

Interview Insider: The Separation is in the Preparation

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Catherine Tuck Parrish, Executive Search Practice Leader for The Novak Consulting Group, is our new career insider. Catherine has 20 years of management experience working with local governments, non-profit organizations, and associations. Her work as a consultant includes executive recruitment, project management, and consulting on projects including process improvement, departmental assessments, development review, policy review, and fee studies.

Catherine's most recent local government experience was as Deputy City Manager in Rockville, Maryland, where she oversaw parks and recreation, human resources, information technology, finance, communications, customer service, and intergovernmental functions. She also served as acting city manager for 11 months and Assistant City Manager.



When you go on a trip, what do you do to prepare? Some of us think for months about where to go, study blogs and reviews online, consult friends and family about their experiences, and read about what to do before we go in order to best use our time once there. Others of us get one recommendation from a trusted person or online source, and book the trip. Your approach might say something about how spontaneous you are and also might have to do with how much money you are spending. A quick day trip or weekend might require very little preparation, while a longer trip or an overseas trip might require more preparation and planning.

The same thing applies to preparing for an interview. When you interviewed for your first part-time job, maybe you just showed up and answered questions. However, if you are considering a job that may require you to move yourself (and possibly others) and/or giving up a job you really like, you will likely spend more time preparing for the interview process. And you should.

In my work, I occasionally see people who approach the interview process like a teenager might approach a summer job opportunity.



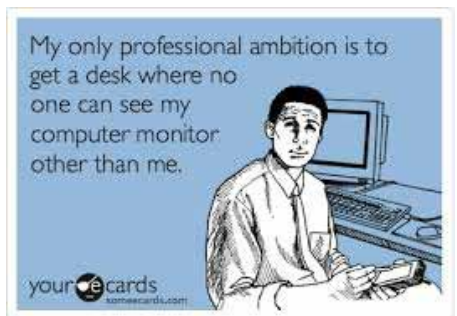
With a “whatever-is-meant-to-be-will-happen” attitude – little preparation. When you are prepared for your interview, it shows a number of things: that you want this position, that you understand what the job is, and that you are prepared to do the job.

There are many parts of the job-hunting process you can't control but this is one area over which you have sole control. Take advantage of it.

8 Tips for Preparing for a Job Interview

Do your homework about the community

Learn about the manager, elected officials, demographics of the community, strategic plan, major budget issues, big projects underway. Read online media sources to find out about hot topics. What are the jurisdiction's biggest challenges and what are its greatest successes?



Learn about the people who work there.

There is no one more influential on what your job experience will be like than your boss. Find out about the manager and elected officials. Most communities also post governing body minutes online and many allow you to view video of their meetings. Use your ICMA, ELGL, and state association resources to learn more about the manager and key staff. What is it like to work there? What is

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the manager's style and what might he/she need to complement his/her style?



Reflect on the skills and experiences you bring.

You should be able to clearly and succinctly articulate this – both on your resume and verbally in the interview. What have you done that might be useful for this community? Make a list, write down examples, think about specific ways your particular skills and the type of work experiences you have had are a good match.

Practice makes you more confident (and understandable).

You probably have a good idea about some basic questions you might be asked in a job interview. Practice your answers. Do this not because there is a “right” answer and you need to memorize it. Rather, do this because the more you tell your story, the more confident you will be. You can write your answers and examples, practice with a trusted (and honest) colleague, and even videotape your answers and review them. This will help you see if you have any presentation tics that might distract someone from what you have done, and identify areas you could be more succinct and/or clear about your experience.

Be positive and enthusiastic in your own way.

If you have sat on interviews you have seen the difference in how people react to candidates who are negative and those who are positive. Remember that they are trying to envision you speaking out in the community, to employees, at a council meeting.

Show them through your own personal style what excites you about this job. You don't need to jump up and down with enthusiasm – it should be your own personal style that comes out.

Be yourself.

At the end of the recruitment process, make sure that there is a good match for you personally and professionally. You need the local government to be clear and honest about what it needs, and you need to be open and honest about who you are. They need to see the real you – which is awesome in a unique way – the person they will see on Monday morning after they hire you. Trying to be what you think they want or anything other than honest generally comes through in the interview and not in your favor.

Do your personal due diligence.

Before you say yes to an interview, decide if this job might be a good fit for you per-



sonally and professionally. It doesn't seem like this should have to be said, but if you haven't done your homework about the community, you might not know. Do your homework as noted above and also talk to whomever will have an influence on your decision to take the job. Do this before you go. Don't waste time and resources if you know that you would not accept this job if offered. This will also help you be in a

better position to articulate what is important to you during the interview, ask better questions, and you will be better prepared to negotiate if you get an offer.

Come with questions.

After you have done your homework, you still will likely have questions that can't be answered as part of your research. Be prepared with questions for people you may encounter during the interview process. Thoughtful, genuine questions can be a powerful way to learn what you need to know and engage those in the interview process in a different way. And, in some cases, this can be the most powerful way to both learn about the organization and to convey who you really are.

Power of Talking to Yourself

Self-reflection is a key in preparing for a job interview. A few questions to ask yourself:

1. What are your strengths and how can you best use those in this position? What are some things you know you need to work on and what are you doing about those things?
2. What would your peers say about your work ethic? What advice have you gotten from your current or former bosses?
3. What is the best way to motivate you?
4. What makes you mad and what do you do when you get frustrated?
5. What have you done that would be helpful to this community?
6. Why do you want this job?

