

The Insider's Guide

To

**Being
Interviewed**

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by Kevin Buckley, CPC

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Introduction

Being interviewed is an audition of your talents, skills, experience, personality, and character. You are under the spotlight, but the light that shines on you illuminates your abilities, and gives the person interviewing you confidence; your self-awareness, poise, verbal delivery, and the body language signals that you send, reinforce or diminish the interviewer's impressions of your suitability for hiring.

We have conducted thousands of interviews. Over time, I have learned that highly accomplished professionals, and beginners alike, share a similar feeling of apprehension, going in to an interview. It isn't something you do every day. Being interviewed does not have to be an event that you approach with trepidation.

There are some fundamental skills to practice, and techniques to handle the mechanics of the hiring process. Beyond these learned abilities, there is something more important: the character of the person being

interviewed. A person's genuine character needs to shine through the haze of questions and answers; when it does, there is a different kind of communication happening between the interviewer, and the person being interviewed.

Character is a fundamental building block of career progress; it is difficult to counterfeit, and someone looking for evidence of it will readily recognize it in another person.

"Character is Destiny." (Herodotus, 480 BC)

What An Interview Is, And Isn't

An interview isn't just a friendly chat between strangers. Neither is it meant to be a verbal joust or boxing match, with winner takes all. When an interview works, it is a mutual exchange, and free flow of information. This shared information gives both parties insight into the other's needs and expectations.

Some people approach being interviewed with a sense of dread, as if entering the lion's den, with only a paper resume to defend against being eaten alive by jaded judges. They grit their teeth, and take the attitude of let's get this over with. Experienced and inexperienced interviewers pick up on that defensiveness.

Others take a more casual, day at the beach attitude; nonchalant, unaware of the impression they are making, and unwilling to take the process seriously, they often wonder why they weren't called back for a second meeting. The attitude they project is that they can take it or leave it. The interviewer usually adopts the same attitude towards them.

Then, there are those who gird their loins for battle; determined to overcome all opposition, they march into the interview with a take-no-prisoners approach, and resistance-is-useless game plan, and proceed to alienate the people they wanted to impress.

An interview doesn't need to be a contest of wills, where you warily circle your opponent, looking for openings to make points, and avoid being caught in a verbal ambush. That adversarial approach creates a negative sense of expectation.

The first important point to realize is that an interview is what you expect it to be. If you expect a pleasant exchange of information in an agreeable atmosphere, more likely than not, that is what you will experience.

If you expect to have to defend your honor, justify your existence, and battle your way to the next level of meetings, then you will telegraph those expectations and intentions, just as surely as the person who expects a more positive exchange.

Telephone Interviewing

With the pace of business today, many companies are relying more on telephone pre-selection. This is cost effective for them, as they do not have to reserve a manager's valuable time in the boardroom to wade through numerous pre-qualifying interviews. This pre-selecting of candidates is often delegated to an assistant or more junior employees in the department. These employees may not be trained in a focused selection interviewing approach.

They may be working from a script or list of questions given to them by their manager. It is possible that they do not have a thorough grasp on the nature of the duties of the position. Other times, the hiring manager may conduct this type of telephone interview. Regardless of who is conducting the interview, there are certain things to do in preparation, which will make it a more positive and progressive experience for both parties.

The goal is for both parties to come away from the telephone interview convinced that they want to take the discussion further. This is best accomplished by having preplanned and prepared. The focused telephone interview creates the basis for stimulating buyer interest between the employer and the applicant.

Gather your materials together

Telephone interviews may be prearranged through an email message, or, they may happen out of the blue, as you receive a call unexpectedly from a potential employer. If you are actively looking for employment, it is a very good idea to have what you need close by the telephone at all times.

This includes your resume, a sheet of employment references, and the interview handout that you would give the potential employer, meeting them face-to-face.

Chances are if you are being called, the caller probably has at least a copy of your resume. However, that is not always the case; sometimes the caller will only have handwritten notes about you. It is important to be prepared, to project confidence, and create buyer interest.

Interview Handouts: Influencing The Hiring Decision

One of the most effective selling tools you have to supplement your resume is an interview handout. You can give this handout at the start of the interview, or the end of the interview, either way; it reinforces your knowledge, skills, and accomplishments in the interviewer's mind. Your resume creates a basis for mutual interest. An interview handout helps to seal a decision to hire in the decision-maker's mind.

Have a copy of your handout for telephone interviewing. At a glance, it summarizes your strengths, your accomplishments, your knowledge, and your abilities. You can refer to these points during your discussion with the employer. A quick reference interview handout sheet needs to be modified for telephone interviewing. You will need to condense your points. When you relay these points to a telephone interviewer, you do not want to sound stiff and formal. On paper, you can certainly elaborate on each individual point. In a telephone interview, reduce the amount of words to quickly convey the essentials.

In the first section of a standard interview handout, you list very specific achievements not found on your resume that reflect the demands of the job you are interviewing for:

- Retained a customer we were about to lose through providing after-hours service to chase down and resolve their problem; identifying the root causes of the issue.
- Created a streamlined reporting procedure to prevent this problem recurring.
- Trained other staff on this new procedure, earning senior management's commendation.
- This was implemented company-wide and is now common practice.

The key is to be specific, to show how you used your initiative, creativity, knowledge, and dedication, to achieve a particular result.

In the next section, in point form, in multiple columns if necessary, you list the documentation, software, applications specific to your industry, product knowledge, and industry sector knowledge, geographic or trade lane knowledge, computer systems, and other data, which comprises your knowledge base. In the third section, you summarize why the company should hire you, leaving in the interviewer's mind the idea of a person who has taken the time and the initiative to clearly explain what they know, and what they bring to the organization.

Summarize the skills that you have that are vital to successful execution of the duties of the position. Do not list the duties that you have had. You are painting an image in the interviewer's mind. The points should be carefully edited to zero in on creating buyer interest in the product that you are selling: You.

What I Bring To The Company:

- A proven ability to achieve results; 150% increase in bottom line profitability at XYZ in 2009.
- Leadership: increased productivity 64% in 2012 vs. 2011, at ABC Inc.
- Team building: created a customer service center that increased customer satisfaction by 26%.
- Communications: gained the cooperation of a diverse workforce in multiple locations.
- Versatility: able to switch hats and make effective decisions in changing circumstances.
- Quick learner: able to get up to speed on new programs and systems with minimal downtime.

You must be very concise, choosing each word for impact and clarity.

Most of your competition will not take this step, and you will stand out from the rest of the applicants vying for the job. Do not assume that the interviewer has read your resume, and understands what you have accomplished.

What does the company say about its core values in their website or brochure? Some common ones are Courage, Initiative, Dedication,

Integrity, and so on. What experiences, abilities, or accomplishments can you point to that reflect these core values that they will identify with? Create a section focused on these values, and provide evidence of how you live and conduct yourself by them. If they see that you identify in what they believe, you are creating the link of a shared philosophy and common purpose. These are very appealing and powerful influences in decision-making.

An interview handout focuses the discussion on those areas that you want to concentrate on. It is both a selling tool for you, and a context to discuss how your achievements suit the demands and challenges of the position that you are applying for. You can customize this for different positions that you apply for, replacing different bullet point sentences, as required. The impression that you leave on the hiring manager who has this handout to reflect upon can tip the balance in your direction. It will be remembered when the decision is being made.

You have shown initiative, organization, clear thinking, and foresight. These are some of the attributes that every progressive company seeks in the people that they hire.

Having these points available during a telephone interview increases your confidence and gives you a list to check off as the discussion progresses. You don't want to hang up the telephone and suddenly think, oh, I should have mentioned this skill or that achievement.

Have your voicemail work effectively for you

Voice mail is very often overlooked as a useful tool. We have all experienced situations where you call somebody and there is a disorganized or unintelligible voice prompt, or kids screaming in the background, or dogs barking on the voicemail. This leaves a negative impression on a potential employer.

Ensure that your voicemail is clear, brief, and conveys the image that you want to have the potential employer receive:

"Thank you for calling, I am out at the moment, or away from the phone. I will be checking my voice mails shortly, please leave your name,

telephone number, and the reason you called, and I will return your call at the earliest opportunity."

You can include a specific time that you will be checking your messages, this indicates to the caller the general time frame that they might expect a return call from you. The key is to be clear and professional, and to eliminate background noise distractions, which only detract from the image that you want to project.

