



advantage

THAT DIDN'T REALLY HAPPEN, DID IT?

So, as HR professionals and business owners, you say you've heard it all. Well here are some more unexpected (and amusing) stories and answers given by candidates during the interview process. Trust us, we could not have made these up if we had tried, but we think they are worth sharing with others.

I recently needed to call an applicant to inform him he was not eligible for employment with us because his drug test was positive. He called me back 10 minutes later and said, "If I study real hard, can I come back in two weeks and take the test again?"

In my early days, when it was legal to have boxes on the top of the application that asked for name, Social Security Number, and sex, one woman put "three times a week." I told her what we wanted was M or F for male or female. She replied, "Well, I did think it was kind of personal, but I need a job so I answered honestly."

One of the questions we ask when interviewing someone is, "What brought you to our organization?" By this we mean motivation. I had a guy look at me and answer, "Oh, I drove myself."

We recently asked an applicant to give us an example of how he would cut and paste something in MS Word. We were trying to gauge his knowledge of the software. He replied, "Using scissors and glue." Next!

In reference to the employment application question, "Have you ever been convicted of a felony? If so, please state the circumstances," an applicant looked puzzled. He turned over the application to see if there was more room to write on the back, and said, "You only want the felonies?" This was for a banking position. Needless to say, he didn't get hired.

At a catalog retail distribution center, a new hire was asked to fill out paperwork that included Equal Employment Opportunity Commission reporting information. On the ethnicity line, the employee wrote "Hillbilly."

Interview question: "Have you had any jobs since high school?" Answer: "I recycle metal I find along the highway." Two days later the interviewee was arrested for stealing tractors. Technically, I guess you could say he was recycling metal from along the highway.

I once asked a candidate if there was anything he did not like to do, expecting an answer related to the computer programming position he was applying for. After much debate, he answered, "I don't like to clean my bathtub."

Upon viewing some applications for warehouse assistants on a previous job, I came across an interesting response. Under the ethnic race section, the applicant checked the "other" box and had written in Human. A very unique answer indeed. That individual was hired for the position.

When a prospective employee tested positive for his drug screen, we called to inform him that he was not eligible for hire. His response was, "I smoked pot three weeks ago at a party and didn't think it would show, but now it should be OK. Can I take it again?"

Several years ago, my place of business was located at 140 West 51st St. in New York City. A job applicant set up an appointment for an interview, but cancelled the day before because he was not feeling well. Fair enough. We rescheduled the appointment for 10:30 a.m. a few days later. On the scheduled day, he called around 10 a.m. to say he was stuck in traffic and would be a little late. Again, fair enough. At about 10:45, he called to say he would be even later, because he went by mistake to 1240 West 51st St. instead of 140 West 51st St. I could not resist asking him, "How's the water today?" He seemed puzzled, until I explained that there is no such address as 1240 West 51st St., because the last address before the Hudson River is in the 1100s. He then confessed that he simply had overslept. He was admittedly a very creative fellow and perhaps was a good swimmer, but given the lack of honesty, we went on to the next applicant.

We had a gentleman come in one day and fill out an application for employment. When he reached the part of the application asking, "Have you ever committed a crime? If yes, please explain," he responded with the following answer: "Yes — a Mr. Meanor." Needless to say, it was the highlight of our day.

As an HR manager, I was reviewing an application for a construction worker. Under "Ever convicted of a felony?" the applicant wrote "Breaking and entering." Under "Any other special skills?" Applicant wrote "Good with hand tools." No kidding!

A man in personnel with the government in Washington, D.C., was reviewing applications for federal employment. The standard form included the question, "Why did you leave your previous employment?" One applicant, a former US congressman, responded, "The express wish of 116,000 voters."

CAUGHT SLEEPING AT WORK?

