

Nail the Job Interview!

A grayscale photograph of a man in a business suit, standing with one hand on his hip and giving a thumbs-up with the other. He is positioned behind the main title text.

101 Dynamite Answers to Interview Questions

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Nail the Job Interview!

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Contents

1 No More Sweaty Palms! 1

- Nail the Interview With Confidence 1
- From Apprehension to Anticipation 2
- Interviews Count the Most 2
- Who Really Gets Hired 3
- Are You a Nailer or About to Be Nailed? 4
- Exchange Information 6
- Prepare Your "Best Self" 8
- You Need to Both Answer and Ask Questions 8
- Create Your Own Interview Power 9
- Avoid Easy Temptations 12
- Choose the Right Resources 13
- Put Dynamite Into Your Interviews 13

2 Interview Tips and Techniques 15

- Variable Situations 15
- Interviewer Goals and Expectations 18
- Interviewee Goals and Expectations 19
- Interview Types/Goals 20
- Informational Interviews 20
- Employment Interviews 21
- Screening Interviews 21
- Electronic Screening Interviews 24
- Hiring/Placement Interviews 25
- Handling Several Formats 28

- Interview Settings 28
- Questioning Techniques 30
 - Interview Structure 36

3 Mistakes, Trends, and Resources 40

- Employers' Negative Goals and Experiences 40
- 37 Mistakes You Can't Afford to Make 41
 - Focus on Behavior and the Internet 50
 - Interview Prep Resources 51

4 45 Key Interview Principles 53

- Different Goals 53
- Strategies for Interview Success 54
- Principles for Interview Preparation 54
 - Principles for the Interview Encounter 63
- After the Interview – Follow-up 73

5 Get Prepared 75

- Prepare for the Interview 76
 - Assess Strengths and Relate to Employers' Needs 76
 - Research Your Field of Work and Related Organizations 77
- Prepare for the Verbal Interchange 78
 - Nonverbal Elements of Success 81
- Deal With Logistics 81

6 Answer Questions 83

- Interview Phases 83
 - Interviewer's Concerns and Techniques 85
- Interviewee's Ways of Answering Questions 88
 - Questions and Answers 96
 - Illegal Questions 134

7 Handle Yourself Nonverbally 138

- The Nonverbal Edge 138
- A Winning Image 139
- Dynamite Images for Men 139
- Dynamite Images for Women 141
 - Let Nervousness Work for You 142

- Project Composure 143
- Project Dynamism 144
- Project Class and Competence 145

8 Questions You Should Ask 147

- Ask Questions 147
- Questions About the Company 148
- Questions About the Job 150
- Questions About the Work Environment 151
- Questions to Ask At the Close 152
- Questions About Salary and Benefits 153
- Questions About Relocation 155

9 Follow Up, Follow Up, Follow Up 156

- It's Not Over Until It's Over 156
- Keep the Process Going 157
- Follow-up Means You Follow Through 158

10 101 Answers You Should Formulate 163

- Prepare for the 101 163
- Personality and Motivation 164
- Education and Training 166
- Experience and Skills 167
- Career Goals 168
- Why You Want This Job 169
- Unexpected Questions 170
- Behavior- and Situation-Based Questions 171
- Always Ask Questions 172

Index 173

The Authors..... 176

Career Resources..... 178

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1

No More Sweaty Palms!

"Tell me about yourself," the interviewer said after he motioned to take the seat across from him.

"Would you prefer *that* I focus on my educational preparation or my work experience?" I asked, realizing that a lifetime autobiography would not serve either of us well in a job interview.

"Why don't you tie the two together and describe how your education prepared you to be effective in your most recent position?"

As I started to respond, I was grateful that I had anticipated and prepared for a question similar to this. I hadn't expected it to be the first question I would be asked, but I was prepared and I knew I could respond better than most applicants faced with this difficult beginning. Indeed, I nailed that interview and got the job offer!

Nail the Interview With Confidence

You, too, want to nail the job interview by being prepared to respond to critical interview questions. You do this by anticipating questions, considering thoughtful and compelling answers, focusing on your accomplish-

ments, asking intelligent questions, and handling the interview situation with ease and confidence. But that's not what most candidates do. Instead, they quickly discover they are unprepared for many critical job interview questions, and they fail to ask important questions about the job and the employer. While ostensibly well qualified to do the job, they make many interview errors (see Chapter 3) that knock them out of the final competition. Failing to focus on what's most important to winning the job, they communicate the wrong message to employers – they really are not "fit" for the position. Much of this communication problem is found in how they answer important interview questions.

From Apprehension to Anticipation

What are the first thoughts that come to mind as you contemplate a job interview? Joy? Relief? Fear? Apprehension? Is the surge of joy you feel at having a chance at the job – an opportunity to demonstrate to the interviewer that you are the person who should be hired – overshadowed by feelings of nervousness? Do your fears of sweaty palms, a dry mouth, churning stomach, and wobbly knees leave you less than enthusiastic? If your answers to these questions are “yes,” you have lots of company, and lots to learn.

Since a successful job interview is a prerequisite for most jobs, it makes sense to find ways to turn interview apprehension into interview anticipation. That's what this book is all about – making sure you leave the job interview a winner. Your goal should be to nail the job interview by sufficiently impressing the interviewers who will then offer you the job.

Interviews Count the Most

Interviews don't just count – they count the most. Take yourself back a few weeks. Maybe you wrote a terrific resume and cover letter, networked with the right people, got yourself invited to the interview through sheer persistence, or just had a stroke of good luck. Whatever methods you used, congratulations; you are a "winner" at this stage of the job search. You've become successful at what others only dream of achieving – grabbing the interest and attention of employers who decide it's now time to see you in person. They need to further evaluate your qualifications to determine if you will fit into their organization.

But it's now a whole new ball game. While writing resumes, following job leads, and contacting employers are very important job search activities, the job interview is what really counts. Indeed, the job interview is **the** prerequisite to getting the job. No job interview, no job offer. No job offer, no job. You simply **must** perform well in the job interview if you are to land the job.

The skills you used in writing, distributing, and following up your resumes and letters, researching companies, and networking helped get you an invitation to meet hiring officials in person. You now have a personal invitation – the door is open for you to meet those who have the power to hire. Now you must demonstrate another set of important skills once inside that door – your ability to conduct an effective interview. This means knowing how to best handle the interview situation and the interview process. It involves everything from greeting the hiring official, engaging in small talk, both answering and asking questions, and following up the interview within 48 hours.

*The job interview
is **the** prerequisite
to getting **the** job.
No job interview,
no job.*

Who Really Gets Hired

It's an old observation, but it's well worth repeating as you prepare for job interviews:

The person who gets the job is not necessarily the best qualified candidate. It's the person who knows how to best nail the interview! For in the end, employers want to hire individuals they feel will be a good "fit" for the job and the organization. They hire people they like both personally and professionally.

The person who wins the job knows how to best present himself or herself both verbally and nonverbally in critical face-to-face interview settings. Whether dealing with multiple interviewers or different types of interviews, he or she has acquired a set of attractive behaviors centering on positive answers to questions that serve as important indicators of future performance. As you will see throughout this book, these are behaviors you can learn and practice with success.

Are You a Nailer or About to Be Nailed?

If you want to nail the interview, you must be prepared to handle the interview from beginning to end as well as beyond the interview encounter. Test your ability to nail the interview by responding to the following statements. Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement by circling the number to the right that best represents you.

SCALE: 5 = strongly agree 2 = disagree
 4 = agree 1 = strongly disagree
 3 = maybe, not certain

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. I know the basic purpose of a job interview for both me and the interviewer. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 2. People in positions of authority are usually attracted to me both personally and professionally. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 3. I'm good at purposeful small talk. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 4. I often take the lead in asking questions. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5. I'm a good storyteller, especially when the subject is about me and my work. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 6. I have several specific examples of my major work-related accomplishments. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 7. I know what questions most interviewers are likely to ask me. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 8. When asked to "Tell me about yourself," I know exactly what to focus on. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 9. I can clearly explain to employers what I do well and enjoy doing. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 10. I can state within 90 seconds why an employer should hire me. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 11. I can easily approach strangers for job information and advice. | 5 4 3 2 1 |

12. I know the five most important questions for determining whether or not I'll get a job offer – and I know how to answer each properly. 5 4 3 2 1
13. If asked to reveal my weaknesses, I know how to best respond. 5 4 3 2 1
14. I know the various types of interviews and how to appropriately respond in each. 5 4 3 2 1
15. I know how to best prepare and practice for the critical job interview. 5 4 3 2 1
16. I know how to stress my positives. 5 4 3 2 1
17. I'm prepared with positive responses to illegal questions posed by prospective employers. 5 4 3 2 1
18. I can conduct an effective telephone interview. 5 4 3 2 1
19. I know when and how to best deal with salary questions. 5 4 3 2 1
20. I'm prepared to take a psychological screening test and expect to pass with flying colors. 5 4 3 2 1
21. I can nonverbally communicate my interest and enthusiasm for the job. 5 4 3 2 1
22. I know how to use positive form and content as well as supports when responding to interviewers' questions. 5 4 3 2 1
23. I know how to summarize my strengths and value at the closing of the interview. 5 4 3 2 1
24. I know what to include in a thank-you letter. 5 4 3 2 1
25. I know when and how to best follow up an interview. 5 4 3 2 1
26. I can explain why I made particular educational choices, including my major and grade point average. 5 4 3 2 1
27. I can clearly explain what I like and dislike about particular jobs. 5 4 3 2 1

28.	I can clearly explain what I want to be doing 5 or 10 years from now.	5	4	3	2	1
29.	I can clearly state my job and career objectives as both skulls and outcomes.	5	4	3	2	1
30.	I know how to talk positively about previous jobs and employers even though my personal and professional experiences may have been less than positive.	5	4	3	2	1
31.	I <u>know</u> how to listen effectively.	5	4	3	2	1
32.	I am prepared to handle the salary question if it comes up early in the interview.	5	4	3	2	1
33.	I can outline major achievements in my last three jobs and show how they relate to the job I am interviewing for.	5	4	3	2	1
34.	I am prepared to handle both series and stress interviews.	5	4	3	2	1
35.	When asked "Doyou have any questions," I can respond with at least five critical questions about the job and employer.	5	4	3	2	1

TOTAL

Once you have completed this exercise, add your responses to compute a total score. If your score is above 150, you are well on your way to nailing the job interview. If your score is below 100, you are likely to be nailed at the interview! You should find this book, along with many other resources we recommend, useful in preparing for the job interview. Upon completing this book, your score on this quiz should increase by at least 30 points. Accordingly, you should be much better prepared to nail the interview and win the job offer.

Exchange Information

The main purpose of the job interview is to exchange information about you, the job, and the employer. You do this by answering and asking

questions both verbally and nonverbally. This is a serious business – the employer's money in exchange for your talent. Therefore, you need to learn as much as possible about each other before making any long-term commitments. This is not the time for playing any get-the-job games.

The process of answering and asking questions for you involves two important and sometimes contradictory considerations:

1. **Get the job:** You must sufficiently impress hiring officials both professionally and personally so you will be offered the job.
2. **Get useful information:** You must acquire critical information on whether or not you wish to join the organization. In other words, the employer must also sufficiently impress you before you will accept a job offer.

These two considerations often compete with one other because of interview apprehension. Indeed, apprehension about the interview situation – complete with a dry throat, sweaty palms, and wobbly knees – leads some interviewees to concentrate solely on playing the "good interviewee" role to the exclusion of acquiring important information for decision-making. Fearing they will not sufficiently impress the interviewer, they become preoccupied with dressing right and giving "model" answers to interview questions rather than concentrating on exchanging information and learning about the job and the employer. They communicate anything but their real selves to employers.

*Stress what is
right about you –
your patterns of
achievements that
define your
success.*

You should not let this happen to you. After all, you owe it to yourself, and perhaps others close to you, to make sound career decisions. The job interview is not a time for you to become someone else by engaging in role playing – "the good interviewee" – that doesn't represent the real you. Like your resume, your interview behavior should clearly communicate the "unique you" to employers. This is the time to present your best self in the process of learning about both the job and the employer.

Throughout this book we stress the importance of lowering your

apprehension, raising your anticipation, and focusing on the main purpose of the interview – exchanging information that will help you make a critical **career decision** as well as assist the employer in making an important **hiring decision**.

Prepare Your "Best Self"

The skills involved in answering and asking interview questions are not something you acquire overnight by reading a book on how to conduct effective job interviews. They are **communication skills you already possess** but which you may not have used for a while. What you need to do is refocus and sharpen those skills in relation to a clear understanding of how the interview process unfolds and what you are expected to do in the interview situation.

You want to prepare well for all types of questions you are likely to be asked as well as identify several questions you need to ask of the employer. This preparation involves everything from anticipating certain types of questions and maintaining a positive attitude to expressing a particular answering style and presenting positive content in your answers.

You want to be honest in everything you say and do. This by no means implies you should be either naive or stupid in what you say by confessing your weaknesses to hiring officials. You need to stress what is right about you – **your strengths and achievements** – those patterns that determine and support your success. This is what you should concentrate on when preparing for the interview – presenting your best self to employers who are interested in hiring your strengths.

Without this preparation, you may not be able to present your best self to the employer. Your dry throat, sweaty palms, and wobbly knees may take center stage as you make numerous interview mistakes that prevent you from both impressing the employer and acquiring useful information. That would be unfortunate, since you have already come a long way toward landing the job. Whatever you do, don't short-change yourself by not preparing well for possible interview questions.

You Need to Both Answer and Ask Questions

This is what this book is all about – learning to sharpen communication skills you already possess in relation to the interview situation and the

interview process. You'll learn to present your best self to employers. We'll show you how to make a smooth transition from your resume to the job offer. You'll answer and ask questions that both impress employers and generate important information to assist you in determining if indeed this job is the right "fit" for you.

Let's be perfectly clear what this book is not about. It is **not** a book on how you can take charge of the interview situation. That would be presumptuous and you would probably become either overbearing or obnoxious, or both. It is **not** a book on how to pull the wool over the eyes of the employer by arriving "dressed for success" and then dishing out "canned answers" to interview questions. That would be dishonest and stupid. And this is **not** a book about how to cleverly manipulate the interviewer to your advantage. That would be unethical, it assumes the interviewer is stupid, and the technique probably would not work.

This is a book about some of the most important communication of your life. Doing well in a 30- to 60-minute interview can have several positive outcomes for you and your career. In addition to a nice compensation package, it should result in a job you will really do well and enjoy doing – the ultimate in career satisfaction.

Create Your Own Interview Power

You can acquire the power to turn interview apprehension into interview anticipation and success. In the following chapters we will share with you the secrets to interview success. We will focus on you in relationship to the employer – what you both need to do in order to arrive at a mutually satisfactory arrangement that will hopefully lead to a satisfying long-term professional and personal relationship.

Our approach to this subject is very simple. We begin with you, the interviewee, and move you directly through the interview process, from beginning to end. For the most part, the chapters flow in the same manner as the job interview – a sequence of different interview questions you need to both answer and ask.

We begin in **Chapter 2**, Interview *Types* and Techniques, by analyzing the interview situation – types of interviews you can expect to encounter as well as the structure of job interviews. We believe much of your apprehension is related to these structural questions. We include a section on behavioral questioning techniques because many job applicants report

encountering this relatively new line of questioning. The more you know about the types of situations you are likely to encounter in interviews, the better prepared you should be for answering and asking questions both verbally and nonverbally.

Chapter 3, Mistakes, Trends, and Resources, focuses on major interviewing sins committed by job seekers as revealed by numerous employers. These errors can easily knock you out of future consideration. The chapter also examines two major interviewing trends as well as offers several key print and electronic resources to help prepare anyone for an effective job interview.

In **Chapter 4**, 45 *Key* Interview Principles, we turn our attention to a comprehensive set of interview rules that form the basis for effective interviewing. These precepts are much more than just a scattering of hot tips, generic experiences, common-sense knowledge, or structured logic. Based on research and experience, they are a well integrated set of principles that define effective communication in most professional and social settings. Our principles cover three distinct interview stages you will most likely encounter during your job search:

- ◉ interview preparation
- interview encounters
- interview follow-ups

Taken together, these principles also constitute a well-defined **strategy** for conducting a dynamite job interview. They are your tickets to interview success.

