

Hitting the Target During a Personal Interview!

BY



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INTERVIEW PREPARATION

One of the best ways to separate yourself from the competition is to be prepared!

Ok, we made it to the interview, now what. First of all, you need to understand what the interview is all about. Your winning resume, and the way SPI of Chicago presented your abilities, character and background have gained you entrée into the potential Employer's office. The interviewer has already reviewed your resume in detail with me so they are intimately knowledgeable about the hard facts of your employment history and skills. The actual interview is a subtler, more subjective aspect of the job-hunting process. During the course of each interview each person you meet will be forming an opinion of you and gauging your compatibility with the needs of the organization and more importantly their ability to work with you within that role. Bottom line – **You're trying to make a good impression!!**

You need to be sincere, polite and enthusiastic about your knowledge of their company and the industry in order to secure the position. Your resume may well have shown examples of your skills as a team player, but now you need to convince them that you fit their team. In order to make the best impression you can you need to be prepared, know what to expect, and how to handle it if things don't go quite as you had planned.

Preparation

Research the company:

- Check out the company website. Know about their history and growth over the years.
- Check out other company profiles through websites like Hoovers or Dun/Bradstreet.
- Look for relevant press releases in major newspapers or trade publications.
- Read through again any notes you have surrounding the interviewers you will meet. Try to understand their role within the organization and make sure you answer their questions with a bent toward their area of expertise.
- Re-read the job description so you can fit your background most effectively to their needs.
- Be ready with questions for each interviewer but focus on responsibility related issues not "what's in it for me" questions.

Presenting Yourself

General Rules For Presenting yourself:

- Arrive early
- Bring extra copies of your resume, references, a notepad & pen.
- Be sure you know how to pronounce your interviewer's name correctly.
- Be polite to *everyone* you meet there. They all count.
- Be personable as well as professional.
- Do NOT chew gum, smoke, swear or use slang.
- Assume all questions are asked for a good reason and answer accordingly.
- Do not assume that your interviewer knows how to elicit the information he/she is looking for.
- Feel free to ask for clarification before answering a question.
- Take some time to formulate your answers before you speak.
- Answer all questions honestly, but in the best, most positive light.
- Do NOT bad mouth old employers.

Proper Attire:

- First Impressions are extremely important. The way you present yourself can be as important as what you say.
 - **For a woman:** A suit or conservative dress is appropriate. Minimal amounts of jewelry and perfume. Stylish low heel shoes are best.
 - **For a man:** A conservative business suit, long-sleeved shirt and tie are still best. No jewelry other than a wedding ring and a watch, matching socks and polished shoes are the way to go.

*** If you are unsure as to the attire you were planning to wear-please call me.***

Some really good things to read and think about:

These next few pages are some excellent articles to read prior to going on any interview. They were written by EXPERTS so they are very much worth heeding and applying to this interview.

A Guide to Behavioral Interviewing

"Tell me about a time when you were on a team, and one of the members wasn't carrying his or her weight." If this is one of the leading questions in your job interview, you could be in for a behavioral interview. Based on the premise that the best way to predict future behavior is to determine past behavior, this style of interviewing is gaining wide acceptance among recruiters.

Today, more than ever, every hiring decision is critical. Behavioral interviewing is designed to minimize personal impressions that can affect the hiring decision. By focusing on the applicant's actions and behaviors, rather than subjective impressions that can sometimes be misleading, interviewers can make more accurate hiring decisions.

Behavioral vs. Traditional Interviews

If you have training or experience with traditional interviewing techniques, you may find the behavioral interview quite different in several ways. Instead of asking how you would behave in a particular situation, the interviewer will ask you to describe how you did behave. Expect the interviewer to question and probe (think of "peeling the layers from an onion"). The interviewer will ask you to provide details, and will not allow you to theorize or generalize about several events.

