

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

indicates that women use these tentative terms more frequently than men. By using these indecisive terms, you can – male or female – appear indecisive and somewhat muddled. You want to communicate that you are a clear and purposeful individual.

Most people could improve their use of positive form. But it's difficult for someone to follow those suggestions after reading them the night before the interview. One needs to begin making the necessary changes well in advance of the interview. It can be done if one really wants to make the changes, but for most people it takes concerted effort over time.

Analyze Your Listener and Use Supports

Public speakers are always advised to analyze both their audience and their situation before speaking. The same advice should be followed when you interview. **The language you use should vary according to the interviewer.** If the interviewer is from the personnel office with little or no background in your field of expertise, your language should be less technical than it would be if you were talking with someone who shares your technical background. If you are interviewing with someone in your area of expertise, who also has the technical background, you should use a vocabulary relevant to the job in order to build common ground as well as your credibility. But don't overdo the use of jargon.

Analysis of your situation should tell you this is not the time for excessive modesty. Of course, you do not want to become an obnoxious braggart, but you do want to present your strengths – skills and accomplishments – in a positive way. Therefore, don't be reluctant to **talk about yourself and your accomplishments**. Remember, the interviewer wants to know more about you, especially your potential value to him or her. The more positive information you can communicate to the interviewer, the stronger your position will be in the final hiring decision.

When you make statements about your skills or accomplishments, try to back them up with **supports**. Can you give an **example** of how you improved production on your last job? Can you **describe** the sales campaign that won you the Best Copywriter of the Year Award? Can you **compare** the previous bookkeeping system with the one you instituted that saved your last employer so much money? Can you **cite figures** that demonstrate how you increased sales at the last company you worked for?

When you back up your assertions with supports, you gain several

advantages over individuals who do not. Supports help clarify your comments; help substantiate them; help the listener recall them at a later time; and they add interest. Supports include such things as:

- examples
- illustrations
- descriptions
- definitions
- statistics
- comparisons
- testimonials

Use such supports to emphasize your accomplishments. While you may have included a few of these supports in your resume, the interview is the time to expand upon your accomplishments by using many of these supports.

A frequent question asked by prospective interviewees is "*How honest should I be?*" Most individuals have something in their background they believe would work against them in getting the job if the interviewer knew about it. They wonder if they should tell the interviewer before he or she finds out. We advise you to be honest – but not stupid. In other words, if asked a direct question about the thing you hoped to hide, answer honestly, but emphasize positives. Under no circumstances should you volunteer your negatives or weaknesses. The next section will show you some ways to manage questions about your weaknesses.

Use Positive Content

The actual content of your answers should be stated in the positive. One example of this is the type of hobbies you communicate to employers. Many employers prefer "active" hobbies, such as swimming, tennis, golfing, or jogging, to more sedentary activities, such as reading and stamp collecting.

But the most important examples of positive content relate to managing the specific interview questions which are designed to probe your knowledge, abilities, motivations, strengths, and weaknesses. The employer's goal is somewhat negative in the interview; he or she wants to know why not to hire you. The major unstated question is "*What are your*

weaknesses?" Several other questions may be asked to indirectly answer this major one.

You should always phrase your answers to questions in a positive manner. Avoid the use of such commonly used negatives as "can't," "didn't," and "wouldn't." These terms direct listeners into negative avenues of thought. They do not communicate optimism and enthusiasm – two qualities you should demonstrate in the interview. Take, for example, two different answers to the following interview question.

QUESTION: Why did you major in business administration?

ANSWER 1: *That's real funny. I wanted to major in history, but my parents told me if they were footing the bills, I shouldn't be studying useless subjects. I tried political science, biology, and accounting but didn't like any of them. Business administration wasn't that difficult for me. I couldn't think of anything I like more – except perhaps history. And it's not a bad field to be in these days.*

ANSWER 2: *I always enjoyed business and wanted to make it a career. As a youth I had my own paper route, sold books door to door, and was a member of Junior Achievement. In college I was involved in a couple of small businesses. It seems as though I have always been in business. I tend to have a knack for it, and I love it. My major in business administration further strengthened my desire to go into business. It gave me better direction. What I want is to work with a small and growing firm that would use my abilities to plan and implement marketing strategies.*

While the first answer may be the most truthful, it presents a negative and haphazard image of you. The second answer, while also truthful, stresses the positive by communicating strengths, purpose, and enthusiasm.

Let's take as another example an employer who asks the interviewee why he is leaving his present job:

QUESTION: Why do you want to leave your job?

ANSWER 1: *After working there three years, I don't feel I'm going anywhere. Morale isn't very good, and the management doesn't reward us according to our productivity. I really don't like working there anymore.*

ANSWER 2: *After working there three years, I have learned a great deal about managing people and developing new markets. But it is time for me to move on to a larger and more progressive organization where I can use my marketing experience in several different areas. I am ready to take on more responsibilities. This change will be a positive step in my professional growth.*

Again, the first answer communicates too many negatives. The second answer is positive and upbeat in its orientation toward skills, accomplishments, and the future.

Most interview questions can be answered by using positive language that further emphasizes that you are competent, intelligent, friendly, spontaneous, honest, and likable. This language should project your strengths, purpose, and enthusiasm. If you feel you need to practice formulating positive responses to interview questions, examine the sample questions outlined in the remainder of this chapter. Consider alternative positive responses to each question. You also may want your spouse or friend to ask you interview questions. Tape record the interview and review your responses. Are your answers positive in both form and content? Do they communicate your strengths, purpose, and enthusiasm? Do you use specific examples to support the claims of success you make? Keep practicing the interview until you automatically respond with positive yet truthful answers.

How to Overcome Objections and Negatives

Interviewers are likely to have certain objections to hiring you. Some of their objections may be legitimate whereas others are misunderstandings. Objections might relate to any of the illegal questions outlined at the end of this chapter – marital status, sex, or age. But many objections are perfectly legal and are common ways of differentiating one candidate from

another. Among these objections are questions relating to your bona fide qualifications – education, experience, and skills.

If you are weak in any of the qualification areas, you may not be able to overcome the objections unless you acquire the necessary qualifications. But chances are these qualifications have been screened prior to the interview and thus will not be enough to automatically preclude you from consideration. If your education, experience, and skill level pose any objections to the interviewer, stress again your strengths in a positive and enthusiastic manner. Objections to your educational background will be the easiest to deal with if your experience and skills demonstrate your value.

On the other hand, one objection individuals increasingly encounter today from employers is being **over-qualified**. More and more people by choice are moving **down** in their careers rather than up. Given the desire for and ease of higher education, more and more people appear over-educated for many jobs today.

