

Let's GLINC Differently About How to Sell and Brand Yourself Virtually

Gerry Lewis:

Hi and welcome to another episode of GLINC Outside the Box. I'm Gerry Lewis.

Gerry Lewis:

Preparing for and doing the interview is perhaps one of the most nerve-wracking times for job candidates. Regardless of whether it's for a frontline role or a C-suite position, weeks go into making sure you bring your A game in front of the interviewer sitting across from you. But what if the interviewer across from you is on a screen? How does that change the dynamics of the interview? How do you create rapport? Small talk? Do you prepare differently for it? And of course, that age old question, what do you wear?

Gerry Lewis:

COVID changed what we need to think about when presenting and selling ourselves forever. Facial expressions become magnified. Body language scrutinized. And what you wear are can make or break that first impression when that camera turns on. Our guest today is David Zsoldos.

Gerry Lewis:

Over the past 11 years as a senior recruitment partner at BMO Wealth Management, David's role as an experienced recruiter and sourcing expert in the professional and financial services sectors has provided a great deal of lessons and insights that he's going to share with us today. Welcome, David. Great to have you here.

David Zsoldos:

Thanks, Gerry. Really honoured to be here with you and to share some tips and experiences that I have as a recruiter. Thanks again for inviting me.

Gerry Lewis:

How's Montreal today?

David Zsoldos:

Montreal's great. A little bit grey today, but we don't have snow yet, so we're counting our blessings.

Gerry Lewis:

I know. That will come soon enough. I think you might have just jinxed it, David. You might have just jinxed it for us. It's great to have you here. Let's get right into the interview. Over the past two years, so pre-COVID, what have you noticed as the biggest difference when you interview candidates?

David Zsoldos:

That's a great question. It's been quite an adjustment not only for candidates, but also for the recruiter or the hiring manager who's interviewing the candidate. We're so used to being in front of someone in person. Now, judging responses or perceptions is a little bit different. In the past, to look at verbal cues accompanied by non-verbal cues and body language was very prominent. Whereas now it's more of the small and limited gestures, even more the tone of voice that are all too important.

David Zsoldos:

Let's GLINC Differently About How to Sell and Brand Yourself Virtually

There's also less time for small talk. In the past, the recruiter would go and pick up the candidate in the reception area, walk them over to the boardroom. You might be talking about how they got there in the morning, where they're parking. It created a little bit more of a small talk situation up until you got to the boardroom. Whereas now you're directly into the interview and that has also changed things. It's really more about what your presence is like on screen.

David Zsoldos:

The camera lens, for example, should be considered the eyes of the interviewer. You shouldn't be looking at yourself or the other person the whole time, but really looking squarely into the camera. You'll appear to be looking in the eyes of the interviewer.

Gerry Lewis:

These are some great points. Let me unpack those a little bit. I want to come back to the small talk piece. I think that is such an important... The fact that we call it small talk minimizes the meaning of that. I think small talk is such an important part for both parties, for the interviewer to just get a sense of the naturalness of the individual, for the individual to also relax a little bit.

Gerry Lewis:

It's easier to talk about the drive here was horrible. The traffic is always crazy. It's such an important part. You're so right about that.

David Zsoldos:

Yeah, absolutely. I think now where things have changed, specifically when I think at the beginning of the pandemic, most of my icebreaker is the initial small talk, if you will, was really about COVID and the pandemic. I felt a natural obligation or empathy to want to check in on the candidate, how they're coping, how are their families and friends doing, without perhaps going into too much detail. It just seemed inappropriate to just ignore it.

David Zsoldos:

We ended up talking about how we're coping and how we changed our lives and changed our schedules to make it work. Another reason why I brought it up is that a lot of people are going through a tough time right now, and you want to show some empathy and appreciation for the current situation.

Gerry Lewis:

We're going to go into some of your tips and lessons going into it, but I definitely want to jump back later on to looking into the camera, because that is a huge part of that. Maybe that's a perfect segue going into our next question because it's really asking you, what are some of the biggest faux pas or mistakes seen from interviewees?