Your Interview Begins On The Phone - New Graduates - Calling Employers

Your interview begins the minute you start speaking with a hiring manager or their representative. How you express yourself on the telephone influences the decision that the hiring authority makes about whether to interview you.

Practice what you will say when you introduce yourself, follow up a resume that you sent, ask about openings in the industry, or are seeking contact information to direct your resume to the right hiring authority. The listener is assessing your telephone voice because that is the primary method of communication with customers in any company. Jot down key words or phrases that you want to use as a memory aid, if that is helpful for you. When a hiring manager or his agent talks to you on the phone, he/she will be listening to see how you would sound to customers. If you are hesitant or rambling in what you say, you may miss the opportunity to meet the listener. You want the listener to remember you, and for your call to stand out and impress the listener favorably. This is your first opportunity to act and sound professional.

It is worth the effort to practice with friends and older family members through role-play. In this way, you get used to introducing yourself, and finding the most natural speaking style for you.

Remember these basic points:

- Introduce yourself by first and last name.
- Explain the purpose of your call.
- Don't rush your words or speak too slowly.

- Think of how newscasters speak when relaying news items, and make a conscious effort to speak at a moderate speed so that your words flow.
- Put a 'smile' in your voice – try and visualize the person on the other end as someone that you would like to know.
- Pleasant and courteous manners are never old-fashioned and will leave a very positive impression with the listener.
- People want to help people that they like; if your telephone personality is positive, you will find yourself getting more direction and guidance.
- Acknowledge the time that the listener is giving to you, and thank them for it.
- As a follow up to your phone call, reinforce the positive impression by sending a thank-you email; it will be remembered.
- If you are transferred to an assistant to give your information, treat that person the same way you would the hiring manager, with respect and courtesy.
- Very often an assistant manager or supervisor may actually be the person you end up reporting to---make sure you get off on the right foot!

Introducing yourself

It is always a good idea to ask how convenient it is for the listener to speak with you:

“ How convenient is it to speak presently? “ Your listener may be juggling ten different priorities at once. Offer to call back if the contact is busy: “ When would be the best time to get back to you? “ or, “ I can call you back whenever it suits you, what’s a good time to call? “ Notice the difference between those questions and “ Are you busy now? “ or, “Can you talk presently? “

Most people will appreciate that you are respecting their time, and that’s a great way to establish a positive rapport.

"Hi/Hello, _____. My name is _____, and I’m a new graduate of the XYZ program. I have knowledge of _____ procedures and am familiar with the documents involved. I’m looking for an entry-level position, and would like to send my resume to you. What email address may I send it to?"

"Hi/Hello, _____. I'm _____ a recent college graduate. I sent a resume to you a few days ago, and I'm wondering what your opinion is of it. I'm looking for an entry-level position in the (_____) industry. I think I have the skills that will make me successful, and I'd appreciate any guidance or direction that you could provide."

These are just two examples. The key to making a conversation like this a smooth one and to gather information is to avoid asking questions that can be answered with a "yes" or a "no" – unless you are simply asking a question such as, "Are you hiring now?"

Questions that can't be answered with yes/no are called open-ended questions. They begin with: "who, what, where, when, why and how."

Instead of asking, "Are you hiring?" say instead, "When are you planning to hire new people?"

Instead of asking, "Do you have any job openings?" try "What sort of jobs could I apply for?"

Open-ended questions encourage the flow of information; and while the listener is responding, you can prepare your next follow up question. Whenever you make a statement about yourself, your skills, or experience, try to follow up with an open-ended question:

"...I think I could be a real asset in the ____ area because I'm organized, hardworking and I have a positive attitude. When would be a good time to follow up with you?"

"...I'm really interested in making my career in the industry? Who do you think is hiring at the moment?"

"...I'm excited about joining a good company where I can apply what I have learned and gain some experience. Who do you think I should send my resume to?"

In summary:

- Refine your presentation and practice in role-play with fellow students, family members, and friends.
- Determine how convenient it is to speak; offer to call back if it isn't.

- Introduce yourself and explain the purpose of your call.
- Deliver your presentation at a moderate pace and with a smile in your voice.
- Use open-ended questions to encourage the flow of the conversation.
- Thank the listener for whatever guidance or direction you get.
- Follow up with a thank-you by email (proof it for errors).
- Make a list of your contacts as you develop them for future reference.

The positive impression you make in your initial telephone introduction is a solid foundation that you can build from when you meet for an interview.

That first call is the first step.

When You Are Being Called By A Potential Employer

When a potential employer is calling you, they are in the driver's seat. You will quickly know if the interviewer is working with an organized or disorganized approach to conducting the interview. The better interviewers will explain why they are calling and what they want to accomplish.

Disorganized interviewers will usually dive right in without asking if you have time to speak. Better interviewers will want to know if you have the time available, to cover the necessary bases with you.

If there is noise or commotion in the background where you are, it is best to ask for the caller's number and say that you will call right back. This way, you can go to a quiet room, compose yourself, have your materials by your side, and call the employer back in a more settled environment.

Setting the tone when you call back

This is your first opportunity to make a good impression. By choosing to call back, you have already shown that you want to handle the call professionally. Now, you need to convey an attitude of willing cooperation to provide information for the employer to assess you. After you introduce yourself, ask an open-ended question to determine what the employer wants to accomplish.

"How would you like to proceed?"

"What would you like to know first?"

"How can I help you?"

These types of questions signal to the interviewer that you are both ready to give information, and that you want to make the best use of their time. These small courtesies are important when you are establishing rapport with a stranger on the telephone. A little deference goes a long way to making a positive impression.

These questions also start the ball rolling, allowing for the employer to indicate what information they are seeking from you.

Passive and active listening

Passive listening is a state of mind that is more disengaged from the conversation. Passive listening often involves missing key points that the speaker is trying to make, as you wait patiently (or not) for your turn to speak. If you are not concentrating on what the speaker is saying, you risk losing important information.

Active listening, by contrast, is focusing your attention on what the speaker is saying, visualizing the person behind the voice, and thinking of good follow-up questions to ask in return. Customer service people in many industries are trained to visualize the customer, to establish good rapport. The employer is the buyer, and you are the seller. Create the human connection through practicing active listening, and displaying interest and attention throughout your discussion.

Interrupting the speaker, not allowing them to finish a sentence, or blurting out information that is unrelated to the question they are asking you can transmit your nervousness to the caller. Before you initiate a callback, take a few deep breaths; this creates a calmer inner state, and allows you to speak at a more moderate pace. There is no need to hurry your responses. You make a better impression if the listener has time to absorb what you are saying.

With your interview handout accessible, you can methodically cover the points you want to impress on the caller, and set the stage for the physical meeting.

When It Comes To First Impressions, It's The Little Things That Count - You Out!

It is difficult enough to land a good job with a good company out there in these market conditions. Losing focus, making unfortunate remarks and inattention to some of the smallest details in the hiring process can have major consequences.

Some actual, recent events:

The person asked a 'gotcha' type of interview question chuckles at the interviewer thereby offending the interviewer who takes it personally.

The person when asked what they don't like about their current employment says "dealing with ignorant and unreasonable people."

The person going in for an important interview forgets to take the gum out of their mouth and chews throughout the meeting.

The candidate, when asked what others think about them at work says, "They all hate me."

When asked how he solves issues between co-workers, the candidate states that he "bangs heads together."

These sound like outtakes from a bloopers reel, but were the means by which promising career opportunities failed to materialize. They were not beginner's mistakes either. All the above people would be considered by their peers and their superiors to be people of high intelligence, possessing more than the average amount of experience, focused and alert in meetings. They are people whom you would be happy to work with, and who have a lot to offer an employer. They all list impressive accomplishments in their resumes. Many of them are highly educated, and all are very presentable from a recruiter's standpoint.

So what happened?

Basically, it comes down to a lack of mental focus. Relaxing your vigilance, treating a situation with complacency, being too casual, making assumptions, and not thinking as you speak, can lead to unwanted results. This happens both in telephone and physical interviewing situations.

Relaxing your attention and letting down your guard can be detrimental in these situations. It takes only one small slipup to derail a positive hiring process. Employers tend to be less forgiving of these gaffes during these procedures because there is a lot at stake when you're hiring somebody. How you handle situations is being regarded with intense interest. Doing or saying something that causes a person to question your credibility, judgment, maturity, or awareness is something to avoid.