Employers' objections to candidates being over-qualified are a legitimate concern. From the perspective of employers, the over-qualified individual may quickly become a liability. Becoming unhappy with the job, they leave after a short period of time. Other individuals may have an unrealistic ambition of quickly moving up the organizational ladder. In either case, the over-qualified individual may cost an employer more than he or she is worth.

The over-qualified candidate may think he or she is doing the employer a favor – the company is getting more for their money. If this is your perception of your value, you need to change it immediately. Unless you are prepared to take a position which is beneath your qualifications and can clearly communicate your desire to the employer so as to lessen his or her fears, you will most likely not get the job. In the interview you must convince the employer that you understand his apprehension about you, but you are willing, able, and eager to do the job.

While you want to communicate your strengths, employers want to know your weaknesses. There are several ways to handle questions that try to get at your weaknesses. If the interviewer frankly asks you "What are *some of your weaknesses?*," be prepared to give him or her positive responses. You can do this in any of four different ways:

1. Discuss a negative which is not related to the job being considered:

I don't enjoy accounting. I know it's important, but I find it boring. Even at home my wife takes care of our books. Marketing is what I like to do. Other people are much better at bookkeeping than I am. I'm glad this job doesn't involve any accounting!

2. Discuss a negative the interviewer already knows:

I spent a great deal of time working on advanced degrees, as indicated in my resume, and thus I lack extensive work experience. However, I believe my education has prepared me well for this job. My leadership experience in college taught me how to work with people, organize, and solve problems. I write well and quickly. My research experience helped me analyze, synthesize, and develop strategies.

3. Discuss a negative which you managed to improve upon:

I used to get over-committed and miss important deadlines. But then I read a book on time management and learned what I was doing wrong. Within three weeks I reorganized my use of time and found I could meet my deadlines with little difficulty. The quality of my work improved. Now I have time to work out at the gym each day. I'm doing more and feeling better at the same time.

4. Discuss a negative that can also be a positive:

I'm somewhat of a workaholic. I love my work, but I sometimes neglect my family because of it. I've been going into the office seven days a week, and I often put in 12-hour days. I'm now learning to better manage my time and my life.

Take Initiative

Employment recruiters on college campuses indicate that the most appealing candidates are those who take some initiative during the interview. You need to provide complete answers, using many of the

supports we discussed earlier as you communicate your positive qualities to employers. You need to demonstrate depth of knowledge and abilities by going beyond short and superficial answers. You need to ask questions as well as respond to those asked of you. At least 50 percent of the conversation should be carried by you. If the interviewer is doing 70 to 80 percent of the talking, you will sense the interview is probably not going well!

We are not suggesting that you take control of the interview, but you need not play a completely passive role either. Taking initiative is a quality many employers prize in their employees. Indeed, many employers wish they could find more employees who would take initiative.

Even with the best interviewer, you will need to ask questions. Remember, you have a decision to make too. Are you really interested in the job? Does it fit your goals and skills? Will it give you the chance to do something you do well and enjoy doing? Will it give you an opportunity to move in directions you want to move? Use the interview situation to get answers to these and other questions that are critical to your future. In Chapter 8 we address the issue of asking questions of the interviewer. Throughout this chapter and the remainder of the book we identify 101 of the most important questions and answers to interview questions.

Questions and Answers

Expect to be asked numerous questions about your background, personality, experience, knowledge, skills, abilities, accomplishments, and goals. While the exact combination of questions will vary with the interviewer, you can expect several of the following questions to arise in most interviews. The responses and strategies we present here are examples. You must consider your situation and adapt these to reflect your situation. Don't try to memorize answers, but formulate strategies for responding to various scenarios you may encounter.

Personal

Personal questions are often sensitive questions given today's litigious employment environment. This area of questioning sometimes includes illegal questions.

In many cases, the interviewer will ask indirect questions to probe your

personal situation, such as age, marital status, family situation, income stability, or class. For example, instead of asking about your age, he may ask when you graduated from high school or college and then do some quick arithmetic to calculate your age within one or two years of accuracy.

Instead of asking if you are married, divorced, or single, he may ask if your spouse has had a chance to visit the community. If he wants to know if you have children and a stable family situation, he may ask if your family is interested in information on private schools.

Religion can be handled by making reference to holidays: **"Do you have any special religious holidays you need to observe?"**

If he wants to know if you financially stable, he might ask you, **"Do you feel your current salary is sufficient given your lifestyle?"**

The question of class may be handled by asking where you currently live or plan to live in the community as well as if you rent or own a home; homeownership and neighborhood locational patterns are good indicators of income and status levels as well as community stability.

Be prepared to answer these questions with tact. If the question is direct and illegal, try to manage it as best possible (see section on illegal questions). If the question is indirect, also be tactful, knowing full well you are being asked a personal question which could have negative consequences for you. If, for example, you are asked **"Do you rent or own a home?"**, do more than just indicate one or the other. If you say you rent, the interviewer may interpret this as a sign of potential community and financial instability. You might answer by turning this potential negative indicator into a positive:

I've been renting a townhouse during the past three years. That worked well for the first two years. But I've now outgrown it. And I know I'm losing money by not building equity in a home. I plan to either purchase or build a home within the next two years.

This answer indicates you are in transition. You view homeownership as a wise financial investment. Money doesn't appear to be a problem – only timing and the right location. It also suggests a commitment to staying in the same geographic location.

Questions about other personal subjects should be handled in a similar manner. Turn what appears to be a potential negative question into a positive outcome.

Education

If you are a recent graduate with very little long-term work experience, your education will most likely be your major qualification in the eyes of most employers. Interviewers will look at education as an indicator of your potential to learn and grow in their organization. If they refer to your resume, the only information they may have is the educational institutions you attended, graduation dates, majors, and any special recognitions or extracurricular activities, such as a high G.P.A., scholarships, or offices held. They may ask numerous questions relating to your education-related experiences. Expect to encounter these questions:

Why did you attend _____ university?

Why did you major in _____?

What was your minor?

- **What subjects did you enjoy the most?**
- **What subjects did you enjoy the least?**

These questions attempt to probe your **motivation** for making certain educational choices. When you answer these questions, make sure you demonstrate that you made conscious and rational choices, even though your choices may have been haphazard and accidental at the time. For example, when asked why you attended a particular university, formulate your answer in a positive manner:

I decided on Bowers College because of its strong liberal arts tradition and its international program. The college has an excellent reputation for individualized learning and operates a fine semester abroad program which I participated in during the Fall of 1995. It also gave me an opportunity to participate in excellent band and student government programs. After visiting more than 15 different colleges, I decided Bowers College was the best place for me given my particular interests and career goals. In the end, it was the right decision. I really enjoyed my four years there, including a wonderful semester abroad in France. I learned a great deal and made some terrific friendships with both faculty and students.