In **Chapter 5**, Get Prepared, we examine important interview preparation steps that go beyond just practicing model answers and questions. You'll examine strategies and learn to anticipate interview scenarios in this critical chapter that serves as a transition to the actual job interview.

We then turn our attention to the nuts-and-bolts of job interviews – specific questions and answers. Based on our principles of effective interviewing, in **Chapter 6** – *Answer* Questions – we examine the verbal components of the interview – the art of speaking well and the most common questions asked of interviewees. Each question is followed with examples of **dynamite answer strategies** that will both impress interviewers and generate useful information for decision-making purposes.

These clearly illustrate our interviewing principles.

In **Chapter 7 – *Handle Yourself Nonverbally*** – we turn to an equally important but often neglected element in effective interviewing – the critical nonverbal components of the interview. Again, based on our principles in Chapter 4, we discuss dynamite visuals which constitute another important channel for answering interview questions. These nonverbal components are constantly affecting answers to interview questions. Indeed, they often answer many un verbalized questions the interviewer prefers not asking, because they may be illegal, or they appear unprofessional or embarrassing to both ask and answer. You need to be aware of this silent language so your nonverbal messages are as appropriate as possible. We'll show you how to communicate at this level without uttering a single word. You may be surprised to discover your nonverbal answers to interview questions are sometimes more important than your verbal answers! Chapter 7 addresses many such important interview behaviors.

Chapter 8 – *Questions You Should Ask* – turns the interview table. The focus of attention shifts from questions about you to questions concerning the job and the employer. While you will primarily answer questions during the job interview, you also must be prepared to ask questions. After all, you need information about the job and employer. You will gain some of this information when responding to the interviewer's questions, but you should prepare a set of questions that address your most important concerns. Interviewers expect you to ask intelligent questions which demonstrate your interest in the job and enthusiasm for the employer. In fact, the more you find out about the job and the concerns of management, the better you can focus your responses to their needs. This chapter identifies numerous questions you should ask in the process of both favorably impressing the interviewer and gathering useful information.

Chapter 9 – *Follow Up, Follow Up, Follow Up* – completes our examination of dynamite answers to interview questions. This chapter is the critical action chapter. Here we address a much neglected aspect of the job search – effective interview follow-up methods. It's based upon a simple truism: you won't get the job offer until the employer takes action beyond the question-and-answer interview encounter. There are certain things you can do to help the person reach a decision, from telephone calls to thank you letters. We identify the best follow-up methods as well as provide some telephone dialogues and model thank you letters.

Chapter 10 – 101 Answers You Should Formulate – presents a comprehensive checklist by category of the 101 sample interview questions and answers addressed throughout the book as well as provides a useful orientation on how to best handle each of the questions. The chapter is organized in this manner so you can review some of the most important job interview questions and suggested answering strategies based upon the 45 principles we outlined in Chapter 4. If you need to prepare for a job interview that's coming up in a few days, this chapter will assist you in getting quickly organized.

Taken together, these chapters constitute a crash course in effective job interview skills. Ideally you should complete this book early in your job

*Whatever you do,
don't try to
memorize canned
answers to inter-
view questions. To
do so may raise
questions about
your honesty and
integrity!*

search. However, chances are you are reading it in preparation for an impending job interview, which may be in another day or two! If this is your situation, we strongly recommend focusing on the interviewing errors and principles outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. These elements emphasize a particular **attitude and orientation** you need to consistently present throughout the interview as well as during the follow-up phase. The principles will help you formulate answers to the many standard interview questions you will need to address with-

out sounding like you have prepared "canned" answers. They also will help you handle the secret language of interview success.

Avoid Easy Temptations

One important word of caution is in order before you proceed further into this book. Whatever you do, don't try to memorize canned answers to interview questions. Succumbing to such a temptation will probably produce negative outcomes for you. This approach is likely to turn off interviewers who may think you are being less than forthcoming; it may even raise questions about your honesty and integrity. In addition, your nonverbal communication may negate the messages you intend to communicate at the "canned" verbal level. Our examples of effective answers

are presented to **illustrate the principles** in Chapter 4 that should guide you through each step of the job interview process – preparation, presentation, and follow up.

Choose the Right Resources

This book is primarily concerned with communicating critical job and career information to employers in face-to-face job interview situations. Each year millions of job hunters turn to career planning books for assistance. Many begin with a general book and turn next to resume and interview books. Others begin with a resume book and later seek other types of job resources, including letter writing and networking books. Some go directly to software programs or visit various Internet sites for producing resumes and preparing for job interviews.

If this book represents your first career planning guide, you may want to supplement it with a few other key books. Many of these resources are available in your local library and bookstore or they can be ordered directly from Impact Publications (see the *Career Resources* section on pages 178-183 at the end of this book). Most of these resources, along with hundreds of others, are available through Impact's comprehensive "CAREERStore" on the Internet: www.impactpublications.com. Impact's site also includes new titles, specials, downloadable catalogs, and job search tips for keeping you in touch with the latest in career information and resources. You also can request a free copy of their *What's New and Hot?* career brochure by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to:

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Manassas Park, VA 20111-5211

Put Dynamite Into Your Interviews

Whatever you do, make sure you acquire, use, and taste the fruits of dynamite answers to interview questions. You should go into the job interview equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to be most effective in communicating your qualifications to employers and acquiring important information on both the job and the employer.

As you will quickly discover, the job market is not a place to engage in wishful thinking. It is at times impersonal, frequently ego-deflating, and unforgiving of errors. It can often be a depressing journey into the valley of rejections where you quickly lose one of your most important assets – your self-esteem. Success in today's challenging job market requires clear thinking, strong organizational skills, and effective strategies. Above all, it rewards individuals who follow through in implementing each job search step with enthusiasm, dogged persistence, and the ability to handle rejections.

May you soon discover this power and incorporate it in your own dynamite answers to interview questions. If you do this, you will certainly nail the job interview much sooner than most other job seekers, including your competition!

2

Interview Tips and Techniques

JOB SEEKERS AND ADVICE GIVERS ALIKE TALK ABOUT “THE job interview” as if it were a single entity – always the same, with one person, and with a single set of expectations on the part of both the interviewer and interviewee. In reality, job seekers encounter many different types of interviews as well as multiple interviews with several individuals in a single organization. Many interviewees are surprised to discover that their interview(s) did not conform to what they were told to expect, including many questions they prepared answers to. Not surprisingly, the interpersonal dynamics change as the participants and the situation change, and each interview is different from any other.

Variable Situations

Interviews involve numerous variables – the interviewer’s and interviewee’s goals, personality, and approach; types of interview; interview settings; questioning techniques; and interview structure. Since each of these variables will affect both your answers/questions and interview

outcome, you must be aware of changing interview situations and handle each variable in the best manner possible.

While many interviewees expect interviewers to be in the driver's seat – intelligent, confident, competent, and in control – in fact many interviewers have no training in interviewing, let alone personnel interviewing. They may be hesitant or unsure of themselves, asking many questions that may be irrelevant to the job under consideration, or simply restating information contained in the applicant's resume. If the interviewer is from outside the personnel department, he may conduct interviews infrequently. If he is from the operational unit, rather than personnel, he may view the time consumed to conduct an interview as taking valuable time

Interview skills involve a great deal more than learning appropriate answers to expected interview questions,

away from the work at hand. He may also feel very uncomfortable doing something – conducting the interview – that he knows he hasn't had much experience with. In other words, he is far from being in the driver's seat. Indeed, you may have to help him through the interview!

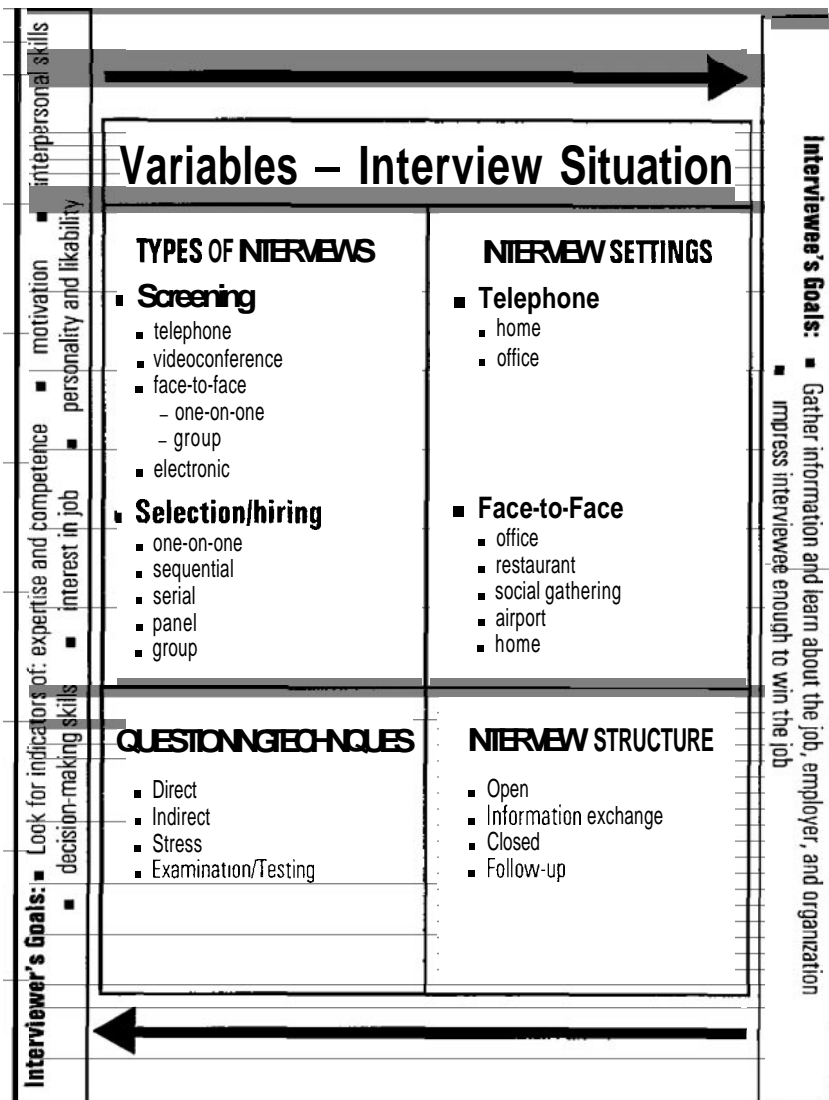
Although there are several different interview types and each interview is different from other interviews, there are

enough similarities for each type of interview that one should be able to develop a set of expectations that will be useful.

Let's describe the interview situation in comprehensive terms. We include several types of interviews along with interviewers' and interviewees' goals and various interview settings, questioning techniques, and structures you are most likely to encounter. These variables are outlined and related to one another in the diagram on page 17.

This chapter should help you identify the types of playing fields you will most likely encounter with a single employer or with many different employers. You will quickly discover interview skills involve a great deal more than learning appropriate answers to expected interview questions. At the very least you must be prepared to encounter many different types of settings for interviews, which may involve anything from climbing out of the shower to answer a telephone call that unexpectedly becomes a screening interview to encountering a panel of interviewers who engage you in a two-hour stress interview. You also must be prepared for different questioning techniques as well as the overall structure and flow

Interview Situation: Types, Settings, Questioning Techniques, and Structure



of the interview. These are variables which will both grow out of and affect the goals of both you and the interviewer. They will have an important impact on the outcome of the interview that goes far beyond the content of interview questions and answers.

Interviewer Goals and Expectations

The interviewer expects that an applicant who is invited to an interview will be at his best – both in appearance and behavior. You will have conducted basic research on the company and will be able to both answer and ask questions that relate to your skills and goals as they relate to the job under consideration.

The interviewer has certain goals she must achieve through the interview process. She will control many of the variables affecting the interview situation in order to achieve those goals. First, the interviewer looks for indicators of the applicant's **expertise and competence** – your skills, knowledge, and abilities as they relate to the job. Since your education and past work experience are factors that would have been apparent on your resume, you have met the basic requirements for consideration for the position or you wouldn't have been invited to the interview. But now the employer wants specifics that go beyond the degrees earned, jobs held, and duties performed – specifics that indicate what you can do for the employer in **her** organization.

Second, the interviewer is interested in indicators of the applicant's **motivation**. Expertise is an important consideration, but your drive and energy may be what set you apart from others and give you an edge in the hiring process. The employer wants to know about your development potential. Are you motivated to learn new skills and do new things?

Third, your **interpersonal skills** also are of concern. Someone who can do the job, but doesn't fit into the work setting, isn't a valuable employee. Your ability to get along with co-workers is not always easy to discern, but something the interviewer will be trying to assess. How well do you take supervision? Are you able to follow orders from those in positions to direct you? And if you are hired in a track that may lead to your becoming a supervisor, your leadership skills will also be important.

Fourth, the applicant's **decision-making and problem-solving abilities** will be important for many positions. How well are you able to deal with an out-of-the-ordinary situation you may encounter on the job?

Will you be able to distinguish between those situations where innovation is required and those where established procedures must be followed? Can you quickly deal with a situation by analyzing the nature of the issue and taking appropriate action that incorporates alternative courses of action?

Fifth, at the same time that the interviewer is attempting to discern your skills to do the work as well as fit into the corporate structure, she is also trying to assess your real **interest** in the job and the firm. Do you really want this job? Will you be a dedicated and loyal employee? Or do you merely see this job as a way-station to something bigger and better somewhere else?

Sixth, while you may think employers are mainly concerned with assessing your job performance skills, they also are interested in your **personality or likability**. They prefer working with people they like. After all, likable people are those who tend to get along well with others. How well do you relate to the interviewer? Do you listen well, give positive verbal and nonverbal feedback, have a pleasant and enthusiastic manner, and demonstrate a sense of humor and smile? Or do you tend to be negative, boring, and unenthusiastic? Employers look for energetic personalities who also tend to transfer their energy into their work.

Interviewee Goals and Expectations

Interviewees also have specific goals relevant to the interview situation. Your major goals are to gain information about the job, employer, and organization and demonstrate how your skills, knowledge, and abilities will fit the needs of the organization. You want to impress the interviewer enough to be offered the job. You expect the interviewer to take the lead in determining the structure of the interview, but you also need to structure your behavior in such a manner that it affects both the interview situation and the final outcome.

Most interviewees have little knowledge of the various types of interviews or the variety of settings and forms that an interview may take. The information in this chapter is designed to provide a basis for understanding the various interviews you may face. Granted, no two interviews are the same, but it is possible to classify interviews in ways that should enhance your understanding of what is happening if you encounter a situation that doesn't quite fit into your perceptual expectations as to what constitutes a job interview.

Interview Types/Goals

There are two basic types of interviews with which the job seeker needs some familiarity: the **informational interview** and the **employment interview**. The informational interview results from the networking process. You should talk with people in your area of interest and identify persons who are in a position to share information with you about your potential field of employment. Once you have identified persons who are likely to have useful information, you want to contact them and try to arrange informational interviews. As the name implies, you are not seeking a job from these people – only information and advice that will be useful to you later in your job search.

Informational Interviews

Your goal in an informational interview will be to pose questions about such things as opportunities in "X" field – at the entry level or at whatever level you expect to enter the field; the likelihood of advancement; what changes are taking place within the field that will affect things such as hiring needs, special skills, degrees or certification necessary for employment; special problems facing workers in "X" field; salary levels in your geographical area in "X" field – both at your anticipated entry level and as you advance. You will probably want to ask questions about various companies in your area that are hiring workers in your field. Your goal is to find out as much as you can about your field and the organizations that are hiring – or are likely to hire in the future – from people in your field of employment.

For more information on informational interviews, you may wish to consult another of our interview bootls, *Interview for Success*, as well as *Haldane's Best Answers to Tough Interview Questions* (Impact Publications). Since the informational interview is a particular type of interview in which you become the interviewer, we only mention this type of interview in passing here. However, it's an extremely important type of interview in one's overall job search; indeed, it may be the single most important job search activity for making contacts with potential employers who may later invite you to a job interview. Our main focus in this book, however, is the employment interview where you primarily play the role of interviewee in the process of getting a job offer.

Employment Interviews

Employment interviews may take several forms. If your job search takes you to many interviews, you are likely to encounter more than one interview format. Employment formats may be best divided into two major categories – screening interviews and hiring/placement interviews.