You're in your office or cubicle, and just as "Zzzzzzzzz" escapes from your lips, your boss pays you an unscheduled visit. How to save the day? Try these creative snooze excuses:

- "It's okay: I'm still billing the client."
- "They told me at the blood bank this might happen."
- "This is just a 15-minute power nap like they raved about in that time-management course you sent me to."
- "I was working smarter, not harder."
- "Whew! I must have left the top off the liquid paper."
- "I wasn't sleeping! I was meditating on the mission statement and envisioning a new paradigm!"
- "This is one of the seven habits of highly effective people!"
- "I was testing my keyboard for drool resistance."
- "I'm actually doing a "Stress Level Elimination Exercise Plan" (SLEEP) I learned at the last management seminar you made me attend."
- "This is in exchange for the six hours last night when I dreamed about work!"
- "I was doing a highly specific yoga exercise to relieve work-related stress. Do you discriminate against people who practice yoga?"
- "Darn! Why did you interrupt me? I had almost figured out a solution to our biggest problem."
- "Someone must've put decaf in the wrong pot."
- "Boy, that cold medicine I took last night just won't wear off!"
- "I was cross-training for telecommuting."
- "Wasn't sleeping. Was trying to pick up a contact lens without hands."
- "Geez, I thought you were gone for the day."

YOUR PEN AND YOU

In case you needed proof that every aspect of the workplace gets examined by someone, a new study describes how employees will act based on what kind of pens they use. People with more than a dozen pens are more likely to stay at a job. People with purple pens are more likely to say their bosses are happy with their work. Women who use black pens are the least likely to be criticized by their bosses. Men who use erasable pens are the least likely to be helpful to the boss. The study, conducted by a market-research company by phone, interviewed 645 randomly selected employees, and was paid for, naturally, by the Pilot Pen Corporation. But they did not tell us the hidden meaning behind those who use red (Judy) or blue felt tip pens.

Editor: Deborah Jeffries, PHR, CPC. Advantage is published monthly and is designed to provide information on regulations, HR practices and management ideas and concerns. The intended audience is managers, supervisors, business owners, human resource and employee relations professionals. If you have questions about the content, an opinion about the information, questions about your subscription, or if you need additional Advantage binders, please give us a call at (503) 885-9815 or e-mail djeffries@hrnorthwest.com.

THE IRATE CUSTOMER

A crowded airline flight was canceled. A single agent was rebooking a long line of inconvenienced travelers. Suddenly an angry passenger pushed his way to the desk. He slapped his ticket down on the counter and said, "I HAVE to be on this flight and it has to be FIRST CLASS."

The agent replied, "I'm sorry sir. I'll be happy to try to help you, but I've got to help these folks first, and I'm sure we'll be able to work something out."

The passenger was unimpressed. He asked loudly, so that the passengers behind him could hear, "Do you have any idea who I am?"

Without hesitating, the gate agent smiled and grabbed her public address microphone. "May I have your attention please?" she began, her voice bellowing throughout the terminal. "We have a passenger here at the gate WHO DOES NOT KNOW WHO HE IS. If anyone can help him find his identity, please come to the gate."

MAY I HAVE THE DAY OFF?

So, you want the day off? Let's take a look at what you are asking for:

- There are 365 days per year available for work.
- There are 52 weeks per year in which you already have two days off per week, leaving 261 days available for work.
- Since you spend 16 hours each day away from work, you have used up 170 days, leaving only 91 days available.
- You spend 30 minutes each day on coffee break, that accounts for 23 days each year, leaving only 68 days available.
- With a one-hour lunch period each day, you have used up another 46 days, leaving only 22 days available for work.
- You normally spend two days per year on sick leave. This leaves you only 20 days available for work.
- We offer five holidays per year, so your available working time is down to 15 days.
- We generously give you 14 days vacation per year, which leaves one day available for work, and no way are you going to take it off.

QUIZ

You are driving along in your car on a wild, stormy night. You pass by a bus stop, and you see three people waiting for the bus:

1. An old lady who looks as if she is about to die.
2. An old friend who once saved your life.
3. The perfect man (or woman) you have been dreaming about.

