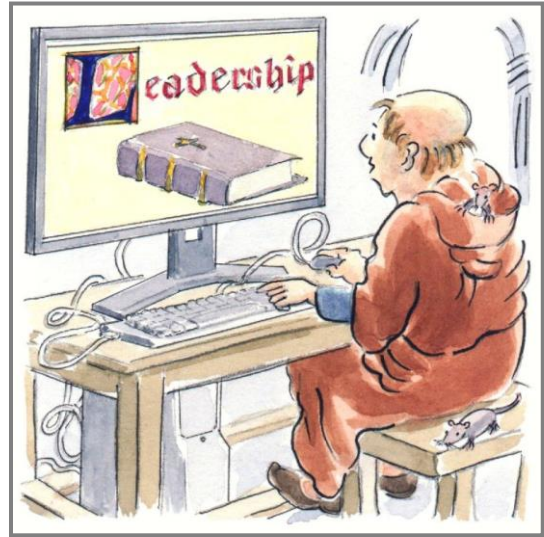


Job applications in Christian ministry

Part B: Presentation

A23 Articles series: Leadership



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Throughout this article I am addressing you as you apply for any post in a church such as Minister, Youth Pastor, Director of Music or Administrator, or for a post in a mission agency such as CEO, Regional Manager or Finance Officer. Most of the examples will come from a church setting.

I am writing personally to you as though I am one of the team who are short-listing and interviewing for this appointment. I do this not because I wish to appear to put myself in a position of power. No, in this process we are both on a journey to discover God's will for this post and your application so he must be the one in control.

But I want you, in your application, always to have someone like me in mind. Put yourself in the shoes of those responsible for the selection and you are more likely to write and present yourself in a helpful way.

As this article is longer than most items on this website it is split into two separate files. This is Article A23, **Presentation**. Article A22, **Preparation**, precedes it and needs to be read first. Here is how the two fit together.

A: PREPARATION (Article A22)

1: Be ready

- 1.1 Seek God's will
- 1.2 Consider your CV
- 1.3 Write your CV
- 1.4 Follow key guidelines
- 1.5 Format your CV
- 1.6 Prepare a private assessment

2: Study the profile

- 2.1 Check this could be you
- 2.2 Read between the lines
- 2.3 Define questions to ask
- 2.4 Understand the process

B: PRESENTATION (Article A23)

3: Write your application

- 3.1 Explain why you have applied
- 3.2 Address the issues
- 3.3 Be real about yourself
- 3.4 Give me reasons to select you
- 3.5 Apply in the required format

4: Prepare for the interview

- 4.1 Prepare the formal interview
- 4.2 Be ready for the questions
- 4.3 Make a presentation
- 4.4 Get the most out of your visit
- 4.5 Learn from the outcome

3: Write your application

The first two sections of this article (in Part A) have been concerned with your preparation – and most of your work has now been covered. In this third section I assume that you are now preparing your written application. Here I ask you again to put yourself in my shoes as a selector and see it from my perspective. That should help you pitch yourself correctly. Then, always complete an application form in typescript, not handwriting. Even if you have the neatest of writing, reading a pile of applications is much easier in typescript.

I present this as a series of eight questions (Q1-Q8) over five sections of text (3.1-3.5).

3.1 Explain why you have applied

If you have already followed advice so far, you will have checked carefully that you feel it is right that you should apply for this post (section 2.1). Now you have to convince me that this is a right decision. I am praying for God's discernment, but I need your help.

Here are two questions that will be going through my mind. An interviewer I know and respect often asks as a first question at formal interview: 'Why now? Why here?' So I start there.

Q1: Why are you considering leaving your present post?

The reason may be straightforward but a sentence of explanation somewhere is still necessary.

- You have completed a reasonable number of years for the post in question and you are looking for a fresh challenge.
- You are at college or in a fixed-term post and the period expires soon.
- Your family are now at an age when you can look again for full time employment.
- You were not thinking of leaving but saw the details for this post and felt it matched you particularly well, or friends encouraged you to apply.

But it may be that things are not so straightforward.

