

CANDIDATE SERVICES

1. Interviewing Strategies

HOW TO SELL YOURSELF

A typical interview may take form only thirty minutes to an hour, yet it could determine your business career for years to come. Obviously therefore, it's well worth taking the time to prepare for the interview so that your confidence will be increased and you'll be able to make the most of your qualifications.

Your primary objective, of course, is to convince the interviewer that you are the most qualified candidate. You need to "sell" your experience, qualifications and ability.

If you make your living in a field other than sales, you may feel that you don't have a sales personality. But consider this: all of us are selling all the time. Every day of your life you are selling your views and ideas to your family, friends and business associates. Every time you persuade your colleagues to use your solution to a business problem you use your selling skills. All you need is a basic sales strategy that anyone can use.

Find out what the prospect (the interviewer) really needs; the package your product (your experience, qualifications, ability) meet those needs.

This sales approach involves more than simply listing the virtues of your product (which you really do when you prepare your resume). It means that you must evaluate all of your past responsibilities and accomplishments in terms of the position to be filled.

To use this strategy effectively for your interview, you need some advance preparation:

- **Research the company:**

If you've ever conducted an interview, you know how impressive it is to talk with a candidate who has shown enough interest to find out more about the company than its name and address.

You should know about the company's products or services, market sales volume and growth. Check out its plant locations, website, recent stock market activity, and its standing in its particular field. Once you've found out as much as possible about the company and the job, you're ready for the next step in your pre-interview strategy.

- **Review your experience and your qualifications:**

Review your experience and qualifications in terms of the specific job. Suppose, for example, that your ability to solve marketing problems or reduce production costs is a significant feature of your experience and would be a valuable benefit to your prospective employer. **Be prepared to offer specifics about the savings or profits that resulted from your efforts**, or about other contributions you've made to the success of companies you've worked for.

- **Review your resume:**

Review your resume to be sure that it emphasises the experience and qualifications most pertinent to the needs of your potential employer.

QUESTIONS TO PREPARE FOR

Answer questions honestly and completely – but be wary. There is no need to dwell on negatives. If you can, avoid mentioning them. Sell yourself on your true capabilities and

qualifications without exaggerating your abilities. If you are asked a technical question that you do not know the answer to, do not bluff. If your bluff fails, your candidacy is seriously threatened. Instead, say: *"I don't know the answer, but if I were to venture an educated guess I would say..."*

Your responses to questions must be sufficient and informative. You do not want to give yes or no answers. Elaborate. On the other hand, try not to dominate the interview. Do not speak for more than 60 seconds without re-involving the interviewer in the dialogue. Studies show that the average attention span for an uninterrupted, lengthy answer is between 45 to 90 seconds.

Allow the interviewer to guide the course of your interview. Don't lose the person on the other side of the desk. Re-involving the interviewer is a technique, which expands and distills the content of your conversation. Use tactical questions to make sure that your answers are geared towards your audience. Here are some sample statements to consider.

"What is a quick summary of the three solutions that I provided to the Government Desk? Which one would you like me to elaborate on further?"

"Is this answering your question? If not, tell me which direction you would like me to go in."

"That is a quick overview of the project I manage. Would you like more details? Which do you want to hear about first? How I dealt with the users? Managed my staff? Employed technology?"

Use questions and statements like these to help direct your answer and keep the attention of the interviewer. These interactive conversation techniques will help you quickly determine what information the interviewer needs and wants, and will allow you to respond quickly, intelligently and with increasing focus as the interview progresses. Match your qualifications to the direction of the interviewer's questions – point for point. Using interactive conversation techniques will eliminate tangential answers, demonstrate that you are an extremely effective communicator and allow you to stress why your experience qualifies you for this specific opportunity.

Do not be afraid of silence. Take a few seconds to gather your thoughts before launching into an answer. A few seconds of silence followed by a well thought out answer reflects very well on you. If you are finished answering and the interviewer does not ask another question immediately, you may ask if you should elaborate on part of your answer or just wait. Just as you may need a few seconds to phrase your answers, the hiring manager will often have to spend time gathering thoughts in order to phrase intelligent questions.

Emphasise the result of your work. How did your experience and labour create something positive? Reduce costs? Increase Productivity? Streamline workflow? State, clearly and concisely, your duties and responsibilities on each job, focussing on:

- Particular problems / challenges you encountered
- Your solution
- How you implemented those solutions
- How you will bring the same skills to bear for a new employer

Think about your answers to questions you're likely to be asked. To help you consider answers ahead of time, we're listing some of the probable questions:

"Tell me about yourself."

With what you've learned about the company and the position, plan and answer that emphasises your experience and accomplishments in terms the position to be filled. Don't be modest and do take credit for your successes.

You can use this same question to get the interviewer talking about his own needs, by answering him, *"I'll be happy to tell you about my qualifications, but there's so much to cover that I'd like to know more about the position and your company so I can answer more specifically."*

Then, depending upon what the interviewer says, you can modify your planned response to put even greater emphasis on relating your experience and qualifications to his requirements.

ANSWERING THE "TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF" QUESTION

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Let's face it, interviewing is stressful enough without having to answer stupid interview questions. But unfortunately, many interviewers, because of habit, lack of preparation time, poor training, or yes, even laziness, often ask stupid questions. Of those, one of the most challenging is the oft used "Tell me about yourself" interview opener.

What most candidates ask me about this insipid interview question is: "What do they want to know?" They want to know about you the candidate as a potential employee. They don't want to know about your family, your last vacation, your hobbies, your religious beliefs, that you like the Cubs, or that you are a proud member of AA. Yes, I have had candidates give each of those responses to the infamous "Tell me about yourself" question. I don't recall any of them ever getting hired by the employers who interviewed them.

Interviewers also think it is improper, a sign of your lack of preparedness, or even rude, for you to answer their "Tell me about yourself" question with a question of your own like, "What would you like to know?" If you are prepared, and seriously thinking about making a career change, you will have a prepared and thoughtful answer to this question BEFORE you begin interviewing.

Why? I am glad you asked, and I think one example should convince you I am right.

