

1. WWWWW

- Who am I?
- What can I do?
- What do I want?
- Where do I start?

1.1 Who am I?

Who am I? That is the first question you should ask yourself. What are your good and bad sides? How is your character put together? The reason this matters so much is that an employer is looking for someone who fits their company or a team in a particular department. Job advertisements often contain terms that in themselves say very little, such as 'flexible, enthusiastic, copes well with stress, team player'. Only in context does it become clear what such a term actually means. The mistake is to adopt these terms unthinkingly when you are asked to describe yourself. The employer has a certain image in mind of the character an employee in their organisation should have; they know the 'context'. Some 'bad' qualities may in fact be just what is needed: a stubborn, shy or dominant personality can complement the other colleagues extremely well. There is no point in pretending to be someone you are not; after all, you also want to feel at home in your new workplace.

Before you learn to present yourself well, it is essential to know who you actually are.

Exercises: Who am I?

1. Take a pen and paper. Without thinking about it for too long, write down 10 good qualities and 10 bad qualities of your own. Don't just think them up in your head: actually write them down. 
2. Go to an astrology website and have a personality horoscope drawn up (free of charge). (e.g. www.astro.com) The point is not that your character is written in the stars; it merely serves as an aid to help you identify characteristics (and the wording of them!). Descriptions of this kind are packed with character traits. Take a few that you had not yet written down in exercise 1 and add them to your list.
3. Ask a loved one (partner, close friend, family member) what he or she considers your good and bad characteristics to be. Ask for five. Explain beforehand that it is for job application training and that you will not argue about it or take it personally. Note these characteristics down on a new sheet of paper with the heading 'Others'. 

4. Ask someone who knows you, but who you feel does not have a very high opinion of you, the same question. Think of friends of your loved ones, colleagues, someone from your sports club or that uncle who always looks at you somewhat reproachfully. Ask in a businesslike way and mention that it is for job application training. Don't feel uncomfortable; the information can be very valuable to you. (Well? Surprised?) Note these characteristics down below the previous ones on the same sheet of paper.
5. Now ask the same of a very casual acquaintance, for example a neighbour you don't know, someone from your tennis club you have never spoken to, or a barman at a café you sometimes visit. Don't feel embarrassed; mention that it is part of a training course you are taking. Note down these characteristics on the same sheet of paper.
6. Take both sheets of paper together, look at the characteristics again and now choose three that you feel describe your most essential qualities. Choose three positive characteristics and three negative ones.

1.2 What can I do?

'What can I do?' is the second question you need to ask yourself. Besides a particular type of person, employers also set requirements for what you must be able to do. Sometimes that is a fairly broad requirement (VMBO level of thinking and working), sometimes a very explicit one (speaking fluent French). Be honest about what you can do. If you do not speak French fluently, do not under any circumstances lie about it just to get the job! And as a starter, do not apply for end-of-career positions.

On the other hand, you do need to map out clearly what your own potential is, what you can do and what you are worth. You may be able to do things you have never even thought about. Besides the competencies you have acquired through education and work experience, think about your language skills, knowledge gained from hobbies and software skills. Think about your life experience too: full-time motherhood, for instance, is an excellent training ground for management.

Exercises: What can I do?

1. Take a stopwatch. For two minutes, say out loud everything you are good at. Don't play yourself down; go at a rapid pace and name everything. (Including that you look after your fish well, greet your neighbour properly, are good at maths, are good at throwing parties.) Don't hold back!
2. Now that you are warmed up: write down what you can do and what you might be able to make use of in a work environment. Take this very broadly. Also include qualities you have gained through clubs and societies or hobbies. Working accurately thanks to years of embroidery. Management skills from

organising club tournaments, or PR knowledge from throwing the best-attended street parties. Write down everything you can do in the broadest possible sense.

1.3 What do I want?

'What do I want?' is the third question you should ask yourself. Bear in mind that work is where you will spend most of your time. On average, you see your colleagues more often than your own partner. If you don't feel 'at home' at work, this will undoubtedly start to work against you. You may become tired, unhappy and even ill.

Even though your dream job is not always there for the taking, and sometimes even remains a fantasy for ever (such as wanting to be a top footballer when you are a 50-year-old woman), it is still very important to map out what you want in your life and why. Take the example of the woman who wants to become a top footballer: perhaps that woman enjoys being physically active, working in a team, or having responsibility and the chance to 'score'. (Or the salary!)

Discover your own motivations and always keep an eye on 'your own bigger story'. Set goals for the future and adjust them as you go. Did you think you wanted to be a flight attendant and is it a huge disappointment? Then adjust your wishes. Even if in the meantime you have to do something for practical (financial) reasons that has nothing to do with your goal, make sure you keep applying for jobs and keep working on your ultimate goal in your spare time. Sometimes your most important wish in life does not lie in the field of work. For instance, you may want relaxing work in a quiet environment so that you can spend a lot of time with your children. Opportunities for advancement are then unimportant to you, while location and a low workload matter all the more.

Exercises: What do I want?

1. Take a pen and paper. Write down: If I could do anything I wanted to do, then I would.... (fill in what you would want to do). Then write 10 sentences with 'because', each referring back to the previous sentence. For example: If I could do anything I wanted to do, then I would be a firefighter, because I like rescuing people heroically, because I want to do something important, because I want to do something useful, because I want to help other people, because I enjoy working together with others, because the people around me make me happy, because I consider the well-being of others important. Etc. Now look at the reasons you have written down. Can you spot a common thread in your motivation? You can also do this exercise a few times if several professions appeal to you. Find out whether the same reasons keep coming up. 

2. Search the internet for job advertisements, look at as many as you can and write down what you like about an advertisement and what you don't. Which jobs appeal to you, what kind of company appeals to you (small, large), which sector appeals to you (government, business), do you want a 9-to-5 job or precisely not? Do you want security or does that repel you? Would you rather have money than free time? Would you rather commit yourself to society than to the business world? Does a civil-servant mentality make you happy or furious?
3. Take a new sheet of paper and write down, on the left-hand side, a top 5 of your most important motivators from the first exercise. On the right-hand side, write down a top 5 of the roles you aspire to.

1.4 Where do I start?

You have now created your 'personal CV' (p-CV) setting out who you are, what you can do and what you want. Keep your p-CV in a separate folder and make changes or additions as you discover more about yourself and your wishes during your job applications.

With your p-cv in hand, you can start scanning advertisements and see whether a job suits you. Look at these advertisements from your own point of view: do I want this job? Does this job suit me? Does the company suit me? Analyse the advertisement and read between the lines: a request for a stress-resistant and accurate candidate sometimes means that the company is a shambles and that they are looking for someone to put out fires 24/7!

Now that you have a personal CV, you can also apply actively to companies you find attractive. Look at their websites, search there for vacancies or send a speculative application.

Make use of your personal network as well. Don't be ashamed; tell everyone that you are looking for work, what kind of work you are looking for and why. Why the why? The same job evokes different associations in different people. (Think of the footballer example: perhaps you think of being 'in the spotlight' while someone else thinks of working in teams.) An acquaintance may just happen to know of a job that matches your motivations and goals exactly. After that it is almost an open goal, because nothing works better than being introduced!

Exercises: Where do I start?

1. Choose one half-day this week (at least 4 hours) in which you look for suitable vacancies in the newspaper, on the internet and through your network. Keep your p-cv folder to hand.