



The Louisiana Workforce Commission Summit



Soft Skills Session

Lafayette, Louisiana
Wednesday, October 22nd 2008

Soft Skills Session

This session will focus on how the workforce development system can improve the LEVEL of *Soft Skills* of those entering the workforce.

For the purposes of this meeting, *SOFT SKILLS* are defined as:

Understanding the basic behavior needed in the workforce including,

- Interviewing Skills*
- Understanding drug policies*
- Showing up to work on time*
- Basic communications skills and courtesy*

By design, very few people are *professional* interviewers, regardless of their level of education or work-skill experience!

So little time is spent by most job seekers on the fundamentals of *preparation for the interview* that they fail to recognize or understand what the interviewer or hiring manager is **REALLY** looking for or wants to hear.

With the detailed *pre-qualification screening processes* used by most companies today, candidates arrive at the interview room door with the necessary level of education and work experience to perform the specific job available.

However, it is what goes on *inside* the interview room that separates the candidates, and where most applicants fall short.

More training must be given to help them understand how to *communicate* their:

- Wants
- Needs
- Desires
- Passions
- Honesty and Integrity
- Enthusiasm
- Commitment

The training of effective *Soft Skills* for job candidates will allow them to **COMMUNICATE** who they are, what they stand for, where they want to go, how they want to get there, and **WHY** they should get the job!

To thoroughly prepare job candidates with these *Soft Skills*, training objectives must include:

1. How to Research, Prepare and Practice for the interview
2. *Physical Presence – Visual Motion – Verbal Delivery* - These three LEARNED skills help job seekers present the best of who they are and what they can do
3. How to apply for the right job and stop wasting time!
4. Knowing what employers look for and **WANT** from candidates and new hires
5. Writing resumes, cover letters, and gathering character references

6. Understanding what background checks reveal, drug policies and testing mean, and the importance of clean driving records
7. What it takes to “*Dress up and Look Good*” for the interview
8. The importance of the first THREE - MINUTES of the interview
9. How to ask and answer questions before, during, and after the interview
10. The right ways to follow-up after an interview
11. Asking for the job, accepting an offer, handling rejection
12. Preparing for the first day on the job
13. Honesty, ethics, teamwork and loyalty to the company
14. Knowing what to expect during the first year of work

Training materials and instruction should focus on:

A. Before you start your job search...

Address the confusion and frustration candidates may experience as they begin their career search. Offer suggestions and thought-provoking ideas to help job candidate’s narrow options and career choices by identifying their personal assets and strengths, likes and dislikes, and passions and aspirations.

Most importantly, give them a directed course of action to seek help and avoid wasting time.

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Specific reference and source material should be available for candidates to learn more about career opportunities and how their degree or previous work experience is valued and sought after by various industries, corporations and businesses.

B. Knowing what employers are looking for in new job applicants...

Candidates should identify their talents and credentials and match them to fit the job they are applying for.

Knowing what a company does, what products or services they offer, and the specifics of the job they will be expected to do will help candidates talk intelligently in an interview, and show a potential employer that they are serious about coming to work.

While no two organizations are the same, candidates should understand the processes and procedures used by corporations and businesses in their hiring practices to determine if candidates have the right qualifications.

C. Preparing resumes, cover letters, references, and much, much more...

The roadblocks getting to the interview room are harder to overcome than the actual interview!

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With the advent of the internet and advanced technological screening systems, unless a candidate's resume matches exact "requirement" data fields, their paperwork will be "kicked out" and sent back with an auto-reply note simply stating: "Thanks, but no thanks."

Perhaps the biggest obstacles in getting past "first, second or third base" on the interview circuits are the highly sophisticated "background" check processes that have become so prevalent in screening procedures.

Conformity in preparing resumes and cover letters is

<u>Checking Out New Hires</u>	
Workplace violence is the leading security threat among large companies. Employers are taking the following steps before hiring candidates:	
RESUME:	
Employment verification	86%
Criminal records check	81%
Drug screen	78%
Reference checks	70%
Education verification	70%
Motor vehicle records	56%

essential. Simple resume layouts must be used, focusing on specific information that answers the needs of the job postings.

D. Research... Prepare... Practice...

Candidates must understand the three critical KEYS to getting ready for a job interview:

- RESEARCH
- PREPARATION
- PRACTICE

A degree, specific work skills, fancy resumes, letters of references, cover letters, or selection at a career fair,

over the internet, or phone conversation will only get a candidate to the interview room door.

It is what goes on “behind” the interview room door that will determine if candidates are selected as PRIME CANDIDATES for positions available.

E. Dressing the part for the interview...

If candidates want to get into the game, they must learn to play the game!

Dressing and looking the part is critical to making the right impression in an interview. Candidates must be encouraged to look at the whole grooming process as an “investment” in their future that will pay handsome dividends for years to come. They must be taught:

- What clothes to wear...How to wear them...When to wear them...How to take care of them.
- How to present the *best* you, from grooming tips to facial hair.
- Appropriate makeup, nail lengths and colors, hair styles, shoes, and perfumes and colognes.
- Eating, drinking, and social etiquettes to avoid embarrassing mistakes.

