

Professional Survival

The Job Interview

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Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of articles on "Professional Survival." Margo C. Trumpeter is assistant to the dean for Management, University of New Mexico General Library, Albuquerque.

Making the most of the job interview is an important part of professional survival. Instead of mentioning the principles of *Dress for Success*, however, or why you should carry an extra pair of stockings in your purse, this article will focus on two key points: (1) preparing for the interview, and (2) judging the institution as a result of the interview process.

If you can talk yourself into a positive attitude before the interview, your relaxed demeanor will be one of your strongest recommendations. One way to achieve a positive attitude is to think of all the disastrous consequences of not getting the job: e.g., you will be the laughing stock of your family and your peers; the interviewer will tell all your colleagues how awful you were; you will never be asked to interview for another library job again; and you will have to move to a less expensive apartment and sell newspapers to keep your refrigerator stocked with yogurt. When you have pushed the possible results of not getting the position to the most ridiculous conclusions, smile, shrug your shoulders, and relax, because nothing can be that bad. Look at the interview as an adventure.

Another way of achieving a relaxed attitude is to prepare and practice. Read everything you can find about the institution in annual reports, journal articles, and publications issued by the library itself. Find a copy of the organization chart and get to know the names and positions of people who may be interviewing you. Once you have learned about the library from published sources, begin making telephone calls to your friends. Learn as much as you can about the managerial style of the dean or director and the conditions of employment (e.g., vacation, personnel policies, contracts, when salary raises are given, and how they are determined). You must have enough information about the library, its practices, and its policies to ask intelligent questions during the interview.

Find out whether librarians at the institution in question have faculty status. If they do, what job requirements go along with status as a faculty member? If the rewards and requirements of faculty status excite you, then apply to those libraries that confer it. If the demands of research

and scholarship do not interest you, do not apply. It is not fair to the library, nor is it helpful to your career, to join a faculty and then leave because you are not interested in meeting the requirements that go with faculty status.

Some libraries may ask you to prepare and deliver a speech. If they do not, prepare a presentation anyway. Although your hosts may not put you in front of a large audience, they will probably ask you to explain your philosophy of service or to describe your most important accomplishments. Be prepared to tell your interviewers about yourself, your work, or your accomplishments—in an interesting way.

You can be fairly certain that you have the formal qualifications for a position if you have been invited to interview for it. You know what your professional experiences have been and can describe them confidently. But, can you handle questions like: "How would you change the scope and duties of your present position if you had the authority?" "What are your goals for the next five years?" And, "What are you doing, specifically, to achieve these goals?"

Keep in mind that you are not being interviewed for the position so that the institution can tell you what it can do for you. You must be prepared to answer the question, "If hired, what can we expect your contribution to be?"

Do a practice interview with a professor, personnel officer, or colleague. Don't just make up answers to questions in your head. Say them out loud. An interview is one of the few situations in which you will be rewarded for tooting your own horn, and it may be difficult to do unless you have practiced.

Remember that you are being interviewed during the entire time you are on "their" territory. Some interviews last all day and include meals. Don't make the mistake of assuming that the interview is over when the socializing begins. Your interviewers are not making that mistake and neither should you.

Be prepared to ask questions. A candidate who can ask intelligent questions leaves a much better impression than the one who doesn't. Don't miss your chance to ask top administrators about the long-range goals of the library, its fiscal outlook, or its status with the state legislature. It may be interesting to find out whether administrators and the library staff answer questions in the same way.

Imagine that you are in an interview with the staff of a whole department, and they sit there looking at you, clearly unprepared to ask you any questions. What do you do? One candidate that I

know handled a situation like this by suggesting that all present introduce themselves and describe their duties. This suggestion relaxed the group and led to the discussion of a number of interesting issues.

Now to focus on my second point. What can the interview process tell you about the library? Even before the interview the institution should provide you with materials about the library, the school, and perhaps the city or locale to help you prepare. You should receive: a job description and specifications, a library organization chart, pertinent personnel policies, insurance and retirement plans. Potential employers should describe in writing the conditions of employment that go with a job. If they do not, you may question their procedures and their consideration for the important decision you may have to make.

Note the kinds of questions you are asked during your interview. All should be directly job-related. If you want the job, you may be willing to respond to illegal, personal questions. But be

aware that an organization that finds information like this of interest may not be one in which you wish to work.

You may be interviewed by the entire staff of the department in which you would be working, or you may be interviewed by only a few top people. The way this is handled may tell you something about the management style of the library.

Some people use a stress-inducing interviewing technique. The idea is to see how you handle yourself under pressure. Other interviewers will help you over the rough spots with ego-building friendliness, while they probe for information. Here again, you have an opportunity to see how people in the library operate.

To summarize, there are two basic issues involved in interviewing that will help promote your professional survival: preparing for the interview so as to put your best foot forward and using the interview to help you determine whether a given library position would be the best for you. ■■

Continuing Education

Career Goals—Achieved through Continuing Education

One is tempted to brand “continuing education” a fad because a number of institutions and organizations are now rushing—or being pushed—to embrace the concept. Needless to say, this has come none too early for the library profession and for each of us as individual academic librarians.

ALA has begun, just as have other organizations, to assume a leadership role in continuing education. A Council resolution passed in January calls for the creation of a comprehensive ALA plan for continuing education. It will be interesting to see what the plan will be and how it will be implemented.

We academic librarians, like other professionals, should be careful, however, that in a frenzied rush to update credentials, to acquire new skills, and to gain new knowledge, we do not simply take any continuing education offering we can get our hands on, just for the sake of participating in continuing education. If we do, we will be disappointed, and the concept of continuing education will suffer.

We must determine, through individual career goal analysis and commitment, the kind of program we each need to fulfill our individual goals. This is an often overlooked but vital step in the whole lifelong learning process. It is only after such self-analysis that the individual will be able

to capitalize on the many offerings in increasingly varied formats—including self-directed study (reading, correspondence courses, etc.), teleconferencing, or other programs, in both traditional and nontraditional formats. In other words, all activities undertaken as a part of a career development program should be goal-oriented. Although many of us may participate in continuing education in its broadest definition, only a few ever manage to concentrate on and direct our activities and energies toward that career goal. I must stress again that most of us have participated in haphazard or sporadic education rather than a continuous or ongoing one. Instead of simply having a group of isolated, unplanned, and unintegrated learning experiences, we must move to the point where we can experience sequential modules of learning that will have a continuous and cumulative impact on our individual career development. When this has been achieved, then we can truly fulfill our continuing education obligations.—*Robert D. Stuart.*

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