This answer stresses that fact that you made a conscious choice after considering your options. You had specific goals which were met by

attending this institution. In other words, you demonstrate strong motivation, clear thinking, and a sense of purpose. Moreover, your experience confirmed you made the right choice.

The same principle holds true when asked "**Why did you major in**

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I chose history because I always enjoyed the rigorous tradition of analyzing events, formulating theories, conducting research, and writing reports. While many people may think this is not a useful major, I believe it has prepared me well for the type of work I want to do. History really helped me develop some excellent research and writing skills, especially in using computers. I can quickly analyze most issues or problems and reformulate them into agenda items for directing brainstorming and group problem-solving sessions.

Other questions you may be asked about your education relate to your achievements, grades, and your future. You might be asked

If you had to do it all over again, what would you have changed about your college education?

This question tests your judgment concerning everything from choosing an institution to selecting a major, taking courses, and participating in educational life. It may also probe what you feel you have learned from the college experience. There are many ways to respond to this question – both positive and negative. We suggest that you again focus on the positive. If, for example, your grades were not exceptional and you know the interviewer knows this, you might want to take a potential negative and turn it into a positive:

If I had to do it over again, I would have spent more time developing good study skills during my first two years. Like many other freshmen and sophomores, I quickly got involved in extracurricular activities. I joined everything and my grades suffered accordingly. I really got down to business during my junior year and my grades improved considerably. I just wish I had done that earlier.

This answer demonstrates that you recognize your grades were a negative. It also demonstrates that you learned and improved yourself.

On the other hand, the interviewer may ask you a direct question about your grades if he knows they were not great:

You obviously were not a star performer in college. Why didn't you do better than a GPA of 2.6?

This is not the time to confess your weaknesses, although your G.P.A. indicates you are at best "average." If you say *"I really don't know,"* you indicate you are indeed average. Again, be prepared to answer this in the positive. You might use the same strategy as in the previous question – your first two years were not good, but you learned and improved considerably during your last two years. Alternatively, the following may apply to you:

College was not easy for me. I was the first person in my family to attend college. While I did have a small scholarship to help with tuition expenses, I worked all four years earning 80 percent of my educational expenses while carrying full course loads each semester. I wish I had had more time to devote to my studies but I was working 30-hour weeks at part-time jobs. I know I could have done better, especially during my first two years and, in nonmajor courses. However, I did receive a 3.5 G.P.A. in my major.

Employers will also want to know something about your college experiences outside the classroom. These may tell them something about your personality, leadership abilities, and level of energy. You might encounter some of these questions:

- What types of extracurricular activities did you participate in during college?
—
- I noticed you worked on the student newspaper. Can you tell me about your work? What did you do?
—
- Did you join many groups while attending college?
— Which ones did you enjoy the most? The least?
— What was your role?
—
- What leadership positions did you hold in college?

Did you work while also attending college? Full-time? Part-time?

Keep your answers focused on relating specific experiences to the interviewer's interests – how you will best fit into the job you are interviewing for. Try to tie your extracurricular activities to your leadership abilities, participative behavior, and entrepreneurial skills. For the employer, they may be good predictors of future on-the-job performance. You'll be demonstrating that you learned and accomplished more in college than just subject matter and grades. You have energy beyond the stereotypical sedentary student who always "hit the books."

Finally, the interviewer may want to hear from you what you think is the relationship between your educational experience and the job for which you are interviewing:

How does your degree prepare you for working as a

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Answer this question by stressing how your knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired in college have a direct or indirect bearing on the job. Don't focus on the subjects or courses you took; these are of less interest to employers than what you can do for them in terms of using specific job-related skills that may have been acquired while in school. Employers especially look for individuals with strong communication, analytic skills, and problem-solving abilities and who are flexible, trainable, and enthusiastic. Above all, they like people who demonstrate **energy and drive**. Therefore, try to think of your college experience in terms of these key skills and qualities. Do you, for example, communicate better – both orally and in writing – because of your college experience? Do you demonstrate problem-solving or leadership abilities because of your extracurricular activities in student government, on a sports team, or as a member of a fraternity or sorority? Are you an enthusiastic individual who approaches new tasks with energy and drive? Are you open-minded and willing to learn new things? Do you get along well with others, especially those in superior positions? You answer these questions by stressing those skills that are most likely to **transfer** to the job.

If some time has passed since you graduated and you have had several years of subsequent work experience, the interviewer may ask few questions about your educational background. He will most likely focus

on your work experience, or how your education prepared you for the work you do. Expect to be asked:

- Why did you choose to attend _____ university?
- How did your major relate to your work after graduation?
- I notice you have an MBA. What do you think about working with people who have **MBAs**? Are they really as sharp as we are led to believe?
- I see you majored in history, but you've been selling pharmaceuticals during the past 15 years. Do you feel it was a mistake majoring in history?
- If you had to do it all over again, what would you major in and what degrees would you pursue?
- Are you planning to take any additional graduate work during the next few years?
- Have you ever thought of changing careers by going back to school to get another degree? What would you like to do if you had a chance to take two years off and return to the university as a full-time student?

If you graduated several years ago, the interviewer may want to know about your educational and training progress in recent years. He may be looking for indicators of your willingness to keep current in your field as well as learn new skills. You might, for example, encounter some of these questions about your education and training experiences:

- Have you regularly participated in **company-sponsored** education and training programs? Could you elaborate on which ones you attended, for how long, and what you felt you learned in the process?

- If you had a choice of three one-week training programs to attend, which ones do you feel you would benefit the most from? Why?
- You said you didn't know how to use Word and Excel. Everyone here uses these programs. Do you plan to learn them soon?
- How much time do you spend each month keeping up with new developments in your field?
- Which trade and professional journals do you regularly read and subscribe to?
- How many professional conferences or seminars do you attend each year? Which ones are you planning to attend this year?
- What are your educational goals for the next five years?

You should answer each of these questions in as positive a manner as possible. Employers want to hire individuals who are continuously learning and adapting to changes in their field.

Other questions concerning your education might include:

How did you finance your education?

Why didn't you decide to go to college?

- Why didn't you go on for a graduate degree?

Why did you drop out of college?

Why did you decide to join the military before going to college?

- What didn't you like about school?

What did you normally do during summer breaks?