Let me share just one story about this opening interview question that cost a candidate a job she REALLY wanted. It is a perfect illustration to make you understand why you must plan a response for this question whether you are asked it or not. The scenario was this: The candidate was a financial services professional, her recruiter had a financial services client that was looking to fill a VP position for a 125k base + 25k bonus. The candidate had an ideal background and skill set, and the client thought she was a perfect fit. The candidate knew the client and was thrilled to interview with her. The client joked that when the candidate came to the interview the recruiter should send the candidate with an invoice for the fee, because they thought they might make her an offer on the spot.

You can more or less guess how the story ended. The candidate didn't get the job, but please pay attention as to why, because that is the part of the story that matters most. To start the interview the candidate was asked the dreaded "Tell me about yourself" question. Thinking that it was an inconsequential icebreaker question, she retorted, simply intending to cause

an opening chuckle, "Well, as you can obviously see, I am 15-20 pounds overweight."

She was only joking! Yet, due to the impact this answer had on the client, for all practical purposes the interview was over as soon as she said this. That "amusing" answer to what the candidate viewed as a seemingly innocuous question convinced the employer that this \$150k VP had an image or low self-esteem problem. Despite the recruiter's insistence that it was just a joke, the employer declined to make the candidate an offer. The retort was just a joke! But not really. It was no joke to the candidate who lost the \$150k dream job. It was no joke to the recruiter who had invested so much time in finding the employer this ideal candidate. This candidate attempted to humorously break the ice, but the interviewer misinterpreted the response to a stupid question, and became convinced the candidate was not VP material.

This whole fiasco could have been avoided if the candidate had just been taught a very simple formula for answering this question. Sure, we know this question is a stupid and unnecessary one with which to begin an interview. But because interviewers open interviews with this question, candidates need to know how to respond to it intelligently. The formula I've learned has worked wonders for hundreds of my candidates, and those of thousands of recruiters I have shared it with over the last half dozen years.

Many, in fact a sad majority, of interviewers open with some form of the "Tell me about yourself" question. It would be an easy question to answer if candidates answered with a prepared and well thought-out initial marketing statement of themselves and their skills, which are applicable for the open job. This sounds pretty straightforward, but few of the thousands of candidates I have interviewed in the last 15 years have EVER been able to answer this question in this intelligent manner. The best candidates typically respond with a narrowing question like: "What would you like to know?" But let's get one thing straight: It is extremely poor form to answer the opening interview question with another question. Yet, that is how the BEST candidates do typically answer this question, due to its ambiguous nature. Though it seems to be a logical approach, you must prepare to do better.

Candidates must teach themselves to answer this question with a three-part, pre-planned marketing statement that can more or less be reused from interview to interview. Part one of that three-part marketing statement is always a one-sentence summary of the candidate's career history. For example, let me share with you a former candidate's opening sentence:

"I am a five-year veteran of LAN/WAN Admin and Systems Engineering with substantial experience using Novell , NT , Cisco, and Lotus Notes/Domino."

You get the picture; your whole career needs to be condensed into one pithy sentence that encapsulates the most important aspects of your career, the aspects that you want to leverage in order to make your next career step. Few candidates seem to be able to condense a career into one sentence, but it must, and can be, done. Ask any recruiter for help here, this is what we do.

Part two of the pre-planned marketing statement will be a one-, maybe two-sentence summary of a single accomplishment that you are proud of that will also capture the potential employer's attention. It immediately follows your initial career summary sentence from above. This accomplishment should be one that the employer will be interested in hearing, one that is easily explained or illustrated, and one that clearly highlights a bottom line impact.

When done correctly this will build interviewer intrigue about the accomplishment so that they inquire further, giving you an opportunity to further discuss a significant career success.

The above candidate's accomplishment statement was:

"Recently, as a long-term contract employee at a local regional bank, I learned they were about to install Lotus Notes/Domino and were planning to use outside consultants for the project. I let them know I had done a similar installation at my last assignment, outlined how we could get the job done with in-house staff, and successfully completed the install for \$55-65k less than it would have cost with outside consultants."

Part three, the final piece of the marketing statement, is probably the most fluid piece. It needs to be a one-sentence summary of specifically what you want to do next in your career. The reason this third part is difficult is that it needs to specifically address what you want to do next, AND it needs to change from interview to interview to make sure it matches exactly what the INDIVIDUAL employers will be interviewing you for. Continuing with the above example of one of my past candidates, two of his final sentences, which were used for two different employers, follow:

"For the next step in my career, I would like to move away from contract work and find myself as a direct employee of a large firm where I could join a substantial IT team and be involved with a group that focuses on email and network security applications, while having access to the knowledgebase that would come with a large, diverse IT group."

But for a second employer, this ending was significantly altered because of the candidate's multiple interests in differing opportunities, to:

"For the next step in my career, I would like to find myself as a direct employee of a small to medium sized firm that was looking to hire an in-house IT generalist so I could continue growing my career by getting exposure to multiple IT areas, such as networking, help desk, security, and application issues for the users of the organization. As the firm's IT needs grew, I would love to apply my past team project management skills to managing the second or third members of a small but growing IT team."

These were two very different endings that perfectly matched two very different employer needs. Clearly you can see why the first ending wouldn't have worked for the second employer or vice versa. With some simple revising, the candidate made sure that each employer heard that they were interested in doing exactly what the employer was interested in hiring them for. That revising is what makes the third piece fluid and sometimes challenging, as candidates don't always see the need for being this specific from job interview to job interview. Most tend to be generalized, hoping that a shotgun approach will work. But it is the rifle sharpshooters, those who get specific in what they want from interview to interview, who get the best results. With some simple planning BEFORE an interview, you, the candidate, will quickly realize the benefit of a targeted third sentence in these pre-planned opening statements, as employers feel you are perfectly suited to do just the job they are interviewing you for.

