



SHUT UP! AND LISTEN....

By Linda Lexo and Rick Miller

The interview has just begun, but it feels like it will never end. Then all of a sudden you realize your future boss finally stopped talking and is staring at you waiting for an answer...ahhh! He talked so long you just couldn't hang on- you spaced out, but at least you didn't walk out.

Or maybe this time you were actually the one doing all the talking? How can you make sure it isn't you? Listen! How can you make sure you listen? Be silent – ever notice the letters to the word LISTEN rearranged spell SILENT?

Interviews are stressful and people are busy. So you would think people would get down to business during the process- right. Guess again. So many people just talk and talk and talk while the other person struggles to pay attention. It's like dating- who wants a date that talks about him/herself all night? Don't be the blind date (If you never had a bad one, your date probably did!)

Face it, no one likes interviews- not candidates, not human resource managers, not hiring managers, no one. When was the last interview you looked forward to?

The Interviewing Company's turn aka: The Blind Date

A candidate may initially be put at ease when you, as the interviewer, do all the talking, but at some point, the candidate needs to communicate his/her skills. *As a rule of thumb interviewers should talk less than one-third the time.* A good candidate will have done research on the Company- you can just fill in some details... If you don't know what to say - spend more time learning about the candidate. Sit back and listen to what the candidate has to offer. The best defense against saying too much is to be prepared. At the very least, read over the candidate's resume beforehand and bring to the interview. Candidates expect and deserve some effort on your part, too.

The Candidate aka: Mr. Oblivious

Usually it's the candidate who won't shut up. Typically, interviewers want precise answers so don't ramble. Look for cues to continue or to stop, don't be oblivious to the obvious and subliminal. Answer the question and listen for the next one. Even ask your interviewer- "*Did I answer your question?*"

How do you know when it's time to just listen? If it is a phone interview listen for the *two extremes* – too much silence on the other end or failed attempts to interrupt you. If in person, you should always maintain eye contact. Have they yawned lately, looked at the clock, answered the phone, fallen asleep, sent an email, played a game on a Blackberry, called their mother... Are they avoiding *your* eye contact? What is their body language telling you? The contest is between you and other candidates, not you and the person conducting the interview.

Bottom Line!

Remember it pays to stop and listen throughout the interview process. Candidates and interviewers alike should be especially conscious of this in order to avoid it or you could be perceived as oblivious, arrogant or just plain annoying. As an interviewer, give the candidate a chance to shine or fail- this may be the only time you have to make an important hiring decision. As a candidate, since you already made it to the interview stage, odds are the company believes you are technically competent, so they are likely interviewing you more for a fit within the corporate culture. Don't miss an opportunity for a better career – just listen and just maybe the offer will be there!

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