



TOOLS FOR LIFE

A Series of Self-Help Booklets designed to help students beyond the classroom into Life

#3 (undated)

NUMBER 3 THE JOB INTERVIEW GETTING TO SEE THE MAN & SELLING YOURSELF AT THE INTERVIEW



TOOLS FOR LIFE/Number 3

THE JOB INTERVIEW

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"This is the big cheese speaking."

(With grateful acknowledgement to the New Yorker)

When a resolute young fellow
steps up to the great bully,
the world, and takes him boldly
by the beard, he is often surprised
to find it comes off in his hand,
and that it was only tied on to
scare away timid adventurers.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, 1861.

After reading our first booklet of the series, CREATIVE JOB SEARCH, let's assume that you've got plenty of job applications in circulation. This being the case, you may be tempted to sit back and wait for results. Don't. If you're going to do the job properly, the list of forty or more potential employers to whom you sent your job resumé must be followed up. Not all employers make a practice of advising applicants where they stand. Behind each name on your list there should be a column marked "Follow-up" and another marked "Action". If on follow-up the answer is "No", cross the name off your list. If the answer is "Maybe", mark under "Action" the date when you propose to make another follow-up call. Thus your efforts can gradually be concentrated on those who offer some practical hope of employment. The list, incidentally, may be considered a "float", in the sense that you send off another job resumé to a new prospect for every one you cross off. That way the "float" is always loaded with forty names.

However, there may be parts of the day and days of the week when you may decide to make a straight face-to-face pitch for a job without preliminary paperwork. *Remember that 80% of employers use eye appraisal as the criterion for actually awarding jobs.* The problem is three-fold:

- (1) HOW TO FIND OUT THE NAME OF THE RIGHT MAN TO SEE;
- (2) HOW TO GET TO SEE HIM;
- (3) HOW TO BEHAVE WHEN YOU GET FACE-TO-FACE WITH HIM.

(1) HOW TO FIND OUT THE NAME OF THE MAN TO SEE

The simplest, fastest way is to pick up the telephone and ask the name of the person who does the hiring, without giving your name or your reason for calling. Nine times out of ten the switchboard operator will tell you immediately.

An alternative is to go to the place and ask somebody who works there. This might involve going round to the back and speaking to someone in the Shipping/Receiving Department; or having a cup of coffee at the nearest coffee shop patronized by those already employed by the firm. Don't waste time telling them you're looking for work: they are unlikely to know the job situation and may put you off. Only the man who does the actual hiring knows the company's manpower needs. All that you want is his name.

With larger firms you can, however, smooth the way if you have some idea of the department in which you feel you would like to work. As a preparatory step you could find out the name of the Department or Section Head, and go straight to him, even though he is not the man

who awards the actual job. In big firms, the Department Head, or Foreman, or Supervisor, often has a great deal to say about who is hired. If you can get him interested, he may put in a word with the man who does the hiring. He may even pick up the 'phone and arrange for you to be sent up. Should you be lucky enough to achieve this two-level approach, try to keep the gleam of triumph out of your eye when you walk through the door of the Man. Play it straight and skip, or at least minimize, the fact that you've pulled a flanker.

(2) HOW TO GET IN TO SEE THE MAN

The telephone, properly used, is one of the most valuable tools in the Job Search Program. Having found out the name of the man who does the hiring, ask for him by name when you telephone for an appointment. If you do this with brisk self-confidence, the impression will be created at the switchboard that you are someone known, a business connection, possibly a friend. Invariably, you will stand a greater chance of being put through than if you ask for "The Man who does the Hiring", or the "Personnel Manager".

If you get through directly to the Man, state your business succinctly and ask for an appointment. If you get it, make sure you keep it. And be there on time. Avoid making more appointments than you can reasonably keep. There is a tendency on the part of some people, sadly familiar to airline reservation offices, to make a bushelful of appointments, pick out the ones that look promising and ignore the rest. This is unbusinesslike and will ultimately recoil on you.

If you don't get through immediately, try to make an appointment with the Man's secretary or assistant. Remember that you're not asking for a slice of the moon. People in the manpower business have their days filled with appointments made by job seekers. That's what they're there for. If you have something to offer, you are entitled to get on to the appointment list.

