

KEEP IT PROFESSIONAL

Personal problems don't belong in job interviews

If all goes well, the person you meet at your next job interview could end up as your employer. It's understandable that you'll want to cozy up, but beware of getting too chummy too fast.

After talking to dozens of employers about what goes on in job interviews at their companies, one thing became clear: Too many job hunters blow it by discussing things you wouldn't talk about with strangers — let alone a hiring manager in a job interview.

Bad marriages, sexual preference and bouts of depression. Sick children, pets and mothers. Broken-down cars and a spouse's bad job situation. Interviewers can't figure out why someone would even want to go there. Is it to create a bond with their interviewer? Do they think it will gain sympathy and make a manager want to hire them?

It has the opposite effect.

When Eric Zuckerman, president of Pac Team America in Paramus, N.J., has an interview, he not only looks for someone with the right skills and attitudes, but the so-called right fit.

In other words, he's constantly monitoring: What would it be like to have this person working at his company? His conclusions are based on how the person acts in the interview.

Take the time he was interviewing a woman who, he says, "started going deep into personal issues."

"It was past the point of 'too much information,'" he says. "She's going on about how this happened and then that happened and how she got really depressed. Then she went to a doctor. And I'm just listening. For 20 minutes, she went off on all of this personal information."

What did he conclude? She's the wrong fit. He gave these reasons:

She would bring the wrong attitude. "When you're going on about how the world has treated you so badly, I'm thinking, 'You've got Oscar the Grouch sitting here; and there-

fore, she's not a good fit.' What's important to me is to have someone who's adding to our work experience and environment and who brings positive energy."

Her behavior predicted how she would fit in with others. "I can only imagine what it would be like if she was working here," Zuckerman says. "She seemed overly dramatic."

Her behavior showed poor judgment and lack of professionalism. Zuckerman is looking for mature individuals who "understand where to draw the professional line." When you interview someone who can't leave personal issues at the door, it makes you question if they have that maturity, he says.

Another employer described an interviewee who talked about a trip he and his boyfriend had taken.

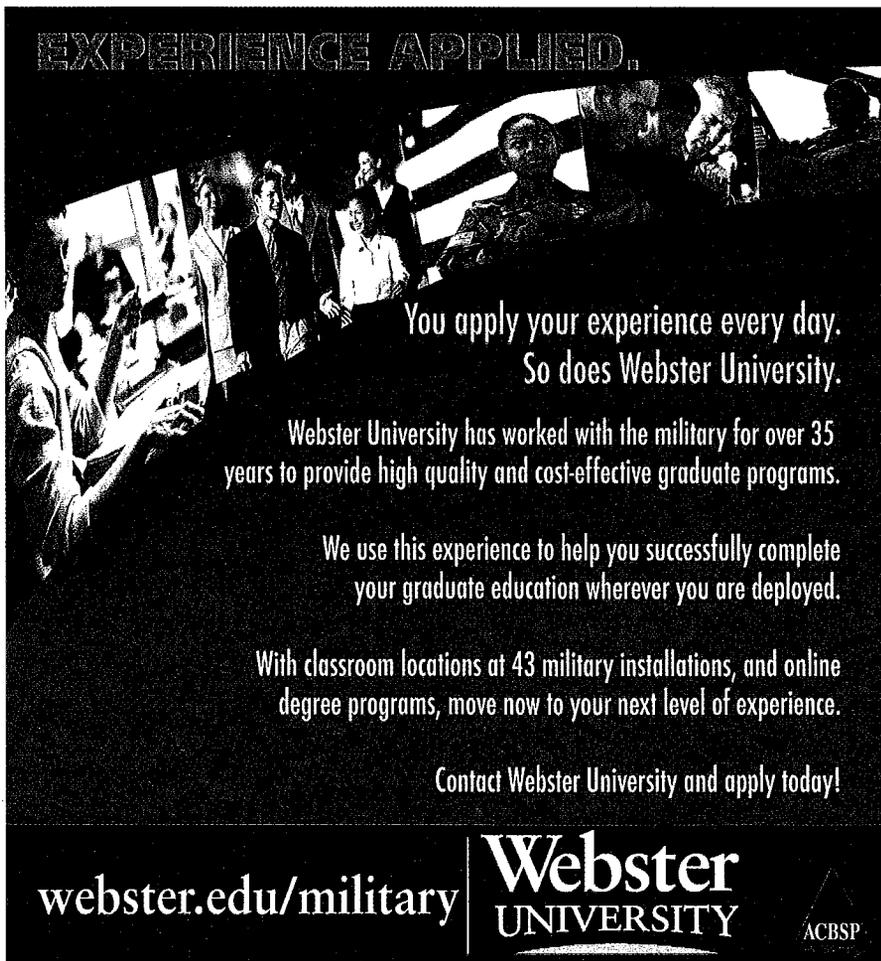
"It was totally unrelated to what we were discussing in the job interview," the employer says. "I think he wanted to make sure I knew he was gay."

"I don't care what his sexual preference is. But the fact that he brought this up put questions in my head about his judgment that weren't there before. Would he also feel the need to let clients know? Some may not be so open-minded."

As Zuckerman points out, "An interview is not a therapy session. Nor is it the place to talk about anything but the job at hand and your qualifications to do it."

Stick to the script. ☒

Andrea Kay is the author of "Life's a Bitch and Then You Change Careers: 9 Steps to Get Out of Your Funk & On to Your Future."



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