

Always Interview on Fridays

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

When I was in college I remember going for an interview with the investment bank JP Morgan. I had no idea how I had gotten the interview but it was for something dealing with finance and statistical studies of Asian securities markets. I had gone to high school for awhile in Bangkok and thought it would be fun to have some sort of job involving Asia. I did an "on campus interview" and a few weeks after submitting my resume they called and invited me to come speak with them for half a day in their offices in Chicago.

It was one of the strangest interviews I had ever had.

The interview was at 7:30 in the morning in downtown Chicago—about a 30 minute drive from where I was going to school. While I am up and about very early now, in college I was in the habit of getting up each day at around 10:30 to 11:00 am and going to sleep around 2:00 am. I did this for years and getting up at 6:30 am to make an interview was a tough road to hoe.

The night before the interview I was unable to sleep until around 3:30 am. Not only was I tired, but I also became worried that I was unable to get to sleep and tumbled around in bed worrying that I would be tired during my interview.

When I rolled out of bed at 6:30 am I was a wreck. I could scarcely think and did not enjoy my trip to downtown Chicago at all. When I got into the bank's imposing offices on the top of a giant skyscraper, I was brought into a room and shown orientation videos about the bank. I could not help but notice that everyone I had seen in the bank so far was Asian. Most were speaking Mandarin (at least I thought so). I felt a little out of place and did not understand what was going on. In fact, I realized I probably would not fit in there.

After watching an orientation video that I did not understand (it was in English but I was so out of it I was confused), I was led to a conference room and another Asian person appeared to start interviewing me.

"It must be weird having a Chinese last name and not being Chinese, eh?" he said to me.

I had no idea what he was talking about. I was so exhausted and tired that I felt like I was on drugs. I tried to answer his question in a way that seemed non-biased. I wondered if he was probing to see if I was racist or something. I had heard that a lot of these banks ask very sophisticated questions in their interviews to uncover various personality traits and so forth.

"I think that it is perfectly fine to have an Asian last name and not be Asian. There is absolutely nothing wrong with it."

The man frowned and seemed a little taken back.

"I did not mean to offend you," he said. "It's just that it not something I have heard of a lot. I mean, what are the odds?"

I considered his statement a bit more. Since this job involved statistics I assumed that this must be some sort of statistical type of question and answered accordingly.

The interview continued for some time. At one point the man said:

"Do you play any other instrument besides piano?"

"I do not play piano," I told him.

"Ha! You are an award winning concert pianist! How can you say that? You must mean that you are seeking perfection and have not reached your full potential."

"No, I certainly have not reached my potential with the piano," I answered.

The interview seemed very strange but I went along with it. *What the heck is wrong with this guy?* I kept asking myself.

I went into the next interview. The woman I was speaking with, also an Asian, called me "Mr. Ling" a few times during the interview. It was among the strangest things I have ever seen. I was really spaced out. I'm not Mr. Ling ... I was thinking. Why do these people keep trying to pretend I am Asian?

About 15 minutes in the interview she asked me why I chose to major in economics. I told her I was not majoring in economics. She told me my resume said I did and I asked her to show it. When I took a look at the resume I could not believe it. It was a guy who was obviously Chinese who went to my college. It was not my resume. They had the wrong resume.

For whatever reason, the rest of my interviews did not go so well when they realized that they had the wrong guy. I think the real reason they were so upset was because I had been so "spaced out" that I did not even realize they were interviewing the wrong guy. They certainly did not look good having interviewed the wrong guy; however, I probably looked even worse. I was simply too out of it to communicate effectively.

One of the worst things you can do is go into a negotiation, job interview—or any situation where a lot is at stake—in a bad mood, tired, or out of it. It is just not a good idea. I have lost opportunities, jobs and so forth when I have not been "up". It is also a bad idea to negotiate when you are tired and out of it. You simply will not do well. Had I been "up" during the interview and not down and out of it, I am pretty confident I could have gotten the job.

Jennifer Lerner, a professor of public policy and management at Harvard University, has done extensive studies on how mood influences decision making. She has found that buyers who were sad when making decisions often spent as much as 30% more than buyers whose emotions were neutral at the time. Similarly, she has found that sad buyers often sold items for around 33% less than more neutral buyers.

Several years ago I went to look at a car that was priced at around \$6,000 and was worth what the seller was asking. The car was being sold by a graduate student at the University of Michigan. When I showed up to see the car, the guy had been smoking pot with a few of his friends. He was completely out of it and stoned.

I was with my fiancé at the time and she looked under the hood and started telling him she noticed some corrosion on wires (something I personally was not at all concerned about) and that due to this the car was not worth more than \$2,500. She was a tough negotiator and quite savage when it comes to getting a good deal. The car she was harping about, though, was quite beautiful and I did not think that what she told him was fair at all.

She started telling the guy all these small things that were wrong with the car and walking around the car with him. The man was so stoned and out of it he could not defend himself at all. Finally he said to her: "Ok, you can have the car for \$2,500."

I was completely shocked by the whole thing. I thought the car was worth far more ... but we purchased the car for \$2,500. It was a really nice car and worked quite well for some time. He ended up selling it for far less than it was worth.

I have done the same thing before. I remember selling a car once for a few hundred dollars after having a bad argument unrelated to the car. I was depressed and could have sold the car for a lot more money had I been in a better mood.

The mood you are in has a lot to do with what ends up happening to you.

A few months ago I was at a seminar. Before one of the speakers came up, I noticed that he was standing in a corner sniffing something in his hand. There was another guy standing next to him that appeared to know him.

"Jesus Christ, don't do coke here! There's people looking at you."

"No, you got it all wrong ... " the speaker said. "I am sniffing lavender to 'get in state'. Lavender helps me get 'up' and I do better."

The speaker then went on stage and proceeded to sell people on attending a seminar he was going to give and charge \$3,500 for. He did a great job.

The best salespeople, executives and others know how to control their states and "get up" when they need to. They know how to make themselves 'on'. This is their most potent weapon in selling. It is the most potent weapon of politicians, CEOs and others who are at the top of their game. They know how to be "on" and get themselves there.

For some strange reason, every time I have interviewed for a job on Friday I have almost always gotten the job. When I have interviewed earlier in the week I have not had nearly as much success. Why is this? I think it has something to do with the sort of mood that people are generally in on Fridays. They are more relaxed and excited about the weekend. They are more relaxed. They are in a "better buying mood."

If you are buying or selling anything—including yourself—nothing is more important than being on. You need to be in the game and your mood has a lot to do with how well you will end up doing in everything you do.

THE LESSON

Your mood is a major determinant of success in anything you do. You should never enter an interview or any other high-stakes situation in a negative frame of mind. You can needlessly lose many opportunities simply because you haven't been "up". For example, job seekers find considerably greater success when interviewing on Fridays, perhaps due to the fact that people tend to be in a better mood towards the end of the week. When people are relaxed, they are in a better "buying mood".

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