

Interviews that Make People Take Notice

By Kelly Smith, Editorial: Nancy Trypuc

If you don't walk away from an interview feeling good, like you nailed it, we guarantee the interviewer felt the same.

Harvard Business Review published an article in 2005 entitled 'Competent Jerks, Lovable Fools and the Formation of Social Networks.' It's become quite famous due to the surprising outcome and who people want to spend time with every day when they go to work.

Everyone at work is judged on two dimensions **Competence and Likability** table below

The **Lovable Star** is the superstar every hiring leader is looking for, they are content knowledge experts and are well liked by colleagues. These are the unicorns and are very difficult to find, and if you do find one, be ready to pay.

Then there is the **Incompetent Jerk**. If you are working with one of these, we're sorry. Hiring leaders, if they are good at their job, can pinpoint these pretty quickly and eliminate them from the process. Occasionally they sneak through, but don't tend to last long in their jobs.

Eliminating the Lovable Star and the Incompetent Jerk from the study, 10,000 employees were asked 'if you had a problem that you needed help fixing at work, would you go to the Competent Jerk or the Lovable Fool?' Overwhelmingly, most people selected the **Competent Jerk** because at least while they're difficult, they'll be able to help solve them problem. Then a real problem was introduced the employee had to correct, and overwhelmingly they ran to the **Lovable Fool**. What they found is people wanted someone to commiserate with them, not make them feel worse.



Now you can see the power of likability in the interview process. If you are not in the **Lovable Star** or **Lovable Fool** quadrant, you're going to have a tough time getting hired. Being lovable is really about being authentic. Just be yourself. Make sure you read our white paper [The Power of Voice](#), this will help you deliver your message authentically, but you also need to consider how to share your knowledge and strengths authentically.

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How to Deliver your Knowledge and Strengths in an Authentic Way

Preparing for the interview

Know Your Resume

- If it's on your resume you better be able to speak to a level of detail only the person who worked on it would know.
- Study, study, study
- If you find you can't describe an item on your resume clearly and succinctly, remove it. The day of the interview, send an updated version to the interviewer.

Know the Company and Industry

- This one you have no excuse not to do, most people worldwide can Google or use their country's version of it so do your homework.
- Know some basics about the industry, examples:
 - What is the field
 - Who are the main players
 - Is it a growing field
 - Is it a new field
 - What is the hot new topic for this field, eg regulation? Taxes?
- Study up on the company, examples:
 - Did they recently buy another company
 - Was the CFO sent to jail for embezzlement – while an odd one, still good to know in case it comes up
 - How are they performing relative to their peers
 - What is their product set, and which one appears to be the big seller
 - If they are public, look at their financials online. How much revenue did they make last year?

Research the interviewer

- I used to think this was a little creepy, but now if I'm interviewing someone and I don't see them pop up on my *Who's Viewed Your Profile* on LinkedIn, I think they haven't done their homework
- Do not use any personal information you find about them
- Any work-related accomplishments are on the table for discussion, everyone likes to be complimented

Research the Job

- Very likely you've received a job description, read it thoroughly
- Search for other individuals on job sites currently doing the same job, and read their resume and skills
- Know where your strengths and weaknesses will be in performing this role and be ready to recite your top 3. Take the guesswork out of it for the interviewer.

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Handling Interview Questions

Now that you have an overview on how to prep for your interview, what do you do when you are face-to-face and are expected to make a lasting impression on the other person in only 30 minutes?

I've conducted thousands of interviews in my life, and there are some basic mistakes I see repeatedly.

Answer the question

This one always blows my mind. It's amazing how many people don't answer the question. When someone doesn't answer the question, one of two assumptions is made:

- They weren't listening
- They don't know the answer

If you don't understand the question, it is totally acceptable to ask for clarification on the question. No one will slight you, and it gives you a chance to think through your answer. This technique should be used sparingly though, because if you ask for clarification on each question the interviewer is going to think there is a problem here.

Don't BS the answer, if you don't know, you don't know. The interviewer is most likely asking a question they know the answer to and will see right through you. Typically, if you cannot get into the weeds on your answer, the interviewer won't believe you know what you're talking about.

Example

Interviewer What metrics do you monitor to know if your product is viable?

Interviewee BAD response I study many metrics monthly, and the product is performing well.

Interviewee GOOD response I want to ensure we see month-over-month revenue growth through incremental sales of the product. I also monitor the expenses associated with the product. If they get out of hand, it could lower our profit margin.

If you only know part of the answer, tell them in detail the answer to the part of the question you can answer.

Example

You are interviewing for a Product Management job in Finance, and the interviewer asks you about your experience launching a new insurance product. If you've never launched an insurance product, say that, but tell them all about the product you did launch even if it was for a teddy bear for kids.

Wrap up the question by stating;

'Yes, the product and the demographic are different, but the process to launch a product is the same and there are skills I can leverage. Working on an insurance product sounds like a great learning opportunity for me.'

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Always have a failure or opportunity prepared ... and own it, everyone fails.
So many times, people try to glaze over this one with an answer that nobody buys.

The reality is everyone fails. Leaders ask this question not to get you to admit to a failure, they know you've failed in the past. They are asking because they want to know how you handled it.

Example

Interviewer Tell me about a time when a project didn't go accordingly to plan, and what you did.

BAD response There's no specific project I can think of, but I've been told I work too hard; I'm an overachiever.

GOOD response We had to launch this new operational process for our customer service teams, and the technology build went well so we turned it on but realized we forgot to train 2 of the 5 customer service teams impacted. We had to back out the process until we could train the rest of the teams, delaying us by 2 weeks. Next time, I asked for the change management team's help in identifying all stakeholders.

Have 3 keywords to describe yourself

This one comes up frequently, and usually takes people off-guard. It tends to be a wrap-up question and is a great way to leave the interviewer with a final impression of your strengths boxed up nicely, wrapped with a bow.

Examples

- Efficient, Engaged, Empathetic - They don't all have to start with the same letter, but I was channeling Dr. Seuss here.
- Driven, Collaborative, Self-starter
- Entrepreneurial, Thoughtful, Energetic

This is an important one, and so many people don't spend time really defining their strengths. Spend some time thinking about a few words that really highlight your skills as a content expert and potentially a leader if the role requires team management.

Even if the question isn't asked, it will frame your thinking and give you three keywords to continually impress on the interviewer throughout your 30 minutes.

Interviewing isn't hard, most people just don't do their homework, and when you don't do your homework, you will not come across as authentic, confident or knowledgeable ... aka likable.

So get studying!

Footnote

Competent Jerks, Lovable Fools, and the Formation of Social Networks – Harvard Business Review June 2005, Tiziana Casciaro, Miguel Sousa Lobo