

# **Experience Matters**

empowering the 50+

*Mike is a recently retired partner of a major accounting firm who now has a portfolio of public and private sector roles where his experience can add value.*

## **Making interviews fun and improving your chances of success**

**By Mike Burrows**

I had an interview the other day. It was for an unpaid part time role. Unusually for me I rather enjoyed the interview so I started to think about what I need to do to enjoy an interview and increase my chances of success.

The starting point of course is to do some research. This has been made so much easier by the internet. It is necessary to go beyond looking at the organisation's web site at what the organisation does, the key people involved in it and what stories there are about it in the media. This is not just to be more knowledgeable during the interview but it helps you confirm whether it is the sort of organisation you want to be involved with. This does mean of course that I am advocating that you be selective in what roles and what organisations you apply to, and that you do not try and get interviews with too many organisations. I believe we should take care in selecting who we want to apply to, we need to use our experience to increase the chance that we and the organisation will make a good fit.

The result of this research among other things is that you will find out about what aspects of your experience will be relevant. And I am not just talking about work, as someone with a few years under your belt there will be something that you have done that will have given you a connection or a skill that will be a differentiator with your application.

The research also enables you to tailor your CV and any personal statement to ensure you do indeed emphasise the right skills and experience for the post you are applying for. Again this means that the interviewer can hone in on areas of interest to them and that you are knowledgeable about. It also of course means that you have not missed out on making it clear what some of your key skills are that can be of real use in the role.

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W: [www.experiematters.org.uk](http://www.experiematters.org.uk)

E: [info@experiematters.org.uk](mailto:info@experiematters.org.uk)

T: 0207 700 6623

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Of course all this helps you portray a really positive and confident attitude during the interview. We all know it, but all too often we just have not done the homework to be able to talk with confidence and knowledge about why we want the particular job we have applied for. This is not about being able to put on a false performance. By doing the research and thinking about what we can bring to the party, it facilitates the enthusiasm and confidence quite simply because we have it- if we do not then we should not even be at the interview in the first place. In my experience interviewers are very good at spotting genuine enthusiasm for the role and they believe that is a key attribute in a candidate.

The experience you have that makes you right for the job must never be downplayed- your experience is different to everybody else and so is your unique selling point. I seem to be taken aback when an interviewer looks at my experience and sees it in a positive light- over thirty years or so it is a lot of experience! And in reality it is what I have and nobody else has the same.

At the end of the interview, you should ask for feedback on your application and your performance during the interview. This shows that you are keen to know how you have done. Younger interviewers will expect it I think because they have come through their own development at a time when people have been far more willing to share. Secondly, it is perhaps the key chance we have to get information that can be a key learning point. At my interview I was told that my CV was set out in an old fashioned way. I had not realised this and was able to find out the specifics. I suspect like many others, I had pulled off a template from the internet some time ago and had been merrily updating it. So the feedback I had was very useful and usable. Thirdly I can be terrified at the end of an interview when I get asked if I have any more questions. I am like many others in that I have not had that many interviews for jobs over the years and so I do not have a standard bag of tricks up my sleeve that would be designed to leave a strong positive impression. Hence my question- can you give me some feedback about my application and interview? - is a good close and one that I believe leaves a good impression with the interviewer and gives me some good information.

After the interview I ask myself-what did I do well? What could I have done differently? Note I have not asked myself what I did wrong. We all make mistakes - I do not want to beat myself up- I want to learn so that I can do better next.

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Of course it sounds as if I got the job. In fact I do not know yet. It was a long list interview and I do not even know if I have made it to the short list. However, I enjoyed it and thought that meant that I might have some useful tips to share. Like me I am sure you have been to interviews that were very unpleasant experiences and whilst these tips might not exactly make them fun, they might put a little bit of fun into them.

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