Experts agree that a first impression is a lasting impression, and therefore, the secret is NOT only to *dress to impress*, but also to dress to *remove objections* and turn the focus of the interview to what the candidate knows, what they say, and why THEY should be chosen for the job.

***F. Physical Presence... Visual Motion...
Verbal Delivery...***

Interviewing successfully and capturing the attention and imagination of hiring managers will depend largely on a candidate's ability to communicate.

Candidates must demonstrate their *Soft Skills*, the strengths and weaknesses of their self-presentation, and focus on THREE characteristics to preparing for any interview situation.

These characteristics are:

- *Physical Presence*
- *Visual Motion*
- *Verbal Delivery*

Practicing and mastering these three skills will help candidates control their nerves, build their confidence, and give them the ability to greet people, develop speech and communication skills, and focus their

attention to present the very best of what they have to offer.

G. The *THREE - MINUTE* interview...

The job can be yours in the first three minutes of the interview, if you know what to say and how to say it!

Developing a candidate's readiness to handle the first three minutes of an interview is paramount to their success in getting a job. An *interview* can be defined as any time a candidate interfaces with a prospective employer, such as:

- *Walking the aisles at a career fair*
- *Engaging in a phone interview*
- *Sitting in front of interviewers or persons making the hiring decisions*
- *Social interactions, such as breakfast meetings or coffee breaks*

The things a candidate does and says in the first ***three minutes*** of an interview can make a significant difference to the balance of the meeting and influence the hiring decision.

From a response to a question such as “*So, tell me about yourself,*” to the presentation of a candidate's academic qualifications, previous work skills, passion for life,

work, success, and enthusiasm for the job, interviewers will judge candidates against any number of other qualified applicants.

H. How to ask the right questions and give the right answers...

Questions to ask... Answers to give! One of the biggest complaints from interviewers is that applicants seem to have *no questions*, and one of the biggest fears of applicants is how to answer dreaded questions such as “Where do you see yourself five years from now?”

Candidates must learn what questions to ask, and prepare acceptable answers to give to some of the most common questions asked by interviewers.

They must learn how to prepare in advance of the interview, refer to their notes, and show interviewers that they are serious about the job by demonstrating their interest and enthusiasm for the position they are applying for.

I. ASK FOR THE JOB...

After all the hard work candidates must do to prepare for an interview, they must make sure their interviewers know they WANT the job!

Candidates spend weeks preparing to interview, only to walk away and never ask for the job?

They must convince the hiring manager that **THEY** are the right person, and not only have the qualifications and talents to do the job, but can be team-player, represent the company with loyalty, pride and respect, and have the desire and commitment to work hard, learn, grow, and contribute to the mission and objectives of the company.

J. Things to do after the interview...

Whether the interview goes well and poorly, candidates must learn how to communicate after an interview to show respect for the time they received from the interviewers, as well as continue to express their desire for the job.

From an immediate e-mail thank-you, to handwritten notes, candidates must know what to say, what to write, how to send correspondence, and how to keep themselves on top of an interviewer's list.

K. Accepting the job, understanding the employment package, and getting ready to go to work...

If candidates are offered a job, knowing how to accept the offer and prepare for their first day of work is critical.

They must know where they will work, who they should report to, and how long they will be in training?

They should understand how to read an “offer package,” how to raise questions about salary, benefits, additional schooling, job training, and advancement opportunities, and how to possibly negotiate, and finally confirm employment.

L. Your first year on the job...

Things to expect...

Pitfalls on the job...

Looking for your mentor...

Giving your best!

A candidate’s first year on the job can be dramatic and traumatic. They should understand office politics, water cooler gossip, honoring their company, respecting their co-workers, working according to a code of ethics, accepting responsibilities, owning up to mistakes and everything in between!

SUMMARY:

The goal of the session will be to identify the basic needs of the workforce in the region, those entities best suited to provide training and to discuss potential solutions such as building public-private partnerships to address ongoing regional issues.

Discussions will also address how these skills can be provided in a variety of environments including:

- ✓ Public Schools
- ✓ On-The-Job training programs
- ✓ Prison work release and job training programs
- ✓ Programs administered by the non-profit community

Your input, questions, suggestions and active participation in this session is eagerly sought and valued!

Laurence Stuart, lstuart@c2cseminars.com is the founder of Stuart & Associates and College to Career Seminars LLC. He conducts inspirational and motivational seminars on the subjects of communication and the interview process to students at universities, colleges, tech and high schools, as well as professional organizations and private industry. He is the author of:

“How to Get the Job You Want” (CD & book formats/ 2004)

“Integrated Business Communications in a Global Marketplace” (Textbook, John Wiley & Sons/2007)

“The Three Minute Interview” (DVD & book formats/ Spring 2009)