

# Everyone comes second! Recruitment panels and candidates: tips, tricks and secrets for those seeking employment in schools

Gillian Anstee, Education Consultant, former school principal and PhD researcher

I have been a principal in government and independent schools, early childhood, primary and secondary, over the last 10 years. I am now offered many delightful opportunities as a sought-after panel member for recruitment, appointment and employment of principals of schools and senior executive leaders in schools.

After the written application is sub-

mitted, few candidates are then chosen to proceed to interview. This is indeed an exciting opportunity and an indicator that you have a higher percentage chance of gaining the position for which you applied. It is an opportune moment to be aware of any tips, tricks, secrets and strategies that you may employ to ensure that you are the best candidate and thus ultimately chosen for the job.

Many candidates seek feedback after their interview. It has been my observation that the comment “You were the second best candidate from those interviewed” is a common refrain when feedback is given to the unsuccessful interview candidates. Have you heard those words? Following are examples of a series of errors and unfortunate representations that candidates may make on the day of



interview. They are all genuine. Scan these and see if you have demonstrated one of these. It may be the simple explanation for you always receiving the feedback that you were the second best candidate!

**Situation number one.** You include a photo of yourself on the application. This is a glamor shot. Regardless whether the panel has paid attention to the photo, it is quite a shock if you do not resemble the image that you have sent when you arrive for interview. It is the equivalent of having a younger version photo of yourself on your profile on RSVP. Think carefully about whether adding a photo is going to improve your application.

**Situation number two.** Your behaviour and manners on arrival for the interview will be noted by the reception staff. Often after an interview for a very senior leadership position in a school, everyone on site who interacted with the candidate will contribute their views of the candidates who were interviewed at the school. Because you have been shortlisted for interview you are one of a very few. Make sure you are seamlessly and fanatically polite to all you meet and use your very best manners.

**Situation number three.** In the interview do not claim initiatives taken or programs developed that are not genuinely yours. Be honest. Acknowledge the team effort. Sometimes a member of the panel may have further knowledge and details about programs and initiatives that you mention and reveal that they were not

entirely a solo effort as you are claiming.

**Situation number four.** Retain any personal information that is not relevant to the role. When asked why you are seeking the role, do not say that you need a job as your partner has left. Do not say that the school is convenient and close to home. The school wants to be the desired and ultimate, ideal employer for you, not a school that suits your needs. You should aspire to join such a successful and highly valued team with an excellent reputation.

**Situation number five.** Dress professionally. Wear a jacket. And keep it on! One candidate had nine piercings in her ear and had attached an earring or stud to each one of them. When asking for feedback it was suggested that she moderate her use of jewellery. She replied that she likes to show her personality. The advice is to get the job first and then allow your personality to be revealed slowly. Another candidate wore nine silver bangles on her wrist and every time she gestured to make an important point an unpleasant jangling sounded. It was both distracting and irritating.

**Situation number six.** If you have sought to keep your application confidential the panel will ask the reason for this. Do not say that you are not sure that you actually want the job. Panel members might then mentally screw up your CV and throw it in an invisible bin. Be more subtle. Be honest. If your current team leader is not supportive,

say so. Explain that perhaps your current line manager and you have a different approach to quality pedagogy. Be professional. Concentrate on the message of what you can bring to this team.

**Situation number seven.** Often new principals will be asked to give an idea of what they will accomplish in the first 100 days in the role. Principals come in two types. There are change managers and there are stability minders. When giving information about your first 100 days remember to get to know the staff and the culture of the school first. Some principals choose to action improvements immediately. Depending on the school culture this may be disruptive and disturbing or may be desired and celebrated. But you don't know this yet! So make sure that in your presentation you combine elements of both change and conservation. Some of these suggestions are obvious. However when nerves and anxiety come to the fore simple mistakes may be made. Be calm. Breathe deeply. Think before you respond. It is good to see a candidate who is thoughtful and mindful of what they are saying, particularly as this is a skill that is desirable in senior executive and principal leaders in schools. Good luck!

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