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DO YOU GET FLUSTERED DURING INTERVIEWS?

7 ways to stop 'um-ing' and 'ah-ing' when talking with a hiring manager

After months of seeking out jobs, hundreds of revisions to your résumé and going to every networking event you can, you've finally landed an interview. After brief small talk about how bad the traffic was or how slow the elevators are, the interviewer switches gears and begins her formal line of questioning.

"I see you currently work for our main competitor," she asks. "What makes our company a more appealing choice for you?"

It's not a difficult question to answer. But suddenly you're tongue-tied and your answer comes out as: "Well, actually, it's like, um, you know."

What happened? This scenario is all too familiar to many job seekers. In stressful situations such as speaking in front of a group or interviewing for a job, people often revert to filler words such as "like," "you know," "basically" or "actually" and even sounds such as whistling, snorting or giggling to patch over pauses before collecting their train of thought.

We're all guilty of throwing in one or two of these utterances during normal conversation, but the danger lies in how often they are repeated. When you rely on these interruptions as substitutions for actual words in order to express your thoughts, you diminish your image as an intelligent professional and viable job candidate. You may be perceived as an individual who has trouble focusing, or as someone who has difficulty organizing his or her ideas – deficiencies that potential employers interpret as hindering your work performance.

Self-awareness is a fundamental step toward correcting such habitual speech patterns that disrupt the flow of conversation, so here are seven ways to pick up on when you're about to trip up:

1. Evaluate your verbal communication skills by taping yourself as part of a mock interview, suggests Leah Ross-Kugler, a certified speech-language pathologist. That way you can go back and listen for where you stumble.
2. Prepare talking points about yourself and keep them tucked inside your writing portfolio. Discreetly refer to your points in order to keep the flow of conversation moving smoothly.
3. Focus on your breathing by taking replenishing breaths between phrases so you can use complete words instead of sounds. Ross-Kugler explains this helps slow down your speech and allows you concentrate on what you're going to say next.
4. Modify a distracting behavior such as giggling by smiling. By using an action considered to be positive and engaging, you not only patch over potential gaffes but also improve your connection with the hiring manager.
5. Wear a ring or a watch on a hand that is not routinely assigned such accessories. They serve as reminders for avoiding nervous laughter during an interview, Ross-Kugler says.
6. Join a speaker's group such as the National Speaker's Association or Toastmasters International to practice and improve your verbal communication skills.
7. Keep an empty "filler sound jar" and lots of pennies handy. Monitor the number of filler sounds you use or enlist a friend or family member to do so. Similar to keeping a "swear jar," throw a penny inside the jar each time you use a word filler, snort, giggle or do anything that interrupts your flow of speech.

When you want to get the right message across, it's best to let the words flow. While you may not catch every 'um' or 'ah' at the next interview, you'll certainly reduce the number you say and come off as the clear, intelligent candidate you are.

I Love My Job!

NAME? Bruce Nevins

WHAT IS YOUR JOB TITLE? Owner

WHO IS YOUR EMPLOYER?

Bonnets, Stems and Accessories, Inc.

WHAT SERVICES DO YOU OR YOUR EMPLOYER PROVIDE?

We sell plumbing repair parts for home owners, plumbers, restaurants and rentals. We help them all keep what they have running and save money in the process. The best part is the instant gratification of having what they need when no one else does.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN AT THIS POSITION AND/OR IN THIS BUSINESS?

April 21, 2010

WHAT LED YOU TO THIS CAREER?