The interview will be a more structured process that will concentrate on areas that are important to the interviewer, rather than allowing you to concentrate on areas that you may feel are important. You may not get a chance to deliver any prepared stories. Most interviewers will be taking copious notes throughout the interview. The behavioral interviewer has been trained to objectively collect and evaluate information, and works from a profile of desired behaviors that are needed for success on the job. Because the behaviors a candidate has demonstrated in previous similar positions are likely to be repeated, you will be asked to share situations in which you may or may not have exhibited these behaviors. Your answers will be tested for accuracy and consistency.

If you are an entry-level candidate with no previous related experience, the interviewer will look for behaviors in situations similar to those of the target position: *"Describe a major problem you have faced and how you dealt with it."* *"Give an example of when you had to work with your hands to accomplish a task or project."* *"What class did you like the most? What did you like about it?"*

Follow-up questions will test for consistency and determine if you exhibited the desired behavior in that situation:

"Can you give me an example?"

"What did you do?"

"What did you say?"

"What were you thinking?"

"How did you feel?"

"What was your role?"

"What was the result?"

You will notice an absence of such questions as, "Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses."

How to Prepare for a Behavioral Interview

Recall recent situations that show favorable behaviors or actions, especially involving course work, work experience, leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, and customer service. Prepare short descriptions of each situation, be ready to give details if asked. Be sure each story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, i.e., be ready to describe the situation, your action, and the outcome or result. Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable). Be honest. Don't embellish or omit any part of the story. The interviewer will find out if your story is built on a weak foundation. Be specific. Don't generalize about several events; give a detailed accounting of one event.

A possible response for the question, "Tell me about a time when you were on a team and a member wasn't pulling his or her weight" might go as follows: "I had been assigned to a team to build a canoe out of concrete. One of our team members wasn't showing up for our lab sessions nor doing his assignments. I finally met with him in private, explained the frustration of the rest of the team, and asked if there was anything I could do to help. He told me he was preoccupied with another class that he wasn't passing, so I found someone to help him with the other course. He not only was able to spend more time on our project, but he was also grateful to me for helping him out. We finished our project on time, and got a 'B' on it."

The interviewer might then probe: "How did you feel when you confronted this person?" "Exactly what was the nature of the project?" "What was his responsibility as a team member?" "What was your role?" "At what point did you take it on yourself to confront him?" You can see it is important that you not make up or "shade" information, and why you should have a clear memory of the entire incident.

Don't Forget the Basics

Instead of feeling anxious or threatened by the prospect of a behavioral interview, remember the essential difference between the traditional interview and the behavioral interview: The traditional interviewer may allow you to project what you might or should do in a given situation, whereas the behavioral interviewer is looking for past actions only. It will always be important to put your best foot forward and make a good impression on the interviewer with appropriate attire, good grooming, and a firm handshake and direct eye contact. There is no substitute for promptness, courtesy, preparation, enthusiasm, and a positive attitude.

General Overview

Behavioral Interviewing, also referred to as Structured Behavioral Interviewing, is by design a more systematic and standardized process of evaluating job candidates than is typical of the "traditional" interview process. Its primary intent is to increase the success rate of an organization's in "good" hires and is, therefore, the form of interview being used more often by a wide variety of recruiting organizations. Behavioral interviewing is based on the "Behavioral Consistency Principle" which essentially states that the best predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar circumstance. Therefore, the questions that are asked of you will tend to focus on behavior, and attempt to evoke how you responded to a variety of specific personal and interpersonal situations and what results occurred from your actions.

"HOW DO I KNOW WHEN I'M BEING GIVEN A BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW?"

It is quite possible that the interviewer may make you aware prior to the interview that you should expect a structured or competency-based interview. However, you shouldn't have much trouble identifying whether or not you're being given a behavioral interview even without prior

information. If you hear questions that are asking you to describe or recount specific situations in which you carried out a job-relevant action, and are then asked to describe the consequence or result of your action, you know you're being behaviorally interviewed.

