

## SELLING YOURSELF

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Many people don't enjoy selling themselves. Most will at some point have to promote their own skills and competencies to other people and find this process a challenge. It may be a job interview, or it may be a presentation being made to others where important personal stakes in the outcome are involved; in other words we have to persuade other people and a reputation is involved – ours.

Whatever the case, the ability to communicate is the key factor in success, or failure. The stakes can be high (for example a new job opportunity), or low (for example a small change in a church council policy) in terms of personal outcome, but the principles of how to operate are always the same.

Introverted people often find this process energy draining and demoralising. Selling your own personal

skills so that other people think you are the best thing since sliced bread feels vain, self-centred and counter intuitive. So, a competitive process, where what we have to say might be rejected by others can feel threatening and exposing – like placing our head above the parapet. It is a vulnerable place and the safest course of action is to retreat, or not perform well.

Extroverts can equally find it challenging and sometimes over perform, coming across as over confident, or lacking reflective ability and are equally prone to failure.

These, of course, are simplistic portraits, but as someone who in my day job interviews a lot of people there is an element of truth in the painting. So how should one prepare to sell yourself, win friends and influence others? Here goes with some simple tips applied to a job interview setting.

### KNOW THE GAME

The simple questions are the best. What is the game, why do I want to play, when and where is it and how will I fulfil it? Applied to a job interview this means the process starts well before actual application. Asking some hard questions about personal aspirations for work, realistic appraisal of abilities and gifts, contextual limitations and so on will all be useful in informing what sort of jobs to apply for.

Get assistance from others to help identify what you are good at and the type of place where you will best serve. This will save a lot of time and heartache in the future. This comes back to knowing oneself well and



being honest about the type of role we could and should do. Challenge is obviously necessary, but asking the simple questions will guide which oath to follow and help us understand our motives for wanting a new role.

### KNOW THE RULES OF THE GAME

If it is a job interview there are certain processes and protocols that will need to be followed. Do your research and understand how this operates. Read and follow instructions carefully and be helpful to the process. Fill out application forms diligently and on time and ask if in doubt about anything. There is lots of help available online these days and so use the tools available to help you sell yourself.

For example, in many leadership roles transferrable skills are often relevant. Thinking carefully about your previous career and how it can inform a new role will help you make useful connections.

Be creative but honest in how you apply showing others how your experience adds value and worth to the role in question. In this way you are thinking carefully across the whole of your experience and applying your skills to the post in hand. You will not be the finished article but a good appointing panel will look at your character, try to spot your potential and discern what is best for you and the post available. This is a mutual discernment process.

### TRAIN FOR THE GAME

When it comes to interviews practise helps. This sounds awful, but how many of us have left an interview process thinking 'I wish I'd mentioned that example' or, 'Why didn't I include mention of this aspect of my career?' This is frustrating and means that we may regret our performance. It is not unspiritual to prepare well. Thinking carefully through the paperwork beforehand is important. Try and forecast the type of questions that will be asked and think of a series of good examples that illustrate well how you operate and tackle leadership. Any interview panel wants you to do well, and by preparing thoroughly you can help them and yourself. There are courses that give advice and training on this and if you have not been interviewed for a while it makes sense to refresh your skills, get a bit of practise and seek advice from others. Use training for this purpose and not applying for jobs you don't really want – you may end up in the wrong place.

### PLAY THE GAME WELL

Interviews are not easy. Some people thrive in a competitive process where other candidates are present, and others find it unhelpful and distracting. Whatever you feel, concentrate on your role in the process and don't fall into the trap of comparing yourself with others.

You bring a unique set of gifts, skills and experience which no one else can offer. You have been called to interview because the panel can see this so forget others and concentrate on yourself, the post and the panel. Your preparation and

training will be so important at this point and hopefully take much of the stress away.

Be natural, and allow yourself to enjoy the process and talk about yourself for once. Where else do you get the opportunity to share your approach to leadership and your faith in Christ with such a captive audience. What the panel want to see is the real you, and after an hour together this likely to come through, so there is no use trying to act. What you don't want is to leave the room feeling that either they have not seen the real you, or that you have let yourself down through ill preparation or under-performance.

### ACCEPT THE RESULT AND LEARN FROM IT

There are always things we can learn. Appraise the result and talk through what happened with a trusted friend. Think through what you would have done differently and why and make a note to yourself. Learn from any feedback offered and once the dust has settled allow objective analysis to lead your thinking rather than raw emotion which fades and might not be reliable.

Handling disappointment well is a real pointer to the gifts of grace and maturity. I have had many conversations with disappointed candidates giving them news they'd rather not hear and am always humbled and amazed by the gracious responses of many.

Once you move on from disappointment hopefully there will be good things to learn and remember. These things will inform future challenges. Finally, one day it will be you that is appointed and then the real challenge of beginning a new leadership post really begins and there will be nowhere to hide.

