When the Interviewer Gives You Homework

Here’s the scenario: You passed easily through the initial phone screen conducted by the recruiter and HR representative. You were very quickly invited to an in person interview with the hiring manager.
You were well prepared for that one, too. You studied the website of the company, and reviewed the LinkedIn profile of the interviewer. You practiced your answers to "Tell me about yourself", "Why did you leave your last position?", and "Why are you interested in this role?"

The second interview also went well. You clearly established a connection with the hiring manager and built rapport during the conversation. The interviewer soon informed you that she would like you to meet 2-3 more people, including several members of her team. You are delighted and dare to think that this could turn out well.

Then, you are informed that before she can move you forward, you will have to prepare an assignment. It might be a business or marketing plan, a 90 day roll out plan for the new job, a presentation to the team, or some other type of project.

Your first reaction is uncertainty. Is this appropriate? The project looks time consuming and challenging. You are not working for this manager yet, you think. Can she really put you to work? Will they take your plan and say, “Thank you, but we are moving forward with another hire?”

**This is your dilemma! So -what are your choices?**

1) You choose NOT to deliver the project. You don't want to spend the time and give away your "stuff" for free.

* Result: the opportunity disappears.

2) You DO the project but invest little time or effort. After all, you are not getting paid and you feel put upon by the request anyway, so you offer a mediocre product.

* Result: the opportunity disappears.

3) You spend several days obsessing over the project and deliver a high - quality piece of work.

* Possible result #1: The hiring manager receives it and expresses thanks but does not call to arrange next steps; or
* Possible result #2: You are invited in for the next round of interviews and you move through the process to the final round, remaining competitive for the role.

Which option is your best choice?#3 is the only choice—if you want the job, that is! Why option #3?

First, you really have little to lose by taking on the assignment? A few hours of job search time that you could be spent sending out additional new inquiries? Is that really more worthwhile than continuing to pursue a role for which you’re already a finalist?

Secondly, try to see the justification for the assignment from the employer’s side: Making a hiring decision is an important move for any company. Hiring mistakes are costly to the organization, both in time and money. This practice of requesting a project or presentation is a reflection of the increasing desire of companies to “share the risk” in the staffing process. Whether it is by demonstrating value before you get paid, having your compensation more heavily weighted towards equity or bonus, or employing “temp to perm”, or “try before you buy” hiring practices, companies are increasingly looking for ways to share the risk of a bad hire with new employees at all levels in organizations.

Try to at least respect that the hiring team wants to ensure that your written / presented work is as impressive as your verbal communications, and that they are exercising caution and care in building the team that you want to join.

**What about the materials if you don’t get the job?**

Whether you’re hired or not, you will have nonetheless created valuable intellectual property that you might use again to enhance your appeal to another employer. You might add a link to the materials on your Workfolio website, or blog about it on LinkedIn. Think how well-prepared you will be for the next job interview if they too request a presentation or project! You might even bring this work to your next interview to demonstrate your creativity or value to that organization.

In summary, if you do your best work on the project, and get the job, you’ll feel validated and appreciated for your value and ability to deliver. If you don't get the offer, you will be confident in knowing that you gave it an honest try, and you’ll have fewer regrets as a result. So – if asked:

**DO YOUR HOMEWORK!**