

Talk Your Way into a Dream Job

David Fielding, Director at attenti highlights how chief executives can put themselves in pole position when they get shortlisted.

You are now down to the final four shortlisted candidates for your dream job. You have done your homework, the headhunter and trustees like you and you have started to 'think yourself into the job'.

As the sector continues to professionalise, so too does the approach taken by trustees when recruiting chief executives. It is likely you will be asked to participate in some form of psychometric assessment. There are essentially two main types of psychometric tools; ability tests and personality profiling. Ability tests such as verbal and numerical reasoning can be improved with practice and you can find sites on the internet which will allow you to have a go and see your results. It is well worth doing this, irrespective of how bright you are. Personality profiling tools such as WAVE, LJI and OPQ typically highlight preferences in style and approach. These are not 'pass' or 'fail' tests. No preparation is required; and being as honest as possible when responding to the questions is crucial. Don't try to respond in the way you think you should. This is tempting but it will skew the results and do you a disservice.

You will be asked to provide two references. Personal references are frowned upon, as are formal written references these days. Ideally you should include your current Chair and your previous line manager. Telling your current Chair in advance is often a sensitive issue but it's always best to be open and transparent as they are likely to find out about your application in the future even if you don't get the job. Headhunters will usually speak with your referee on the phone and ask them a range of questions. This can take up to half an hour. What has been said will be transcribed and sent back to your referee for approval. It is therefore crucial you speak with your referees in

advance. Talk them through why you are going for the job, what you think you have achieved in your current role and what makes you a good fit for this new position. References have more weight than psychometrics and can really make a difference in the decision-making process. I have taken far too many 'bad references' over the years simply because candidates have taken their referees for granted.

In recruitment there is a saying 'there is no such thing as an informal interview'.

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Given that the chemistry between Chair and Chief Executive can make the difference between success and failure, it is important that you take the opportunity to meet with the Chair informally should this be offered. This may be billed as an 'informal meeting' but it is important to plan and prepare in advance. This is your opportunity to steer a conversation and find out what they are like, what the key issues are and how they want to work with you. Don't ramble or show off. Listen, engage and make sure you look, sound and act motivated. You will have views about improving the organisation but the last thing you should do is be critical of what you have seen or heard.

You may also get a chance to meet with the outgoing Chief Executive and some members of the senior team. Again, you only have one chance to make a good first impression. These meetings are about listening and engaging. Whilst it is the trustees that will appoint you, don't antagonise the executive team - you would be surprised how easy it is to get this wrong.

Then you are ready for the final panel, where you can go from zero to hero in an instant.

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