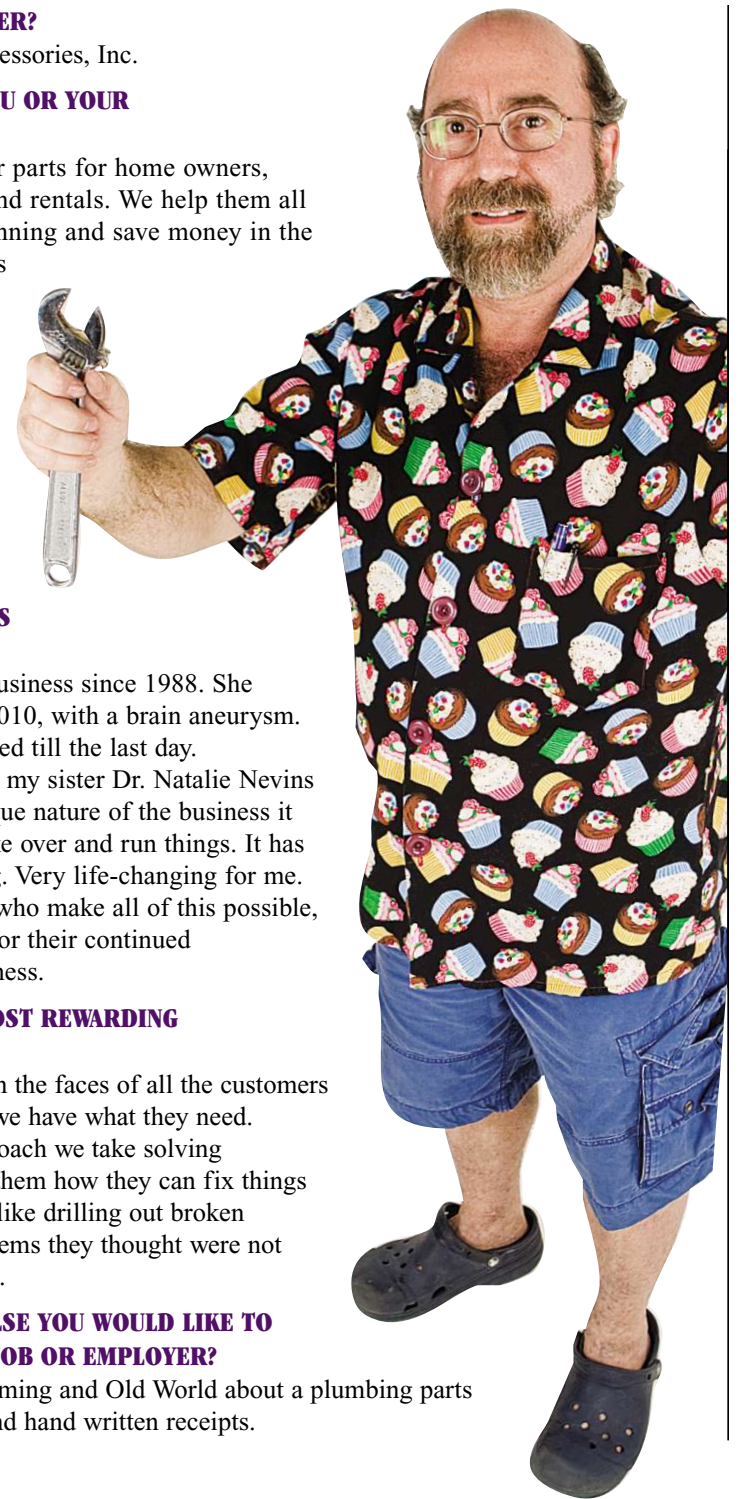
This was my mother's business since 1988. She passed away April 20, 2010, with a brain aneurysm. It was sudden, she worked till the last day. The business was left to my sister Dr. Natalie Nevins and me. Due to the unique nature of the business it was decided I would take over and run things. It has been hard but rewarding. Very life-changing for me. I have three employees who make all of this possible, and I am very grateful for their continued contribution to the business.

WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST REWARDING ABOUT THIS JOB?

I enjoy the relief I see on the faces of all the customers that come here and see we have what they need. I love the hands on approach we take solving problems, and showing them how they can fix things for little or no money. I like drilling out broken screws and re-tapping stems they thought were not repairable. I love my job.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO TELL US ABOUT YOUR JOB OR EMPLOYER?

There is something charming and Old World about a plumbing parts store with no register, and hand written receipts.

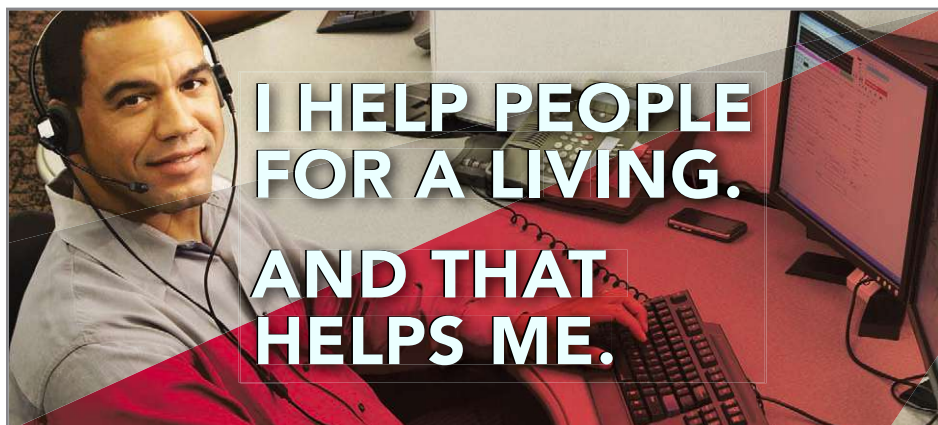


YOU'VE HEARD A LITTLE ABOUT THIS JOB – NOW TELL US ABOUT YOURS!

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