

Audition **~~Interview~~ for** **Your Next Job**

**Observations on Resumes, Interviewing,
Networking, and More
Based on the Performing Arts**

Prologue

James W. Schreier, Ph.D. SPHR

www.212-careers.com

www.performance-project.com

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If you search the internet for information on resumes or interviewing, or any other topic related to career advice, you'll easily hit hundreds of thousands of articles and sites. You'll find scores of resume formats and 100's of sample interview questions. Search Amazon for "interviewing" and you'll find over 7000 books; search for "careers" and you'll find almost 400,000 titles.

If you explored more deeply on any of these topics, interviewing for example, you'll find that almost all of the books will discuss one of the most frequently asked questions: "What are your strengths?" You'll discover individuals who claim it is their favorite interview questions and they'll expound on how it is helped them make great decisions about whom to hire. You'll find someone else who criticizes it as one of the worst of the bad interview questions asked every day. Perhaps this situation is best summarized by a quote from the founder of one of the most successful job hunting forums, Bill Needler:

50% of everything you hear at Forum meetings is absolutely correct. But there's an argument among the experts over which 50%.

Several years ago I decided, based on years of training managers and companies on improved processes for hiring and interviewing, after dozens of presentations to college students and job seekers, to create a website devoted to helping job seekers. I further decided that the website would contain advice that was a little stronger, a little edgier. That meant none of the "standard" books on resumes, none of the "standard" books on interview questions. The advice provided on the site would be stronger, not shying away from sharply criticizing boring resumes or boring responses to typical questions. If I decided to recommend a book or a person or a website, it would be because I assessed that it contained excellent advice that stood out from all the rest.

At about the same time I combined the insights of one of the most important books I had read as a management consultant, conducting training for hundreds of managers, with a lifelong interest in a variety of performing arts. Peter Vaill's "Managing as a Performing Art" is a seminal work in looking at management through the lens of the performing arts.

...the manager's situation is much more like the problem faced by a movie producer, an orchestral conductor, or a director of a play... Like these counterparts in the arts, the manager can seek to discover and develop an organic feeling among participants for what the business is basically about. "Every employee must understand the essence of the business." This is the principle the performing arts demonstrate so vividly.

One reason that “the show must go on” is such a powerful norm in show business is precisely because of how sensitive the performing system is to the context, and how many different reasons there might be for the show not to go on. If the system were intrinsically resilient, the powerful norm would hardly be needed.

As the insights from my work merged with the awareness of this connection with the performing arts, I began to see concerts, Broadway shows, and musicals from a new perspective. I began to see leadership and management lessons in movies. These are connections recognized by many. Classic movies like “Twelve Angry Men” and “12 O’clock High” have been used for decades to analyze leadership behavior. It became enjoyable, and useful in many training programs, to find new connections in movies ranging from “The Karate Kid” to “Harry Potter” and even television series like “The Walking Dead” or “The Sopranos.” Many of these connections were identified by others in articles, books, and training materials.

Two events occurred in somewhat close proximity that sparked this interest even more. I became friends with the members of a singing group, even getting several opportunities to do some consulting with them, traveling with them, and helping them sell merchandise at their concerts. Then I became personally acquainted with several members of the touring company of a Broadway musical during its successful two-plus year run in Chicago.

From all this came “The Performance Project,” a project to look for examples from concerts, shows, movies, and television, examples that could be translated in “Lessons in Leadership and Management from the Performing Arts.” Because of some other opportunities, I included a few examples from sports – although the sports connections have been explored by many others in scores of articles and books.

As all of these examples appeared on a website devoted to the project, and in some short articles I wrote, I began to see how so many of the examples applied to the various aspects of a career search. And perhaps more important, I began to see several examples from the performing arts where job seekers could learn some new, some stronger, some more effective techniques to successfully land a position that provides them with career satisfaction. In keeping with the performing arts metaphor, here’s a preview:

In **Act One**, I’ll start by asking a fundamental question that every job seeker needs to answer: Who am I? Sparked by outstanding insight from a Broadway actor and a personal experience, I’ll tackle the importance of seriously contemplating an answer to this question as a key first step. Act One will also tackle some of the realities of job market including some attitudes held by job seekers that hinder your success in almost every phase of the search.