- You are at present out of work and urgently looking for something.
- You have only been in your present post a short time but it is not working out well.
- You have been made redundant or, possibly, dismissed.

In these last cases I would prefer you to be honest. The application is not the place to go into detail but you will need to work harder to

show why you are applying for this new post than people in the first category. Better to say now that you and your boss cannot work together, explain what this means in a sentence and what you have learned from it, and then go on with an excellent application than to hide this now and for it to come to light at interview or through a reference.

Q2: Why are you applying for this particular position?

Again, the reason may be fairly clear. If I can see that you have a good reason for looking for something new and that this post clearly matches your gifts, experience and personality pretty well, you will not need to do much. Be careful, though, about overdoing it. Do not tell me that God has told you to apply for this post, or that this is the perfect post for your spiritual gifts.

But sometimes people apply for something where the match is not so close and, in these cases, I need to know more. Here are some typical cases.

- This is a deeply rural church, and your experience has been in urban areas until now. If you don't help me, I will have questions. But if you tell me that you were brought up on a farm and have always felt a call to get back to that environment, that explains it.
- You are relatively young and inexperienced in ministry and are now applying for a post of considerable responsibility. You may well be God's choice (as Samuel found with David), but I need to have some pretty good reasons to know why I should consider you seriously.
- You are a manager in the retail industry applying for a post as a Children's Worker. I can see you have two children of your own but I need more than that to justify taking you on to the next stage.

For a written application, try to include brief answers to both Q1 and Q2. The answers do not have to come at the start and may be slipped in at other points in the application.

3.2 Address the issues

I now need to ask myself two more questions to help me to judge whether you should be considered further for this post. These relate not to you now, but to the vacant position.

Q3: How wisely have you assessed the situation?

This takes the previous question on a little further. I want to see evidence that you understand this church or mission agency and the needs for this post. So if you have followed the advice in section 2.2 and read carefully between the lines, analysed the position and addressed what you see as the key features, I will be impressed.

Let me now give you the kind of things that I do *not* want to see in an application.

- A general application that you are probably putting in for several posts, changing the name of the church and a few other details here and there. This kind of application usually stands out a mile.
- An application that sells you and your gifts but seems light on this post and the needs here. Sometimes I get the distinct impression that the person applying is trying to twist the post to fit what they know they can do. I want you to start from this post and show me why I should consider you seriously for it, not to start with you and show me that this post could be made into your dream job.
- A pedantic approach to the papers for the post, ticking every box mentioned and giving me information that I should be able to assume. The post wants someone who prays and you do that. They want a good sense of humour and you have that. From all this I can see that you can read, but I have no evidence that you can think.
- An approach that seems to show that you know exactly what the problems are and have already formed a clear plan for how to tackle them all in the first three months. I shall be suspicious if you seem to know more about this post than we do. Tell me you will 'explore' or 'investigate' or 'listen' more than you will 'initiate', 'scrap' or 'revolutionise'.

A copy of what you have done in your present post. So, as a Pastoral Worker, you stopped all the home groups and started 'missional clusters' (whatever they are) instead and that is exactly what you intend to do here too. This idea is valid, but as one possibility among several others, not as a definite action to take when you know so little.

Q4: Have you sussed out the likely problems?

But I do need to sense that, once you have checked out the real position, you have some ability in problem-solving. In fact I want you to spot the possible problems, even if they have not been articulated in print as such.

Here are some possible difficulties associated with three church posts. Some recognition of them and outline ideas of how you might deal with them could justify your short-listing. Then at formal interview I can dialogue with you about one or two in more detail.

For a Minister

- a financial deficit;
- the previous Minister dying in post after 21 years;
- lack of any small groups in church life;
- decline in numbers over the years;
- managing a gifted staff team in a larger church.

For a Schools Worker

- few teenagers in church;
- vandalism by local youths;
- lack of adequate equipment and budget;
- loneliness as there are no other staff;
- a youth group that is almost entirely female.

For a Church Administrator

- an amateur website;
- an elderly volunteers team;
- the previous post-holder putting in hours of overtime;
- coping with tight deadlines;
- being on call at Sunday services.