Who was your favorite teacher? What did she do differently from the others?

Why didn't you participate in more extracurricular activities?

Do you think your grades reflect how well you will do on this job?

Questions may relate to learning beyond formal education. The rapidly changing face of business today forces the successful job seeker to continually upgrade her skills. The interviewer is interested both in *whether* you continue to upgrade your skills as well as in *what* skills you are learning or improving.

What is the most recent skill you have learned?

If you have learned or upgraded several skills recently, select the one you believe enhances a performance area required for the job you hope to land as a result of this interview. For example,

Although I have given a lot of presentations in ~~my~~ present job, I did ~~not feel~~ as comfortable giving speeches as I wanted to. So two months ago I took a three-day seminar in public speaking. I had a great instructor who not ~~only~~ helped me polish my preparation ~~and~~ presentation skills, but helped ~~me feel~~ more comfortable giving speeches as well. I took her advice to seek out additional opportunities to ~~gain~~ experience and ~~self-confidence~~ by joining a local Toastmasters group. I ~~have~~ given ~~five~~ speeches over the past six weeks and now I look forward to each opportunity to give a talk.

This response demonstrates the interviewee took the initiative to improve a skill, learned from the classroom experience, and went beyond it by seeking additional opportunities to practice his skills.

Experience

Questions relating to your experience will attempt to clarify how qualified you are for the job beyond what appears in your resume. Some questions may be technical in nature – testing your ability to work with special equipment, programs, people, routines – whereas other questions relate to your overall experience. Expect to encounter several of these types of questions:

■ What are your qualifications?

Here you want to stress your skills and accomplishments in reference to the position in question. Give examples and use numbers whenever possible to support your claims. For example,

I have over 10 years of progressively responsible experience with pharmaceutical sales. Each year I have exceeded my performance goals by at least 15 percent and expanded my client base by 10 percent. My previous employers consistently praised me as one of their top five salespeople. I bring to this job a proven record of performance as well as several key accounts worth more than \$1.2 million in annual sales.

If education is an important qualifying criterion, be sure to include reference to your educational background, degrees, and accomplishments.

■ What experience do you have for this job?

Again, as in the previous question, stress your skills and accomplishments rather than formal job duties and responsibilities assigned to your position. Provide specific examples to support your claim.

■ What do you like most about your present/most recent job?

This question is designed to get at your work values. Try to stress the same values held by the employer – focus on perfor-

mance and getting the job done. Avoid any reference to self-centered values, such as salary and benefits:

I really enjoy working with a team of competent, energetic, and innovative professionals in developing and implementing projects. During the past three years I've had a chance to work closely with two of the industry's best project managers. I learned a great deal about how to make decisions and implement them in a timely manner. I'm looking forward to working in a similar environment that encourages team efforts, initiative, and risk-taking. But most important of all, I enjoy seeing the results of such efforts translated into satisfied customers and new projects.

What do you like least about your present/most recent job?

The reverse of the previous question, this one should be answered in a similar manner, keeping in mind the principles for handling possible negatives. It's best to mention a negative you managed to improve upon because such an example stresses your initiative and problem-solving abilities. For example,

I didn't like always having to crisis manage and work overtime to meet deadlines. I like to see ~~my~~ work get done on time and with the least amount of stress. During the first year with XYZ Company I was usually in a reactive mode – always in a crisis trying to meet project deadlines. I got the work done, but I never had time to do the thoughtful planning and scheduling that were necessary to meet those deadlines. I had inherited that system from my predecessor. But during the second year I developed a new planning and scheduling system that enabled our division to meet all of our deadlines with minimal crisis management. This gave us more time to realistically plan projects and meet all requirements within the designated time frames. It also saved the company more than \$30,000 in overtime salaries. Morale increased tremendously, and I believe we became a much more productive workforce because of this planning and scheduling system.

What do you like most about your present or most recent boss?

Focus on something that demonstrates your appreciation for sound supervisory principles rather than focus on the personality or personal characteristics of the individual. You want to generalize beyond this specific case as you link your observations to the position for which you are interviewing:

*My current boss is a terrific role model who really knows how to work well with her employees. She doesn't expect her subordinates to do things she wouldn't do. In fact, she has an open-door policy where everyone has easy access to her and where open two-way communication is encouraged. She has created a very congenial and supportive work environment where everyone performs to their best level. What I really like about her is her constant and sincere effort to assist her subordinates. She regularly asks us, "How are you doing? Can I be of any help? Let me know if you have any questions." She's genuinely concerned that we do the very best we can. She knows the strengths of each employee and tries to use them in the best possible combination. Her subordinates really admire her. **They** go that ~~extra~~ mile to produce quality work. Someday I would like to become such a supervisor.*

What do you like least about your present/most recent boss?

Be careful with this question. What negative things you say about your past bosses probably reflect what negative things you will say about your future bosses. Even though you may have had conflicts with a previous boss, focus on a negative that can also be interpreted as a positive. For example,

What I least liked was the lack of feedback on my performance. My boss of five years ago always gave his subordinates immediate feedback on their performance – whether positive or negative. You always ~~knew~~ where you stood with him. I got used to working in such an environment where open communication between supervisors and subordinates was actively encouraged. I assumed that was

how supervision normally operated. But when I moved to XYZ Corporation, the management style and organizational culture were very different. The company relied heavily on its annual performance evaluation to communicate with its employees. And my supervisor always gave me outstanding annual performance evaluations. Furthermore, he was an extremely competent individual whom I really enjoyed working with and learned a great deal from. But he just didn't give his subordinates much feedback on a day-to-day basis. I later learned that may have been just his style. But I've learned to operate well under ~~two~~ different styles of supervision and two different organizational cultures. I think his weakness actually benefited me in the long run.

How does your present/most recent job relate to the overall goals of your department/the company?

Again, you want to answer this question in very clear, performance terms. Before going to the interview, think how your job fits into the larger organizational scheme. What is it you do that promotes the goals of the organization? Better still, try to demonstrate how you might have taken initiative to **expand** your job into an even more important job than originally envisioned by the company. Such an observation demonstrates taking important **initiative** on your part. An applicant might, for example, answer the question in this manner:

*When I first began, the job required that I do routine editing using the old paper-and-pencil technique and often burning the midnight oil. I would be assigned an article or report and sit down for several hours looking for organizational, grammatical, and spelling errors. Since I'm patient, a detail person, and somewhat tenacious, I enjoyed the work, but it wasn't particularly exciting. Anyone with a basic background in editing could do this job. However, during my second year, I took **advantage** of a special computer editing course sponsored by the local community college. The course opened a whole new world of **editing** for me. I learned how to use several state-of-the-art computer editing programs. I then persuaded my supervisor to request management to invest in one of the*

programs. Since I already had the skills, they agreed to let me bring the program online for a six-month experimental period. Well, within one month I was able to produce dramatic results for my supervisor and management – we reduced editing time by 60 percent and errors by 20 percent. Management immediately invested in several other editing programs which saved the company nearly \$40,000 in freelance editing fees during the first year. I'm now in charge of managing our new computerized programs, which involves training employees, customizing programs, and updating software. Even with my new responsibilities, I still do a lot of editing. The job is now more fun, and I feel much more productive. It's now an exciting job that is very important to the overall operation of the company.

