

## Common interview mistakes made by CEO Aspirants

Many years ago, I had recruited a VP- Sales for one of my clients and I still remember him asking me a question on what he should do to become a CEO. I had then told him that one of the things he must do apart from doing a good job is to talk less! It is another matter that he did go on to become a successful CEO in his company. We often talk of CEOs having the 'X' factor and the ones who don't make it, lacking the 'X' factor. This 'X' factor is as vague as it can get as a reason for someone making it to the top job. Essentially this means that there's no proven formula to develop leaders in a classroom. There's a certain element of natural talent within the individual which has to be spotted by organizations to provide them the right opportunity and exposure to groom them..

However, despite being talented and having the right experience for the job, still a job interview can go awry. The company making a decision is taking a leap of faith in your ability to transition from a line management position to a general management position. During the interview, it is important to demonstrate your ability to set the agenda, lead people and having a broader vision for the organization and the business in its entirety. While strong results orientation and a proven track record is obviously vital to your success, it is important to showcase your performance with an ability to manage people as key assets. People management skills will form the core for your success as a leader.

Based on my 20 year recruiting experience interacting with several candidates, successful and otherwise, these are some of the common mistakes made by CEO aspirants during their interview process.

**Ambiguity:** Being specific and answering to the point is a big quality and makes for an interesting and productive conversation. Most interviews happen in fixed time slots and the interviewer wants to make use of the time to get the right questions in. Your responses reflect your working style and your ability to address a specific issue. Providing hazy responses to pointed questions especially relating to responsibilities, key achievements and deliverables on the job don't help the cause.

**Inflating achievements:** Inflating one's role and impact on the organization is a sure shot recipe for disaster. Also it is good practice to own up or acknowledge past mistakes on the job and showcase them as key takeaways for the future.

**Casual approach:** It starts from your attire for the meeting. In most cases, depending on the culture of the company, a blazer would suffice. Your attire demonstrates your seriousness for the process and respect for the interviewer. At times, candidates stroll into an interview without prior research on the company and the industry. In one instance, a candidate had already ordered for an alcoholic beverage while waiting to meet the interviewer in a five star hotel.



Verbal diarrhea: Volunteering excessive information and showing undue familiarity with the interviewer / hiring manager is a big put-off. It is always better to maintain a veil of formality in your interactions with various stakeholders during the process. For example, inviting the other party for a drink without giving time for the relationship to develop is a big no-no.

Poor Listening Skills: Most interviews are about good listening skills. It gives you a chance to understand the role and the company and also not to over-expose yourself during the early stages of the interview process.

Excessive name dropping: While it is good to demonstrate one's network, some candidates resort to indiscriminate name dropping across the industry. I remember a particular instance of a candidate referring a high profile Chairman on a first name basis much to the irritation of the panel.

Bad mouthing: It is important not to make negative remarks about past managers and companies. Even if the concerned individuals or companies have a bad reputation, maintaining a neutral stance is better.

Coterie: Some people during the interview process, voluntarily offer to bring their teams with them. This is a red flag for the hiring organization as they may believe that you could do the same with them as well. You are also seen as someone building his / her own coterie.

Visible anxiety: Showing undue haste and anxiety in bagging the position is a clear sign of weakness and hampers your ability to negotiate a good deal. Maintaining a positive and healthy ego right through the interaction will help in positioning one's candidature for the job in a much better fashion and come across as a strong leader.

Posturing: Some candidates resort to undue posturing and appear inflexible in their approach. Also at times, candidates are fussy about issues like class of travel for the interview, meeting venues and such other things which can portray them as being high on maintenance. Avoidable if you are keen to pursue the opportunity. If you're not keen, it makes sense to politely turn down the opportunity rather than act difficult and burn bridges.

Excessive focus on compensation: This is a serious put off for most companies. Some candidates focus on the minutiae while missing the larger picture. Also candidates come up with unrealistic expectations citing personal compulsions.

Let's remember that to be a successful CEO is one thing and to become a CEO in the first place is another. But common sense dictates that the very qualities which help you become a CEO should give you a more than reasonable chance to make a success out of that job. Good luck

