

From the Desk of Dr Jenn Hardy

A quarterly-ish newsletter



Hello!

So, my last newsletter showed up a few months late. This one is either early or right on schedule. I'll let you decide. ;)

I have been itching to create more e-courses about career development but hadn't been able to carve out the time. Did you know that career issues are one of my primary specialities?

During grad school and my postdoc training, I was fortunate enough to work at Penn State's Career Services Center. While there, I learned so much about career choice, job searches, interviewing, applying to grad school, networking, and more. I knew I had landed somewhere special a couple of months into my graduate assistantship. It wasn't just the practical advice I was learning. The team at Career Services was such a healthy, supportive community. In the competitive environment of psychology doctoral programs, they felt like a lighthouse in the storm.

They taught me so much of what I know about career issues. I feel fortunate to share what I've learned with you. When we know better, we do better. With that mind, let me look back on some unfortunately bad interviews. I will outline what I got right and what I would do differently, so you can learn from my mistakes and successes.

@drjennhardy

The Disorganized Interviewers.

I had a phone interview with a couple of faculty members for a psychology grad program. I had received permission to conduct my interview while at work (Thank you, Carole!). The professors called a little late but then didn't realize I had answered. I had to say "hello" a few times before they stopped their conversation. I correctly rolled with their missteps, remaining professional.

Their first question was: "We don't think you are a good fit for our program. Can you tell us why you think you are?" I'm glad I didn't let that one shake me. I smartly knew they must not be a competitive program if they are interviewing people like me who they didn't see as a good fit. I chose to pretend they asked me "Can you tell us why are you interested in this program?"...a question I had prepared for.

Without fail, every reason I had supplied was an aspect of their program they had changed or ended. Looking back, I'm proud of my 24-year-old self for remaining calm and positive, for holding my ground. I remained professional despite the negative tone of the call.

This interview was just before lunch. I remember this, because their lunch dates arrived during the call. My interviewers chatted with them, inviting them to sit in on the last minutes of the interview before they left for lunch. By then, I was so frustrated I was tempted to end the interview early. That said, I knew these people are now a part of my network. The world of psychology academia is small. I didn't need to make enemies of someone who could end up in the same department as me. Looking back, I made the right decision.

When we get to the end, they tell me false information about how offers and acceptances to psychology grad programs are handled. Essentially, they were claiming they could give out more offers than they could accept, that it was first come, first served. Again, I remained calm. I said something like "Now, it is my understanding that APA-accredited programs are required to allow people until April 15th to accept or decline an offer. You are APA-accredited, right?" I knew I was right but was trying to gently give them a chance to fix their misinformation. At this point, one of the interviewers said, "Oh yeah, that's right, John. That's what we do."

Despite me being a bad fit in their eyes, I got an offer. I turned it down before I had other offers. I didn't want to risk being tempted into saying "yes" to that program if I didn't get any other offers. I knew I would regret it.

This interview taught me a few important lessons.

- Not all interviewers are good at their job.
- If you are paying attention, then sometimes the red flags are visible even over the phone.
- You need to have the confidence to walk away from bad offers.
- Regardless of their professionalism, it is your job to be your most professional self.



The Condescending Interviewer.

Unfortunately, I've had a few of these types of interviews. This story represents an amalgamation of them.

I completed my first interview for a psychologist position and had been told that the Clinical Director needed to "sign off" on me before I could get an official offer. I was also told that the offer letter would be waiting for me in HR once I had finished my interview with the director. I was nervous but encouraged. I basically had an offer, so that's good, right?

The first question the director asked was "I don't think you are qualified for this job. Can you tell me why you think you are qualified?" Yikes. I had the presence of mind to remember that the offer letter was down the hall. I also knew this agency hired student therapists. As a licensed psychologist, how was I less qualified than them? I took a breath to ground myself before answering this more appropriate question: Can you tell me more about your experience and how you see it helping your work here with us?

After that first question, he was nicer. I think he liked that I didn't immediately get rattled. This job was not for people who easily rattle. To keep my nerves in check, I kept reminding myself of the letter down the hall in HR. I also reminded myself of the kind site director who I would be actually working with. I would rarely interact with this man after today's interview.

The phone rings. Again, it's just before lunch. He looks at me for permission to answer. I'm not sure what interviewee would ever be so confident as to refuse their request to answer the phone. Surely, it must be important. It wasn't. Just lunch plans. He hangs up. ...and then he makes another phone call to invite someone to join them. Clearly, he wanted me to know I wasn't good enough for him. I, once again, sidestepped the trap to react. I put on my most neutral and open expression, waiting for us to resume. We did.

He decided to spend much of the remaining hour explaining the history of the mental health system in that particular state. Admittedly, he was a good storyteller, and I learned a lot. I wondered if I should be turning the conversation back toward my experiences and interests in the job. Generally, that would have been the right call. With this person, I had a gut sense that the job was mine and that this was the start of my orientation. I guessed right. At the end of the interview, he pointed me in the direction of HR.

This interview taught me a few important lessons.

- Interviewers are not only listening to what you say but how you react to the situations they create.
- Though it helps to have general advice to guide you, be sure to pay attention to your intuitive read on the interaction.
- Grounding, breathing, and positive coping statements help us manage performance anxiety. Practice them ahead of time so that they are easy to integrate into your interview situation.

@drjennhardy

