

The truth shall get you hired

Sometimes interview responses can be too over the top

I have officially become irked by the word “passion” in job interviews and on resumes. Don’t get me wrong, I’m all for positive talk but only when it is attached to proven results.

I have recently been interviewing candidates for a support position in my firm. The job is all about administration: The hardcore background work that requires meticulous attention to detail. One woman spent



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most of her interview telling me how passionate she is. About filling in forms? I still don’t know. She is just “really really passionate.” It didn’t ring true, it didn’t feel plausible.

What would happen if she told the truth?

I hear lots of stories from successful people around the world while doing my

research on women and finance. One thing they have in common is the ability to communicate in an earnest fashion. Nothing is more convincing.

One research analyst told me how he got started. He’d seen a job posting for equity research that looked interesting, but he was considerably short on academics and experience.

The research director asked “You worked at McDonald’s?”

Without missing a beat, he answered “Yes.” As it turned out, the director wanted someone who knew how to show up on time, do

unpleasant tasks on occasion and work as part of a team. I have heard younger people say that this type of job is beneath them. What if they knew it might lead to their dream job?

In my 20s I had an opportunity to interview with a Fortune 500 firm that was famous for its grueling panel interviews. In order to be as prepared as possible, I read and re-read books on the history of the company. I knew everything about them. I really wanted the job. Then the quiet one on the panel asked this question: “What was the most difficult thing you have ever

done in your life?”

Pause. What seemed like an eternity went by and no words came out of my mouth. The panel was staring me down. I felt like fleeing the scene. I knew the answer to the question but I couldn’t possibly say it! If I told them the truth it would destroy my chance to get the job. I sat quietly.

I tried desperately to come up with some other plausible answer. I was frozen. I finally cleared my throat and said “I had a serious eating disorder when I was 18 and it took me over a year to recover.” The interview ended shortly after that. I

walked home bawling my eyes out.

A few weeks later I found out that I got the job. It turned out that the quiet one on the panel had studied anorexia nervosa in university and she knew it was statistically probable that I was highly competitive and obsessed with perfection, even after I had recovered. These traits aligned perfectly for the sales position!

In each story, we didn’t get the job in spite of something we were embarrassed about; We got the job because of something we might have tried covering up or glossing over.