



## "Practical Problem-Solving Advice for Publishers"

### Thoughtful Job Interviews: How to Treat Job Candidates

© 2014 by John B. McHugh

#### Take Recruiting Seriously

As a manager, recruiting top talent is an important part of your job. Extensive information is available on recruiting and interviewing techniques. However, little is available on the job candidate's perspective as the one being interviewed. My goal in writing this paper is twofold: namely, to provide insights into the interviewee's mind during the interview and to sensitize you to how he/she is feeling.

Have you ever thought about how job candidates feel during the interview process? Do you think about the respective positions of power during the interviewing process?

Many job candidates today have been fired, laid-off, down-sized, or quit in protest of a toxic boss or stressful work situation. Add the fact that we are living in a permanently downsized economy as a result of the financial crash of 2007-09. Anyone who thinks they have a high degree of job security is kidding themselves. Some day you, too, may be "out there" on the job market through no fault of your own.

Look at the respective positions of interviewer and interviewee: you, the interviewer with a possible job, a lot of power; and the job-seeker, a needy supplicant, with no power. As you will learn in the next section, the interviewee may be hurting and carrying emotional baggage. He may also be resentful of having to stoop to being interviewed for a job.

#### How Does the Job-Seeker Feel?

How does a person out of work feel? Most likely a person out of work will experience some combination of negative feelings. His ego may be deflated and he may think he is a failure. Constant rejection makes a job-seeker feel demoralized and depressed.

Someone out of work for a long time will feel pessimistic. Many feel a social stigma if they are not going to a job every day. Add financial problems, health care and credit card bills, and possibly a pending home foreclosure to this emotional cauldron, and you can see the stress this combination brings.

For these reasons, show empathy, respect and courtesy for those you interview. This is the decent thing to do. Usually such kindness is repaid one way or another.

## Tales from the Front

### “What a Long Strange Trip It's Been”— *Grateful Dead Album Title*

I have been interviewed 60 to 75 times for various jobs during my career. I have also interviewed hundreds of candidates in my time as an executive and as a recruiter.

I have been on that “Long Strange Trip” myself. I reminded myself of that fact every time I interviewed a candidate during my executive days or, now, when I interview candidates in my executive recruiting service. Here are a few noteworthy interview moments from my career.

#### *Great Opening Line*

“So you are unemployed?” No fooling, a human resources manager opened up with this beauty. He made me feel even worse as if going through the job search travail wasn't enough of a downer.

*Site for Hoarders* I have been in offices that could be used as a set for the *Hoarders* reality TV program. A messy, cluttered office is a bad sign and an immediate turn-off for the applicant.

#### *“What Am I — Chopped Liver or Job Applicant?”*

I was on an interview when both the human resources director and hiring manager were late, 15 minutes and 25 minutes respectively— a total of 40 minutes. This treatment brings new meaning to the question, “What am I, chopped liver?”

#### *“What Resume?”*

Have you been on an interview where the interviewer asks you for a copy of your resume? This has happened to me on a number of occasions. You can guess how interested they are in you. (**Tip:** Always bring extra copies of your resume.)

#### *Dazed and Confused*

On another interview I was to speak with three people: the human resource director, the hiring executive, and the president. My first interview was with the HR director. Once we started the interview it was apparent that this person had not read my resume. I thought, “How long does it take to read a resume?” Invest time in learning about a candidate's background before the interview.

#### *Seeking Info*

Once on an interview it became apparent that the company had no interest in me, only what proprietary information I could reveal about my former company. This hit me during the second hour of the interview when five of the company's top executives assembled in a conference room and peppered me with questions. It went on like this until after a lunch with three of the executives. I would have had an easier time being the subject of investigation by a pack of aggressive district attorneys.

#### *Contact Overkill*

I interviewed with one company located in a historical town in the mountains in a southwestern state. I figured I would do the requisite interviewing and then do some sight-seeing. Wrong. I

was in town for two days and two nights. Every meal was scheduled (two dinners, two lunches, and two breakfasts) with different staff from their company.

Add to this whirlwind social agenda the two days spent with the company's staff at their and I thought to myself, "I thought this visit was to interview for a mid-level executive position, not the president of the United States."

I understand the hiring company wants a number of looks at the candidate but this was an unreasonable overkill. I wanted a job; I didn't want to marry the company. As it turns out I did get a job offer from the president/owner of the company, at about half the salary I was seeking.)All of the people I met were great, but my reply to the president: "Thanks, no thanks."

### **Six Suggestions on How to Approach Job Candidates**

How you approach job candidates is a matter of common sense and decency. It boils down to being considerate and courteous. My suggestions:

*Open The Interview Positively* Start the interview on a positive note. Find some accomplishment in the candidate's resume to admire. This will build the candidate's self-esteem and make the candidate feel more confident.

*Be empathetic.* You should be aware of the many negative feelings that the job applicant may have. Don't make this person feel worse as a result of interviewing with you.

*Make your candidate feel comfortable.* Think of the interviewee as an important guest. Sit on the same side of desk facing the person or on a comfortable sofa. Conducting the interview in a conference room is fine. Offer water or some other beverage. Open up with some small talk from something you pick up from his/her resume.

