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Job Hunting in a Crazy Economy

Could you stand up and sing in a Karaoke bar? In front of complete strangers? Without any practice? With little or no lead time?

If your vocal talent is similar to Tony Bennett, Michael Bublé, Christina Aguilera, Seal, or Lady Gaga, you would undoubtedly enjoy doing this, even basking in the afterglow of audience applause and whistles from your newfound fans chanting “Encore!”

If your voice is mediocre at best, or if you are sorely out of practice, you know what it feels like to sing your heart out trying to imitate your favorite performer only to be met with laughter, groans, and rude remarks such as: “Next,” “Get out of here,” or “Don’t give up your day job!”

Translation: If you don’t know what you’re doing (even if your intentions are good), you’re going to be in trouble. Moreover, if you quit your regular paying job to become a singer, you will starve.

This type of negative reaction can be disheartening at best.

In today’s tough economy, I don’t know many people who are contemplating quitting a secure, well-paying job to become a singer or turn their other passions or hobbies into an income-generating business. In

fact, most people consider themselves lucky if they have a job at all. For many people who are unemployed, though, their full-time job is looking for a job.

Job Market Overview

By definition, persons are classified as unemployed if they do not have a job, have been actively looking for work for the past four weeks, and are currently available for work. With unemployment hovering around 9 percent at the end of 2011, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), it's no wonder many people are discouraged at their prospects of finding employment, especially in their chosen fields. Add in those who have stopped hunting for jobs, and the numbers soar to 11 percent nationwide.

Everyone is familiar with tales of the Great Depression, which sparked the stock market crash and forced millions of people into the unemployment line. But did you know that the Great Recession, launched in December 2007, has put more people out of work for longer periods of time since the Great Depression? The fact is 6.4 million people have been jobless for at least six months, and 1.4 million have been unemployed for two years or longer.

The country is experiencing the greatest recession since the Great Depression with 9.2 percent unemployment reported in October 2011. Unemployment rates rose in 28 states and Washington, D.C., according to the BLS. Nevada had the highest unemployment rate for the 18th straight month (13.4 percent), followed by California (11.7 percent) and Michigan (10.6 percent).

If these statistics don't motivate you to hone your interviewing skills, then nothing will. It's time to consider your options if you're not independently wealthy or the holder of a winning lottery ticket.

If you cannot pack up and move to North Dakota, which boasts the nation's lowest unemployment rate of only 3.5 percent, Nebraska (4.2 percent), South Dakota (4.5 percent), or New Hampshire (5.3 percent), then you must have a winning job interview strategy in place. Table 1.1 lists unemployment rates by state.

Is there an end in sight to this bleak employment picture? Well, maybe. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projected

Table 1.1 United States Unemployment Rates by State

Modified November 22, 2011		
Rank	State	Rate
1	North Dakota	3.5
2	Nebraska	4.2
3	South Dakota	4.5
4	New Hampshire	5.3
5	Vermont	5.6
6	Wyoming	5.7
7	Iowa	6.0
8	Oklahoma	6.1
9	Minnesota	6.4
9	Virginia	6.4
11	Hawaii	6.5
12	New Mexico	6.6
13	Kansas	6.7
14	Louisiana	7.0
14	Utah	7.0
16	Maryland	7.2
17	Maine	7.3
17	Massachusetts	7.3
19	Alaska	7.4
20	Montana	7.6
21	Wisconsin	7.7
22	New York	7.9
24	Pennsylvania	8.1
25	Colorado	8.1
26	Arkansas	8.2
26	West Virginia	8.2
28	Texas	8.4
29	Missouri	8.5
30	Connecticut	8.7
31	Idaho	8.8
32	Ohio	9.0
32	Indiana	9.0
32	Washington	9.0

(Continued)

Table 1.1 (Continued)

Rank	Modified November 22, 2011 State	Rate
32	Arizona	9.0
36	New Jersey	9.1
37	Alabama	9.3
38	Oregon	9.5
39	Kentucky	9.6
39	Tennessee	9.6
41	Illinois	10.1
42	Georgia	10.2
43	Florida	10.3
44	North Carolina	10.4
44	Rhode Island	10.4
46	Mississippi	10.5
47	South Carolina	10.6
47	Michigan	10.6
49	District of Columbia	11.0
50	California	11.7
51	Nevada	13.4

that unemployment will decrease to 8 percent in 2012, but don't count on it dropping to a more normal 5.3 percent until 2016.

