

Tales from the interview: Lunch is not a competition

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One thing that many interview candidates fail to comprehend is that lunch is not a competition. You're not auditioning for *Fear Factor*. No matter how many times we explain this, candidates don't believe it.

One of my colleagues took a candidate to lunch. As is typical, the candidate is asked whether there was any particular preference or phobia, and as is also typical, the candidate expressed no preference (trying not to look difficult). My colleague explained, "Okay, well, I like sushi, but please, if you don't like sushi, please just say so, and we can go to an Italian or Mexican place or even just grab a burger."

— *No, sushi is fine* was the response.

My colleague hesitantly took the candidate to a local sushi place. The two were seated and the wait staff came to take their order. From the way the candidate nervously read the menu, my colleague began to suspect that the candidate had never had sushi before.

"Okay, now remember, you can order whatever you want. You don't have to order the sushi. They have all sorts of cooked food on the menu, too. Just order whatever you would like to have for lunch. I'm going to have (among other things) the salmon roe with raw quail egg, but please, that's just my personal preference."

— *Um, okay, yeah, I'll have the same thing.*

"Are you sure?"

— *Yeah.*

The food was delivered, and the interview candidate sort of started at it suspiciously.

Fortunately, my colleague realized that without remedial action, somebody at the lunch table was going to starve and convinced the candidate to order some veggie yakisoba.

Disclaimer: This story is a reconstruction from a conversation from over two years ago. Some details may be incorrect. I can't believe I had to write this, but apparently some people carefully deconstruct every word of these stories in order to call out any flaws or weaknesses.

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