Screening Interviews

Screening interviews may take place over the telephone or in a face-to-face setting. **Face-to-face** screening interviews are usually held somewhere other than the employer's offices. In a college setting, on-campus interviews may be held in conjunction with the career services office or at a campus career fair. Screening interviews may be a part of the activities involved with a job fair held in a hotel or other neutral place and in which many potential employers take part. Not limited to private industry, job fairs are also held by government agencies and nonprofit organizations.

Most face-to-face screening interviews are also one-on-one – one applicant talking with one hiring official. However, some organizations that are deluged with applications for certain positions, such as the airlines for flight attendants, may bring 20-30 people together at one time. In this situation the employer is able to screen far more people in less time than if they scheduled them each for individual interviews.

Those applicants who are screened "in" as a result of the group screening interview are invited back for an individual hiring interview.

Screening interviews, as the name implies, provide employers the opportunity to make initial decisions as to whether they want to further interview an applicant. It helps them narrow the field of applicants to a more manageable number for conducting formal face-to-face job interviews. In other words, applicants are screened "in" or "out" of further consideration. Job offers are seldom an immediate result of a screening interview.

Telephone screening interviews are one of the least understood interview formats. Because many applicants are unprepared or do not understand the purpose of this format, they do poorly. Many employers use telephone interviews these days. Such interviews are more time efficient and cost effective in eliminating a large number of applicants than face-to-face interviews. While the telephone interview may take only five to ten

minutes, an office interview may take an hour or more. The telephone interview is especially cost effective when applicants are from out of town, since it saves the expense of bringing several in for face-to-face interviews.

Since employers can be expected to conduct screening interviews with greater and greater frequency as interview costs increase, it pays to be prepared when your telephone rings.

If you receive an initial phone call from an employer, assume you are being screened for a later face-to-face interview. Take this telephone interview as seriously as you would one in any other format. What you say and how you say it will probably determine whether you will be invited to a hiring/placement interview.

With this in mind, it is advisable to have an area by your telephone equipped with everything you will need to come through the unexpected screening interview with flying colors. A pad of paper, pen, copy of your resume, a calendar (with commitments noted) are basic elements. It is also a good idea to have a list of the organizations which you have contacted in your job search; the names of individuals to whom you have sent your resume (or talked to previously) listed; and a folder or notebook with copies of all your job search correspondence organized alphabetically by company. If, however, you are contacted on your cell phone, you may not be in a situation conducive for handling this screening interview, such as being at work, driving, or in a meeting. Ask to call back (*"I'm in a meeting right now. Could I call you back in a half hour?"*) so you will have time to get better organized for handling this screening interview.

Keep the essential elements you need to be prepared for the telephone interview available at any location where you are likely to receive a call from a potential employer. If you have listed both your home and work numbers on your resume or application, you could receive a call at either place. If your present employer doesn't know you are engaged in a job search, you may wish to keep your interview essentials organized in your briefcase in the event you get a call at work. However, if you have no private place at your office where you could conceivably talk on the phone, you may prefer to ask potential employers not to call you at your present place of employment. Alternatively, you may want to ask the interviewer if you could call her back at a specific time – convenient to the interviewer – since you are in the middle of an important meeting. This will give you time to collect your thoughts and find a more private location from which to handle the telephone screening interview.

At this point the interviewer is looking for reasons to knock people out of further consideration. For example, she may ask you to clarify some points in your resume concerning experience as well as inquire about your availability and salary expectations:

When you say you have 'six years of progressive experience handling all aspects of quality control with XYZ Company,' what does that mean in terms of the number of employees you supervised? How did your responsibilities increase?

Would you be ready to start work in another three weeks?

What are your salary expectations?

Factual questions, such as the first one, deserve factual answers along with some positive contextual comments. For example, try to put your supervisory skills into some **performance context**, such as

I supervised six people. We were able to improve product quality by 50 percent, which resulted in 25 percent fewer customer complaints.

On the question of availability, use your own judgment. Remember, you should give your present employer at least two weeks notice. If the job requires a major geographic move, you may need more time. For now you may want to answer "Yes," knowing full well you need to work out the details with both your current and future employer. If you say "No," you inject a negative into this interview that may eliminate you from further consideration.

As for salary expectations, the rule is to keep this question to the very end of the job interview – after you learn the **worth** of the position and demonstrate your **value** to employers. Answer by saying you are "open" at this point. You need to know more about the position. If the interviewer persists, turn the question around and ask "What is the current range for this position for someone with my qualifications?" And if the person continues to persist for a figure, give a salary range you know from your research is in line with industry salary norms as well as your expectations. "I was expecting in the range of \$43,000 to \$50,000." Base your responses to salary questions on information gained from your research. This is not the

time to resort to wishful thinking,

The person conducting the screening interview has a negative goal as far as the applicant is concerned. The interviewer wants to eliminate as many candidates as possible from further consideration so the hiring/placement interview can be conducted with a more manageable number of applicants. On the other hand, your goal is to be included in the final pool of candidates. What you say in this screening interview will be very important in moving you into the select group of applicants.

The telephone screening interview is primarily a verbal encounter, but it also includes numerous nonverbal components. Make sure you speak up, use good grammar, speak in complete sentences, avoid vocalized pauses and fillers, are decisive and positive, and inject enthusiasm and energy into your telephone voice. If your voice tends to be high-pitched over the telephone, try to lower it somewhat. You want to sound interesting enough so the interviewer will want to see you in person. If your grammar is poor, if you sound indecisive, lack enthusiasm, or have a high-pitched and squeaky voice, the interviewer may screen you out of further consideration regardless of what you say in response to his questions or how terrific your resume looks. He will have "a gut feeling" that he doesn't want to interview you because you just don't sound right for the job.

Electronic Screening Interviews

A relatively new method for screening job applicants is the use of computerized questions to elicit information before the applicant meets with the hiring official. The applicant is initially asked to sit at a computer terminal and respond to a series of questions that will also be "scored" electronically. Though in limited use at present, and used primarily by larger firms, the method may catch on. If you face this situation, you should do better if you have some understanding of what is happening to you.

Employers who use this method believe electronic screening has several advantages. First, the computer presentation poses exactly the same questions in the same way to all applicants and will score the responses, thus supposedly taking some of the subjectivity out of this portion of the interview. Second, the computer can score your responses quickly. If several questions are designed with purposeful redundancy in order to

identify the individual who is not responding honestly but trying to skew the results a certain way, the computerized scoring will identify the inconsistencies and this information will be available to the human interviewer who conducts the subsequent face-to-face interview. In some instances the scoring programs are designed so that inconsistencies in responses as well as response rates are noted. In other words, if you take a significantly longer time to answer certain questions than is **your** norm for the majority of questions, the questions you pondered excessively will be noted.

The interviewer whom you meet with following your session at the computer terminal will no doubt probe areas in which your responses or response rate seemed to indicate inconsistencies or longer than usual hesitations. The interviewer will assume that you may have problems or something to hide in these areas. If you have read the following sections in this book which help you prepare for interview questions and how to present your responses in an honest, yet positive manner, you should be able to handle the face-to-face follow-up to the electronic screening interview.

Although many employers may initially jump on the bandwagon and move into what they consider to be the progressive new interview methodology – electronic screening interviews – we suspect it may be fraught with problems that will slow its general use. Aside from the expense, which may not be justified for many smaller firms, it seems to be a modern method of presenting traditional personality testing.

Two decades ago many firms used paper-and-pencil tests to assess applicants' personality traits. After several court cases in which employers could not demonstrate a bona fide relationship between the tests and the jobs for which applicants were being screened, employers quietly dropped the use of most of these tests. A similar fate may be in store for these new electronic tests.

Hiring/Placement Interviews

Once you make it through the screening interview – if there has been one – you go on to the **real** interviews. There are five basic formats for hiring interviews. Most any interview will fall into one of these categories or be a combination of more than one of them. They are one-to-one, sequential, serial, panel, and group interviews.

One-to-one Interviews

Most interviewees encounter one-to-one, face-to-face interviews. The applicant and the employer meet, usually at the employer's office, and sit down to discuss the position and the applicant's skills, knowledge, and abilities as they relate to the job. At some point, though hopefully late in the interview, they discuss salary considerations as well as other benefits.

While a screening interview is often conducted by someone in personnel – after all, screening is one of their major functions – hiring decisions are usually made by department managers for lower and many mid-level positions, and by upper management for top-level positions. If the hiring interview is conducted by someone from the department which has the position, you can expect the interviewer to ask many specific job-content questions. If the interviewer is from personnel, the questions will tend to be more general.

Sequential Interviews

For many positions, especially those beyond entry-level, more than one interview will be necessary. Sequential interviews are simply a series of interviews with the decision being made to screen the candidate in or out after each interview. The candidates who are screened in are called back for additional interviews. Although each of the sequential interviews is most frequently a one-to-one interview, you could meet with more than one interviewer at the same time in any of these sessions. You may meet with the same person in each interview, but it is more likely you will meet with new people in subsequent interviews.

When sequential interviews are held, many of the terms of employment issues such as salary and benefits may not be discussed in the initial interview. These considerations may be saved until later interviews – after the pool of candidates has been narrowed and the employer is getting serious about only a very few candidates. This can work to your advantage, since with each interview you should have the opportunity to find out more about the position – ask in subsequent interviews some things you wish you had asked, but forgot, in your initial interview. You also have a greater chance to demonstrate your qualifications and try to convince the interviewer(s) that you are the person for the job.

Serial Interviews

Serial interviews also consist of several interviews, one after the other. However, with serial interviews the series has been set up from the time the interview was scheduled and no decision will be made until all the interviews have been completed. Usually each meeting is with a different person or group of people, and all the interviews will be held over a one- or two-day period. Following these interviews, the individuals you met with will get together to compare notes and make a group hiring decision.

Panel Interviews

Panel interviews occur infrequently, but it is possible you could encounter a situation that included this format. **As** the name implies, in a panel interview you are interviewed by several people at the same time. Panel interviews, by their very nature, are more stressful than most other types. At its best, you are facing several people at the same time, responding to the questions of one panel member as you try to balance your perceptions of the other members' expectations. At its worst, it can be a pressure-cooker atmosphere as you are subjected to a barrage of questions, some of which may seem hostile.

Group Interviews

Though perhaps the least common of our interview types, group interviews do take place. If you find yourself being interviewed along with several other applicants, you are in a group interview. Employers use the group setting to gain information not thought to be readily ascertained in a one-to-one interview.

In group interviews the employer will observe the interpersonal skills of the applicants. How well a candidate interacts with peers – the other applicants – is thought to be an indicator of how well the individual will get along with co-workers.

Often a question will be posed to the group, or the group will be presented a problem to solve. If an applicant exhibits positive leadership and/or followership behaviors in the group setting, employers tend to believe that person will respond in similar ways in the workplace. The employer will be looking for positive skills – the ability of an interviewee

to draw other candidates into the discussion, to listen to others' points of view, to ask questions, to act as peacemaker if necessary, to summarize salient points, and to keep the group focused on the task at hand and moving toward the goal.

Handling Several Formats

Some applicants will face a variety of interview types in the course of pursuing one position. Many candidates for a university faculty position,

*Treat each
successive*

*interview as if it
were your first,*

for example, encounter a series of interviews that span two days or more. Having flown or driven into town the night before, the candidate will be picked up at his hotel the next morning by a member of the department. The morning may consist of several meetings: a meeting with the department chairperson, and

meetings with two or three other faculty members as time and class schedules permit (**Series Interviews**). The candidate will go to lunch with several of the faculty (**Panel Interview**) and in the afternoon meet with the Dean of the Faculty and later successively with two or three additional faculty members (**Series Interviews**). During the evening a dinner meeting may be scheduled at the department chairperson's or a faculty member's home (**Panel and Series Interviews**). The next day consists of meetings with any faculty not seen individually the previous day (**Series Interview**) and perhaps teaching a segment of a class (**Examination/Test Interview**). In the end, this individual will go through three or four different types of interviews and will be judged by several people.

The most important thing to remember during series interviews is to treat each successive interview as if it were your first. Indeed, it is your first interview with this person. Try to be as alert, fresh, and dynamic with each person as you were with the very first one who interviewed you.

Interview Settings

Interviews can take place almost anywhere. The telephone screening interview will most likely take place with you in your home or office. At

either place make sure you have your interview essentials ready and organized. If a **phone** call comes when you are at work, ask the interviewer to excuse you for a moment while you close the door. Take a moment to close the door, if this is possible, and to get your interview essentials out of your briefcase – or wherever you are keeping them. Take a deep breath to help calm you as you pick up the receiver to continue.

Face-to-face interviews most often take place in a hotel, convention center, or college campus setting for screening interviews. Employment interviews usually take place in the employer's offices, but may occur at other sites. Some interviews, or at least parts of them, may take place in a restaurant, the employer's home, or even in an airport waiting area.

The portion of an interview that takes place in a restaurant can be the most dangerous minefield for many interviewees. Evening dinners in the employer's home often have the same effect. One potential problem is that many applicants who have been on their best behavior for the interviews in the more formal setting that preceded the **lunch or dinner** session now mistakenly believe that the interview is over and act accordingly!

As long as you are with the prospective employer or her representatives, the interview continues. The setting may change; the participants may seem to turn from talk of business-related matters to a more social set of conversation topics; but you, the applicant, are still on stage and continue to be evaluated. This is no time to relax, let your hair down, and forget what you are there for. Continue to give thoughtful responses to questions and probe in a non-threatening manner for insight into the company where you may have the opportunity to work. Your interest and enthusiasm for the company must remain dynamic even if you are tired and worn out from travel and the stress of several series interviews.

Another consideration should be what you will order if you are in a restaurant and what you will take should you be eating in someone's home. If ordering from a menu, select something that will be easy to eat. Bony chicken or lobster in its shell are to be avoided along with spaghetti or anything else that may prove difficult to eat. You want to be able to give your full attention to your dinner companions and appear in control and well mannered rather than having to struggle with your food and only give half attention to your dinner companions.

If eating in someone's home, you will have fewer choices, but at least everyone else will be facing the same struggle you are if the host's menu

choices have not been planned for ease of eating. However, you should still have some leeway. Take small portions of any foods you don't like or expect to be difficult to eat. You will probably find your appetite is not great and you probably won't be eating much today anyway. Eat enough to appear polite and keep you from starvation, but give your attention to your real purposes for being there – promote your candidacy and evaluate the position you hope will eventually be offered to you.

The question of alcoholic beverage consumption often arises as interviewees attempt to decide, "*Should I, or shouldn't I?*" The best rule is to avoid completely any offer of alcohol at lunch. You need to be clear-headed for the interviews you are likely to still face that afternoon. And you do not want to give the impression that you may be one to drink at

*When ordering from
a menu, select
something that will
be easy to eat.*

noon each day before going back to the office for the afternoon's work, even though it may appear to be part of the work culture – or maybe it's just an interview test.

If you are at an evening dinner or cocktail party, you have some leeway with this rule. If you don't drink, simply

decline the cocktail – there is no need for an explanation. If you do drink and wish to have a cocktail along with the others, then **one** is generally acceptable. No more tonight – no matter how many others may consume. If you are female, you may choose to ask for white wine. Many find this less objectionable for women than hard liquor. Some women may be offended by this advice, but now is the time to go after the job – not the inequities.

Questioning Techniques

Direct

Applicants encounter the direct questioning approach most frequently. Interviewers tend to use this method because it allows them to control the direction of the interview. Asking specific questions of each candidate is the questioning technique most employers know best, and it allows them to feel the most comfortable. By asking similar questions of each candidate, interviewers find it easier to compare one applicant with another.

The interviewer who uses the direct questioning technique has specific questions and usually asks these in a planned sequence. Usually the interviewer ~~asks~~ questions that relate to your:

Education

Work experience

Interpersonal skills

Skills and strengths

Ability to take initiative and solve problems

Career goals

The direct questioning technique involves both open-ended and closed questions. Closed questions are those that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." Although candidates often will elaborate beyond the simple "yes" or "no," even these elaborations are usually more concise and to the point than answers to open-ended questions. Open-ended questions call for information, reflection, or judgment; they are intended to give the interviewer insights into the knowledge, personality, or character of the applicant. Open-ended questions must be answered with more than a "yes" or "no" and often begin with "what?" or "how."

