

THE INTERVIEW EXPERT

HOW TO
GET THE JOB
YOU WANT

JOHN LEES

**"John Lees is a purveyor of
sound, no nonsense careers
advice which delivers results."**

Carol Lewis, Business Features
Editor, *The Times*

“John has consistently raised the bar when it comes to communicating world class interview wisdom. His kind, reassuring, practical advice will help anybody who wants to radically improve their interview performance and, more than that, to succeed in the career of their choice.”

Sophie Rowan, author of *Brilliant Career Coach* and *Coaching Psychologist at Pinpoint*

“John Lees knows his stuff in the careers field and can always be relied upon to give wise, considered advice. Anybody thinking about which way to turn in their career would want somebody like John in their corner.”

James Brockett, *People Management Magazine*

“John Lees’ approach works because he gives readers simple, practical steps to help flip their mindsets into the more daring, exploratory and confident mode needed for career transition success.”

Stuart Lindenfield, Head of Transitions Practice, Reed Consulting

“John makes you think differently about your career and how you manage it. He provides really useful and practical tools in a fun and engaging way.”

Gordon McFarland, Head of HR, British Gas Commercial People Team

hear is ‘make my job easier’. An interviewer needs to get you to disclose information, some of it relatively personal. If you disclose the right things in the right way, it’s difficult not to get a result. So smile and breathe deeply, because you’re trying to help someone do their job.

For some people who display more than half a dozen of the nervousness symptoms outlined above, it pays to learn some kind of relaxation system such as relaxation tapes, relieving muscle tension, or meditation. There are as many ways of doing this as there are nervous interviewees, but the interesting thing is that you probably already know what works for you, and you avoid doing it because that means getting to grips with the problem.

START FROM STILLNESS

Do you look agitated or calm at the beginning of an interview? Look at politicians. The ones who are trusted the most are often the ones with *gravitas* – that old-fashioned word which describes a calm, dignified presence. They begin an interview sitting straight, looking attentive rather than formally stiff. They look around slowly at what is going on in the room, weighing things up. Even though they may be nervous, they don’t look it because their body movements are slow and controlled. When asked a question, they respond in a measured, clear way rather than rushing into the answer. As they speak, they command attention and ‘hold the floor’ for a few moments. Their answer ends audibly, too – you can almost hear the full stop.

Work towards an interview presence which begins in stillness – particularly important if you are slightly agitated, fidgeting or pulling at your collar or hemline, perhaps talking too fast. Practise sitting. Sit in a position which is comfortable but where your balance is tipped slightly forward, with one foot slightly forward of the other, exactly as you would if you were holding yourself ready to stand quickly in one smooth

movement. Keep your hands still by holding a document folder. Look forward, and release any tension in your neck and shoulders. Breathe in slowly and gently, for longer than you would do normally, and release your breath slowly. This technique will improve the strength and depth of your voice (both factors which impress) as well as relaxing you.

Listen, too. Listen to the volume that other people speak at, because this is the best clue you'll get about your own delivery volume.

Sitting and breathing and listening – is that it? It also helps if you can do something to still the racing mind at the same time. Breathing is often enough, but if you have some other meditative technique that helps you be still mentally as well as physically, use it now. It might be a repeated phrase like 'calm, calm, calm'. It might be visualising a place and time when you were quietly happy. Be still, and wait for the first question.

This is where you come to life, but in a controlled way. Rather than talking too much, not listening to the question and constantly going off at a tangent, your answer will be energised, but also focused. Answer clearly, audibly, with evident interest in the question, and be confident that as a result of your preparation your answer is going in the right direction.

CHAPTER SIX

Getting into the right frame of mind

THIS CHAPTER LOOKS AT:

- Trusting in your material
 - Working on your mindset
 - How not to get in the way of your own goals
 - Advice for introverts and extroverts
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TRUSTING IN WHAT YOU KNOW

The things you are most worried about the night before an interview may not be the most important problems. You worry about having the right skills and experience, but if you didn't, you wouldn't have got this far. You worry about being up to the job, despite your solid experience. You worry about the questions, knowing that most are predictable. Trust in what you know, and trust in what you have done.

