

Don't wake sleeping dogs in a job interview!

You are probably familiar with Paul Watzlawick's here slightly different request: «Don't think of an elephant with butterfly ears». This refers to our inability to imagine anything when we hear a term. Unfortunately, disregarding this principle in job interviews is just as common as knowing it.

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Some time ago, I did job interview training with a client who had a somewhat varied CV. I had noticed his many changes during the preparation, and I intended to address them with him. As the conversation turned out to be interesting and he had a lot of exciting things to say, I didn't think about his many changes.

To be more precise: I would have forgotten them if he hadn't reminded me. When I asked him what was important to him in a working environment, he replied: «I want to feel comfortable in an environment and not change jobs so often.» Too bad for this change of direction in a promising conversation. He had awakened the dog in me that would subsequently bite into his many job changes.

«Slips of the tongue» even without a negation

In the stress of a difficult conversation, we often unconsciously bring up what is bothering us the most. Like little children who have done something forbidden, we blurt out what we wanted to hide.

For example, one of my outplacement clients, who had great difficulty with his age, said when I asked him to briefly introduce himself: «My name is X, and I am 50 years old». As he was a

top specialist, nobody would have been interested in his age if he hadn't made it an issue himself.

To avoid stressfully bringing up the very topics you don't want to talk about, you need to come to terms with them before the interview.

The power of positive language

The linguistic bad habit of negation not only creates images that we want to avoid. The formulations are also awkward on a purely linguistic level. They require the listener to translate and are therefore tiring. In our example, this means: He wants to change jobs often - no, he doesn't want to. Even worse are double negatives in the form of: «I am not inflexible». I will leave the necessary translation steps to you.

So, phrase it as positively as possible. My client could have expressed his concern as follows: «It is important to me to be able to commit myself to a company in the long term».

Unfortunately, even writing professionals often make a poor impression in this respect. I often pause when reading a newspaper article because a sentence doesn't make sense in the context of what I've read so far. On re-reading it, I then realise that I have missed the word «not».

If I hadn't noticed the contradiction (sometimes a «not» makes perfect sense;-)), I would have understood exactly the opposite of what the writer wanted to express.

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