

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 19, 1992

TEACHING BUSINESS INTERVIEWING STRATEGIES WITH AN EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH

Daryl L. Kerr, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

ABSTRACT

This article describes an experiential program designed to assist students in developing effective job seeking skills. One major goal of this program is to point out that the effectiveness of the interviewing process and the nature of judgments rendered, are primarily dependent upon the communicative skills of the participants. The experiential program consists of three components: self-assessment, career exploration, and placement. Readings, experiential exercises, and specific assignments are used to assist students with their own individualized job search process. This program has been found to be very effective and very much in demand by college students and other job seekers.

BACKGROUND

A large number of college graduates with strong academic backgrounds continue to be at a disadvantage in obtaining desirable positions because they lack job seeking skills (Blackledge & Blackledge, 1990). Because of this, the entire process of career planning and placement should be of major concern for students, career counselors, and faculty. Having a program such as "Business Interviewing Strategies" that teaches necessary job seeking skills, could be a key factor in whether or not one succeeds in that process.

Some companies have reported their hiring plans are down from the previous year's quota (Moskal, 1990). The latest analyses of the supply and demand of college graduates shows a significant "easing" of the competition that existed for graduates from the early 1970's to the present (Occupational Outlook Quarterly, 1989). However, the Bureau of Labor Statistics points out that the narrowing gap between the supply and demand for these graduates does not rule out some problems with the number of graduates prepared for particular occupations. In addition, a reduction in the number of companies that interview on college campuses could increase the difficulty of the job seeking process for the student (Haberman, 1990).

Because of these and other factors, it is of crucial importance for students to develop effective job seeking skills. Of more importance is the fact that students should learn these skills before they begin their job search. Furthermore, if students began their job search by utilizing exercises that assessed their skills, abilities, and interests and then explored career possibilities that matched their personalities, the placement process would be less stressful for them. They would enter the employment interview better prepared for the position and therefore more likely to secure that position.

OBJECTIVES OF THE EXPERIENTIAL PROGRAM

Business Interviewing Strategies is a practical program which assists students in developing effective job seeking and interviewing skills, both as a job applicant and as an interviewer. In this program, the job seeking process is considered as a special form of purposive and persuasive communication, which is based upon effective oral and written communication skills.

There are a variety of resource materials available for this type of program. Two suggested texts are Career Planning Today by C. Randall Powell and Sweaty Palms: The Neglected Art of Being Interviewed by H. Anthony Medley. Both of these texts have a variety of experiential exercises for the students. Supplementary resources that could be used for the program include: current newspaper and magazine articles on related topics; theoretical and applied research articles; and employment publications by the federal and state government, local businesses and area Chamber of Commerce offices.

COMPONENTS OF PROGRAM

The program is divided into three components: self-assessment, career exploration, and placement. Approximately one-third of the program is devoted to self-assessment and career exploration. The majority of the program is dedicated to the placement component.

Self-Assessment Exercises

In the self-assessment component, each student explores their own interests, beliefs, and work values. Readings and class discussions provide the student with information about these areas. Once the material has been introduced to the student, experiential exercises and assignments are used to facilitate individual exploration and identification.

A Job Seeking Notebook is begun at this point by each student. This notebook consists of five major sections: (1) Skills/Interests, (2) Working Resume, (3) Information Interviews, (4) Company Research, and (5) Interviews & Company Visits. Each section is developed as the program proceeds.

The first section of the notebook, "Skills/Interests", is completed during the self-assessment component. The student is given instructions and exercises to assist them in developing this section. Specific categories are provided to facilitate individual research and critical thought. Categories include items such as interests, strengths, weaknesses, work values, working conditions, geographic preference/travel, and skills identification exercise.

Each student evaluates their own attitudes and

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 19, 1992

desires as they relate to each category. A separate page is used for each category so the student can add to or modify their list as their values and attitudes change.

In addition to these exercises, students are encouraged to take the Strong Interest Inventory and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator tests. These test results provide the student with more information about their personality characteristics and interests. Furthermore, the Strong Interest Inventory compares the student's interests with the interests of people in various occupations. The results from this test inform the student of existing similarities with these occupations.

Career Exploration Exercises

The second component of the Business Interviewing Strategies program is career exploration. In this component students are taught how to research careers. They begin by reading resource materials published by the United States Department of Labor as well as company brochures, annual reports, newspaper articles, and other related books and pamphlets. In addition to this information, students interview professionals who work in the local area. This is an excellent opportunity for students to gain first-hand knowledge and advice on careers they are interested in pursuing.

Once the initial research process has begun, each student is required to prepare three "Career Profile" reports. These reports are added to the Job-Seeking Notebook. In each report, students are asked to provide relevant information about a potential career they are interested in.

