

How to be confident and not arrogant in talking about your professional experience

I have excellent experience in training. Having worked in training all my career I don't feel this statement is 'hot air', arrogant or inflated. However, when discussing this word with French speaking workshop participants many admitted not feeling comfortable in using it in their own professional context.

We have delivered a large number of workshops in the last two years focused on giving job applicants the confidence and skills needed to perform powerfully in job interviews (when English is not their first language). A constant theme is the extent to which you can use forceful adjectives to describe your professional experience. This has generated some healthy debate about whether words such as 'excellent', 'considerable', 'extensive' or 'expertise' are arrogant/OTT - over the top.

What has become clear is that different words feel more or less appropriate in different working cultures. It is worth being aware of this, for example, if you are attending an English interview for a French Bank in Luxembourg you may consider toning down some of the adjectives you use to describe your experience.

As a general principle don't be shy in using forceful adjectives. We can all suffer from a desire to underplay/downplay our skills, knowledge and experience. The little voices in our head might well turn 'excellent' into 'good' or 'good' into 'reasonable'.

I believe that in the English language, adjectives such as 'expertise' or 'specialist' are not mystical and only attainable by an elite few. I also don't think they are a function of the level of qualifications you have.

You can be a specialist in Microsoft Outlook if you train yourself to be the 'go to' person for tips and shortcuts in your team or division. Being excellent or an expert does not require decades of experience. What is required in an English speaking interview is the ability to substantiate the forceful adjective you use. So if you do state you are excellent at something, give concise evidence (with real world references, for example to a project or particular job role) that validates the claim.

In summary if you are faced with an interview or performance review in English be bold in how you describe your experience and consider using some of the phrases below.

I have...

- excellent, (very) strong...
- extensive, in depth, considerable...
- comprehensive, robust...
- varied, diverse, wide-ranging...
- a (very) high level...
- developed an expertise/specialism in...

I hope this has been helpful. If you would like to get in touch, contact me on toby@tlp.lu.

Power for the week.