Which one would you choose to offer a ride to, knowing that there could only be one passenger in your car?

Think before you continue reading.

This is a moral/ethical dilemma that was once actually used as part of a job application.

You could pick up the old lady, because she is going to die, and thus you should save her first; or you could take the old friend because he once saved your life, and this would be the perfect chance to pay him back. However, you may never be able to find your perfect dream mate again.

The candidate who was hired (out of 200 applicants) had no trouble coming up with his answer. I love this, I may actually use it sometime for an interview situation. WHAT DID HE SAY?

He simply answered: "I would give the car keys to my old friend, and let him take the lady to the hospital. I would stay behind and wait for the bus with the woman of my dreams."

Never forget to "Think Outside of the Box."

YOU'RE WORTH MORE THAN YOU THINK

Here's something to think about the next time you're considering whether an employee deserves a raise. A number of people have spent a great deal of resources calculating the composition, and the worth or worthlessness, of the human body. When we total the monetary value of the elements in our bodies and the value of the average person's skin, we arrive at a net worth of \$4.50!

(This value is, however, subject to change, due to stock market fluctuations. Since the studies leading to this conclusion were conducted by the United States and by Japan respectively, it might be wise to consult the New York Stock Exchange and the Nikkei Index before deciding when to sell!)

The U.S. Bureau of Chemistry and Soils invested many a hard-earned tax dollar in calculating the chemical and mineral composition of the human body, which breaks down as follows:

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| • 65% Oxygen | • 0.25% Sulfur |
| • 18% Carbon | • 0.15% Sodium |
| • 10% Hydrogen | • 0.15% Chlorine |
| • 3% Nitrogen | • 0.05% Magnesium |
| • 1.5% Calcium | • 0.0004% Iron |
| • 1% Phosphorous | • 0.00004% Iodine |
| • 0.35% Potassium | |

Additionally, it was discovered that our bodies contain trace quantities of fluorine, silicon, manganese, zinc, copper, aluminum, and arsenic. Together, all of the above amounts to less than one dollar!

Our most valuable asset is our skin, which the Japanese invested their time and money in measuring. The method the Imperial State Institute for Nutrition at Tokyo developed for measuring the amount of a person's skin is to take a naked person, and to apply a strong, thin paper to every surface of his body. After the paper dries, they carefully remove it, cut it into small pieces, and painstakingly total the person's measurements. Cut and dried, the average person is the proud owner of 14 to 18 square feet of skin, with the variables in this figure being height, weight and breast size. Basing the skin's value on the selling price of cowhide, which is approximately 25 cents per square foot, the value of an average person's skin is about \$3.50.

WHO ARE YOU?

- If you can start the day without caffeine;
- If you can be cheerful, ignoring aches and pains;
- If you can resist complaining and boring people with your troubles;
- If you can eat the same food every day and be grateful for it;
- If you can understand when loved ones are too busy to give you time;
- If you can overlook when people take things out on you when, through no fault of yours, something goes wrong;
- If you can take criticism and blame without resentment;
- If you can face the world without lies and deceit;
- If you can conquer tension without medical help;
- If you can relax without liquor;
- If you can sleep soundly every night;

Then...

You are probably the family dog!

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH

Hiker Leonardo Diaz found out at the most inopportune moment that the prepaid minutes on his cell phone had run out: He was hiking in the Andes mountains, a blizzard had just begun, and he needed help.

He slowly began freezing to death, surviving for the next 24 hours with only the warmth of some carefully measured doses of brandy. Then his phone rang. It was Bell South operator Maria del Pilar Basto, asking if he would like to buy more time.

"We called him to remind him that his cell phone was out of minutes. He said it was the work of an angel, because he was lost in the Andes," Basto recalled later. "We thought it was a joke, but he insisted, and it was true."

As Reuters describes it, Basto made calls to have help sent to Diaz. During the wait, she and other operators kept ringing him to keep him awake and help ward off hypothermia. Rescue teams arrived seven hours later.

