



# career hub

insider's guide to interviewing



## Insider's Guide to Interviewing

### Introduction



Hi!

My name is Louise Fletcher and I am the Managing Editor and Co-founder of the [Career Hub](#) blog.

I founded Career Hub to provide job seekers with the best advice from experts in career counseling, resume writing, personal branding and recruiting.

The nature of blogging means that our experts can't always get into depth about their favorite subjects, and that's why I decided to ask them to contribute to this eBook.

"The Insider's Guide to Interviewing" is our third eBook (if you don't have "The Insider's Guide to Job Search" and "the Insider's Guide to Resume Writing" be sure to download them at [www.careerhub.typepad.com](http://www.careerhub.typepad.com)).

This time I asked each writer to give their very best piece of interview advice, and once again we have some wonderful articles.

Topics include how to prepare effectively, some new ways of approaching interviews, how to tell if you're being oversold, and how to negotiate salary. On all of these subjects and more, our experts provide real-world strategies for success.

We hope you find the information valuable.

Please feel free to share this eBook freely and visit us at the Career Hub blog ([www.careerhub.typepad.com](http://www.careerhub.typepad.com)). You can check in daily, subscribe to our RSS feed, or request daily email updates.

We'll see you there,

*Louise Fletcher*

Managing Editor

[Career Hub](#)



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## **Transform Interviews into Business Discussions**

***Louise Kursmark, MRW, JCTC, CEIP, CCM***

Consider the interview stereotype: The all-powerful employer grills the hapless candidate, looking for flaws, prying into weaknesses, and trying to trap candidates into saying or doing something that will knock them out of the running.

While this might be how it feels to candidates, in fact interviewers desperately want to find the right person to fill an open position. The talent shortfall is hampering productivity, hindering growth, and causing the hiring manager to spend inordinate amounts of time interviewing. Candidates who understand and appreciate the interviewer's perspective give themselves an advantage during interviews. They tend to be less nervous and less paranoid about what the interviewer is trying to uncover with a particular question.

But candidates who can elevate the interaction yet one more rung – from "interrogation" to "business discussion" – will find this change in focus alters the interview from a stressful test to an engaging dialogue about business challenges and solutions.

The first step in achieving this transformation is to change your mindset. During your job search, approach each contact, each discussion, each meeting with confidence. You know what you have done in the past; you know your strengths,



skills, and expertise. Be sure you are spending ample pre-interview time preparing your success stories and quantifying the results of your past efforts. Take time for introspection, too, so that you clearly understand and can articulate "who you are" and the value you offer.

Next, approach each conversation as an opportunity to learn. Whether engaged in a networking discussion or on an actual job interview, be careful not to overemphasize what you're looking for or deliver a monologue on your qualifications. Instead, ask questions. Listen carefully. Then look for opportunities to relate what you've learned (about a company, an industry, a competitor, a tough challenge the company is facing) to your own knowledge and experiences – phrased in the form of solutions.

In such a dialogue, you can mention articles or books you've read, experiments you've conducted (successful or not-so-successful), things you've learned from colleagues or competitors, problems that you found intractable in similar situations. As mentioned, the interview then takes the form of a dialogue between two business professionals with some shared challenges and some shared experiences. It becomes natural to relate your own success stories in a way that is wholly relevant to the company's challenges, rather than simply reciting "accomplishment statements" that you've memorized for an interview.

Consider the advantages of holding a business discussion rather than simply submitting to an interview:

- **Peer-to-peer conversation rather than power figure-to-subordinate interrogation.** By sharing "war stories" and possible solutions, you will form a bond with the interviewer and establish yourself as a colleague who can provide valuable expertise, advice, and assistance. Rather than thinking, "this person seemed to have some good experience," the interviewer is likely to think, "this person knows what we're facing and can help us!"



- **Increased comfort and confidence that project a professional presence.** Think about how you feel and perform in meetings, sales presentations, board reviews, and other business discussions. You might find yourself a bit keyed up for a major presentation, but in all likelihood you go into meetings feeling confident and professional. Now imagine feeling this same way for interviews, rather than sweaty-palmed and anxious not to get screened out. Your inner confidence has a huge impression on the way you come across, so why not establish the appropriate professional persona from the very beginning?
- **Greater emphasis on what matters: what you can do for the organization.** In many interviews, time is spent on questions that often don't reveal information of value. You might find it amusing to discuss what kind of animal you'd like to be or take comfort in parroting your list of strengths. But what really motivates employers to make a job offer is the confidence that you will solve problems for them. So why not get to these important issues as soon as possible?
- **Screening criteria that make sense.** If during your discussions you find out about problems that you don't think are solvable, you can eliminate that opportunity with few qualms. Similarly, if you learn that the company's challenges require someone with an expertise you don't have, you'll understand why you don't get the job offer. From a better-informed perspective, you'll be less emotionally invested in each opportunity. As a result, you'll be able to keep yourself on a more even keel during your job search and better understand the importance – for you and the company – of making the right match.

You might be concerned about "taking over the interview" with this approach or wonder how to steer the conversation in the right direction. These scripts might help:



- **In a formal interview, when asked to "describe your background:"** "I'd be delighted to tell you about my experience, but first – if it's all right with you – I'd like to learn a little more about the challenges you're facing with regard to [topic]. Then I can give you the information that's most pertinent to your situation."
- **In a networking meeting, after your initial introduction:** "I'm most interested in finding an opportunity with some interesting business challenges. Situations that would be a good fit for me would be [challenge], [challenge], and [challenge]. What companies do you know that face challenges like these?"
- **During an informational interview:** "I've been reading quite a bit about [industry challenge or company challenge] and I'd love to learn more about your perspective on this issue."

You might not be successful at converting all of your interviews to business discussions. Some interviewers will be bound and determined to ask "their" questions and will not be amenable to engaging in a deeper dialogue. But when you can do so, you'll enjoy more meaningful conversations and glean better information that will help you make good decisions about your career. The end result should be a new position that is a great fit for your experience and your talents – a genuine win-win for you and the company.

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## How to Think Your Way to Interview Success

**Heather Mundell**

Receiving a job offer after an interview depends on many factors – how well your skills and talents fit what the organization is looking for, how well you communicate your value proposition, how many other qualified candidates are interviewed, and sometimes the capriciousness of the hiring managers.

But one key component of interview success you may not have considered much is what you are thinking about as you prepare for, go through and reflect on a job interview.

I'm not talking about using telepathy or the Law of Attraction to get the job you want, but the degree to which you think optimistically, keep the right things in perspective and maintain a poised mental attitude directly affects the outcome you are hoping for - a job offer that you are really excited about.

What do you think about as you prepare for a job interview? Of course you've done your homework on the organization and the position to the extent you can, you've come up with your key messages you want to get across about yourself and your value proposition, you've practiced answering the toughest questions you can think of, and you've got a great suit or other outfit. But what's your attitude?



Do you view the interview as a “sink or swim”, “do or die” proposition? Are you telling yourself how this one probably won't work out? Are you worried that you won't communicate what the interviewers want to hear?

All of these kinds of thoughts raise your anxiety level. But what you need to be feeling going into an interview is confident, curious and open.

Think about how different you'll sound in the job interview if you are telling yourself these kinds of things beforehand:

- This is going to be really interesting
- I'm excited to tell them about my experience with \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm curious about the culture and will be sure to ask the questions I've prepared
- I'm open to learning whether this company might be a good fit for me
- I'm going to be fine, whether I get a job offer or not

You will be much more relaxed and open. You won't project energy of desperation. All of this will be palpable to you and the interviewers. You'll be able to focus on creating a strong impression and will feel more on top of the interview experience.

During the job interview, it's important to keep the right things in perspective. This is about calming your mind so you can focus on presenting your strengths to the interviewers. It's also about remembering that as much as they are interviewing you, you are interviewing them.

Examples of thoughts that are out of perspective are:

- Oh, I think I just blew that question
- They think I'm too old for this job
- They think I'm too young for this job



- What can I say that will convince them I'm right for this job?
- If I don't get this job, what will I do?

All of these worries distract you from performing your job at the interview. Rather than focusing on what is out of your control, you need to stay present during the interview and keep your mind focused on your selling points and how the conversation is flowing with the interviewers.

The interview is a time when both you and the organization can learn if there is a good "fit" between you. If you lose perspective about this and pretend to be someone you're not, you're doing both you and the organization a disservice. If you misrepresent yourself in the interview and subsequently accept a job offer, how likely is it that you or the organization will be happy?