Along with lack of mental focus comes lack of simple preparation. Write down the date that you are going to meet somebody, the name of the person, and the correct address for the meeting. Practice your responses with a trusted friend, spouse, family member, mentor, or colleague. Anticipate where certain areas of focus might be in your resume, personal experiences, and track record. Preparation and practice can help to eliminate most of these types of career opportunity killers. How do your answers sound? How can you improve them, and convey more of what you are about, and how you can contribute to your new employer?

Avoid being eliminated from the hiring process because of lack of preparation, practice, small lapses of attention, focus, discretion, or judgment.

Don't let it happen to you!

Personal Grooming and Attire

Instant impressions are formed in the interviewer's mind through what you wear, and what you carry with you to your meeting. There are certain basics to keep in mind. An interview is a more formal than social interaction with another person. With that in mind, you cannot go wrong if you err on the side of dressing conservatively. For men, this generally means a business shirt and tie. Suits and sports jacket in pleasing neutral colors such as gray and blue are still preferred by many interviewers.

For women, the same basic guidelines apply. The additional caveat here is when it comes to jewelry and handbags. You want to avoid distracting the interviewer's attention through having a flashy or heavy jewelry, just as men should avoid flashy or unusual ties. If the

interviewers attention is directed towards what you're wearing or carrying, you are doing yourself a disservice.

For both sexes, avoid heavy perfumes or colognes. Some interviewers are overpowered by heavy scents, and they can be allergic to some of the ingredients in these grooming aids. Remove Bluetooth earpieces and stowaway those iPods and ear buds. The interviewer does not want to think that they are competing for your attention during the meeting. Don't put your smart phone on the table or desk across from the interviewer. This also serves as a distraction or potential interruption in the interviewer's mind. Keep all devices either in your pocket, your car, or your handbag.

Staying Focused in an Interview

One of the biggest ways to reduce your chances of making it to the next stage in the hiring process is to be unfocused in the initial interview.

Recall the scout motto: "Be prepared." Arrive ten minutes or so before the start. You will be more composed and settled walking in to meet your interviewer.

From the minute you walk into the employer's lobby or reception area, consider that every move you make and every comment made will be noted. It starts with the interviewer's secretary or assistant. Don't make the mistake of being condescending or aloof with this person. How you treat he or she will be communicated to the interviewer. This person is the interviewer's first screen. Establish the proper relations with the doorkeeper; this itself may improve your chances for a successful meeting. Social etiquette is important. Your mission is to make a lasting positive impression with everyone you meet at the company. A smile or friendly greeting is a universally accepted method of introducing yourself.

While you wait for the interviewer, review your personal presentation in your mind. See yourself confidently expressing who you are and what you can do. If you have prepared yourself properly, you will be able to present yourself effectively.

The Greeting and some useful starting phrases:

“Hello Mr./Ms. _____, thank you for this opportunity to meet with you today.”

“Good morning/Good afternoon, Mr./Ms. _____, it’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“Hello _____, thank you for taking the time to meet with me.”

This acknowledges that you are using this person’s valuable business time, and the inference is that you will not take advantage of this.

Offer a warm handshake.

Setting the Tone:

“I’m looking forward to discussing this position, and answering any questions you may have. How would you like to begin?”

“I’m ready to answer any questions you may have about my experience and qualifications, what would you like to know first?”

“I’ve read the position description/advertisement, and I’m confident that I have the skills and experience that you are looking for.”

These and similar phrases indicate that you are ready to answer questions, have familiarized yourself with the requirements, and are willing to provide information.

The Greeting and Setting of the Tone should be given with good eye contact, and with an attitude of mature enthusiasm and interest. Don’t go overboard but don’t appear bored either.

The Discussion:

Here, the interviewer will likely mention that they have reviewed your resume or application and would like to clarify certain points, or they may ask you why you are interested in the position, and why you feel you should be considered. Your resume will provide the interviewer with your agenda for the meeting. You will have noted significant accomplishments, or areas of major contributions that you made to your employers, in each position that you held. You will have noted your promotions and achievements, and how you created value for your

employers. You will illustrate to the interviewer how you increased sales, improved processes; lead teams, created new programs, and achieved corporate and personal goals.

You can build on the positive impression made so far or diminish it, according to what you say, and how you say it. This is where being focused is vital to a successful meeting. It doesn't mean you have to be tense and coiled like a spring; it means knowing beforehand what you will say. Avoid being long-winded. Keep your answers directly related to the specific questions asked. Do not ramble. A long answer to a short question may be interpreted as having an unfocused mind, or even weak intelligence.

Minimal answers, or being abrupt, may be interpreted as a lack of confidence, interest, or even arrogance.

Have at your fingertips the facts of your achievements:

- How was your performance measured?
- What did you achieve in new sales development?
- What percentage of growth of revenues was achieved?
- How did you win or keep those customers?
- What steps did you take to solve the problems?
- What procedures did you need to create to achieve the goals?
- How did you create value for your past employer and how does that experience translate to creating value for this employer?
- What problems are you able to solve for this employer?
- How will you make this employer's company/department better?

To be or not to be... (Invited back)

Express your values, and what motivates you to succeed, in ways that support and address the needs and expectations of the employer.

Speak from a personal perspective about the importance of integrity, honesty, dedication, and perseverance. Cynical attitudes, bitterness, hidden resentments; all of these can cast a negative light on discussing why you left past employers. The interviewer may wonder if you are carrying emotional baggage with you. Your grievances, real or imagined, are not suitable topics. This is one of the easiest ways to derail the meeting: indulging in philosophizing about why certain

decisions that affected you were made, and how you or others might have resisted them, and could have made better ones.

If you are viewed as a whiner, complainer, or political player, you will likely not be invited back.

An interview is often lost because personal feelings and attitudes are perceived as not being in tune with the corporate culture.

- What is important to this employer?
- What qualities of character do they look for?
- Do you see yourself reflected in these expectations?
- What qualities, ethics, and values are reflected in their Mission Statement?

Ask some questions of your own

One of the chief reasons that people don't survive to the next level is that they don't ask the right questions, when given the opportunity to do so.

This is not the time to ask about compensation and benefits. This is the time to ask about expectations and problems that require solving.

Show the interviewer that you have researched them on the Internet, and that you have taken the interest to learn about their products, service, and mission.

Bring up their corporate mission statement, and ask about how the interviewer sees you fitting into the corporate culture.

- How will your performance be measured?
- What internal advancement can you work to, eventually?
- What are the key problems that this position will address?
- What does the employer want to achieve in the first six months, and then the next six months?
- What tools will you have to work with?
- How did this position become open?
- What is the training program and what does it entail?
- Who will you work with inside the company?
- What qualities do you look for in the people that you hire?

These and similar questions show an analytical and focused mind looking for common ground and mutual benefit, and aware of the employer's concerns and needs. Stay focused at the end of the meeting. If you have interest in this position, express it, and leave the interviewer with either a list of references, or a performance appraisal, or a business card; something given to the interviewer that reinforces your name in his/her mind.

If you want the job, ask for it: "I really want this job, _____ and I'll be happy to meet with you again to discuss it further."

Recap:

- Greet everyone in a friendly and professional manner
- Keep good eye contact and offer a warm handshake
- Acknowledge that you are using the interviewer's time
- Display mature enthusiasm and interest
- State that you are ready to answer questions
- Confirm that you are familiar with the position's requirements
- Express your confidence in being able to meet expectations
- Provide a resume that creates talking points
- Have the facts and figures of your achievements at hand
- Avoid being long-winded and keep your responses clear
- Avoid extended discussions about past employers
- Determine what the corporate culture and expectations are
- Avoid discussing compensation/benefits in the first meeting
- Ask how your performance will be measured
- Ask about the training program
- Ask about whom you will work with
- Ask about the potential for future advancement
- Leave references, a performance appraisal or business card
- Offer to make yourself available for a second meeting
- Indicate your interest in the job

Assessing Potential Employers

You liked the sound of the advertisement, and you have the skills for the job, so what is it like to work there?

Be aware of potential warning signals that this employer may not be the best one to join. You need to gather impressions and assess relevant

information to make an informed decision. Your research needs to begin before you ever set foot in the interviewer's office. Here is a general list of issues you can investigate through the web or through a reference library prior to an interview. Privately held firms may not make this type of information publicly accessible.

Before The Interview

- If they are a publicly traded firm, how is their stock doing?
- How have their earnings been in the last two to three fiscal quarters?
- What is their reputation for quality and customer service?
- What is their size, number of employees and is there an annual report available for review?
- How long have they been in business?
- What growth or expansion have they experienced in the last 2-3 years?

