

## The two essential interview elements

*By Candace Moody*

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There are two essential things you must do to connect with an interviewer in the brief time you have together. You must establish rapport and establish credibility to be seriously considered as a candidate.

Equally important, rapport and credibility require different skills and are crucial at different points in the interview. We'll take them in order.

Rapport is defined as "a relationship, especially one of mutual trust or emotional affinity." In everyday language, it means that you and the interviewer have hit it off; that you like each other. Why is that important? It's very difficult for an interviewer to determine how effective you'll be at a job from a brief interview. In the end, the decision to move you on to the next phase of the process comes partly from intuition - and how likable you are. The interviewer also is making judgments about how well you'll fit into a team and how you'll interact with the company's customers. Your interpersonal skills play an essential part in how you'll perform as an employee.

How do you establish rapport in the interview, especially if you're already nervous and ill at ease? First, be yourself. You want the interviewer to like you, not some carefully crafted persona. Be natural and speak as you usually do (within reason). Trying to keep up a facade of fancy language or mannerisms only will put more stress on you during the meeting. Look the interviewer in the eye and smile a genuine smile. A smile is the universal language among all kinds of people, and helps create a connection between you and the interviewer.

Next, let your genuine interests and sense of humor show through. Again within reason, make conversation the way you might with any new person you meet. If you notice a print in the interviewer's office by an artist you admire, say so. If you graduated from the same school, mention it.

Connecting to other people's interests and tastes is a great way to establish rapport. Don't think you only can connect through things you know something about. Asking sincere questions also will help start conversations and build a relationship.

During the interview process, your credibility will take on importance as the interviewer starts to evaluate whether you can do the job. Credibility means that the interviewer believes in your experience, your judgment and your accomplishments. Assuming you are knowledgeable about the company or industry, or have done your research well, you can become credible early in the interview with power statements. Power statements are statements of fact with which your interviewer will naturally agree.

Examples of power statements include "I see that your company is building a new plant in Tulsa" or "The market for digital cameras is growing much faster than anyone anticipated." Power statements help establish you as knowledgeable and put the interviewer into an

agreeing mind-set. You also can follow up with thoughtful open-ended questions ("Why do you think the market is so hot right now?") to stimulate conversation and learn even more about the industry.

Another way to establish credibility is to be specific about how and when you've performed certain tasks or handled challenges. Don't talk about what you would do or might do. Discuss what you have done, with specific results. Be prepared to discuss how what you did impacted the team or the company, and how that success can transfer to another environment. In an interview, specific information equals credible information.

With both credibility and rapport on your side, you'll be hard to overlook in the selection process.

*Candace Moody is vice president, marketing and communications for WorkSource.*

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