Indirect

The indirect interview technique is less structured than the direct method. It's also used less frequently than the direct method. When using this method, the interviewer wants you to talk as much as possible about yourself and the job so he or she can determine your likely performance as a result of this interview. The interviewer tends to ask broad general questions relating to several key areas that he thinks will elicit indicators of your likely on-the-job performance. Most questions are open-ended, requiring elaboration from the interviewee. You might be asked:

We had a problem last year with one employee who leaked information on our new product designs to our major competitor. How might you have handled this if the employee were one of your subordinates?

I see you have degrees in both engineering and sociology. That's an interesting combination. Tell me how your educational backgrounds in both fields might help you on this job.

We've talked about some of the challenges facing this office during the next two years. What would you want to accomplish during your first 90 days on the job? Could you give me some specific changes you would bring about immediately?

What kind of personality do you think would work best in this work environment?

Tell me more about your career goals over the next five to ten years and how they might relate to this job.

You may take several minutes responding to each question. And your response may lead the interviewer into related areas of questioning that were unplanned. It is this lack of planned structure as well as the lack of parallel questioning of other applicants that makes some employers uncomfortable and more likely to use the direct form of questioning.

In the indirect interview you will be at center stage doing most of the talking. You may feel more at ease during such an interview because you feel less pressure to come up with the "right answer" to specific questions. But beware of getting too comfortable; you are still being evaluated even though you are not answering a series of specific questions most commonly identified as the key to the interview process. The interviewer may be looking for key analytical, problem-solving, and communication skills along with determining your style, personality, and philosophies. In such a situation, **how** you answer the questions and converse with the interviewer may be just as important as **what** you say. Before responding, quickly try to determine what the interviewer is trying to assess. Try to focus your response and answer in an organized, coherent fashion. Be careful not to ramble in an unfocused stream of consciousness.

Stress

Although most interviews seem stressful to job applicants, fortunately for you, few interviewers actually put candidates through a **stress interview**. But since you could encounter one, you need to know what one is so you would recognize it and keep your composure if ever you are subjected to one.

Stress interviews may be conducted by one person or a panel of interviewers who fire numerous questions at the candidate. The inter-

viewer's tone of voice may be threatening, and the questions, which may be quickly fired at the applicant – like a barrage, may be accusatory in nature.

The purpose of a stress interview is to see how the applicant reacts in a stressful situation. Some employers use this method when interviewing for positions which require coping with on-the-job stress. A chief of campus security, for example, points out he always subjects potential officers to a stress interview. He's hard on them, and his goal is to reduce an applicant – male or female – to tears. If he's successful, however, the applicant is not hired. He wants people who can remain in control of themselves and stressful situations, and he believes the stress interview gives some indication of how well the candidate will perform under stress.

Not always is the connection between the stress interview and the stressful job as obvious as in the above case of the chief of security. But many employers want employees who can work in a pressure-filled atmosphere. While they can review the individual's record to learn how he or she has handled stress in the past, the stress interview gives some indication of how well the candidate will perform under stress.

If you encounter a stress interview, simply understanding what is happening and why should help you through the interview. Try to keep calm; take a deep breath and don't allow the interviewer to upset you; remain in control of yourself; and be complete but concise and to the point as you answer.

Behavioral Interviews

You think you have a lot on the line in an employment interview – that to a large degree your future rests on the outcome. You are not alone in your anxiety; the employer has anxiety as well.

The employer knows that you, the job candidate, will try to make a favorable impression during the interview. He knows you will present yourself in the most positive way you can. He expects you have read books on how to interview, that you will have already considered how you will respond to certain questions, and he is afraid. He is afraid that you may have prepared so well that you may fool him – convincing him that you are right for the job when in reality you are not. He is afraid that you may possess greater interview skills than job skills and he may hire the wrong person!

Knowing that job candidates are coming into job interviews more savvy about the interview process than ever before, employers want better ways to identify the prospective candidate who is really the best one for the job – not just the best at interviewing! The technique now gaining greater use among employers is to ask behavioral questions. There are three types of behavioral questions that tend to be asked: self-appraisal questions, situational questions, and hypothetical situational questions.

Self-appraisal questions ask you to consider and report on your behavior – not your skills. For example, the interviewer might ask, *"In what situations have you become so involved in the work you were doing that the day flew by?"* If you have been explaining how you handled an irate customer, the interviewer might ask, *"If you were to encounter that same situation now, how would you deal with that customer?"* Or, *"If you had the choice of working in our marketing or our public relations department, which would you chose?"* And after your response, you might get the follow-up question, *"Why would you make that choice?"*

Like self-appraisal, situational questions look for past experience as indicators of future behavior. *"Tell me about a recent time when you took responsibility for a task that was outside of your job description,"* might be asked of an applicant. Or, *"Tell me about a time when you took action without your supervisor's prior approval."*

Hypothetical situational questions differ only in that, rather than asking what the interviewee has actually done in a particular situation, these questions ask the applicant what he would do in a hypothetical situation. Thus they give the interviewer the opportunity to ask questions about situations the applicant may never have actually encountered in previous positions. If, for example, the applicant has never held a supervisory position, and the job he is being considered for would involve some supervisory responsibilities, the hypothetical situational questions can provide the interviewer an opportunity to get a sense of what the candidate's supervisory style will be.

So why do employers like behavioral questions? Why are behavioral questions being used by more employers and with greater frequency these days? It is generally thought that the strength of behavioral interviewing is that it allows the interviewer to get at thought processes on past behaviors as well as at behaviors themselves and that, as a result, job candidates cannot prepare for these questions as they do for the more traditionally asked interview questions.

However, you **can** prepare for the behavioral interview! You may not be able to anticipate every single question – no more than you can prepare for every single traditional question that may be asked. But just as you can anticipate the areas of questioning which an employer is likely to probe and consider the gist of the responses you will give, you can do much the same thing in preparation for the possibility you may face an interview in which at least some of what you are asked are behavioral based questions. This, of course, assumes you have had a relevant experience and that you have acted in a positive manner that you are pleased to have the opportunity to talk about! But the major problem for most job candidates is not whether they have had a related experience, nor that they have responded inappropriately, but rather that they are thrown off balance by a question they not only didn't anticipate, but had never considered. They have a tough time formulating a good response under the stress of the moment.

Your strategy, as you prepare, should be two-fold. First, anticipate as many of the behavioral questions you are likely to be asked as you can. Consider the job for which you are interviewing. What kinds of behavioral questions do you think the interviewer might want to ask specific to that job? What special situations would someone working in this job likely encounter? Are there any things on your resume or in your work history that might raise questions? Looked at in this way, you may be able to add questions to your behavioral list.

Once you have a compiled a list of possible behavioral type questions, your next step is to strategize the responses you would make. Your tactic, as in any aspect of the interview, should be to be honest, but not stupid. In other words, how can you best answer this question honestly and yet in the most favorable light possible vis-a-vis your behavior? Remember that the interviewer will probably check your references if the company is seriously considering hiring you. So you want to keep your answers focused on the truth.

Consider the questions about your real life performance and pull out as many examples as you can of how you have responded in relevant situations in the past. If you have a great deal of work experience, most of the examples you use should be related to past jobs. However, if you are recently out of school, your examples need not all be work-related. Examples taken from situations you encountered in organizations you belonged to at school or in volunteer experiences may yield positive

illustrations of past behavior.

Practice talking about the experiences in ways that support the point you are trying to make. Don't memorize responses. When most people give memorized responses, they sound "canned." After all, you don't want your response to sound as if you have practiced it getting ready for the interview! You want your response to sound thoughtful and intelligent and as if you are formulating it for the first time – which you are! Talk through possible responses by telling the story that sets up the situation, explains what you did, suggests why you took the action you did, and then concludes by explicitly tying your response back to the question you were asked.

Examination/Testing

Some interviews will include elements of testing or examination. For some types of jobs, such as clerical or mechanical, you may be tested on the actual equipment you will be using. Teachers may be asked to conduct a one-hour classroom session where their performance will be observed and evaluated by both faculty and students. Certain questions, similar to those outlined in the section on indirect questions, may be asked to ascertain your level of knowledge, decision-making capabilities, analytic capabilities, and competence.

"What if" questions that begin with "What would you do if. . ." are designed to test your ability to relate your past experience to the employer's current situation and needs. Using questions designed to test you, interviewers are looking for thoughtful answers that demonstrate your competence.

Interview Structure

Each interview will be different simply because the different combination of people involved and their goals produce different dynamics. However, there is a basic structure that approximates what one can expect in most interview situations. The actual conversation and amount of time spent in each phase will vary, but the progression from one phase to another will normally follow a predictable pattern. This structure is evident from the moment you arrive at the interview site to when you learn whether or not you are right for the job.

Opening

As soon as you meet the interviewer, you normally spend some time in small talk. This is an important ritual. It gives both the employer and the applicant a chance to feel more at ease with each other and the situation. Discussions of the weather, whether the applicant had any trouble getting to the interview, and similar topics are appropriate things to talk about at this stage. The main goal of this exchange is to **establish rapport** between the interview participants.

The main goal of this exchange is to establish rapport between the interview participants.

Exchange Information

What we might refer to as the "body" of the interview is the phase that will normally have the most time devoted to it. It is now that the interviewer and interviewee will exchange information – with both persons posing questions as well as giving answers. The interviewer tries to size up the applicant in terms of his work abilities, level of knowledge, related experience, interpersonal skills, communication skills, motivation, dedication, loyalty, career goals, and likability. The interviewer attempts to give the applicant information about the position.

The applicant tries to make a favorable impression as he answers the questions posed by the interviewer and asks questions to probe the nature of the job.

Close

The close, like the opening, is another time for exchanging amenities. The employer will normally thank the applicant for coming, indicate she enjoyed meeting with him, and perhaps indicate that the company will be making a decision soon.

This is no time to murmur your thanks and meekly leave. This is your opportunity to refocus the interview toward your skills and how they fit the position as well as to determine what your next step should be. Briefly, try to summarize your strengths as they fit the position and employer's needs, indicate your appreciation for the time the interviewer has spent with you, but, before you leave, ask when you might expect to

hear about their decision. (This could be an actual hiring decision or it may be a decision as to whom the company will invite back for further interviews.) Assuming you are given a time frame, it's perfectly acceptable to follow up with this question:

If I haven't heard anything by (select the day following the date you were told a decision would be reached), may I call you to check on my status?

***This is no time to
murmur your
thanks and
meekly leave.***

Usually the interviewer will say you may call. You now have a date by which you should follow up if you have not heard about your hiring status. Be sure to put this date on your schedule to a phone call.

Follow-up

Later that same day, if possible, and no later than the following day, write a brief letter to the employer. This is a business letter, not a social thank-you note. It should be produced on business size stationery and mailed in a business size envelope.

You can again thank the interviewer for the time she spent with you and indicate your continued interest in the position. You may choose to briefly restate your strengths as they relate to the position to be filled, and say that you look forward to hearing from her on (fill in the date she indicated they would have reached a hiring decision).

At the close of the interview you asked whether you could call the interviewer to check on your status if you hadn't heard by a certain date. When that date arrives, if you haven't heard, **CALL**. You already set the stage for the call at the close of the interview, now follow through.

You have nothing to gain by not making that call. By calling, you let the interviewer know you are still interested and you have the tenacity to follow through. If a decision hasn't been made, you may score a few points in your favor. If a decision has been reached and someone else has been offered the job, even if you are disappointed, you are better off knowing, since you can now concentrate your efforts on other positions. Thank the individual, and ask to be remembered for future openings they may have that would utilize your skills.

At this point you may even wish to write a final thank-you letter indicating your continued interest in the firm and asking them to remember you for future openings in your line of work.

3

Mistakes, Trends, and Resources

TRY AS EMPLOYERS AND CAREER COUNSELORS MAY, many job seekers still don't "get it" when interviewing for a job. They make awful mistakes. Unlike many other job search mistakes, such as failing to address a resume to a specific person, interview errors tend to be unforgiving sins. They are knockouts. After all, this is the time when first impressions count the most, because the employer is trying to make a final decision on whom to hire.

Employers' Negative Goals and Experiences

Employers have both positive and negative goals in mind when recruiting candidates. On the positive side, they want to hire someone who can do the job and add value or benefits to their organization. On the negative side, they are always looking for clues that tell them why they should not hire you. Many are gun-shy because they have made hiring mistakes in the past by naively believing what a candidate told them about their performance. Could you be another stranger who makes inflated claims about your competence in the hope of getting a job offer?

It's not until you start performing on the job that the employer gets to see the "real you" and discover your patterns of behavior. In the meantime, the employer needs to be on his or her guard looking for evidence that you may be the wrong person for the job. Make a mistake during the job interview and you may be instantly eliminated from further consideration. Therefore, you must be on your very best behavior and avoid the many common mistakes interviewees make.

37 Mistakes You Can't Afford to Make

Employers readily volunteer a litany of mistakes job seekers make when applying for jobs. These errors often constitute a body of interview humor and job search stories that are as sad as they are hilarious. Many of these mistakes are simply stupid, whereas others indicate a lack of knowledge, experience, and interview savvy. Initially outlined in our companion job search guide for college students and graduates – *The Job Hunting Guide: Transitioning From College to Careers* (Impact Publications, 2003) – they are well worth repeating here, since they provide a larger context for the many questions and answers you will address in the remainder of this book.

These mistakes are relevant to the whole process, from initially arriving to closing the interview.

1. **Arrives late to the interview.** First impressions really do count and they are remembered for a long time. Arrive late and you've made one of the worst impressions possible! Indeed, regardless of what you say or do during the interview, you may never recover from this initial mistake. Employers wonder, "*Will you also come to work late?*"
2. **Makes a bad impression in the waiting area.** Treats receptionists and secretaries as inferiors – individuals who may have important input into the hiring process when later asked by the employer "*What was your impression of this candidate?*" Caught reading frivolous materials, such as *People Magazine*, in the waiting area when company reports and related literature were readily available for perusal.

3. **Offers stupid excuses for behavior.** Excuses are usually red flags indicating that a person is unwilling to take responsibility and do the work. Here's a killer excuse for arriving late for a job interview: *"I got lost because your directions weren't very clear."* Goodbye! Here are some other classic excuses heard during job interviews:
- I forgot.
 - It wasn't my fault.
 - It was a bad company.
 - My boss was a real jerk.
 - The college wasn't very good.
I can't remember why I did that.
 - No one there appreciated my work.
I didn't have time to visit your website.
4. **Presents a poor appearance and negative image.** Dresses inappropriately for the interview – under-dresses or over-dresses for the position. The interviewee may choose poor quality clothing, select inappropriate colors, or put them together poorly. He or she may need to learn some basic grooming habits, from haircut and style to makeup and nails, or undergo a major makeover.
5. **Expresses bad, negative, and corrosive attitudes.** Tends to be negative, overbearing, extremely aggressive, cynical, and opinionated to the extreme. Expresses intolerance and strong prejudices toward others. Complains a lot about everything and everybody. In Yiddish such chronic complainers are known as kvetchers. Indicates a possible caustic personality that will not fit in well with the company. Regardless of how talented this person may be, unless he works in a cell by himself, he'll probably be fired within two months for having a bad attitude that pollutes the office and lowers morale.
6. **Engages in inappropriate and unexpected behaviors for an interview situation.** Shows off scars, tattoos, muscles, or pictures of family. Flirts with the interviewer. Possibly an exhibitionist who may also want to date the boss and harass co-workers!

