

THE INTERVIEW DANCE

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Penny Morehead modestly says that qualified graphologists may find part of this article elementary but she has found the sample interview described here to be an effective way of opening a dialogue with prospective hiring professionals. They can immediately relate to the experiences and chronic frustrations faced by the interviewer. She hopes that we too can find this a useful way to begin a conversation.

Humans are funny creatures. Most of us *try* to be honest but there are those who mislead, some intentionally, some not. When it comes to the hiring arena, that less-than-honest behaviour can wreak havoc unless detected before it is too late, which is before he or she gets hired.

During my first 16 years as a human resources manager I thought I had encountered every way of being misled and was surprised when I failed to notice what afterwards seemed glaring signals. Then I got smart and started using handwriting analysis. It was my safety net against people who mislead and also against my own shortcomings as an interviewer.

Below is a mock interview with a candidate who bamboozled the interviewer with his charm and confidence. Had she taken a sample of his handwriting to an analyst, she would have uncovered the flaws - and kept the egg off her face. The handwriting discussion at the end points out what the interviewer missed.

"Thank you Mr. Applicant for coming in today to interview for our Compensation Manager position," the mid-west hospital HR manager said, clutching a clipboard to her left side and extending her right hand for the usual handshake. *He's nervous. His hand is cool and wet, she thought.* "Please sit where you like," she offered, pointing to the nearby rectangular conference table and casually wiping her hand on the back of her skirt.

"Thank you. I'll sit here," replied Mr. Applicant.

Hmmm . . . He quickly seated himself at the head of the table. Decisive.

"Mr. Applicant, I've read over your resume and application earlier. It appears you have a strong background in the area of compensation analysis with a combined total of 20 years job experience. Is that correct?"

He's dressed appropriately for this interview; clean shoes, pressed slacks, dress shirt with tie, jacket.

"Yes, that is correct," Mr. Applicant responded as he leaned back, shifting his body to fit more comfortably in the chair. "I think my resume speaks for itself. I have a large base of experience in hospital administration including work in compensation analysis."

Good. Seems self-assured.

"Mr. Applicant, you've had several long-term positions with other companies. Can you tell me why you left your last position?"

"Certainly, Ms HR Manager. The last company I worked for went through a huge budget cut and they downsized hospital administration significantly. My position was eliminated. Nothing I could do about it."

"I see." I remember reading about that in the newspaper.

"And about the job before that one. Our hospital had a new CEO come on board and I felt the subsequent changes in policy weren't the best fit for my own work values." In his best applicant demeanour, Mr. Applicant leaned forward, holding steady eye contact with Ms HR Manager, and gave several

detailed examples of the policy changes that had occurred and how he thought they were detrimental to the hospital.

"I understand, Mr. Applicant," Ms HR Manager said, "and how about the position prior to that one?"

"I went out on my own to act as a consultant."

"How was that, Mr. Applicant," *Maybe not so successful, given you went back to work for a hospital.*

"Well, I found consulting to be rewarding in its own way but I feel I can be more influential and productive as a team member in a hospital setting. The staff is more accepting of me. Don't think of me as an outsider. And frankly I am getting older and I appreciate the medical benefits package hospitals can offer."

Makes sense. Willing to get a little personal.

"Mr. Applicant, will you please tell me how you prioritize projects?"

"No problem, Ms HR Manager," chuckled Mr applicant heartily. "I just wait to see who offers me the largest bribe." He roared with his answer, slapping his large hand down on the table as his entire body shook with laughter. "No, I'm just kidding." His voice quieted. "Actually, I use a first-in, first-out policy for daily work. And I find my ABC system of prioritisation is effective for larger projects. It helps me be successful in meeting deadlines."

Okay, a sense of humour, but verbally articulate and serious when appropriate. I wonder if he is the one for this job?

"Mr, Applicant, are you able to work with a large staff, taking into consideration the varied personalities and backgrounds of our employees? At present we have over 2000 employees working at our hospital."

"Yes, I am comfortable relating to a wide range of personalities," opening his face with a warm smile. "I have

experience of working with a diverse range of ages and ethnicities."