If there's not a good fit between you and a certain job, learn what you can from the experience and then simply move on. No need to berate yourself or take it personally. How you reflect on your job interview experience directly affects your attitude going into the next one. If you have interviewed for many positions without receiving a job offer, it's time to take a close look at your interviewing skills and perhaps receive some professional coaching.

Optimistic thinking and keeping your perspective both assist you in maintaining a poised mental attitude. Often interviewing can seem like a fairly formulaic and predictable experience, but you need to stay flexible for the occasional curve ball.

Interview situations you may not have experienced yet include:

- Group interviews
- "Marathon" interviews at a company for several days
- Casual interviews in casual places, such as a taxi or the golf course
- Poor interviewers who ask illegal questions



- Interview questions that, while legal, strike you as bizarre or irrelevant

If you find yourself in any of these stressful situations, it's easy to panic. Your heart rate goes way up, you may feel confused, and you may not have any idea what to say.

The best approach is to take deep breaths and remind yourself to stay poised. Poise is a skill that all of us have been called on to use, usually without warning. Poise is about staying cool even as your alarm bells are going off.

Before heading to an interview, imagine the situations you might face that could require poise. Visualize yourself staying calm and focused through the stress.

Be confident that you'll get through it and that your intuition about how best to handle the situation will kick in if your mind is not panicking. For maintaining poise requires having access to your intuition, and access to your intuition requires a fairly balanced state of mind.

Thinking optimistically, keeping a certain perspective and maintaining poise all are about calming your mind so that you have the best possible chance of job interview success.

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## **How to Take Charge of The Interview**

***Louise Fletcher***

You are not alone if you dislike job interviews. Many senior-level executives, accustomed to being in control, are uncomfortable with the uncertainty of the interview situation. The good news is that you can take charge of every interview, by using a common interview technique to your advantage.

I'm referring to the technique of behavioral interviewing, which simply means that interviewers ask very specific questions about real situations. The theory is that your past behavior is the best predictor of how you will behave in the future, so employers probe your background for clues.

Let's imagine that XYZ company is looking for a Marketing VP who can generate a lot of buzz with a small budget. In order to understand your experience in this area, an behavioral interviewer will ask:

"Tell me about a time when you had to promote a product with very little cash."

*or :*

"Describe a time when you created a lot of excitement about a new launch using non-traditional marketing techniques."



Behavioral interviewing has become quite common over the last 15 years and, you may well have experienced it yourself, either as an interviewer, or an interviewee. Provided you are prepared (and we'll talk about this in a moment) a behavioral interview gives you an excellent opportunity to talk in detail about your experiences and accomplishments.

Unfortunately, many interviews still follow the old format – the questions may be arbitrary, sometimes based on the content of your resume, sometimes on the preoccupations of the interviewer. They may also be very general in nature. For example, if the XYZ company isn't using behavioral interviewing, they may ask VP candidates a question such as: "How much experience do you have working with a small budget?" This question doesn't invite the same detailed response as the request for a specific example – *but who needs an invite?* The secret to wowing them at every interview is simply this: **act as though you were asked a behavioral question, even when you were not.**

Imagine two different candidates for this fictional marketing position. When asked "How much experience do you have working with a small budget?", Candidate A replies, "I've had to do that a lot actually – most of the companies I worked for were small to mid-size, so there was never a lot of opportunity to spend money. I'm very good in those situations and I always find a way to make things happen."

Candidate B, however, gives a 'behavioral' answer: "I've had to do that a lot actually. Let me give you a recent example... you know the film "Dark Night?" I created the campaign around that movie with a \$10,000 budget. It came to my attention because it was the only film all our staff were excited about, although it was a low-budget, independent production. I decided to create a really cool web site themed around the film, and then we planted seeds of interest on forums and in chat rooms ... the whole thing took off within weeks and the movie eventually grossed millions. We never did run a single TV advertisement."



By answering in such a concrete and specific way, Candidate B brings himself to life – and ensures that he will be much more memorable than his competition.

You can use this technique for any question that is vague or general in nature:

**Q: “How much do you know about?....”**

A: “I’m very familiar – just recently I ....”

**Q: “How often have you had to ....?”**

A: “That’s something I’ve done frequently ... actually, I remember when ...”

The technique also works when an interviewer asks a hypothetical question:

**Q: “What would you do if .....?”**

A: “Well, I faced a similar situation just last year. What happened was ... ”

## **PREPARATION IS KEY**

To prepare effective stories you must first focus on the employer’s needs and then develop examples that demonstrate your ability to meet those needs.

### **The employer’s needs**

Research the company before you go for the interview – identify their key business issues (Are they growing rapidly? Are they in a crowded marketplace? Are they planning new product launches?) Get into the minds of the company’s executives and ask yourself: *Given their business issues, what will they want to know about me?*



### Developing Your Examples

Use the C-A-R (challenge-action-result) formula to develop stories that demonstrate your ability to meet the needs of the employer. If you know from your research that ABC Corporation needs a sales executive who can forge new strategic partnerships, develop stories about your experiences in that area. Describe the initial **challenge** (e.g. need to enter a new market), the **actions** you took (researched the market, identified targets, met C-level decision-makers) and the **results** (built partnerships worth \$15 million in revenues within 12 months).

If your interviewers have been trained in behavioral interviewing, you'll be exceptionally well-prepared. But if not, you'll be able to separate yourself from all the other candidates by telling compelling, interesting and targeted stories that demonstrate your ability to add value.

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## **Don't be a Victim of Your Own Ignorance: Research That Company Before You Interview!**

**Laurie Smith**

### **A Typical Interview Disaster Scenario**

Jack is congratulating himself that this job interview has been going really well, and observes to the hiring manager on the other side of the desk: "I don't know what products your company makes or what markets it serves, but with my 15 years of award-winning sales performance I'm positive that I can dramatically boost your revenues and profit margin."

Suddenly the air in the room seems to chill and Jack is baffled. From here on things seem to go downhill. Jack is soon dismissed with a rather perfunctory "Don't call us, we'll call you."

### **What went wrong here?**

Jack has made one of the cardinal mistakes that can be made in the interviewing process. He did not prepare for the interview by learning everything he reasonably could about the company, its industry, vision, products, markets, customers, issues and challenges, financial health, etc. Displaying this lack of knowledge to the interviewer, he was immediately eliminated from



consideration. "After all," the interviewer thinks, "if he has that little interest in us, why should we be interested in him?"

Jack has offended the potential employer and committed a major *faux pas*. He has also put himself at a disadvantage in terms of his ability to sell his skills and the bottom line benefit he might bring to the company. He was totally unequipped to paint a picture of how what he has to offer is specifically matched to that company's needs.

Looking at this from another angle, why would Jack have interviewed with a company that he knew almost nothing about in the first place? None of us would make a major consumer purchase without researching different brands and their features and benefits. Choosing an employer is much more important than buying a car or refrigerator! The employer/employee relationship is a critical one in Jack's life: His current livelihood and future earnings, success, personal satisfaction, and ultimate career path will be greatly affected by the job choices he makes along the way. How does he know that this company is right for him if he hasn't taken the time to learn all he can about it?

### **How to Avoid the Disappointment Jack Experienced**

We all shudder at what happened to Jack . It vividly illustrates the importance of gathering considerable knowledge about companies before interviewing with them. Yet one might wonder, "How can I best gather this information and avoid a scenario like the one above?"

The short answer is: Do your homework. Below you will find a sampling of the easiest and fastest ways to find the information needed to both evaluate a company's fit with your career needs and prepare yourself to ace that interview.

- **Leverage the Power of Search Engines**



With the power of today's Internet search engines you have literally at your fingertips just about everything you could possibly want to know about any company you are considering.

Submit queries about the company to all three major search engines—[Google](#), [MSN](#), and [Yahoo](#). Each will come up with different results to help you round out your picture. Though I would not categorize it strictly as a search engine, [About.com](#) can also be a great primary resource for research sites. Type in the phrase "Company Research" in the search box and you'll get over 9,600 results. "Company Information" brings up over 31,000.

A primary resource you will be looking for is of course the company's own commercial website. Plan to spend significant time reviewing it thoroughly, but don't stop there. Look at articles where the company has been mentioned and blog entries where it is discussed. (This is often a good way to learn less favorable facts about the company's dealings with its employees and also to gain insights into its corporate culture.) Review summaries about the company contained on the websites of Wall Street analysts, business periodicals, etc. Read analyses of their industries and markets to gain a perspective of the company's current and emerging challenges and opportunities.

#### • **Access Web-Based Clearinghouses of Company Information**

There are quite a variety of these sites, some free, some at fairly nominal cost, and others involving a hefty fee. You will find many by querying any search engine with phrases like "company information," "company profiles," etc. Here are a few of my favorites:

- ❖ [Hoovers](#) has long been known as an excellent source for extensive company information, but be aware that a very limited portion of the information there is free.