3.3 Be real about yourself

Any application needs to be strenuously honest for any Christian post (as for any other post applied for by a Christian). You may not intend to tell any lies, but I need to feel I am receiving an accurate assessment (see section 1.4). So, two more questions I ask.

Q5: Am I discovering the real you?

I want you to be honest about your strengths, but I don't want a hard sell, thank you. So I certainly want to hear about where your gifts and experience will fit you well to this post, but I also want to know where your weaknesses lie.

I will respect you for your honesty. Tell me that administration is not your strong point (though don't bother to go on if applying for a post as Administrator!). Your referees will probably tell me anyway and I would far rather hear it first from you. "I am not particularly good at managing my diary but my husband helps me and tells me I have improved significantly over the past year. I have a part-time PA in my present post and would like to explore whether there might be funding for something similar here."

If you have health problems, say so and explain how you overcome them. "I am somewhat dyslexic so my spelling is not good. However, many people I deal with are unaware of this because I use a computer with a sophisticated spellchecker."

One question I sometimes ask at interview is, "What would scare you most if we now told you we were offering you this post?". If someone assures me that nothing would frighten them, I cannot see that they are the right person or this post is the right one for them. If they pause for a moment and then mention something out of their experience, or a level of responsibility they have not had to cope with before, or something about the risks they would be putting their family under, that sounds good. I want to know you will be frightened, because it shows the post is going to challenge you and will ensure you have to rely on God.

Q6: Are you telling me the whole story?

In section 1.4 I advised that you never leave gaps in your CV that I as a selector might become suspicious about. The same applies for an application. Here are some examples that would give me hesitations about whether to short-list you.

- The church asks for someone with outstanding pastoral gifts as a key requirement but you say nothing about this. Are you hiding anything?
- This is a church clearly set in a particular tradition or network of which you do not seem to have any experience. You do not address this in your application. Do you just not see it as important, or do you have an agenda to win the church over to your own particular style?
- There is some aspect of your past that raises an issue, but you make no

reference to it. For example, you apply for a post at the church where you were yourself a member for some time.

- Aspects of your CV raise questions: you are leaving your current post after only a short time and do not explain why; you do not give your current Minister or manager as a referee and fail to comment on this.
- You are applying for a post that would be classified by most people as one step beyond what you should naturally be looking for next, but say nothing about this.

In each of these cases you may be an excellent candidate who is well worth short-listing but, if you keep quiet on issues that are obvious to me as a selector, I am left with questions about you.

There may also be points about your beliefs or practices that might conflict with this church's position (although not necessarily stated in the papers). If you hold strong views and feel this might be an issue, it is worth raising these now rather than waiting for them to come up at interview. Issues might include your firm views on:

- doctrine: Scripture, salvation or other key issues;
- the gay or trans issues;
- baptism, divorce, remarriage;
- gifts such as tongues, prophecy, healing
- women's ministry;
- current debates within the denomination concerned.

3.4 Give me reasons to select you

But looking at this post and then at you, how can I be sure that you have the potential to fill this role? What I have to work from is your past and present experience but I need to assess your future capability (the point I made in section 1.2). This applies in the written application and at interview.

Q7: What evidence are you giving me for all you tell me?

Don't underplay your strengths. However, I don't want to know so much about your own opinion of your brilliance, but some evidence that what you are telling me stacks up. So a leadership position needs someone who can handle conflict. To say "I am good at conflict" will not impress. To outline, briefly, a conflict you resolved would be different.

Don't write, "My main gift is preaching". That tells me nothing other than your opinion which others may or may not agree with. Instead, "I believe passionately in preaching and use a

variety of means. On average one person per week asks if they can talk to me one-to-one about something I have said in the sermon.” That tells me much more. It is not conclusive (perhaps it is the same one person every week!) but it is something to pick up at interview. Here are some other examples.

- “When I arrived the youth group had eleven members, all apart from two of whom were girls. Meetings averaged five or six. Three years on and we have 26 members, many of whom have joined through recommendation of a friend at school and attendance averages 19 with about 40% being boys.”
- “When a local man died through a drugs overdose, I invited people to attend a meeting with the community police officer. 32 came (of whom 26 were not church members). Out of that came the local Drug-awareness Project which they asked me to chair.”
- “During the past two years I have recruited and trained a team of four volunteer office staff which means the reception facility has been greatly improved. I now have time to focus on the major issues I have to address, which is how I managed to get the first-ever staff handbook written.” (You might bring a copy with you to interview.)

