



Power Boosters: How to Land That Job When You Think You Can't

To land that dream job, adopt a mindset that signals power, even if you don't feel so powerful.

Candidates invest considerable resources in the form of time or money to prepare for that interview that will grant them entrance to their dream school or land them their dream job. In these situations, candidates are often tempted to work on planning how the interview will go and what they will say: why is my background relevant for that job? How can I bring value to the company? Why do I want to work in this industry?

While thinking of answers to these questions is important, recent research suggests that what interviewers are looking for is a specific mindset. In particular, what will persuade them to hire you is whether you communicate a powerful mindset - one that signals the candidate will be a great recruit. In the midst of a crisis, will you know how to take the right action? When it comes to selling a product, will you communicate enough enthusiasm to the client?

What is this “powerful” mindset anyway and how we can acquire it? Here are two tips for candidates that will make a difference in interview settings.

1. “Think powerful”

Job candidates are rarely in a position of power as interviewers decide the fate of their future career prospects. Yet, the winning strategy in these situations is thinking that one has power, in spite of the situation. As a candidate, how can you engineer

a powerful mindset? Well, a simple trick is to remind yourself about a time you had power over a situation right before an interview, and invoke the precise feelings associated with that memory – feelings of confidence and competence, as well as decisiveness during decision making.

One of my recent research projects, [Power gets the job: Priming power improves interview outcomes](#) co-authored with Joris Lammers (University of Cologne), Derek D. Rucker (Northwestern University) and Adam Galinsky (Columbia University) tested just that idea: as part of a session of individual mock interviews, we assigned business school applicants to one of three conditions. In the first condition, applicants wrote a short essay about a time they had power just before entering an interview. In the second condition, applicants also wrote an essay, but this time about a time they lacked power. Finally, the last group did not write anything.

Then, we asked interviewers the likelihood that they would accept the candidate into a business school. When candidates went straight to the interview, interviewers accepted 47.1 percent of the candidates. However, the admission rate went up to 68 percent for those people in the group who wrote an essay about a time they had power, and fell to a low 26 percent for those who wrote an essay about a time they lacked power. Importantly, interviewers

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were unaware of the power manipulation we had given candidates. Thus, merely recalling an experience of high power increased candidates' likelihood to be admitted by 81 percent compared to baseline and by 162 percent compared to those who recalled an experience of powerlessness.

Of course, there are other ways to engineer personal feelings of power. For instance, candidates can wear objects that make them feel powerful, such as a watch or a particular bag - anything that links you with feelings of power.

2. "Behave powerful"

Power is not only a mindset; it is also a behaviour. Small, almost unconscious moves signal power to an audience and can significantly change the outcome of an interview. In her recent [TED talk](#), Amy Cuddy (Harvard University) provides an excellent summary of how non-verbal language can have a profound effect on how people are judged in contexts as varied as hiring or promotion interviews, a sales context or even a date. As such, physical poses such as wrapping legs, hunching or relying on one's arms are many subtle signals of powerlessness that cast doubt on what candidates say, regardless of the content of the conversation.

The Virtuous Circle of Power

Interestingly, adopting "power poses" does not only affect how interviewers judge candidates, but also ironically reinforces candidates' feelings of power. In [recent research](#), Li Huang from INSEAD and colleagues had participants take powerful (for example, expansive postures) or powerless (constricted postures) poses and found the former behaved more powerfully than the latter, by taking action more often and thinking more abstractly, two well-known consequences of power. So, behaving in a powerful way is not only important for how interviewers perceive candidates, it is also a key driver of how candidates will behave!

History is full of examples showing that what really counts for the recipient of a message is the communicator's mindset, not their actual resources or power. During the early days of the Second World War, Charles de Gaulle, today recognised as one of the great wartime leaders, was an isolated general with a following of a few hundred soldiers who refused to recognise the legitimacy of the Vichy government and fled to London after the German invasion to set up a government-in-exile. During a famous negotiation with Churchill, the British prime minister abruptly reminded de Gaulle of his powerless position, noting that his organisation was only surviving thanks to the goodwill and financial help of the allied forces: "Anyway, who are you to represent France? You don't even have an army!"

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But de Gaulle, standing tall, straight, and direct, calmly retorted, "If I am not France, then why are you talking to me?" Churchill was forced to sit down and continue the negotiation. Interviewees, adopt the "de Gaulle" mindset!



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