- ❖ [Corporate Information](#) provides free snapshot reports on all companies, and expanded information for a fee.
- ❖ [Vault](#) provides basic company information for free, and expanded information with membership. The site also spotlights employers, features employee surveys, and provides ranking lists.
- ❖ [Forbes](#) provides a variety of lists such as the 400 Best Big Companies, 200 Best Small Companies, Fastest-Growing Techs, Largest Private Companies, Global High Performers, and others.
- ❖ [Fortune/CNN](#) similarly provides lists of the Fortune 500, Global 500, Best Companies to Work For, etc., with reports on them as well as links to News, Analyses, Blogs, and Press Releases about them.
- ❖ [The Inc. 500](#) lists and briefly describes the nation's fastest-growing privately held companies.
- ❖ [Wetfeet](#) supplies basic company profiles covering company history, business, profitability, and jobs, and offers expanded profiles with a subscription.
- ❖ [AnnualReports](#) offers free and easy access to companies' annual reports.

#### • Use Your Library Card

Nowadays many larger library systems allow card holders remote access via the Internet, or you can find information the old-fashioned way by visiting the library in person and enlisting the assistance of the usually amazingly helpful research librarian.

Valuable resources to be found in the library include databases of periodical articles such as *Onefile* and *Proquest*, *Standard and Poor's Industry Surveys*, *Mergent's* company overviews, and a variety of business directories.

The New York Public Library has kindly published an online, printable guide to searching for company information that is available either in print or on the Web. You can access a copy at the [NYPL website](#).



- **Talk With People In The Know**

Ask your family, friends, and acquaintances if they know anyone who works at the company. If you are lucky enough to identify one or more such treasure troves of information, interview them thoroughly to get an insider's perspective.

- **Use Social Networking Sites to Learn About the Company**

In the process of leveraging all of the above techniques, you will identify names of people who work for the company. With this information in hand, search for them on social networking sites such as [ZoomInfo](#) and [LinkedIn](#), and read their profiles carefully. You will likely find there links to articles by or about them, their personal or business blogs, etc. You may even be able to strike up an acquaintance with one or more employees through such sites. Wouldn't it be great to arrive at the interview able to drop the names of a few people in the company?

### **Don't Be Like Jack**

The bottom line is that it is so easy nowadays to find a wealth of information about a company you are considering or one that you are scheduled to interview with that there is just no good excuse not to do so! Shame on the candidate who shows up at the interview without substantial knowledge about the company whose representative is sitting on the other side of the desk!

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*Barbara Safani, owner of [Career Solvers](#) works with Fortune 100 companies and individuals to deliver targeted programs focusing on resume development, job search, networking, interviewing, and salary negotiation. She is a triple certified resume writer, frequent contributor to numerous career-related publications, and co-creator of a leading resume writer certification exam. Ms. Safani advises members of the NY chapter of the Financial Executives Network Group and chairs a SHRM networking group for HR professionals in career transition.*

## **Interview Authentically**

***Barbara Safani, M.A., NCRW, CERW, CPRW, CCM***

The goal of the interview is to showcase your accomplishments while developing a relationship with the hiring manager. The quality of the relationship hinges on your ability to build credibility for your candidacy and effectively gain the hiring manager's trust.

Despite this, many job seekers continue to "spin" their responses to interview questions. This is often the tack that job seekers take when they are asked questions with a negative slant to them such as "What is your greatest weakness?" or "Tell me about a mistake you made." Perhaps candidates spin their answers in an effort to downplay any blemishes in their background or maybe because it's the strategy that so many interview preparation books teach. Either way, candidates who lack authenticity are easy to spot, and the outcome of the interview is severely compromised when job seekers chose to spin their responses to tough interview questions. As a matter of fact, in a recent Society for Human Resources Management survey, recruiters and hiring managers reported that one of their biggest pet peeves within the context of the interview situation was candidates who responded to difficult interview questions with answers that attempted to spin a tough situation into one with only positive outcomes. Below are a few of the most common interview questions that job seekers try to spin their responses to.

### **What is your greatest weakness?**



### Red flag answer

"I am a perfectionist and I get frustrated when people aren't as committed to the job as I am."

### Problem

The candidate is answering the question about a weakness by responding with an answer that suggests a strength. Such answers are disingenuous and are not well received by hiring authorities. The candidate is also assuming that perfection is considered a desirable trait in the organization. Some hiring managers will perceive a perfectionist as someone who gets so caught up in the details that they can't achieve the project's objectives.

### Adjusted response

Earlier in my career, when I was a software developer, my strong attention to detail was an asset because I could quickly spot and correct systems errors. But after I was promoted to project manager, this strength became a bit of a liability because I was now responsible for delegating work and overseeing the big picture aspect of the project. I struggled at first because it was my nature to want to fix every error. While I still have that tendency, I now rely on the technical expertise of my team and this allows me to concentrate on delivering projects on time and on budget.

### **Tell me about a situation where you did not get along with a supervisor.**

### Red flag answer

"I've been very fortunate and I've never worked for someone I didn't get along with."

### Problem

Everyone has had situations where they disagreed with a boss and by saying you have not forces the interviewer to question your integrity. It also can send out a



signal that you are not seasoned enough or haven't been in situations that require you to develop a tough skin or deal with confrontation.

#### Adjusted response

"It's natural for people to have differing opinions. When this has occurred in the past, I have presented my reasons for my position and openly listened to my supervisor's opinion as well. Recently my supervisor recommended a change to a report that in my opinion made the reporting more cumbersome and time-consuming. I expressed my concerns but also asked many questions to determine what additional information my boss needed. Once I understood her needs, I was able to offer a suggestion that satisfied her information needs and actually streamlined the existing report and made it easier to use."

#### **Describe a situation where an initiative you were part of failed.**

##### Red flag answer

"I've never had a project that failed and my supervisors have always praised my work."

##### Problem

If you can't discuss a failure or mistake, the interviewer might conclude that you do not possess the depth of experience necessary to do the job. The interviewer is not looking for perfection. They are trying to better understand your level of responsibility, your decision-making process, your ability to recover from a mistake, what you learned from the experience, and if you can accept responsibility for your mistakes.

##### Adjusted response

"Everyone makes mistakes. I'd like to think that I have learned something valuable from every mistake I have made. In my previous role as marketing director, I launched a product and was disappointed in the initial sales results. I realized that we had launched too quickly and needed to do additional market research to determine the needs of multiple demographics within our market.



Following the research initiative, the marketing was realigned with a niche demographic and sales doubled within one year.”

By developing and practicing responses to difficult interview questions that display honesty, thoughtfulness, goodwill, and fallibility you will create a realistic and authentic portrait of your candidacy and develop a strong rapport with the hiring authority. This will help you advance to the next round in the interview process and lead you one step closer to securing the position.

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## **WOW Interview Tips, Tricks & Tactics**

***Billie Sucher, MS, CTMS, CTSB, JCTC***

When you hear the word *interview*, often times it conjures up fear, trepidation, and worry over what will go wrong instead of how it can be the most rewarding experience ever – one that lands you right where you want to be. The next time you have the opportunity to conduct a *business conversation with a purpose* (AKA interview), educate the employer about the very best of brand *you* -- your features, benefits, and value. Think effective. Think relevant. Think credible. With solid preparation, excellence and professionalism, you will find that interviewing can yield a highly favorable return on investment (ROI) for you. And isn't that what you want...to optimize results for self? In short, make it easy for the employer to select you. Listed below, in alphabetical order, are some of my favorite tips, tricks and tactics for interview success.

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| Anticipate | Anticipate questions you did not practice. Don't be thrown off. Take a moment to formulate a solid answer, then respond.                              |
| Attire     | Wear professional, appropriate attire. Your wardrobe selection for the interview is totally within your control. From head to toe, make it your best. |



Attitude	Know that the best credentials in the world won't outshine a bad attitude.
Body language	Convey a message of confidence – one that shows you're happy to be there.
Brand	Know <i>your</i> brand <i>before</i> you go to the interview. What five words best describe your brand? What <i>one</i> word best captures your brand?
Cards	Ask the hiring manager for a business card. That way, you'll have the information you need to write a thank-you note within 24 hours. Also, share your <i>own</i> professional business card with relevant contact information on it. (Do not use your current employer's business card.)
Carriage	Walk into the interview with head high, back straight and chin up.
Concerns	Listen for the "concern" word as the interview conversation progresses. Prior to the meeting, identify potential areas of concern regarding your candidacy and develop strategies to keep yourself in a competitive position.
Confidence	Confidence is your ally; cockiness is your enemy.
Confirm	Confirm date, time, location and details prior to attending the interview.
Desire	How badly do you want <i>it</i> , whatever <i>it</i> is?



