

4594 **globeandmail:Job candidates getting too slick for interviewers**

• **Sandra Lifshitz**

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In my opinion, it's about time we get back to real interviews! Unfortunately I read somewhere that now they send you to psychological tests. It used to be this way when I graduated, in the early 80's (in Israel, but I suspect they got the idea from US). You even had to handwrite your resume so they can do graphological tests. I can't tell you how many days I spent answering pages and pages of stupid questions... The worst for me was when I had to draw something (I'm sure I came up as retarded!). What I learned though, is to conceal any trace of a sense of humour (still valid now-a-days in HR interviews!)

Sandra

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Some job candidates getting too slick for interviewers  
By VIRGINIA GALT, Globeandmail, Monday, Feb 7, 2005

TORONTO -- Who's in charge here?  
Accustomed to calming interview jitters in others, recruiters say they are now encountering the opposite challenge: the too-slick candidate.

These "professional candidates" have been coached, rehearsed, groomed -- sometimes even tipped off about the questions they will be asked in interviews for the jobs or promotions they are applying for. They turn up better dressed than the interviewers, proffer firmer handshakes and -- thanks to their career coaches -- often appear to be the best man or woman for the job.

This makes it all the more difficult for recruiters to differentiate between an "enthusiastic self-starter and a highly-coached, interview-savvy candidate," management consultant Michael Gravelle told an overflow crowd of human resources practitioners at a conference in Toronto.

Since the downsizings of the 1990s, an entire new industry has emerged to coach people on how to improve their job prospects and "do a great job in interviews," said Mr. Gravelle, vice-president of the Toronto-based McQuaig Institute, which advises corporations on selection and assessment techniques.

And job seekers who don't want to spring for a coach can find plenty of free career advice, including "virtual interviews" tailored by occupation, on the various on-line job posting services.

There is nothing wrong with candidates being prepared, Mr. Gravelle said. But some of these coached candidates are so well prepared that "a tremendous gap is opening up between the competency of the interviewees and the competency of the interviewers," Mr. Gravelle said in a presentation to the annual conference of the Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario.

So how do recruiters avoid being outfoxed by someone who presents as the top candidate, and knows all the right answers to the questions, but might not turn out to be the top employee?

Dig below the smooth surface, Mr. Gravelle advised. Sometimes the person who appears to be the best candidate for the job really is -- but not always.

The well-coached candidate shows up on time, has great communications skills and asks "incredible questions about the strategic direction of the company," he said.

"They may follow up with you --several times, friendly little e-mails -- and, of course, they are ready to start tomorrow."

It is tempting to choose this candidate over the less-polished one

who, nonetheless, is highly motivated, highly accountable and "who wants to think things through before accepting an offer," he said.

Well-coached candidates are also very adept at "managing up" and impressing the senior executives, so employers should "get the whole team involved" in the selection process, Mr. Gravelle said.

When the president is not in the room, "they may let their guard down if they feel they are dealing with a subordinate or someone who is not important."

And "give them homework" to see if there is substance behind the sizzle, he said. A technology firm that Mr. Gravelle works with asks engineers it is interviewing to sketch one of their current projects on a whiteboard. A financial services firm asks insurance adjusters to read a file and come back in 20 minutes with recommendations.

Sometimes, he said, the not-so-slick land the position. There have been other times, Mr. Gravelle conceded, that his advice has been ignored.

He recalled being contracted by a consulting company to assess candidates for the position of general manager. The preferred candidate had a strong résumé that spoke of impressive results achieved at previous companies where he had worked.

But when Mr. Gravelle asked to speak to his previous bosses for a reference, the candidate became flustered, said they couldn't be reached, and that his previous CEO had cashed out and moved to an island without telephone service. "All sorts of wild stories," Mr. Gravelle said.

By this point, however, the president of the company was already sold on the candidate -- "he loved the guy" -- and he was hired, Mr. Gravelle related.

"On the 60th day, they had to get security to remove him from the building because of his tendency to get flustered at things."

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