Accomplishments and Work Style

What is your greatest strength?

This question should be answered with a skill and accomplishment that is directly related to the employer's needs. Avoid strengths that tend to emphasize your personal characteristics, such as your values or attitudes. Instead, focus on those things you both do well and enjoy doing related to your experience and qualifications. We especially like strengths that indicate your capacity to adapt and learn in new work settings. For example,

I've always adapted well to new work situations with a great deal of energy, drive, and initiative. I like taking on new challenges and working with people who have clear goals in mind. But I'm not just a "starter" who gets bored after the "new" becomes "routine." I like getting things started and seeing them to the very end. I guess I would say my greatest strength is keeping focused on what needs to be done, and then doing it.

What is your greatest weakness?

Be careful with this question. This is not the time to confess a weakness that can be interpreted as a negative and thus dis-

qualify you from further consideration. Select a weakness that can also be interpreted as a strength, as we discussed earlier:

One of my weaknesses was to take on too many projects with too little time to complete any to my satisfaction. I've learned to prioritize and set more realistic goals. As a result, ~~I'm~~ much more focused and productive in both my professional and personal lives.

This response also follows the principle of "being honest, but not stupid." We are sure you can come up with examples that fit your situation and follow this principle on handling questions about your weaknesses. Whatever you do, don't be coy by saying "Oh, I don't have any weaknesses." That would also be stupid. Everyone has weaknesses, but you need not confess things that might knock you out of further consideration.

■ What are the two things you would like to improve about yourself?

Again, beware of this question which is an indirect way of asking about your weaknesses. You can easily slip up and confess your weaknesses by merely identifying what needs to be improved. Keep focused on the employer's needs. For example,

The two things I would like to improve on over the next two years are my supervisory and computer skills. I already know supervision and computers well, but I would like to do even better. ~~I'm~~ going to take some special courses to help me improve in these areas.

■ What are some of the reasons for your success?

This is not the time to become an obnoxious bore. Focus on a particular attitude **and** skill that may contribute to your success. These might be generic attitudes and skills the interviewer already knows are ingredients to success. Your response should be thoughtful and engaging, confirming that you have the necessary ingredients in place to become successful in this company. One might answer the question in this manner:

I attribute much of my success to one of my college mentors, who instilled in me a particular attitude about work and life in general. He stressed the importance of being both competent and tenacious. I've always tried to improve my skills either on the job or through special training programs. I approach my work with enthusiasm and stick with it until it's done, however difficult and challenging it may be. I don't have time to find excuses for not doing something or pushing work off on to others. I think this particular stick-to-it attitude has served me well. And I try to instill a similar attitude in others I work with. I think success comes to those who know what they want to do, where they are going, and put in the necessary effort to see that things get accomplished.

Tell me about an on-going responsibility in your current/most recent job that you enjoyed.

Focus on a responsibility that you believe is essential to the job you are interviewing for as well as important to your current or most recent position.

What duties in your present/most recent job do you find it difficult to do?

Try to identify things that either are not part of the job description of the job you are interviewing for or that are a minor or unimportant part of the job.

With so many orders being shipped I sometimes find it difficult to keep up with filing of the shipping confirmations.

Describe your typical workday.

This question is aimed at getting some sense of how you orient yourself to the workplace. What exactly do you do each day, from the time you arrive at the office to when you leave? Avoid giving a dull hour-by-hour chronology of your workday. Focus, instead, on stressing your enthusiasm for work, your key skills, and your daily accomplishments. For example,

My typical day involves a great deal of accounting work and meetings with the chief financial officer and bookkeeper. I usually begin by balancing the ledger and reporting yesterday's balance to the chief financial officer. I then meet with the bookkeeper to make sure all invoices have been posted and payments have been issued. The remainder of my day involves meetings with other financial officers to resolve any problems arising in the daily accounting process. I would say I'm mainly involved in managing our financial team and doing a great deal of trouble-shooting throughout the day.

■ **Do you usually anticipate problems or do you react to them?**

Obviously employers want to hire people who have a view of the big picture. They want individuals who can anticipate potential problems and hence avoid them or, at the very least, minimize the negative impact on the organization. At the same time, even the most adroit employee will occasionally find a problem is upon him and his only choice is to react. Cite examples of your past successes at anticipating potential problems before they can negatively impact the company or indicate the systems you put in place to assure that you get periodic information from subordinates so there will be few surprises.

How much business will you bring to our firm during the next year?

This question is especially appropriate for individuals who work with a client base and who are expected to bring many of their clients with them to the new employer. For many lawyers, this is the most important question they may be asked in the interview. Law firms are less concerned with the work skills – research and consultation – of candidates than with their ability to bring with them paying clients who are the single most important resource for the company. A similar situation relates to other occupations, such as advertising and public relations, where a client base is key to the organization's operation. The answer to this question is very factual – tell the interviewer

exactly how many clients you expect to bring as well as their total annual dollar value. Also, try to project how many additional clients you are likely to attract in the coming months.

Do you ever lose your temper?

This question is aimed at uncovering one of your possible weaknesses. Again, be careful with your answer, even though you may occasionally lose your temper. For example,

I sometimes get irritated but I generally don't lose my temper. I've learned to separate my temper from my job.

■ **How do you deal with stressful situations?**

Here you should communicate what it is you do to manage stress. This is not the place to indicate you don't have stress, because the job may very well come with a great deal of built-in stress. For example,

Over the years, I've learned to put stressful situations in better perspective than I used to. I know some stress comes with the job. If the stress involves the work of my subordinates, I usually open up lines of communication to deal with any issues contributing to the stress. If the stress is a result of the daily workload, I get through the day knowing full well my exercise routine at the end of the day will renew me both physically and mentally. I've also given up coffee, which seems to contribute to stress, and I've joined a health club.