Distractions	Do not let little things become distractions, i.e. chewing gum, biting nails, fiddling with hair, answering cell phone, interrupting, fidgeting or squirming, to mention a few.
Educate	Educate the hiring team about you, your features, value, and benefit as you align your credentials with their needs.
Employer	Share information that offers ideas, insights, strategies, and solutions regarding your ability to help the employer achieve <i>their</i> goals.
Equality	View yourself as a partner, an equal, in the business conversation.
Excellence	Everything you say and do is a reflection of you. Make it superb.
Eye contact	Look directly at the hiring manager without staring or making them feel uncomfortable.
First impressions	This is your one chance to wow 'em! Will you?
Fit	On paper, and in person, you may have the most talent; in reality, the employer strives to <i>hire the best fit</i> .
Focus	You are there for one purpose: to determine if this blind date will warrant a second meeting. Maybe it will; possibly it won't. You won't know until you go out together!
Google	When the hiring manager performs a Google search of your name, what, if anything, will they find that diminishes your



candidacy for the position? Discover any digital dirt demons prior to your interview, not during or after!

- Handshake Practice your handshake. What message does it send?
- Helpfulness Are you making it easy, or difficult, for the hiring manager to choose you over your competition?
- Honesty Heed the advice of Mark Twain, "Always tell the truth. That way, you don't have to remember what you said."
- Integrity Don't *tell* decision-makers that you have integrity; *show them* by offering specific, concrete examples of your personal and/or business integrity.
- Intellect Share what you know, not what you don't. Don't belittle or demean yourself. Forget about perfect answers or right answers. Simply respond to the question asked in a positive, constructive manner.
- Interested If you want the job, let the hiring manager know it's exactly what you're looking for, and how thrilled you are about the possibility.
- Intuition Pay attention to what *isn't* being said and what *isn't* happening and what *isn't* apparent. Hint: red flags.
- Joblessness Explain in a straightforward, sincere manner your reason for being jobless. You need not provide a long, detailed explanation; keep it short and to the point. "*My company downsized and 34 of us lost our jobs.*" Offer your "reason" for



being unemployed (between jobs) at the beginning of the interview, not at the end.

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Listening          | Listen carefully. Don't let your mind wander when the hiring manager speaks. You may be tested to see if you're paying attention..."Now where were we?" |
| Manners            | Mind your manners. People notice.   |
| Memorable message  | Make your meeting memorable and your message credible.  |
| Mission            | Know the mission statement of your existing (most recent) employer, as well as the mission statement of the prospective employer. You may be asked.     |
| Name dropping      | While it is who you know that helps, dropping a person's name doesn't <i>always</i> work to your advantage.   |
| Name Pronunciation | Learn how to correctly pronounce the name of the person who will be interviewing you. Some people are super-sensitive about this matter.                |
| Needs              | Identify the employer's needs (and expectations); then, sell your knowledge, skills, and abilities to align with their needs.                           |
| Next Step          | Discover the next step in the interviewing process prior to interview exit.   |
| Opportunity        | View your interview (business meeting) as a chance to explore in greater detail a potential opportunity.  |



- Organization Do your part to keep the conversation organized and on-track versus random and discombobulated.
- Passion Let the hiring team see your passion. You either have it, or you don't.
- Performance Perform your part with excellence, just as you would a part in a play. Act the part, speak the part and deliver a stellar performance. It could win you the job.
- Practice Rehearse your presentation several times; it will boost your confidence and enhance your overall performance.
- Prepare Preparation is often the fine line between winning and losing. It takes energy, commitment, and discipline to achieve desired results.
- Professional Present yourself as a true professional through your words, actions, and deeds.
- Questions Ask questions – more than one, fewer than 10.
- References Know what your professional references will say about you. What will they say you need to work on?
- Relax Let the hiring manager see you as a competent professional who is calm, focused, and a pleasure to be around.



Research	Thoroughly research the organization's people, products, services, trends, changes, innovations, and competition prior to your interview.
Salary	Research salary and compensation factors before the interview. Online salary calculators, recruiters, and professional organizations are helpful resources.
Smile	Your smile can distinguish you from your competition. "I remember him; he was the only candidate who smiled."
Stand-out	Among five top-notch candidates, what makes you <i>the one</i> ? Figure out at least three distinctive traits that distinguish you from the competition.
Talking too much	Excessive talking will not give you an edge; it will give the hiring manager a reason to end the interview.
Thank you	Remember to express your thanks and appreciation – on the telephone, at the interview, in e-mails, and future follow-up.
Think	Think about what you want to say <i>before</i> you say it.
Time	Arrive at the interview a few minutes early instead of a few minutes late.
Title	Discover the hiring manager's exact title; you may be asked about it.
Unexpected	Expect the unexpected. For example, perhaps you didn't expect the interview to take place at the hotel's swimming pool? Or



maybe you didn't expect such an inappropriate question? Or what about that illegal one? How will you respond?

- Uniqueness      Know what distinguishes you, your brand, from 25 other equally-qualified candidates.
  
- Value            Articulate with confidence your value and worth to the organization.
  
- Voice of others      Identify people in your network who are willing to attest to your professional competencies, talents, gifts, and abilities.
  
- Words            Be mindful of your word choice – one wee *wrong* word can cost you the opportunity.
  
- You                Let the employer see, hear, experience and get to know the very best of you!

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*[George Blomgren](#) has more experience as a job seeker than he likes to think about. He's also been responsible for recruiting, interviewing and hiring. He's a widely published author on career development and job seeking. He works for a national network of employment Web sites, where every day he gets to see what works and what doesn't. George likes motorcycling, the band Yes and vegetables that start with the letter "a".*

## **The Prop To Bring To Every Job Interview**

**George Blomgren**

In *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*, readers are advised that the only thing you really need when traveling the universe is a towel. While this may be invaluable advice for intergalactic travel, towels are of limited value in job interviews. What you really need instead is a leather portfolio with a pad of paper and a pen.

As with many props, the effectiveness depends largely on what you do with the portfolio. Leaving it sitting on the table will result in few bonus points; in fact, it may work against you, for reasons that will become clear.

There are five purposes for the portfolio:

1. A nice portfolio, like a clean suit and a firm handshake, reflects both style and quality.
2. Using the pad for taking notes sends a clear message that you are taking the dialog seriously.
3. Your notes may come in useful later. In subsequent interviews, for example, or when writing follow-up cards.
4. Your pad can be an effective tool for "buying time" when needed. Taking several moments to jot things down and collect your thoughts looks better than staring blankly at an interviewer, waiting for inspiration.



5. Although you may have emailed your resume in advance, bring several fresh copies on nice paper. Keeping them in your portfolio is the perfect way to make sure they stay crisp and clean.

These points deserve additional elaboration. First, don't underestimate the value of appearances in an interview. All other things being equal, the candidate who makes the more professional impression has a real advantage. When two candidates are dressed similarly, a nice portfolio may be the deciding factor.

As far as using the portfolio, and taking notes, anytime the interviewer says something important, write it down. (Perhaps more importantly, anytime the interviewer says something he or she clearly *thinks* is important, write it down.) This where your pad can backfire. Having one and not opening it (or not taking notes) sends the unfortunate message "I'm fully prepared to take notes, but this conversation doesn't warrant the effort."

Using your notes in follow up interviews or communications (such as thank you notes) can send a powerful message. First, it shows that you took relevant notes. Second, you referred back to them. And third, you are using them in a constructive manner. Since these are all skills associated with many jobs, demonstrating them in the interview process can be very effective.

Regarding "buying time," many career professionals support the idea that deliberate, well thought out responses are better than snappy answers. But a long pause can be awkward. Take the edge off by composing your thoughts on paper. If you think it will take more than several moments, excuse yourself by saying "I just need to capture this thought — give me just a moment, please."

Finally, why bring extra copies of your resume? There are two benefits here. One, you may interview with people who don't have resume, at least not readily at hand. Providing one solves that problem. Second, every resume they receive electronically has been printed out on the same boring white photocopy paper.



Having yours on nice paper — I recommend a linen stationary with a very subtle grey or ivory tint — is just one more to make your resume stand out.

Clearly, your portfolio is like a magician's hat: it doesn't really matter what it is, but what you do with it. You have to work this prop. Fortunately, it's not difficult!