David Zsoldos:

Yeah, no, for sure. Well, first of all, one of the things that could really kind of throw off in the interview is in the initial, when you start the interview, sometimes you've got poor connection or poor audio. Do a test beforehand. Check your connection. Check your audio. Please use a laptop and not your phone. I think that is really a big one for me. Try to be in front of a window so the light is actually facing you.

Let's GLINC Differently About How to Sell and Brand Yourself Virtually

David Zsoldos:

And ideally, if you can be, in a home office or in a room that has a neutral background. You don't want to be sitting in a suit in your kitchen island with the fridge behind you with funny magnets staring back at the interviewer. You also want to dress appropriately. Just because you're at home doesn't make it okay to wear a hoodie. You really dress like you would if you would be going to the office.

David Zsoldos:

Another thing I find too, and I've heard stories from other recruiters and other hiring managers, is don't multitask just because you're at home and you're able to. I've heard stories of candidates that were cooking, folding their laundry. Yes, you'd be surprised. You really want to be concentrated and engaged in the discussion.

Gerry Lewis:

I think you've covered off one of the biggest mistakes in there. It's amazing how your background, what's happening in your background is actually part of what you're wearing as well. You mentioned the fact about the magnets. It's not that the interviewer is actually looking at your magnets, but because they're part of that shot. It really is like you're wearing it. It's a really great way to think about your background is actually what you're wearing as well.

Gerry Lewis:

That's a really, really good point. I know you've gone through so many interviews. Any great moments that you can share with us in that we can then maybe leverage or apply if we are in that situation?

David Zsoldos:

Being at home in a way offers a more intimate sort of comfortable environment for an authentic conversation. It's perhaps less formal than being in a boardroom, and it allows candidates to just be themselves if they're comfortable in the situation. Sometimes there have been situations where I've just forgotten that I'm actually on screen. I feel like I'm just sitting there with the candidates. Those are always really great moments.

David Zsoldos:

Being in confinement and everyone working at home at times, there could be unexpected situations where you hear a child perhaps laughing or making noise in the background or a doorbell rings out of nowhere. It can actually spark a good laugh. And it just reiterates our humanity and the predicament that we're all in right now and coping with confinement. It really is the new way of work and life.

David Zsoldos:

Probably the same thing goes for meetings that we have during the day in our own just day-to-day work without necessarily being in an interview. One of the great moments that I have had in an interview on Zoom or on Teams specifically is a candidate that was a senior executive at one of our competitors. When I asked her about her motivation in regards to the role, she said that her daughter looked at her one day and said, "Mommy, you're always in front of your computer," because she was working until 11 o'clock, midnight at night.

David Zsoldos:

Let's GLINC Differently About How to Sell and Brand Yourself Virtually

She was a very senior executive, very ambitious individual and had a wonderful career. She was actually looking to not necessarily downsize, but take a role that perhaps had more work-life balance. And that was important to her, even if it meant taking a pay cut. I find that I'm having these discussions more and more now with candidates. The pandemic has really changed things.

David Zsoldos:

A lot of people are looking for a new direction, what's important to them in their own personal lives and in their own mental health, if you'd like. This has been probably one of the key things that I've noticed in the pandemic.

Gerry Lewis:

You'd say one of the great moments that you're remembering isn't so much what they said or did, but the fact that their authenticity came across, perhaps even in your particular example with the executive, a bit of vulnerability. It's a vulnerability. I'm taking a step down. If I was really trying to climb the ladder, I'm actually going to be okay to take that step down because it's more important to me.

David Zsoldos:

Absolutely.

Gerry Lewis:

It's also interesting you talk about out the child that runs in, and we've seen many of this, the pet that jumps onto the table. I think that also says a lot about the individual as well and how they kind of handle that situation. Are they flustered by it? Do they laugh it off? Do they shrug it off? Do they manage with it as though it didn't happen? I think that really is an incredible sign of someone who are going to be very fazed by something that happens suddenly or unfazed.