Both on the telephone, as well as in person if you visit the office, be friendly and pleasant with the secretary or receptionist. She can be invaluable in helping you to get in to see the Man. A few words of hers may make all the difference.

Finally, a word about patience, which is generally held to be a virtue. Most of us expect to spend a reasonable part of our time simply waiting for things to happen. There are, however, times when patience carried to excess may be self-defeating. A man looking for work should respect his time. If you are kept waiting in a front office (and this applies especially to Personnel Agency Offices) while the switchboard operator carries on interminable private conversations; or shows by her attitude that she'll do something about announcing you in her own

sweet time; or if you have been announced and thereafter left in limbo, don't just sit there like a bump on a log. After fifteen minutes or so, get up and ask the receptionist again, pleasantly, if it is likely that the Man may have forgotten that you are there, and if she wouldn't mind finding out how long the wait is likely to be.

If you don't get immediate satisfaction, ask if there isn't a more advantageous time to come back. Say that you have another appointment and that, regretfully, you can't wait any longer.

A man looking for a job should not act like a doormat. Respect your own dignity and especially your time. Until you get a job, you should be master of your own time and not its servant.

(3) THE MAKE OR BREAK OF THE INTERVIEW

There are people who, when they are asked to propose a toast or say a few words at a party, positively blossom. They are relaxed and primed for the occasion. They slip in and out of the limelight with an ease irritating to most of us who tend to get the shivers and become tongue-tied.

Similarly, there are born interviewees, who are at their best when sitting face-to-face with the Man and elegantly fielding questions about their ability to fill the job. Let's leave these admirable creatures swimming in the pool of their own perfection.

A job interview to most mortals can be an intimidating thing. It's *natural* to be scared, or at least apprehensive. If your heart pounds a bit, your hands feel clammy and a trickle of sweat begins to form on your forehead, remember this: most of the people the Man will be interviewing that day will feel the same way. The secret is to face up to it.

Mop your brow, straighten up and walk through the door. Wait till you're offered a chair, and then sit down squarely and not on the edge. If the Man holds out a hand, shake it firmly but don't try to break it to demonstrate that you're a man of iron. If not, keep your hands by your side. Don't walk in smoking, or light up uninvited the minute you get in. If you are offered a cigarette, take it or leave it, but don't initiate the move. Don't dump your hat, or your briefcase or anything else you might be carrying on the Man's desk. Put them down beside your chair until they are needed.

Wait for the Man to open up. He knows what he's looking for, and separating the wheat from the chaff is his job. He's likely to be experienced enough to take into account all the symptoms of nervousness displayed by applicants. If he's any good at his job, he'll try to put you at ease before getting down to serious questions.

You may find yourself responding by losing some of your tension and answering naturally. On the other hand, you may simply contract into an inert lump, swallowing and trying to untie the knot in your tongue. If this should happen, there is one positive thing you can do: You can tell the Man the way you feel. Admit you're scared. Blurt it out. Get it off your chest. This will do two things. In the first place it will make you feel better, simply because it's out in the open. And second — and this in itself is both curious and reassuring — by displaying your naked humanity you will have comforted the Man across the desk and made his job easier.

Why? Because fear is contagious. It makes people angry and frightened in turn. Some of the tongue-tied misery you display is bound to affect the Man. He's just as anxious as you to get rid of it, and the only way out for both of you in that sweatbox is to talk about it.

The chances are that the Man will do just that. He might even dig back into memory and recall how scared he himself was during the first few interviews that ultimately led to his present job. This will make *him* feel better, while he's making *you* feel better.

And if he doesn't react along these lines, he's not much good at his own job. And if he's no good at his job, he's worth an ounce or two of your sympathy. And whoever heard of being scared of a man you feel sorry for?

Once the interview gets under way, the questions will start coming at you. Right here you face a dividing line. You can either treat the whole thing like a tennis match, with questions and answers being lobbed to and fro until game is called, the Man always serving and you merely responding. Or you can try for Service yourself. Instead of returning answers, try lobbing a few questions of your own.

