

The One Thing You Must Do to Get Hired

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More important than showing expertise, know-how, skills and experience

Ask most inside counsel why they hire the lawyers they do and they'll tell you it's for their specific expertise. Many take a rational approach to their search for counsel—they develop a list of criteria to narrow down the candidates and then have each of the finalists come in for a final interview, presentation or pitch.

Some inside counsel may claim that through that process, they are able to hire the lawyer with the best skills and expertise for the job. However, research on job interviewers suggests that buyers of legal services may rely on other hidden criteria that they could be unaware of themselves.

Chad Higgins from the University of Washington and Timothy Judge from the University of Florida uncover these hidden criteria in a [research paper published in the Journal of Applied Psychology](#). After tracking the success of job applicants, Higgins and Judge reported that having a particular background, expertise or skill set had little to do with the candidate's chances for success. In fact, job seekers who promoted themselves and their experience or specific expertise in the interview did poorly compared to those who did not engage in self-promotion.

So, if pointing out your background and expertise won't get you the work, what will?

The answer is ... being nice. Those candidates who found common ground with their interviewers and came across as pleasant and interested were hired far more often than those who simply touted their experience.

The successful candidates probably knew that the purpose of the interview was not about rattling off accomplishments, but rather an opportunity to demonstrate that working with them would be an agreeable experience.

Part of that agreeable experience requires building trust. Many assume that it takes time to build trust—at least more time than a 30-minute prospect meeting would allow—but that may not be so. According to Charles Green, co-author of *The Trusted Advisor*, creating trust is accomplished through four ways: reliability, credibility, intimacy and self-orientation. Green points out that only one of these—reliability—by its definition requires the passage of time to build trust. The others can all be experienced in a moment. As [Green says](#), credibility can be established through credentials, insightful comments, “a firm handshake, a look in the eye and a straight answer.” Intimacy can be established “by a knowing nod, a sense of empathy and a recognition of the personal.” Self-orientation, or establishing that you place the interviewer's or the organization's needs above your own, can be shown in the way you ask questions and whose concerns dominate your reactions in the moment.

So, when you reach the last step—the meet and greet, the beauty contest, the in-person meeting, the pitch—leave the resumes and lists of accomplishments back at the office. They already know you're good or they wouldn't be talking to you. Instead, focus on showing them they can trust you and that working with you would be more pleasant than working with the next lawyer they interview.