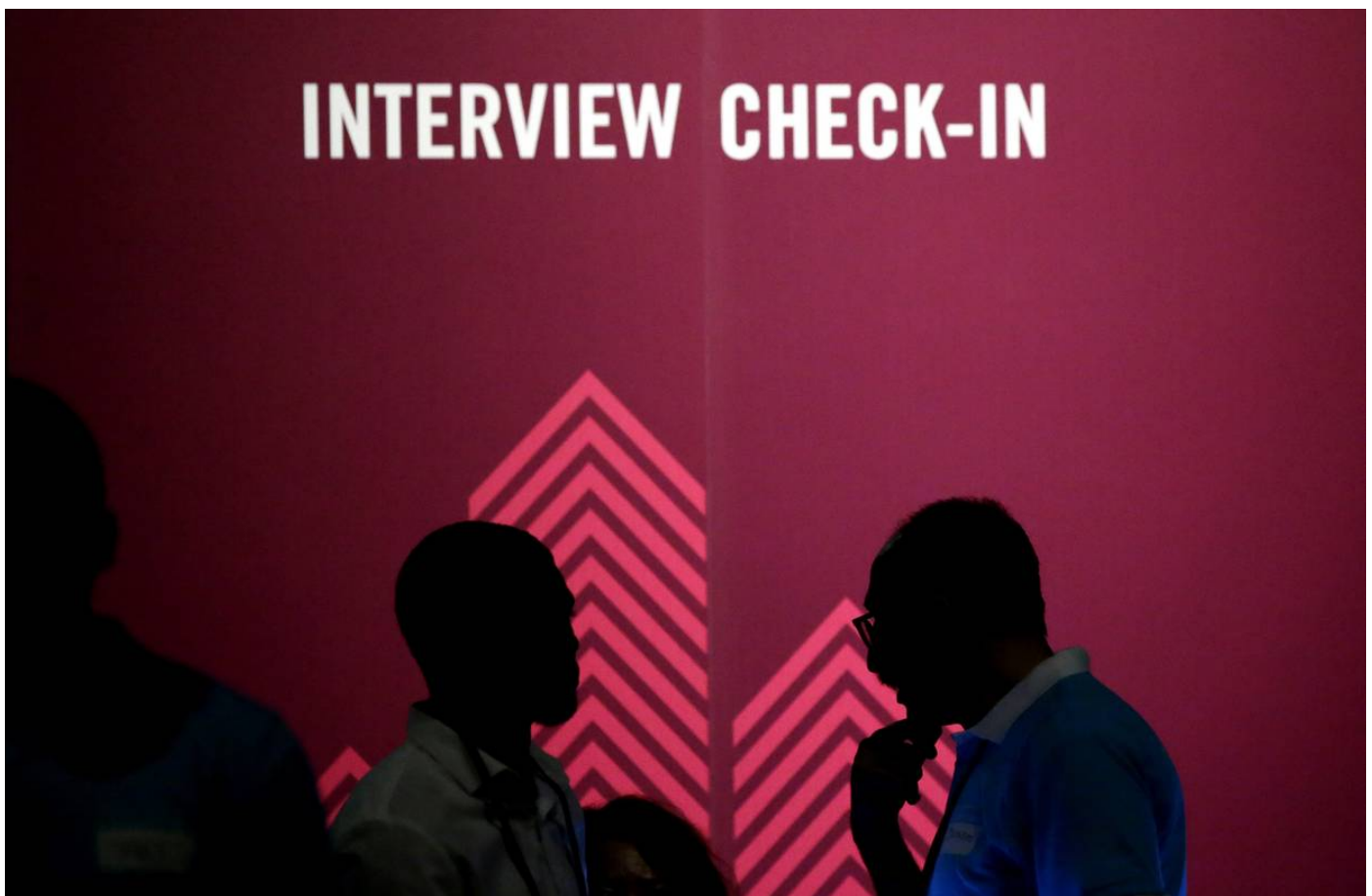


Talkaholics Sink Partnerships, Presentations—and Careers

Long-winded executives think they're personable, but loquaciousness can turn off colleagues and potential clients

[Joann S. Lublin](#) Dec. 13, 2017 9:00 a.m. ET



Executives who talk too much get into trouble during job hunts, executive recruiters say. Photo: LM Otero/Associated Press

By
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She yammered on and on—and then talked some more.