7. **Appears somewhat incoherent and unfocused.** Tends to offer incomplete thoughts, loses focus, and jumps around to unrelated ideas. Hard to keep a focused conversation going. Incoherent thought processes indicate a possible attention problem.
8. **Inarticulate.** Speaks poorly, from sound of voice and diction to grammar, vocalized pauses, and jargon. Uses lots of "you know," "ah," "like," "okay," and "well" fillers. Expresses a low-class street language – "cool," "damn," "mart," "wow." Not a good candidate for using the telephone or interacting with clients. Appears verbally illiterate. Writing is probably similar in quality.
9. **Gives short and incomplete answers to questions.** Tends to respond to most questions with "Yes," "No," "Maybe," or "I'm not sure" when the interviewer expects more in-depth answers. Appears shallow and indicates a lack of substance, initiative, interest, and enthusiasm.
10. **Lacks a sense of direction.** Appears to have no goals or apparent objectives. When asked "Where do you see yourself five or ten years from now?," has difficulty coming up with an answer or patronizes the interviewer by saying "With you!" Just looking for a paycheck rather than pursuing a passion.
11. **Appears ill or has a possible undisclosed medical condition.** Looks pale, glassy-eyed, gaunt, or yellow. Coughs, sneezes, and sounds terrible. Talks about her upcoming surgery – within six weeks of starting the job!
12. **Volunteers personal information that normally would be illegal or inappropriate to ask.** Candidate makes interviewer feel uncomfortable by talking about religion, political affiliation, age, family, divorce, sexual orientation, or physical and mental health.
13. **Emits bad or irritating smells.** Wow! The candidate reeks of excessive perfume, cologne, or shaving lotion – could lull mosquito~Can smell smoke or alcohol on breath. Strong body odor indicates personal hygiene problems. Has bad breath throughout the interview, which gets cut short for an unexplained reason!

14. **Shows little enthusiasm, drive, or initiative.** Appears to be just looking for a job and a paycheck. Tends to be passive and indifferent. No evidence of being a self-starter who takes initiative and solves problems on his own. Not sure what motivates this person other than close supervision. Indeed, he'll require lots of supervision or we'll have an employee with lots of play-time on his hands, or the job will expand to fill the time allotted. He'll become the "job guy" who always says *"I did my job just like you told me,"* but not much beyond what's assigned. Don't expect much from this person, who will probably be overpaid for what he produces.
15. **Lacks confidence and self-esteem.** Seems unsure of self, nervous, and ill at ease. Lacks decisiveness in making decisions. Communicates uncertainty with such comments as *"I don't know," "Maybe," "I'm not sure," "Hadr't really thought of that," "Interesting question," "I'll have to think about that,"* or redirects with the question *"Well, what do you think?"*
16. **Appears too eager or hungry for the job.** Is overly enthusiastic, engages in extreme flattery, and appears suspiciously nervous. Early in the interview, before learning about the company or job, makes such comments as *"I really like it here," "This must be a great place to work," "I love your products," "I need this job," "Is there overtime?," "What are you paying?," "Do you have medical and dental insurance?,"* or *"How many vacation days would I get?"*
17. **Communicates dishonesty or deception.** Uses canned interview language, skirts probing questions, and appears disingenuous. Looks like a tricky character who has things to hide and thus will probably be sneaky and deceptive on the job.
18. **Feels too smooth and superficial.** Dresses nicely, has a firm handshake and good eye contact, answers most questions okay, and appears enthusiastic – just like the books tell job seekers to do. When asked more substantive *"What if"* and behavior-based questions, or requested to give examples of specific accomplishments, the candidate seems to be caught off balance, stumbles with incomplete answers, and starts sweating. Can't put one's finger on the problem, but the gut reaction is that this role-playing

candidate is very superficial, demonstrating little depth beyond general answers to some well coached interview questions. He will probably end up being the “dressed for success” and “coached for the interview” employee from hell!

19. **Appears evasive when asked about possible problems with background.** Gives elusive answers to red flag questions about poor grades, changes in major, time gaps, and excessive number of jobs. Such answers raise questions about the interviewee’s honesty, credibility, sense of responsibility, and overall behavior. Indicates a possible negative behavior pattern that needs further investigation. On second thought, don’t waste time investigating such candidates – they are usually more trouble than they are worth.
20. **Speaks negatively of previous employers and co-workers.** When asked why he left previous employers, usually responds by bad-mouthing them. Has little good to say about others who apparently were not as important as this candidate. Indicates a strong sense of self-esteem but a bad attitude toward most people he works with. This attitude probably also extends to customers!
21. **Maintains poor eye contact.** At least in North America, eye contact is an indication of trustworthiness and attention. Individuals with poor eye contact, especially those with “shifty eyes,” are often judged as untrustworthy – they have something to hide. Having too little or too much eye contact during the interview gives off mixed messages about what you are saying. Worst of all, it may make the interviewee feel uncomfortable in your presence.
22. **Offers a limp or overly firm handshake.** Interviewers often get two kinds of handshakes from candidates – the wimps and the bone-crushers. Your initial handshake may say something about your personality. Candidates offering a cold, wet, and limp handshake often come across as fishes or corpses! Bone-crushers may appear too aggressive and well coached.
23. **Shows little interest in the company.** Indicates he didn’t do much research, since he knows little about the company and didn’t have time to check out the company’s website or even read some

company literature which was readily available while he sat in the waiting area for over 15 minutes. Asks this luller question: "What do you do here?" Goodbye, again!

24. **Talks about salary and benefits early in the interview.** Rather than try to learn more about the company and position as well as demonstrate her value, the candidate seems preoccupied with salary and benefits by bringing them up within the first 15 minutes of the interview. Shows little interest in the job or employer beyond the compensation package. When the interviewee prematurely starts to talk about compensation, red flags go up again – this is a self-centered candidate who is not really interested in doing the job or advancing a career.
25. **Is discourteous, ill-mannered, and disrespectful.** Arrives for the interview a half hour late with no explanation or a phone call indicating a problem en route. Just sits and waits for the interviewer to ask questions. Picks up things on the interviewer's desk. Bites nails and picks nose during the interview. Challenges the interviewer's ideas. Closes the interview without thanking the interviewer for the opportunity to interview for the job. Not even going to charm and etiquette school would help this insensitive and thoughtless candidate!
26. **Tells inappropriate jokes and laughs a lot.** Attempts at humor bomb – appears to be a smart ass who likes to laugh at his own jokes. Comes across as an irritating clown who says stupid and silly things. Will need to frequently put this one out to pasture to keep him away from other employees who don't share such humor.
27. **Talks too much.** Can't answer a question without droning on and on with lots of irrelevant talk. Volunteers all kinds of information, including interesting but sensitive personal observations and gossip, the interviewer neither needs nor wants. Doesn't know when to shut up. Would probably waste a lot of valuable work time talking, talking, and talking and thus irritating others at work. Seems to need lots of social strokes through talk which she readily initiates.

- 28. Drops names to impress the interviewer.** Thinks the interviewer will be impressed with a verbal Rolodex of whom he knows. But interviewers tend to be put off with such candidates who, instead, appear insecure, arrogant, and patronizing – three deadly sins that may shorten your interview from 45 minutes to 15 minutes!
- 29. Appears needy and greedy.** Talks a lot about financial needs and compensation. When discussing salary, talks about his personal financial situation, including debts and planned future purchases, rather than what the job is worth and what value he will bring to the job. Seems to expect the employer is interested in supporting his lifestyle, which may be a combination of irresponsible financial behavior, failing to plan, living beyond his pay grade, and having bad luck. This line of talk indicates he probably has debilitating financial problems that go far beyond the salary level of this job. Not interested in supporting his needs or high cost habits.
- 30. Closes the interview by just leaving.** How you close the interview may determine whether or not you will be invited back to another interview or offered the job. Most interviewees fail to properly close interviews. A proper close should include these six elements:
1. Indicate you are indeed interested in the job – if you are.
 2. Summarize what you see as your major strengths and possible future contributions to the company.
 3. Thank the interviewer for his or her time.
 4. Ask when they plan to make the final hiring decision.
 5. Shake hands and say, *"I hope to hear from you soon. Would it be okay to call you next week?"*
 6. Leave with a smile on your face and a spring to your step – positive body language as you exit.

Never ever close the interview with this rather stupid and presumptuous closing prior to being offered the job: *"So when can I start?"* This question will finish off the interview and your candidacy – you're back to being needy and greedy! Also, don't play the hard-to-get pressure game, even if it's true, by stating, *"I*

have another interview this week. When can I expect to hear from you?"

One other critical element to this close: send a nice thank you letter within 24 hours in which you again express your appreciation for the interview and your interest in the job.

- 31. Fails to talk about accomplishments.** Candidate concentrates on explaining work history as primarily consisting of assigned duties and responsibilities. When asked to give examples of her five major accomplishments in her last jobs, doesn't seem to understand the question, gives little evidence of performance, or reverts once again to discussing formal duties and responsibilities. When probed further for accomplishments, can't really say much and feels uncomfortable about this line of questioning.
- 32. Does not ask questions about the job or employer.** When asked "*Do you have any questions?*," replies "*No*" or "*You've covered everything.*" Asking questions is often more important than answering questions. When you ask thoughtful questions, you emphasize your interest in the employer and job as well as indicate your intelligence – qualities employers look for in candidates.
- 33. Appears self-centered rather than employer-centered.** This will become immediately apparent by the direction of the answers and questions coming from the interviewee. If they primarily focus on benefits to the interviewee, the candidate will tend to be self-centered. For example, a candidate who frequently uses "*I*" when talking about himself and the job may be very self-centered. On the other hand, the candidate who talks about "*we*" and "*you*" is usually more employer-oriented. Contrast these paired statements about the job and compensation:

What would I be doing in this position?

What do you see us achieving over the next six months?

or

What would I be making on this job?

What do you normally pay for someone with my qualifications?

- 34. Demonstrates poor listening skills.** Doesn't listen carefully to questions or seems to have her own agenda that overrides the interviewer's interest. Tends to go off in different directions from the questions being asked. Not a very empathetic listener both verbally and nonverbally. Seems to be more interested in talking about own agenda than focusing on the issues at hand. Apparently wants to take charge of the interview and be the Lone Ranger. The job really does require good listening skills!
- 35. Seems not too bright for the job.** Answering simple interview questions is like giving an intelligence test. Has difficulty talking about past accomplishments. Doesn't seem to grasp what the job is all about or the skills required. Seems confused and lacks focus. Should never have gotten to the job interview but had a terrific-looking resume which was probably written by a professional resume writer!
- 36. Fails to know his/her worth and negotiate properly when it comes time to talk about compensation.** Job seekers are well advised to only talk about salary and benefits **after** being offered the job. If you prematurely talk about compensation, you may diminish your value as well as appear self-centered. Be sure to research salary comparables so you know what you are worth in today's job market (start with www.salary.com). Listen carefully throughout the interview and ask questions which would give you a better idea of what the job is actually worth. Stress throughout the interview your skills and accomplishments – those things that are most valued by employers who are willing to pay what's necessary for top talent. When you do start negotiating, let the employer state a salary figure first and then negotiate using salary ranges to reach common ground. These and other salary negotiation techniques are outlined in several books on salary negotiations as well as on several websites (see resources on pages 51-52).
- 37. Fails to properly prepare for the interview.** This is the most important mistake of all. It affects all the other mistakes. Indeed, failing to prepare will immediately show when the candidate makes a bad first impression, fails to indicate knowledge about the company and job, poorly answers standard interview questions,

and does not ask questions. In other words, the candidate makes many of the mistakes outlined above because he or she failed to anticipate what goes into a winning interview. Since you should be communicating your very best self during the interview, failing to prepare for it says something about how you deal with important things in your life and work. In this case, the employer and job were not important enough for you to prepare properly. That's okay. The employer now knows the real you.

Focus on Behavior and the Internet

Within the past few years, the job interview – as well as the whole hiring process – has changed in several important ways. These changes require

Employers are spending more time screening candidates for behavior patterns in order to better predict their future performance.

both interviewees and interviewers to better prepare for the interview. Most changes reflect the need of employers to better define their hiring needs and then make more intelligent and cost-effective hiring decisions. While employers used to hire fast and fire slow, more and more employers see the wisdom of doing things differently: hire slow and fire fast. This means more extensive screening of candidates and focusing on patterns of accomplishments in order to best pre-

dict employee behavior. Employers want a perfect "fit." This also means conducting a different style of interviewing. Rather than call a candidate in for two interviews, an employer may interview a candidate four to seven times before making a job offer. So, how do you handle your fifth interview? Not surprisingly, many candidates have difficulty remaining buoyant after the third interview!

At the same time, employers are taking more time to screen candidates with everything from drug, skills, and psychological testing to in-depth background checks. Within the interview itself, more and more employers are asking behavior-based questions to ascertain a candidate's ability to make decisions and solve problems relevant to their organization. Consequently, candidates who prepare for interviews with memorized or canned answers to anticipated interview questions do not do well in such interviews; they appear coached and thus lack authenticity. Going beyond

behavior-based questions, many employers also seek better indicators of a candidate's decision-making style and pattern of performance. They want to know more about your motivated skills and abilities.

Within the very near future, the Internet may play a key role in screening candidates, from doing background checks and administering skills and psychological tests to conducting interviews via a video link. Indeed, the Internet is proving to be the perfect medium for improving both the job search and the hiring processes. For employers, new Internet-based hiring software will enable them to eliminate many of the costly face-to-face steps currently involved in interviewing candidates. In so doing, interviews will be more employer-centered with greater emphasis placed on what you can do for the employer.

The overall trend is simple: no more hiring surprises due to poor hiring skills! Employers want to better predict individual performance within their organizations. They can no longer make costly hiring mistakes that are often attributed to their own lack of good screening and interview skills. They want to take the guesswork out of hiring. They want the perfect skills set for the perfect fit.

Interview Prep Resources

Interview preparation is essential for conducting a winning interview. Fortunately, numerous books and websites are available to help job seekers improve their interview skills as well as avoid the many interview sins and knockouts outlined in this chapter.

Books on Job Interviewing

101 Dynamite Questions to Ask at Your Job Interview, 2nd Edition,
Richard Fein (Impact Publications, 2001)

101 Great Answers to the Toughest Interview Questions, 4th Edition,
Ron Fry (Career Press, 2000)

The 101 Toughest Interview Questions and Answers That Win the Job!
David Porot with Frances Bolles Hayes (Ten Speed Press, 1999)

250 Job Interview Questions You'll Most Likely Be Asked, Peter Veruki
(Adams Media, 1999)

Haldane's Best Answers to Tough Interview Questions, Bernard Haldane Associates (Impact Publications, **2000**)

Interview for Success, 8th Edition, Caryl and Ron Krannich (Impact Publications, **2003**)

Interview Rehearsal Book, Deb Gottesman and Buzz Mauro (Berkley Publishing Group, **1999**)

Job Interviews for Dummies, 2nd Edition, Joyce Lain Kennedy (John Wiley & Sons, **2000**)

Naked at the Interview, Burton Jay Nadler (John Wiley & Sons, **1994**)

The Perfect Interview, 2nd Edition, John Drake (AMACOM, **1997**)

Power Interviews, Revised Edition, Neil M. Yeager and Lee Hough (John Wiley & Sons, **1998**)

Savvy Interviewing: The Nonverbal Advantage, Caryl and Ron Krannich (Impact Publications, **2000**)

Sweaty Palms, H. Anthony Medley (Ten Speed Press, **1992**)

Interview-Related Websites

- **Monster.com** [interview.monster.com
content.monster.com/jobinfo/
interview](http://interview.monster.com/content.monster.com/jobinfo/interview)
- **CollegeGrad.com** collegegrad.com/intv
- **JobInterview.net** job-interview.net
- **Interview Coach** interviewcoach.com
- **Quintessential Careers** quintcareers.com/intvres.html
- **Riley Guide** rilevguide.com/netintv.html
- **WinningTheJob** winninathejob.com

4

45 Key Interview Principles

BEFORE FORMULATING DYNAMITE ANSWERS TO INTERVIEW questions, let's review some basic interview principles to prepare for the job interview. If you understand interview goals – both your goals and the likely goals of the interviewer – and the process by which you both will attempt to reach these goals, you will be in a position to formulate your own dynamite answers to interview questions. You'll also better understand the examples we present in subsequent chapters.

Different Goals

Since your goals and those of the interviewer will often differ, it is important to understand the questions posed by the interviewer in terms of her goals – both the obvious goal and possible subtle "hidden agenda" type goals – as well as your own. At the most simplistic level, the interviewer wants to find the best person to fill the job opening. Based on previous hiring experience, the interviewer believes the best person is usually the one with:

- The most appropriate fit of skills, knowledge, and abilities to the position to be filled.
- The best fit with the company environment in terms of temperament.
- The best fit with any of the company's special needs, such as someone who can travel, relocate, or put in long hours evenings or on weekends.
- An appropriate fit with the position in terms of salary history and expectations of salary and benefits.

Your goals are somewhat complex. First, you need to ask questions that will help you determine what the employer really is looking for and whether or not you want to work for this company or in this position. Second, you want to convince the interviewer that you are the best person for the job! Achieving both goals will not be easy.