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*Known as the "Career Assessment Goddess", Susan is an expert in using personal branding and career assessments to reveal exciting career and business choices. She is the only National Certified Career Counselor in the world with certifications as a personal branding strategist, career management coach, distance career counselor, and expert resume writer. These multiple credentials and her 21 years of experience represent the "cream-of-the-crop" for the careers industry. Her web sites include [www.assessmentgoddess.com](http://www.assessmentgoddess.com) and [www.resume-magic.com](http://www.resume-magic.com)*

## **Likeability: The "Wild Card" in Interviewing**

***Susan Guarneri, NCCC, CPBS, CERW, CEIP***

Do you come across in interviews as likeable and friendly? There just might be a big payoff if you do – landing your "dream" job or promotion and with a higher salary than anticipated.

According to Scott Ginsberg, the nametag-wearing record-holder of 'Hello, My Name is Scott' fame, "Friendly always wins".

Mark McCormack, Founder and Chairman of IMG, a powerful sports management and marketing company, says, "All things being equal, people will do business with a friend; all things being unequal, people will still do business with a friend."

In *The Likeability Factor: How to Boost Your L-Factor and Achieve Your Life's Dreams* author Tim Sanders says, "Life is like a series of popularity contests." He defines likeability as "an ability to create positive attitudes in other people through the delivery of emotional and physical benefits."

So, if the interviewing process can be compared to a job-winning contest, do you hold the wild card of likeability?



## **Interview Decision-making**

Most decisions, including the hiring or promotion decision, are based on emotions and supported by logic. While interviewers strive to be impartial and logical, they are also human beings susceptible to human connections and emotions. In his book, Tim Sanders postulates a 3-step decision-making process that is centered on the emotion of likeability. The employment interviewer is using these 3 steps to decide whether to “buy” you or not:

1. Listen – If you are perceived as likeable, your target audience (interviewer) is more apt to really listen to what you are saying and remember it.
2. Believe – Likeability greatly enhances the level of trust and believability accorded to what you are saying.
3. Value – Your likeability factor has an enormous impact on your perceived value. This translates into your perceived value in the functional role, team, department, and organization, as well as the salary and benefits that will be commensurate with your value.

Likeability plays a key role in whether you are the candidate listened to, believed, and valued – and subsequently on the receiving end of a job offer or promotion. Hard to believe? An NFI Research study of senior executives and managers across many industries, reported in September 2006, found that of these study participants:

- 63% rely on a candidate’s likeability when hiring and promoting,
- Rank skills second to likeability (at 62%), and
- 73% hire and promote based on a candidate’s “likelihood to fit in”.



## **How Do You Convey Likeability?**

The heart of likeability and approachability is about building and maintaining trust, and drawing people to you via confident and comfortable interactions.

These interactions potentially include a host of intellectual and sensory perceptions that are clues to your friendliness: personal branding, conversations, questions and answers, phone and email, first impressions, networking, written communications (résumé and cover letters, blog, web site, portfolio), stories, examples, body language (non-verbal behaviors), tone of voice, scent, physical space, open-mindedness, availability, social etiquette, active listening, and more.

## **Likeability Skills-Building**

No matter what stage of the interviewing process – pre-interview, during the actual interview, and post-interview – be aware of these opportunities to market your likeability and friendliness. To increase your likeability, here are some skill-building steps suggested by Tim Sanders, along with tips related to interviewing:

1. **Friendliness.** Develop a friendly mindset and communicate friendliness at all times. Record possible interview stories that demonstrate your skills and accomplishments and then listen to how you sound. Play back your answering machine message. Does your tone of voice sound friendly?
2. **Relevance.** Connect with others' needs, wants, and interests. Let others do most of the talking and listen to how you could relevantly connect and be believed. As Eric Schmidt, CEO of Google said in a recent interview with students at Stanford's Business and Design School, "You don't learn very much when you yourself are talking."



3. Empathy. Connect on a feelings level. Recognize, acknowledge, and show a sincere interest in others' feelings, getting into their heads and hearts. It is the quickest shortcut to meeting them more than halfway and increasing their likeability response to you. Ask for the three most important expectations for the job and why they are important. Show that you understand both the logical and emotional implications of achieving those expectations.
4. Realness. Be true to you and share your realness with others. Your authenticity is embodied in your personal brand. Use your personal brand to attract positive attention and top-of-mind awareness; exude your uniqueness and embed the notion that there is no other candidate quite like you. According to William Arruda of The Reach Branding Club, "Your personal brand is your unique promise of value."

### **Likeability and Communications**

Tell your authentic, personal brand story – stories are memorable. Relate your brand-defining experiences and stories in such a way that it connects to the organization's and department's mission, as well as with the interviewer. Pay attention to both the content and the delivery of the story; you may need to alter them to appeal to your target audience (the interviewer). The more you are perceived as being likeable and like (similar to) the interviewer, the more readily you will engage them in receiving your communication. Your personal brand can be a strategic tool in the "wild-card" advantage of likeability.

To aid you in communicating with individuals of diverse personalities, you may want to read *The Art of Speed Reading People: How to Size People Up and Speak Their Language* by Paul Tieger. This guide will equip you with the ability to quickly grasp the nuances of others' behaviors and speech patterns and then reflect their personality and communication style in your interactions.



## **Niceness Will Get You Ahead**

*The Power of Nice*, written by two advertising executives Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval, promotes the idea that being nice in the business world WILL get you ahead. Their six principles and how they relate to interviews include:

1. Positive impressions are like seeds. For example, treating everyone in a friendly, positive manner has a multiplication effect – it will resurface in positive impressions that interviewers will hear about you from others.
2. You never know. How important is it for you to treat that person you meet in the elevator at a job interview in a likeable way? This principle says you never know how important the people you are interacting with could be in your job search. Perhaps they have the ear of the hiring manager or may even be on the hiring committee...you never know.
3. People change. That receptionist or junior accountant you interact with now could end up in a hiring capacity 5, 10 or 20 years from now – and it could be exactly for the job you really want. Be nice to everyone.
4. Nice must be automatic. Faking likeability by turning on the charm and “schmoozing” in an interview may seem like a shortcut to success, but generally interviewers can sense when it’s not the real thing. Your likeability must be genuine and real, an everyday behavior and not just reserved for job interviews.
5. Negative impressions are like germs. Being aloof or rude or even just unaware of circumstances, surroundings, and people will cause others to react to that behavior in a negative manner. That “first impression” you make will spread to color the rest of the interview – for better or worse.



6. You will know. How you treat others – nice or not – is something you will always know, even if the hiring authority does not. You will know if you value niceness, along with skills and talent and intelligence, and that will unconsciously be conveyed in your verbal and non-verbal behaviors during the interview.

### **Assess Your Likeability – Right Now**

Are you nice and likeable already? Are you able to honestly and easily present yourself in an interview and “win” the hearts and minds of others with the “wild card” of likeability? To assess your likeability, here are links to two quizzes:

- ✓ The Power of Nice – [NiceQ](#)
- ✓ *Say It Better E-Zine*, “Your Likeability Quotient: [A Gut-Instincts Quiz](#)”

For more on building your likeability skills refer to these classic resources, as well as newer articles and websites:

- *How to Work a Room* by Susan Roane
- *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie
- *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* by Robert Fulghum
- *How to Speed-Read Hiring Managers* by Paul D. Tieger and Barbara Barron-Tieger
- *Five Tips to Increase Your Likeability in the Office and in the World* by Justin Hartfield, Deputy Editor of The Prometheus Institute



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## Boost Your Credibility During Interviews

**Wendy J. Terwelp, JCTC, CCMC, CPBS**

**Case studies:** you see them on websites, marketing brochures, and business proposals. They describe challenges, actions, and results (CAR) -- ultimately demonstrating how the company or product can do the same for you.

Even dreaded infomercials use them. They demonstrate the products' benefits by having actual product "users" tell their story. "Why, I lost 25 pounds using Therma-Trim combined with diet and exercise. Here's my story," says the 95-pound, athletic-looking blonde.

Can you use this same strategy to promote what you can do for a company -- without sounding like an infomercial? Yes! Does it work? Yes!

This strategy helps demonstrate your expertise during -- and after -- an interview. Develop at least three case studies that demonstrate your expertise. Keep each study to one page per study, if possible. Name it something exciting, such as: "New Web Strategy Tripled Sales for X-Marks-the-Spot Marketing." Avoid too much jargon to make it an easy read.

For example, if you are a web designer, provide the Challenge encountered when developing a particular website. Perhaps it was capturing the company's personality in an exciting way or creating an exciting e-commerce solution that



would triple online business in the first six months. Provide the Action steps you took to achieve the Results. This can include the way you developed the web concept and marketing plan, structured the site, researched effective keywords, partnered with outside resources, etc. Then describe the Results. What happened with the project? If you have stats that demonstrate the amount of hits increased combined with a sales increase, these are hard facts that prove you can do the job.

