them with *branding* being essential for personal marketability. Though, at times, we may feel uncomfortable in considering that we are mere commodities selling our perceived value to the buyer (company), it is part of our society's present economic structure. Though the level of sophistication of this process differs at the *starter end* the same concept applies.

My *starter end* research work was based in Philadelphia, N.J. The centers and programs included: the Alternative to Violence Project (AVP) taught in prisons; New Jerusalem Laura for people newly out of prison but not yet independent; the Recovery Cultural Center, a meeting place for addicts to support one another; and One Day at a Time (ODAAT) a program facilitated by counselors for addicts and alcoholics who are integrating back into society and the work force.

Interview presentation goals on both ends of the salary/portfolio market are fundamentally the same: have a successful job interview, followed by a job offer that, in turn, provides the working conditions desired.

Within the *high end* group *tips for success* have been well researched and finely tuned over the years by public relation firms, management coaches, consultants and executive search firms.

The *starter end* of the job market has had little access to this information. I spent 4 years researching violence within drug and alcoholic "communities." This led to one month living with addicts in a recovery center and providing professional presentation coaching and job interview counseling. The methods that resulted in confidence building, self-assurance about their lives, a positive attitude toward work, an enhanced professional image, and ultimately a successful interview, are outlined in the following steps.

### **Mental Preparation**

To relax clear the mind, energize the body, and create a positive attitude.

Sit with a straight back, eyes open or closed. Silently within, on the inhaled breath say, "Calm." On the exhale say, "Smile." Next, on the inhale say, "Present moment." On the exhale say, "Wonderful moment." Repeat the cycle several times.

### **Dream and Goal Realization**

In the late 1970's and early 1980's, while doing movement performance analysis and mental preparation coaching for some Olympic athletes and Princeton University sports teams I used the followed technique entitled, "*Visualizing a Successful Outcome*." I have used the template in several performance contexts, including preparing for an upcoming job interview.

\* · For a few moments, with eyes closed, *contemplate your upcoming interview*.

· *Imagine yourself sitting before the interviewer(s).*

- *Visualize your surroundings* – see the people near you, the various objects in the room, and the colors.
- *Feel* the excitement in the air.
- With *happiness in your eyes*, strength in your body, confidence in your voice, and clarity in your words *begin your professional interview*.
- *As you are finishing the interview visualize your friends* and supporters, those of times past, present, and in the future, *joyously applauding your success*.
- Allow these positive, powerful, *expansive emotions to fill your being*.
- *Feel the strength and energy pulsating through-out* your body.
- *Hold these feelings* for several moments.
- *Open your eyes*, stretch your body and then move onward towards your successful interview. ★

The Olympic diver, who has practiced her twists and tucks and velvety smooth entry into the water thousands of times, when called by the judge to take her turn at the board allows her finely tuned body responses to automatically take over and perfectly perform her dive. So too, with *visualizing a successful outcome*, you have already completed in body, mind, and feelings your successful interview. The final step is just showing up!

### **Movement**

In keeping in tune with the old stage adage, 'People are known by their entering and leaving' practice walking with strong, balanced, graceful movements; shaking hands warmly and firmly; and introducing yourself with confidence and poise.

### **The Interview – Answering Questions**

During the interview your personal presentation requires an *increased energy level*, yet projecting calm. A job interview is like giving a speech, singing, or appearing as a guest on a TV talk show. *It's a professional performance that looks easy and natural*.

Next, establish rapport with the interviewer through eye contact, good listening skills, and being prepared to actively answer, and ask, relevant job related questions.

Project a friendly, open attitude while speaking in a positive, enthusiastic manner. As Hellen Hemphill, CEO of Performance Spectrum, has pointed out, in the work place 85% of people quit or are fired due to relationship and communication problems with their co-workers. Therefore, an important criterion for hiring is good inter-personal relationship skills.