Strategies for Interview Success

The principles that follow form the basis of strategies that should help you in any job interview. Some principles point you to necessary work to be done before you ever enter the interview situation. Other principles focus on concerns of the interviewer as her questions attempt to elicit answers that may tell her more than you wish if you are not thinking clearly as you respond. The final set of principles deal with actions you can take at the close of the interview as well as once it is over in order to maximize your chances of being offered the job.

Principles for Interview Preparation

The job interview is much more than just answering a set of questions and preparing accordingly. It involves knowing about different types of interviews, various settings in which interviews take place, and a variety of interview formats and questioning techniques. You should prepare for all aspects of the interview by anticipating what lies ahead and how you should best present yourself both verbally and nonverbally.

1. Identify and assess your strengths.

One of the first steps any potential job seeker/job changer should take is to conduct a thorough self-assessment, which consists of an evaluation of one's skills, abilities, and accomplishments. This is important in part so you will know what you are good at, but it is also a critical step toward being able to clearly communicate your strengths to potential employers. The old adage that you should "know thyself" is extremely important during all phases of your job search. With this self-knowledge you will be in a better position to tell employers what it is you do well, enjoy doing, and want to do in the future. This information will play an important role in both developing your resume and preparing for the interview. This self-assessment generates a useful language that stresses your major skills, abilities, and achievements.

2. Translate your strengths into job-related language of accomplishments and benefits relevant to the needs of employers.

It is one thing to say that you enjoy talking to people. But to tell an employer you enjoy speaking in front of groups and have a flair for holding their attention and getting the action you desire

from them, translates your skill into a job-related benefit for the employer. Whenever possible, give examples of your strengths that relate to the language and needs of the employer.

Stress benefits you are likely to provide for the employer.

3. Be sure your communications are employer-centered rather than self-centered.

While you have specific needs in relation to the job – salary, benefits, satisfaction – these are self-centered interests which should not be the major issues discussed with interviewers. Always put yourself in the shoes of the interviewer – he or she has specific needs. Keep focused on what it is you can do for the employer rather than what the employer can do for you. Most of your

answers and questions should stress **benefits** you are likely to provide for the employer. When preparing for the interview, be sure to use an employer-centered language of benefits.

4. Support your accomplishments with specific examples illustrating what you did.

Whenever you make a claim of your accomplishments, it will both be more believable and better remembered if you will cite specific examples or **supports** for your claims. Tell the interviewer something about a business-related situation where you actually used this skill and elaborate about the outcome. If it actually occurred on the job, stress the benefits to the company where you were employed. Try to identify four or five good work-related examples of your accomplishments which you may be able to share with the interviewer. Avoid talking about "what happened" when you worked in another organization. Your story needs a subject – you – and an outcome – a benefit or performance.

5. Identify what you enjoy doing.

There are a lot of skills you may have honed to the point of excellence, but do you want to spend the better part of your work life engaging in this activity? When he was 95, George Burns claimed one reason he was still going strong and working a rather demanding schedule was that he loved his work! A secretary may have excellent typing skills but want to move up and out of consideration for another similar position. If this is the case, he doesn't want to stress his typing skill – even though he may be very good at it. Skills you really enjoy using are the ones you are most likely to continue to use to the benefit of both you and the employer.

6. Know about your "field of dreams" by conducting research on important job-related issues.

Before you go to your first job interview you should have conducted research on the field in which you plan to work. Though some of your information may come from printed materials and electronic

sources – reference materials in the library, company publications, or company websites – informational interviews with persons already working (or better yet hiring) in your field will yield information you will need later.

You want to know **before** you go for a job interview what range of salaries are offered in your geographical area for the kind of work you hope to do. **Know** what starting salaries are as well as the salary level for someone with your education and experience. Find out as much as you can about jobs **in general** in your field so that you can talk intelligently once you have a job interview. What are the duties and responsibilities? How far can one advance in this field? What kinds of special skills are useful? What training or degrees are required?

7. Gather information about the organization.

Prior to going to the interview, do your research on the organization. Find out as much as possible about what they do, their reputation, corporate goals, management philosophy, the kind of people they tend to hire, whether they primarily promote from within – any information you can gather will be to your advantage. It will help you make decisions about your desire to be a part of their team as well as ask better questions and give better responses to those they ask you in the course of the interview.

With large corporations, much of this information is available on the Internet. Check out these websites:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| ■ CEO Express | ceoexpress.com |
| ■ Hoover's Online | hoovers.com |
| ■ Dun and Bradstreet's | |
| — Million Dollar Database | dnbmdd.com/mddi |
| ■ Corporate Information | corporateinformation.com |
| ■ BizTech Network | brint.com |
| ■ AllBusiness | www.allbusiness.com |
| ■ BizWeb | bizweb.com |
| ■ Business.com | business.com |
| ■ America's CareerInfoNet | www.acinet.org |
| ■ Forbes Lists | forbes.com/lists |
| ■ Annual Reports | annualreportservice.com |
| ■ Chambers of Commerce | www.chambers.com |

Daily Stocks	dailystocks.com
The Corporate Library	thecorporatelibrary.com
Forbes 500	forbes.com/lists
Fortune 500	fortune.com
Harris InfoSource	www.harrisinfo.com
Inc. 500	inc.com/inc500
Moody's	www.moodys.com
NASDAQ	nasdaq.com
One Source Corp Tech Profiles	onesource.com/products/corptech.htm
Standard & Poor's	standardandpoors.com
Thomas Regional	thomasregional.com
Thomas Register	thomasregister.com
■ Wall Street Research Net	wsrn.com

Most companies – both large and small – maintain company websites. These sites can provide a wealth of information on company operations, including directories of key personnel. You should supplement these resources by talking with people who work or have worked for the company. You can get a better assessment of interpersonal dynamics within an organization from talking with people. In the case of very small firms your only source of information may be talking with individuals in the community.

8. Gather information about the interviewer.

It is often said that organizations do not hire, people do. Thus it is to your advantage to try to find out what you can about the person(s) who will be conducting the interview as part of your data gathering on the organization. What is this person's background? What types of questions does he like to ask? What about his personality? Does he ask tough questions that put stress on interviewees? The more you know about that individual, the better you can phrase your responses in honest, but targeted, terms.

9. Talk in the employer's language.

Talk in the employer's language of organizational goals and expected performance. The employer is interested in getting the work done, getting it done in a timely manner, getting it done at a certain quality level, and getting it accomplished within budget.

The employer is usually not interested in your career and personal goals except as they relate to your performance within the organization and the company's bottom line.

10. Anticipate and prepare for questions.

You can anticipate before you ever walk into the interview 90%-95% of the questions you will be asked. You can expect to be asked about your education and work experience as they relate to the job under consideration. You may be asked questions about your personality, work habits, ability to work with others, or your career goals. In addition to the standard areas of inquiry, a look at your resume should tell you if there are areas likely to get the attention of the interviewer. Do you have unexplained time gaps in your education or work life? Have you jumped around from employer to employer in a short time period? Are you applying for a position that is significantly below your apparent abilities and previous work experience?

In other words, if there is anything that is likely to have come to the attention of the interviewer as questionable – either positive or negative – expect that you will be asked about it during the interview and prepare accordingly. It is far easier to think how you would respond in an honest, yet positive, manner to a question when you are in the relatively comfortable surroundings of home than in the midst of a stressful interview.

Gather the information necessary to respond intelligently to the questions you are likely to be asked, collect your thoughts, and plan strategies for responding to various likely lines of questioning.

11. Consider your response if asked an illegal question.

We are happy to report that the incidence of employers asking illegal questions of an interviewee has declined significantly since the early days of affirmative action. However, it can still happen. Consider prior to the interview how you would respond if you were asked an illegal question or one inappropriate for the work setting or unrelated to the job requirements.

Your options are to inform the interviewer it is an illegal question and you will not answer it; tactfully indicate that, since the

question deals with an area of illegal inquiry, are they sure they want you to respond to it; indicate tactfully that although an illegal area of inquiry, you welcome the chance to respond to it; ask how the question relates to the job for which you are interviewing; or you may choose to answer the question without comment on its appropriateness. Choose an option with which you feel comfortable in terms of both your response as well as the likely impact it may have on a job offer.

12. Practice the form and content of your responses.

Most people find it is good preparation to practice various responses to anticipated questions. This does not mean that you try to memorize answers – whether someone else's or your own – but rather, after thinking through the basic strategy to your response, you try to actually verbalize an answer. Most people find it useful to go through this process several times prior to an interview.

13. Practice questions with a friend or tape recorder.

Preparing for the interview in isolation of feedback information for evaluating your potential performance is likely to produce less than satisfactory results. Try to enlist a friend to help you prepare for the interview. You may want to role play – your friend becomes the interviewer and you the interviewee. Run through a practice interview session where you must do everything from greet the interviewer to answer specific questions and close the interview. Tape record your answers to questions and analyze them to see if you indeed stress your strengths and benefits to the interviewer. Do you provide examples and supports? Are your answers always positive in content? Are your responses employer-centered? Keep practicing until you're comfortable in answering/asking questions.

14. Prepare for different interview types and settings.

As outlined in Chapter 2, you should be prepared for two types of interviews: informational/networking and employment. These may occur over the telephone or in face-to-face meetings such as the

employer's office, a restaurant, or in a social setting. If, for example, you are interviewed in a restaurant, be sure you observe proper eating etiquette as well as avoid ordering foods that can be difficult to eat, such as spaghetti or crabs. Your eating behavior will be observed. How and what you eat may be as important to the interview as how you answer the questions. And don't answer questions with a mouth full of food!

15. Expect several interviews with the same employer.

Many interviewees are surprised to learn they are subjected to more than one interview with the same employer. They normally experience two interviews: screening and hiring/placement. The screening interview may take place over the telephone. You must be prepared for that unexpected telephone call in which the employer probes about your continuing interest in the position, your availability, and your job-related expectations, including, perhaps, salary requirements. The hiring/placement interview is normally conducted in the interviewer's office. But it may involve a one-to-one interview or sequential, series, panel, or group interviews. This process could take place over a one- or two-week period in which you are called back to meet with other individuals in one-to-one, series, panel, or group interview situations. Each interview may probe a different level of your interests, abilities, knowledge, and skills.

16. Be prepared for different questioning techniques.

While you may be prepared to answer direct questions with direct answers, some interviewers also include indirect and stress questioning techniques. For example, rather than ask *"Do you have difficulty working with your employers,"* they may ask *"Why did you leave your last three jobs?"* or *"How did you get along with your last three employers?"* Rather than ask you directly about your social status and financial situation, they may ask *"Where do you prefer living in the community?"* If a job involves a great deal of stress, the interviewer may ask you questions that put you under stress during the interview just to see how you handle such situations. For example, you may unexpectedly be asked *"If we hire you and three months later decide you're not the person we want, what are we going to do?"* or *"We normally don't hire*

someone without a college degree. Do you plan to complete college?" You may very well be thrown questions that are designed to challenge what may be perceived to be your well-rehearsed interview script. Remember, interviewers will be looking for indications of your weaknesses by asking questions that elicit such indicators.

17. Know how you communicate verbally to others.

Strong verbal communication skills are highly valued by most employers. They are signs of educated and competent individuals. Do you, for example, speak in complete and intelligible sentences? How's your diction? Do you say "~~going~~" rather than "goin," "going to" rather than "gonna," "didn't" rather than "din't," "yes" rather than "yea"? Do you have a tendency to use vocalized phases ("ahs" and "uhms") and fillers ("you know," "like," "okay")? How's your grammar? Do you use the active rather than passive voice? Do you avoid using tentative, indecisive terms, such as "I think," "I guess," "I feel"? Do you avoid ambiguous and negative terms such as "pretty good" or "fairly well" which say little if anything? They may even communicate negatives – that what you did was not good!

18. Know how you communicate nonverbally to others.

How do you dress, groom, greet, shake hands, use eye contact, sit, maintain posture, use your hands, move your head, maintain facial expressions, listen positively, eat, drink, or enter and leave a room? These are nonverbal behaviors that may communicate more about your competence and personality than what you say in the interview. You may want to videotape yourself in a mock interview to see how well you communicate both verbally and nonverbally.

19. Dress for success.

Before you ever open your mouth to speak, your appearance has already made an impression. Since you never get a second chance to make a first impression, make it a good one. Make the first few seconds of the interview work for you by nonverbally communicating your class, professionalism, and competence.

20. Prepare your telephone area.

Once you have made known your job search intentions – whether by sending out resumes, *networking*, or conducting informational interviews – you may receive a telephone call from an employer quite unexpectedly. It may be a call to schedule an interview, but most likely it will incorporate a "screening interview."

Be prepared by keeping essential items related to this potential telephone interview in an area by the phone. Minimum supplies should include a pad of paper, pen, copy of your resume, and note cards or equivalent on which you have information on all the companies which you have contacted as part of your job search.

Principles for the Interview Encounter

Many of the principles identified for interview preparation are also principles applied to the interview encounter. Others, however, specifically relate to the interview process. The following 22 principles will help you get through the job interview.

21. Arrive on time.

There's nothing worse than to arrive late for a job interview. Since the first five minutes of the interview are the most important, arrive five minutes late and you effectively lull much of the interview – and your chances of getting the job. Your tardiness will be remembered and in a negative light. Always try to arrive at least ten minutes early. If need be, drive to the interview site the day before to estimate how long it will take you to get there as well as find parking. Allow plenty of time, anticipating that you could well lose a half hour or more to bad traffic.

22. Treat everyone you meet as potentially important to the interview.

When you initially arrive at the interview site, chances are you will enter a reception area, meet a receptionist or secretary, and be asked to sit in this waiting area. Other employees also may enter this area while you are waiting. Make sure you are courteous to the

receptionist or secretary and anyone else you meet. Also, you should appear competent in how you greet these people, sit, and what you read. For example, you should greet the receptionist or secretary by introducing yourself: *"Good morning. I'm Jane Morris. I ~~have~~ a 9 o'clock appointment with Mr. Jameson."* Wait to be invited to sit in a specific place. If you are wearing an overcoat, take it off before sitting. Interviewers sometimes ask these employees for their reaction to candidates: *"What did you think about the candidate? Did you have a chance to talk to her? What did she do while she was waiting to meet me? Do you think you'll like her?"* Employees' opinions of such people can be very important to the interview process. So make sure you treat **everyone** you meet as **important** to the interview.

23. When waiting for the interviewer, do something that looks relevant to the interview and job.

While waiting to meet the interviewer, do something that looks relevant to the organization and interview. For example, you might engage the receptionist or secretary in small talk concerning the organization, employees, and the interviewer. Try to learn something relevant to the interview. You might ask some of these questions: *"How many employees work here? How long have you been with the organization? Has Mr. Jameson been with this company long? What did he do before moving to this position? How do most people like working here? What computer system do you use?"* Don't overdo it by becoming an interrogator or appearing self-centered by asking questions about parking privileges, vacation time, benefits, or office space. Your small talk should emphasize your interest in the organization as well as generate information about the organization and interviewer relevant to the interview. You might learn something important that will help initiate small talk with the interviewer or raise a question you feel needs to be answered. You might want to raise certain questions with the interviewer if you were told in the lobby that there's a lot of stress in the organization, many employees have left during the past six months, or not many people stay around here more than two years. That's important inside information indicative of possible internal political and management problems you may want to question. It's best to learn this now rather than become a victim of company stress or Byzantine politics.

24. Greet the interviewer properly.

Chances are the interviewer will come out to the reception area to greet you. Stand up straight, shake hands firmly, maintain eye contact, listen carefully, look energetic, speak in the positive, and introduce yourself: *"Hello, I'm Jane Morris. It's a pleasure to meet you."* Watch the small talk carefully. This is not a time to tell dumb jokes, look tired, or appear nervous. If you are asked if you had any trouble finding the place or parking, appear competent and positive by indicating you handled this part of the interview with ease.