You'll be able to back up your claims during an interview with solid examples. And, for added effect, leave copies of your case studies behind for the interviewer to review at her leisure.

In my former world of newspaper reporting, we were always told, "Show it; don't tell it." You'll be doing the same, showing your expertise to a prospective employer through case studies. A classic "try-before-you-buy" that shows you can be a solution to their business problem. And people who provide solutions get hired.

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*Pat Schuler was born in a humble log cabin, stolen by gypsies at an early age and raised by wolves, all of which served as excellent preparation for a 25-year career in sales and sales management in corporate America. She helps sales executives, managers and business owners salvage their investments by turning around sales reps in trouble. She makes a difference in an astonishingly short time. Seeing these sales reps flourish is the joy of what she does. [www.geminipro.com](http://www.geminipro.com)*

## **Interview Danger -- Don't Be Oversold!**

***Pat Schuler***

You are probably familiar with the metaphor that the job search is a sales process. This is even more true for the interview. No mystery here. You're trying to persuade the interviewer that you're the best fit, the best buying decision, with the highest potential Return on Investment (ROI) and the lowest potential risk. This is exactly what the best big-ticket (and best paid) sales people do every day. So why not take some lessons from them as you pursue your job search?

But there is a ***danger***, something that more than 80% of us forget, especially in the later stages of interviewing.

Like a big-ticket sales person you've done your homework and you're ready for another closing conversation.

- You *know the industry* or you've done extensive research on it, including informational interviews. If you're changing industries or specialties it's especially important to know the vocabulary and the acronyms that are common to the area. Failure to do so brands you as an outsider and a greater risk. At that point you need either to walk on water or you need to be a much cheaper hire to stay in the running.



- You've *researched the company* and even the person you're interviewing with. (We see that as many as 30% of sales professionals use Google to research the person they're meeting with.) How often are you doing this when you interview?
- You know the *problems and challenges* of the industry and this particular company. As a candidate, how can you prove your potential value if you don't know the problems you'll be asked to solve? In sales jargon, these problems are called *pains*. Your entire value proposition is based on the problems you solve, the improvements you can make, the ways in which you simplify life – the pains which you eradicate! If you can't understand these problems and speak to them, you have NO chance of closing the sale, in your case, of getting the job.
- You have your *success stories* (some as case studies or white papers) and accomplishments prepared so you can articulate your value. You can prove by example that you've already faced the challenges they're facing, and **you've won**. Sales people come to any presentation prepared to tell the prospect about other clients who've successfully used their tools or services to solve the problem. Again this lowers the perceived risk of the interviewer and is your best opportunity to build a value case for hiring you. This demonstrates your probable return on investment or ROI. How good of a deal are you?
- You have references prepared and you either already know or you will learn what the interviewer hopes to hear from your references. What areas still cause her concern about you? In sales these would be the interviewer's *questions and objections* which you have failed to address. Top sales people ask some version of the question, "What concerns do you still have?" "What have I missed?" "What else do you need to know, hear or see to feel that moving forward with me is a good decision?"



Can this be a scary question? Absolutely! Failure to ask some version of it means you have dramatically lowered your odds of being selected. Asking the questions shows the interviewer you have a certain amount of courage and have nothing to hide. Ask – you'll be amazed how often the interviewer will tell you specifically what her concerns are.

- You have ascertained in the initial phone interview (or at the latest during the current interview) what sales people call the *timeline*. You have specifics on how they accomplish this hiring process and when they would like you in place solving problems and making money for them.
- You know you're in the ball park for compensation. You've researched the industry and the norms in this particular company. Sales people call this determining the *budget*. Are there ways to sell beyond the budget? Certainly. With the right match of skills to the pains, the prospective employer could even create a position just for you.
- You are prepared to negotiate the best compensation possible. Sales professionals *expect to negotiate*. Most of us hate to negotiate. Some of us even feel it's demeaning. After all, you think, they should know how valuable you are and give you what you're worth. *You shouldn't have to ask for it.*
- Bottom Line: If you don't negotiate, I guarantee you that at least 60% of the time, you are leaving money or benefits on the table. It could be *yours*, if you're willing to ask questions and give good reasons for the higher compensation you have in mind.

Sounds like you're prepared to ask for the order. In this case the order or deal is your next job. What have you missed? **Why is your future at risk?**



**You're in danger of being oversold!** You may have heard it called *being blue-skied*. We are so busy selling, persuading and building value that we forget one very important fact – in most cases, **the selling is a two-way street!** The interviewers have been subtly (or not-so-subtly) selling you on the company and the position. Yes, I know, you occasionally run into the interviewer from the Jack Webb/Dragnet school of interviewing. (You know, the person whose face will crack and peel away if they smile or answer any of your questions.) But those people are few and far between if you're interviewing with the right people and not HR.

Over 90% of the time, you are being sold at least as hard as you are selling. This becomes more true the higher up the ladder you go in your career.

### **How do I recognize I'm being oversold?**

What might that sound like? You could be hearing legitimate benefits like an on-site daycare or fitness center, each of which has swayed hiring decisions of clients and associates. At a certain level, it could be membership in a country club or social club.

More insidious are the *subtle cultural cues*. Ever heard, "We're a work hard, play hard group here at Universal InterGalactic!" My experience has been that this is code for "We work 12-14 hour days and everybody meets in the bar to drink heavily on Friday."

For many of us, there's something seductive about the work hard, play hard stance. Perhaps it's the whole comrade in arms mentality. If you don't do your research, you risk being oversold and finding yourself in a *siege mentality* instead.

Another version of being oversold might sound like "Join us on the *Grand Crusade!*" Also very seductive, especially for those who would like to make a



difference in what we do. One former client increased her workload by over 40% when she moved to a medical services company. She is happily working 12- and 13-hour days because she knows that her product saves lives. She is also being paid extremely well for doing so. She negotiated. The point is that some would not be prepared to make that trade for any amount of money.

One of the key areas where many of us are oversold is – you guessed it – *compensation*. If there is any element of incentive compensation, this is where we are most likely to be burned. Even serious sales professionals. *Especially* sales professionals. We always want to believe we've finally found the perfect compensation package that will reward us for all our hard work.

### **How do I keep from being oversold?**

Here are some questions you might to ask:

#### **Team bonus –**

- Who qualifies as “The Team”?
- What’s the history?
- How many times in the last month/quarter/year have they been successful?
- What factors is the bonus designed to reward or incent?
- What factors can impact the numbers or ratios?
- What allowances are made for factors beyond your control? (Like equipment failure, a transportation strike or bad weather)
- Can one person destroy it for everyone? What does management do if this is a pattern?

#### **New bonus/incentive –**

- How is it structured?
- What problem is it designed to cure?
- Who designed it?
- What percentage of the team is expected to qualify for it?



- Based on historical data, what percentage of the potential participants would have qualified if this program had been in place last year?
- What's changed since then?
- What are the challenges and obstacles to success?
- How could the program be affected by management decisions and/or industry trends?

**Individual bonus/incentive –**

- What are the *specific* criteria for success?
- What is the exact timeline? Be particularly aware of distinctions like booked vs. shipped!
- What percent of your peers qualified last period?
- What got in the way of those who failed to qualify?
- Ask to see examples of the reports that determine qualification and a list of those who qualified last period.

These questions may sound hard-nosed and as though you don't trust the interviewer. Soften the questions and make them more diplomatic if that's your personal style. Just make it very clear that you're not taking bland assurances where your compensation is concerned. I'm not saying that an interviewer would deliberately mislead you, but you definitely want to protect yourself from their enthusiasm and overzealous view of your or the department's future.

The stories from people who have been oversold would fill volumes. One of my favorites is the candidate who chose technology Company A over another because Company A had lakeshore cabins that the employees got to use for free! After the hire, he found out there was a complicated formula based on seniority to determine who got their first choice of dates. New hires barely qualified at all. Free also didn't include taxes the employee was expected to pay, which could amount to as much as \$100 per day. No real surprises when you think about it, and still better than paying full price at a resort, but those facts took some of the luster from the candidate's decision.



Another favorite compensation story is about a senior sales person who exceeded her multi-million dollar quota by 25%. She was very excited. This meant an extra bonus on top of her regular compensation, plus a trip for two to the Bahamas. Imagine her dismay when she found out that she qualified for neither the bonus nor the trip because she was short \$25,000 in one of four categories of products and services. She had not read the very fine print about specific amounts in each of the categories. She'd been working all year so she and her husband could qualify for the trip.