Gerry Lewis:

In terms of one of my... We've done a lot of interviews as well as we expand our company. One of the things I really look for is how well do they know the company they're about to be interviewed for and to me, that is a huge telltale sign of whether they're really interested or they're just putting on a great show. In terms of research tips on a company, tell me what are your thoughts about that? What should people do?

Gerry Lewis:

What should they research? The websites can be very long. What's your guidance there?

David Zsoldos:

Oh, absolutely, Gerry. I think you really hit it on the nail there. Definitely I would tell a candidate to really go on the company website. Get a good sense of what their core business is, who their leaders are, see what their mission statement is. Are there any recent activities that they've been involved in? It could be the United Way Campaign or how they give back to the community. Maybe recent awards that they've won and how they compare to their competitors.

David Zsoldos:

Let's GLINC Differently About How to Sell and Brand Yourself Virtually

Not just look up who they are, but actually take a look at what their competitors are doing and see if they have any specific goals or objectives? Think about in your mind how you can personally contribute to those goals in the role. I would also look up who is actually interviewing you. Look them up on LinkedIn. Get an understanding of their career path and what their background is. I also find that could also be an opportunity for small talk as well.

David Zsoldos:

If they went to a certain university or perhaps they moved from St. John's, Newfoundland to Toronto, you could ask about their move, how was it like to transition to a new environment. But it gives the recruiter or the hiring manager who's interviewing you a good sense that you've actually taken the time to look at the company, the background, and get a sense of what the role is.

Gerry Lewis:

Can I unpack that question a little bit more? Because I love what you said about looking at their core business, looking at their competitors, looking at the LinkedIn profile. I'm going to share sort of a situation with you where I just want to get your take on it. Because when you go to a website and you look things up, it feels very factual. You can see that they're number two in the industry or whatever the case may be.

Gerry Lewis:

I find sometimes when the candidate or when I'm interviewing a candidate, they spew these facts as though they were experts in your business. All right? They're kind of saying, "Oh, I read this and you became number one. Your biggest competitor is this." I'm just curious what is your guidance to not come across as though you know the business better than the interviewer? I'm just curious on that, because I felt that.

Gerry Lewis:

I felt that in interviews where people are telling me my business and I'm thinking, no, you actually have it wrong. I don't want them to fall into that trap. What's your guidance of how should you bring up this knowledge?

David Zsoldos:

Gerry, you're right. You don't want to necessarily just be regurgitating what's on the specific website. But if there was something or a few pieces that you could point out on the website that you saw, perhaps you can mention, "Oh, I saw this on your website. Can you tell me a little bit more about that? Or I was curious about this. What is your plan around that?" Or perhaps a strategy on some of the goals and objectives that are perhaps in the mission statement.

David Zsoldos:

It just shows that you're interested in the follow-up with some of those things that you saw online.

Gerry Lewis:

That's perfect guidance, David. That is exactly... And if they had asked me that as opposed to telling me, "Oh, this is what you do," I would've thought to myself, "Wow! What an interesting question to ask that I never thought about." And right away if there were silent little bells going off, the bells would be going

Let's GLINC Differently About How to Sell and Brand Yourself Virtually

off right there. Excellent guidance. Thank you. Let's move to, oh, I love this one, salary. Let's not kid ourselves.

Gerry Lewis:

It really does count down to money. As much as we say we love what we do, we're passionate, purposeful, money is definitely a factor. Is there a good way, a better way, a not good way to bring up salary?

David Zsoldos:

This is a great, great question. As a recruiter, I'm very desensitized to this question, so I feel very comfortable talking about compensation. There are two types of candidates. There are candidates that apply to a role, and there are candidates that are directly sourced or headhunted. We use the word now directly sourced for a role. We call them passive candidates. When this question is approached, depending of the two of profiles I just share there now, it could be a different approach.

David Zsoldos:

If you are an applicant to a role, you don't want to say, "I don't want to share. I want to hear more about the role first, or tell me more about the range of the position." It just shows that you're keeping your cards too close to your chest. You're an applicant to the position, so really come to the table and be open to discussing around compensation. If you are a directly sourced candidate, some of those candidates prefer to wait perhaps at a later stage to have more of a direct conversation.