*Don't allow any interruptions.* I am amazed at how many people think it is OK to take a call or allow other interruptions. Each interview has its own rhythm; do not interfere with this rhythm. It's been said millions of times: turn off your cell phone.

*Ensure privacy.* If you don't have a private office, scout out a location where you will have privacy. Usually a conference room will work well to ensure privacy.

*Use the person's first name and/or the nickname he/she prefers.* Ask the interviewee what name he/she prefers to be called. For example, my legal name is "John B." but I prefer "Jack." I always introduce myself as Jack McHugh.

My suggestion is to open like this, "You like to go by 'Jack,' right?"

### **Four "Don'ts" When Interviewing**

*Lose the hard-edge questions.* Think about what you will ask and how you will ask it. Soften up the tone. You are not a district attorney or police detective.

*Don't make someone feel guilty.* Avoid an accusatory tone with questions such as "So why did you leave company X?" "Why were you fired?"

*Don't Do All the Talking* Some interviewers get carried away with talking about the company, the position; themselves etc. and neglect to find out anything about the candidate

*Don't turn the interview into an opportunity to glean competitive information and for free consulting. It is permissible to find out what the candidate knows about industry trends and the marketplace. But it is not permissible to use the interview as a license to probe for competitive information. Likewise, do not use the interview as an opportunity to obtain free consulting.*

### **A Job Ad-Decoder: Seven Euphemisms**

The job search does have its light moments when it comes to euphemisms used in job-ads. I saved this sidebar from the July 1999, *Training* magazine, entitled, "Wanted: A Job-Ad Decoder." I suggest you avoid this type of verbiage in job ads.

*"Join our fast-paced company."* "We have no time to train you."

*"Requires team-leadership skills."* "You will have the responsibilities of a manager without the pay or respect."

*"Seeking candidates with a wide variety of experience."* You will be replacing three people who left.

*"Problem solving skills a must."* "Our company is in perpetual crisis."

*"Must be deadline oriented."* "You will be behind schedule on your first day of the job."

*"Some overtime required."* "Some time each night and some time each weekend."

*"No phone calls, please."* We've filled the job: our call for resumes is just a legal formality."

### **McHugh Executive Recruiting Services**

John B. "Jack" McHugh is an experienced executive recruiter with a specialty in commercial and nonprofit publishing, including college, business, technical, professional, religious, and association publications. He has written extensively about the field of effective publishing management, drawing on his expertise as a successful executive of both book and journal programs.

Tap into McHugh's extensive knowledge of the publishing industry to find top talent. Save on recruiting costs since McHugh charges a fixed fee instead of the costly retainer percentage used by most executive search firms.

McHugh's full recruiting service for publishing executives offers these advantages:

- Save expensive staff time involved in screening resumes and preliminary interviewing of candidates.
- Use McHugh as a third-party independent interview to validate your own observations.
- Get an expert evaluation of prospects and final candidates.
- Receive a comprehensive interview report customized to your job needs. (This service is available on an a la carte per interview basis.)
- Save money by paying a flat fee vs. typical 33 1/3% of first year salary charged by executive search firms.
- As an added benefit, these *McHugh Papers* are free to clients:
  - PM-2, *Interviewing Finalist Candidates: How the Hiring Executive Should Prepare*, 2009, 3 pages

- PM-7, *Preparing to Recruit an Executive: Seven Questions to Ask*, 2010, 3 pages
- PM 16, *Recruiting Executives: McHugh's Tips and Suggestions*, 2010, 4 pages
- PM-53, *Executive Recruiting: A McHugh Select*, 2014, 5 pages

**Free Papers at John B. McHugh's Website** Link <http://goo.gl/OHe882>

- PM-12, *Job Searching in Association Publishing vs. Commercial Publishing: Key Differences and Interviewing Tips*, 2009, 4 pages
- PM- 46, *Executive Recruiting Checklist of 22 Milestones: A McHugh Select*, 2013, 3 pages
- PM-54, *For Job Seekers: Eight Interview Tips and Four Questions to Ask*, 2014, 1 page

**Free Expert Interviews** <http://goo.gl/l3iyfz>

- I-1, *McHugh Interviews McHugh on Consulting*, 2013, revised
- I-11, *McHugh Interviews McHugh on Executive Recruiting*, 2011

**About John B. McHugh**

John B. "Jack" McHugh is a 40-year veteran of the publishing business. Jack has worked as an executive for Houghton-Mifflin, Wadsworth, and Saint Mary's Press. Jack is also an experienced association publishing executive. For seven years, he was Publisher and Director of Programs at the American Society for Quality and for a two-year period, he served as the Interim Publisher at the Project Management Institute. Jack's specialties include association/nonprofit publishing, book publishing, executive recruiting, journal publishing, rights and permissions, organizational design, and startups. He manages two LinkedIn™ groups, *Association and Nonprofit Publishing* and *The Self-Employment Forum*.

**John B. McHugh: Practical Problem-Solving Advice for Publishers**

Contact: John B. "Jack" McHugh

Email: [jack@johnbmchugh.com](mailto:jack@johnbmchugh.com)

Website: <http://www.johnbmchugh.com/>

Phone: **414-351-3056**