**Bottom Line: What can you do to protect yourself?**

***You must know what's important to you.*** The key to any successful negotiation (and successful job search) is to be very clear in your requirements: what's important, what would be nice, and what's a deal breaker. Being clear on this makes you much less likely to be oversold.

*Have your questions prepared in advance.* What do you most want to know? Are you ready for 13-hour days or is work/family balance one of your highest priorities? Ask gracefully about culture and a typical day. Use the behavior-based style of questions the interviewers have been using on you.

What else can you do? One tactic is to *interview those who will be your peers.* These players are usually considerably more candid. They may not feel the need to do you any favors, but most will enjoy making certain you have an accurate picture of the terrain, especially if they feel they were oversold themselves.

Another tactic is to *call into the sales department.* Explain your mission to one of the sales people. You're apt to get an accurate reading on how the manager and the department are viewed and a decent reading on the culture. You may need to promise that their confidentiality will be respected. They may have to work with the people you're discussing and they won't want any fallout.



***Be on the lookout for what I call fluff words.*** You'll find them in abundance in most conversations about compensation, benefits and responsibilities. They include: usually, frequently, probably, often, almost always, almost never. What do they sound like? You ask what percentage of your peers qualified for the bonus last quarter. What you hear is, "Why, just about everyone in the department who was really working made the cut." If you listen closely, what you heard bears no relation to an answer to your question. What you want to hear is, "12 out of 17, or 70%." If you can't get specifics, don't count on anything that's being implied. Even if you have a history of beating the odds, in this case the game may be wired against you.

Finally, let's ask why you are being oversold. As I said, it's not because I think most interviewers deliberately mislead you. But look at the situation from the viewpoint of the interviewers:

- You and one or two others hold the hope for ending the interview nightmare.
- Most haven't been trained to be effective interviewers.
- Interviewing is a huge dent in an already full schedule and you have potential.
- The position may have already been open for months.
- Everyone is tired of taking up slack for the open position and you look presentable.
- The interviewer is genuinely proud of the company and excited about what you could accomplish in the position.
- You're seriously underpaid at your current company and you could save them thousands of dollars in budget money.
- They don't know you borrowed rent money from your in-laws last month.
- They want you excited and eager so they can sell the dream when you balk at the low-ball offer they plan to make.



Sometimes candidates are concerned about rocking the boat and souring a potential employer on them. Your responsibility in the interview is not to submit to the Spanish Inquisition, but to ask questions as well. The truth is most interviewers respect questions if they're handled diplomatically. In some cases failure to ask questions that are specific and incisive can disqualify you for the position. If you can't ask them tough questions, how will you handle your peers, a challenging vendor or a problem employee?

You may be in a position where you really need the job. You're living on your credit cards and the bills are piling up fast. You're struggling to make ends meet and any job looks good. It's tempting to take the first thing that's thrown your way. You may even think it's just a temporary solution.

If the little voice in the back of your head is trying to be heard, at least give it a hearing. You may be like the associate who was promised a corner office and her own admin. She arrived her first day to find she was sharing a conference room and a phone with three other people. This *temporary* situation lasted three months while her office was being built. How effective do you think she looked in her first ninety days?

Please, look before you leap. Ask the tough questions diplomatically. Don't get enlisted for the crusade. Don't confuse yourself with a nonprofit or volunteer. Make sure you check to see if you're heading for the frying pan or your career could end up in the fire.

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## **Ensure Success in the Non-traditional Interview**

***Paul Copcutt***

Most candidates, even when they are nervous, find that having a one-on-one, face-to-face meeting is something they can endure for an hour or so. If they prepare well, conduct some research and put themselves in the right frame of mind, the meeting can even be enjoyable – well almost!

But the explosion of technology, the talent shortage, global hiring replacing local and the fact that companies know that they won't keep a new employee for life, has meant an increase in alternatives to the traditional face to face interview.

So how do you prepare for the non-traditional interview, and what can you expect?

### **TELEPHONE INTERVIEW**

The main challenge for most people is that the telephone eliminates the ability to 'read' the interviewer. A telephone meeting also entails honing your listening skills and resisting the temptation to multi-task or even just check your email while on the call. Don't laugh - it has happened!

Quite often, a recruiter or hiring company will use the telephone interview as an initial screen and they might use this in one of three circumstances:



### **As a First step**

With the use of email, job boards and web site response there are very few instances where an initial application is now a telephone call. Certain jobs might mean this is a good strategy and if this is the case you need to prepare as much for this interaction as a face-to-face – because there is a whole area of the unknown.

Think about the position and what questions might be asked about your background and suitability to the role. Have a list of questions so if you get the chance to ask questions, you appear interested and prepared and don't look as if you're just dialing in for a job.

Unless the advertisement states specific times to call try early or late in the day, people tend to be at their desks and more available to talk than the middle of a hectic schedule.

### **Information gather & confirmation**

This is usually a less-planned interaction on the behalf of the recruiter or hiring manager. They may have received a good response to the posting from similarly qualified candidates but they want to be able to manage the list down to a workable number for face-to-face meetings.

Quite often they will have set aside some time in the day to make these calls and they are trying to complete the task quickly and efficiently. Resist the temptation to launch straight in to a conversation if they catch you at your phone. It is much better to say you are busy and set up a specific time to talk. That way you can have all the necessary paperwork in front of you, copy of the posting, your resume, list of questions and can ensure you are not going to encounter distractions or interruptions.



Before the interview ends, always ensure that you ask "does that answer your question?" or "do you require more information on that?" - then at least you are leaving the call not second guessing yourself as to whether you answered all their questions.

### **First Stage Interview**

There are a number of reasons a company might use the telephone to conduct a complete first stage interview:

**Geography** – candidates are scattered across the country or globe and it is difficult to bring them together quickly and cost effectively.

**Mass hiring** – a number of candidates are needed for the same or similar positions, response has been high and there is a need to reduce the pool.

**Outsourced** – where third party recruiters or other outside agencies are being used to bring just a handful of candidates to a shortlist for the client to meet with.

**Profile Fit** – many companies are now spending a great deal of time and resources on identifying good fit candidates. Usually this is conducted in part at looking at the attributes and skills of current successful employees and then creating a benchmark for candidates to match up to. These criteria are then developed into a series of questions that they take you through during a very structured telephone call.

In all cases of a 'first stage' telephone interview you should apply the same 'rules' as for an 'information gather and confirmation' call, but you should be ready for a potentially longer process, maybe over an hour. You will likely get more of a chance to ask more questions and you are legitimate in asking the question "Is there anything that you have heard about my background or skills



that are particularly relevant to the position and you want to know more? Or that I may not yet have made you aware of but are important for this job?

### **Teleconference**

This again is a technology that is being utilized due to global hiring or the need to involve decision makers from various locations. Keep in mind with this technology that there can be time lapses depending on the distance and technology that is being used so occasional silences are not a bad thing.

### **Video Telephone**

One of the major search firms pioneered the concept of using video phones to screen candidates due to the global nature of their business. Candidates are sent a video phone by courier and an interview appointment is set up. The process is quite intense and once over the candidate returns the phone and may never get to physically meet the recruiter, but they have been able to make a visual impression.

### **PANEL**

When faced with more than one interviewer at once you need to be conscious of the fact that each may have a different reason for being there and have a different agenda. You need to be prepared for this by finding out as much as you can about each person and their role in the organization.

In these situations there is normally a main point person who facilitates the group and controls the process, but be sure to share your time with all members of the panel in terms of eye contact and when speaking move your delivery around the group.

Not as common in today's job market, panel interviews are still used in academic, technical and government selection processes and not always just conducted for internal selection.



## **GROUP**

This format has been used heavily in hiring for junior positions or in a graduate intake process, however there have been cases where the group interview has been used at more senior positions.

Interviews have been known to last a few hours to even include an overnight stay and observations of candidates in various situations including formal dinners and social situations. Never assume that you are not being assessed. Sometimes the idea is to get you to relax, so they can see if you act differently when the interview hat is not on.

Although companies might be using this approach to aid seeing large numbers in a short space of time, most often it is to see interaction and leadership skills as well as reaction to pressure situations and scenarios.

## **VIDEO CONFERENCE & WEBCAM**

The advance in technology and improved internet connections have led to the ability for interviewers to use webcams and other visual technology to conduct interviews. This is still in the early stages of usage but with companies now hiring around the globe and considering candidates from all corners of the world this approach is only going to increase in use and there are even companies now setting up in major cities with these facilities for hire on an hourly basis.

Candidates need to remember that the technology is not in real time. There can be quite a lag in saying something and the person at the other end hearing you, so again you need to allow for lapses and silent gaps.