David Zsoldos:

But you should be at least open discussing it to a certain degree. Right now companies are actually moving away from asking candidates what they're currently earning. We are just asking candidates what their expectations are. This is creating a little bit of a gray area for candidates to a certain degree. Going back to what I said earlier, don't ask the recruiter what the range is. Shrewd negotiators are trained to go high first, but that actually might be outbidding yourself for the role at hand.

David Zsoldos:

A recruiter or a hiring manager will already have a range in terms of what they can offer in terms of comp, but really what they're doing in assessing you as a candidate is trying to figure out where you compare in comparison to the peers that are in a similar role. If you go really high initially, but the hiring manager or the recruiter sees you more at the middle range, you may actually be outbidding yourself for the position.

David Zsoldos:

What I tell candidates is really, what is the ideal range, an all in range, that you are looking for? And what would be your bare minimum when we compare you to are the members of our team for this position? Also, what are you leaving behind? There could be a bonus, for example, that you're expecting in December, or you want to know what the amount of that bonus is and if there's an expectation on your part to be made whole on that.

David Zsoldos:

Let's GLINC Differently About How to Sell and Brand Yourself Virtually

So again, I usually ask what expectations are, not what their current compensation is. The reason why we move away now from current compensation is really to not create a situation where there is a bias.

Gerry Lewis:

We talked about total package when it comes to comp. Let's use that same terminology, total package, in terms of image, because I think that is also something that is not just one part, but there are many parts. What creates that sort of total image for you on screen? Like you said earlier, when that camera turns on, it's that second. You don't get that second back. What do you look for? What is the first thing that you would say, "Okay, I already like them." What would that be?

David Zsoldos:

Whenever I do a writeup on a candidate or create a summary after an interview and I send it to a hiring manager, the very first bullet is always motivation. If you can come across someone that's really motivated in this opportunity, they're excited about this role, that's going to be your number one strength going into the interview. Have you done an honest assessment, a self-assessment, of yourself towards the mandate at hand?

David Zsoldos:

Are you able to articulate your strengths and how best you can contribute to the success of the business and the potential team that you might be joining? Are you also being honest around your developmental areas? That's very, very key. It's important that there is still something new that you're learning in a new role. We don't want to have a discussion with an employee after six months because they're bored.

David Zsoldos:

It's okay to be honest about some of your weaknesses or developmental areas are, but it's important to be able to share how you're going to tackle those areas, whether it be shadowing peers, maybe obtaining a new designation, doing some research, but have a plan on how you're going to tackle that in your onboarding. Someone who is articulate, very comfortable in speaking, comfortable with themselves, able to laugh at themselves too. Try to show some authenticity during that interview.

David Zsoldos:

I often think to myself when I'm interviewing the candidate, would I be comfortable putting this person in front of a client? Can they handle stressful situation? Do they come across as polished and articulate? Also, are they interested in the company's culture? I think it's a great question for a candidate to ask during the interview. Tell me a little bit more about your culture, because you also want to see how they're going to fit into your culture.

David Zsoldos:

Sometimes I think to myself as well, and I actually do this actually every interview, do I want to work with this person? Quite often, the roles that I recruit for are senior leaders. I'll probably end up becoming a recruiter working for that individual and supporting them. Do I want to work with this individual?

Gerry Lewis:

Let's GLINC Differently About How to Sell and Brand Yourself Virtually

I'm so happy you brought up cultural fit, David, because I think that that is a really important part. Maybe if I can flip that around, when you said as an interviewer I'm asking myself, do I want to work with this individual, I think as an interviewee, I should always think about, would this person like to work with me? Would they want to work with me? Would they want to have lunch with me in the lunchroom? It's that sort of lens that I think it's such an important image to get across.

