

TJ Blog by Stuart Walkley

## Likeability and the job interview

No, I am not seeking to start the equivalent of a blog-war. But it's time to own up to the fact that whenever we are looking for suitable candidates for employment that quality of "Likeability" either subconsciously or consciously has a lot to do with our final selection.

Not that things should not be fair and square. I am all for competence-based interviews, for adhering to policies on diversity and equality, and for looking behind the interview mask worn by every candidate to discover the "real" person. But I am human – and I like to like people. I also like to be liked. Likeability is at the heart of my wish to be around colleagues at work, customers, friends and even family.

Let's face it --- what is the first comment anyone makes at selection panels as the final candidate scurries out of the door. It goes something like this:

"I really liked Mandy....."

"Sam was great – I warmed to him..."

"Suzy was fabulous – I liked her a lot"

Now once these asides have been made, usually at the same time as the final dregs from the teapot or the bottled water are consumed, we start getting all professional and rational justifying our initial "I like.." subjective remark with.... "I scored her highly on her competence" and "He showed great emotional intelligence.." or "She demonstrated our values in terms of customer-focus.."

But that initial reaction? So telling, so spontaneous and often such an indicator of who will ultimately land the job. The need to like and to be liked is strong for most of us.

This is very much on my mind at the moment as we prepare for another season of Graduate Applicants, but it could apply to school leavers, to those on Government Work Programmes, to anyone in fact entering the employment market in highly competitive times.

Yes, polish your shoes, neaten your hair, wear business-attire (such a delightful word, “attire” my “wiki” suggests its from Old French – *atirier* – to put in order, to put in ranks – those serried rows of job applicants). Certainly be ready with a polished Curriculum Vitae, have a few clever questions ready and prepare one or two answers to the more obvious questions you will have thrown at you by some slightly jaded interviewer.

But most of all work on your likeability... Ensure that when you leave the room you leave your interviewers thinking and commenting “ She’s nice, He’s a good bloke.. I liked her...” How can you do this without seeming insincere or ingratiating? It’s all about your personal mind set before and during the interview rather than gimmicks.

First – think positive about the job and the people you are going to meet. See them as reasonable and helpful, willing you to win rather than trying to catch you out, and understanding the situation you are facing is nerve-wracking. They really do want you to do your best. It really is only on *The Apprentice* that the focus is on trying to catch you out and grind you into the “You’re fired!” taxi.

Second – think positive about yourself. Recognise that you are there because you want to be, that you have something to offer and although you may not be the finished article you will commit yourself to doing your very best. Forget the past, do not be anxious (yet) for the future --- just for the present be positive and hopeful about yourself.

Of course it’s all about self-esteem and sadly for many who have been out of the workplace for some time this is in short-supply. I am full of admiration for those working with the long-term unemployed, often in geographic regions where there are few suitable vacancies, for so much of their job is about raising levels of self-esteem, of helping people to begin to like themselves enough to feel they have something to offer. It is hard work and it deserves our utmost support, both to those candidates and to those who work with them. Do not let recent press coverage divert us from the supreme efforts made day in and day out by such job coaches and employment support workers. They more than anyone I know are doing more to transform lives than politicians, newspaper columnists, or armchair critics. Helping people to like themselves, to be positive, and to become likeable is something to be really proud about.

So this likeability factor, in the end, is all about self-belief, all about a sense of confidence and comfort with oneself that is then conveyed in interviews as a positive viewpoint on the world. But it is so powerful. In the end, we lean towards choosing people to work alongside us who we like, who we want to spend time with, and who we feel will like us as well. This does not mean we all have to hold hands and dance along the yellow-brick road, nor do we have to sing Kum-by-ya around the annual bosses Bar-B-Q pit, but we have to start from a basic premise that most people are good and want to do the best they can and that we are good and have something to offer. If you do not have this in your heart then your own likeability score will be lower and your chances of securing that position just that little bit less. However objective the selection process seeks to be there will be an important subjective element. There is nothing wrong with subjectivity, of course. So long as you are on my side.

**Stuart Walkley**

For further information contact:

Brigit Egan - Director

Oakridge

Tel: 0161 327 2031

[Brigit.egan@oakridgecentre.co.uk](mailto:Brigit.egan@oakridgecentre.co.uk)