Q8: Can I detect some enthusiasm for your ministry?

Finally, I want to feel some passion in both the written application and at interview. But the more you try to fake this the more obvious it is. It is worth checking through a written application to see if there is any emotion there. If it is flat and dull, don't engineer something but write in addition about something that excites you.

If you believe in preaching, explain that it is changed lives that excite you, not your ego trip. If it is pastoral work, talk about how local people coming to believe in their own abilities to visit and lead worship is what gets you out of bed in the morning, even if the changes are small and come at a high cost. If quality administration sends shivers down your spine, explain something of your excitement at the projects you have completed because of what they have achieved.

Print is not an exciting medium, but don't rely on exclamation marks! Be aware too that double exclamation marks are a complete turn-off!! If you are excited, it should shine through. Never manufacture passion.

3.5 Apply in the required format

It may be tempting to try to copy one application for another, but it is usually obvious if someone has done this where the two formats required are not identical. Here are some possible formats you may be expected to apply in.

Standard forms to complete

Many of the questions will apply to information you have on your CV, which is why it is wise to have written a CV before seeking out any posts. But check that you complete the form in the way requested.

If it is an online form, fill it in exactly as instructed. If the spaces do not expand, do not go beyond the boundaries given to you. If they do, don't put in too much as this confuses rather than impresses. Try to lay it all out clearly in columns wherever possible so that I as a selector can read it quickly and easily.

If the form includes doctrinal questions (such as 'What is your understanding of salvation?') take your time and work through drafts before you feel you have something that is right and ready to be entered on the form.

If it asks what theological traditions have shaped your ministry (as the standard Church of England form for clergy does) be honest but state it within the context of what the church is looking for. It is however important to be aware of the meaning and sub-meanings of different terms, most of which carry baggage with them. Much will depend on who is reading your application. For example, will everyone reading the papers understand a term you use such as 'Word and Spirit' or 'Liberal Catholic' or 'Open Evangelical'?

There should be one question, however, which allows you to explain why you have applied for this post, and/or how well you fit the job description and person profile. It is often this question or questions on which the selectors will fix their attention provided nothing else you have stated gives cause for concern. It is often better to state your answer to this point on a separate sheet and give a reference to this on the form. You can then use more space, but never more than two sides of A4, and lay it out well (see all the advice about laying out your CV in section 1.5).

CV and reasons for applying

You may find there is no form to complete and instead you are asked to send in your CV and your reactions to the profile for the post.

This should end up as giving almost exactly the same details as requested in an application form approach (other than the possible questions there about doctrinal understanding). Here it is the request for reactions to the profile that is the equivalent of the question as to why you have applied for the post.

If you are simply asked to send in your CV with a covering letter, it would be worth letting that letter do the same work as the reasons for application or reactions to profile request. You will need to be careful here not to overdo the extra detail in case at this stage they do not require this. A telephone call should enable you to discover what might be appropriate.

For your covering letter:

- Ensure you lay it out in correct letter format and address it the right person with their rightly spelled name and correct title. It is worth erring on the side of formality, so 'Dear (title – surname)' unless you know the person, and 'Yours sincerely' rather than a flowery Christian greeting. Use a bold one line heading to start, referencing the job.
- Include all your contact details within the letter-heading.
- Keep it to no more than two sides: or use one side and then add another sheet for your reasons for applying – or add a special third side to you CV.
- Offer to supply further information in any format they wish and try to sound enthusiastic without overdoing it.
- Remember the advice about layout for CVs and keep to short paragraphs, tabular or bullet form where that makes sense and aids understanding, plenty of margins and spaces between lists and paragraphs, one font, and so on.

Then get it all carefully proofed both for typos but also for the way you have expressed yourself and your style of writing. Bad sentence construction is not going to impress a selector. You can send this by email as a pdf attachment on headed paper, rather than in the text of the email.

