

## **“Let Me Prove You Wrong”**

*How to Over Come Perceived Liabilities*

By Michael P. Lynch

Believe it or not, I once had a new client (actually there have been dozens), who was determined to prove he was “right” and the interviewer was “wrong”. The interviewer had made an observation suggesting that my client’s background was not a perfect match. It could have been as simple as, “*Gee, Mike, I’m concerned about your lack of experience in the publishing industry.*”

What flowed forth from my client at that point was 15 minutes worth of “*Yeab but...*” and “*You don’t understand...*” followed by “*Let me prove you wrong.*” I doubt any of you are surprised to learn he didn’t get the job.

No one has ever gotten hired by proving the interviewer wrong. I think we all understand that intellectually, but in the heat of the moment, with a dream job on the line, we don’t always think rationally. Even the best of us can get defensive when challenged. It’s part of our self-preservation mechanism as human beings. But it has no place in an interview – not if you want to be hired, that is.

One of the most valuable services we provide as Career Consultants is to prepare our clients for situations like the one I’ve described and to help them understand what is really going on. Take this situation, for example. My client had applied for a Customer Relations Manager position with a local publisher of specialty magazines. The employer was creating a new position and really wanted to upgrade the level of customer satisfaction, utilizing (for the first time) a Customer Relationship Management Database. My client was an expert in this area, but had not worked directly in the publishing field. The employer, having reviewed the resume, already knew this, but chose to interview him anyway. This tells us two important things:

1. Lack of industry experience in this case isn’t a “death” factor. You should approach the interview with confidence, knowing that you have already overcome one hurdle – most employers are far too busy to interview people they have no intention of hiring. The employer has a problem. He is trying to fill a position as quickly as possible, and he’s hoping against hope that you are the one. So why is the interviewer asking the question? First, it’s a fair, due diligence question. More likely, he wants to see how you’ll respond. How you respond in the interview is a good indicator of how you’ll respond to peers or employees who question your lack of experience in a field they’ve been in all their lives.
2. There are other skills the employer values in a candidate that more than compensate for the lack of industry experience. Do you know what they are? In this case, it is the knowledge of and ability to design and implement a Customer Relationship Management System – that is the *Hot Button*, the strength my client needs to embody.

Here is the correct way to respond to the raising of a perceived liability.

1. Defuse the concern by seeming to agree with it.

- *“Jim, I can understand why you might feel that way. If I were in your shoes, I might feel the same way.”*
- He is expecting you to get defensive and disagree with him, however tactfully you might do it. Responding differently takes the wind out of his sails and allows you to re-focus the conversation on the *Hot Button* or key skills he really wants in the position.

2. Refocus the conversation.

- *“Jim, I can understand why you might feel that way. If I were in your shoes, I might feel the same way. Am I correct in assuming that what you’re really looking for is someone who can come in, develop, and implement a Customer Relationship Management System that would allow you to determine what your customers really want and need?”*
- Don’t assume you know what the *Hot Button* is. Always verify. Don’t say “*If I’m correct...*” – you could be wrong. Always ask, “*Am I correct...*”

3. Get the *Buy- In*

- *“If I can demonstrate that I’ve done that and can do that for you, would that lessen your concerns?”*
- Not, “*Would that change your mind?*” That is far too confrontational. Instead use, “*Would that lessen your concerns.*”

4. Close the deal with a story or example that illustrates your skill in area of the *Hot Button*.

- *“Jim, let me tell you about what I was able to do for my last employer in that area.”*
- Describe the situation in detail; tell him what action you took and end with the concrete results.

Using the above process will help you respond, rather than react, keeping yourself and the interviewer focused on the *Hot Button* skills that he is looking for in the first place.