### **Tell Me about Yourself**

Briefly highlight your background, qualifications and how you can contribute to the organization. If asked to elaborate, a few suggestions follow:

### **Comments and Answers for Defining Yourself**

1. I have a *high interest* in this job that will *support the goals* of your company. Note: it's important to do some research beforehand to fully understand what the company goals are, and to express what interests you about the company.

2. I'm a *fast learner* and enjoy immersing myself in the job. First, gather information about the job responsibilities, and then give examples of how you learn from studying, preparation, and then hands on experience.

3. I *enjoy completing a job* that has *stretched my abilities*. Show that you are a responsible person who enjoys a challenge by giving examples of what you have learned and accomplished in your last job(s).

4. *Tie your dream into the job requirements*, e.g.:

- Job applicant's dream - 'design shoes that are comfortable, stylish and strengthen the foot.'
- Job requirements - 'our company builds ski resorts and is looking for a creative, entrepreneur to oversee customer service.'
- Job applicant's response - "I can offer you my services as someone who is dedicated to the comfort and well-being of the guests, along with providing them with a sense of style and safety on the slopes, and a warm, refreshing atmosphere in the Inn."

Note: project the sense that you and the company are of one mind. Believe in your abilities and let your enthusiasm carry you to your job goals.

**Think of 3 Successes in Your Life**, things you've accomplished and are proud of, e.g.

1. Completed a special training. Explain how it was important to you.
2. Took a 2 month journey along the Silk Road from central China to Eastern Europe with only your backpack and wits to accompany you. Elaborate on how you have the fortitude and determination to finish the job at hand.
3. Sole supporter of your child who has now entered a highly respected university. Though the job may be difficult, you can be counted on to do it, and do it well.

**Think of 3 Failures or Weaknesses**. This is a common question asked of applicants. Turn your weakness into your strengths, e.g.

1. I eat too much and exercise too little but recently, through reading about creating a natural lifestyle, I've begun to eat healthy foods and tone up my body.
2. I've always been afraid of high places. Little by little though, I've been challenging myself and taking control of my fear.
3. I didn't complete a Biology class in high school as I had to work extra hours in my part time job. But I took the class again during the summer evenings and received an A.

### **Defining Your Life Direction**

Interviewers will often ask a series of questions exploring your psychological life outlook along with your creative, organizing and completion skills. Possible questions follow:

1. What's important to you (including in a job)?
2. What motivates you (especially in a job)?
3. What expectations in life do you have (and for the job)?
4. What are your career plans?
5. What have you learned from your last job?
6. What new skills or interests are you learning about these days?

## **Asking Questions to the Interviewer**

1. What are some exciting new things your company is now doing? And could you tell about the direction your company is moving in? The questions infer that you will be dedicated to the long term health and development of the company.
2. Are there opportunities to advance through greater responsibilities, a higher position, financial incentives, and personally growing with the job? Your personal growth and company growth support one another.
3. Will there be ample personal time to be with my family? Connotes that you are a caring person.
4. How are creative and innovative ideas supported? You can work independently and would like to contribute ideas adding to the well-being of the company.
5. Could you tell me about company activities and the chance to meet other employees, e.g. picnics, dinners, sports games? Implies you are comfortable with others and being part of the group or team.

## **Appreciation**

A follow-up *expression of your thankfulness* for the interview, by way of email or letter, *is a gracious way to leave the stage of presenting yourself.*

## **Conclusion**

The most valuable career investment is communicating a refined presentation.

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6. Landor Associates – multinational branding and design company. My worked involved the image strategies of the Tokyo, Japan branch
7. New Jerusalem Laura, Philadelphia – founder Sister Margaret McKenna, a non-denominational community, focuses on the unique challenges of advanced recovery, transition, and chronic relapse for addicts and alcoholics
8. One Day at a Time (ODAAT), Rev. Henry Wells –Director, Philadelphia
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12. Thich Naht Hahn – Vietnamese Buddhist monk, mediation teacher and author of over 30 books and proponent of *engaged Buddhism*
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