

Guest blog: Interviewing Techniques

Posted by [Gill Hasson and Sue Hadfield](#) on Thursday, October 28th, 2010 at 9:23 am.

Exclusively for FMWF, assertiveness experts Gill Hasson and Sue Hadfield offer a practical guide to giving a confident and assertive performance in an interview, with a host of useful tips including ways of handling tricky questions and tricky interviewers.



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How to be assertive at interviews

The ability to be assertive is an important factor in performing well at interviews; how you behave and communicate will be taken as an indication of how you will perform in the job.

One employer, Sarah Jones, director of www.stylechew.com advises that *'Assertiveness in interviews is all about describing what your responsibilities and achievements have been in past and current work. It's about explaining what you are capable of and most importantly, being clear that you are willing and able to learn'*.

Certainly, being assertive in an interview covers all these things, but what if your nerves get the better of you, you are asked a question you don't understand or you have to cope with a rude, hostile interviewer?

Here, we examine these issues and advise on how to behave assertively.

Coping with nerves

Of course, there's nothing unusual about being nervous about an interview; most people feel this way. You want this job and the pressure is on to do well in the interview.

On the day of the interview, to help calm your nerves, focus on a single word — for example, 'calm', 'peaceful,' or 'graceful' — and practice carrying it out in your movements on the day of the interview when getting dressed, eating, walking driving, etc. It might feel strange at first, but it will help you feel and communicate the right mix of calm and assertiveness.

Assertive body language.

As soon as you meet the interviewer, extend your hand and give a warm handshake. Hold it for a beat as you look them straight in the eye, smile and say hello. This is one of the most simple and easiest things to rehearse with a friend – practice until he or she feels that you've got it right. (And then you'll have the right handshake for every situation, not just interviews!)

Coping assertively with questions you don't understand or know the answer to

Although the usual advice is to prepare yourself by anticipating the questions you will be asked, unless you have a crystal ball you are not going to know what all those questions might be!

When it comes to handling a question you do not understand, the best advice to follow is to be honest and say you don't understand the question. It is ok to do this – you have a right to say you don't understand and ask for more information.

Quite simply, say: 'I'm not sure I understand. Could you tell me a bit more about what you mean?'

Once you have heard the question again, you can clarify by saying "*I think you're asking meand if that is the question, my answer is.....*"

The way you handle questions you don't understand will say a lot about you. In fact, it's possible that rather than be disappointed by your lack of knowledge or understanding, the interviewer may be more impressed with your ability to clarify and deal with the situation.

What If you actually don't know the answer to the question? Say so. Let the interviewer deal with it. Don't let tough questions throw you and ruin the rest of the interview.

Asserting yourself with a difficult, hostile interviewer

As inadvisable as it is to get into conflict in an interview, you do not have to accept comments from an interviewer who adopts a skeptical, dismissive or even aggressive approach.

Whatever the reason for the interviewers' rudeness, at the very least, this is an opportunity to show him or her that you can handle an irate person. So speak calmly and get through the interview as best as possible.

Supposing, for example, the interviewer makes a derogatory remark about the last place you worked. If you decide to speak up, simply explain why you do not agree. *‘Actually, I enjoyed working there; the company insisted on a very high standard of customer service. We continually received excellent feedback.’*

If, however, you don’t feel confident enough to disagree, don’t even try. If you choose to ride it out, simply ignore the remark; you can pretend you didn’t hear it and just smile or stare blankly.

Know that you don’t *have* to assert yourself. An assertive person can choose to respond in a passive way and admit ‘I am not going to react or do anything about it’. They may not like what the other person has said, but they recognise that they are in control by choosing *not* to assert themselves.

If, however, you do assert yourself, remain in control by calmly stating your views and experience.

Remember:

- The ability to be assertive is an important factor in performing well at interviews. Employers will assume that your conduct during the interview will be the same conduct you will exhibit in the job.

Behaving assertively will help you to come across as a confident, capable candidate who is likely to get on with other people and be able to get things done.

Gill Hasson and Sue Hadfield are teachers and facilitators of motivational workshops. Their company ‘Making Sense’ delivers motivational workshops in schools, workplaces and community centres.

They are co-authors of [How to Be Assertive in Any Situation.](#)

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