But no matter where you live in the United States, nobody's escaping today's tough economy. Seasoned workers and newbies alike are nervous about their jobs, even in states where the unemployment rate is relatively low compared to the rest of the nation.

Every day, multibillion-dollar companies and small privately owned businesses alike are handing out pink slips. Whether you are working for a conglomerate or a family-owned business, it does not matter. Everyone's job is at stake. People are holding onto the jobs they have even if they feel dissatisfied, unappreciated, or unfulfilled in their careers.

It's scary to search for a job in a tough market. The worse the economy is, the harder it is to get and keep a good job. With a bad economy and no credentials, sometimes it feels almost futile to search when jobs are in such short supply.



Yet hiring across the country has not come to a complete halt. Jobs exist, but fewer openings and more competition mean they're not all that easy to come by. If you're looking for your first job, or if you're out of work and looking, your task is to get into extreme job search mode to land a job interview, and then do everything in your power to shine during the interview. This is your time to stand up and sing, even if you don't sound like Tony, Michael, Christina, Seal, or Gaga.

Why Is the Interview So Important?

The interview allows someone (typically the interviewer or company) to gather information about you, which would be difficult or impossible to obtain by any other means. The interview provides your reviewer with information crucial in evaluating your potential and fit for the job. For example, a job candidate who is vying for the slot as a communications director or a corporate spokesperson must have top-notch verbal skills, sales managers must have a proven track record, and hair stylists must have an existing and satisfied clientele. The interview is usually the deciding factor in determining whether you get the job.

Many interviewers use a list of established questions while others may develop their own questions, discussion areas, and problem-solving behaviors. Even though there is no set procedure for beginning an interview, the opening minutes are critical to your success. This is where having a strategy in place, practicing, and being ready to perform will impact how you start your interview.

Bookstores and the Internet are inundated with resources and how-to guides that list countless creative ways to hunt for a job and land an interview. Everyone is networking and using social media tools like Facebook and LinkedIn to establish connections and build relationships that will lead to job interviews.

The marketplace, however, has limited sources that provide job hunters with a bona fide step-by-step program for preparing for the interview—a process that coaches them on the proper behaviors to exhibit to help them stand out in a sea of job candidates—especially one that is based on science and research.



When you are lucky enough to snag an interview, you need a tried-and-true strategy you can implement immediately and that makes you rise to the top like the proverbial cream of the crop, nail the interview, and get the job offer.

An effective job interview strategy can be your hidden ace in the hole for getting a job offer, whether you are seeking your first job out of school, you were recently laid off, you are seeking a key position, you are trying to get into a professional school, or you are ready to make a career change.

With intense competition for jobs, many candidates are attempting more creative approaches to get noticed. A little ingenuity may help get you noticed. You do not, however, need to send a singing telegram, a bouquet of balloons, or a tin filled with homemade cookies to a prospective employer's office to attract attention. Just be sure you spend as much time preparing for the interview as you do landing the meeting.

So, what is the silver bullet for learning to put your best foot forward during the interview, effectively engaging the interviewer, and ultimately landing the job?

Enter "Crazy Good Interviewing." No, this term does not imply that you act like a crazed lunatic. Crazy good means excellent or out of the ordinary. The word interview refers to a formal meeting (typically in-person although phone and Skype are being used more often these days), especially one arranged for assessing an applicant's qualifications. You will learn the skills and behaviors to have an excellent formal meeting.