Gerry Lewis:

I want to go back to though, you said motivation. I think that you just hit the nail on the head on that one, because there've been many interviews that I've had where I've actually felt or sensed they weren't really motivated to be part of this company. I'm going to ask you to say, it's so hard to gauge motivation. How do you look for motivation on a screen? What should I be thinking about as an interviewee to demonstrate, I'm motivated? What do I need to do?

David Zsoldos:

Certainly motivation is both a visual and verbal. And when I say visual, it's when the hiring manager or the recruiter is sharing more about the role itself, perhaps some of the attributes of the mandate or some of the tasks that you might be involved in, or the objectives that might come up, if they interest you, look into the camera, open your eyes, show your excitement about those different things and the opportunities that they'll open up for you.

David Zsoldos:

While you're doing that self-assessment, when you're looking at the job description before the interview, put together a list of things that excite you about the opportunity, whether it be short-term or long-term, what specific goals that you have and how they fit into the role, and actually articulate that when the recruiter or the hiring manager asks you about your motivation. It's the very first question I ask in interview, what is it about this opportunity that motivates you about this role? Show your excitement.

Gerry Lewis:

I love that you broke it down to visual and verbal. And although that is not new, because that is a universal interviewing categories that we look for, but it's so much more magnified when it's just all you're seeing is the facial expression of someone. I think that that's really... I love that. What I actually look for, David, as well when you say verbal, not just what you say, it's your voice. Your voice is one of the most powerful weapons that you have in an interview.

Gerry Lewis:

And if you have a timid voice, if you have a quiet voice, you need to bring that up. You need to articulate, you need to enunciate, and you need to show, "I'm really excited about this opportunity," versus, "Yeah, I'm really excited about this opportunity." That makes a huge difference.

David Zsoldos:

If I could just jump into something you said earlier about candidates not being that excited or motivated, earlier I talked about passive candidates versus applicants. For those passive candidates, as I'm interviewing the candidate, I'm trying to figure out what their stress points are in terms of their current role and what they're looking for in the new opportunity. I'm offering, for example, solutions for those stress points in the current role.

Let's GLINC Differently About How to Sell and Brand Yourself Virtually

David Zsoldos:

But if you are still kicking tires throughout the whole interview, again, I'm not seeing any motivation, even after I've given you examples of how we could solve some of those stress points for the candidate, you're probably not going to have a second interview. We want to make sure that whoever is in front hiring manager, whether it be their second or third interview, that they're really excited and motivated for that role.

Gerry Lewis:

Great. I love chatting with you, David. I have one final question, because you've covered off a lot of great universal tips for me. This is my final question for you. You kind of alluded to this already when you asked a question, what about is job motivates you? I think that's one of your... How should I call it? Your go-to questions, if I could. What are some questions that you have asked that would either immediately make it or break it for you?

Gerry Lewis:

Right? The way they answer it will either, "Oh, keep going," or, "All right. If they can't get past as this question, they're likely not going to get past too many other questions." Any of those questions that we as an interviewee on the other side should kind of listen for and maybe prepare for in the future?

David Zsoldos:

Well, I think a lot of the universal questions that we normally expect is what are your strengths for this opportunity and what your developmental areas are. Really be honest for both those two questions. And again, you want to relay them to the actual mandate. Sometimes it could be a soft skill question. For example, I find I tend to control things too much, or I have difficult to delegate things. It's okay to talk about those things.

David Zsoldos:

If you can just demonstrate that you're working on them and that's fine. But we want to make sure that whoever is starting in a new role, that we can support them in their mandate and in their onboarding on some of the things that we could expect. I find one of the common mistakes candidates make is in speaking about career path and what they're looking for next in their career.

David Zsoldos:

They end up asking the recruiter or worse, the actual hiring manager, what will it take to take their job within a certain period of time. You don't want to come across as if you're gunning for your manager's role. That could be quite threatening the recruiter or the hiring manager who is interviewing you. And it's okay to share what your long-term expectations are or your thoughts on a career path. But if you make it look as if it's your specific goal coming in, that may not look good for you.