■ **What has your present/most recent supervisor criticized about your work?**

This is not the time to confess everything every supervisor has criticized you for. Two strategies are to either select a relatively unimportant element of your work that was criticized (or one unrelated to the job you are interviewing for) or turn the criticism into a positive by demonstrating how well you ac-

cepted the criticism and that you have corrected or are working to correct the problem. (See examples on page 95.)

How do you feel about working overtime and on weekends?

Again, be honest but not stupid with this question. Avoid using negative terms such as "don't," "won't," or "can't." You might also turn this question around with a question of your own that subtly puts you into the position. For example,

I would expect to occasionally put in extra time since I know there are deadlines that sometimes must be met outside regular working hours. In general, how often should I expect to work overtime and on weekends in this position?

Your question is an attempt to gain information which may later help you determine whether you want the job. But notice it is asked in such a way that you are *not* suggesting you are unwilling to put in overtime.

How well do you work under deadlines?

This question is designed to identify your work style. Do you stay around until the work gets done? Are you willing to put in overtime? Does the stress of deadlines get to you? Are you a peak performer given impending deadlines? The interviewer wants to know what type of performer you will be when deadlines come around. The most positive thing you could say is this:

While others may have difficulty managing deadlines, including experiencing a great deal of stress, I do well under stress. I tend to take charge, organize tasks, and move everything along quickly to get the job done. More importantly, I try to avoid doing things only at deadline time. My goal is to get tasks done well in advance so that we have more time to do the necessary evaluation required for producing a high-quality product.

■ **How do you feel about the contributions you made to XYZ corporation?**

Be positive and specific since you are being asked to evaluate your performance with your present or former employer. Try to make a logical connection between your achievements with XYZ corporation and the needs of this employer. Use examples and numbers to emphasize your performance points. For example,

I really feel good about what I accomplished there. When I arrived, the division was in disarray. Morale was low, employee turnover was high, and performance was at best questionable. Within five months I managed to turn this situation around by implementing a new management system that gave employees greater say in what they were doing. Morale increased dramatically, employee turnover declined by 30 percent, and our division became one of the best performers in the organization. In fact, we also became the model for management changes that eventually took place in all other divisions. I think the organization as a whole performs much better today than ever before.

■ **What do you wish you had accomplished in your present/most recent job but were unable to?**

Select examples of things you were on the way to accomplishing and could likely have accomplished with more time.

My goal was to cut customer complaints by 50%. In the past three months we've cut complaints by 40%. I think given another month we could reach the 50% mark.

■ **What will you bring to this position that another candidate won't?**

Again, emphasize your skills, abilities, accomplishments, and experiences that may be unique in comparison to other candidates. An example that can be remembered may serve you well even though it may not illustrate a unique contribution. For example,

*If I look carefully at my previous experience, I know there is **one** thing that really stands out: **I'm** successful at what I do. Take, for example, the **time** my supervisor asked **me** to develop a **new** approach to marketing DVD players. We knew we had a poor market situation **since** DVDs were quickly displacing videos. So I came up with the idea of marketing our Tatus DVD player along with the Tatus VCR as part of a special Spring College Special. We **learned** many buyers were still reluctant to purchase a DVD player but they weren't sure if they should buy a VCR. So we included a **free** VCR with the DVD player. Our market research showed it was **mainly** the parents who made the purchase as a gift for their child. Many of these buyers **could identify** with the VCR but not the DVD player. As a result of this marketing scheme, we realized a 330-percent increase in sales of both the DVD player and VCR. It's this **type** of talent I will bring to your organization. I enjoy developing solutions to challenging problems. My supervisors **usually** turn to **me** for marketing ideas that will work.*

How do you get along with your superiors?

Whatever you say, make sure you communicate positive relations with your supervisors. The interviewer may be trying to get some indication of your attitudes toward superiors rather than an accounting of your behavior.

*I generally work well with everyone. I **especially** work well with supervisors who **regularly** provide feedback on my performance. I had excellent relationships with **my** last two supervisors who rated me in the top **five** percent of the workforce in **terms** of cooperation and performance.*

How do you get along with your co-workers?

Employers want individuals who can work well together, who don't create interpersonal problems that get bounced up to supervisors, and who are productive as a team. You should indicate that you are a team player who works well in such an environment. For example,

I see myself as a team player. I enjoy the collegial atmosphere that often comes in working with fellow professionals. I also work especially well in one-on-one settings. I usually end up being the spokesman for the group and often emerge in leadership roles. My co-workers respect my work and often turn to me for advice.

■ How do you manage your subordinates?

If you are interviewing for a supervisory position, make sure you understand the principles of good supervision and use the language of supervision. This question is as much a test of your knowledge as a probe into how you deal with subordinates.

How do you feel about working with superiors who may be less intelligent or competent than you?

This question may arise in some organizations where there is a distinct difference in education, knowledge, and performance levels between the "old" versus "new" blood. Older organizations that have undergone recent rapid expansion often face this issue. You need to indicate that you are prepared to work in this situation, if indeed you are. At the same time, this is a good opportunity to get some "inside" information on the organization's potential management problems. For example,

I normally get along well with ~~everyone~~ in the organization regardless of their age, education, or experience. But quite frankly, I do have difficulty accepting poor performance, especially when it affects my work. If this is a problem here, I assume it is a management problem which will be dealt with by management. I expect to be evaluated according to my performance and that my performance would not be judged on the inabilities of others. Could you elaborate more on the nature of the situation I might encounter?

■ Do you prefer working with others or alone?

Most organizations look for team players rather than loners. It's best to indicate you are a team player or stress that you work

well in both types of situations. You might respond to this question as follows:

*I'm a team player in most situations, although I normally don't seek the limelight. I'm quite content doing **what** I'm supposed to do. At the same time, I also work well alone on tasks that require individual initiative and creativity. I don't need a great deal of direction. Just let **me** know what needs to be done and I usually will find a way either alone or in consultation with others.*

■ How do others view your work?

This question can be answered in many different ways. Keep in mind the so-called "others" can be supervisors, co-workers, subordinates, customers, or clients. Try to present evidence that your work is well respected by others for its quantity and quality. For example,

*I'm generally viewed by those I work with as a dependable producer. My supervisors and co-workers often turn to me for advice and leadership. I also work well with clients, many of **whom** have been with me for more than five years.*

■ How do you normally deal with criticism?

Here's another question designed to learn how you relate to others in the workplace. Acknowledge the reality of criticism, treat it as a positive force, and show how you have dealt with it. For example,

*I value constructive criticism because it helps me do a better job. I'm a good listener who takes criticism seriously. If it's **justified**, I try to make the necessary changes. When it's **unjustified**, I probe the nature of the problem with questions. I've never really had a problem with criticism since I try to maintain open communication on the job. This enables me to deal with many problems before they become subjects for criticism.*

Do you consider yourself a risk taker? Could you give examples of risks taken in previous jobs?