Behavioral interviews are designed to assess your "real" ability or skill level in functioning in any number of work related activities by delving into how you functioned in your past jobs or extracurricular activities. As with any sort of interview, there are a number of common behavioral "themes" or "performance dimensions" that most recruiters are likely to be interested in. These include (but are not limited to) leadership, interpersonal, communication, multi-tasking, management and cognitive skills, Transition ability (e.g., personal flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity), motivation, decisiveness and commitment. The kinds of inquiries you'd hear from a recruiter might resemble the following:

- What do you estimate to be your biggest academic achievement at this point? What did you do to contribute to that achievement?
- Cite an example of when you were faced with an unpleasant task. How did you go about facing it?
- Give me the most recent example of a conflict you had with a coworker or a supervisor. How did you handle it?
- Describe a situation in which you had to use your communication skills in order to make an important point. Tell me about a time when you had to use a persuasive argument to help someone see things your way. How did you do it?

Note that each of the above examples integrates three universal components of a good behavioral inquiry: a particular performance situation or task, an action on your part, and the consequences of your action.

It is highly critical that you first do some preparation. For any given job interview, this should begin with an analysis on your part of what you believe to be the most important skills, abilities, and personal qualities needed to successfully fulfill the various responsibilities of the job.

Once identified, think carefully about any kind of "working" experience that you've ever had that required you to use these skills, what courses of action or strategies you used to accomplish the tasks, and what positive results came about from your diligence. It is often the case that an interviewer will seek a relatively high level of detail in your responses (e.g., the conversation you had, the mood of the person you were talking to, your specific thought processes at the time of action, etc.).

The final key is preparation, you don't want to be trying to think of examples "on-the-spot" during the interview. Review your past and make some notes to help you recall your past successes during the interview. On the next page is a sheet formatted to help you recall and detail those successes.

Don't Talk Too Much

by Michael Neece, founder of [Interview Mastery](#)
Monster Contributing Writer

The gift of gab can be something of a curse during an interview. You could end up talking your way right out of the job.

It's important to remember that interviewers are only human, and their attention tends to wane as you speak. Fully understanding this is critical to effectively communicating during any interview. Your response should be less than a minute and a half when an interviewer asks you to "[tell me about yourself](#)." Why? You'll have that interviewer's attention for just about 90 seconds.

The average interviewer's attention span looks something like this:

- As you begin speaking, the interviewer is listening with nearly full attention.
- After about 10 seconds, he begins listening with less intensity.
- After 60 seconds, his mind begins to wander and he's devoting less than half his attention to you. The interviewer starts asking questions about your response or begins formulating his next question.
- After you've been speaking for 90 seconds without interruption, the interviewer is barely listening at all.

An interviewer's attention level can be nearly impossible to detect, because most people are skilled at nodding their heads and saying "hmm" while looking at you, all in an effort to disguise their wandering minds. The longer you speak without interruption, the less attention the listener is giving you. Hence, when you provide a long answer that builds to an important conclusion, often the interviewer is no longer listening. This is particularly important when you respond to an interviewer's request to tell him about yourself, because there is just so much you can say on the subject, and you can't be sure what part of your background the interviewer is most interested in learning about.

Your Questions Are Key

Near the end of your response, it's important to keep the interviewer engaged by asking questions.

Skilled interviewers will pose behavioral-event questions, asking you to describe specific examples of your experience. In these situations, your response can easily last much longer than 90 seconds. In such situations, interrupt yourself by asking the interviewer a question like, "Is this the level of detail you are looking for?" or "Is this the type of example you're interested in?" This strategy helps to reengage your listener and promotes two-way communication.

According to Kent Kirch, the global director of recruiting at Deloitte, interviewers are more impressed with your questions than any selling points you try to make. "What's really disappointing to an interviewer is at the end of an interview and I ask the candidate, 'Do you have any questions I can answer for you?' and he says, 'Nope, I think you answered them all,' and that's the end of it; it's just really frustrating," he says. "It all goes back to preparation, and [your questions] tells the interviewer you thought about this interview before you walked in the door."

Asking questions can also give you a strategic edge. "People love to talk about themselves," says Austin Cooke, the global recruitment director at Sapient. "So if you as a candidate can kind of get interviewers talking about themselves, you're one step up."

Your interview goals are to ensure you are understood and to make the best presentation of your talents. Engaging interviewers in two-way communication by asking questions helps you ensure they are listening while you deliver your response.

