



PREPARE FOR AN INTERVIEW WITHOUT BEING OVER-REHEARSED

If you've been keeping up with our monthly articles, you know that we talk a lot about preparing, practicing, and rehearsing which are critically important for a successful interview. Over the past 24 years, I've interviewed countless individuals seeking positions with public and private organizations and can tell when someone hasn't prepared. When this happens, my immediate conclusion is they'll bring the same level of effort to the job and I don't need someone who lacks motivation or is disengaged. While preparation, practice, and rehearsing are important, there's also a caution when you begin the rehearsal phase – don't go overboard. This also sends a message to the hiring manager and it's generally not good. The key is to rehearse in the correct manner, versus memorizing several "micro-speeches" in response to a list of anticipated questions.

How can we tell that you've over-rehearsed?

There are several ways that a hiring manager might conclude that you've gone overboard – the first and most obvious way is that you sound like a robot. Robot candidates not only sound like they're reading from a script, they often forget important lines. A frequent "robot-like" characteristic is when someone begins answering a question, talks for a few sentences, pauses, asks to begin again, and then delivers the same exact wording just used while completing their answer. It's like watching a play where someone doesn't know their part very well or forgets key lines in the script. Please don't go through the effort of preparing for an interview only to come across as if you're in a bad production of Shakespeare.

Over-rehearsed candidates can also appear to be disengaged when memorizing exact responses. The problem is that when the big event happens and stress levels increase, they only know how to answer based upon the exact words (script) they memorized and rehearsed. The added stress prevents them from adjusting responses to match the current situation. In addition, they might need to look away from the recruiter while attempting to remember their lines. This lack of personalization and reduced eye contact can be perceived by the recruiter as being disengaged.



The next sign of possible over-rehearsing is that your answers to some of the questions are smooth and complete while others are choppy and incomplete. This tells us that you might have rehearsed answers to a list of questions, however we asked one or more that you weren't ready to address.



PREPARE FOR AN INTERVIEW WITHOUT BEING OVER-REHEARSED – Part 2

Another way you might signal being over-rehearsed is when your answers to specific questions are good, however, you can't engage in discussions before or after the interview. Being conversational throughout the hiring process is important, so please don't focus on verbatim answers to interview questions then fail to communicate well at other points in the interview.

Finally, use of multiple buzz-words within a short period or in a single answer is another indicator. A variation of this is when a candidate uses extravagant (big) words they wouldn't use outside the interview setting. Don't enthusiastically articulate a scalable synergist and integrate recitation of your strategic paradigm regarding global sustainability and transparency (ouch, that hurts)! Buzz-word bingo isn't a game that hiring managers particularly enjoy, so avoid this trap. You can, however, incorporate key words from the job description or advertisement within your response....just don't go overboard and understand what the words mean before using them.

How to prevent from sounding over-rehearsed:

First, we recommend against memorizing any scripted answers and suggest using key concepts, words, and phrases that should be included in responses to questions and in conversations. While preparing, identify your key strengths, skills, and experiences which best align to the position. Practice incorporating these into your answers and discussions, however, deliver these in a conversational manner, not like you're reciting from a memorized script. Trust me, there's a big difference to the hiring manager in these two approaches!

Second, don't practice for an interview using just a list of specific questions -- focus on the topics or concepts of interest for each position (examples: experience levels, strengths, and skills like leadership, technical abilities or problem solving). Remember, these items can be asked about using a variety of questions. It's unrealistic to think that scripted answers to a list of 100 possible questions will ensure success. Being able to discuss your strengths, skills, and experiences which align to the position ensures you're ready for hundreds of possible questions. Focus on ways to discuss how your experience, strengths, and skills align to the position, then listen to the question and determine which concept is being asked about.

Third, be yourself during an interview. This means using the same language you used before walking into interview. You should use terms and phrases associated with the industry, company, and position; however, don't go overboard with the buzz-words.

Finally, smile, be confident, and have fun. You might not actually be having fun, however, you need to appear comfortable with both the people and the environment. Remember, how you present yourself is just as important as what you say during an interview, so take these recommendations to heart.

In summary

You should always prepare, practice, and rehearse for an upcoming interview; however, don't become so familiar with a specific list of questions and scripted answers that you come across as over-rehearsed to the hiring manager. Focus on the concepts of interest, be yourself, be confident, have fun, and be successful.