Arriving for the Interview

- How do employees interact with each other-- smiling, neutral or grim?
- Do they have interesting sales literature or an employee-supported newsletter?
- Do they have awards, employee recognition plaques, or community service citations in the lobby?
- Does the receptionist or the hiring manager's assistant treat you with a lack of courtesy?
- If the hiring manager is late to meet you, does the staff know where he/she is?

During the Interview

- If the hiring manager/interviewer late for the meeting, does he or she apologize?
- Does the interviewer greet you with a friendly handshake and make eye contact?
- Are you given a copy of the position description?
- Does the interviewer speak in derogatory terms about the last person in the job?
- Does it appear that the company has had a high turnover in this position?

- Does the interviewer make negative remarks about fellow managers or superiors?
- Do they have a good training program for their employees?
- Does the interviewer pay attention to you or do calls and visitors distract him?
- Are you interrupted during your responses or are you rushed for answers?
- Are they vague about salary, review dates, and/or company benefits?

After the Interview

- Do they invite you to call back if you have any questions?
- Do they change the figures or salary range in follow up discussions?
- Are you left without a clear idea of when a decision is to be made?
- What are their attitudes towards negotiating specific issues?

The way you are treated before, during, and after the initial interview may indicate how you will be treated as an employee.

Notice how your questions and concerns are handled. Are the answers clear and your concerns dealt with satisfactorily? Do you get the feeling that you are one in a long line of applicants, or do they seem genuinely interested in what you have to say and offer? Companies that value the skills of their employees are inclined to pay for job-specific educational courses, usually reimbursing employees upon successful completion of the program. What is their attitude towards career development training?

Listen to your intuition. Do the views and attitudes expressed by the interviewer sit well with you? Can you see yourself working there? The more you observe the small impressions that come in through the interviewing process, the better equipped you will be to make a sound decision based both on the facts that you have obtained, and your feelings about the people you have met.

Questions To Ask The Employer

Your interview isn't supposed to be a one-way street, where only the employer can ask questions. You need to ask a few of your own, to

determine how suitable this opportunity is. The first thing to determine is how stable this position is, and what prospects for advancement there are.

- **Why are you looking?** Is this a static position that has little opportunity for growth, or is it a position that offers the ability to interact with other departments, learn new skills, and be challenged?
- **What happened to the person who was in this position?** This is a general question to find out why the person left, and what the attitudes are to the incumbent. It will also provide information on where the person has moved on within the company. This lets you know what the promotional possibilities may be in the future.
- **How long have you been looking?** Find out if they are in a panic, or if they are taking a more measured approach to this hiring. Also, if they have been looking for a long time, maybe your negotiating position will be strengthened if you have the skills they need.
- **How has the position become available?** Did the incumbent quit suddenly, was there a promotion internally, or are they unhappy with the person that they have?
- **How often do you look to fill this job?** This informs you whether it is a position that has a high turnover, a position that is vacant only rarely, or if it has been newly created.
- **What are you looking for?** After you establish why they are looking, you need to understand what they are looking for. Not every position has a growth curve. Do you have what they require, and will you be happy with the scope of the responsibilities, in the long run?
- **What is the most challenging part of this job?** This gives you a sense of whether the interviewer understands the demands of the job, and the expectations placed on the successful candidate.
- **What role will I play in the department?** This will indicate how important your job is in the organizational scheme of things. It

gives you a sense of responsibility involved, and how visible the position is for future promotions.

- **What kind of person has been successful in this job?** Understand the personality traits they are looking for. Different jobs demand different levels of aggression, patience, interpersonal skills, ability to work with or without support, and the ability to withstand pressure and stress. Make sure that the demands of the job reflect your basic style and personal orientation.
- **How will you measure my performance?** It is important that you know what the expectations of performance are, and what factors they will review to assess your progress. Are the standards and benchmarks realistic and achievable? I often see people who are attracted by the higher income and greater responsibilities of a career move, only to find out in the fullness of time that the employer expectations are unrealistic, or unattainable.
- **What does the future hold?** If you will assume the risk of making a career move, you want to ensure that there are prospects for long-term job satisfaction. Where will you progress to in the company? The best promotional opportunities occur in positions of higher risk. What can they offer you in the way of growth, and in what general time frame?
- **Where will I go within the company later?** This will tell you what you can expect. If there is a clear path of succession mapped out within the department, then you are more likely to be happier in the long-term. If this position is a good entry point into the firm, you may have more options for growth in different departments. If the interviewer or hiring manager is vague or noncommittal about your prospects, there may be limited scope.

These are a few of the questions that you can consider when assessing the suitability of an employer. You owe it to yourself to have a clear understanding of their expectations, to avoid making a move for short-term gain but long-term dissatisfaction.

The Interview: Are You A Potential Leader?

You are faced with an attractive career opportunity that is a step forwards into management. The problem is that you have very little or no management experience.

What can you say to convince the hiring manager that you are qualified for the position?

- Have you shown initiative in taking on large and complex projects that demanded an uncommon degree of commitment, energy, and dedication to achieving a goal?
- Do you have a developed degree of self-discipline, and the proven ability to persevere in the step-by-step tasks required to reach an objective - despite setbacks, uncertainty, and disappointments?
- Can you prioritize and organize work so that your progress is achieved in measurable ways, with clear guidelines and clear results?
- Have you been successful in presenting ideas, having senior management approve them, and then implemented them to the benefit of the company's profits, or reduction of costs, or improved productivity?
- Have you devised training manuals, or been able to clarify confusing information for your peers or superiors, and had these improvements adopted within the company?
- Have you turned disgruntled customers into satisfied customers through going well beyond the call of duty, thinking outside the box?
- Have you been successful in up-selling products or services, to increase revenues or create new customers, and been recognized for these achievements?
- Are you adept at creating strong working relationships with decision-makers in and outside your own firm, and developed mutual trust and confidence with them?
- Have you developed a network of useful contacts and sources of assistance that you can draw from, to help you solve problems and expedite solutions?
- Are you the person in the office considered to be the resident expert on a particular topic, and do people gravitate to you for guidance in solving work-related problems?

- Have people sought you out specifically to provide guidance in conflict-resolution situations that demand objectivity, empathy, and rational thinking, thereby defusing emotionally tense events?
- Do you enjoy teaching others, and imparting your personal knowledge to help them become successful?
- Have you been effective in training junior people, and able to have them catch on quickly, to learn new information and procedures?
- Have these people then moved on to higher levels of responsibility in their own careers?
- Do your superiors seek out your opinions or advice when considering options in tackling important issues or problems?
- Are you constantly thinking about how to do things better after hours; to work on plans, and create new ways of doing things?
- Do you think nothing of having to put in extra hours, to ensure that projects are completed on time, whereas others grumble at the imposition on their personal time?
- Are you taking career-oriented courses, and do you see yourself working to make that vision a reality?
- Do you find it second nature to be able to weigh and consider the merits of various options, to make a decision without being confused by the choices available?
- Are you effective at creating written reports, using various forms of media, and have you received positive feedback from superiors on the quality and clarity of your information?
- Can you handle the stresses and uncertainties of business life, while maintaining equanimity, self-motivation, and an unswerving direction to the attainment of goals and objectives?
- Can you objectively critique your conduct, successes, and failures, and learn from those situations?

All these qualities, skills, and attributes are evidence of potential or actual leadership abilities. To gain the trust of those, below and above you in responsibility is one of the marks of a leader.

Review your experience, your successes, and achievements, and develop talking points that will provide evidence of these leadership skills when sitting down with an employer to discuss your future, and what you can bring to the company, and the role you are being considered for.

Attitudes, Values & Feelings

Why is one person chosen over another when both may have almost equal qualifications and experience?

Very often, a hiring decision is influenced by how the interviewer/s feel about the person that they select. After all of the testing, panel interviewing, assessment and evaluation, it can simply boil down to the decision-maker's gut feeling. What influences that gut feeling invariably goes back to the attitudes and values that were expressed in the first and subsequent meetings - first impressions count. Employers not only want to believe that you can do the job and have the knowledge and experience to handle the challenges that may arise; they want to believe that you will fit the team. They also want to see reflected in you those attitudes and values that they feel comfortable with. An employer wants to reduce the chance of friction between team members, and will look for people who harmonize with the work group's ethics and team spirit. In addition, there may be a broader corporate personality or image by which a firm is perceived in the marketplace, and the hiring manager may look for attitudes and values that mirror that image in the marketplace.