The very chatty woman was interviewing this fall to become a vice president of water utility [Aqua America](#) Inc. But during her corner office session with Chief Executive Christopher Franklin, she spent 25 minutes answering his initial question. Her next reply lasted another 25 minutes.

“I felt like I was being filibustered,” says Mr. Franklin. “There should be no need for verbal diarrhea.” He didn’t hire the prospect.

Executives who talk too much get into trouble during job hunts, board presentations, customer pitches and networking events. The common but correctable habit often communicates poor preparation, an overblown ego or low confidence, executive recruiters and coaches say.

“Overly talkative executives now run greater risks than five years ago because businesses’ heightened sense of urgency has chipped away at their tolerance of long-windedness,” says Daniel Smith, chief operating officer of recruiters Raines International Inc.

In a world where leaders issue policy pronouncements in 140-character bursts, shorter attention spans mean “executives must make their point quickly,” concurs John Hartmann, head of True Value Co.

The CEO cut short a top lieutenant’s first presentation to the hardware cooperative’s board four years ago. The executive addressed True Value directors 10 minutes longer than his assigned half hour—without finishing his 20-page presentation. “It’s time to wrap up,” Mr. Hartmann declared.

A rising number of companies assign speech coaches to star players with talkaholic tendencies. The help typically costs between \$300 and \$500 an hour.



Aqua America CEO Christopher Franklin said one vice president candidate was overly loquacious and didn't get the job. Photo: Matt Stanley for the Wall Street for The Wall Street Journal

A coach devises practical remedies that range from rehearsing short scripts to making sure an ally secretly signals when the speaker drones on too long.

Overly talkative people should picture the word “WAIT” on a listener’s forehead, suggests Laurie Schloff, a senior coaching partner at Speech Improvement Co. The acronym stands for, “Why Am I Talking?”

Verbosity can prove especially hazardous for job seekers. Aqua America’s Mr. Franklin asked the vice president candidate to briefly describe her background and why she wanted to join the company.

The CEO says the contender kept chatting even after he gave her a healthy nudge about his desire to pose more questions. Her uncontrolled loquaciousness was a derailer, he continues.

Some garrulous executives doom their chances of landing fresh employment because they boast too much without substantiation. Last year, recruiter Ellen Kinlin considered recommending a senior executive for a divisional CEO spot at a financial-services firm. But when she met the industry veteran, he launched a nonstop monologue about himself. “He told me three times in the first 15 minutes how smart he was,” says Ms. Kinlin, president of Kinlin Co., a boutique search firm.

She encouraged him to provide examples of his wise experience. “He kind of

looked at me and said, ‘Why? I am smart,’ ” Ms. Kinlin says. She never recommended the executive.

A professional coach can help. Earlier this year, a woman retained speech coach Diane DiResta while pursuing a coveted management role at a multinational development organization.

The applicant says she learned that she would have just seven minutes to pitch her qualifications in front of an interview panel.

Ms. DiResta recorded a dry run that horrified her client when she heard it, however. “It was way longer and full of technical terms that no one would have been interested in,” the manager recollects.

The client talked so much that “her value was getting lost,” says the coach, president of DiResta Communications Inc. Ms. DiResta advised her to craft a concise script focused on the challenge, action and result for every example. The manager won the job.

Arjun Moorthy, chief executive of technology startup CivikOwl, had a similar coaching experience at his prior employer, [HubSpot](#) Inc. He says his verbosity initially crimped his ability to snare corporate customers after he became a vice president of the sales and marketing software company in 2011.

Mr. Moorthy blames his sales inexperience and desire to be liked for speaking excessively about HubSpot’s products and services. He turned to sales coach Rick Roberge, who critiqued his sales calls.

The coach persuaded Mr. Moorthy to instead forge strong ties with potential clients and discover their specific needs by asking more questions. The approach required Mr. Moorthy to talk less.

The sales executive gradually developed deep business relationships and “got

to know some of these people really well,” he adds.

The result? Mr. Moorthy played a big part in HubSpot signing partnership agreements with three tech giants—including Salesforce.com Inc. in 2015.

Informal guidance sometimes cures excess talkers, including the novice board presenter at True Value. After that meeting, Mr. Hartmann told his deputy that material already provided to the board “doesn’t need to be gone over again.” He also stressed the importance of pausing to solicit feedback.

Heeding the advice, the lieutenant improved his board presentations, the CEO says, adding that masterful communicators “spend far more time using their ears than their voices.”