If you take the time to prepare this way as a candidate, it will be apparent to an interviewer that you are a prepared and serious candidate right at the beginning of the interview when you answer the "Tell me about yourself" question with this memorized, brief marketing statement, which combines a

career summary, an exceptional accomplishment, and employer-specific career goal as in this example:

"I am a five-year veteran of LAN/WAN Admin and Systems Engineering with substantial experience using Novell, NT, Cisco, and Lotus Notes/Domino. Recently, as a long-term contract employee at a local regional bank, I learned they were about to install Lotus Notes/Domino and were planning to use outside consultants for the project. I let them know I had done a similar installation at my last assignment, outlined how we could get the job done with in-house staff, and successfully completed the install for \$55-65k less than it would have cost with outside consultants. For the next step in my career, I would like to move away from contract work and find myself as a direct employee of a large firm where I could join a substantial IT team and be involved with a group that focused on email and network security applications, while having access to the knowledgebase that would come with a large, diverse IT group."

Clearly you can understand how the candidate who opens with this type of prepared response to the "Tell me about yourself" question will make a significantly better first impression than a candidate who responds by answering, "What would you like to know?" or worse yet, "Well, as you can obviously see, I am 15-20 pounds overweight." Plus candidates who prepare in this manner are typically more confident at the interview's start, make a substantial and positive verbal first impression, give a clear indication of their interest in making a career move, and force the interviewer to get past the icebreaker questions to the parts of the interview that will help both parties begin the process of seriously determining if this is a solid match. As you can see, there is a great deal of bang for your preparation buck.

Clearly these three simple steps—**summarizing what your experience** is as candidate, sharing an **impressive career accomplishment**, and then **summarizing what would be an ideal next career step for you, one that matches what the employer is looking to hire**—are the keys to beginning your interview with a competitive advantage. Candidates who take the time to do this significantly improve their initial verbal impression, get their interview off to a confident and focused beginning, and more often than not get called back for second interviews, or better yet, for offers of employment with employers who are impressed.

"What are your goals?"

This is a very popular question because well-thought-out goals show maturity and a commitment to your profession or business. Your goals should be both long and short range, ambitious but realistic.

"What is your greatest strength?"

Again, answer the question in terms of the position to be filled. State your greatest strength and support your claim with illustrations of past accomplishments.

"When I'm working on a project, I don't want just to meet deadlines. Rather, I prefer to complete the project well ahead of schedule."

"I have exceeded my sales goals every quarter and I've earned a bonus each year since I started with my current employer."

"My time management skills are excellent and I'm organized, efficient, and take pride in excelling at my work."

"I pride myself on my customer service skills and my ability to resolve what could be difficult situations."

"What is your greatest weakness?"

This is a loaded question because negatives usually won't score pluses for you on the interviewer's evaluation sheet. Offer a job related minor shortcoming or a "positive-negative" such as, *"I've been accused of a workaholic."* or, *"I've been kidded about being a perfectionist."*

"When I'm working on a project, I don't want just to meet deadlines. Rather, I prefer to complete the project well ahead of schedule."

"Being organized wasn't my strongest point, but I implemented a time management system that really helped my organization skills."

"I like to make sure that my work is perfect, so I tend to perhaps spend a little too much time checking it. However, I've come to a good balance by setting up a system to ensure everything is done correctly the first time."

"I used to wait until the last minute to set appointments for the coming week, but I realized that scheduling in advance makes much more sense."

"I would say that I can be too much of a perfectionist in my work. Sometimes, I spend more time than necessary on a task, or take on tasks personally that could easily be delegated to someone else. Although I've never missed a deadline, it is still an effort for me to know when to move on to the next task, and to be confident when assigning others works."

"I've learned to make my perfectionism work to my advantage at work. I am excellent at meeting deadlines, and with my attention to detail, I know my work is correct."

"I used to like to work on one project to its completion before starting on another, but I've learned to work on many projects at the same time, and I think it allows me to be more creative and effective in each one."

"Why do you want to leave your job?"

Be sure you have a good answer to this question before going on an interview. Your reason for leaving might be because of corporate changes, lack of opportunity or recognition, insufficient authority, or unsatisfactory earnings. If appropriate, you might say, *"I wasn't thinking changing jobs. I'm not happy where I am, but I was told this was an opportunity worth discussing."*

If you were terminated, or have leaving because of a personality conflict, very careful not to make negative statements about your former employers or colleagues. Explain the situation as factually and briefly as possible. Then to turn what might be a negative into a positive you might add, *"Despite that problem, I really feel I learned a great deal in that job and from that company, and I'm sure I could put that experience to work for you effectively."*

"What salary are you asking for?"

You should avoid discussing compensation on the first interview unless you're actually offered the job and want to accept it.

If the interviewer asks specifically what your salary requirements are, your answer should be, *"What I'm really looking for is the right career opportunity. I'm sure you'll make me a fair offer if you want to hire me."*

If you are pressed for a specific figure, describe your current compensation and then add, *"I believe on the basis of what I've accomplished I'd be entitled to some increase, but I'd rather hear what you think I'm worth to your company."*

More questions you should expect:

QUESTIONS ABOUT COMPANY

What do you know about our company?

"I've heard that (name of the company) offers a challenging work environment that expects a great deal from people and give them the opportunity to realize their potential. That is what I look for in an employer – an active, creative environment where I am limited only by my capabilities and where positive results are acknowledged."

What interests you about our company?

I've been very impressed in all the reading and research I've done about (name of the company). The information gives and projects an excellent image and I also see great potential for growth. I want to be part of such a company.

I am convinced that there would be no better place to work than _____. You provide your employees with the tools they need to stay competitive and sharpen their skills while working in an open, team-based environment.

Personal:

These questions help the hiring authority determine what makes you tick. Answer thoroughly; using organic conversation techniques to determine if the direction of your answer is correct. Remember to stay positive!

- What makes you unique?
- To what do you owe your present success?
- What is your favourite hobby and why?
- What motivates you?
- What type of work environment appeals to you most?
- Are you willing to travel?
- Why have you chosen this particular profession?
- What do you like most about your current job?
- What has been your greatest challenge?
- What work experiences have been most valuable to you and why?
- Tell me about a situation in which you were under tremendous pressure and how you dealt with it.
- Give me an example of a time in your life in which you had to overcome great adversity to get the job done.
- Tell me about your most difficult decision and how you went about making it.
- Tell me about your most difficult decision and how you went about making it.
- Where do you think your interest in this career comes from?
- Give me a situation in which you failed, and how you handled it.

