



Interview Tricks from a Professional Recruiter

By [Lynellen D. S. Perry](#)

I recently had the experience of job hunting with the help of a professional recruiter. After posting my resume on my home page and in several resume banks I applied online to dozens of jobs via [monster.com](#). I also participated in a fistful of interviews, which I thought went rather well. One afternoon I received a phone call from what sounded like a telemarketer. The caller turned out to be a professional recruiter, hired by various companies, to find employees for their high-tech vacancies.



We discussed my resume and he asked me a few questions about my career goals. He next said that I sounded like a good match for several companies and that he would talk to them. He mentioned that the interested companies would contact me directly for an interview. I did indeed get several calls from companies for interviews. The recruiter then became my new best friend, calling me several times a day to see what progress there was and to grill me in preparation for the interviews.

A word of caution is warranted here: *Don't let a recruiter push you around.* Recruiters will often use pressure tactics. One such tactic is to imply that a job opportunity will expire if you don't make a quick decision. Remember that a recruiter is paid to put warm bodies into job slots. They do not have *your* best interests in mind. If more and more pressure is being applied, you have a right to start getting suspicious. It may indeed be the case that the only reason the recruiter is pushing a particular job is that he gets a nice fat commission when you get hired.

That said, back to the interview advice. I'll spare you the hours on the phone. Let me mention that this article is not about how to research a company, how to evaluate a job offer, how to negotiate a job offer for more stock or other benefits, or other parts of finding a job. This article offers only a few tips about the interview session itself.

First, the objective of every interview (whether over the phone or in person) is to convince the company to give you a job offer. To get the job offer, you must sell yourself. As the interview winds down there should be only one question left in the mind of the interviewer: How quickly can they get you to accept a job offer. So how do you convince them of your worth?

You need to use what my recruiter called QLR -- Question, Listen, Respond. You ask them a question related to your background, listen to their answer, and respond by giving them background information about yourself. In this way, you are not merely reacting to the questions they try to pop on you, but you are guiding the interview to the facts that you want to present. Along the way, you build common ground between yourself and the interviewer. Why build common ground? Because you want the interviewer to feel that you are the same type of person that they are, that you are the type of person they would want to work with or to work for them.

Be careful to keep a positive attitude and to stay away from negative connotations. Lets say the interviewer does ask some hard questions like, "Why are you leaving your current situation?" You want to answer this by indicating what you're looking for, and avoid what you're trying to get out of. If you can be honest, say that your current situation was good but that you're looking for more opportunity or that you felt it was an appropriate time to enter industry. Focus on the future instead of the past. In some cases, which you'll have to feel out for yourself, you can indeed tell the interviewer what you didn't like about your last position. Some companies are interested in what others are doing wrong so that they can learn how to retain employees. On the other hand, some interviewers don't have nearly so lofty a goal. You'll just have to use your best judgement.

Another tricky part of the interview is the part where you talk about money. The recruiter's advice is that when you are asked what salary you would like, to respond by saying "Right now I'm more concerned about whether I'm a good fit for the position. If I fit then I'm sure you'll make a competitive offer." The recruiter suggests memorizing those two sentences.

Do follow through on all the other job-hunting advice you've heard before: do research on the company, etc. And when the interviewer asks, "Do you have any questions?" you'll have your last big chance at influencing the interview in your favor. You do this by turning the tables and asking questions to the interviewer. Here are some questions

the recruiter recommended I take along to my interviews. Obviously you need to decide which of these questions fit into the interview. This list should not be used as a blind checklist. Also, you may need to tailor these questions to fit the formality of the interview. Some interviews are like conversations. Other interviews are very rigid and formal. Just pay attention and do what seems appropriate. Without further ado, some questions you can ask the interviewer are:

- Can you give me a rough breakdown of how I would spend my time in this position?
- What are the key qualities needed to be successful in this company?
- Will you describe your management style for me?
- Will you tell me about a project that you have worked on for this company that you found frustrating? Interesting? [If they can't tell you about their projects that they have worked on in the past, think about how to evaluate the company in other terms, but you'll have to be creative.]
- Could you show me where this position fits into the organization chart?
- What do you consider the ideal experience for this job?
- What is the largest problem facing your staff?
- Is there anything unusually demanding about this job that I should know about?
- What have been some of the best results produced by people in this job position?
- What are the primary results you would like to see me produce?
- Can you tell me about the prospects for advancement?
- Does the company actively seek to publish the results of its research or development efforts at technical conferences or in trade publications? Is there a list of recent publications available?

Listen to the answers and see if you can distinguish the bluster from the facts. It's an interesting experience to have the interviewer squirm. Do your best to be courageous in asking questions. Any potential place of employment has to make you happy enough to want to get up in the morning and go to work. Remember that it's not just you being checked out. You should be checking them out too. Remember when you were picking a college to attend for four years? You probably poured over their catalogs and brochures, visited the campus, talked to student recruiters, toured buildings, asked a lot of questions, and maybe attended a few events. Why should you take any less effort when picking a place of employment?

If you decide you like the company, be sure to ask for the job by indicating your

interest. To do this, summarize what you've heard during the interview and show interest by saying something like, "I look forward to evaluating an offer from the company." As you finish talking with each interviewer, ask for one of their business cards. Keep all of these in one place at home. This is part of networking and I guarantee those business cards will come in handy at some point in the future.

Well, that's it for interview tips. Let me point you to an interesting article that is related: "What Employers Want from Students: a Report from OOPSLA," by Phil Pfeiffer, located at www.acm.org/membership/students/employmntart.html.

Best of luck in your job search!