

(Plan Your Career) Gender and the job search

Written by Julie Desmond
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Disclaimer: I believe, and most professionals I know believe, men and women in the world of work are equals. They have the right to equal pay for equal work and they are equally capable of succeeding in comparable positions. Sexism has no place in the workplace.

That said, do men and women have differences? Of course they do. Do these differences influence the job search styles of men and women? Watching men and women compete for positions, I have to say yes. Gender rarely drives the hiring decisions of good managers, but it does seem to influence the way we look for work, specifically in terms of communication, problem solving and sensitivity to the needs of others.

Generally speaking, men communicate through actions, women through words. According to her book, *The Female Brain*, Dr. Louann Brizendine asserts that men speak an average of 7,000 words per day and women, 20,000. During a job interview, men need to be sure they are providing sufficient information, answering questions completely and interjecting the small talk they usually hope to avoid. Alternatively, women should refrain from jabbering on endlessly.

Both men and women should look for their interviewer's nonverbal cues to know when to stop talking and start listening: an interviewer who rubs an eye, pulls an earlobe or massages his neck has heard enough; stop talking. An interviewer who seems to pause longer than is natural before asking the next question may need more information. Men who fall into the category of "strong, silent type," may want to ask outright: did that answer your question? In the same situation, women generally will want to refrain from filling the silence with words. If you must speak, ask a question. Then, wait for an answer.

Generally speaking, men and women take different approaches to problem solving. One study watched groups of teenage boys and girls find their way out of a maze. The boys solved the problem in a linear way, one step at a time, instinctively appointing a leader and systematically demonstrating their competence by achieving a solution. The girls used a more circular, whole group approach, consulting one another throughout the process and testing multiple options to achieve the same solution. In this way, women seem to value the process, while men value the end result. Armed with this knowledge, both men and women will sometimes have to adjust their interview style to that of their interviewer. Listen carefully to know whether the interviewer is looking for information about your approach or your result, and answer questions accordingly.

Sensitivity to others is an important tool in job searching. According to many studies, men who are focused on a result (getting hired, for example) may lose sight of the needs of others along the way. Saying thank you and making an effort to network on behalf of others are two chores men are going to have to deal with during a job search. Remember, these are also life skills that will help you get ahead in many situations, not just job searching. Women, conversely, may be overly concerned about what other people think. Taking a cue from the men in your life, let go of the judgments of others and be confident in yourself. A little ego goes a long way in a job search, provided it's honest confidence, not bravado.

Career management requires constant adaptation to situations and to the people around you. While men and women often overlap on the behavior spectrum, those who are aware of their

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tendencies can use that information achieve their desired results more easily.

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