

Carolyn Hax: How to manage severe job-interview anxiety

Hax, Carolyn . The Washington Post (Online) , Washington, D.C.: WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post. Apr 19, 2022.

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FULL TEXT

Adapted from an online discussion. *Dear Carolyn*: I'm 40 and have a master's degree and plenty of experience. Yet I have severe anxiety around job interviews, I think due to lack of confidence. The more I want the job, the more anxious I become. I'm like a 16-year-old interviewing for her first job, sweating and stammering and rambling. I thought this would improve with age but it might actually be worse. I've been wallowing in self-hatred since I bombed an interview yesterday. I don't even know what my question is. I'm just so angry at myself.

— Anxious

Anxious: Oh no, don't be angry at you. You aren't doing this to yourself on purpose —and you don't stay angry at people who do things to you that are clearly by accident, do you?

Presumably your question is, "How do I fix this?"

I'll give you the start of an answer, by advising you to find a career coach or useful friend who can give you some mock interviews. Practice makes calm. Consider talking to your doctor about your anxiety, too, to see if treatment makes sense.

The rest is collective wisdom from readers:

·I've hired several people who gave lousy interviews, when they were exceptionally strong candidates. Note that "lousy" here doesn't mean hostile, clueless, or clearly lying about their qualifications —just nervous. Bonus points for a self-aware introduction like, "I know I don't give the strongest interviews, but I'm a very strong employee who could help your organization by [specifics]." An interview should only be one part of the equation.

·My approach is to always be applying for new jobs, with the goal of having about one interview a quarter, so I'm not out of practice when it matters. I tell my supervisors I'm doing this so they don't freak out when they find out.

·My local community college has a whole department for helping their students and community members. You can do practice interviews, get help with your résumé, network, do aptitude testing.

·Reach out to the bombed interviewer: "That didn't go as well as I would have hoped. Would like to clear up my reply on the question of X/Y. Thanks for your time, it's a very interesting position and I'd appreciate being able to flex my skills in Z."

·I'm terrible at interviews. In the most recent one they asked the typical, "Anything else you want us to know?" And I just said it: "I'm bad at interviews. But, I'm really good at my job." I got that job.

·Interviews were pure agony, until the time I realized I didn't want to work for the person interviewing me. He was not pleasant. I felt a shift in the balance of power and I relaxed. Now I have internalized that I am interviewing the employer as much as they are interviewing me.

·Alison Green has really good tips on interviews and applying for jobs.

·I wear black to avoid having to be concerned about visible sweat stains.

·I take charge and ask a lot of questions instead of sitting there and trying not to say something dumb.

·Next time you get nervous (or self loathy), remember my college professor. He had the same issue —terrible sweating in job interviews. He was bald, so he would bring a handkerchief with him to dab his head. One time he

wiped his whole dome and after a while realized he wasn't sweating. He walked out thinking he nailed the interview and things were changing ...turns out he grabbed the handkerchief he had recently used to wax his bowling ball. No sweating, but a very shiny interview.

Write to

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DETAILS

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| Subject: | Anxieties; Sweating; Employment interviews |
| Business indexing term: | Subject: Employment interviews |
| Publication title: | The Washington Post (Online); Washington, D.C. |
| Publication year: | 2022 |
| Publication date: | Apr 19, 2022 |
| Section: | Lifestyle |
| Publisher: | WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post |
| Place of publication: | Washington, D.C. |
| Country of publication: | United States, Washington, D.C. |
| Publication subject: | General Interest Periodicals--United States |
| ISSN: | 26419599 |
| Source type: | Blog, Podcast, or Website |
| Language of publication: | English |
| Document type: | News |
| ProQuest document ID: | 2652417481 |
| Document URL: | https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/carolyn-hax-how-manage-severe-job-interview/docview/2652417481/se-2?accountid=44910 |
| Copyright: | Copyright WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post Apr 19, 2022 |
| Last updated: | 2022-04-20 |
| Database: | U.S. Major Dailies |

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