People Skills:

These questions will be used to determine how you interact with others, both your team members and users. Show yourself as a team player that can take initiative and drive prospects.

- Have you ever supervised people?
- What is your management style?
- How do you interface with users?
- How do you handle a customer or user who becomes irate?
- What would your management say about you?
- In this particular leadership role, what was your greatest challenge?
- Describe the project or situation that best demonstrates your management / supervisory skills
- Tell me about a team project of which you are particularly proud and your contribution.
- Have you taken/How do you take specifications from users?
- Describe a situation where you have with someone who was difficult, how you handled it?
- Tell me about a problem you have with one of your work associates.

- Which area of technical expertise do you feel is your strongest?
- Describe the type of manager you prefer.
- What are your team-player qualities? Give examples.
- When you take on a project do you like to attack the project in a group or individually?
- Tell me about your relationship with your previous boss.
- How do you take direction?

Work habits and analytical skills:

These questions will be used to determine not only your background experience and skills, but also your suitability for the discussed position. Don't be bashful. Thoroughly explain your background, experience and skills.

- What accomplishments are you most proud of?
- What part of the project life cycle have you worked on?
- Describe the project or situation that best demonstrates your coding skills.
- Describe the project or situation that best demonstrates your analytical abilities.
- Give me an example of a problem you solved and the process you used.
- Give me an example of an idea that has come to you and what you did with it.
- Tell me about a project you initiated.
- How have your educational and work experiences prepared you for this position?
- What is your most significant accomplishment?

Questions that set the stage for selling yourself:

Use these questions to explore why you are the perfect candidate for the vacant spot. Match your strengths to the job requirements, point for point.

- Why are you interested in our organisation?
- Give me an example of the most creative project that you have worked on.
- What type of position are you seeking?
- What makes you think you can handle this position?
- Why should my company be interested in you?
- What challenges are you looking for in a position?
- What interests you about this job?

Danger questions:

Be careful. The only reason to ask these questions is to determine why NOT to hire you. Make your answers as short and bland as possible. Remember not to disparage any past employers, companies or co-workers.

- What interests you least about your current job?
- What types of situations put you under pressure, and how do you deal with pressure?
- What industry besides this one are you looking into?
- With which other companies are you interviewing?

Explaining your work history:

"Can you explain why there is an 8 month gap between Company A and Company B? Why were you out of work for so long?" or "Can you explain why you had 3 different employers in 5 years?"

Have a sound explanation for your work history. Whether you have a gap in your employment or have held several jobs in short period of time, emphasise that you were looking for a company to settle into where you could make a long-term commitment/contribution. Stress that you are not just looking for a higher paycheck.

"Why are you leaving your current employer?"

Focus on positive reasons for leaving. Talk about limitations in growth potential and learning at your current job. Do not dwell on negative reasons, such as not getting a raise or not getting along with your boss/co-workers. Point out that the prospective position provides the additional growth, training or responsibilities that you are seeking.

Why are you the right candidate?

"Why should I hire you?"

Stress the areas on your background that relate to the challenges inherent in the new position. Meet the employer's description of the position point for point with your skills and experience. Emphasise your qualifications and your dedication to success. Discuss how you will bring this to bear for the employer's company.

Why should I hire you?

Don't repeat your resume or employment history. Offer one or two examples to explain why you're talking to this particular company. What's the most compelling example you can give to prove your interest? This question often remains unasked, but it's always in the back of the recruiter's mind. Even if this question isn't asked, you should find an opportunity to use your prepared response sometime during the interview, perhaps in your closing remarks.

"What are your weaknesses?" or "With regards to the job description, where do you feel your weakness are?"

Turn the question around and get the interviewer to disclose what he believes your weaknesses are. Use this opportunity to change the interviewer's mind. Give specific proof why the weakness does not exist or is not a factor in performing on the job. Describe strengths that compensate for any weaknesses that could affect your performance.

"Give me an example of how you could help my company"

Describe a project where you made a significant contribution and how it affected the bottom line. Emphasise results. Show how this ability transfers from your past positions to the one being discussed during the interview.

WHY ARE YOU LEAVING YOUR JOB? – REASONS FOR LEAVING

Don't Badmouth Your Boss

Regardless of why you left, don't speak badly about your previous employer. The interviewer may wonder if you will be bad-mouthing his company next time you're looking for work. I once interviewed a person who told me that her last employer was terrible. They didn't pay her enough, the hours were awful and she hated the job. That company happened to be my company's biggest, and most important, customer. And there is no way I would have hired someone who felt that way, justified or not, about our valuable client. So, she gave up any opportunity of getting the job as soon as she answered the "Why did you leave?" question.

Prepare answers to typical job interview questions, like this one, in advance. Practice your responses so you sound positive, and clear, about your circumstances and your goals for the future.

Sample answers to the interview question "Why did you leave your job?"

"There isn't room for growth with my current employer and I'm ready to move on to a new challenge."

"I'm looking for a bigger challenge and to grow my career and I couldn't job hunt part time while working. It didn't seem ethical to use my former employer's time."

"I was laid-off from my last position when our department was eliminated due to corporate restructuring."

"I'm relocating to this area due to family circumstances and left my previous position in order to make the move."

"After several years in my last position, I'm looking for a company where I can contribute and grow in a team-oriented environment."

"I am interested in a new challenge and an opportunity to use my technical skills and experience in a different capacity than I have in the past."

"I recently received my degree and I want to utilize my educational background in my next position."

"I am interested in a job with more responsibility, and I am very ready for a new challenge."

"I left my last position in order to spend more time with my family. Circumstances have changed and I'm more than ready for full-time employment again."

"I am seeking a position with a stable company with room for growth and opportunity for advancement."

"I was commuting to the city and spending a significant amount of time each day on travel. I would prefer to be closer to home."

"The company was cutting back and, unfortunately, my job was one of those eliminated."

"I graduated from college and resigned in order to find a position where I could use my education and related experience."

"To be honest, the position wasn't a fit and I decided it made sense to resign and to refocus my career path."

"I resigned because the position required me to be on-call evenings and weekends and it was difficult to arrange child care on short notice."

"I resigned because the position was part-time and my personal situation has changed so I need full-time employment."

