

ALWAYS ON STAGE

By **Stephen Rebora, R.A.**

“Mr. Rebora, I am pleased to inform you that your firm has been selected to present its qualifications at an interview that is scheduled for next week.” Being short-listed for a new project is always great, but it also sets a chain of efforts in motion that can be monumentally wasteful with one wrong step and without proper leadership. There are a few things to keep in mind that can help keep everyone on the right track.

Game Plan

Have a game plan. Past performance and reputation go a long way in being invited to an interview in the first place. Nothing succeeds like success. However, firms that rely too heavily on their past portfolio of work in an interview often come off as being conceited or arrogant. Clients like to know that you have experience, but it is just as important to tell them what you can do for them specifically. Do some research ahead of time so you and your team arrive at the interview with a clear understanding of the assignment. Visit the site, learn the campus/city/health center, and identify project challenges. All of this will help you form a strategy that plays to your team’s strengths within the context of this specific assignment.

Know Your Audience

As consultants, we have the pleasure of being part of many different planning sessions about many different building types. As such, we tend to pick up a little knowledge about a lot of different aspects of planning, construction, operations, and design. It’s important to recognize that a little knowledge does not make you an expert on the subject. Clients respect honesty. Be careful to stay within your expertise, especially if you do not know your audience. Interview panels are typically made up of diverse groups of educated individuals. Many times, members of the panels have very different interests and goals for



the assignment based on their background. The panel may include landscape architects, civil engineers, attorneys, financial experts, or other professionals. Learn your audience and you will be able to tailor your presentation to include their interests. By providing respect for their occupation, you will ensure that you do not overstate your expertise.

When Does the Meeting Start?

I am amazed at people who depart from their homes half-dressed. They are the ones who

board the train, plane, or elevator with their shirt unbuttoned and tie draped over their shoulder. Of course, they will be buttoned up in time for the interview, but the fact is they just encountered thousands of people on their way to work. Keep in mind that one of the panel members may be on that plane, train, or elevator. Similarly you should not discuss strategy in an elevator full of people you don’t know. Your potential clients may be in there as well. This is especially true the closer you get to your destination.

Don’t change your attire or personality just in time for the interview. You are always on stage. Start the interview when you leave your home. Dress for success and conduct yourself properly from the time you leave until the time you return. **P**



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