

WAIT OUTSIDE PLEASE.

I LOOKED IMMACULATE. This is not a common occurrence, not one of my normal failings, but this morning I'll swear the mirror leered at me. Lounging elegantly on the hotel settee, I awaited the call.

Interviews demand the best. I only had one suit and as I'd got married in it, as it was dark red and as it had flared trousers, it was unsuitable (sorry). Mind you, it still fits, twenty years on! Bragging again. Something better was required.

Being too poorly paid or too tight-fisted to buy a new one, I visited the Relate shop, emerging triumphantly with a dark grey, all wool M and S suit, and just £20 worse off. I couldn't believe my luck at finding something which fitted my tuning fork figure so elegantly.

Now resplendent in grey striped shirt and matching tie, plus a pair of sparkling shoes, only one of which squeaked embarrassingly with every step, I could face anything. There were no flies on this guy. Which reminds me, must check those before the call comes.

"Mr. Jobber, please".

I nearly fell out of the settee when the door opened. Yet another check of the tie, fiddle with the forelock, check downstairs and the victim followed the predator towards the lion's den. The call had come.

Looks are deceptive. I walked into the room oozing, I hoped, confidence and nonchalance.

The Got Jobber

Facing me were two rows of tigers, smiling, ready for the main course.

Around a table were the main interrogators; off to the right, two ultra-professionals, all furrowed brows and lethal clipboards; in a row behind the long table, a long line of observers, just watching for my first fall from grace. There were to be several.

Introductions over, I sat down, waiting for the first blow to be struck, the first weakness to be exposed.

At first, questions were gentle, answers straight forward; simply a little softening up. All too comfortable, but also too senous.

"Mr. Jobber, what would you do if a disagreement arose between you and the board?" There was a long pause. Was it worth it? Go for it!

"Well," I replied slowly, "I'm quite a good runner."

It worked. The ice was broken, only to be followed, moments later, by the real conversation stopper.

"And, Mr. Jobber, can you tell us how you would advise the board if it was suggested that they took out a bank loan?"

I froze. Didn't they know that her indoors does all the shopping, deals with all the policies and checks every bank statement, while this suave dude here is barely aware of the name of his own building society?

I was tempted to reach for the glass of water (oh, hemlock, please) at my elbow, but that would have been a dead giveaway. No inspiration came.

I babbled something about frugality and consulting widely, but the look on the tiger's face suggested that my answer lacked conviction. Lacked anything. Down my side, a cold trickle headed for the waistband. Don't they make anti-perspirants interviewproof?

Finally I got him off my back by answering a subsequent, twist-the-knife question in a way that showed I did understand the difference between a budget statement and a financial summary, if that was what it was called.

Relief was short lived. It was the professionals' turn.

My answers to the lady's questions about man-management seemed to be well received, although she had the disconcerting habit of looking continuously at me whilst writing non-stop.

The bearded slicker, however, was no walkover. He hounded me with successive questions, all on the same subject, his perseverance and his flow of "yes but"s making it quite clear to everyone that his hands were closely caressing my throat.

Gasping for air, and surely with little pools of water trapped above the waistband, final pleasantries were exchanged and I broke free, leaving them to dissect me in peace.

I returned to the settee.

And waited.

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