Choose your referees with care

Practices on when to add references into the process vary. They might be taken up on application and available for short-listing, or only for those short-listed and available to the interviewers, or only shown to interviewers after

the interviews, or only taken up for the successful candidate to check that all is in order.

The choice of referees will, within some well-marked boundaries, be within your power but I have seen plenty of unwise choices. If you are asked to submit names and contact details of referees with your application (as is normal) bear in mind the following guidelines.

- 1 Choose the number and types of people they ask for. So if they want three referees of whom one should be your current employer, don't send in four names (unless you can explain a good reason, such as you currently have two distinct employers).
- 2 Ensure you have approached these people for permission before you submit their names. In the case of your employer this will not be necessary if you do not want him or her to be aware of applications. In this case ask that they are not approached without your further permission.
- 3 If the form asks for a character referee, choose someone who knows you well over some time and who would be able to write honestly about you. Better someone you trust to be objective than an enthusiastic member of your fan club.
- 4 If the form asks for a referee who has observed your ministry, choose someone who can comment on your current use of the kind of gifts you need for this post. It is not so helpful to have someone who has not seen you for a few years, or who never sees you preach or lead a youth group or whatever.
- 5 Choose people who are likely to be honest and express with integrity weaknesses as well as strengths. If I see a reference which says you have no weaknesses that the referee is aware of (and I do see these), that throws into doubt his or her assessment of everything else about you.
- 6 It can be well worth discussing your application with your referees before you submit it. They can then say if they feel this is not right for you, which may make you rethink, rather than being asked to comment when they think you should not have applied for this post.

See Training Notes TN76, *How to prepare a job reference*, for advice on being a referee.

4: Prepare for the interview

So, you have been short-listed or head-hunted and now invited for interview. This is where some careful thought and preparation will prove worthwhile. Section 4 seeks to tell you what you might expect and how to approach the whole event.

4.1 Prepare the formal interview

One piece of preliminary advice: read Article A17 on this website. *Staff selection step-by-step* is written for those who will be interviewing you, so it would be no bad idea to have a peek at that.

The interview process may include a number of elements, but here I am focusing solely on what I have termed so far in this article ‘the formal interview’. Within that I will leave any presentation you are required to make until section 4.2. So here are you, without any other candidates, in a room with the selectors who are going to ask you some questions. It sounds terrifying – but remember that some of them, if not used to doing this, may be almost as nervous as you!

Your task is simply to be true to the person that God has made as you. You will have prayed about this – and the church or mission agency will be praying for you too. You are not there to create a false impression, to hide your faults or to shine above the other candidates. But you do want to put yourself across in as good a light as possible. So here are some ideas.

Be ready for the likely format

A typical interview may last from 30 to 90 minutes. If appointing someone in a responsible position I usually ask for an hour per candidate plus some space in between each one. But sometimes in church appointments no more than 40 minutes is allocated.

Normally you should be asked to wait somewhere comfortable when you arrive and given proper hospitality. Be ready for the programme to run late which may mean you are kept waiting there for longer than you expected – take something to do that will calm you down if anxious. If you hear the previous candidate leaving remember that the selectors may take ten minutes for a comfort break or to write up notes.

The person chairing the selectors should then come and take you into the interview room, at which point you will probably be introduced to each person while your mind is in a haze. It is wise to do some preliminary research to find just who will be interviewing you and who each of them represents.

A good selector will start with a pretty general question (such as “What attracted you about this post to make you apply?”) or ask you to tell the panel a bit about your present role or background. Each member of the panel will probably have a pre-arranged set of questions to ask you and every other candidate, though the supplementary questions will depend on your answers.

After the panel have been through their list, you should be asked if you have any questions to ask them. It is a good idea to have something ready at this point. You should then be asked for your contact availability later that day or the next day and informed when you are likely to hear the outcome. There should also be a check that your expenses are being covered.

You should also be asked, “If you were offered the post, would you be likely to say ‘yes’?”. If the answer is indeed ‘yes’, do include some slight hesitation in your reply. “It is very likely but I would of course want to check with my spouse and children first before I gave you a definite answer,” or “Almost certainly but I would value a pause for an hour or so to pray and be sure this was right for me”.

