

How can I make myself the headhunter's #1 candidate?

Q "Should I just answer the headhunter's questions, or should I tell her what I can do for her client? Is that too presumptuous? My goal is to be the headhunter's #1 candidate. How can I do that?"

A Any particular strategy can be risky because there's no telling how a headhunter likes to approach an initial interview. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't test the waters. There's no telling how anyone—including a headhunter—will respond to an assertive person who expresses their abilities. But if you're good at what you do, then you owe it to yourself to show it. And if a headhunter—or anyone else—can't deal with that, then you probably don't want to work with them anyway.

(I'm not suggesting that anyone should be arrogant, presumptuous, behave like a know-it-all or dominate an interview. If you're not sure about your ability to present yourself, ask people you respect what they think of your communication skills. If you need help tuning your presentation, get it. Learn to be compelling but diplomatic.)

How far a candidate should go in an interview with a headhunter is a judgment call. Should you wait patiently for questions and just answer them as best you can? Should you take charge of the interview? How far should you go to try and make yourself the headhunter's #1 candidate?

It depends on whether you can do the job for his client. If you're not going to try, you shouldn't continue the discussion.

Here's how to kick your initial interview into high gear. The intent is to take control of the interview and drive it without irritating the headhunter. *The more you can focus the meeting on the work you can do (versus reciting your work history), the greater the edge you'll gain over your competition.*

Before you take an assertive step, clear the way by offering cooperation.

How to say it "I'm pleased to meet you. I'm glad to answer your questions. I want to make sure you leave our discussion (or meeting) with all the information you need to form a judgment about me. If you'll tell me how you like to conduct an interview, I'll do all I can to make it as productive and profitable for you as possible."

Few candidates ever say that to a headhunter. Most are too nervous and too intent on selling themselves. They don't stop to consider what the headhunter needs, which