How to Handle Objections During an Interview

The interviewing process is similar to an elimination tournament in sports. You compete against a rapidly-diminishing group of people, and once you lose, you’re out of the competition. At each stage, the competition becomes more intense and only the best candidates make it to the final round.

While the interview is not a contest of physical strength, it is a strategic process conducted on two levels, the spoken and the unspoken, and you must communicate on both planes. Be aware of the words you choose and the way in which you deliver them. At the same time, read the interviewer’s verbal and visual signals to determine how your words are being received. Do you suspect a misunderstanding? If so, stop what you are saying, and address that concern before proceeding.

In many cases, what appears to be an objection may merely be a question. For example, if an interviewer says, “Do you have an SH&E degree?” he is asking a question, and you should answer it. If you don’t have a SH&E degree, follow up by asking if one is necessary for the position. If he responds by saying, “We only hire CSPs,” then it’s an objection.

The key is not to feel defensive or devastated, since an objection does not automatically eliminate you from the competition. Think about how you can deal with it tactfully, without allowing your emotions to enter the interview. Discuss the issue objectively, and respond to it methodically.

When to Handle Objections

There are three times when it is best to handle an objection. First, you should anticipate it and address the concern before it comes up. Second, many misunderstandings will surface during the interview unexpectedly and must be dealt with at that time. Third, you may find it more to your advantage to postpone discussing the dilemma until later.
Next Level Interviews

What often makes the corner office so elusive is the patience and determination of the interviewee. This is because you may have to endure up to three different interviews with different groups of people in the same organization. Often they have different expectations and biased views of what the role of the position in the organization will be. They are often held on three different days over a period of a month or two. You have to then figure out if you want to spend vacation on the job opportunity. You have to answer the question, “Is it really worth it?” Many times, SH&E professionals determine that it is not and the corner office remains unattained. On the other hand, what can happen is that the interview changes mid-course and other high ranking officials who were not on the original agenda are called into the interview. You have to be prepared and study up on the company just in case you get fast-tracked. The downside is that interviews are emotionally draining. Being “on” for an extended period of time can drain the life out of you. So make sure you’ve had a good night’s sleep before the interview.

Usually the first interview is with your prospective boss and a few of his or her peers. There is really nothing different here, other than a determination of whether you will make the cut and go on to the next round. Sometimes this is done by phone so they can narrow the field and won’t have to bring in all the candidates.

There are usually two ways to go in the second interview, either to operations or upper management. If upper management is available during the first interview, you could fast-track through that hoop or fail miserably if you are unprepared. I’ve actually seen where a candidate is made an offer before they leave the building if he or she hits home runs here. Often, the company has been looking for a long time and hasn’t found someone who can meet all their needs. When they find the perfect candidate, they strike and strike quickly. So be ready for an offer before you leave the building if this happens to you. If they want an answer right now, tell them that it sounds great but regardless, you need to sleep on it and/or speak to your spouse. Reassure them that you think it will be yes, you just want to confirm it.