25. Communicate positive behaviors during the first five minutes.

The first five minutes of the interview, which may not even address job-related questions, are the most important to the interview. It's during this time that critical first impressions are made and interviewers decide whether or not they like you. And being likable is one of the most important criteria for being selected for a job. If you make an excellent first impression – from shaking hands and dressing right to handling the initial small talk – the rest of the interview may go extremely well as the interviewer helps you through the interview. He or she may have decided during the third minute that you should be hired. The questions and answers may merely reinforce these initial impressions. Make sure your perfume or cologne is applied in moderate amounts and jewelry has been minimized. You don't want to be remembered for your strong scent or the noise your clanging jewelry generated! Indeed, many interviewers smell their interviewee as they pass in front of them when entering the interviewer's room.

*The most important
impressions are
made during the
first five minutes.*

26. Wait to be invited to sit in a particular seat.

The particular seating arrangement for the interview may be important to the interviewer. You may, for example, be asked to sit

on the other side of a desk or table. Alternatively, you may be invited to sit on a sofa. Whatever the case, don't look like you are in a hurry by taking a seat before you are invited to sit. Chances are you will be seated within six feet of the interviewer—a comfortable conversational distance for maintaining good eye contact.

27. Keep your hands, arms, and elbows to yourself.

If you are sitting at a desk, keep your hands, arms, and elbows off the desk and away from any distracting items such as pencils or pens. Try to look alert, energetic, and focused on the interviewer rather than fidget with items that indicate your nervousness or irritating habits. If you don't know what to do with your hands, try folding or steeping them.

28. Sit erect and lean slightly forward.

Avoid leaning back in your chair or on the sofa looking extremely comfortable and relaxed. Such posture may communicate that you are more interested in talking about yourself than in listening to and learning from the interviewer. The best sitting posture is to sit erect and lean slightly forward toward the interviewer folding or steeping your hands. This is good listening posture. Nonverbally it communicates that you are interested in the individual. You will look more alert and energetic in this posture than in other postures.

29. Keep your feet on the floor.

If you are sitting on a sofa where your full body is in view, avoid crossing your legs and showing the soles of your shoes. Keep both feet on the floor. Crossed legs still indicate a degree of informality and familiarity that is unwarranted at this point in your relationship with the interviewer.

30. Let the interviewer initiate the openers but take initiative in offering some of your own openers.

It is the responsibility of the interviewer to initiate openers. During the first two or three minutes the interviewer will probably talk

about your trip to the office, the weather, your impressions of the facilities, or some other small-talk topics. Respond to these questions with more than just “yes” or “no” answers and observations. You need to take some initiative here to express your personality. Initiate your own positive small talk by making an interesting observation about the office, such as the art work or decorating, or the personnel you met in the reception area. You might, for example, discover from seeing a framed degree hanging on the wall that the interviewer is a graduate of your alma mater. He or she may be a collector of unusual items that are displayed in the office. Or he or she may have an interesting photo displayed of family, friends, colleagues, a ceremony, or someone famous. Show some personal interest in the individual by focusing on one or two items for small talk. This small talk period may result in building an important **personal bridge** between you and the interviewer that will make this professional encounter a much easier and more enjoyable one. Remember, the most important impressions are made during the first five minutes. You want to appear energetic, positive, and interesting during these initial moments of the interview. In the end, how you handle yourself in the small-talk may be more important to getting the job than how you handle yourself with the standard interview questions.

Small talk means developing a conversational line that has a purpose and establishes an agenda.

31. Be prepared to respond to initial small talk in an interesting and positive manner.

Small talk does count! It indicates something about your social capabilities which may be just as important to the job as your work-content skills. Small talk does not mean telling jokes. It means developing a conversational line that has a purpose and establishes an agenda. If you need assistance developing your small-talk skills, we recommend two excellent books on this subject: Anne Baber and Lynne Waymon, *Great Connections: Small Talk and Networking for Businesspeople*, and Susan RoAne, *How to Work a Room*. Both

books are available directly from Impact Publications by completing the order form at the end of this book.

32. Answer questions with complete sentences and with substance.

Avoid simple "yes" or "no" answers. Remember, the interviewer is looking for **indicators of substance and benefits**. Brief answers give little information about you. They may indicate a lack of interest or substance on your part. The interviewer should leave this interview saying "I feel good about this person. He gave good answers to my questions." If you don't answer the questions completely, how can this person feel good about you?

33. Reduce your nervousness by practicing a few stress reduction techniques.

You can better control your nervousness by following the same advice often given to public speakers. As you walk into the interview room, try to take slow deep breaths. You can do this subtly so the interviewer will be unaware of it. And although this

*If you are nervous,
you are probably
focusing too much
attention on
yourself.*

is easier said than done, the more you can get your mind off yourself and concentrate on the other person, the more comfortable you will feel. If you are nervous, you are probably focusing too much attention on yourself. You are self-consciously concerned with how you are doing and what impression you are making on others. Try to be more other-directed. Rather than concentrate on your needs and fears, concern yourself with the employer's needs and questions. Preparation is probably the greatest aid in lessening nervousness. If you followed Principles 1-20 and arrived on time (Principle 21), you should walk into the interview feeling well prepared and confident. If you arrive early for the interview, you will have a chance to collect your thoughts, take those deep breaths, and focus your attention toward the employer.

34. Focus on the interviewer's needs.

Assume that most interviewers need to select someone who will fit into their organization well in terms of both productivity and personality. You must confirm during the interview that you are both a productive and personable individual. You do this by stressing your benefits for the employer and handling well the questions and small talk so that in the end you will be evaluated in the most positive manner possible.

35. Focus on exchanging useful information about each other rather than just on getting the job.

Keep in mind your objectives and goals. Remember, both you and the interviewer need to acquire information that will best assist each of you in arriving at a proper decision. If you focus all your answers and questions on making a "good impression" so you can get the job, you will probably be very nervous and make mistakes along the way. Take it easy and focus on what you should really be doing – giving and gathering information that can be used for making a decision. In your case, you need information on the job, employer, and organization. Is this really the place you want to work? Will it be right for you? The employer also has similar questions about you.

36. Emphasize the positive.

You want both the content of your responses and the manner in which you phrase your answers to be positive. As you talk about your previous employer(s), try to cast them in as positive a view as possible. After all, if you talk negatively about a former employer, the prospective employer will assume that someday you'll talk that way about him. If you bad-mouth your former company, the employer will expect that one day you'll do the same to his. If you have only negative remarks about your co-workers, he must question your ability to get along in his organization as well. In other words, you have little to gain – and much to lose – during the

stupid – as you phrase your responses. Avoid negative words like “can’t,” “didn’t,” “wouldn’t,” and phrase your answers with positive words instead. Rather than say, “*I wouldn’t want to travel more than 4-5 days per month,*” you could respond with a more positive, “*I would prefer to keep my travel to 4-5 days per month.*” Practice being more positive in your day-to-day communication and you will find it will come to you more easily in an interview.

37. Turn potential negatives into positives.

While interviewers also want to know what's wrong about you – your negatives – you want to continuously stress your positives – what's right about you. You can do this by maintaining a positive orientation toward all questions.

Most applicants, for example, have some qualification or lack of a qualification that they, as well as potential employers, may consider to be a negative which is likely to knock them out of consideration for the position. Perhaps you are just out of school and hence don't have experience. Maybe you are over 50 and, although you know it is illegal for an employer to discriminate against you on the basis of your age, you believe this will be a hindrance to your getting a job. Perhaps you have not stayed in your past jobs for very long and your resume shows a pattern of job-hopping. Maybe your grades in school were average at best.

Whatever the negatives you believe will hinder your efforts at landing a job, you should attempt to find a way to turn the negative into an honest positive. Caryl recalls an older woman – well into her sixties – who came into her office where she was the personnel director several years ago. The woman evidently thought her age would be a negative, so she came prepared with several advantages to hiring someone her age. Her first advantage was that she “*would not get pregnant!*”

38. Engage in positive nonverbal cues.

Studies of the employment process indicate that 65-70% of a hiring decision may be based on nonverbal communication. Nonverbal messages – your appearance and dress – are the first to be communicated to an interviewer. The enthusiasm in your voice and anima-

tion in your face indicate your interest in the job as well as suggest an energy level conducive to getting things done. Your eye contact with the interviewer helps establish rapport and maintain interest. Because nonverbal messages are much harder to control, people tend to believe nonverbal messages over verbal ones. So make your nonverbal communication work for you. Pay particular attention to your dress, accessories, make-up, scent, handshake, facial expressions, eye contact, sitting, and listening behaviors.

39. Be sure to ask questions.

Be prepared to ask several questions relevant to the job, employer, and organization. These questions should be designed to elicit information to help you make a decision as well as demonstrate your interest, intelligence, and enthusiasm for the job. You may want to write out several of these questions on a 3x5 card to help you remember the questions you want to ask. It's okay to refer to the card during the interview. Just mention to the interviewer that *"I have a few questions I wanted to ask you. I made some notes so I would be sure to ask them."* Then take out your notes and ask the questions. This indicates to the interviewer that you are prepared and have specific concerns he or she must also address. We outline several of these questions in Chapter 8. However, avoid asking questions about salary and benefits. These questions are too self-centered at this point. They are best left to the very end – once you receive a job offer and begin negotiating your terms of employment.

40. Delay salary considerations as long as possible.

Usually salary is brought up by the interviewer near the end of the first interview, during a second or third interview, or after a job offer has been made. However, some interviewers will bring it up earlier. It is almost always to your advantage to delay discussion of salary as long as possible. In the meantime, you need to do two things:

Determine the **worth** of the position.

Demonstrate your **value** to the employer.

You can only do these two things **after** you have had a chance to interview for the position – not at the beginning or in the middle of the interview. You need to have the opportunity to determine what the job is worth based on the duties and responsibilities of the position – something you can best evaluate after you have a chance to ask questions about the position. You also want the opportunity to promote your value to the employer which you have a chance to demonstrate and support during the give and take of the interview.

Interviewers who bring up salary early – during a telephone screening interview or early in the initial interview – are usually trying to screen people out of consideration based on salary expectations that are either too high or even too low! Attempt to stall by indicating that salary is "open" or that you need to know more about the position before you can discuss salary.

41. Delay accepting an offer until you can consider it.

Once you are offered the job, your immediate response may be to accept it right there on the spot. In most cases you are better off to request at least a day or two to consider the offer. This gives you a chance to weigh whether you really want this job; check your status at any other organizations where you have applied for a position; and perhaps to even negotiate a better employment package either with this employer or at one of the other firms, which may decide that if they want you they will have to act now.

It is reasonable to ask for 24-48 hours to consider the offer as well as discuss it with other family members. If a geographical move is involved, a longer period of time is not unreasonable.

42. Close by asking when to follow up.

At the end of the interview make sure you know what the next step is – further interviews or an employment decision – and when the employer expects to make a decision. Once she indicates a hiring decision date, ask if you may call a day or two after that date if you have not yet heard. If she says they expect to make a decision by the 10th, ask, *"If I haven't heard anything by the 12th, ~~may~~ I call you to check my status?"* In most cases you will be given an okay to call.

Now you know the date by which you should start calling, and it will be easier for you to place the call since you have provided the entre.

After the Interview – Follow-up

The interview is not over when you shake hands and leave the interview site. It's over when you get and accept the job offer or another applicant is hired. Therefore, plan to do additional things during the post-interview period to enhance your candidacy.

43. Record information about the interview for your future reference.

Often you will have more than one interview – probably a series – with a company. Make notes while the interview is fresh in your mind, within 24 hours after you leave the interview. Include the name and position of the interviewer(s), information about the job (duties, salary) – anything pertinent to the position, your qualifications for the position which you stressed in the interview, and any other information you may need later.

You will have a summary of the interview which you can review prior to a future interview with the firm – whether a follow-up interview for this same position or another opening at a later time.

44. Send a thank-you letter.

As soon as possible after the interview – later the same day or the next day at the latest – send a thank-you letter. In this letter express your appreciation for the time the interviewer(s) spent with you, indicate your continued interest in the position (if this is the case), and restate any special skills or experience you would bring to the job (keep this brief and well focused).

This is a business letter and the stationery, format, and method of writing should reflect your professionalism.

45. Follow through with a telephone call when the decision date has passed.

Remember at the end of the interview you asked when a decision would be made, and asked whether you could call if you hadn't heard within a couple of days of that date? Don't just ask the question and leave it at that – you must follow through. If the decision date has passed you must make the follow-up call.

If no decision has yet been made, your call will remind them of your continued interest. You also should impress the employer as someone who does follow through, and he could expect this same commitment from you as an employee. If the employer has made a decision and was about to call and offer you the position, that's great! If someone else has been offered the job you may be disappointed, but it is just as well to find out now and concentrate your job search efforts elsewhere than to waste your time waiting to hear about this job.

If you put all of these interview principles into practice, you will be in an excellent position to get the job. You will approach the interview with confidence, energy, and enthusiasm. You will impress the interviewer as someone she would like to have working in the organization.

Let us now turn our attention to applying these principles to each step in the interview process, from preparation to follow-up. The following chapters elaborate on many of these previous principles. They address questions you are likely to encounter.

5

Get Prepared

ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO LOWER YOUR STRESS level and avoid those sweaty palms and wobbly knees as you face a job interview is to prepare well. Knowing you are well prepared, your self confidence will soar. You'll be better able to concentrate on communicating your strengths to the employer rather than merely trying to impress the interviewer with the "right" answers to questions. You will feel better about yourself, and you will do better in the interview. Thorough preparation takes time and involves some practice, but it is a critical step to a dynamite interview.

There is no substitute for solid preparation. Don't risk interview failure by attempting to take shortcuts and assuming that because you are glib you will wing-it when you get to the interview. You may be able to fill silent spaces with talk, but your responses will most likely lack coherency and focus. Overall, without preparation, most people engage in what could best be termed "a stream of consciousness" and appear disorganized and inept.

Prepare for the Interview

The principles for interview preparation in Chapter 4 provide guidance for much of what you need to do as you gear up for job interviews. To get a better understanding of what's involved here, let's begin by dividing interview preparation principles into five categories:

Assess your strengths and relate them to employers' needs.

Conduct research on the field of work you hope to enter as well as conduct research on organizations in your targeted community that hire for these types of positions.

Prepare for the verbal interchange.

- Prepare your nonverbal strategies.

Deal with logistics.

Preparation takes time, but since your livelihood as well as your work satisfaction and enjoyment of the work you do are on the line, it is time well spent.

Assess Strengths and Relate to Employers' Needs

If you have not already done so, you should assess your work-related strengths and consider ways to relate these to the employer's needs.

*Employers are
interested in hiring
your strengths.*

Principles 1-5 in the previous chapter deal with this process. Before you talk to an employer – in fact, before you even write your resume – you should have a clear understanding of what you do well and enjoy doing. What are your

major skills? How have you demonstrated them in your past work? Can you elaborate your seven major achievements and relate them to the needs of the employer? What are your major weaknesses? Remember, employers are interested in hiring your strengths – those things you do well and enjoy doing. They will be looking for indicators of your

weaknesses in the way you answer questions. Some may even ask, "*What are some of your weaknesses?*" From the very beginning of your job search, you should have identified your strengths and communicated them clearly to employers in your resumes, letters, and networking activities. The job interview enables you to further communicate your strengths to the employer. But you will only be able to do so if you first conduct a thorough assessment of what you do well and enjoy doing. Don't begin looking for a job until you first complete this self assessment. For more information on self assessment, see another of our books, *Discover the Best Jobs for You*.

Research Your Field of Work and Related Organizations

You need to gather as much information as possible about your industry in general and your field of work in particular. You should also find out as much as you can about the organizations in your targeted community – this may be where you live or where you would like to live – that hire for the kinds of positions in which you are interested. Principles 6-8 in Chapter 4 discuss this process.

If you want to work for a large corporation you will be able to obtain some information from **written sources** – business directories available in the reference section of your local library as well as public relations brochures you can obtain from the company. If you are interested in working for a small local firm there will be less available in printed publications, but this does not preclude you from doing research. Check the Internet. Most firms, regardless of size, have websites that offer a great deal of information about their organizations.

Whether you are researching a small local firm or a huge multinational corporation, information gathered by **talking with people** who are familiar with the company will likely yield the most useful information. Do you know someone who works for the company or who has worked for the company recently? These are important people to talk with. If you don't know anyone who is or has been an employee, ask your friends if any of them do. Put the word out that you are interested in finding out more about the company. Chances are someone you know will know of someone who can answer many of your questions. These personal contacts will provide insights not normally available in company publica-

tions or in business directories.