How do you determine whether your own attitudes and values are in harmony with those of the potential employer? Ask what attitudes and values the interviewer feels are necessary to do the job and fit the team. If they have different expectations than what you have to offer in attitudes and values, it is best to know this at the beginning. You won't help yourself in the long-term by pretending to be what they want, just to get the job. You do not want to leave an interview with the employer having a neutral attitude to you. Your task in the first interview is to sell yourself effectively. Most interviewers, from the inexperienced to the veteran, look for a positive attitude towards one's work, co-workers, and superiors.

They expect you to have a sense of energy or enthusiasm, to achieve and accomplish goals.

A positive attitude is essential to making a good first impression. The interviewer should be interested in having you back for a second meeting.

The first few minutes of a meeting between strangers are when impressions are formed. Express your personality and character through the initial greeting, using your words, eye contact, and positive

body language. Don't be too aggressive, thinking that you have to take control of the discussion. Being too relaxed may be perceived as nonchalance or lack of interest. You are presenting yourself to a potential buyer. The voice tone that you convey is as important as the information that you share with the interviewer. Tell the interviewer what is important to you in building successful working relationships with people. Know what you want in joining forces with a company, and what you are prepared to offer in return.

Tell the interviewer how you worked with other people, and how you intend to conduct business.

Why Should We Hire You?

Why should we select you? What value do you bring to our organization, and why should you be chosen over others who may have stronger qualifications or experience?

To answer these types of questions, it is vital that you know yourself, your abilities, your skills, and aptitudes, and be able to communicate these concepts effectively. The interviewer has been forming a decision about your suitability for the position. The interviewer may have decided that you are good to proceed with to the next level. Now they are looking for confirmation of what you bring to the company. They may look for signs that confirm a negative view as well. This question might be asked when you have no information about what the employer is seeking or expects from the person they hire. Have a clear idea of what you will say beforehand.

- Where have you been most successful?
- What are you good at doing?
- Why do people like working with you?
- Why have you received promotions?
- What specific contributions have you made?

When this question comes towards the end of the interview, quickly review in your mind what the employer said were important ingredients to success in performance of the job.

- How do you meet the corporate needs and expectations voiced by the employer?
- Are you on the same page?

- Do you feel that you have the skills and qualities they are seeking?
- Why are you a good fit?

Don't leave the interviewer guessing or neutral to you. The image of you fitting into the company needs to be painted in the interviewer's mind. If the employer can "see" you as a member of the team and visualize your working there, you have answered the questions successfully. If you come across as hesitant, unsure, or unaware of what you have to contribute, then that impression will be the one left with the interviewer.

Naturally modest people sometimes don't like to promote themselves. Point out what your achievements are. This is helpful to the interviewer, as it allows him/her to understand what you have to offer and what you want to contribute. For newcomers, interviewing in North America is a learning process. The experience of the interviewing and hiring process can be frustrating for people who are used to making decisions, and being in a position of authority or control. It can also be a culture shock when one's experience and qualifications earned overseas are not looked upon as being of equal merit in North America. It is important to realize that the "Why should we hire you?" question is not meant as a challenge to your knowledge. It is part of the hiring process here, and is often asked by even the most junior of interviewers. If you are from a different culture, you may find it demeaning or immodest to have to "sell" yourself and what you can do, to someone who is more junior than yourself. This can be a stumbling block, and a reluctance to talk about oneself can be misinterpreted as pride, lack of interest, or arrogance.

Maintain the goodwill achieved in the meeting by having prepared before the meeting a general overview of your skills, experience, and qualifications. Give this to the interviewer. Be attentive to the people-skills factor, as many hiring decisions are not made strictly on technical merit. Many positive hiring decisions are made because of how a person is perceived as fitting into the company's way of doing business, the makeup of the department, and the hiring manager's personal preferences. The interviewer wants to hire someone who will get along with other people. That ability to be positive, self-motivated, and to work well with people from diverse cultures is highly prized by potential employers. The workplace is becoming increasingly multi-cultural.

The ability to communicate with clarity is a key hiring issue when the job duties involve any degree of interaction with customers, internally or

externally. The ability to write and speak effectively is essential to your career progress. With the competitive nature of the marketplace, misunderstanding a customer's needs or technical information can spell the difference between a satisfied customer and lost business. Employers have these skills in mind when they are interviewing for customer contact positions. Poor communications skills mean fewer opportunities for advancement. Higher positions require more developed communications skills.

Some employers are willing to hire someone with less experience but a clearer style of communication. If this is an area of technical weakness, it is very helpful to take additional courses or have plans to upgrade these skills. Take the time to learn the language well because you are in competition with people who have those skills already. Review your accomplishments, assess your skills, and know your strengths. Communicate clearly and confidently how you see your experience, skills, and abilities serving the needs of the employer. Focus on how you can solve problems, work with minimal supervision, learn new information quickly, and adapt to new and challenging work environments.

Why should we hire you?

A Guide To Successful Interviewing - Points to Remember

- Genuine character shines through: be honest and forthright.
- Review your accomplishments, skills, abilities, and aptitudes.
- Decide what you want to draw attention to in the interview.
- Mentally, then verbally rehearse your presentation.
- Practice your presentation with a spouse, friend, or colleague.
- Be proactive, and do research to familiarize yourself with the company.
- Think about the skills you have developed, your talents, abilities, and aptitudes.
- How have you grown through your achievements in and outside work?

Choose specific examples of your progress.

- How did you develop new business, retain, or win back unhappy customers?
- What improvements did you make to existing processes?

- How did you reduce costs?
- How did you boost profits?
- How did you increase shareholder value?
- How did you make our superior's job easier?
- What impact did you have on other staff - training, development, and mentoring?
- How did those people grow through your mentoring of them?

Most people do not interview for a living. Otherwise successful and competent people can find being interviewed stressful. Presenting yourself effectively, and leaving a positive impression in the interviewer's mind, requires focus, clarity, sincerity, and preparation. Take time to learn about the company.

- Do research on the company, view the website, review applicable industry journals and read the Press Releases page of their site.
- When setting up meetings, offer before or after work flexibility.
- Select clothing that does not distract the interviewer.
- Remember that your sense of self-control, enthusiasm, openness, maturity, and self-confidence are all transmitted through body language; poise and power are conveyed through your movements, reactions, speech modulation and eye contact.
- The quality of your handshake forms an impression; a limp grasp can be interpreted as passivity; an over vigorous handshake as insecurity or aggression; offer your hand first, if possible; it denotes friendliness and approachability.
- Ask the interviewer how he/she would like to begin, as this may reveal the interviewer's agenda for the meeting.
- Ask whether you can take notes, as this displays interest in the proceedings, and is practical to record important aspects of the job that come under discussion.
- Use open-ended questions (ones which cannot be answered by a simple 'yes' or 'no'), to create a flow of information; after answering a question, follow up with an open-ended one to obtain clarification, or shift the discussion to areas you consider important to explore.
- Open-ended questions begin with 'who, what, where, when, why or how' or 'describe, explain, outline, clarify', etc.
- Speak positively about past-employers; avoid being critical or defensive if you had a bad experience with a past/present employer; negativity leaves a lasting impression.

- Don't assume that the interviewer knows what is in your resume; point out those achievements and skills that best illustrate to the interviewer who you are, and what you can do.
- Avoid being abrupt or rambling, stay on topic, and answer questions directly.
- Be aware of what the interviewer's reactions are to what you have to say.
- Speak at a moderate pace (such as television announcers use), refuse to allow yourself to be rushed, and maintain friendly eye contact.
- Have reasons why you are interested in the position, and be ready to give them when asked.
- When asked about compensation, avoid boxing yourself into specific figures; outline what your current or immediate past earnings are/were, and convey your interest in the opportunity under discussion; follow up with an open-ended question: "What range are you offering?" or a similar type of question.
- Ask the time frame involved in a final decision being made on the person being hired; you need to know whether there are lengthy delays likely because of other people being involved in the hiring process.
- Offer to leave a list of past employer references or copies of actual employer reference letters, and ensure that their telephone numbers are updated.
- Thank the interviewer for the opportunity to meet, and reiterate your interest in the opportunity, if applicable.
- Send a thank-you note after the interview, affirming your interest in the position.

Employer Interviewing Styles

Hiring managers employ various techniques when interviewing potential employees. The following are some of the methods and tactics in corporate use.

The Group: Used primarily for volume recruitment with two or more applicants interviewed together, answering open or rotating questions, to assist in determining applicant competitiveness.