When you leave you are usually free to go home.

Dress appropriately

The position is not as straightforward as it would have been a few years ago.

You cannot go far wrong by erring on the formal side, but whatever you do it is wise to look smart even if it is smart casual. A dark pin-striped Savile Row suit (for men or women) may be further than you need to go for most local-church posts, but most panels will want to see that you are taking this process seriously. Office posts in a mission agency may deserve slightly greater formality.

Dress to avoid looking either dull or extreme. The default for Ministers would be to include a dog collar. Aim to show that you realise that this is a professional setting, but other than that you don’t want your clothing to be what people remember about you. Be sensible for the post in question, the church and the likely interviewers. But don’t go outside your own comfort zones or you will feel uneasy and not interview well.

Think body language

When I am interviewing I pay particular attention to each candidate's body language.

You should be given an upright chair so practise walking in and sitting down. What will you do with your legs? If you spend the interview crossing and uncrossing them, the selectors will start to focus on you and not your answers. What will you be holding and so where do you place your arms?

Practise shaking hands with the panel by asking a couple of friends to mock up the situation for you. As a selector I notice both the limp hand and the one that grips me like a vice. You will be nervous but try to get it right.

But the most important part of your body will be your eyes. When you are introduced to me will you look at me? When I ask you questions will I get your attention or will you stare down at the floor? I want to engage with you at interview so I want you to look at me, and around at the other selectors as you give an answer, then back to me again. With some interviewees I end up staring a candidate in the face willing him or her to look at me and engage with me.

If all this comes naturally to you, fine. If not, ask a friend to give you a mock interview so they can check out how you come across in every way: appearance, mannerisms, posture, answering questions. Do try to smile from time to time.

4.2 Be ready for the questions

Prepare answers to likely questions

Put yourself in my shoes, reread your application and the profile for the post, and think of the kind of questions *you* would want to ask the candidate. Write them down and think how *you* would answer them.

When in interview, obvious though it may sound, listen to the question. So often I hear a candidate answering a question that has not been asked. If the interviewer does not know how to interrupt you, you then speak for three minutes, only to hear "But what I really meant was..." and that is not good news. If you do not understand the point being made, ask for clarification.

Secondly, pause for two or three seconds to think how to answer it. If you rush in immediately you may not give the answer you later wish you had, and the panel may feel you never stop and think. Don't play for time with the comment "That's a very good (or intriguing) question". I've had that a number of times and I am afraid I come straight back with, "But what I want is a very good answer"!

But don't pause for more than two or three seconds or the whole interview slows right down. If you are stuck, think of an alternative. A panel I was on asked a candidate "What kind of conflicts have you had to handle in your present church and how did you deal with them?". The candidate paused and then said, "I can't think of one because I have not been in the leadership role, but I could give you an example from my position as a manager in my office – would that be all right?" It was and he convinced us all in no time that he knew how to deal with conflict.

When listing possible questions, consider also the following (these are with a Minister or CEO in mind):

- Which parts of the job description and person profile do you match best, and which parts least well?
- What are your views on (current issues of the moment in the Christian world)?
- What do you teach on (specific issues of debated doctrine)?
- What are your own practices in (issues like pastoral visiting, policy on women's ministry, and other topics listed under Q6 in section 3.3)?
- What experience in your present ministry will prepare you well for (each main feature of the job)?
- How do you develop your own spiritual life? How have you grown as a Christian over the past year?
- What would you do in the following case (then a safeguarding issue of some kind)?
- How do you protect your time off? Do you overwork and if so what do you do to maintain boundaries?
- How would you solve these problems: (any issues for Q4 in section 3.2)?
- What is your experience of solving conflicts / building a team / pastoring difficult people / helping people to go with you (and other people issues)?
- What would you do in the first six months in post?

Aim to get a dialogue going

Your answer to any question should not be too long. Better to stop short and let the panel ask a supplementary, or at least ask something like, "Do you want me to give some more detail about that?". A good interviewer should stop you if you go on too long, but many do not know how to and then everyone gets bored.

