

Chapter Five: Mastering the Interview

Have you ever experienced that panic when an interviewer asks you a question that you didn't expect, and you're scrambling for an answer? You feel ill-at-ease and pressured, so you blurt out an answer. More often than not, your hastily crafted response fails to showcase your strengths, and may in fact damage your chances of a follow-up call or job offer. Going into an interview prepared allows you to avoid such nightmarish debacles and gives you confidence that you can handle anything the interviewer throws your way.

What Interviewers Want to Know

Capability Factors, Work Style, Personal Values and Priorities, Risks & Rewards

- Personal traits, characteristics, self-presentation and "social intelligence"
- Ability to learn new skills and grasp new constructs/knowledge
- Creativity and innovation
- Ability to deal with complex issues and problems, to see the big picture
- Style when working under pressure or during a crisis
- Ability to read and respond to social or interpersonal situations
- Motivational "hot buttons" such as money, power, influence, prestige, affiliation, challenge
- Definition of success, achievement, personal and professional growth
- Attitude toward risk, uncertainty, tradition, commitment or security

Before the Interview

Here are some common-sense steps that will ensure you are polished and prepared for the interview, leading to a strong showing with hiring managers:

Research the Employer. Make sure you do the research on the company and can talk confidently about key points, such as the firm's industry standing, main products and new developments. Also, during interview explain why you want to work for the company, how it would align with background/experience and future career goals.

Know Your Resume. Review not only interview questions but also your resume. Be *very* familiar with it as it may be used as a partial guideline for interview.

"You have to know your experience inside-out," says John Challenger, CEO, Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc., the nation's first, oldest and premier outplacement consulting firm. By knowing your strengths and accomplishments over your career history, you can then target your accomplishments to the specific opportunity. This is crucial because companies have their pick of candidates with 15 million people unemployed and a lot more job seekers under employed.

Practice. Interviewing effectively takes practice and preparation – walk in ready and confident. You are an active participant in the interview, so come prepared with a handful of insightful questions about the job and the company, and what you bring to the position. Select two or three primary problem-solving accomplishments, to prepare for the common interview question, “Tell me about a time when you [took initiative, resolved a complex problem, etc.]...”

Role playing with another person playing the part of the interviewer is a great way to get hands-on practice in an interview. Have your friend ask both questions and follow-up questions, while audio and/or video recording your answers. Listening and watching the mock interview will help you polish your delivery and overcome distracting quirks such as speech that includes “uhs,” awkward hand gestures or not enough eye contact.

Always answer the question FIRST, and then elaborate later. Get to a stopping point and don’t ramble trying to fill in silences. Challenger says, “It’s crucial to not talk too much, especially in the beginning so the interviewer can tell you what he or she is really looking for and then you can begin to focus your responses on the things you’ve done that are really applicable.”

Be ready for questions designed to assess your interpersonal qualities – especially if the job requires you to manage or work closely with others. Fundamentally, the interviewer is picturing how you would fit in with the organization. You want to demonstrate that it does not matter what kind of people you work with - just that work gets done. This shows the interviewer that you are more concerned with outcomes than personalities, says Don Georgevich, author of [*The Complete Interview Answer Guide*](#). He advises that you should emphasize that you work well with anyone who delivers what they promise.

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