The Co-workers: One or more future colleagues ask questions with their superior to assess team qualities and attitudes in prospective

group members; interview roles and questions are established beforehand, allowing superiors to see group interaction skills of present and future staff.

The Behavioral: Applicants are tested on decision-making, problem solving, and attitudes and values; open probes are used to encourage the applicant to talk about specifics; examples of how applicants handled certain situations are asked for, indicating applicant's character, values, and general maturity.

The Technical: Job knowledge is tested to qualify the applicant for further consideration; knowledge of procedures, processes, and technical industry jargon is verified, typing tests or similar assessment tools may be administered on the spot; the interviewer questions center on actual functions and daily duties.

The Aggressive: Interviewers at the beginning establish a challenging tone; stress is created to see how applicants react under pressure; knowledge and performance may be questioned with a skeptical attitude; the applicant's poise and self-control are probed for weak points.

The Written: Applicants are required to provide written answers to questions; determines basic skills, aptitudes, and work experience; provides interviewer with a record of responses and statements; indicates writing skills, grammar, and spelling.

Common Interviewing Mistakes

- Poor or casual personal appearance
- Lack of interest and enthusiasm: passive and indifferent
- Over-emphasis on money: interested only in best dollar offer, benefits, hours, vacation
- Condemnation of past employers: bitterness
- Failure to look at the interviewer when conversing
- Limp, clammy handshake
- Late to interview
- Asks no questions about job or company
- Indefinite response to questions
- Over-bearing, over-aggressive, and conceited attitude
- Know-it-all or arrogant attitudes
- Inability to express self clearly: poor diction and grammar

- Lack of planning for career: no purpose and/or goals
- Lack of confidence and poise: nervous and ill at ease
- Expects too much too soon: impatient and demanding
- Makes excuses, evasive: hedges on unfavorable factors in track record
- Lack of tact, diplomacy, and courtesy: ill mannered
- Lack of maturity and questionable judgment skills
- Lack of vitality; gives the impression of lassitude, or weariness
- Indecision and hesitation: timidity
- Low moral standards, cynical, lazy
- Intolerant: demonstrates strong prejudice
- Inability to take criticism: volatile temper evident
- Incomplete, incoherent, or illegible application

Frequent Interviewing Mistakes - Part I

It is a competitive job market, and you need to make sure that you avoid making errors that reduces your prospects for getting the job you want.

These are avoidable situations.

Not Preparing Beforehand/Researching The Employer: The Internet is a valuable resource, use your search engine to discover data about the company's products, new services, philosophy, strengths and plans. Surprise the interviewer by knowing something about the company.

Being Evasive About Unexplained Gaps In Your Work History: One of the quickest ways to lose a potential employer's interest is to appear to be defensive or evasive about gaps in your work history. People do get released, downsized, restructured, and fired. Explain objectively what happened, and don't show bitterness or resentment to the ex-employer.

Being Late For The Meeting: If you are unfamiliar with the area, take a test-drive to the meeting location a day or two before it is scheduled. Plan ahead to avoid traffic problems. Being late is discourteous, and you are getting off on the wrong foot.

Not Showing Up and Not Calling: This is worse than being late. Unless the employer is desperate to hire, you can write off this opportunity. It shows a lack of responsibility and common courtesy.

Not Dressing Properly: Stick to the basics - business attire for both men and women. Dressing down for a meeting is taking a risk with your credibility. This can offend interviewers, especially if the company has an established dress code. On the other hand, if you are going into a cutting-edge video games development firm, you may want to change that pinstriped suit for a more relaxed, business casual look.

Having Poor Personal Hygiene: Dirty hair, fingernails, bad breath, not shaving, having offensive body odor, and showing up with stains or shabby clothing, indicates a lack of self-esteem and care. It also shows a lack of organization and self-respect.

Not Having Your Resume and Reference Letters With You: Hiring Managers often are so busy that they forget to bring a copy of your resume to the meeting. This can lead to an unproductive meeting, if you don't have it with you to refer to, either. Being prepared with reference letters shows that you are organized and confident about what you have to offer the company in terms of skills, track record, and personal reputation.

Not Making Eye Contact: This is a classic error. Not maintaining reasonable eye contact in listening to and responding to questions gives the impression of a lack of interest, focus, or honesty. When you first meet someone, give him or her your full attention without staring him or her down. Some cultures discourage steady eye contact as a sign of rudeness to superiors. In North America, steady eye contact, head nodding and smiling is taken as friendliness and good interpersonal skills.

Staring Down The Interviewer: Locking eyes in a laser-like fashion with interviewers can be read as being over-aggressive and domineering. Some people think that this displays interest, but it actually shows a lack of social grace, as prolonged staring can be interpreted as being hostile or challenging.

Not Shaking Hands Well: A medium grip of about 2-4 seconds in duration is best, accompanied with a smile. A weak, limp grip can give the impression of a lack of confidence, energy, or vitality. A vise-like pumping of the hand and arm can indicate nervous tension, over aggressiveness, or domineering tendencies.

Being Too Casual - Poor Posture: Slouching in an interview, stretching out and crossing your legs, or appearing too relaxed is interpreted as being lazy. It can also seem like a lack of initiative, or just being bored with the proceedings. Sitting ramrod straight, and/or folding your arms, and/or tightly crossing your legs gives the impression of being tense, rigid, or even fearful.

Trying To Aggressively Control The Beginning Of The Interview: Some people feel that they have to control the meeting from the start; this often happens when a more senior person is meeting with a junior, first-level interviewer whose job it is to pre-screen candidates. Diplomacy and tact are called for in these situations. If you offend the less experienced interviewer by trying to establish dominance and control over the meeting, you may not get to the next level.

Poor English Grammar: Your ability to communicate effectively and in an educated manner is vitally important. You are being graded on your command of the language. Choose your words carefully. If English is a second language for you, practice your interview presentation with friends or colleagues who are fluent speakers. This is one of the key areas of focus for most interviewers.

Speaking Too Quickly or Too Slowly: A rapid-fire monologue indicates nervousness, lack of confidence, or even an attempt to quickly cover an uncomfortable area of discussion dealing with qualifications, track record, abilities, or education. Speaking too slowly can be interpreted as a lack of intelligence, being pedantic or plodding, or questioning the interviewer's intelligence and ability to absorb information.

Giving Curt and Uninformative Responses: This is usually seen as rude, a lack of interest, or the sign of a touchy personality. The impression you are making is that of being impatient with the proceedings.

Displaying A Lack Of Enthusiasm: This shows boredom or a lack of interest. You do not have to cavort like a half-time cheerleader, enthusiasm is transmitted through maintaining good eye contact, nodding in agreement, leaning toward the interviewer, and injecting interest in your vocal tone in reply to questions.

Arguing or Being Stubborn With The Interviewer: This can occur when a more junior interviewer is interviewing a senior. The idea is that the junior interviewer may need correcting about a technical point, or that the interviewer doesn't understand the information being given. The junior person may decide that the person is unmanageable, or won't be a team player, and the opportunity to advance to the next level may be lost.

Interrupting The Interviewer: This indicates impatience or even arrogance, two qualities that are not in high demand with potential employers. Wait your turn to make your points. This tendency to want to dominate the proceedings indicates a lack of empathy and business courtesy. Will you also be interrupting customers when they are speaking with you?

Being Nervous and Timid: Employers want to hire people who are confident in their abilities. Being nervous and timid comes out through speaking in a low voice, a whisper, not meeting the employer's gaze, and appearing rattled or unsettled with normal questions.

Nervous Hand Gestures: These range from tightly clasped hands to violent hand gestures made when speaking. Keep your hands away from your face; avoid wringing them, drumming your fingernails, picking at any part of your face or body, and playing with pens, etc., as this indicates nervousness, tension, or a lack of confidence.

Being Coy or Flirtatious: Answers given with a wink or with seductive gestures will annoy most hiring managers. It will not win the respect of the interviewer and may alienate some. Men and women both do this in the mistaken belief that by making a personal connection and showing that they are approachable and open, they will win the interviewer over.

Being A Comedian: Small jokes or humorous remarks about the weather or traffic are good icebreakers in the beginning of an interview. Carrying on like a stand-up comedian joking about this or that topic can wear thin quickly. Interviewers will see this as being lightweight and maybe disguising a lack of substance.