Six Interview Mistakes

by Michael Neece, founder of [Interview Mastery](#)
Monster Contributing Writer

It's tough to avoid typical interview traps if you're unsure what they are. Here are a half dozen to watch out for.

1. Confusing an Interview with an Interrogation.

Most candidates expect to be interrogated. An interrogation occurs when one person asks all the questions and the other gives the answers. An interview is a business conversation in which both people ask and respond to questions. Candidates who expect to be interrogated avoid asking questions, leaving the interviewer in the role of reluctant interrogator.

2. Making a So-Called Weakness Seem Positive.

Interviewers frequently ask candidates, "[What are your weaknesses?](#)" Conventional interview wisdom dictates that you highlight a weakness like "I'm a perfectionist," and turn it into a positive. Interviewers are not impressed, because they've probably heard the same answer a hundred times. If you are asked this question, highlight a skill that you wish to improve upon and describe what you are doing to enhance your skill in this area. Interviewers don't care what your weaknesses are. They want to see how you handle the question and what your answer indicates about you.

3. Failing to Ask Questions.

Every interview concludes with the interviewer [asking if you have any questions](#). The worst thing to say is that you have no questions. Having no questions prepared indicates you are not interested and not prepared. Interviewers are more impressed by the questions you ask than the selling points you try to make. Before each interview, make a list of five questions you will ask. "I think a good question is, 'Can you tell me about your career?'" says Kent Kirch, director of global recruiting at Deloitte. "Everybody likes to talk about themselves, so you're probably pretty safe asking that question."

4. Researching the Company But Not Yourself.

Candidates intellectually prepare by researching the company. Most job seekers do not research themselves by taking inventory of their experience, knowledge and skills. [Formulating a talent inventory](#) prepares you to immediately respond to any question about your experience. You must be prepared to discuss any part of your background. Creating your talent inventory refreshes your memory and helps you immediately remember experiences you would otherwise have forgotten during the interview.

5. Leaving Your Cell Phone On.

We may live in a wired, always-available society, but a ringing cell phone is not appropriate for an interview. Turn it off before you enter the company.

6. Waiting for a Call.

Time is your enemy after the interview. After you send a [thank-you email and note](#) to every interviewer, follow up a couple of days later with either a question or additional information. Contact the person who can hire you -- not the HR department. HR is famous for not returning calls. Additional information can be details about your talents, a recent competitor's press release or industry trends. Your intention is to keep everyone's memory of you fresh.

Interviewers' Pet Peeves

by Carole Martin

Monster Contributing Writer

You sit facing the interviewer, feeling like things are moving along nicely when all of a sudden the interview takes a drastic turn for the worse. What just happened? You may have hit one of the interviewer's pet peeves, one of those things that automatically triggers a negative response.

Here are seven of the most common peeves provided by experienced interviewers, along with some tips on how to avoid them:

1. Smells: Too Much of a Good Smell Can Be Bad

Pat Riley, author of *Secrets of Breaking into Pharmaceutical Sales*, has a pet peeve story to relate: "Preparing for an interview is not like preparing for a date. I had one interview with a woman who [doused herself with perfume](#) (the same perfume my ex-girlfriend used to wear) right before stepping into the small interview booth. The perfume was overpowering and brought back bad memories."

2. Communication: Too Little Leaves Interviewers Exasperated

"My number one interviewing pet peeve is an applicant who won't talk," says Steve Jones, a manager of client services at a software company in Dallas. "I try to ask open-ended questions and prod them for longer answers, but no luck. I've even mentioned to a few that I need more information so I can get an idea of where they're coming from -- still no luck. I always end the interview saying, 'Now it's your turn to [ask questions](#),' and still no luck; they don't have any. Oh well -- next!"

"Help me out here," says Jones. "Come prepared to answer questions and talk about yourself."

