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The Art of Successful Interviewing

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French artist Edgar Degas had a unique method of preparing his paintings. He would first sketch the entire subject, then extract the figure from the background to perfect it. Next, he would redraw the scene and reposition the subject where he thought it fit best. The result was his ideal: "premeditated spontaneity."

Degas' technique-taking his model out of context, examining and articulating it, then placing it where it looked best-applies to job interviewing. "Premeditated spontaneity" lets you put yourself in the best light. If you take time to establish your own outline, you'll be able to channel what the interviewer asks into what you want to say.

Sketch your self-presentation using the following six components:

1. Describe your expertise. What do you do-in specific terms? Most candidates share useless information such as job titles and company names. Or they might say something like, "I'm in marketing." These responses frustrate the interviewers. A more helpful answer can be phrased: *"I'm a senior marketing executive with extensive experience in corporate communications, public relations and advertising."*

2. Demonstrate your range of experience. Interviewers like to know where you've worked. They might be interested in the company names but more likely a sense of industry experience and specialization factors will be most useful. So, you might expand your self-description with: *"In my 15 years of professional experience, I have worked both domestically and internationally in the consumer products industry, specifically in beverages, luxury foods and pharmaceuticals."*

3. To give the interviewer a concrete sense of your achievements, be prepared to offer two or three examples of recent accomplishments. You can select these while you're developing your resume. In the early stages of the interview, state these examples briefly. The interviewer will have an opportunity to ask for the details later. Some phrases which have impact are: *"I recently repositioned a declining taco chip product, achieving a sales increase of 40%."* Or: *"This past year, I developed a research project to evaluate the division's entry into a new OTC category. My recommendations for product strategy and advertising resulted in a successful test market and product launch."*

4. Your education can help position you favor-

ably against other applicants. If your degree seems irrelevant to your current goals, find a way to integrate the advantages of your studies with your abilities. Example: *"My undergraduate major in psychology, combined with corporate courses in management and leadership training, has given me effective people management skills in addition to my technical expertise in marketing."*

5. Your exit statement is critical. Every interviewer wants to know why you're looking for a new

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position-or why you're leaving your present employer. Make the statement simple and positive: *"While I have enjoyed my four years at XYZ Co., the recent reorganization has limited my potential for advancement and I'm exploring opportunities outside the company."*

6. Discussing your expectations provides a smooth transition to your future plans. Many job candidates repeat the mistake of reverting to specific job titles. Worse yet, they speak about wanting something: a bigger salary, more advancement possibilities, to be part of a growing company. Organizations typically don't care what you want; their concern is what you can do for them.

Thus, in constructing your statement about what you want to do, frame your expectations according to the functions you can perform for your prospective employer. Analysis of your past successes will help substantiate your potential contributions: *"I seek a strong management role in marketing, where my abilities to identify potential new product lines, launch successful campaigns and work closely with creatives-both in-house and at agencies-will be an asset. I see myself developing a stronger international orientation, building on my recent experience with XYZ Co."*

Having prepared your interview agenda, make your presentation come alive. Rehearse the phrases you've developed in front of a mirror, on tape and with friends. Get feedback on your effectiveness. Spontaneity increases as you become comfortable with content.

Art is the ability to simplify the complex, to depict what occurs naturally in a unique way. Like any creative effort, artful interviewing takes preparation. energy and the ability to focus the interviewer on the subjects you choose to illuminate.