Frequent Interviewing Mistakes - Part II

- Asking about the salary in the first meeting
- Sending a fawning follow up letter or message

- Asking for special hours of work
- Negative comments about your current/past employer
- Not asking questions about the job
- Complaining and sounding like a victim
- Appearing too eager/desperate for the job
- Appearing to be too ambitious
- Wandering away from the topic being discussed
- Not asking for the job

Asking About The Salary In The First Meeting: Never be the first person to bring up the topic of salary in the first meeting. Always let the interviewer broach this subject. Establish the mutual interest level first. Asking about what the company is willing to offer can easily be misinterpreted as being strictly money-motivated or mercenary. Dwelling on the subject will confirm that impression. You can always nudge the interview gently in the direction of the company's offerings by asking obliquely about the company's point of view to supporting industry education, and the costs involved. You can remark about how expensive continuing professional education can be. This at least opens up an area of monetary discussion, and the interviewer may then shift the topic to salary. If this doesn't happen, be patient and wait until the subject arises naturally.

Sending An Over-Emotional Follow Up Letter: If you are sending a follow up letter thanking a person for their time after an interview, be very aware of what message you are sending. Sometimes, a euphoric feeling can develop when the interview chemistry is strong. You feel that you have to follow up that feeling and tell the interviewer just how much you enjoyed the discussion, and that you appreciate their time and interest. There is nothing wrong with doing this. It isn't so much what you say; it is how you say it. If your writing style is more emotional than how you speak, have someone who is objective review your message. The basic rule of thumb is: keep it short and professional. Some cultures tend to write with more feeling in their business letters. Check your spelling and grammar if English is a second language. What may sound respectful to you may sound flowery or over-the-top, to a person from another culture.

Asking for Special Hours of Work: If you go into an initial interview with a personal agenda based on your lifestyle and the family needs, and you bring up your preferences in the meeting without being asked, you may talk yourself out of further consideration. You need to be

careful here. You can always ask what the company's policy is about their working hours, flexible hours, and the shifts that they run. This is simple information gathering, and you learn what the company's policies are without having to give them a demand to meet or reject.

Negative Comments About Your Current/Past Employer: This is a big mistake. Even if you have a legitimate grievance or have been mistreated by a potential employer, it is very important that you not come across as a victim or resentful, as these attitudes can be interpreted as a lack of maturity, objectivity, or a tendency to hold grudges. If you have experienced a difficult situation such as being downsized or fired, you can be sure that the interviewer will be looking for signs of instability, depression, or a person who is unmanageable.

Not Asking Questions About The Job: The interviewer wants you to be interested in the job, the company, and the future that you may have with them. Asking intelligent questions about the company's products, services, competitors, and plans are made easier by doing research on the Internet before you meet. Go to the news or press releases pages on their website and see what's new. Take the time to find out about them. If you have a copy of the job description before you meet, look it over. What is unclear? What do you need more information on? Write the questions down and take them with you. Doing this shows you are organized and interested, and will make a good impression because many people don't do this.

Complaining and Being A Victim: Complaining about the conditions you had, how long it took to get to work, the coworkers you had to endure, and the boss who wouldn't support you paints you in the interviewer's mind as a problem person. Someone who thinks of himself or herself as a victim will not be considered as a good team player, or able to handle stress effectively. Employers want to hire people who have a positive approach to their work. They want someone who blends well with other people, and an employee who can raise the morale of the team, not lower it.

Appearing Too Eager/Desperate For Job: There is a fine line between showing strong interest, and appearing to be overeager for the job. The balance starts to be tipped to the negative when an interviewer or hiring manager starts getting constant calls for status updates, or emails seeking feedback. The same holds true for recruiters. If an interviewer tells you that you will be contacted by a certain date, and

you aren't called by 9:00 a.m. on that day, and you leave a couple of messages or voicemails by 10:00am or 11:00am that day, you will convey the impression of being over-eager; quickly diminishing the employer's hiring interest. Patience can pay dividends in this situation. Wait at least 24 hours after the deadline before following up, and then leave only one voicemail. In your message, simply reiterate your interest in the job, and your willingness to make yourself available for further discussion. If there is sufficient interest on the other side, you will be contacted.

Appearing To Be Too Ambitious: Hiring managers are cautious with candidates who begin focusing on what the next step in the career progression is in the company, instead of discussing the duties and job performance expectations. Spending too much time on what the future may hold, and especially discussing how the monetary rewards may increase, and then expressing the confidence that you will quickly get to that level can backfire, and convey the wrong impression. The interviewer may think you are just using this job as a stepping-stone, and that you have no real interest in the job under discussion. Being career motivated is a positive quality. Appearing impatient with the time it may take to achieve the job and monetary progress that you seek is a negative to many hiring managers.

Wandering Away From The Topic Being Discussed: Interviewers quickly become bored with long-winded explanations and digressions from the subjects that they want to discuss. Stay focused and don't use ten words when five words will do. Practice your answers with a spouse or friend about relevant aspects of your employment experience. Avoid lengthy and enthusiastic discussions about your personal interests and hobbies. If you have a tendency to speak at length about any given subject, monitor your answers, and establish a mental time limit to answer questions in. Losing or boring your audience does not generate hiring interest.

Not Asking For The Job: Many people think that they just have to answer the questions, present their credentials, and the employer will automatically choose them because they are the best person for the job. The key point to remember is that you are essentially selling the product that is you. To make the sale you need to close the deal. Ask for the job. Express clearly your interest in the company and the position. Tell the hiring manager that you want to work there. Convince

them that they will be getting a motivated, interested, and dedicated employee who is willing to work hard.

Don't Oversell Yourself Out of a Job Offer!

An interview is a two-way exchange of information, where you highlight your experience and skills, and how they can serve the employer's needs. Danger arises when you become too comfortable or expansive in an interview, and then decide to indulge in telling anecdotal stories that derail the positive direction that the interview had. As friendly as the interviewer may be, and as encouraging as the interviewer may appear, he or she is not looking for lengthy, involved and rambling stories from you.

The key to overcoming this tendency to ramble is to practice your answers with a trusted colleague, and ask that you be given a signal if you are beginning to ramble or stray off-topic. Tell your partner to be brutally honest about this. It is in your interest to streamline your answers. Stick to the essentials, and don't lose your audience in a fog of words.

If you see your interviewer starting to fidget, tap their pen or pencil, shuffle papers around, yawn even, this is a clear warning that you are rambling. If you find yourself being what you think is unduly interrupted in the middle of a sentence, this is a red light that you should heed immediately. At that point, you smile and start becoming more aware of the physical feedback you are receiving from your listener. As a recruiter, I don't want to hear from a client that a candidate oversold his or herself, or seemed to be trying too hard. You need to know when to stop talking, and ask open-ended questions to gather information. When you are aware through prior interview practice, you begin to see how you can condense your presentation to make it focused, relevant, and impressive.

Beware of those seemingly innocent questions like "Tell us about yourself" that can turn into a five-minute monologue where you serenely meander into the past, not noticing the steam that is beginning to curl out of the interviewer's ears, or the glazed look coming into the interviewer's eyes. Think out your answers beforehand. Speak in bullet-point instead of paragraph length sentences. It doesn't mean you have to be abrupt, just exercise some verbal self-discipline, and keep you

answers relevant. Your interviewer will see you as focused and concise--two key attributes that are appreciated by senior management everywhere.

Body Language In An Interview: Reading The Signs

Beyond the words you say in an interview are the nonverbal signals you are sending to the interviewer.

You can communicate many different attitudes and feelings through nonverbal signals. You can also pick up signs of agreement or disagreement from the interviewer.

It can be misleading to interpret a single sign as having a definite interpretation. Look for several signs, and take the context into consideration.