Be careful with this question. It can be a double-edged sword, especially if the organization does not want risk takers! Analyze the situation and assess whether risk taking is likely to be viewed as a positive in this organization. If you believe it is a plus, try to cite specific examples of what you've done. If you are unsure, you can answer this question by noting you do have some qualities of the risk taker, but you are also a very rational and responsible individual who is not reckless.

Do you consider yourself to be someone who takes greater initiative than others?

Employers prize employees who take initiative, since it means less time needs to be spent on many supervisory tasks. Assuming you do take initiative, indicate that you are someone who can be expected to take initiative on the job, perhaps more so than others. For example,

Yes, I do. Most of my jobs have afforded me a great deal of decision-making latitude, especially at the production level. In fact, initiative was literally institutionalized in my last job. I've worked with quality circles where we were expected to take initiative at all times, both as a team and as individuals. Could you tell me how initiative is handled here? How is decision-making structured in this organization? Would you say it's highly decentralized? Is initiative actively encouraged among employees in dealing with production issues?

Are you a self-starter? Could you give examples?

Yes, I am able to take on a new assignment and run it successfully without supervision. When I was hired by Foremost Printers, they had just taken over a publication they did not want and did not know what to do with. They were in the business of printing and knew nothing about publishing. They gave me the responsibility of

running the publication. I didn't know anything about publishing either, but I understood marketing, so I read and talked to people and learned what I needed to know. At the end of the first year the publication was running in the black, and by the end of the second year we had increased our subscriber base by over 300%.

Are you a good time manager?

Time is one of the most precious commodities you have, and once squandered it can never be regained. Interviewers seek employees who set goals, prioritize tasks, and use time wisely:

I consistently meet deadlines. When circumstances beyond my control interfere, I re-prioritize my tasks as well as those of my staff so we can get right back on track.

Then cite examples from your experience to support your claim that you are a good time manager.

Motivation

■ What is the most important thing you've learned from the jobs you've held?

Try to combine task/skill elements with interpersonal elements. Or if you are interviewing for a job utilizing different skills than those used on your present and recent jobs, stress the people skills you've learned – whether it's to manage in a style that gets things done while maintaining good esprit de corps or learning to follow directions and work cooperatively with co-workers.

■ Why should we hire you?

This is often considered to be the knee-bender – it brings you to your knees before the employer who wants to know your real motivations for seeking employment with him. However, this should be one of the easiest questions to answer given the principles we previously discussed. You should stress how your

skills and abilities relate to the employer's needs. It's time to toot your horn. Be as specific as possible. For example,

I assume you are looking for someone with a solid track record in sales and marketing of automotive parts. I will bring to this job 12 years of progressive experience in all phases of sales and marketing of both domestic and foreign automotive parts. In my last job I increased sales by 20 percent each year for the past five years. I have a consistent pattern of performance employers readily seek, including your competition. I would think this is something your organization would want to bring on board.

■ What really motivates you to perform?

Focus again on job-related performance criteria rather than on other motivational criteria. For example,

What really motivates me is the work itself: I really enjoy my work, especially when I see the results – actual increases in sales. I tend to focus on outcomes rather than duties or responsibilities.

Why do you want to work for _____?

This question is much like the one on why they should hire you. Focus again on what you will bring to the job in reference to the employer's needs. You might also stress the importance of the organization to your career goals.

I've greatly admired your organization. Since I've worked for your competition during the past seven years, I've had a chance to regularly evaluate your work and at times out-perform your marketing team. You provide an excellent service which I consider to be the best in the field. I also believe my experience and skills are such that I will make an excellent addition to your marketing team. I know your competition well, and this knowledge, combined with my skills, should further strengthen your marketing efforts in the coming months when two new competitors will be entering your southern territory.

Why do you want to leave your present job? Why did you leave your previous jobs?

Give positive rather than negative reasons for leaving, regardless of how negative your situation may have been. If you left because you were asked to resign or were unhappy, try to elaborate on positives. Call it “*furthered career advancement*” or “*seeking a new challenge*.” Avoid using negative terms. For example,

I left my last job after four years of progressive experience. As a small firm, it offered few opportunities for career advancement. I felt I had gone as far as I could there and decided it was time to expand my career horizons.

Why have you changed jobs so frequently?

■ **Why would you be more likely to stay here?**

Even though tenure with companies tends to be a lot shorter these days than a decade or two ago, employers are reluctant to hire people who have job-hopped excessively—especially if there seems to be no good reason for the frequent changes. Hiring and training employees is an investment the employer makes. She wants to get a reasonable return on that cost. Stress reasons why the situation(s) that caused you to job-hop no longer exist or what is different about this opportunity that will cause you to stay. Stress you intend this to be a longer-term commitment. For example,

I realize I did not stay long in the first three jobs I held after college. In each instance I had accepted positions in very small firms. I learned and rapidly gained proficiency each time, but found there was no place to advance. I was stuck in a dead-end job. With this job search I have limited my interest to firms like yours that are large enough for me to grow with the firm as my skills increase.

Why do you want a job you are over-qualified for?

If you apply for a job that appears to be beneath your qualifications, you may be asked why you want to step down the career ladder to such a job. In fact, many employers will object to hiring someone who appears over-qualified. You will need to come up with a bona fide explanation for your behavior. After all, if over-qualified, you might leave within a very short period of time, thus creating another personnel problem for the employer. For example,

I know I may appear over-qualified for this position. Some employers may not want to hire me because they are afraid I will be unhappy and leave soon. However, I've given this a lot of thought. I'm really interested in this position, and I believe I could bring something to this job that others may not be able to. I prefer the location and the ability to develop a flexible schedule. I'm committed to staying with the job for at least ____ years. During that time I think the position will grow in reference to my particular interests and skills. I believe you will be pleased working with me.

Are you willing to take a cut in pay from your present/most recent job? Why?

Be careful with this question. It begins intruding into the salary negotiation phase of the interview. You are not ready to discuss money at this point, even though the interviewer may raise this question. Your goal is to learn about the worth of the position as well as communicate your value to the employer. If the interviewer raises this question, he may be trying to put stress on you or lower your salary expectations. The best response to this question is to turn it around to your advantage.