"I resigned from my job because I am interested in a new challenge and an opportunity to use my skills and experience in a different capacity than I have in the past."

"My family relocated to this area and my previous employer doesn't have an office here."

"I've been working as a temp, but I'm seeking a permanent position, so I resigned from the temp agency's staffing roster."

"I resigned due to family circumstances, however, I have regained the flexibility I need to work effectively in a full-time job."

Compensation negotiation:

"Tell me about your salary expectations"

Turn the question around. Ask the interviewer to discuss the approximate pay range for the position.

"Based on your discussion, what do you feel an employee with my skills is worth?"

Describe your current compensation package in detail. Avoid giving a specific desired salary in the opening stages of discussion. If you give a number too high you may come

across as greedy. If you give a number too low, you can lose out. Show genuine interest in the position. Inform the hiring authority that you will consider the strongest offer based on the skills you bring to the table.

Tough Technical questions:

"How do you?" (You are not sure what the answer is)

Never exaggerate or lie. Honest will go a long way here. Some interviewers ask questions.

20 QUESTIONS COMMONLY ASKED IN AN INTERVIEW

Tell me something about yourself?

(Start with the present and give a brief summary of achievements).

Where would you like to be 5 years from now?

What is the most difficult situation you have had to face?

How did you handle it and what was the outcome?

How could you add value by joining this company?

What do you know about this company?

What would you like to specialise in? (Technology, career path etc.)

Why do you feel you are right for this position?

What are your strengths?

What is your weakness?

What were your reasons for leaving your previous company?

How would your friends describe you?

How do you handle confrontation?

If you were an animal what would you be and why?

What is your motto in life?

Describe yourself in one word?

What was your greatest disappointment?

Do you prefer to work in a team or individually?

Do you delegate work or do you prefer to handle everything yourself?

Who has had the most influence in your life and why?

QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK

20 QUESTIONS TO ASK IN AN INTERVIEW

What specific expertise or skill do you feel is most important for someone to succeed in this position/company?

What is the most difficult aspect of this position?

What is the first problem I will be solving (i.e. biggest or most difficult challenge)?

What exactly am I going to be doing?

Who will I be reporting to? What interaction will I have with him (i.e. do you see him once per week or 24 hours per day)?

Any set criteria for promotion, or is it based on merit?

When asked about salary expectations, remember to be as open and negotiable as possible – a commitment to a figure could overprice or under price you – allow you consultant to negotiate the best salary for you.

How can I contribute to the team?

What would your expectations be of me in order to be successful?

Is your preference a team player or independent worker?

Do you have performance measures in place (e.g. performance appraisals etc.)?

Do you offer additional training?

How can I improve on the person who held this position before?

What exciting projects does the company have planned for the future?

Company and company history (i.e. competitors, holding company, and structure of company)?

Ask to see the work place (it shows interest).

What is the company culture and working environment?
What is the company vision?
What is your future growth plans for this department?
What are the company policies?

- Questions about the job duties, the company and its services show your interest.
- Questions about people who held the position previously and where they are today illustrate your interest in the company's future and can keep you from making a wrong decision.
- Questions about the importance of the job, your responsibilities and authority, and the career potential indicate that you are goal-oriented and motivated to succeed.

Questions that boost the interviewer's ego and give you an insight into general company morale are: *"Why do you like working here?"* or, ***"Are there any major company problems that might affect your decision to stay here or my decision to work here? After all, I'm looking for a long-term relationship."***

Questions to avoid. Until the job is offered, do not ask questions about fringe benefits, vacation, and retirement or, of course, salary.

YOUR PROFESSIONAL APPEARANCE AND DEMEANOR

Visual first impressions are important. Consider your personal grooming. Your own personal taste in clothes may not always be the most appropriate for a job interview. You are safer to err on the side of conservative attire. Try to appear as businesslike as possible.

THE INTERVIEW

Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes early for your interview. Carry a briefcase of portfolio with several copies of your resume and some examples of your work. Be sure you know how to pronounce and spell the name of the person who will interview you. Greet your interviewer with a firm handshake and maintain eye contact at all times.

Your attitude and tone are important. Answer all questions and enthusiastically. And remember your basic strategy: show how your qualifications, experience and ability relate directly to the company's needs.

Always conduct yourself as if you are determining to get the job you are discussing. Never close the door on opportunity – the more positions you can choose from, the better.

Close the interview with enthusiasm.

When you sense the interview is coming to an end, try to summarise a few of your key credentials, and stress your interest in working for the company. If you are really interested in the position, this is the time to say so and ask about the next step. If the position is offered to you, and you want it, accept it on the spot. However, if you are not prepared to accept, tell the interviewer you'll need one day to think it over. If no offer is made, ask for a second interview date.

Don't be discouraged if the offer is not made at the first interview, or if an appointment for a second interview is not set at this time. Before you leave, get a commitment form from the employer regarding what the next step will be and when it occurs.

And finally, be sure to get the interviewer's business card – you'll need it for an important follow-up contact.

AFTER-INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP

After the interview, there are three things you must do: review, report and write. Review what happened. Take a few minutes to summarise (on paper) what happened in the

interview while it's still fresh in your mind. Write down the names of the people you met and a description of the job duties. Jot down the portions of the interview that you thought went well and those that caused you some problems.

SELF PROJECTION

It almost goes without saying that the interviewer's first impression of you is very important. Whether you like it or not, many decisions are based on first reactions when you meet someone. Check your presentation now and be careful to avoid the following major presentation faults:

The irresolute look – showing how unsure you are of where you are and what you are expecting, and evading eye to eye contact.

Fiddling e.g. with hands – turn the twitch or nervous movement into a positive gesture to demonstrate what you are saying positively but with style.

Sitting – the general rule that sitting four-square in whatever chair is provided, upright and looking directly ahead is easiest to manage.

Gabbling – take deep breaths before, during and after entering the interview room. Walk steadily to your place and take your time to sit down. Then look up, clearly waiting to be spoken to. Pace your words in reply, take your time to consider rather than rushing. Wait for the full question and maybe follow-up ones too.

2. Salary

NEGOTIATING SALARY

Discussing salary with a prospective employer is a sensitive procedure.