Gerry Lewis:

That's a really good point. I think what we always look for is terminologies like, I want to grow with the company. I want to grow as it grows. And to be honest, David, I think the most honest response I've ever received for that type of long-term question is, it's so difficult to predict what is about to happen five years from now, because we've just seen in the last 18 months the world has turned upside down. Industry has changed the way they work.

Let's GLINC Differently About How to Sell and Brand Yourself Virtually

Gerry Lewis:

I think someone who is more reflective of the past first than look into the future, I think is a much more thoughtful and reflective candidate, for sure.

David Zsoldos:

In most interviews, there is a portion of that interview where the recruiter will ask them behavioural type questions. What that means is asking the candidate to give us some examples of what they did during a specific situation. For example, I always ask every leader, can you give me an example of how you motivated your staff during a significant change?

David Zsoldos:

Another one I ask often is, understanding that we all make mistakes, can you give me an example whereby as a leader, you made a decision that proved to be a mistake? What was the fallout from that mistake and how did you mitigate it? And what did you learn from it? These are all questions where I'm looking for a specific example, but I find often, when I say often, at least 50% of the time, the candidate actually gives me a hypothetical response.

David Zsoldos:

Well, in that scenario, I would do this, or in this scenario, I would do that. That shows me that they actually didn't listen to my question. I wanted a specific example. Another thing I find, and I'm not sure if it specifically answers your question, but oftentimes candidates take too long to respond to a question and they talk too much. The recruiter has a specific set of time that they set aside for the interview.

David Zsoldos:

If you suddenly hear the recruiter saying, "I'm sorry, I'm going to have to interrupt you because I'm just conscious of the time," you know right away that is not a good sign.

Gerry Lewis:

I'm going to end that, and then I'm going to do my quick wrap up. I had an interview once where we did run out of time, and I did say to the interviewee, I said, "Unfortunately, we only have five minutes left, and I do know you created a presentation and I do want to see it. I definitely want to see it, but it has to be within five minutes. I do have to end for another call." And they said, "Of course," and then they started and you could tell that they had no intentions of keeping it within five minutes.

Gerry Lewis:

I could tell by the second slide that it was going to go long. And to me, that was the killer. It wasn't even because the slides weren't good, the slides were quite good, but it's because that fundamental piece of my time and that five minutes was completely bypassed. David, it was great chatting with you today. There's so many things. What I take away from this is that the dynamics of the interview hasn't really changed in terms of its core pieces, right?

Gerry Lewis:

The interview, the preparation, what we say, what we prepare for, how we research, that hasn't really changed, whether it's face-to-face or virtual. What it does, what I learned from today is about knowing that because it's a much faster takeoff, a much shorter period, and a quicker time for me to very quickly

Let's GLINC Differently About How to Sell and Brand Yourself Virtually

get you on screen, you got to be that much more ready. I think readiness is really the key that I picked up today.

Gerry Lewis:

When you prepare and you do your research, make sure you get the right point, but don't come across as an expert. Come across as someone who's curious. Ask them more about what you read, not regurgitate what you read. I also heard from you the most important part really, and it's always been important, is authenticity. I think that we all have to let our armour down when we're in a world where really all I'm seeing is your kitchen sink. I need to be able to manage that.

Gerry Lewis:

I need to be able to talk my way through that if a cat jumps onto my table. The final thing that I learned today was about motivation. And to me, I left that last because I think that's the most important. If you do not appear like this is job that you're interested in, and even if it isn't, I don't care, you better make sure that for the interviewer, this is the job you're looking for, then you are already behind in the race.

Gerry Lewis:

I think that preparation, authenticity, motivation, key, key things. Lot of other great stuff that was shared, but thank you for bringing that to our attention today. And I hope that our listeners are going to take that and kind of reflect a little bit before they turn their cameras on for their next interview. David, thank you so much for your time.

David Zsoldos:

Thank you, Gerry. It's been a pleasure speaking with you.

Gerry Lewis:

All right. You've heard another episode of GLINC Outside the Box. Great to be here. I'm Gerry Lewis.