

# The New Job Interview Dilemma: How Much to Study a Hiring Manager's Social Media; Is it strategic—or risky—to bone up on your interviewer's Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram accounts to glean talking points? We asked career experts to weigh in

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## FULL TEXT

The Fixer is a monthly tech column that responds to reader queries about navigating the digital landscape and solving problems with gear.

Q: I have a job interview soon and am tempted to madly research the hiring manager online in case I can unearth details about her to use to my advantage when we talk. Bad idea?

A: Not entirely. I don't know about "madly," but this kind of research can come in handy if you exercise restraint. When I spotted a seemingly handmade vase in a potential employer's office during a job interview a few years ago, for example, I faced a dilemma. Thanks to some thorough Instagram stalking, I knew he was an avid amateur potter. But would an offhand compliment about his craftsmanship endear me to the person who held my fate in his hands—or totally weird him out?

"There's a border between being informed and being creepy," said Los Angeles career counselor Linda Greenfield. "Saying, 'I can't help but notice the unusual piece of pottery behind you,' could be part of an icebreaker. But I wouldn't disclose that you've seen on Instagram that this person is a pottery expert."

That line between informed and creepy has never been blurrier at a time when, thanks to social media, it's a cinch to learn that your interlocutor not only likes dogs, but has springer spaniels named Chip and Dip. That said, some social media is required reading, said Manhattan career coach Lynn Berger: "Looking at [your interviewer's] LinkedIn is important, because that's a window into the job." Ms. Greenfield even recommends browsing in "public" rather than "private" mode so interviewers get an alert that you took a peek. Far from making them feel watched, she said, "you're showing them you're doing your homework." Use what you learn about their current projects and career trajectory to inform the questions you'll ask.

Gleaning talking points from Facebook or Twitter is riskier. If you're interviewing with a designer, "Instagram is an essential demonstration of their work," Ms. Greenfield said. If not, tread lightly. Even if you're convinced a mutual love of long-distance running is your ticket to a dream accounting role, find a way to slip your recent marathon into conversation without revealing that you know the interviewer ran it, too. Or say nothing. "There's plenty of time to get to know people naturally, through the interview process," Ms. Berger said.

In case you're wondering, I squelched my impulse to compliment the pottery. But a few months later, I left my office White Elephant holiday party with one of my now-boss's handmade bowls.

Have a tech problem or digital concern? Email the Fixer: [rachel.wolfe@wsj.com](mailto:rachel.wolfe@wsj.com) .

The New Job Interview Dilemma: How Much to Study a Hiring Manager's Social Media

Credit: By Rachel Wolfe

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