

Your first date: The job interview

Congratulations, you've landed a job interview! If you're like most job seekers, the excitement of getting an interview is almost immediately followed by the dread of the actual interview itself.

The mere thought of sitting in the hotseat in front of a prospective employer can bring on a cold sweat and a racing heartbeat. In reality, interviewing should be a two-way exchange of information where both parties assess each other for the right "fit."

If this sounds like a first date, you're getting the right idea.

When two people come together for a first date, their goal is to gather information about the other person. During their meeting, both parties share equal enthusiasm and responsibility for learning more about their partner.

Although it may not feel like it, interviewing for a job is not much different.

Consider the similarities between preparing for a date and preparing for an interview. Before you agree to date someone you don't know well, you put on a detective cap and do your research.

You might tap into your social network to see if you know anyone who has worked with your date,

and try to dig up any dirt that might be out there. Google searches and social networking websites like Facebook are excellent excavators in the digging process.

Once you have an interview lined up you can apply these same detective techniques to research the company and be well-prepared for the interview.

The employer generally directs the flow of an interview, but the interviewee has more power in this situation than you might think.

Most interviewers use a pre-determined set of questions to structure their time with a prospective candidate. Preparing responses ahead of time for possible questions makes sense. Your answers will be more convincing when backed up by an example, so be sure and have a few stories polished and ready to go.

There is no fool-proof way to be prepared for all interview questions. A good strategy to use is to identify a few key messages you want to send about the kind of skills you have and the kind of employee you would be.

For example, during an interview for a public relations position you might want to send the message that you

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have excellent networking skills. Rehearse a few stories that feature positive results from your networking efforts and insert them whenever possible during your interview.

You will find that many questions used by interviewers are purposefully generic ("So, tell me about yourself?"), leaving you the perfect opportunity to bolster

your message with a powerful example. You can (and should) take control of the information shared during the interview.

One final similarity between dating and interviewing enters in after the initial meeting has ended. Before the end of a date or an interview, there are generally spoken words

about what to expect next.

Be sure to clarify when a hiring decision will be made, and make a note to follow up if you haven't heard anything. You'll probably leave the meeting with a good gut feeling of how things went, and certainly re-play key moments over in your mind.

You can't change the past, but you can learn from it and apply it to your next interview. The final step, of course, is going home and waiting for the phone to ring – good luck!

Michelle has served in various roles as a counselor, educator, and trainer in both higher education and corporate settings. An experienced group facilitator, educator, and career counselor, she is committed to helping people discover and achieve their potential.

Michelle and her young family recently relocated to the North Country, which is closer to her native Vermont.