After the self-assessment and career exploration components are completed, one program session is devoted to integrating and analyzing all of this information. Students are encouraged to "merge" the information from the two components. The students are instructed to look for similarities between their skills and interests, and specific career fields. The primary goal of this "merging" is to assist students with the career planning process (Downs, Smryak, & Martin, 1990).

Placement Exercises

The majority of the program is devoted to the third component, placement. In this component, students begin by learning about the job market and current employment trends. The university placement office is then discussed along with the necessary forms used to register with this office. Salary survey results are also presented at this time in the program. This information is easily obtained from national, state, and local government agencies, as well as from independent research firms. The university placement office also has this information about the university's alumni.

Developing a resume is the next topic covered in the placement component. Several program sessions are spent on this very important area. After students complete their resumes, other forms of written communication related to the job search are discussed. Some of these other forms include: (1) job application letters (cover letters), (2) company application forms, (3) thank you letters, (4) travel expense statements, (5) offer stall letters, and (6) notes on interviews and company visits. The "notes on interviews and company visits" encourages students to maintain

records of these experiences. This information can be used for future correspondence and for comparing job opportunities. Additionally, students can take note of their strengths and weaknesses after each interview so they can be better prepared for future job interviews.

Following the section on written communication, students learn about various methods of locating jobs. A variety of unique methods are presented and discussed in this program along with the traditional methods of locating jobs such as newspaper advertisements, placement offices, and direct mail campaigns.

Company research is another area discussed in the placement component. Students learn about various resource materials that can be used to research an organization. As an exercise, each student selects a company that is of interest to them. The student conducts research and prepares a brief profile on that company using the following categories: industry, competition, company, position, and recruiter.

As mentioned in class, knowledge of the company is of crucial importance in the job interview (Stewart & Cash, 1988, Hunt & Eadie, 1987). Students who have this information prior to the interview could spend an hour or two developing a presentation that would interweave their background and interests into what the employer has to offer.

The remainder of the placement component is devoted to learning about and developing effective interviewing skills and strategies. This includes areas such as: (1) personal appearance and grooming, (2) types of interviews, (3) interview format, (4) typical questions, (5) responding to questions, (6) adaptation to the recruiter and the company, (7) salary negotiation, (8) confidence and nervousness, (9) company visits, and any other relevant topic that assists the student in developing an effective presentation.

At the end of the program, sessions are used for simulation interviews. In these simulation interviews, Students are assigned a partner. Each student is to interview with and be interviewed by their partner. This gives each student the opportunity to role-play as the recruiter and as the job applicant. If time and resources permit, it is even more effective if these interviews can be videotaped.

The simulation interviews are conducted in-groups of eight students. While two students are involved in the interview, the other six students are evaluating them. These six students are asked to provide oral and written critiques of the participant's performance and effectiveness. Three of these six students are evaluating the "job applicant" while the other three students are evaluating the "recruiter." These simulation interviews provide students with practice and the opportunity to hear feedback on their individual performances.

In addition to the content of the program presented in this article, five to seven business professionals are invited as guest speakers. These professionals are recruiters or managers who interview job candidates for their respective companies. In order to be most effective, the individuals selected to serve, as guest speakers should reflect the career interests of the students in the course.

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 19, 1992

CONCLUSION

Business Interviewing Strategies is a very popular program both on and off campus. It is highly recommended by faculty advisors for all students regardless of their major. According to placement directors, it is an excellent program for individuals preparing for the job search process. Many college recruiters and managers in the area have commented on the individuals they have interviewed that have completed this program. These professionals stated these individuals were better prepared for the interview and were more knowledgeable about themselves and their career goals than most other job candidates they met.

REFERENCES

- Blackledge, Walter L., & Blackledge, Ethel H (1990). The Job You Want: How to Get It. Cincinnati, Ohio: Southwestern Publishing Company, 1
- Downs, Cal W., Smryak, G. Paul, & Martin, Ernest (1990) Professional Interviewing. New York: Harper & Row, 110-112
- Haberman, Louise Drather (1990, March). Salary Survey - 1990. New Accountant, p. 35
- Hunt, Gary T., & Eadie, William F. (1987). Interviewing: A Communication Approach. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 168.
- Moskal, Brian S (1990, January 22). Caps, Gowns, and Jobs Industry Week, p. 62
- Stewart, Charles A., & Cash, William A., Jr. (1988) Interviewing: Principles and Practices. Dubuque, Iowa; William C. Brown, Publishers, 1814.
- U. S. Department of Labor (1989, Fall). Outlook 2000: Issues & Implications. Occupational Outlook Quarterly, 33 (3), 9.