How to Ace the Interview: Crash Course Business - Soft Skills #6

Crash Course: Business - Soft Skills
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If you've got a job interview coming up and you're feeling a little nervous, don't worry. If you're anything like me, you've probably seen enough celebrity interviews to know what works and what doesn't. Ok, fine, the business world isn't exactly star-studded and full of gif-able moments. But, interviews are still a key part of the hiring process.

You built hype with your resume and cover letter; that promotional package got an employer interested! Now, you just have to land that job offer. And, we're here to help you show employers your star power, with professionalism and some top-notch answers to common questions. I'm Evelyn from the Internets, and this is Crash Course Business: Soft Skills.

[Intro]

We've already talked about hot the job search is sort of like marketing a movie. You're just marketing yourself. So, the interview is your press junket. It's a chance for you to dive deeper into your work experience, show you're good under pressure, and demonstrate your competence, intent, and integrity face-to-face instead of on paper.

Just like a movie star going on different talk shows, you'll have different kinds of interviews. You could have a one-on-one interview, like on *Oprah,* or panel style, like *The View*. You could be answering questions like you're on CNN with Anderson Cooper, or performing tasks, like you're on *Ellen*. To get a feel for what's in store, it's important to **do your research**. You wouldn't want to be prepared for E! when you're actually on Dateline. It's generally fine to ask who's going to be interviewing you if you aren't told, but be polite about it! It can be helpful to look up your interviewers or skim their social media. You know they're checking yours. Just don't accidentally ask someone how their vacation in Aspen was. Plus, **figure out what skills you want to highlight by perusing the company's website or searching for news articles, to understand their values and current projects**.

We don't have time to go deep into industry-specific questions or styles, because a consulting interview is totally different than an art portfolio review. For the most part, some employers will use **problem-solving interviews**, where you may need to perform tasks, take an assessment, or give a presentation. And, almost all of them use **behavioral interviews**, which are personality questions that help them better understand your skills and working style.

Like a red carpet event where everyone is asked, "who are you wearing?," there are some behavioral questions you should always be prepared to answer. Hiring managers sift through hundreds of qualified applicants, so to find out if you're really interested in their company, they'll ask **"why are you interested in this position or organization?"** To tackle this one, lean on your research. Talk about parts of the company that you genuinely appreciate, like their commitment to equality and diversity or how they encourage creative exploration.

To determine your ability to work with others, you'll be asked about how you handled a specific type of situation in the past. Usually, it's something like, **"can you discuss when you handled a conflict with a coworker or a difficult customer?"** These questions can also be about a specific quality you need to succeed in your industry. So, if you were a freelance YouTuber asked about a difficult client, you could talk about how you helped them hone their scattered vision to create a 4-minute video with a clear, compelling story.

We all like to talk about our successes, and your resume is full of them. But, you'll also be asked something like, **"can you talk about a time you failed?"** or **"what's your greatest weakness?"** And, don't try and spin your weakness into a strength. "I'm just too dedicated to my job" may be a great excuse to avoid going on a date, but in an interview, it's a cop out. Instead, show some self awareness, and talk about something that has impacted you and what you're going to work on it. So, if you have trouble public speaking, you could talk about how you ran a talk show with your best friend every morning in college, which build a lot of confidence.

It can be hard to know what to talk about when behavioral questions are flying at you from all different directions. But, there are some general tips that can help. For one, **be reasonable**— don't feel a need to get too personal. This is a professional interview, and they don't need to know the drama of your private life. To avoid getting tripped up, act like a celebrity who's trying not to spoil the movie they just filmed ([coughs] Tom Holland) by having a set of about 10 pre-planned answers.

To make sure you hit all the key points with ease, use the **S.T.A.R.** format, which stands for situation, task, action, and result. Briefly outline the situation you found yourself in and the task at hand, then emphasize the action you took and the result of your actions. You should also wrap up with what each experience taught you. That shows how you want to grow as a professional. Preparing answers with S.T.A.R. in mind will help you stay clear and succinct, even if you're nervous or tired. Just like an all-day press junket, interviews can have multiple rounds.

To see what I mean, let's go to the Thought Bubble.

A top-secret government program that prevents intergalactic threats has seen your amazing service record at the NYPD. So, they invite you to an interview. You have two assessments, a one-on-one interview with the HR representative, and a panel interview in front of some executives. After completing an aptitude test, you're given one hour to come up with and present a five-point plan to prevent consumer identity theft... by aliens! You're tired from a long morning, but you're only given a short break between the problem-solving interviews and the behavioral interviews. Plus, staring at a panel of six black suits would make anyone nervous.