In essence, crazy good interviewing is all about applying a variety of mental strategies and positive verbal and non-verbal communication skills to the interview process to ensure the best possible outcome. Let me, though, set things straight from the onset. There is no one right way to interview. Many ways are successful. The key is using an underlying process and model.

Successful crazy good interviewing depends on creating situations in which information, ideas, values, and feelings can be exchanged freely, easily, clearly, and directly. Job applicants pray for this best-case scenario.

Unfortunately, not all interviews are smooth sailing. What would you do, for example, if you're cruising along in the interview, and all of a sudden, the interaction between you and the interviewer stalls and starts going downhill? What happens when you're ready to tell your story, and the interviewer does not let you get a word in edgewise?

By learning how to interview in a crazy good way, you will recover quickly from these and any other stumbling blocks or hurdles that arise.

What Makes Me an Expert?

I have provided hundreds of training programs for professional schools ranging from medical schools to graduate medical education residency programs, for associations ranging from law to executive MBA programs, and for organizations ranging from small businesses to hospitals.

I have taught thousands of individuals how to design an effective selection interview. In other words, I have trained these individuals to become insightful, structured, and decisive interviewers. I, too, have interviewed hundreds of individuals for various positions over the years.

All this was fine and good until my students and colleagues asked me, or rather, demanded that I address the flip side of interviewing, namely, how they could master the art of being interviewed, which is at the heart of crazy good interviewing. From this request, I developed a new training workshop, which morphed and evolved into a high-stakes crazy good interviewing model called ACT Out. ACT is an acronym for:

- **Assess:** How to review your strengths and qualifications as they pertain to the position.
- **Communicate:** How to use verbal and non-verbal skills to engage the interviewer(s).
- **Thank:** How to follow up after the interview, thank, and stay connected with your interviewer(s).

The ACT Out model provides individuals with a detailed blueprint outlining how to approach the interview, how to execute an effective interview exchange, and how to follow up after the interview. The model is based on years of observing the successes and pitfalls of individual interviewees, huge doses of common sense, and psychological research into the areas of communication, neuroscience, emotional intelligence, and personality types.

This psychological research plays a large part in the crazy good portion of the meeting; the face-to-face encounter refers to the interviewing part as described in the title of this book.

The skills needed to obtain a prized position, whether you are applying for a job (e.g., management track, senior level, or CEO) or applying to

get into a professional program (e.g., medical colleges, business schools, or residency programs), are basically the same:

- Create rapport quickly.
- Communicate clearly, directly, and effectively.
- Observe and understand what is going on within the interview room.
- Answer all questions thoughtfully and thoroughly.
- Relate answers to the position at hand.
- Show a crazy good fit between you and the job.

In high-stakes positions and professional school situations, you will typically encounter a competitive environment because more candidates exist than positions. In today's economy, this seems to be the case for jobs.

The interview can provoke anxiety because it is tough being viewed under the microscope as you seek a position or wish to move up to the next level. The interview can be a wild process, so it helps sometimes if you are a little crazy. Not crazy in a paranoid-schizophrenic way. Not crazy in an obsessive-compulsive way. Not crazy in a loud, obnoxious, or inappropriate way. But crazy in a good way, such as exhibiting creative, thoughtful, good common sense behaviors that seem to have fallen by the wayside.

This book will discuss the behaviors, strategies, and communication skills that applicants should exhibit during an interview. As with everything in life, knowing what not to do will help.

This book will introduce the *Psychotron*, which is a measurement tool to gauge crazy good and crazy bad behaviors, strategies, and responses. There will be numerous scenarios sprinkled throughout the chapters in which you will be asked to step into the shoes of the interviewer and rate the behaviors of job candidates using the Psychotron.

Throughout the book, key insights will be highlighted under “The Doctor Is In . . .” signage. I will provide spot-on advice, observations, and witticisms to ensure a crazy good interview learning experience.

The Doctor Is In . . .

“It’s critical to hone your interview skills in today’s tough and competitive job market. Let me show you how!”