

The 18 Minute Expert Examination

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We've become a nation of indiscriminate information sponges. We absorb billions of bits of data—facts, analyses and opinions—and, all too often, we accord every single one of them the same credibility and respect. And, in my view, that's a terrible mistake. Just because someone says something—on television, on a Web-site, or on a blog—doesn't mean he or she has the expertise to do so.

Take the career advice that's typically dispensed on morning television news shows. Basically, you have an anchorperson who has absolutely no background in career matters interviewing a reporter who has spent two or three days or maybe even all of a week investigating the job market. Despite that superficial level of expertise, they are positioned as experts and asked to opine about job search strategies and career advancement techniques. The resulting exchange is frequently so simplistic, the caliber of information so poor that the advice you receive is worthless or worse, even harmful.

For example, I recently saw a television interview in which a book author—yes, even their credentials require validation—suggested that “brown nosing” was an effective strategy for people worried about keeping their jobs. (Sadly the topic of workplace survival is likely to be a staple of TV over the next several months.) The show's host was clueless about the value of that notion so promoted it as a good idea. In truth, it was probably the worst piece of career advice I've seen on television in over a decade. Brown nosing is a deceitful, insincere attempt to curry favor with one's superiors. A far more effective way to make yourself indispensable would be to devote the time required to be deceitful to gaining credibility as a meaningful contributor on-the-job.

But advising someone to brownnose is catchy and that draws eyeballs. And eyeballs are the currency of success for television news shows, Web-sites and blogs. Although they will always claim otherwise, many (but certainly not all) will focus on anything, even if its value or credibility has not been vetted, as long as it is unusual, out of the ordinary or outlandish enough to catch your attention. As a consequence, and with increasing frequency, the information that's dispensed in the media—at least when it comes to effective career self-management—isn't information at all. It's “dumbformation.”

What should you do? Use the 18 Minute Expert Examination below. It's easy to do and will minimize your risk of being misled by counterfeit experts spouting dumbformation.

Step 1. (Time Required: 6 minutes) Check the track record of anyone passing themselves off or being passed off in the media as an “expert.” Go online and Google their name to see whether they have any visibility in the known world, and if so, what others are saying about them. Determine how long they've been in the career management field and what, exactly, they've been doing. Also check the search results to see if they have had an article or book published or have presented at career-related conferences. True experts will have measurable and meaningful experience in the career field.

Step 2. (Time Required: 5 minutes) Visit their Web-site or their Facebook, MySpace or LinkedIn profile. If they don't have one, that's a red flag in and of itself. There are experts in career self-management who don't have a site or a profile, but the vast majority do. So, stop by whichever they have and review their qualifications. Check to see if they have a degree in career counseling or have been certified in career coaching. See if they're a member of a career management-related association such as the Association of Career Management Professionals, CareerDirectors International, Career Management Alliance, and the International Coach Federation. True experts will have one or both of those credentials.

Step 3. (Time Required: 7 minutes) If they're a book author, visit Amazon.com and check to see what else they've had published and what reviewers have said about their books. Although generalizations

can be inaccurate, I'd be very skeptical of the advice in any career book written by a CEO—what works for one person doesn't necessarily work for everyone—and by anyone whose fifteen minutes of fame exceeds their cumulative experience in the workplace. If they're not a book author, go back to their Website or profile and read what they've written there. Pick one or two of the techniques they discuss and Google those to see what others in the career management field think of them. True experts will have expertise that others recognize and respect.

Why go to all this trouble? Because managing your own career is the single most important job you will ever have. Employers' jobs belong to them; your career belongs to you. That means two things:

- First, it's up to you to ensure the health of your career and in the 21st Century, you have to work at keeping it healthy every single day.
- And second, you determine the success or lack of it in your career, not your employer, your boss or the HR Department.

Most of us will need some assistance to meet those twin responsibilities, and happily, there's plenty of assistance available. As with anything else, however, you must make smart choices. There is help that can help and help that can harm. There are true experts and, unfortunately, there are counterfeit experts, as well. The only way to know the difference is to examine their experience, credentials and expertise. And you can do that in just 18 minutes.

Thanks for reading,
Peter

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