



Interviewing and Dating: Some Parallel Principles

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Since I am an employment counselor, my clients often ask me for effective interviewing tips and techniques. During these conversations, I often find myself analogizing the interview process to the early stages of dating. If you think about it, it makes a lot of sense. In both scenarios, people are seeking genuine connections with others, while communicating who they are and what they want in life.

Some Parallel Principles

1. Make a good first impression.

In both dating and interviewing, personal appearance and presentation are important first steps in building rapport. You want to look your best so that your interviewer will have a favorable first impression of you. For most interviews, it is a good idea to keep your appearance classic, conservative, and simple. Also, remember to avoid wearing any strong scents (i.e., perfume, cologne, or lotion). You may find the smell you are wearing pleasing, but your interviewer may not.

Example: A candidate shows up to an interview wearing bright green eye shadow. Needless to say, her makeup is very distracting—which makes it difficult for the interviewer to focus on her qualifications and what she has to say. Try to avoid the “green eye shadow effect” by abstaining from questionable grooming and wardrobe choices.

2. Engage the other person in a conversation.

As much as is possible, try to make the interview a conversation, rather than a question and answer session. Many people get nervous in interview situations and wait passively for the interviewer to ask questions before speaking.

As with dating, interviewers will probably have better impressions of you if you actively engage in conversation and also show genuine interest in them and their backgrounds. Therefore, try to market your strengths and accomplishments as much as you can; however, if a more personal conversation begins, let the conversation flow.

Example: At a screening interview with a large firm, the interviewer spends about 10 minutes talking with the candidate about her travels to Europe and then another 15 minutes on the subject of shoes. The candidate actively engages in the conversation, and the two women chat like old friends. After the first interview, the candidate receives a call-back interview and subsequently accepts an offer with the firm. The interviewer had already determined that the candidate was qualified and was more interested in evaluating the candidate’s personality during the actual interview.



3. Leave any emotional baggage at home.

It's not a secret that looking for a job and interviewing can really take an emotional toll on someone. Within the legal field, it is a reality that some interviewers will take it upon themselves to be rude or harsh to potential candidates, just because they can.

It is important to shake off all prior negative interview experiences before going to a new interview. You don't want to unconsciously sabotage yourself in new interviews by coming off as bitter or defensive. As with any first date, try to leave your emotional baggage at home.

Example: A candidate gets belittled in an interview because his GPA is not above 3.0. This one bad experience causes him to literally freeze when asked about his law school experience in subsequent interviews. This candidate needs to make a conscious decision to overcome that one negative experience, so he can move forward. Don't let one sadistic interviewer affect your future opportunities.

4. Desperation is a repellent.

There is an important distinction between acting interested in a job and appearing desperate. Desperation is a repellent, both on dates and during interviews. Thus, try to use your best judgment in terms of walking the line between not showing enough interest and showing too much interest in a potential position.

Reasonable displays of interest include thank-you cards and one or two follow-up calls. The last thing you want to do is exhibit stalker-like tendencies, which may scare and turn off your potential employer.

Example: A qualified candidate finally gets an interview request, after being unemployed for eight months. During the interview, the candidate's nervous and frenzied energy comes off as desperation to the interviewer. The firm later decides to offer the position to another attorney who has less experience. Although the original candidate would have been a better fit for the firm, his lack of confidence made his interviewer question his competency.

5. Be gracious and use good manners.

It is important to demonstrate good manners throughout the interviewing process with every person you encounter. Legal candidates are evaluated based not only on their accomplishments but also on their interpersonal skills and attitudes.

Whether it's a second date or an offer of employment, respectfully decline with grace any offer you are not interested in pursuing. Not only is this the right thing to do, but it is also the smart thing to do—you are always building your reputation within your designated legal community.

Example: A large law firm decides not to make an offer to someone who attended a top-10 law school and graduated in the top 5% of his class. Although the candidate was stellar on paper, in person he was rude and condescending. Never underestimate the value of good interpersonal skills. An interview evaluates the entire person, so don't forget your manners!



Conclusion

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I hope that the above principles have provided you with some helpful interviewing techniques to put into practice along the way. I know it may sound corny, but the most important thing to be in an interview is yourself. Therefore, remember to stay true to who you are and what you want out of life, and the rest will fall into place. Good luck out there!