Also on occasion the video may be only one way – your picture going to the interviewer, but you cannot see them in return. This can be quite disconcerting as you are aware of your own body language but cannot get a feeling from the interviewer in reverse.



These interviews can be the closest you will get to the traditional face to face interview and should be prepared for and conducted in exactly the same way as you would for a 'live' meeting.

## **SUMMARY**

When facing any type of interview candidates should:

- Always try to understand what the selection process is going to be.
- Establish what format the interview will take.
- Ask who will be present, at the least name and title.
- Be prepared – research, resume, results, requests.
- Get used to not being able to see reaction or get body language feedback to your answers.
- Hone your listening skills and eliminate distractions.
- Clarify that the interviewer has all the information they needed and ask what the next steps are going to be.
- Ask for the next step/interview or job.
- SMILE – even when no-one can see you, it still has an effect on you and the interviewer.

The danger for the candidate is that due to the talent shortage they believe that their talents are in demand and short supply and they do not prepare as much for any interview as they should.

The danger for the hiring company is that they want to make the right hire . While the traditional interview has not always been the best way to pick the right person, alternative approaches may make candidates feel uncomfortable if things are not explained clearly, or if too many steps deter the candidate from continuing the process.



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## **Prepare for a Behavioral Interview**

***Liz Benuscak***

Even though the concept of Behavioral Interviewing has been around for quite a while now, it is a technique that is becoming much more mainstream due to its effectiveness. Employers have been using behavioral interviewing for about 15 years because this technique gives them an edge in identifying candidates who possess the qualities and performance history that they are seeking.

The key benefit of behavioral interviewing is that the way that a candidate responds to questions providing past behaviors offers an accurate indication for their future performance. According to one study, behavioral interviewing is said to be 55% predictive of future on-the-job behavior, while traditional interviewing is only 10% predictive.

To evaluate a candidate's value and potential, employers will implement behavioral interview techniques to determine the candidate's potential for success. This is typically done by identifying job-related experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities that the company has decided are desirable in a particular position. For example, some of the characteristics that a firm may look for are:

- Critical thinking
- Being a self-starter



- Willingness to learn
- Willingness to travel
- Self-confidence
- Teamwork
- Professionalism

The interview will be structured around these topics with directed questions to gather past experience and successes in these areas to highlight the preferred characteristics. There are no 'yes' or 'no' questions asked of the candidate. It is always open ended typically starting with, "Can you tell me a time when..." or "What has your experience been.... In the area of...." The latest trend for behavioral interview is a rating system used to measure answers to the performance indicator questions.

It is your duty as a candidate to be able to provide answers to these types of questions readily and with a certain measure of composure. One thing that you must be careful about, however, is to not take over the interview by going on too long in your answer.

While this tool is becoming much more mainstream for many firms there are still those that may lag behind in the interviewing process. If you are not asked questions in a behavioral manner you should feel free to answer them in that fashion – with the caveat that you don't blather on ad nauseam.

When answering a question in a behavioral manner it important is that you provide a clear example of the challenges you faced, the actions that you took the and the results that you archived on the project or experience in question. We call it the C-A-R formula.

While at times it may be difficult to prep for a behavior-based interview due to the vast array of questions that could be posed to you, the best way to get ready for this type of interview is to review as much material about the firm that you can get your hands on and then look back at your own career and develop a portfolio of success stories that you can call upon during an interview. You



should also go back over your resume and make sure that you can speak to each and every accomplishment on your resume.

To prep for any interview it is critical that prior to review your resume. Visualizing your history from the interviewer's perspective prior to the meeting will give you a sense of what they may ask and remind you of critical points that might have slipped your mind.

During the interview keep to the facts – tell your story as succinctly as possible and keep your mind's eye on the prize! Happy Interviewing!

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## **Best Techniques for Managing a Strong Interview Closing**

***Jan Melnik, MRW, CCM, CPRW***

Part of preparing to interview effectively includes developing three or four exceptional questions for the conclusion of the interview based on your research. It is perfectly acceptable to jot these down at the top of a legal pad in the portfolio you bring to the interview. Obviously (but you'd be surprised the number of times I hear from hiring authorities how often this advice is disregarded), pay attention throughout the interview—you may already have gotten answers to some of the questions you've crafted; to ask them again near the close of the interview is a sure nail in the coffin of your candidacy.

As the interview begins to wrap up, you'll undoubtedly be asked if you have any additional questions. Should the interviewer announce the conclusion of the interview by standing up without this question, you most certainly want to take control by quickly interjecting something along the lines of, "Before we wrap up, Dana, I did have a few additional questions." Then segue into your best-of-best, previously researched questions.

Consider including the following as additional questions for the very end of the company-specific queries you've previously formulated from your due diligence:

- How does my candidacy stack up against your expectations and the competition?



- What would you expect me to be doing to earn a rave of “excellent job” 90 days into the position?
- Or, worded another way: How will you measure my success in this role 90 days, 180 days, and one year from now?
- Are there any questions you may still have that keep you from knowing I’m absolutely the most qualified candidate for this opportunity?
- What are the next steps in the interview process? Who should I anticipate meeting with next?
- When do you expect to make a decision?

Whether it’s your first interview with this company for a coveted position—or the fourth: Remember to immediately prepare and send formal thanks for the interview opportunity to everyone who spent time with you. Go beyond the courtesy thanks to reflect on several key points from each exchange. Use the thank you as a platform for strengthening any replies you felt were weak. Likewise, use the note to bring forward additional information you may have overlooked (but, of course, remembered in the elevator after the interview).

Asking strong closing questions helps to cement your candidacy in the mind of the interviewer. When interspersed among several very specific questions you’ve carefully researched, this will also create a positive, lasting impression. Finally, as mom would say, remember your manners, thank the interviewer, reiterate (with enthusiasm) your interest about coming on board, and offer a big smile with that handshake.

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*Debra Feldman, the JobWhiz, is nationally recognized for her expertise in designing and building connections for clients to Network Purposefully™, enabling senior executives to swiftly identify their next career challenge through warm personal referrals. As a candidate's personal talent agent, Debra introduces leading professionals to hiring managers at pre-screened target companies. Expedite your career ascent with the innovator Forbes Dubbed Part Sleuth, Part Networker, the industry's premier career matchmaker. Contact Debra at [www.JobWhiz.com](http://www.JobWhiz.com)*

## **Seven Tips for Acing the Million-dollar Interview Question**

***Debra Feldman***

It can come near the beginning of an official job interview or sneak up before the meeting is about to close, but under any circumstance, poised professionals are always ready to answer the most important question that surfaces in a serious dialogue between decision-makers and prospective employees. Exact phrasing varies but the meaning is clear: "What will it take for you to join our team?" or "What is it going to cost to get you here?"

Does the very thought of being in such a situation make your hands clammy, your heart race and your stomach to churn? Would you prefer any punishment rather than confront this? Unfortunately, part of accepting a job offer frequently entails negotiating the terms of employment. Get prepared and save yourself some last minute angst. Here are a few tips to help you face the inevitable with confidence and armed with good advice.

### **Tips on How to Answer: Advantage Candidate**

**1. Do your homework.** Be prepared with figures and facts demonstrating your value to the prospective employer. Know your worth in the market. Research what comparable positions with similar responsibilities command in your industry and in your locale.



**2. Tell the hiring manager or HR representative that your goal is fairness.** You want to be compensated commensurate with what your colleagues are paid for comparable responsibilities, and you want to be rewarded for superior performance.

**3. Show that hiring you is not an expense but a smart investment.** Prove that you will be able to add to the bottom line through increased sales, cost reductions, revenue gains, enhanced productivity, etc. Have tables or charts to illustrate the impact your expertise will have. Use actual data if available.

**4. Never reveal an exact number for your desired salary or what you are currently making.** Give a range that will allow you more room to negotiate for bonuses, benefits, time off, etc. because no two jobs are the same, no two candidates are alike. See Tip # 6 below.

**5. Have a bottom line in mind.** What is this opportunity worth to you? What will you give up? What can you exchange to make the numbers work? Is there a necessity, must have, uncompromising need? Then, be willing to be flexible on the rest. Think about time off vs. salary, educational opportunities vs. conference attendance, etc.

**6. Remember that this should be a win-win for you and your future employer.** Make sure they understand that you want this job and you are confident that if they also agree that you are the right choice, together you can make this happen. Take the focus off the dollars and put it on the chance to have an impact, find solutions, move forward, etc.

**7. Work this out with your future boss rather than their HR staff person.** Only your future boss knows what they need and will go to bat to get this deal together for you. It's their budget — show them your "other" skills right from the beginning with your abilities to negotiate for yourself!

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