

— RESOURCE REVIEWS —

Tell Me About Yourself

Review by Peter Vogt



Tell Me About Yourself: Storytelling to Get Jobs and Propel Your Career, Katharine Hansen, JIST Works, 2009 (\$14.95)

I hereby nominate this intriguing guide for the “Darkhorse Career Book of 2009” award.

I say that, in part, because it’s easy to brush past the book or miss seeing it on the shelf entirely. Perhaps that’s because its title—*Tell Me About Yourself*—has become such a cliché that we (!?) no longer pay much attention to it.

That’s a shame in this particular case, for author Katharine Hansen is really onto something here.

Hansen’s thesis, in a huge nutshell: College students, recent graduates, and other job seekers can make themselves truly memorable to prospective employers by harnessing storytelling techniques—not just in interviews but also in their cover letters and resumes, their career portfolios, and their networking activities.

In other words, says Hansen, lose the robotics and the gimmickry and rely instead on sincere, compelling, ultimately convincing stories of your achievements and traits—whether you’re telling those stories with your mouth or your hands.

Not Just for Interviews

If this storytelling strategy sounds at least semi-familiar, it undoubtedly is: We’ve been teaching our students behavioral **interviewing** techniques (i.e., Situation/Task-Action-Result [STAR] or Problem-Action-Result [PAR]) for a decade or more, encouraging students to give employers specific, concrete examples during their job/internship interviews.

Hansen is simply taking the concept much further than before, not only in terms of how students can come up with solid stories (the details are all here, particularly in Part 1—“Career-Propelling Story Basics”) but also with respect to the settings where they can use those stories and the ways students can tell them.

As Hansen puts it:

Most job seekers know they can use stories to respond to interview questions. But they don’t realize they can also apply stories in resumes, cover letters, portfolios, and in networking to make themselves memorable and create vivid pictures of their skills and accomplishments.

Take the often stodgy resume, for example. No, you may not be able to turn it into a full-fledged, story-oriented narrative in its own right. But, Hansen points out, you most certainly can complement it with a *resume addendum* that offers more detail on specific challenges you’ve faced, how you’ve handled them, and what the results have been (sort of like the STAR/PAR technique in written form).

Similarly, Hansen says, cover letters can tap storytelling techniques to communicate passion for the job (or company/organization) being sought, demonstrate problem-solving abilities, or even tackle “unusual or potentially negative situations” from one’s past.

Content Trumps Design

Let me be blunt: This book isn’t much to look at (which, to me, is huge when you’re talking about getting college students or recent grads to read it). The pine-green colors and cartoonish “thought bubbles” on the front and back covers are a bit of a turnoff, and the inside design is what I would call heavy—lots of words on a page, small typeface, very few graphics.

So if you were to (initially) judge this book by its cover, so to speak, you might easily dismiss it.

Not a good idea.

What *Tell Me About Yourself* might lack in visual appeal, it more than makes up for in its innovative approach, its content (especially its many document and story examples), and Hansen’s clear passion for helping job seekers succeed.

That’s my story, and I’m sticking to it.