3. Communication: Too Much Can Be Too Much

"Candidates who ramble are the ones who get to me," says Dotti Bousquet of Resource Group Staffing in West Hartford, Connecticut. "Last week, I was interviewing a candidate and asked her one question. The candidate talked and talked and talked for 45 minutes straight. I was unable to stop her. I had to say, 'Let's wrap this up,' and I stood up while she continued to talk. I walked to the door of the office and opened it. She left, but continued to talk while walking out the door."

The lesson? "Candidates should stay focused, and answer the question asked -- in less than two to three minutes," advises Bousquet.

4. Lack of Focus: Results in Losing the Interviewer

"Typically, candidates are simply too intimidated by the process," says Mark Fulop, project director for a large nonprofit agency. "Relating the answer given to one question back with another -- and asking clarifying or follow-up questions -- shows me that the candidate is confident and [thinking about the whole picture](#) instead of enduring an interrogation."

5. Averting Your Eyes: One Way to Avert an Offer

"People who do not make any eye contact during the entire interview" irritate Gwen Sobiech, an agency recruiter in West Hartford, Connecticut. "I realize some people are shy, but to never look at me once -- they look down, around, everywhere, but not at me for the entire interview. I find that extremely annoying. I also tend to distrust someone who will not look at me when I've asked a question."

If you are [uncomfortable looking](#) into someone's eyes, look at his "third eye," just above and between the person's two eyes.

6. Slang and Street Speak: Leave Them on the Street

"Poor communications skills really get to me," says Robert Fodge of Power Brokers in Dover, Delaware. "What I mean by this is not merely their language fluency, but more about the use of language. Slang words and street speak just don't have a place in most business environments. Also, candidates who say 'um,' 'like' and 'uh' between every other word lose my attention very quickly."

7. Deception: Little Lies Leave a Big Impression

One major complaint among recruiters is when a candidate is not completely truthful; small lies are all too common in the world of recruitment. This includes not being completely forthcoming with relevant information, embellishing accomplishments, hiding jobs or leading the process on with no intention of ever following through. Building trust during the interview is key to getting an offer.

Questioning the Interviewer

Even if you don't ask any questions during an interview, many interviewers will ask you if you have any questions at the end. How you respond will affect their evaluation of you. So be prepared to ask insightful questions about the organization.

- Making a list of any questions you have regarding the company is important (but it should contain only question you weren't able to find out through your own research or through us) this will help you identify if this is the right position for you.

Good topics to touch on include:

- The competitive environment in which the organization operates
- Executive management styles
- What obstacles the organization anticipates in meeting its goals
- How the organization's goals have changed over the past 3 years
- What obstacles were commonly met in reaching corporate goals
- What resource are available from the company and what must be found elsewhere to reach position objectives.

Generally it is not recommended to ask about compensation or benefits. Questions in this are make you seem more interested in what they can do for you and less enthusiastic about the position. Also, make sure you ask at least some questions so you don't appear to passive in pursuing the opportunity.

The “ONE” question you must ask each interviewer:

The last question you should ask before concluding with any interviewer is this.

“Do you feel I have the qualifications necessary to be successful in this position?”

Now listen very carefully to how the interviewer responds. If they give you a resounding “yes”, you have done a good job of covering all the issues that are important to them.

If they say something like:

“You appear to have all the qualifications we’re looking for, but...”

Listen for that “but”, whatever comes afterwards is an area you need to re-strengthen their view of your background in, try to go over your experiences in that area one more time. It can make all the difference in the world.

A Few Last Reminders:

Line up your references in advance and verify that they will be good ones.

If we at The Griffin Group have redone your resume and you need additional copies just let us know.

Follow up immediately with thank you emails to everyone that you interview with.

Your ultimate goal should be to go in there and make them want to give you an offer. Remember an interview is not a fishing trip, trying to fish out information. If you go in with that approach often you will discover that you like all you hear about the company and opportunity, yet, you’ve been so focused on gathering information for yourself you have forgotten to sell your abilities and now it is too late to give them the impression of yourself you wanted.

The company will be anxious to know how you thought the interview went so it is important that we talk as soon as possible so that I can pass along your feedback to them. So call me as quick as you can...and a cell phone in the parking lot is not too soon.

Good Luck!

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