If you're reading a book like this you probably have some ideas about what you'll be talking about at interview, and you may know how to do the right research. You may however wonder how you transform a good interview into a great one. The big issue then is not content, but packaging: *how* you get your evidence across. This means thinking less in intellectual

terms (knowledge, facts, information) and more in terms of personal impact (mood, rapport, interaction) – how you will *be* at interview.

GETTING YOUR HEAD IN THE RIGHT PLACE

Career coach Stuart McIntosh says: ‘If you’ve got an interview then the job is yours (why interview someone who you believe isn’t capable of doing the job?). If you are not invited back or offered the job then something happened at the interview to change the employer’s mind.’

In other words, good candidates make sure that they don’t talk themselves out of the job.

If you are up for an interview tomorrow it may be glaringly obvious to your friends that you will come home without a job offer, even though they know nothing about the role. If even members of your family know this in advance, the issue is most probably about your frame of mind.

My colleague, JLA’s Managing Consultant Gill Best, captures this well:

What we think influences how we feel, which then influences how we behave. We routinely reflect on past and future events with ‘self-talk’; that voice in our head that is often our worst critic. We’re more than ready to believe it without question, but we don’t need to.

Instead of telling yourself what is wrong with you and why you won’t land the job, tell yourself what is right with you. Remind yourself what you do well, your achievements and your skills; focus on what you have to offer, and why you will be an asset to the company.

Our self-talk and feelings are much more malleable than we recognise. Need a confidence boost? Borrow one from the past. Think of a time you felt really confident then imagine you are back in that place and remember what you saw, heard and how you felt. Can’t remember a time? Just imagine

what it would be like. Or look at a photograph of a happy time – and pay attention to how you feel as a result. Do everything you can to *feel* good about the coming interview.

There are two ground rules here:

- 1 Thinking about your mindset is *not* an excuse for failing to do thorough preparation on the role and the organisation – see Chapter 7.
- 2 Look seriously at the way that being nervous gets in the way of a solid interview – see Chapter 5.

YOUR TELL-TALE HEART

When you have an interview coming up, look at the way you talk about it. The language you use gives away your underlying approach:

WHAT YOU SAY	WHAT THIS PROBABLY MEANS
‘I will see what they ask me’	I will wing it – no point doing that much preparation.
‘There’s not much more I can do’	I’ve focused on content and haven’t thought very much about the way I appear and sound.
‘I am what I am’	I find it too threatening to think about things I do which put people off or get in the way of good answers.
‘My memory lets me down’	I haven’t bothered to find memory tricks and techniques that work for me personally.
‘I get so nervous I let myself down’	I am uniquely immune to relaxation techniques.



WHAT YOU SAY	WHAT THIS PROBABLY MEANS
'It's a lottery'	The outcome of this interview has little to do with me.
'I don't interview well'	I am frightened of making even small changes to my interview technique.
'It's only an interview'	I don't really want to think about it.
'I've been to hundreds of interviews before'	I am going to pretend that there is nothing I can do better.
'I'll never be the strongest candidate'	I would rather worry about perfection than put my focus on being good enough.
'Interviews always go wrong for me'	I would rather put my attention on past problems than the things that went well.
'You can't teach an old dog new tricks'	I put my creativity and energy into avoiding change.

NOT GETTING IN THE WAY OF YOURSELF

Many of the above statements are self-justifying and self-fulfilling. They set limits on what you can do. It's all too easy to take a jaded view about positive thinking, especially in a tough market; telling yourself you are a winner will not guarantee a job offer – an interview isn't *just* about boundless confidence. But confidence does matter – Chapter 10 shows how candidates who are open and positive make a better initial impact.

A big part of confidence is learning how to achieve your goals without getting in your own way. Self-limiting descriptions do exactly this. They say 'I can't ...' when 'I might ...' is