

Interviewing 101: how to land your dream job

by David A. Lombardo

"Despite the economy there are still companies looking for pilots and OEMs looking to fill all sorts of positions, from pilots to sales reps to maintenance personnel," Jodie Brown, president of Summit Solutions, told AIN. "And I can tell you that we really need leadership and management abilities in this industry, but the jobs are going to those who are qualified, do their homework before an interview and present themselves properly."

Summit Solutions is an Evergreen, Colo.-based team of business aviation professionals dedicated to

helping clients optimize how they select employees and build their corporate team. Some of their many clients include Raytheon, Pilatus Business Aircraft, Signature Flight Support, Elliott Aviation and the U.S. Department of Defense.

"Our goal is to present candidates who not only have the requisite skills, but also have the personality traits and attitudes necessary to be successful in the desired position within our client's corporate culture," Brown said. "From our perspective, it is sometimes amazing how unprepared a candidate can be for an interview."

Brown suggested that both younger and older candidates have something to offer employers. "While younger candidates do not have much full-time work experience, they do have a lot of enthusiasm and a strong desire to get into aviation," she said. "What a younger candidate needs to be able to do is convince the employer they are a team player. They should be able to give examples of their ability to solve problems, negotiate and be creative. They should have a track record of good customer service and high attention to detail, and they absolutely must have a good attitude."

Brown said younger candidates might not have the full-time work experience to exemplify those traits, but employers understand that going into an interview. "All of those traits can be demonstrated by active participation in clubs, school activities and with part-time work," she said. "Sure, you may have finished college, but what did you do during those years? What sets you apart from everyone else who finished college?"

"One candidate's father passed away while he was still fairly young and attending school. Undaunted, he took on the added responsibility of working the farm and did a good job in school. He was successful at doing both, and that was impressive," Brown said. "And many young candidates have outstanding computer skills, which can definitely be marketable. But never exaggerate—you have to be totally honest or it will catch up with you."

Older candidates, on the other hand, have a lot of experience to offer a company. "Here's the problem with an older candidate: it seems as if they always want to tell the employer how to run the company," Brown said. "That's a bad idea. Also, older candidates are unfortunately put in a position that they must prove they don't want to retire in two years and that they're willing to work for a younger boss. In an interview, the kiss of death is a know-it-all or someone with that military command presence. Today's employers are into team building, not the 'do as I say and don't ask questions' mode that was so common 20 or more years ago."

"On the other hand, older candidates have really good work ethics and the experience to be able to identify potential obstacles and problem solve them early on," she explained. "One touchy issue is that older candidates have often grown in their chosen field to the point that starting a new job may drop their salary \$15,000 to \$20,000, particularly if they want to move from a huge company to a smaller one. That's a decision they have to make before going into an interview. Waffling on the subject in an interview doesn't work. If you're willing to take the cut, be prepared to explain why."

Job-search success begins with planning long before the actual interview. "This is a conservative industry," Brown stressed. "Don't jazz up your resumé by using

color paper. You want to be noticed but that's not the way to do it. It works against you. The purpose of a resumé is to get an interview, not a job."

Brown also recommended that candidates do not list references on their resumé. "Have a list of references with you on the interview but wait until asked. Don't offer it," she said. "And for goodness sake, make sure your references will give you good references. You would not believe the horror stories we've heard from references listed by some candidates."

Brown suggested doing some homework about a company before the interview. Find out exactly what the company does, what type of employees they need and figure out in advance how you personally can help them achieve their goals. "What too many candidates don't understand is that they are not selling themselves. From an employer's point of view, they are looking for someone to fulfill a need within their company," she explained. "You want to focus not on how great a person you are but on how you will satisfy their need."

In that regard, you should prepare answers in advance to some fairly standard questions that employers will ask to help them determine if you will meet their needs. Brown suggested two very common questions: "What are your strengths and what are your weaknesses?"

"You really want to watch what you say if you're asked about your weaknesses," she said. "I drink too much" isn't a good choice. Look for answers that put you in a positive light such as, "I have such strong faith in people. I may tend to keep them in a position longer than I should, hoping that they'll work out."

Similarly, Brown suggested that candidates have a short story ready for every job they've held. "You'll be asked how you resolved problems, what you liked about a job, what you disliked and that sort of thing. You should have reviewed your previous jobs or organizational affiliations if you're going to use them as examples of your work experience."

According to Brown, it is also a good idea to prepare a list of questions in advance of the interview. Inquire about the short- and long-term goals of the company, about whom you would be reporting to and why the position is open. Did someone leave, is it a new position and is there someone currently within the company who wants it?

When the day of the interview arrives, Brown said, there is absolutely no excuse for being late. "Being punctual is critical," she stressed. "In fact, be five minutes early."

Brown said it still amazes her that candidates will show up for a job interview in very casual attire. "I don't care what you're interviewing for, even a line-service job, you always wear a suit and tie," she said. "I once met a candidate for coffee before the formal interview. He showed up in a suit and looked pretty nice. Then he spoke and he had a tongue stud. What was he

thinking? He was going to go into an interview with the company's president wearing a tongue stud. Can you believe that?"

During the interview Brown likes to see candidates taking notes when the interviewer talks about the company. "If you take notes then you can follow up with appropriate questions and address the specific needs of the company," she said. "At some point during the interview you are going to be asked how much money you're making. What you want to do is tell them realistically how much money you would like to

be making: what is it going to take for you to join that company? But be sure to say you're negotiable based on who you'd be working for, the responsibilities and so on. Just don't bring up salary yourself, wait for the employer to bring it up—otherwise it looks as if that's the only issue to you. It's also a good idea to tell the interviewer that you're currently interviewing with others. Say something along the lines of, "What is your time frame? I'm very interested in this position but I am also interviewing with other companies."

"I recommend applicants be brief, be bright, be gone," Brown said. "However, it is never up to the applicant to close the interview. Always let the employer decide when the interview is over. You should come to the interview with an addressed, stamped envelope and a blank piece of paper so you can write a brief thank-you note. Be sure to include some comments that reflect the interview and send it as soon as you leave. It's a nice touch that shows the interviewer you're really interested and has the added advantage of bringing your name before him yet another time." ▽