The time the Man has allocated to your interview is likely to be limited. That's the precise span you have to make yourself stand out from the herd, to show him what you're made of. This doesn't mean chopping him off in mid-sentence. What it means is that if you're on the lookout, an opportunity will arise in which you can pop one of your own questions.

Try to turn the interview around, but without being brutally obvious. Ask something about the company or about the job. How does the firm stack up in competition against the ABC Company? Didn't you read in the paper recently that a stock option plan for employees had been initiated? Is the company dedicated to any social purpose other than pure profit (as, for example, the Xerox Corporation)? Has the job you are discussing any hope of reasonable advancement, and is it company policy to promote from within? Don't overdo it, and, above all, be prepared to justify your question if the Man says: "What do you want to know that for?"

And finally, if you're young and obviously starting on the Road of Life, don't make your first question: "What is your Retirement Plan?" I have a friend who was Personnel Manager of a large corporation. That question was his *bête noir*. He almost lay in wait for it, mainly to see *when* it was asked. If it bulked so large in a candidate's mind that it came first, he wrote him off as lacking in initiative and ambition. Even in the Welfare State employers still prize these qualities.

Be fair. If you've thrown the Man a curve ball, give him the same chance you'd expect for yourself — time to come up with a reasonable answer.

If he treats a serious question as trivial, or gives you the brush-off, the best thing you can do is to head for the door. But before you do, pay him the courtesy of telling him why. If you've done your homework *before* the interview, as you should have done, you'll have enough background information on the company to ask questions worth asking. You'll have put in time and effort and shown good faith in preparing for the interview. That entitles you to answers.

You're unlikely to succeed in turning the interview around completely. At some point dictated by common sense, let the Service drift back into the other court. By then you'll have made your point.

A word about dress. There's an apocryphal story about a big corporation in the computer field which says that the man who does the hiring has a pasteboard cutout of the ideal young man they're looking for. As the applicant walks through the door, the Man whips out his matrix and takes a quick sighting to see if the young man's outline fits the cutout. If it does, he's in. If not, he's out.

Ridiculous, isn't it? But don't laugh too hard. There's enough truth in it to be worth considering. Employers, like it or not, *do* have preconceived ideas about the way their employees should dress, about beards and Afro hairdos. It usually boils down to a question of civil liberty: yours to wear what you like, and his to hire you or not. There is evidence that employers are relaxing some of their more encrusted attitudes, but by and large the hard fact still is that most of them give preference to neatly dressed, short-haired types. The only thing to be said on a contentious subject is that if long hair, a beard, or an exotic dress combination is genuinely important to you as a reflection of your character and life style, then go ahead and take your chances. At least you'll be true to yourself and not a phony the Man can spot in one minute flat.

What about pay? Most of the time the job will have a pegged salary or hourly rate. But suppose it hasn't? You should be prepared for the question: "How much money do you want?"

Again, if you've done your homework, you'll know what the going rate is for similar jobs. If it's a new job, you could obtain opinions

from Placement Officers or those operating in the same broad area. Establish a baseline. That's your price. Stick to it.

If you've not done your homework and the question comes at you out of the blue, don't gulp and stand there with egg on your face. The best you can do is to try to turn the question around and say to the Man: "Well, let's be practical. What is the salary range in your firm for the job?" That may or may not get you off the hook, but if you arm yourself in advance, there's no need to get yourself backed up into this corner.

There's also no need to be mealy-mouthed about money in return for work. It's what keeps the wheels turning. The only person who can afford to be above financial considerations is either rich or a liar. In the former case he doesn't need the job and in the latter, doesn't deserve it.

Just as in selling there comes a point beyond which you talk yourself out of the sale, there comes a point in an interview when you should get up and walk out. Anything you say or do beyond that point detracts from your chances. You may want the job desperately, but pounding away beyond the critical point won't help.

How do you recognize the point? More often than not, the experienced interviewer will make it perfectly clear by getting up and saying so. When he does, don't remain seated and try for a final knockout. Fold your tent and go. You've had your chance.

