



B.Lang Consulting

High School Jitters

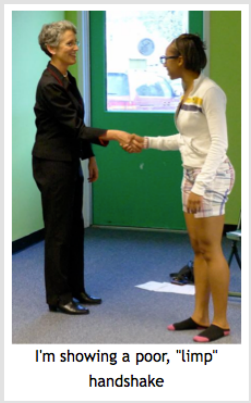
Making a great first impression while interviewing for a summer job

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There is no audience harder to crack than a group of skeptical young high school students. It was a tough crowd with stoic faces, slouched postures and arms folded across chests. I knew that behind those nonverbal cues was a group of nervous kids gathered at the Ithaca Youth Bureau, who didn't think they could get a job. I had only one choice - shake them up, spin them around and set them back in their chairs so fast that they didn't know what hit them. And make them laugh - that was key.

Interviewing for that first summer job is mind numbing. What teenager doesn't think: "Who will hire me? I'm 16 years old and have no experience!" I was there to tell assure them that plenty of people would hire them. But first, the students needed to discover what they had to offer and then learn how to tell an interviewer why they would make a great employee. Creating a positive first impression would also make them all the more appealing.

After group exercises and advice on learning about the company where you want to work, dressing for an interview, and writing a follow-up thank you note (written or email), I had the students complete a worksheet that had 5 steps. The first step was to list 3 accomplishments *they* were proud of that included family, school, sports, or a previous job. Blue ribbons, A+ grades and first-place prizes were not necessary – but personal pride in an accomplishment was required.

The second step was to choose one of those accomplishments and then outline what skills or personal qualities they exhibited contributing to those accomplishments. I listed a few examples of what I meant: were they reliable/dependable, hard working, resourceful, or personable? I emphasized that reliability was the number one personal attribute that would impress a prospective employer when interviewing a teenager for a job. Being true to that claim, was of course, the expectation as well.

The third step was to write a personal episode highlighting the skills they had just listed. The story had to be a genuine snapshot from their lives that would persuade me that their skill was authentic.

The fourth step was to list the summer jobs they wanted. And finally, I walked them through how they could take the skills they had listed and make them applicable to the job they wanted while convincing the employer of that skill through the story they had just written. As I explained the concept behind transferrable skills I emphasized that their attitude, from body language to saying their names clearly and confidently, would also differentiates them from other applicants.

Handshakes and introductions were practiced. Smiles and giggles regularly broke up the session. Towards the end, one student in the back row loudly pronounced, "I like her – she's cool." But this young woman already had created a great first impression - she was smiling when I first walked through the classroom door.