WEIGHING THE OPPORTUNITY

Before you start negotiations make sure you have all the information that you need to make an intelligent decision about the job. Gather information on the company, your future co-workers and managers, job content and your projected career path. Discuss the offer with your family, friends or colleagues.

At first, put aside the issue of compensation and focus on the content and future of the job. After you have decided that the opportunity is right, begin to focus on compensation.

DESIRED SALARY FOR THIS JOB

When filling in the job application, do not give a specific figure for "desired salary". Instead, say one of the following:

- Open
- Competitive
- Negotiable

You do not want to be held to a number that you gave before knowing what a job entails. Suppose a position is perfect for you but you have given a number that prices you out of consideration. You would have taken that job if you had known, but now it is too late.

Conversely, suppose a job requires much longer hours than you would have expected. For the right salary, you would put in the hours. Unfortunately, the salary that the company offers matches the number that you gave on your application, when you thought that there were fewer hours involved.

In either scenario, giving a specific number works against you. It is almost impossible to give a number on the application that is fair to you and the company. Hold off until later in the process.

WHAT YOU NEED TO CONSIDER

Prepare a personal salary range.

- **Minimum Salary:** Determine the minimum amount of money that you would accept to change jobs for this particular opportunity.
- **Market Price Range:** Find out what a person with your skills is worth in the market place. The following list highlights good sources for this information:
 - Professional journals
 - Magazines, newspapers, etc.
 - Executive Search Professionals (Head hunters)
 - Peers and colleagues
 - State Labour Office
 - Other job offers

Dream Salary Figure:

Determine a figure that would totally knock your socks off. This should be the number that you begin negotiating down from. Remember that it's easier to lower your original figure than to raise it.

Consider other forms of compensation that may play a role in the total package.

Facets of total compensation to consider when negotiating:

- Base salary
- Cash bonus plan
- Minimum guarantee year end bonus
- Sign on bonus
- Profit sharing
- Retirement/pension programs
- A car/car allowance or other forms of travel compensation
- Telecommuting options
- Flexible hours
- Vacation
- Benefits (medical/dental)
- Dependent care options
- The timing of salary reviews and performance reviews/promotion cycles
- Stock-option plans
- Stock purchase plans

Ask about bonus levels and get estimates on future performance. Ask about past bonus levels and get estimates on future performance. As general rule, bonuses are not guaranteed, so make sure you understand the conditions for receiving them. Determine if bonuses are based on personal, departmental or company wide performance.

REACHING YOUR MAGIC NUMBER

Be reasonable. Negotiating is not about playing hardball for the sake of appearing to be a tough negotiator. Be willing to adjust your expectations based on your market value.

Get the employer to offer the first concrete number. When and employer asks questions such as *"How much will it take to get you?"* or *"What are your salary expectations/requirements?"* do not provide a firm number. If you do offer a number, you will very likely create one of two situations:

1. The number is too low. You short-change yourself and look uninformed about your market value.
2. The number is too high. You appear ready. You lose the position to a more reasonable candidate.

Instead of offering a concrete number, respond by laying out your current compensation level. Give a detailed base and bonus breakdown. Discuss other forms of compensation that you currently receive, including 401k, stock options, medical insurance, etc. **State that you are open to a good opportunity.**

If this answer is not enough to get the employer to throw out the first figure, follow up your first statement by responding directly to the original question. Your follow up depend on what step in the process you are in:

1. First Interview / Human Resources Screen

"This is my current compensation. I need to learn more about the opportunity in order to make an informed decision. At this point I am open, and am very interested to learn about the work being done here."

2. After attaining a good understanding of the job content and responsibilities

"From what I have seen, this looks like a great opportunity for me. I will consider your strongest/best offer."

Or turn the question around by saying:

"What figure do you feel is appropriate for someone with my skills?"

3. Counter Offer

It is a natural instinct to resist change and avoid disruption and your present employer will be no exception. If you're doing a good job, he will want to keep you and will attempt to do so with a counter offer. Even though you have accepted a new job elsewhere, he will try to convince you that you have made a mistake. Counteroffers can be made in numerous of ways:

- 1) "We have plans for you that have been scheduled for implementation the first of next month. I guess it's my fault for telling you."
- 2) "I want to let you in on some confidential information. There is reorganisation developing that will mean a significant promotion you within six months."
- 3) "We'll match your new offer. This raise was supposed to go into effect the first of next quarter anyway, but because of your financial record, we'll start it on the first of the month."
- 4) The President and Vice President want to have dinner with you.

Reasons Companies extend a Counter Offer

- Department morale suffers when people leave.
- Employee resignations do not look good on a manager's record.
- It is cheaper to give you a raise than it would be to recruit a new employee.
- The project you were working on will suffer delays because of your departure.
- Companies want to have low turnover rate.
- Companies do not want sensitive or confidential information going to a competitor.
- Companies do not want skilled professionals going to competitors.

Implications of a Counter Offer

A counter offer can be very flattering, sometimes causing you emotions to obscure your objective decision to leave your present employer. There is also the natural feeling of "buyer's remorse" – that vague apprehension of change that subtly urges you to

reconsider your decision. When confronted with a counter offer, ask yourself these questions:

- I made a decision to leave because I felt another environment better fill my career needs. If I stay, will the situation at my company really improve just because I said I was quitting?
- If I decide to stay, will my loyalty be suspect and affect my chance for advancement in the future?
- If my loyalty is in question, will I be an early layoff when business slows down?
- They are offering me a raise to stay. Is it just my annual review coming early?
- The raise they offered to keep me is above their guidelines for this job. Does that mean they are "buying time" until they can find a replacement within their regular salary bracket?
- In the final analysis, I got this counteroffer because I resigned, do I have to threaten to quit every time I want to advance with my company in the future?
- Aside from money, your original reasons for leaving your job will still be present after accepting a counter offer.
- The money extended to you in the counter offer often comes out of your next raise or bonus. Companies usually have strict guidelines about salary increases and promotions.
- You will not be considered a loyal employee from here on out, therefore, you will never be included in the inner circle.
- When promotion time comes around, managers remember who was loyal and who was not.
- If the company hits rough waters, you will be the first to be let go.
- You had to threaten to leave in order to receive the rewards and career path you have earned.
- Often, when you accept a counter offer, your manager will already be looking for your replacement.
- Statistically, 80% of all employees who accept a company's counter offer end up leaving that company within 6 to 9 months anyway.