If, on the other hand, you find yourself in full throat while opposed by a curious silence across the desk, the chances are that the point has been reached and passed. The Man may be waiting for a chance to break it up. If by some flash of inner illumination you recognize the situation, you may undo some of the damage by saying frankly: "I'm sorry, I'm so keen on the job I've gone on too long. I hope you'll excuse me." And head for the door.

As a last thought, no athlete ever hits the Olympics cold. He practises, practises, practises. There's no reason why you shouldn't, and every reason why you should, expose yourself to blood-and-bone interviews. You can answer ads or be interviewed on campus by recruiting teams. You can make appointments and visit Personnel Offices. The more you are interviewed, the more confident and relaxed you are likely to get. Then, when *the* crucial interview comes along, you'll be ready to make the most of it. Good Luck!



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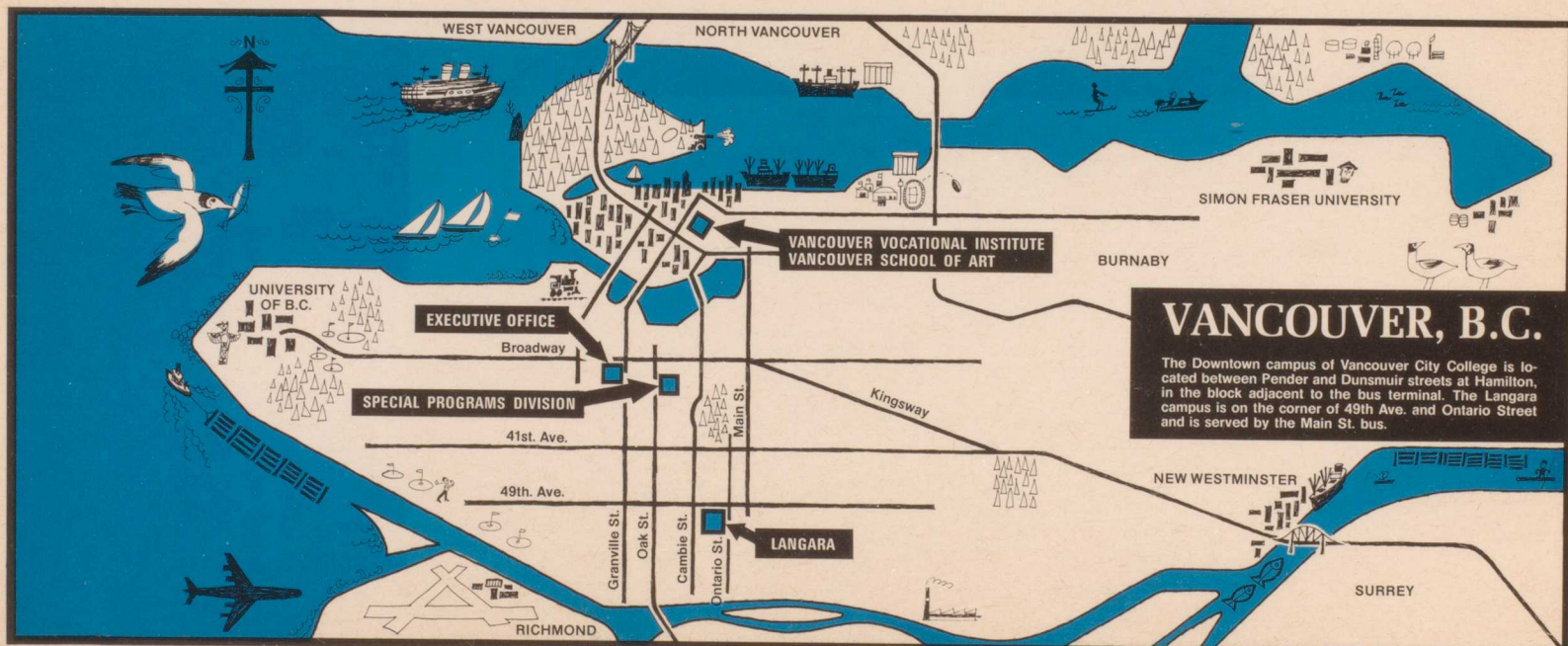
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VANCOUVER, B.C.

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