"Uh, Mr. Applicant," Ms HR Manager said as she scanned her notes on the clipboard in front of her, "sometimes the duties of this position could require that you work more than forty hours in a week. How do you feel about that?"

"I'm fine with that, In fact I'm accustomed to long work hours. Whatever it takes to get the job done."

This is going very well. I'm moving him to the top of the list.

Ms. HR Manager asked a few more questions and concluded the interview with Mr. Applicant. After he left the room she wrote some notes on the interview evaluation sheet: decisive, well dressed, self-assured, forthright, warm sense of humour, verbally articulate, management experience.

She reviewed the interview in her mind and could not identify any of the typical red flags she had learned to look for over the years. So, based on the positive personal interview, his 20 years experience, verified education, verified previous jobs, negative criminal background check and successful negotiation of pay and benefits package, Mr. Applicant was later hired for the job. Ms HR Manager felt a great sense of relief. This job had been vacant for five months and the subordinates in that department were becoming anxious.

How do you think Mr. Applicant performed once hired? Would you believe that within the first two months on the job, complaint reports began to accumulate on Ms HR Manager's desk?

Mr. Applicant had quickly demonstrated to co-workers that he had poor communication skills, both verbal and written. His ambiguous directions were confusing to subordinates. He often could not be found for long periods of time and staff wondered why he left early with so much work to be done. And when an acute potential staff emergency occurred, he failed to act, forcing subordinates to pick up the

pieces. And finally, when it became apparent that Mr. Applicant was using outsource services to do most of the work, Ms HR Manager had no choice but to initiate the progressive discipline steps in preparation to terminate.

What went wrong? Ms HR Manager an experienced interviewer, knew that Mr. Applicant had dressed right, said the right things and had abundant previous experience to qualify him for the position. She personally liked him. Yet Mr. Applicant on the interview was not the same as Mr. Applicant once hired. What else could she have checked out to gain more insight into the real Mr. Applicant?

Starting over to fill the position would take an emotional toll on the staff and cost the hospital thousands of dollars for temporary staffing, hiring expenses and downtime.

Ms HR Manager felt extreme frustration. She felt duped. The whole interview "dance", in her opinion, was a waste of her time. The polite questions and answers. The smiles. The embellished resumes. There must be another way to match the right persons to positions.

I think anyone in the business of hiring people can relate to this sample interview. It seems the traditional personal interview and handshake fail to give the whole picture of job applicants. So many times we end up disappointed and perplexed about what went wrong in the interview process. Then we have to start all over again.

If Ms HR Manager had used graphology as an additional tool for screening applicants, Mr. Applicant's writing would have revealed helpful clues about his personality, as follows:

1. The interviewer judged the applicant as being *decisive*. A qualified graphologist would have evaluated his handwriting and noted a lack of straight firm downstrokes that may be either single strokes or part of a loop. This is a clue as to whether the writer lacks determined, decisive abilities.
2. The interviewer believed the applicant to be *self-confident*. The handwriting analyst would have noted t-bars placed low on the t-stem, suggesting a lack of confidence in his own abilities to achieve his goals. Concave t-bars in the sample also suggest that the writer is under heavy pressure and lacks willpower.
3. It seemed the applicant used clear *open communication* in the interview. A handwriting analyst would have noted tightly compressed ovals in lower-case letters such as "a", "o" and "e". The applicant is likely to misinterpret what is being said in conversation, to make it fit into something he already believes or wants to believe.
4. The interviewer thought the applicant was really *opening up* and revealing himself to her on an *intimate* level. The handwriting analyst would disagree. With a variable slant, having letters slant to the left and to the right and all places in between, the writer is likely to be unpredictable and undisciplined. He may feel socially inferior and out of balance emotionally. At times he may come across as warm and caring about others and at other times appear guarded, secretive and suspicious about others.
5. Finally, the interviewer made notes about the applicant having strong *willpower*. Not so, says the analyst. This writer's t-bar crossings are narrow. Many of the bars do not cross over to the right side of the t-stem, going from left to right. This suggests procrastination and a lack of drive to complete projects and goals.

If only Ms HR Manager had this insight before she hired the applicant! But it is not too late for you to begin a handwriting screening programme at your company. And, who knows? Maybe you can keep the egg off your face.