In **Act Two**, I am going to present the latest of the connections that I see between a career search and the performing arts – the Audition. In traditional hiring processes, job seekers respond to ads, or job postings, or launch themselves into the networking world of LinkedIn. They prepare resumes and hope for that phone, video, or in-person interview. Then they wait for the letter, or the phone call, or the e-mail to receive a job offer – or experience the heightened frustration of never hearing anything. The audition process is completely different, from the “cattle call,” to the audition itself, where a performer is asked to perform in front of key casting individuals, to the notifications of instant rejections to “call backs.” It is a process that is strikingly different from the traditional job hunt – but with significant opportunities for powerful learning.

In **Act Three**, the resume will be examined from several viewpoints. Starting from the perspective that performers have resumes that are very different from the “traditional” resume of most job seekers, this act will examine some of the trends in resumes. Most importantly, it will provide techniques for bringing more life, more of you, into your resume. This act will also include the results of research that overwhelmingly prove that the format of your resume makes a big difference in its chances for success. Moreover, there’s a lesson about how some of the smallest mistakes can make a big difference.

Act Four will turn to a topic that is a major emphasis of every performer’s life – and an overwhelmingly underemphasized element for most job seekers. It is “Practice – Practice – Practice” and it applies to preparing your resume, working on your LinkedIn profile, and definitely to your interviewing preparation. This act will discuss more than just “practice” because practice is not just repetition or memorizing answers to possible questions. Practice has become a more complicated element because of some of the latest research on its value. Because practice is so common in both the performing arts and sports, this act will include some examples from the world of sports.

Act Five provides the bookend to your resume, “practice – practice – practice,” and the always critical interview. While it seems like here is where the strongest connection would be between the audition for the performer and the interview for the job seeker, nothing could be farther from the truth. However, it is also where there are the opportunities for the greatest improvements to your job hunting strategies. The good news is that many organizations are now making use of simulations, work samples, and programming tasks to better assess candidates. Here’s the information that will make your responses during an interview much more representative of your actual “performance.”

Act Six presents some insights into the importance of networking. Networking has always been considered an important component of a successful career search. In the last decade, it has been elevated to an even more important component. For many job seekers, that means LinkedIn where profiles, following companies, and online networking have taken command. However, performers do not network the way most job seekers network. They network personally because they share performances in a different way; they share auditions in a very different way. My business colleagues

have hundreds of LinkedIn connections; my performer contacts have few, if any, LinkedIn connections. There are some valuable lessons here for job seekers.

Act Seven discusses the role of feedback in your job search. Job seekers consistently complain about the lack of feedback in most interactions with companies, “I never hear back when I send in a resume,” “I never hear anything after an interview.” Then there is the importance of soliciting feedback on your resume and interviewing style. In the performance world, feedback is usually immediate and constant during performances, from the audience, but more importantly (YES!) the director, coaches, and fellow cast members. I’ll delve more deeply into the power of both positive and negative feedback and how you can effectively solicit feedback to improve the various elements of your career search.

Act Eight is based on the broader elements of “Lessons in Leadership and Management from the Performing Arts,” the original, much broader scope of The Performance Project. From those observations, I’ve found some very good lessons on communications, team building, and leadership that can directly benefit job seekers. Considering that communication skills and teamwork are considered two of the most important elements required for today’s workforce, a better understanding of these factors can be a direct help.

Act Nine is the “encore.” It was sparked not as much by the work I’ve done with performers – but from a single scene in a Broadway musical. It also has a more universal application because it applies before you start your career search, during the search, and throughout your career. It is about the future. Moreover, it is about the importance of what futurist Joel Barker says: *“You can and should shape your own future: because if you don’t somebody else sure will.”* That is certainly an important message for anyone’s career search.

Interludes

In the spirit of the performing arts, specifically respecting cabarets and vaudeville, I’m placing an example from the world of job seekers in between most of the “Acts.” Some will be more detailed stories about some of the individuals I’ve met on this journey; some will be “motivational” sparks with strong messages, several will be drawn from the real but humorous examples I’ve collected over the years. Amongst the seriousness of the messages presented here, it always remains important to have a positive attitude toward the difficult task of searching for jobs, writing resumes, answering interview questions, and networking. Moreover, laughter is a powerful model for learning. Or as Walt Disney stated: *“I would rather entertain and hope that people learned something than educate people and hope they were entertained.”*

A Terminology Note

I dislike the term “job seeker” for a few reasons but primarily because a job is something viewed by many as a “have to” rather than a “get to.” This point is a theme that will be connected to several parts of the book. It is going to be difficult to apply successfully the lessons in this project if you see your goal as “I’ve got to get a job.” I much prefer the word “career,” clearly indicating work that is personally satisfying and engaging. However, I also recognize the overwhelming use of “job seeker” in discussions of searching, interviews, etc. So throughout this book, I will use both. However, my intention should be clear: Job Seeker equals Career Seeker.