But, luckily, you've got some stories prepared in S.T.A.R. format. Remember: situation, task, action, result. So, if you're asked about when you solved a problem under pressure, you could say "when I cam upon a robbery, the suspect took off. I quickly and calmly assessed the situation, calculated potential routes in my head, weighed my best options, and gave chase. I caught the suspect and received a medal of valor." Or if you needed to talk about working in a team or resolving a conflict, you could say, "Initially, my teammate Frank and I bickered. But we had a discussion and adapted our communication styles to be more forward and direct. Together, we successfully launched an initiative to recover stolen jewels. From this experience, I learned to openly communicate with colleagues to best understand their needs." In no time, you'll have **shown your skills**, **impressed your interviewers**, and be on your way to saving the Earth.

Thanks, Thought Bubble! Even if you're not interviewing for a secret government program, questions can get a little strange. So if you're asked what zodiac sign you most identify with, pause to gather your thoughts. You can take a sec on straightforward questions too, as long as you're not doing it for every single one. Be sure to tie your answer back into qualities the interviewer is looking for. Like, "My Mars is in Taurus, so I'm intentional in my actions, which leads me to succeed by being detail-oriented and driven." It's true. Or if you're thrown a weird problem-solving question, like "How many penguins are there in the United States?," don't stress about getting the right answer. Instead, show them how your brain works and explain your thought process. So you could estimate that there are, like, ten

penguins in every aquarium. And if there are three aquariums per state, then there are roughly 1500 penguins in the U.S. Remember, there's always a difference between strange questions and inappropriate (or even illegal) questions.

No one can ask you about anything covered under protected status like disability, sexual orientation, or gender. There's more on this in our Crash Course Government series. And questions like "Do other people find you desirable?" could be considered harassment. We all admire celebrity shutdowns of really inappropriate or insulting interviewers. Channel your inner Rihanna, shut it down. But if you're asked something inappropriate, don't feel forced to answer it directly. So if you're asked, "Are you religious?," (a question which is illegal, by the way,) you could say something like, "I value the right to freedom of expression." Or if you're asked, "Where are you from?," it isn't necessarily illegal, but it could be evidence of discrimination against nationality. So you could answer it with where you're currently living.

It's also important for you to avoid asking the interviewer inappropriate questions like, "Do you have any more information on that impending lawsuit?" That's the kind of thing that's best to research on your own, or ask about after you've got a job offer. It's better to politely and directly ask about salary, time off, or other potential problems once you've already wowed the crowd. Instead, **use your interview time to ask questions that demonstrate your priorities, your understanding of the position, and your familiarity with the organization.** Show you've done your homework and that you value professional development by asking things like, "I know the Pawnee Parks and Rec department is dedicated to community service. Can you tell me more about your young leadership programs?" Or give the interviewer a chance to talk about their work experience with, "What's your favorite thing about working for this company?" Remember what we said about **emotional influence**? Relevant and thoughtful questions will show that you're professional and take pride in your work.

You can also emphasize your professionalism by dressing nicely and conservatively, showing up on time, and using the names of your interviewers. Now, there's a difference between professional and formal. You don't need to show up looking like you're headed to the Met Ball. But if you look good, you'll feel good. And the best way to knock an interview out of the park is to feel confident and relaxed. Just like the Hitchhiker's Guide says, Don't Panic.

Instead of frantically reviewing your notes right before (which was fine in college, but not so much now), prepare ahead of time. That way, you can wait in that lobby while sipping on some of their fancy cucumber water and chilling to your favorite music (Solange, anyone?)

And your work's not done with the interview is over. Use those written communication skills to send your interviewers a thank you note that includes something memorable you talked about. Then sit back and be confident in the fact that you did your best. If you don't hear back right away, it's okay. Like the Oscars committee, it can take weeks for organizations to reach a decision. If you absolutely need to know if you're getting the job, like if you have another offer on the table or need to move cities, **politely ask with a follow-up email if you're still being considered for the position.** And soon enough, you'll have found a new gig!

So if you remember nothing else from this episode:

1) **Know your show**. Do your research ahead of time so you're not surprised
2) **Know yourself**. Figure out what skills you can emphasize and prepare interview answers ahead of time in STAR format.
3) **Know your enemy**. Strange questions happen, but don't feel pressure to answer anything inappropriate.
4) **Know your style**. Act professionally, dress for success, and send thank you notes.

Next time, we're officially done with our days at the movies. We'll cover what happens after you get a job offer- becoming a master negotiator.

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