Happiness or satisfaction: smiling, enlarged pupils, relaxed posture, serene facial expression, and free, unrestrained movement

Unhappiness or dissatisfaction: frowning, constricted pupils, tense posture, pursed lips, furrowed brow, flared nostrils, rigid body, lack of movement or nervous movement

Agreement: nodding, winking, smiling, relaxation following concentration, continuation of serene eye contact

Disagreement: shaking the head from side-to-side, frowning, crossing the arms, pursing the lips, drumming the fingers, tapping a pen or pencil

Interest or receptiveness: serene eye contact, stillness of body, even breathing, arms folded loosely over lower body

Disinterest or distraction: looking away, hunched shoulders, arms folded on chest, face placid, vacant eyes, sighing, finger drumming or desk tapping

Anger or irritation: accentuated breathing, intense aggressive eye contact, arms folded on chest, face taut, clenched fists, hands gripping desktop

Disbelief: one raised eyebrow, crooked smile, head shaking side to side, tilted head

Surprise: two raised eyebrows, enlarged pupils, sudden attention directed to speaker

Decision-making in progress: eyes directed to the ceiling, blinking rapidly, turning away and looking steadily at nothing, standing and walking back and forth

The decision has been made: deep breath followed by a sigh and relaxation, end of facial tension, followed by smiling or earnest eye contact

Superior status: takes central spot in meetings, speaks without seeking permission, initiates and terminates most transactions, exhibits dominant behavior - stands taller in confrontations, pats people on the back

Subordinate status: takes peripheral spot in meetings, seeks permission before speaking, waits for dominant individual to initiate or terminate most transactions, exhibits submissive behavior - curling shoulders forward in confrontations, seeks pats on the back

The Unique Challenges Facing Mature Candidates

We live in a youth oriented culture and society. The focus is on the next best thing, the newest program, or idea; that which is both fresh and new. In an age where Internet moguls and entrepreneurs may barely be entering their early 20s, it is easy to see that sometimes people with a lot of experience find challenges in measuring up to, or being measured against, their younger counterparts.

There are preconceived notions and age prejudices, combined with the erroneous assumption that once you reach a certain age, your usefulness and your energy are diminished. These ideas may influence certain hiring decisions.

In a technologically driven world, employers want their employees to be able to keep up, be able to change, and adapt successfully to change. As a mature candidate, you need to be able to do certain things to counteract and neutralize these notions. Address these silent or spoken objections with candor and sincerity.

Age and Focus: The biggest spoken or unspoken objection is that you are too old for the job. The other side of that argument is that you bring your accumulated experience and wisdom, gained over a period of years, to bear on the demands of the position. This practical experience allows you to identify and anticipate problems, and devise workable solutions, based on knowing what to do in these situations. This compares favorably to someone of lesser experience who only has theory to draw from. The uncertainty about your ability to sustain focus, in relation to the pressures of the job can be dispensed with by your preparation, presentation, and delivery during the interview itself. Taking a proactive approach, and being well prepared and responsive to the interviewer helps cement your mental focus in the interviewer's mind.

Energy and Stamina: One of the biggest assumptions made by interviewers about older people is that they do not have the energy and stamina to keep pace with their younger colleagues. This is a difficult objection to counter because there are so many stereotypes about the older and slower person in society. Give examples of projects that you had involvement with which required a long-term commitment of energy and time. Perseverance and patience in accomplishing objectives over the long-term is a necessary ingredient for success in these projects.

Familiarity with Technology: The ability to keep up with today's technological changes is highlighted in an interview setting when it comes to programs, software applications and general familiarity with computers, tablets, and so on. If you have not done so already, it is important to upgrade your skills in this vital area. Your resume should reflect this updated information. Noting your familiarity with Windows 95 will not impress the interviewer. There is an assumption on the part of some hiring managers that older employees will shy away from technology and new systems and procedures. Take a proactive approach, and neutralize that argument by being up-to-date with the necessary software in your field or function, and point that out.

Manageability by Younger Superiors: You may deal with an interviewer who has a preconceived notion that older people are more set in their ways, thus less likely to take direction and guidance from a younger superior. There is a fine line to tread here between being accommodating and condescending. On the one hand, you need to impress upon the interviewer that you have no problem working with

someone younger than yourself. Doing this, it is important to avoid giving the impression that you are approaching this from the standpoint of someone of superior experience condescending to being managed by someone of lesser experience.

Flexibility and Adaptability to Change: The ability to switch gears and accommodate unexpected change is a component of many jobs today. In a pressure filled, fast-moving job function, the interviewer will look for evidence of your ability to switch hats, change direction, and accept unanticipated diversions from standard procedure. You need to project a sense of poise and competence in discussing this area with the interviewer. Give the interviewer examples where the adaptability to constant change was necessary to successfully fulfill the mandate of your job and the expectations of your superiors.

Attitudes: Everyone knows the stereotype of the crotchety, cranky, older employee who is unwilling to adapt to changing times. Positive, mature enthusiasm that embraces learning new things, taking on new challenges, and exploring new horizons, is the opposite attitude of a hidebound, traditionally minded person. Your experience in working with many different types of people over the years gives you the flexibility to accept people from different cultures and backgrounds, and to work effectively with them. You have developed practical, interpersonal skills, and these abilities make you a valued team player. You do not have to learn how to get along with people, you already know how.

Recap:

- **Age and Focus** objection: is offset by accumulated wisdom and experience; the ability to anticipate and identify problems; applying practical, proven knowledge versus unproven theory.
- **Energy and Stamina:** demonstrated through examples of work involving a long-term investment of time and energy; illustrate examples of perseverance and patience in the accomplishment of goals.
- **Technology:** having updated computer skills, and the ability to converse knowledgeably about industry-specific software.
- **Manageability:** expressing your prior experience with, and willingness to report to younger managers than yourself; avoiding the appearance of condescension in speaking of younger superiors.

- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** show evidence of your ability to switch gears, think on your feet, embrace change, handle multiple tasks, and learn new skills and procedures.
- **Attitudes:** your proven interpersonal skills, developed over time, combined with positive, mature enthusiasm makes you a welcome team player, capable of working with people from a wide variety of cultures and backgrounds.

The Virtual Interview - Looking Good!

Significant numbers of employers are using the virtual interview for pre-selecting candidates for serious consideration. There are certain special points to keep in mind, to shine to your best advantage when participating in a video interview.

Dress for the occasion

Just because you are not meeting someone face-to-face, it doesn't mean that you should dress down for the occasion. Select clothing that you would wear for any personal interview. Choose nothing that would distract the interviewer's attention from what you are saying. This is not the time to hang out in a bathrobe, or a favorite old sweater; you need to look the part to get the job.

Location, location, location

It is very important to select a location that is quiet, well lighted, uncluttered in the background, and that shows you in a relaxed, yet alert attitude. Don't set up your computer in the kitchen, or any high traffic area, and ensure that everybody in the house is aware of the need to keep noise to a minimum. The interviewer will be scanning your background, so set the scene accordingly. Pleasant, neutral colors in the backdrop are easy on the eyes. Eliminate distractions in your environment so the interviewer can focus on you. If possible, close the door to the room that you are in. The last thing you need is to have Fido or Fluffy jump up onto your computer table, or into your lap looking for some love and attention at a critical moment.

Lighting and positioning the webcam

It is essential to get the lighting right. You don't want to give the interviewer the impression that you are speaking from a cave, nor do you want to be in lighting that washes out your features or, makes it difficult for the interviewer to see your eyes. Test your setup with a friend or two to see how you come across on their monitors. The general idea here is to have a nice, balanced lighting that is as natural as possible. You want to have a level gaze to meet the interviewer's eyes. Avoid looking down at the mini window on your desktop; position that towards the top of the screen.

Internet speed and connectivity issues

Slow Internet connections and resulting connectivity issues can spoil an otherwise well prepared video interview presentation. If you are actively looking for a job, considering investing in the higher bandwidth levels. You can check your upload and download Internet connection speeds on many different sites. How does your average upload and download connection speed compare to the general population? [Speedtest.net](https://www.speedtest.net) is a good place to check this. What happens when you video chat with friends in the same city as yourself, the same country, and in different countries? How do you look to them? Are your movements jerky, or smooth and natural?

Lights, camera, action!

As in any interview conducted face-to-face, you need to project your personality, enthusiasm, interest, and confidence to the viewer. You want to come across as natural and responsive, not appearing stiff and robotic on the one hand, or stoked on high-energy beverages either. Natural body and hand movements that show your poise and self-control make a much better impression. Keep your hands away from your face; avoid playing with objects like pens or pencils.

Video interview recap

- Dress as you would for any interview
- Choose a quiet and well lighted room or place to set up your computer
- Eliminate background clutter
- Choose pleasant and neutral colors

- Test your lighting to ensure balance and a natural look
- Advise everyone of the need for minimal noise while you are interviewing
- Test your Internet connectivity for issues that may affect the interview
- Speak in a natural and confident manner
- Keep your hands away from your face and your eyes level with the interviewer

We will be revising this book every month or so, to add new and useful information.

About The Author

Kevin Buckley, CPC is a Certified Personnel Consultant (1989), and founder of Buckley Search Inc., a leading executive search firm active in Customs, Freight, and Logistics in North America.

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