Interlude I - Profiles in Performance - Steven Goldsmith

Sitting in the audience, waiting for a performance (in Chicago) of the hit musical, Jersey Boys, to begin, you'd notice that Steven M. Goldsmith is playing a key role in the show, the character of Joe Pesci. On some days, if you are fortunate, you'd discover that Steven would be performing the starring role of Frankie Valli, with the look, voice, and energy that brings audiences to their feet. *(Steven performed in the Joe Pesci role – and occasionally as Frankie Valli – for over 1250 performances in the first national touring company of Jersey Boys in San Francisco and then as part of the two and a half year run of the show in Chicago).*

On December 12, 2009, fortune ruled, and I was in attendance for a last minute situation where Steven had to step up and perform the starring Frankie Valli role for the matinee performance. Then for the evening performance, he took the stage again for his multiple roles including his portrayal of Joe Pesci.

So for this profile about "performance" there are two outstanding messages. The first is based on the fact that by the time Steven walks on stage for the first "Joe Pesci" scene, he's already been on stage different times, playing -- with precision -- a variety of different supporting roles. By the end of the show, he'll have performed in 12 different roles.

Performers often play different roles. In a concert performance, they may move from singing an upbeat number to a ballad to telling stories. However, in Steven's case, he is playing multiple parts during the same two-hour performance, with multiple costume changes. Many careers require employees to play multiple roles. Think about the different roles you play and how your awareness of the roles (by mentally changing costumes and behavior appropriately) can help you in your career search.

With less than 24 hours notice in this case, because the performer scheduled became ill, Steven had to prepare to take the lead role that features complex dialogue, precise stage movements, singing the legendary Four Seasons harmonies, and performing solo as the predominant character on stage for the second half of the show. This was a performance that brought the audience to its feet and a delighted expression on Steven's face after a key song in his performance.

I asked Steven after the performance how he maintained the ability to step into a role that he might not have performed for weeks (or even months). His response, an outstanding message for leaders and managers everywhere, was "understudy rehearsal." On a regular basis, typically monthly, the performers who step into key roles participate in the "understudy rehearsal," a daylong session where

all the performers involved as understudies or “swings” (who are always available to step into roles) rehearse for several hours.

All of the factors that we’ve identified for The Performance Project are important – but in studying the performance of individuals in live plays or concerts, and in sports, we’ve seen multiple occasions where some of the factors have stood out. One of these and one which Steven Goldsmith and “Jersey Boys” exemplify is “performance with precision.” The Jersey Boys production has been praised and awarded for the precise nature of the staging, particularly scene changes and how the cast moves during scenes. Steven is involved in several scenes where he performs a complex set of physical maneuvers, following a scripted, rehearsed series of moves.

One of these scenes, in his main role as Joe Pesci, is one which I’ve watched very carefully multiple times. While Steven would probably say there are times where it is slightly different, I would state strongly that he’s performed that key piece with a “six sigma” accuracy that is 99.9+ percent consistent. Observing others performing the same scene, no one has approached the level of precision which Steven delivers in his performances.

Steven Goldsmith is talented – that is easy to discern. However, talent is only the first part of the equation. For Steven M. Goldsmith, there's the passion from spending his middle and high school years devoted to school shows and Florida theatre competitions. Steven's love of acting grew. In the third grade, he discovered his passion for acting, but more importantly he learned that he could act -- and act well. Then, when he saw the national touring company of “Les Miserables” on an 8th-grade field trip, he discovered singing and acting could be combined. Passion cannot be measured easily – although it can be uncovered if, in an interview, you focus on key accomplishments. However, it can certainly be observed – which is perhaps, in part, why the performing arts so clearly accomplish successful selection based not just on talent, but on the passion that goes hand-in-hand.

Steven went on to perform in “Jersey Boys” in Toronto after the Chicago run ended. He then performed in other shows including “Starlight Express” and “Rock of Ages.” In Act Six on Networking, there is a story about the formation of the “Doo Wop Project” and how another “Jersey Boys” cast members performed cabaret style shows on days off. Steven Goldsmith was and is a part of these performances.