

Always stand out from the crowd

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A year like this, in which many employees are facing major organisational change, will remind them that they themselves are actually a product to be presented and sold - in many ways, little different from a car or a mortgage.

The cultivating of a professional image is the subject of formal study courses, as I know well as a motivational speaker. It combines the basic promotional skills, such as market research and product positioning, with that of public speaking, which is the skill of personal presentation.

In a market where those with the money have the power and the choice, both employers and their customers will be overwhelmed with applicants desperate to sell either themselves or their products.

In such a climate of anxiety and fear of unemployment, it is essential to maintain an image of calm professionalism.

Your employer or customer may even be watching to see how you cope in this difficult position, a key to your character and strengths in difficult times.

It is important to remember that nobody buys from a frightened salesman with no confidence in himself or his product. Speak and act as though you are a valuable asset that is highly sought after by many others - and you will be.

An interview is basically no different from any other presentation. Just answering the questions correctly is not enough; others may do the same, and you won't stand out from them. This is when you appreciate that your interview performance must follow some of the show business rules.

You've probably heard young female TV news-announcers complaining that clothes and makeovers seem to attract more attention from viewers than wars and revolutions.

That is because only ten per cent of an audience's attention is fixed on the words that you speak. Ninety percent of it will be assessing your face, your voice and appearance and searching for other hidden clues about your personal background. And your interviewer will be no different from any other audience. He or she just happens to be an audience of one.

You will have heard time and again, about the importance of the first impression that initial visual 'take' that registers immediately, leaving a favourable, or unfavourable, imprint of voice, appearance and manner - which determine whether the viewer, or the employer, will want to 'buy' you or your services.

But there's something else. That is that interviewers (like conference audiences) actually dread boredom and monotony.

So don't give them too easy a ride. Offer them a little surprise - something unexpected. You could term your performance as a game, albeit a serious game, between yourself and your audience.

And in any game or match you are there to win - not to lose. Call the performance something between theatre and sport. If you can establish the correct chemistry you will have gained a distinct edge over your rivals.