The Professional Approach

As a professional, you must make your career decisions objectively free of the emotional pressures you are likely to feel later when urged to reconsider. While well meaning friends, relatives and business associates will offer advice, you must depend primarily on your own judgement. After all, you are the only one who is in the position to understand all of the implications of a counter offer. Expect your company to be sorry to see you leave and to make some attempt to keep your best, their response should be considered flattering, but beset with numerous pitfalls you should not risk.

End your relationship with your employer as professionally as you can. Your new company will be anxious to have you start, so you should do so as soon as possible.

A counter offer is really a belated affirmation of the contributions you made to your old company. Move ahead to your new job with the goal of making yourself as valuable to your new employer as you were to the old one.

4. How to Resign From your Current Position

Most top executives agree that the days of the "gold watch for 30 years of faithful service" are gone. In fact, experience at several companies long period of time is considered as asset that brings a variety of experiences and perspectives to a new job. Today, changing jobs is routine part of every growing professional career.

You are probably considering a change because your present position doesn't offer the growth environment you need. Nevertheless, **your company has helped you progress professionally, and as a result you may feel a bit uncomfortable resigning.** After all, leaving a job means leaving many managers and co-workers whom you see socialise and who have been instrumental in advancing your career.

What then should you expect when you tender your resignation?

Undoubtedly, your company will be sorry to lose you. After all, you contributed to their sales and profits, and are probably involved in projects drawing on your unique talents. If you were in your boss' position what would you be inclined to do when a valuable employee resigns?

Before leaving the firm, take time to speak with each of your support staff, peers, executive personnel, and others with whom you have worked. To the extent practical, clear up any unfinished business. Be sensitive to others' reactions and keep your conversations positive and constructive. Some people may naturally express their own discontentment, and may egg you on to agree with them. Don't! Instead, express your appreciation and tell your colleagues you'll miss them. Also keep in mind that it is professional courtesy to give your employer ample notices to help them prepare for your departure – typically, 2 to 4 weeks. However, you should try to get out as soon as possible to avoid recurring invitations to tell your story, and to avoid having to deal with the frustrations and pressures at the job as the firm adjusts to your leaving.

Resigning is never easy, especially when you've worked at a position for several years, and have become part of a team. Some employers and co-workers take it personally and accuse you of abandoning ship. However, handling your resignation as professionally and thoughtfully as you handle your search for a new job can help make your resignation relatively smooth and amicable.

Make up your Mind:

Before you submit your resignation, you must be clearly committed to leaving.

Keep Resignation Short, Simple and Positive:

Leave your employer on a positive note. You moving on do not have to mean long faces. After all, you have just won an opportunity to advance in your career for which you owe your employer sincere thanks. Thank your colleagues, for their help in preparing you to move onward and upward. When you resign, keep your conversations simple and concise. Avoid lengthy discussions about your new opportunity with your old employer. Do not justify your personal goals or your decision to leave. If you feel you may be faced with a hostile environment, resign at the end of the day.

The Oral Resignation:

Resigning orally may place you in the compromising position of having to explain your decision on the spot. Words are very powerful. Choose your words with care. Your boss may want to probe for factors, which led to your decision. You may be asked who or what is the reason for your leaving, or may be invited to offer suggestions to help make the organisation more effective. "Answer candidly ..." Do not fall for this trap! Remember, your interrogator is still your boss. Whatever you say, will be viewed as biased – and may eventually be used against you. Offer sincere praise for the firm and those with whom you worked. Prepare yourself beforehand by focusing on several positive aspects of your workplace, and mention them liberally when the opportunity arises.

The Written Resignation:

A written resignation gives you the time to effectively prepare what you wish to communicate, and gives you greater control over your delivery of the message. A written resignation also reinforces the fact that you are really leaving and are not simply threatening in order to re-negotiate your position.

5. Resignation Letter

(Date)

(Manager's Name)

(Company Name)

(Company Address / e-mail address)

Dear (Manager's Name)

I am sorry to inform you that I will be leaving (company name) on (date). This was a difficult decision, working for (company) has been a positive experience and one for which I am thankful. I have learned a lot here, and have enjoyed working on our project, and with you. In fact, I am sure that I would continue to benefit if I were to stay.

I have thought long and hard about this and I have made a decision and it is final and irrevocable.

I wish continued success to (company), to your project and to you.

Please feel free to contact me after I leave if I can be of any further assistance to the project.

Yours sincerely

(Your Name)

DATE

**EMPLOYER
COMPANY NAME
ADDRESS**

Dear **EMPLOYER NAME**

This is to inform you that I have accepted a position with **NEW COMPANY NAME**.

I want to express my gratitude for a rewarding professional association during my employment with **COMPANY NAME**.

This decision was not an easy one and involved many hours of thoughtful consideration, particularly with respect to my own plans for my future. I am confident, however, that this new position represents a positive move toward fulfilling my career goals.

I hope you will respect my position in this matter.

My main thoughts now are to work as hard as possible to wrap up my projects here and turn over my responsibilities as smoothly as possible.

Yours faithfully,

**NAME
DATE**

**EMPLOYER
COMPANY NAME
ADDRESS**

Dear **EMPLOYER NAME**

I want to thank you for all you have done for me here at **COMPANY**. It's been a pleasure working with you, and representing the company as your **JOB TITLE**.

I have accepted an offer with another firm and have decided to tender my resignation as of today. This decision has nothing to do with the opportunity you have provided for me

here. You and the company have been fair with me, and I genuinely appreciate all your support.

I wish **COMPANY** continued success, and I want to thank you for allowing me to be a part of your team. Please feel free to contact me at any time if I can be of further assistance in helping with a smooth transition.

Sincerely,
NAME

DATE

EMPLOYER
COMPANY
ADDRESS

Dear **EMPLOYER**

As per section of my contract of employment / employment handbook, I hereby give **RESIGNATION PERIOD** of my intention to leave **COMPANY**.

