

Beat the Job-Search Jitters

By

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Are you shy? Try these tips to soak up the perspiration, suggests David Wilson.

Pumping pulse, sweaty palms, ragged nerves ... Under the duress of an interview, a job seeker may act more like a captive criminal than a candidate. Just browsing ads that carry insanely demanding job descriptions can trigger an attack of the butterflies.

From poring over vacancies to networking and lodging an application before the final face-off, every job-hunt stage involves at least a smidgen of stress. Those habitually anxious "wired to worry" job seekers may be badly rattled by all that the negotiation entails.

Still, most job-search advice served up by career seers addresses go-getters and neglects flustered, high-strung applicants who lack the finesse to achieve the rapport that makes dialogue roll. The shy are left to stumble and suffer. So, for everyone prone to job-search jitters, MyCareer has enlisted a crack team of behavioural experts who unveil the secrets of suavity when you're sweating buckets. And the message? Worriers can be winners.

Focus outward

Try not to make it all about you but also about the employer, advises career coach

Lois Keay-Smith. Focus on the fact that the hirer is seeking the right person for the role. That's you. Just try to lubricate the process and take heart because human-resources managers know that, to make a workplace thrive, they need a mix of personalities. An all-extrovert office is the wrong recipe. A newcomer afflicted by shyness may bring "a breath of fresh air" if the trait is not obstructive - as would be the case if the role entails, say, meeting and greeting at events.

Enlist a mentor

Everyone needs a coach, cheerleader or wise counsel. "Don't go it alone," Keay-Smith says. Ask for help and feedback to promote performance improvement and build confidence. Seek advice on handling interview anxiety and learn techniques such as breathing exercises. Meanwhile, remember your strengths, whatever they might be.

Act the part

Some top actors are introverts. "Robert Redford springs to mind," Keay-Smith says. "Immerse yourself in the role of a successful applicant," she suggests. Also, take interview coaching that teaches you to practise how you come over both on the phone and in person.

Explore real-world training

Alternatively, an option is to simply get more actively involved in the business world in a spirit of practice makes perfect. "By going to lots of meetings and being yourself and not doing post-mortems, you will learn to cope better with anxiety. And its intensity will significantly diminish," coaching psychologist Tom Crvenkovic says.

Chat

Treat any interview secured as a conversation, Crvenkovic says. Remember that how you come across does not predict how you will fare on the job. The evidence shows that interviews are the least effective predictors of subsequent job performance, he claims.

Challenge your beliefs

"What evidence do you have that you're weak, or weird?" Crvenkovic asks, keying into candidates' sense of inadequacy. Ask yourself whether, just because you are anxious, others will refuse to take you seriously. Anyway, you might well appear far more confident than you fear. "The key is to check the truth of all of the negative thoughts that make you anxious," he says.

Banish shame

Acknowledge feelings of doubt and anxiety. A degree of disquiet is natural, organisational psychologist Christopher Shen says. Understand that the job-loss and job-search process inevitably poses challenges. That view will help you reach a level of acceptance that physical and emotional feelings of unease are normal.

Raise your game

Strive to be an elite performer. Remember that the physical and emotional symptoms of stress can be harnessed positively, Shen says. Research shows that when undergoing a job interview or networking, top athletes such as footballer Gary Ablett jnr undergo the same physical stress as anyone. Elite athletes thrive, however, largely thanks to their trained ability to exploit the stress-reaction practically. They see stress as a booster that will help them be alert, keen and excited. Elite athletes also regularly exercise, both to strengthen the body and maintain a healthy mind. And they control

their diet and nutrition by eating a healthy balance of foods and drinking copious amounts of water.

Stay positive

A positive disposition is a classic high-achiever trait to cultivate and apply. Focus on the job search activities you can control, such as interview preparation, the construction of a well-written CV and professional clothing. "And forget about what is out of your control," Shen says.

Log every victory

Look at what went well, Crvenkovic says. It is vital to notice successes and avoid monitoring blips. Work towards building a "database" of positive interview performance moments. If you neglected to make a key point, atone by sending an email and thank-you note.

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Based in Melbourne, Australia, Christopher Shen Consulting brings organisational psychology solutions to workplaces, helping people become stronger leaders and teams become better performers.

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