GUIDELINES MANAGERS SHOULD FOLLOW...OR NOT

To manage effectively, understanding what one should do is easier when you know what not to do. The author of the following list is unknown (probably to avoid unemployment), but provides some noteworthy points to ponder.

- Never give me work in the morning. Always wait until 4:00 and then bring it to me. The challenge of a deadline is refreshing.
- If it's really a "rush" job, run in and interrupt me every 10 minutes to inquire how it's going. That helps.
- Always leave without telling anyone where you're going. It gives me a chance to be creative when someone asks where you are.
- If you give me more than one job to do, don't tell me which is the priority. Let me guess.
- Do your best to keep me late. I like the office and really have nowhere to go or anything to do.
- If a job I do pleases you, keep it a secret. Leaks like that could get me a promotion.
- If you don't like my work, tell everyone. I like my name to be popular in conversation.
- If you have special instructions for a job, don't write them down. In fact, save them until the job is almost done.
- Never introduce me to the people you're with. When you refer to them later, my shrewd deductions will identify them.
- Be nice to me only when the job I'm doing for you could really change your life.
- Tell me all your little problems. No one else has any and it's nice to know someone is less fortunate.

GREAT REASONS TO LAUGH

Laughter lowers blood pressure and increases vascular blood flow and oxygen to the blood. It also reduces your level of stress hormones.

Laughter exercises the diaphragm and the abdominal, respiratory, facial, leg, and back muscles. Laughing 100 times is equivalent to a 10-minute workout.

A good chuckle also defuses the damage done by negative emotions such as anger, fear, and sadness, which can cause harmful biochemical changes and undermine our overall emotional well-being.

So laugh it up!

WORTH PONDERING

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think, say, or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company...a church...a home. The remarkable thing is that we have a choice every day regarding the attitude that we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past...we cannot change the fact that people will act a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% of what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it. And, so it is with you...we are in charge of attitudes.

—Charles Swindall

HUMOR WITH A BITE

A man in a hot air balloon realized he was lost. He reduced altitude and spotted a woman below. He descended a bit more and shouted, "Excuse me, can you help me? I promised a friend I would meet him an hour ago, but I don't know where I am."

The woman below replied, "You are in a hot air balloon hovering approximately 30 feet above the ground. You are between 40 and 41 degrees North latitude and between 59 and 60 degrees West longitude."

"You must be an engineer," said the balloonist.

"I am," replied the woman. "How did you know?"

"Well," answered the balloonist, "everything you told me is technically correct, but I have no idea what to make of your information, and the fact is I am still lost. Frankly, you haven't been much help so far."

The woman below responded, "You must be in management."

"I am," replied the balloonist. "But how did you know?"

"Well," said the woman. "You don't know where you are or where you are going. You have risen to where you are mainly due to a large quantity of hot air. You made a promise, which you have no idea how to keep, and you expect people beneath you to solve your problems. The fact is you are in exactly the same position you were in before we met, but now, somehow, it's my fault."

Special thanks and appreciation to [Monster.com](#), [First Draft](#), and [Workforce.com](#) for the humorous tid-bits contained in this month's newsletter. We hope you laughed like we did.

FOR YOUR CALENDAR

Open up your daytimers, computer calendars and palm pilots. The following is a look at upcoming events, special days and other diverse and fun activities you will want to be aware of and get scheduled. To register for our workshops, please call any of our offices, send an e-mail to Susan Jeffries at sjeffries@hrnorthwest.com, or just register online at www.hrnorthwest.com under Consulting services.

APRIL

Animal Cruelty Prevention, Keep America Beautiful, Listening Awareness, National Humor, National Poetry, Multicultural Communication, and Stress Awareness Month.