The best interviews stop being Q...A...Q...A...Q and turn into a discussion. A panel who are good

at asking supplementaries can do that, but you can help. Throw in the occasional question yourself and the whole interview comes alive (S: Selector, C: Candidate).

S How would you go about introducing 'Back to Church Sunday' into our programme?

C Well, first there is no point in encouraging anyone back to church if they don't like what they find there! So I would want to ensure we had a service that was outsider-friendly. Then it is vital the whole congregation is welcoming to newcomers. Have you done any training for everyone on welcome and hospitality?

S We once did something for our welcome team.

C That's a great start, but I feel we need to work with everyone – almost so we don't need a welcome team! So that would be one idea to check out. But then there needs to be a next step on after they come back to church. Can you give me an idea of how many newcomers you might see in the course of a month at present?

And so on. But be careful you don't overdo it.

4.3 Make a presentation

Within the interview procedure, candidates may be asked to prepare some form of presentation or be given some kind of practical test.

Possibilities include:

- Minister – prepare a five minute talk for a mid-week service on a specified Bible passage. This may then be followed by interview questions in the light of the presentation.
- Administrator – take some form of keyboard (typing) test or an in-tray priority exercise.
- Youth worker – observe them as they take part in a club night activity.
- Finance Officer – getting the Board to agree a large budget increase.
- Anyone – leading a team meeting to achieve a given task, perhaps with the other candidates.

If there is a presentation a PowerPoint display may be permitted. If you include this, keep it very simple with only a few slides and no fancy slide transitions. What the interviewers are looking for is your ability to communicate well; that depends on your material and your personal enthusiasm and clarity much more than the hi-tech aspects. They may also be checking your

theology if you are giving a short talk on a Bible passage.

The presentation, if used, will be an important part of the formal interview. Consider these points if you are asked to give a short talk.

- 1 If you have been asked for a five-minute presentation, ensure it is no longer than that. Obvious, but in my experience of interviews few people manage to stop within the time allotted.
- 2 Address the panel as your congregation or audience as if they really are. Of course it is a forced situation, but play it for real.
- 3 There will not be time for anything complicated so aim to get across one simple message, not ten key points.
- 4 The beginning is so important. Tell a story, bring out an object as a visual aid, relate it all to us playing the part of church members or whatever we are supposed to be.
- 5 Get the body language right – and do look at panel members as you speak. Glance at your notes, but try not to read a text.

In Free Churches, 'preaching with a view' as described in section 2.4 can be seen as a particular form of presentation.

Be prepared for case studies or role play

These fall somewhere between interview questions and presentations.

You may find a panel member describes a case study scene and ask how you would react to it. This has the potential to liven up the interview, provided you are not put off by the approach. So (if you are a male candidate for a Children's Worker post):

"After church one Sunday a 13-year old girl who is often disruptive comes to you in tears, saying she needs to talk about something that is happening at home. She asks if she can see you now privately because you are the only person she feels can help. Her parents are out of sight and the female leader for her group is away that week. What might you do and say?"

It is less likely that you will be asked to involve yourself in a role play, but I use the technique as an interviewer from time to time. If interviewing for a mission office post, I might say that the office phone rings at 4.45 pm on Friday just as you are trying to prepare a PowerPoint presentation for a church visit on Sunday and get home on time. The candidate picks it up. I then play a difficult elderly man who has a complaint

about his mailings and who then wanders off on a range of issues, criticises the CEO and generally tries to hold the candidate on the phone for as long as possible. I want to see if the candidate can finish the conversation well and get me off the phone without being off-putting.

4.4 Get the most out of your visit

In most posts of any responsibility, the formal interview will only be one element in your visit. For many posts the visit may extend over a full day, or sometimes over one and a half with the formal interviews taking place the morning after the visit of the day before.

First, there will be parts of the visit where they are observing you, as in the formal interview and any presentation. The key is to prepare in advance as far as you are able, and to have an attitude that simply says that you will seek to be yourself before God, rather than to be competing to find a 'winner'.