Yours faithfully,
NAME

DATE

EMPLOYER
COMPANY
ADDRESS

Dear **EMPLOYER**

As per section of my contract of employment / employment handbook, I hereby give of my intention to leave **COMPANY NAME**.

I want to thank you for all that you have done for me in my employment here. It has been working with you and representing the company.

It is now time for me to move on and I have accepted a position with another firm. This decision was not an easy one and took a lot of consideration. However, I am confident that this new position represents a positive move towards fulfilling my career aims.

I wish the company continued success and one again, would like to thank you for allow part of your team.

If there is anything I can do in aiding a smooth transition of responsibilities, please let me know.

Yours faithfully,
NAME
DATE

EMPLOYER
COMPANY
ADDRESS

Dear **EMPLOYER**

This letter is to let you know that I am concluding my employment with **COMPANY** effective **DATE**.

The time I have spent at **COMPANY** has been most rewarding and helpful in my career, and I hope that my contributions to the company have been constructive. My relationship with you has always been professional, warm and results oriented.

I have accepted a position that will enhance my career growth and will expose me to challenges and opportunities, which I believe, are in my best interest. Should you flatter me with an offer to remain, I could not, under any circumstances, consider it. My decision is irrevocable and final.

EMPLOYER, I have the utmost respect for you and with nothing but the best for you and **COMPANY**. If I can be of any special assistance during my final two weeks, please feel free to call on me.

Yours faithfully,

NAME

Here is an article regarding interviewing protocol

A typical interview may take from only thirty minutes to an hour, yet it could determine your business career for years to come. Your primary objective is to convince the interviewer that you are the most qualified candidate. You need to "sell" your experience, qualifications and ability. If you make your living in a field other than sales, you may feel that you don't have a sales personality. But consider this: all of us are selling all the time. Every day of your life you are selling your views and ideas to your family, friends and business associates. Every time you persuade your colleagues to use your solution to a business problem you use your selling skills. All you need is a basic sales strategy that you can use for the rest of your life.

You can equate the research and effort that has to go into preparing for an interview to the preparation involved in doing a presentation to your most important client. You only have one chance to make a great impression, so put in all the effort you can muster. Research the company, its products and the department you're interested in joining before the time. If you can, you should even research the manager who will be interviewing you. You need to understand the company's needs in order to present yourself in such a way as to prove that you can make a contribution to their bottom line. It is impressive to the extreme to meet with a prospective employee who seems to have already made the company – and its problems – his own.

Visual first impressions are very important. Look critically at what you plan to wear to the interview – what impression do the clothes convey? Your own personal taste in clothes may not always be the most appropriate for a job interview. Different to the IT-era of the 1990's, it is not acceptable to arrive for an interview in t-shirts and open shoes – rather err on the conservative side and try to appear as businesslike as possible.

Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes early for your interview. Carry a briefcase or organiser with copies of your resume and some examples of your work. Ensure that your cell phone is switched off, or better yet, leave it at home or in your car, along with the bunches of house keys, directions to the company, and the baby's bottle. There is nothing as awkward as trying to get up out of a chair in reception while juggling your personal belongings as well! Be sure you know how to pronounce and spell the name of the person who will interview you. Greet your interviewer with a firm handshake and maintain eye contact at all times.

Once in the interview you still have to be aware of your body language. Be careful to avoid the following mannerisms:

- *The irresolute look – showing how unsure you are of where you are and what you are expecting, and evading eye to eye contact.*
- *Fiddling (for instance, with your hands or a pen) – turn the twitch or nervous movement into a positive gesture to demonstrate what you are saying positively but with style.*
- *Sitting – the general rule is that sitting upright and looking directly ahead is easiest to manage.*
- *Gabbling – take deep breaths before, during and after entering the interview room. Walk steadily to your place and take your time to sit down – after you have been invited to do so. Then look up, clearly waiting to be spoken to. Pace your words in reply, taking your time to consider rather than rushing. Your interviewer will feel flattered that you consider his questions properly.*

The interview will probably start off with the interviewer asking you to tell him about yourself. You should see this as an opportunity to showcase your skills and the highlights of your career. Give the interviewer a brief rundown of your academic background and your career progression, up to the current position. Mention some career achievements at this point – but keep it relevant and within the scope of the position that you are applying for.

There is also a growing trend towards behaviour-based interviewing. This is a method of interviewing whereby the employer asks specific questions aimed at ascertaining your behavioural and activity patterns. Questions will usually sound like this: *Tell me about your most difficult decision and how you went about making it? Where do you think your interest in this career comes from? Give me a situation in which you failed, and how you handled it.* These questions can be tough, should they arise unexpectedly, so – when you prepare for the interview – think about the parallels between your career, the company you're interviewing at, and the position you're interested in.

The other very tough question that is almost always asked during the course of an interview is the one of salary expectations. Most people, including the managers that perform the interviews, are uncomfortable with this interview. If you are properly prepared, there should be no problems. As far as possible, you should avoid discussing compensation on the first interview unless you're actually offered the job and want to accept it. If the interviewer asks specifically what your salary requirements are, your answer should be, *"What I'm really looking for is the right career opportunity. I'm sure you'll make me a fair offer if you want to hire me."* If you are pressed for a specific figure, describe your current compensation and then add, *"I believe on the basis of what I've accomplished I'd be entitled a fair offer, but I'd rather hear what you think I'm worth to your company."* Don't allow your nervousness to under- or over-price you, because it is very difficult to change salary perceptions later on in the interviewing process.

Finally, in the same way as the first impressions are important, so are the last. When the interview draws to a close, thank the interviewer for his time, and shake hands. Very important: if you like the company and the position you interviewed for, tell the manager! In the same way that you would be hesitant to marry someone who has never told you he loves you, companies are reluctant to appoint people who are not clearly interested in them. You may want to phrase it like this: *"Thank you for your time, Mr Paulsen. I have really enjoyed meeting with you and I feel I can add a lot of value to the ABC Group. When can I expect to hear from you with regards to your decision?"* This leaves a good impression, and will let you know exactly what will happen next as well.

All that remains after your brilliant performance in the interview is now to wait for the final offer from the company sign the contracts and join your new company on your way up on the corporate ladder!