

Case Study 15:

Where Did She Go Wrong?

Background

Justine Koropatwa is about to graduate with a Bachelor of Business Administration in marketing and has been applying for a variety of advertised marketing specialist positions at companies in her hometown. She has had ten interviews to date but has not had any second interviews or offers so far.

Current Situation

Although she is discouraged, Justine feels she has an “in” for an assistant marketing and communications manager position at Green Hills Hospital, as her aunt is the administrative assistant to the senior manager of marketing and communications. Her aunt spoke with her boss and within a week of submitting her resumé and cover letter, Justine was offered an interview. Justine’s resumé and cover letter were very carefully prepared to reflect the stated requirements in the job advertisement. Justine’s aunt reviewed the letter carefully and deemed it better than the other applications that had gone through the office since the job was posted on the hospital’s HR site.

The Problem

Justine feels she knows quite a lot about what the hospital—or any employer—needs from her as a marketing and communications specialist, so despite the urging of her boyfriend (a fellow graduate of the same marketing degree program), she does not conduct any research to learn more about the hospital’s mission, mandate, operations, programs, and people. Besides, she’s been super busy helping her best friend plan her wedding!

On the day of the interview, Justine can’t find her best black skirt, so she pulls out a pair of wrinkly black pants (with slightly fraying hems) from the laundry basket, sniffs them to see if they smell okay, and puts them on. She selects a somewhat see-through and low-cut white blouse, and because she can’t find a clean white or nude camisole to wear underneath, she puts on a black camisole. Hey, it’s fashionable at the moment, and aren’t people in marketing supposed to be a bit avant-garde when it comes to how they dress? Justine dons her multiple earrings, as well as her lip ring, smudgy eye makeup with lots of eyeliner, and a dark red lipstick; she spritzes herself liberally with her favourite perfume and puts on a rhinestone necklace. Justine’s shoes may be a bit too casual for the outfit—a pair of slip on black sneakers—but she does have to walk a long way from the bus stop to the hospital to get to the interview.

Having forgotten what time the interview is, Justine arrives ten minutes late. She also realizes she has left her portfolio of advertising and promotional materials and copies of her resumé at home. A man from the interview team has to make photocopies of the resumé for the other four team members.

The interviewers ask most of the standard interview questions Justine learned in business communications courses, but they also throw in a few queries that are hard to answer. Justine had not thought about potentially tricky questions.

“Why are you applying for this job?” asks one man. “To pay off my student loan and have enough money to travel the world,” Justine replies.

“What would be your weaknesses?” asks another interviewer. “Well, I tend to procrastinate, because I am so interested in so many different things... but did I mention that my marketing projects at school earned top marks?”

“How would you describe yourself?” a third interviewer asks. “Well, I’m a fun girl. I would say that I enjoy work most when it’s fun—if it’s not fun, I find it hard to stay motivated. I am also motivated by feedback from my boss—if I don’t get it on a daily basis, I can get off track.”

“What do you know about Green Hills Hospital, and how would your work as an assistant marketing manager support our new strategic plan for better interface with the community?” asks an interviewer. “I’m really good at communicating with stakeholders at any organization, so if I’m hired and read your strategic plan, I will be able to apply what I already know to what your plan is.”

“What are your goals for yourself?” inquires the third interviewer. “Basically, I see this job as a steppingstone to bigger and better things.”

“Can we see some samples of the advertising and promotional work you completed in your co-op placement in university?” asks the second interviewer. “Sorry, I forgot to bring my portfolio, but I can drop some items off tomorrow if you still want to see my stuff.”

“I see you had several jobs between when you were in high school and university, and all of these jobs were of short duration. Why weren’t you able to keep any of these jobs longer than three months?” the first interviewer chimes in. “Well, my boss at one of these jobs was a complete jerk and wouldn’t give me time off to go to my third-cousin’s funeral—so I went anyway and got fired. At another job, my co-workers slacked off and I complained about their work ethic. One of the co-workers was related to the boss there, so I got fired. It was totally unfair.”

At the end of the interview, the coordinator of the interview team asks Justine if she has any questions. “Yes, actually I do. How much does this position pay?” Justine asks. “What are the benefits like?” Another interviewer responds, “The salary is commensurate with experience and education, so we can’t really say at this time.”

Justine does not send a thank-you note to the interview team. She is too busy with the lead up to her friend’s wedding.

A week passes, and then another. Justine calls the hospital’s HR department. Eventually, after leaving five messages asking for feedback, she is told that no, she did not get the job.

Activities and Discussion

1. What went wrong with Justine's preparation for the interview? List possible factors she could have improved on.
2. What about how Justine dressed? Was it appropriate for an interview?
3. At the interview, what mistakes do you think Justine made? What could she do to improve her performance at the next interview?
4. Is it ever a good idea to ask about how much the position pays before you are offered the job? Why or why not?
5. Put yourself in Justine's shoes, getting yourself ready for your first job post-graduation. What would you do from start (getting a call for an interview) to finish (follow-up after the interview)? What would you avoid doing or saying during this process? How would you dress, based on expectations for apparel in your industry, sector, or for a typical employer in your field? Finally, what would you do for follow-up?