But, secondly, there should be a significant amount of time where you are, in effect, observing them and learning about the church or mission. Every interview should be a two-way process so that both parties can assess whether they might be right for each other. Possibilities include:

- A tour of the church buildings or mission offices and related properties. Do pick up any free literature that might give you helpful background and do not be afraid to be asking your tour guide questions about how things work.
- A visit to any tied housing. It is vital that both partners in a marriage see the property and if that is not possible on the day because the spouse is at work, another visit will be a must if offered the post. Ask about redecoration: who is responsible, who pays, and what choices the new post-holder will have.
- A tour of the area served by the church. Try to discover what kind of people live there, what the employment patterns are, what social problems exist, and so on.
- Meet other staff and/or key office-holders. Their reactions to you will obviously be important in the decision of whom to offer the post to, but normally they should not be interviewing you as such, though they may try to do this.
- Meet the church leadership body, senior staff or Board. This is likely to be a buffet meal with all the candidates. The purpose here is to give you an opportunity to ask

questions. But everyone will be forming an opinion of the candidates. Social skills are important here. If this is a problem for you, work out in advance a plan for how you will try to cope with the situation and talk to people.

Throughout this, your test will be how you react to strangers and build immediate links with them. Just coming across as being interested in each person you meet will be fine. And in asking questions yourself, try not to come over as aggressive or with ideas already formed. Make use of every opportunity to assess the church or mission agency to see whether this post might be right for you if offered it. You are the interviewer in this part of the process.

4.5 Learn from the outcome

After it is all over, turn the whole experience into a learning exercise. It will probably have been quite a draining experience so put some time aside to think carefully. Here are some possible questions to try. You might want to talk them through with a friend or close family.

- What did I learn about myself as a person and child of God?
- Would I change anything about the way I approached this whole process, knowing what I know now?
- What do I need to learn about technique in any way for future applications?
- If I am offered this post, would I feel it right to accept? Or what might I want to see could be changed?
- If am not offered this post, what do I learn for my future and/or my next application?
- Whatever the outcome, what have I gained from this process? And what do I thank God for?

If you are told you are not short-listed

This comes logically after part 3 of this article, but is included here for completeness.

Remember that some posts will have many more people not short-listed than the number offered an interview. So seek to learn from the experience (you can use the questions above in this situation too).

It is quite in order to contact the person to whom you sent your application. Rather than ask "Why was I not short-listed?" (you are unlikely to get a straight answer, anyway) try instead, "Do you have any advice for me on the way I should put in a written application or the type of post I might apply for?". It might be wise to email the person

first and say you would value it if you could ring the next day (or whenever). This gives the person a chance to look out your papers and prepare an answer.

If you are told the answer is 'no' after interview

Be aware that in most interviews that your emotions may run high at this point. But it is quite in order to ask some questions. Do be careful not to come across as angry at the outcome.

Again, do not ask why you failed to get the job. Good selectors will know that it is dangerous to say anything too much here and the question may appear to be rather too forceful. Ask instead if the selectors can help you learn positive lessons from this for the future. Do you need to change the way you come across? Should you be applying for jobs that are rather different from this one?

When you have answers (or as much of an answer as you have been given), spend some time to assess carefully what God may be saying to you. Talk to friends and family.

If you are offered the post after interview

Make sure this does feel right. If you have hesitations, raise them – never bury them at this point or you may regret that action later. Do not delay too long in accepting unless there are unresolved issues that need further discussion and even another visit, but give yourself time to talk with your family or close friends, to set aside time to think and pray.

Then you will need to sit on the information until it is in the public domain. Consider how you are required to give in your notice for your present job.

The real challenge, of course, is yet to come....

This is the second of two parts of this article (see page 1 for list of contents). To read Part A, 'Preparation', which covers CVs and job profiles go to <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index> then A22.

This article is available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index> then A23. The item is preceded by Article A22. See also Articles A17, *Staff selection step-by-step*, and A50, *The patronage process as drama*, plus Training Notes TN28, *No two leaders are the same*, TN65, *Sharp interview questions*, TN76, *How to prepare a job reference*, TN114, *How to prepare a church profile*, and TN132, *What you look for in your Minister*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File A22 under Leadership (with a link to Communication)

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