

# The Art of the Job Interview: From Application to Acceptance

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Today's work environment has become increasingly informal in organizational structure, business attire, and communication styles. While you may feel very comfortable in the more relaxed atmosphere of the modern workplace, a job search process is still a formal assessment of skills, experience, accomplishments, and potential. It presents both an opportunity and a challenge. A candidate may have an exemplary reputation within an organization, industry, or community but may be unknown elsewhere. It is important to understand that you will likely need to start anew when applying for a new position. There is no room for assumptions, pretense, or attitude. The process of applying and interviewing for a job requires honesty, self-awareness, and vulnerability.

In this edition of *Arts Insights*, we outline a few of the milestones along the path to securing the job of your dreams. Conducting a great interview is a key component to securing the position. Additionally, have you considered other factors that may influence the executive search professional's and potential employer's decision to move you forward in the search process? By examining your professional image, evaluating your application materials, having reliable communication tools, engaging in a successful interview, and following up appropriately with the executive search professional, you will increase your chances of being selected for the job. From writing a strong cover letter and resume to establishing a positive relationship with an executive search professional, we will look at how best to demonstrate your professional strengths and true character, from application to acceptance.

## Professional Image

Before you consider applying for a new job, realize that you have a global presence. Through LinkedIn and Facebook profiles, Instagram and Twitter accounts, and YouTube videos, the world already has a strong indication of who you are. Executive search professionals and potential employers can easily conduct internet searches for online content and disseminated photos. First of all, find out what information others can discover about you. If there is any personal material from family, friends, or acquaintances that is publically available and frames you as unprofessional, make every attempt to have it removed. What once seemed humorous or harmless may now appear to be highly inappropriate to a future employer. Similarly, be aware of the implications of newspaper and magazine articles that cast an unfavorable shadow upon a previous associate or organization, as you may be unfortunately perceived in a bad light.

In the case of both personal and professional media postings that may be detrimental to your professional reputation, prepare yourself to answer questions regarding your involvement. Even better, when finishing an interview, be forthright and mention that there is a circumstance that you would like to discuss. This gives you the opportunity to share your own assessment and perspective on what occurred. Simultaneously, it demonstrates your personal accountability and integrity in bringing forth a difficult and controversial subject. The willingness to openly discuss a potentially serious issue will be perceived favorably, building trust and credibility between you and the executive search professional of a potential employer.

## Application Materials

The quality of a cover letter and resume determines the likelihood of receiving an initial interview opportunity. Executive search professionals and employers alike have increasing demands on their time and attention. Try to stay within two pages for a resume, highlighting with data the remarkable business results you have achieved. Many extremely accomplished individuals with senior executive positions at recognizable, brand name cultural organizations have successful one-page resumes. For the cover letter, two pages suffices as well.

Look at the job description and research the organization before sending in your materials. The more you match your experience, skills, education, and accomplishments to the requirements of the position, the greater chance you will have to be considered for the job. Explain why you are the right person for this position and make a solid case. Writing a good cover letter takes time. Consider it an investment in your future towards your ultimate career goal. Executive search professionals notice resumes and cover letters that are well-constructed, error-free, and carefully crafted. Even if you do not get this position, you may be considered for future opportunities. Application materials are a significant part of your professional image. Make sure that they reflect who you are, what you have accomplished, and your ultimate potential.

## **Communication**

If you are contacted for a phone, web conferencing, or other off-site interview, respond in a timely and professional manner. Understand the exact time and duration of the interview (in the correct time zone), who will be on the call or at the meeting, and the scope of the interview. If the interview is on the phone, be sure you have outstanding phone reception with no loud background noise. A busy coffee shop, an airport terminal, or a noisy city street are not appropriate places for a phone interview. Make sure that there are no distractions or interruptions. An interview is not simply another occurrence in an otherwise busy day. It is your chance to get a job, so it should be taken seriously.

The use of modern technology in the interview process is becoming increasingly common. Web conferencing requires reliable high speed internet so make sure that you have enough bandwidth for continuous streaming of both audio and video. For these calls, prepare yourself accordingly. Consider what the interviewer will both see and hear. Are you appropriately dressed as if this were an in-person interview? What does the space behind you look like? Is the lighting too bright or too dark? Is the camera aimed too high or too low and are your eyes focused on the camera? Does the audio technology work properly? A dry run with a friend or colleague can greatly assist you in best presenting yourself.

## **The Interview**

Before engaging in an interview, do your research. Know everything about your audience and their backgrounds. Spend time on not only the organization's website but also the executive search professional's website. Think carefully about the question that the interviewer asks. If it is not clear, ask them to repeat it and then answer the question in logical and concise language. Having set and prepared responses that you force upon the interviewer demonstrates inflexibility and implies that you have an agenda. The best interviews are simply conversations about subjects that are mutually interesting to both parties. Just as you engage in a conversation with an acquaintance, the interview should feel natural. It is not a test of how much you know, but rather an attempt to understand if there is a professional, personal, and cultural fit between you and the institution.

## **The Follow-Up**

Write a brief note thanking the interviewer for the opportunity. If you do not hear from the organization or executive search professional for several weeks, then send them a friendly inquiry. The process can take several months, so be patient. If the executive search professional needs to get in touch with you, they will. If you are informed that you will not be continuing on in the process, you may want to ask the executive search professional for advice. If they take the time and effort to offer suggestions, providing feedback and areas of improvement, be thankful. They have now given you the opportunity to make a stronger impression next time.

## **Conclusion**

The process of preparing yourself to apply for a new job requires time, effort, and vulnerability. It is the perfect opportunity to assess the past and look to the future. While not every application results in an interview and not every interview results in a job offer, the process can be a positive experience and greatly beneficial to the applicant. Use it as a chance to examine your public image, update and improve your application materials, and demonstrate your value to an executive search professional and prospective employer. Consider the interview process as a conversation with like-minded and interested individuals who want to move their organization forward. By doing your research and embracing the interview as the chance to learn something new about a future employer and yourself, you will actually enjoy the process and take a huge step towards the position that you deserve.



**Vice President Pamela A. Pantos** joined ACG in 2014 after six years as executive director of Opera North, where she revitalized the company, bringing it firmly into the black and setting a new standard for artistic excellence. This transformation included creating and executing a robust strategic plan, designing a marketing plan that increased ticket sales by 15 percent, and establishing a development initiative that doubled the company's contributed income over three years. As a professional opera singer, she has performed at international venues, including Carnegie Hall and the State Theater of Munich. Ms. Pantos holds a bachelor's degree from Wellesley College, a master of business administration from the F.W. Olin Graduate School of Business at Babson College, and masters in musicology from the University of Hamburg in Germany. She was named one of New Hampshire's four Outstanding Women in Business for 2014 by *New Hampshire Business Review Magazine* and is currently featured in Babson College's *The Entrepreneurs* major marketing campaign as an *Action Star Entrepreneur*.

Ms. Pantos is based in ACG's Boston office and leads the executive search practice.

**Contact ACG for more information on how we can help your organization's executive search process.**

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