Correction: DO practice interviewing. But don’t wait until opening night to stage a dress rehearsal. If you are looking for a promotion, interviewing for a new job or making a sales call, act like your presentation makes a difference, because it does. And because it does, when you are in the hot seat, interviewing for the job you really want, you want to be ready. So you have to practice. But don’t practice interviewing during that critical interview. By the time you get to the big stage, your side of the conversation should be so well rehearsed that it seems totally off the cuff to the person across the table.

Practice by preparing well for every interview, even if it isn’t for your dream job. Especially if it isn’t your dream job. If your life and happiness doesn’t depend on whether you get hired, you will be more confident asking direct questions about a company and answering tough questions about yourself. If you stutter or say something ridiculous, it won’t be the end of the world. Every conversation you have raises your comfort level when telling your own story.

A manager recently told me that he pushes people in interviews. He said he asks about each of the technical skills he sees on a resume or application. If they say the know Windows, he wants to know which programs and how someone used them. This can be intimidating, but preparation is your friend here. Recruit a buddy or mentor or just pick up the phone and call yourself and explain your work history. Answer questions you might be asked, including reasons for leaving and what your successes were. Every time you speak something out loud, you become more comfortable hearing yourself say it; you will start to hear yourself overexplaining or going off on a tangent and you can then edit yourself down to statements that are true and comfortable to say and to hear.

Job interviews and sales calls both are fairly predictable. There’s the occasional trick question or unexpected personality that you might have to deal with, but generally, when you’ve done anything more than a few times, you have a good idea about how it will go. Practice interviewing every chance you get. Stutter, stammer, talk too loudly, wear the wrong shoes and misjudge distance and time. Get it all out of the way when the consequences are low. That way, when you really have something on the line, you’ll win
.
Did Venus Williams play tennis before she got to Wimbledon? Did Barack Obama govern before he won his first presidential election? Was it raining when Noah built the ark?

Julie Desmond is IT Recruiting Manager with George Konik Associates, Inc. Send your job search and career planning questions to Julie at jdesmond@georgekonik.com.