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Auditioning in a Video Résumé

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Dr. Ronald R. Rawitt, a New York City psychiatrist, is shy. When he gets nervous, he slips into “aha” and “um” mode. As someone who often lectures, this is a problem. It is also an issue because he is looking for work, and he worries that he is not coming off as forcefully as he would like.

“I want help expressing myself more openly; I want to know how to articulate what I want to say about myself,” said Dr. Rawitt, who is in private practice but is seeking positions to highlight his expertise in child, adolescent and adult psychiatry. “I like to feel that I’m fluid and present well, so I’m looking for ways to do that.”

So Dr. Rawitt did what more business executives, job seekers, college applicants and aspiring daters are doing: he hired a media trainer, to help him learn how to put his best foot forward.

And why not? With the rise of YouTube, MySpace vlogs, video résumés and video dating sites, the revolution is being televised right before our eyes. To prepare for their 15 minutes, people are seeking professional help. And who better than someone who has been in the trenches?

“Today’s executives not only have to be photogenic, but also telegenic for anything from basic blogs to podcasts,” said Rachel Weingarten, author of the coming book “Career and Corporate Cool” (Wiley, July 2007). “Since this information is also more widely available and accessible, there’s less of a chance to impress people, and the concern is that the immediate sound bite, video loop or MP3 be dazzling.”

Vault Inc., a career consulting firm, informally asked employers if they would watch a video résumé if it were submitted to them, and most said yes. Employers also said video résumés would become a common addition to future job applications.

“We live in an on-demand world where people want the most detailed information to make a decision, as well as the ability to make that decision quickly,” said Nicholas Murphy, 27, the co-founder of WorkBlast.com. The site, which made its debut last week, aims to help users create online video résumés. It also allows employers to videotape themselves so they can advertise to prospective employees.

The trainer Dr. Rawitt hired, Bill McGowan, is a former anchor, reporter and producer at ABC, and he specializes in the visumé—a two-and-a-half-minute visual résumé. He has created about a dozen in the last year, at a charge of \$3,500 each.

“Many people don’t have the proper experience in being engaging and welcoming to this piece of technology,” said Mr. McGowan, founder of the Clarity Media Group in Manhattan. “How do they engage a piece of metal with the same kind of warmth that they might engage someone individually? That’s the big hurdle for some of these people.”

Mr. McGowan and his colleagues typically videotape clients, and then dissect their performance together, evaluating everything from posture to eye contact, to physical appearance to vocal modulation.

That is why Lucy Cherkasets, who is now 26, hired Mr. McGowan when she was trying to land a job out of college four years ago. “I wanted to make myself stand out from the rest of the pack,” said Ms. Cherkasets, who was seeking an entry-level position in advertising or marketing.

Mr. McGowan took out his video camera and together they role-played an interview. They evaluated her body language and helped her tweak her responses. She now works in the human resources department at LaForce & Stevens, a public relations firm in Manhattan.

“I used it to apply for the jobs I wanted the most,” she said. “I wanted to be selective because this was a unique new way to approach the job search. It was something that certainly made me stand out. People, particularly H.R. professionals, were impressed by the initiative and creativity as well. It allowed me to show them my interest and got them to ‘see’ me before they even talked with me.”

Media trainers have other uses as well. Five years ago, Bob Plunkett, a former television news anchor living in Bedford, N.Y., was driving to Boston with his daughter, Maggie, who was interviewing for admission to Wheaton College in Norton, Mass.

“She said, ‘Do you think they’re going to ask me if I have any questions?’” he recalled. “I said ‘Absolutely! That’s how the interview closes.’ I realized that she didn’t really have a plan for doing this interview. She just figured, ‘They’d ask me questions and I’d answer them.’ And

I'd say, this is a big interview that could change your life, and you're approaching it haphazardly."

Since then, he has trained more than 50 high school seniors. He charges \$500.

"Essentially, he teaches how to control the conversation, how to have an agenda going into the interview and getting it across no matter what the questions are, so you know what you're going to say," said Charlie Waln, who enlisted Mr. Plunkett's help when he was applying to Duke University in 2003 (he was accepted on early admission).

About 75 percent of Karen Friedman's work has nothing to do with television or even print media. Instead, she trains senior management preparing for product approvals and withdrawals, manufacturing shutdowns, employee layoffs, educational campaigns and even videoconferencing.

"Executives fall into a trap of speaking business-speak," said Ms. Friedman, a media trainer outside Philadelphia. "While they might speak the language of their subject, it's like listening to someone who's stuck in a tunnel. They're in a fog. The point they really need to get across gets muddled, lost and unfocused. What is it you want the listener to remember about your message when you're done communicating?"

Vincent T. Donnelly, the president and chief executive of the PMA Insurance Group in Blue Bell, Pa., credits Ms. Friedman for helping with his delivery at lectures and speaking at public events. "I need to put things in concrete terms the layperson could understand, not in insurance jargon. She helped me do that."

And while the camera can be brutal, it is a necessary tool, especially in today's highly recorded climate. "People will tell you that they're perceived as dynamic, engaging, interesting, with full command of the material," Ms. Friedman said. "And then they see themselves on videotape or DVD and it's a rude awakening, because they see how other people really see them. You can pick up odd mannerisms you're not aware of. You may have the words down and the verbal techniques, but your body language might give away that you're nervous or unsure of yourself."

Debra Benton, a media trainer in Fort Collins, Colo., got her start in beauty pageants, which she believes are terrific training grounds for corporate America. "You have to walk across the stage in high heels

almost naked in front of thousands of people," she said. "That's exactly how most of us feel in a job interview — like we're naked in front of people."

She tells the executives and job interviewees that she coaches that their No. 1 responsibility is to "maintain the self-esteem of others." Don't falsely pump up someone's ego, but make him or her feel like you're engaged. "People will soon forget what you have accomplished and long remember how you made them feel," she said. "That's true on a date, in a job interview, even in Congress. You can get more of an emotional response if you can tap at the heartstrings."

Her other piece of advice? Do everything purposefully, and slow down. "Not to the point where you look like you're dragging with energy," she said. "But most of us go too fast; we hurry; we look anxious. The more time you give yourself, the more status people give you. If you slow down, you look calm and make others calm around you. For instance, when shaking hands, pump two and a half times instead of one. You only have seconds to set yourself apart."