Finally, don't overlook the opportunity to conduct **informational interviews**. An informational interview is one that you initiate with someone within an organization for the purpose of gathering information about a specific field or a type of job. Your goal is to get information that will be helpful to you in further clarifying your job goals, determining any additional training you may need to qualify, identifying organizations that provide employment opportunities in this particular arena, assessing whether the type of work is something you will be interested in doing on a daily basis, determining whether it is a growth field that will continue to provide employment opportunities as well as career advancement, and gathering salary information for various levels within the field.

The information gleaned from this type of interview can help you make career choices, make contacts within the field that may be useful to you later, and provide information on industry salary ranges that should be useful in employment interviews when the salary question is discussed.

Remember, though, that at no time during an informational interview should you ask for a job. This is an infringement on the good graces of the employer who agreed to take time out of a busy schedule to help you. To ask about a job in this situation will get you remembered, but not in the positive way you would like. For more information on conducting informational interviews, see two of our other books, *The Savvy Networker* and *Interview for Success*.

Once you have a job interview scheduled, use your contacts – friends who are familiar with the company or persons with whom you conducted informational interviews, if appropriate – to fill in any gaps in your information as well as to try to get information about the person(s) who will be conducting your interview.

Prepare for the Verbal Interchange

To prepare for the verbal interchange, consider principles 9-17 in the previous chapter. You need to talk the employer's language. Though you are advised to keep jargon to a minimum if your interview is being conducted by someone from personnel, use of limited jargon of the industry can be a plus if you are interviewed by the head of the operating unit. You don't want to overdo it, but some familiarity with the jargon appropriate to the position and industry identifies you as an insider.

Speaking the employer's language includes acknowledging a commitment to common goals, which may include producing a high-quality product, maintaining an efficiently run department, achieving cost-cutting targets, increasing sales, or improving profits. Your knowledge of the industry, the company, and even the interviewer – which you have already researched – should help you identify the goals appropriate to this employer's situation.

You need to anticipate and prepare for the kinds of questions you are most likely to be asked. You do not need to be a mindreader or have powers of clairvoyance to do this. Just as the president of the United States can anticipate the likely areas of questioning he will encounter at a press conference and prepare accordingly, you, too, can identify the kinds of questions you are most likely to be asked.

The most common areas of questioning for job interviews tend to deal with your education, work experience, interpersonal skills – ability to work with others, follow directions given by others, as well as take a leadership role when the situation warrants. Personality considerations, including questions dealing with how well you work under pressure, whether you take initiative, or assume responsibility, are important for many positions. Your answers to questions relating to your career goals – whether you will be happy in a position that may not allow for rapid advancement, your level of dedication to your work (will you put in long hours when necessary?), and how loyal you will be to your employer – are of concern to many employers. You can expect questions – direct or indirect – to be posed in an attempt to assess how you would fit into the job as well as the organization.

Some organizations prize individualism and a sense of entrepreneurship in their employees. They want individuals who are willing to take initiative and a certain amount of calculated risk. However, in other organizations such personal characteristics would likely lead to dismissal. Both you and the employer should be attempting to assess the fit between your goals and skills and the organization's goals and needs. If the fit is there, fine. You need to focus on the areas of fit. However, if it doesn't seem to be a good match, it may be to both your and the employer's benefit to find that out now. It will save you both a lot of headaches and probably expense later.

If there is anything that stands out on your resume or application – anything that sets you apart, whether potentially a positive or negative –

you can expect you will be asked about that. Again, you anticipate the line of questioning and think through possible responses. You want to consider how this is likely to be viewed by the employer and then what your strongest response – honest, but not stupid – would be.

Most people find it useful to practice an interview. This can be done with a spouse or friend, but if you know someone who conducts hiring interviews as part of their job, you may want to ask them to help you through a practice session. By tallung through your responses to at least some of the questions you expect to be asked, you both get a sense of the areas of questioning where you need to reconsider your strategy as well as gain confidence in the areas where you feel good about your answers. The more times you can engage in practice sessions – ideally with different people conducting the interview – the more confident you are likely to feel.

You also might want to tape record your answers to possible questions. Listen carefully to how you answer each question. Do your answers

You do not want to give memorized or "canned" responses to questions.

conform to our principles of verbal communication in Chapter 4, especially using good grammar and avoiding vocalized pauses and fillers? Do you sound confident and enthusiastic? If you use a tape recorder, you will get direct feedback on your verbal performance. You will be able to compare your responses for evidence of improvement.

As you practice, however, keep in mind that you do not want to give memorized or "canned" responses to questions. You are developing strategies for formulating types of responses for communicating certain ideas. You should not be concerned with replicating the actual words you use to communicate these ideas since the words you use will be somewhat different each time you respond. You want to become comfortable with the thrust of the message you want to convey, but do not try to say it the same way each time. The response itself must remain spontaneous. If you give what sound like prepared, memorized answers, you will not make a positive impression on the interviewer.

Though your preparatory research has answered many questions you may have initially had about jobs in your field as well as the hiring organizations, you will no doubt have more specific questions as you get

ready for the job interview. Prepare a list of questions you want to ask the interviewer. Write them out neatly and carry this list with you to the interview. No doubt many of the questions will be answered in the course of the interview, but you may forget some of them under the stress of the moment. When you feel you are nearing the close of the interview, or if the interviewer asks whether you have any other questions, take out your list and quickly scan it to see what areas, if any, have not yet been covered. If all have been covered, that's fine; you can indicate this to the employer. If there are some you still need to ask, this is your opportunity. Either way, you appear prepared and it is obvious you have given some thought to information you need from the employer. The interviewer should view this type of preparation in a positive light.

You should be prepared for encountering different types of interviews, settings, and questioning techniques from your reading of our second chapter.

Nonverbal Elements of Success

So much is written about the verbal interchange that applicants sometimes forget that their nonverbal behavior may communicate at least as much to an employer as what they say. Principles 18-19 in the previous chapter deal with nonverbal communication. Some studies indicate that approximately two-thirds of a message is communicated nonverbally, so it is an important aspect of any interview.

Planning how you will dress for your interview is an important aspect of interview preparation – one that can further or sabotage your interview goals. Chapter 6 will deal with proper attire to promote your interview goals along with other ways to promote yourself nonverbally.

Deal With Logistics

There are many details that can make or break how well you present yourself to employers. The final preparation principle in Chapter 4 dealt with preparing your telephone area so that you would be ready to handle an unexpected screening interview. Having the essentials ready by your phone so you can respond to questions or schedule an interview will help you create a positive impression.

Once you have an interview scheduled, make certain you know where

it is to be held, how to get there, and how long it will take to get there at the time of day you will be going. You may even wish to make a "practice run" in order to assure yourself that there will no surprises the day of the interview.

Try to get a good night's sleep the night before your interview. Do your preparing ahead of time and get to bed at a decent hour so you will be rested and can think clearly. Eat lightly – whether it be breakfast or lunch – prior to your interview. You probably won't be very hungry anyway. By eating lightly, your energy can be focused on the interview rather than used in the process of digesting food.

Avoid alcohol. It won't calm your nerves, and it won't help you answer questions better – you'll just think you have!

6

Answer Questions

MOST OF YOUR ATTENTION WILL BE FOCUSED ON answering specific questions raised by the interviewer. In preparation for these questions, you need to know what questions are most likely to be asked and how you should best formulate answers for greatest impact. Keep in mind that the interviewer is looking for indicators of your expertise, competence, motivation, interpersonal skills, decision-making skills, interest in the job, personality, and likability. You will express many of these qualities when you answer questions posed by the interviewer. He will look for verbal clues of both your strengths and your weaknesses. How you answer the questions will largely determine whether or not you will be invited back for another interview and eventually offered a job.

Interview Phases

Your verbal encounter with the interviewer will most likely pass through several distinct interview phases. Most interviewers will more or less sequence the interview into the following seven phases:

1. Greeting and small talk
2. Establishing common ground/icebreakers
3. Indicating purpose of interview
4. Drawing out information through the exchange of questions and answers:
 - General and specific questions
 - Brief and drawn-out answers
 - Conversations to clarify questions, explain answers, and reach mutual understanding
5. Summarizing information and understanding
6. Indicating next steps to be taken
7. Closing

The interviewer will be prepared with different types of questions and comments for each interview phase. You should be prepared to respond positively to each of these phases.

Expect the greeting to be short. It will go something like this. The interviewer will extend her hand and say

How do you do Mr. Anthony. I'm Sarah White. Glad you could come in this morning.

The next thing that usually happens – just before the interviewer explains the purpose for the interview – is that you engage in a few minutes of small talk. This brief period gives both of you a chance to feel more at ease with each other. If you know something about the interviewer's interests – either from information gathered in your research or because of something you see in the office – you might use this topic to establish common ground.

Small talk for establishing common ground is important. For example, we know a young woman who applied for a teaching position at a community college. A few weeks earlier, she had read Mager's book on behavioral objectives for instruction. At the beginning of the interview, she noticed a copy of Mager's book lying on the interviewer's desk and commented about it. The interviewer was pleased to learn she was familiar with it. She is convinced to this day that it was a major factor in getting the job offer. It established common ground and set her apart from the many other people applying for the same position.

You might, for example, notice a photo, framed degree, award plaque, or an office decoration that may become the center for small talk. The topic might lead to establishing common ground through an interesting small-talk conversation. You might comment that you noticed the framed degree from XYZ University. Perhaps you know someone who also graduated from there and by chance the interviewer also knows that person. Maybe you know something about the scholastic excellence or outstanding athletic program of the institution. A comment about an award plaque could lead to an interesting conversation about the interviewer's community service work which you also may share. Whatever you do, don't neglect the small talk. It may well become the most important conversation of the interview as you establish common ground that binds you much closer to the interviewer than the 100+ questions he or she has prepared for you to answer.

The interviewer may next talk about the purpose of the interview as he or she attempts to focus the interview session around both the company and the position. At this point the interviewer may be very persuasive, even attempting to "sell" you on the position. Most of the interview time will be spent on the "drawing out information" phase – which is the primary focus of the remainder of this chapter. The remaining phases of the interview relate to questions you will ask (Chapter 8) and the close (Chapter 9). A final type of question, which actually constitutes a separate type of interview, relates to salary negotiations. Questions of salary may be raised near the end of the first employment interview or may be left for a later interview. Salary negotiations are examined in two of our other books – *Interview for Success* and *Dynamite Salary Negotiations*.

Interviewer's Concerns and Techniques

Always keep in mind what interviewers are trying to achieve through the verbal interchange. They know hiring is a risky and expensive business. They never know what they are really getting until the individual starts performing in their organization.

The employer wants someone who can do the job well – someone worth the salary and benefits. The employer also wants someone who will be a good representative to others outside the organization. The person should be able to get along well with supervisors and co-workers inside

the organization. Translating these concerns into questions, most interviewers want to know:

- Why should I hire you?
- What kind of person are you?
- What kind of employee will you make in our organization – willingness to take responsibility as well as directions, be productive, loyal, creative, entrepreneurial, enthusiastic?
- Do you have a demonstrated and sustained interest in this work?
- Do your credentials demonstrate that you are a purposeful individual who gets things done?
- Do you have a clear pattern of accomplishments?
- How much will you cost us?
- What haven't you told us about yourself?
- What are your weaknesses?
- Will you be able to work with your supervisors and other employees in this organization?
- How long will you stay with us before you start looking for another job?

While most interviewers will not bluntly ask you these questions, they will seek answers by asking other questions which may give them clues to your behavior.

Above all, they have invited you to the interview because they need information that goes beyond both your resume and a telephone screening interview. In this face-to-face conversational situation, interviewers will be looking for indicators of your

- expertise and competence
- motivation
- interpersonal skills
- decision-making skills
- interest in the job
- personality and likability

What you say will give the interviewer information in determining if you are the appropriate person for the position. Therefore, make sure all your

answers are oriented toward these indicators. They must be formulated in such a way that they communicate both positive form and content.

While some interviewers may purposefully put you under a great deal of stress, most trained and experienced interviewers will conduct the interview in a professional manner. These interviewers usually follow six rules when conducting interviews:

1. The interviewer will be sensitive to the candidate, respect his or her intelligence, and not act superior.
2. The interviewer will try to put the candidate at ease rather than create stress.
3. Following the initial "icebreakers," the interviewer will state the objective of the interview.
4. The interviewer will try to get the candidate to talk as much as possible without drilling him or her with questions.
5. The interviewer will seek valid information and not interject personal opinions into the interview. He or she will be professional at all times.
6. The interviewer will know when and how to close the interview. This includes clearly summarizing the candidate's interview statements so there will be no misunderstandings about what was communicated.

You can expect to encounter several types of questions which constitute different interviewing techniques:

- direct and indirect
- general and specific
- structured and unstructured
- open-ended and close-ended
- behavioral
- stressful
- hypothetical

interpretive
loaded
multiple choice

While you can expect to encounter someone who has previous interviewing experience and thus conducts the interview in a professional and competent manner, you may also encounter someone with little experience and who asks irrelevant, illegal, or stressful questions. In this case, you need to be tactful in how you respond to the interviewer's questions. You may need to take some initiative to keep the interview on track so you can best emphasize your strengths. If an interviewer's question seems too broad or vague, try to refocus the question by asking a clarifying question:

By _____, do you mean _____?

This question should transform a vague question into something that is more manageable for you to answer. It should give better direction to your answer.

Interviewee's Ways of Answering Questions

Every time you answer a question, you should analyze your listener, use supports, and communicate positive form and content. The concepts of **positive form** and **positive content** stress the importance of avoiding negatives by always presenting yourself in as positive a light as possible. Analyzing your audience and using supports stress the importance of using a language appropriate for the situation.

Use Positive Form

Several opportunities arise during the interview for you to enhance your image through the use of positive form. The first use of positive form relates to **names**. Each of us likes to be called by our name. Make sure you get the name of the interviewer, get it right, and use it from time to time as you speak. Use the interviewer's title (Ms., Mrs., Mr., Dr., Professor, etc.) and last name. Never call the interviewer by his or her first name unless specially requested to do so – even if the interviewer uses

your first name. Many interviewers will be offended by such familiarity.

The second use of positive form is inherent in the **way you phrase questions and answers**. For example, rather than ask "*What are the duties of _____ position?*" ask "*What would be my duties?*" This form of questioning subtly plants the positive thought of you in the position. This is not presumptuous because you used the word "*would*," which indicates you are not overly sure of yourself.

A third use of positive form relates to **good grammar**. Proper use of language is not something to be left in the English classroom. Many so-called "educated" people do not use good grammar, and many of these people do not interview successfully. Check your use of grammar. If it is not impeccable, make an effort to improve it before the interview.

Fourth, use **good diction**. One of the most common problems is to shorten words. How many people do you hear say "*goin*" instead of "*going*," or "*gonna*" rather than "*going to*"? Another problem is substituting, eliminating, or adding on consonants "*Adlanta*" rather than "*Atlanta*," "*din't*" rather than "*didn't*," "*idear*" rather than "*idea*." Do you do this? Do you ever say "*yea*" rather than "*jres*"? The use of sloppy speech is a habit many people – including the well educated – get into. But it is a habit – learned and reinforced behavior – you can change. If you have a tendency to modify words in these manners, it is a habit worth correcting.

Fifth, avoid using **vocalized pauses**. An occasional silence is acceptable and preferable to overuse of "*ah*" and "*uhm*." Try not to fill silences with "*ah*" or "*and ah*." Vocalized pauses distract the listener from your message, and the excessive use can be annoying.

Sixth, avoid the use of **fillers**. Fillers add no information and, if overdone, also distract the listener. The most commonly used fillers are "*you know*," "*like*," and "*okay*." If used frequently, the listener becomes distracted and will find it hard to concentrate on the content of your message. They may also assume you have a speech problem!

Seventh, use **active verbs**. When talking about what you have done or will do, active verbs like "*organized*," "*analyzed*," or "*supervised*" are preferable to the nouns "*organizer*," "*analyst*," or "*supervisor*." Avoid the passive voice. For example, instead of saying "*The entire conference was organized by me*" (passive), say "*I organized the entire conference*" (active).

Eighth, avoid using **tentative, indecisive terms**, such as "*I think*," "*I guess*," or "*I feel*." If you use them excessively, they will negatively affect the impression you are trying to leave with the interviewer. Research