April 1	April Fool's Day
April 6	Daylight Savings Time begins
April 6-12	National Library Week
April 9	HRA Breakfast Briefing - Tualatin Dealing with Office Politics 7:30 - 9:30 a.m.
April 10	HRA Breakfast Briefing - Puget Sound Dealing with Office Politics 7:30 - 9:30 a.m.
April 14-21	Jewish Heritage Week
April 15	Tax Day
April 17	HRA Workshop - Tualatin Understanding & Implementing Leave Laws 8:30 - 12 noon
	First Day of Passover

April 20	Easter Sunday
April 20-26	National Karaoke Week
April 21-27	National TV-Turnoff Week
April 22	Earth Day
April 23	HRA Workshop - Willamette Valley (Salem) HR for the Non-HR Professional 8:30 - 12 noon
April 24	Take Our Sons and Daughters to Work Day
April 27-May 3	National Volunteer Week
April 29	HRA Workshop - Puget Sound HR for the Non-HR Professional 8:30 - 12 noon

MAY

May 8, 15, 22 & 29	HRA Workshop - Tualatin Beginning Supervision I-IV 8:30 - 12 noon each session
May 20, 27 & June 3, 10	HRA Workshop - Puget Sound Beginning Supervision I-IV 8:30 - 12 noon each session

Information and advice offered through Advantage should not be construed as legal opinion. The material contained herein will not apply to all circumstances or to all organizations. Use it as a resource and reference. Should you feel legal advice is required, please consult with your corporate counsel.



ON MY SOAPBOX

The day Fred Rogers died was a sad day in the neighborhood. He had been a part of my household during my kids' childhood. There are some people who become institutions. We are (or at least I am) less likely to think about losing them, so their departure can surprise us. So in tribute to someone important to me (and I want to write this while he is here to read it), I would like to share some thoughts about a "personality" who has touched my life. And if you've been around the Portland area for any length of time, I suspect he has touched your life as well.

My earliest memories of him are that he was very tall, and always good for a story or a hug. He was soft-spoken, but had a strong impish streak. He was one of five cousins, but much older than my brother and myself. During our times together, we two little ones would tag along, listen with great glee to our cousins' shenanigans, and wish we were already big.

At Christmas, we would trek to Lipman's Department store to see the Cinnamon Bear. For those of you not familiar with Portland's history, Lipman's was a big competitor of Meier and Frank's. Our visit to the Cinnamon Bear was a tradition filled with wonder and anticipation. The Bear called us by name, and knew what mattered to us. It would be quite a few years before we figured out how the character knew so much about us. Two of our male cousins played that wonderful bear.

Also, there were several Christmases where Santa made a personal visit to our house, much to the delight of my brother and I and a few special friends. Again, Santa came compliments of my cousins. But I digress....

One of these cousins was destined for a life in front of the show lights. He turned his love of creating laughter into a lifelong occupation. He played county fairs, circuses, and every type of family event. He appeared on radio and had his own TV show for years. He has been a staple at Alpenrose for more years than any of us can count (but I'll bet he could tell you exactly how many). He is Jim Allen, a.k.a., Rusty Nails, the clown. Literally thousands of people around the world have been entertained, delighted, and entranced by his antics. He is able to connect with the smallest of children and those usually resistant to the silliness of clowns.

He is a warm, gentle man of many interests and talents. In addition to his comedic pursuits, he serves as a minister, and is a friend to many. His eyes first connect and then touch you. If they are twinkling, you know that you are in for a surprise. If they are soft, you know that he will have words of wisdom and caring to share. Like Mr. Rogers, he is about love – love of family, love of children, love of community.

Of late, he has decided to stay closer to home, to focus on clowning around here. After 65 years of journeying everywhere, he deserves that. He also deserves to know how much we have all benefited from his red nose, red hair, and infinite capacity to give us moments of great humor and lessons of life. Thanks, Jim, or should I say Rusty! You have enriched the lives of innumerable children of all ages! You gave us a lifetime of humor, and not just on April Fools Day.

- Judy Clark, President



"Whatever the Question"

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