I didn't know we were at the stage of discussing the salary question. I really need to know more about the position – duties, responsibilities, expected performance, and so forth. And I'm not sure you have enough information about me to begin discussing money. Could we discuss this question later after we have had a

chance to get more information on each other? For now, I believe I should be paid what I am worth. I would think you would agree with that concept too, wouldn't you?

If this approach fails and the interviewer persists, take control of the money question by asking several of these questions from your perspective:

How much does someone with my qualifications normally receive in your organization? What were you paying the last person? Why would your pay scale be lower than the industry standard? Have others taken pay cuts to join your organization?

■ How important is job security?

While job security is important to most people, you should not answer this question by indicating it is your major concern. Focus your answer on your performance – job security comes to those who **earn** it. For example,

I've never really had job security, so I'm not sure what exactly it is. I expect to stay with your company because of my performance and because the company fulfills my career goals. If I'm not meeting your expectations, or if the company doesn't meet my expectation, then I shouldn't be here. I look at a job not for security but for what I can achieve for both the company and myself:

■ How long do you expect to stay with our company?

Answer this question in the same manner as the previous question – the bottom line is "as long as both of you are satisfied with the arrangement."

How do you define success?

This is not the time for deep introspection, nor is it appropriate to answer from solely a self-centered perspective. Try to tie personal goals to corporate ones.

To me success is accomplishing each day's work on time and on target so that the goals of the company can be met. Of course, the monetary rewards for a job well done are also important so that I can meet my financial obligations.

■ How do you spend your leisure time?

The employer may be trying to determine whether you are an active person, i.e., likes to camp and hike; a sedentary person, i.e., watch baseball; a joiner, i.e., active in your community's neighborhood watch; or a volunteer, i.e., involved in a food kitchen for indigent persons. Determine what you know about the company and the interviewer. Select from among your interests those you believe best fit the job or the corporate image. Be careful not to mention too many interests though – you must have energy left to do the job!

I really enjoy camping out and hiking when weather permits. It gives me a chance to clear my head of the problems of the work week. I find I return to work on Monday with a clear head and renewed energy.

Career Goals

■ Tell me about your career goals.

This open-ended question allows you to talk about your goals. If you have completed a self-assessment and written a resume which included an objective, the answer to this question should be easy. Link your skills and abilities to the employer's needs:

My major goal is to move into a management-level position that would enable me to work closely with top management in developing new approaches to marketing our software system in Europe and the Middle East. I believe this company has an excellent product that would do very well in these and other overseas markets. My international marketing background would contribute to opening these markets.

■ **What would you like to accomplish during the next ten years?**

Again, keep your answer employer-centered rather than self-centered. You want to communicate that your goals are in line with those of the employer. For example,

I would like to see 40 percent of the company's sales derived from overseas markets. And I want to play a major role in developing those markets during the next ten years. Indeed, in the year 2013, I want us to look back at this year as being the year in which the company reoriented its marketing program around a truly global perspective.

How do your present career goals differ from your career goals ten years ago?

Your answer should indicate that you both learn and grow with time. Experience teaches you to alter your goals in the face of new realities. As you answer this question, try to include examples of how your goals have changed and how those changes have affected you:

When I entered this field ten years ago, I had a very simple goal – work my way up to the top of XYZ Company. However, little did I know how rapidly this field would change in the face of new technology and greater competition. Three years after I started, XYZ Company was bought out by TSR Company in a merger that eventually ended up in bankruptcy for TSR Company. In the meantime, I was hired by two other companies where I moved into middle management positions. I quickly learned my original career goals were unrealistic given the rapidly changing nature of work today. I think my career goals are now more realistic – do what I really love which is to make great quality sound systems. As a result, I'm much happier with ~~my~~ career today than I was five or ten years ago when my career didn't seem to be progressing according to my expectations.

Where do you see yourself here five years from now?

Again, focus on the employer's needs. Whatever you do, don't indicate you hope to be in the president's seat which is already occupied. That would be both presumptuous and threatening to others in the organization. For example,

I would hope to be in a position of major responsibility for marketing. I'm not sure what that position is or will be in the future. I feel I have the necessary skills and experience to grow into such a position.

Describe a major goal you set for yourself recently.

You may select a personal or professional goal, but if you discuss a personal goal you will position yourself better if you can relate it to your professional advancement. "I want to complete my B.A." is a personal goal but one that supports your professional advancement. Another one might be "I want to find a job that is right for me." Be ready to elaborate on what you are doing to achieve the goal.

What are you doing to achieve that goal?

Ideally if you are asked a question about your goals such as the one above, you should indicate how you plan to achieve that goal without being asked. It shows you are a purposeful individual who, once you set a goal, will follow through. You have enrolled in an MBA program or this interview is evidence of your job-finding efforts. If you have already received a job offer(s), that would certainly show success.

Have you ever thought of switching careers?

The interviewer may be asking this question to see if you are committed to your current career and job. It's best to indicate you are not now thinking of changing careers. For example,

In fact, I did go through a career change seven years ago. I used to be a high school teacher. However, after eight years in the classroom I thought it was time to do something else with my &. In the process of identifying career alternatives, I conducted a self-assessment in which I learned I was perhaps best suited for a career in sales. It was another form of teaching, but in sales I got immediate feedback and saw results. I've never regretted making the change, and I've really enjoyed my last seven years in sales. I plan to continue in sales.

Other Questions

Tell me about yourself.

This is not the time to outline your biography from childhood to the present. Concentrate on your skills and experience, with special reference to accomplishments that relate to the needs of the employer. Talk about your strengths. Anticipate this type of question as you prepare for the interview by listing

five of your outstanding personal qualities as they relate to the work setting

five of your strongest skills that relate to the job

five positive work-related accomplishments

Try to remember the points you have identified so you can respond to this or a similar question, but don't try to memorize what you say about each one – just talk about it naturally.

What do you know about our company?

Of course you have done your research on any company you interview with and you know what they do, how long they have been in business, how large the company is, as well as whether they are growing, stagnant, or declining. Your answer should be brief but indicate you do know about them. If you can cite

something about the firm that really interests you, so much the better.

I know you are an association promoting wildlife preservation; you celebrate your 25th anniversary this year; you have approximately 2.5 million members and have experienced steady increases in membership each of the past ten years. I am especially impressed with your programs to preserve the northwest spotted egret.

What trends do you see in our industry?

This question, too, requires that you have done your research. If you have conducted informational interviews, you should have most of the information for answering this question. If not, go online and visit the website of the company as well as other firms in the same or related industries. Read journals in the areas of your professional interest as well as business magazines to keep up with the rapid changes taking place.

What would be the perfect job for you?

Your perfect job should relate to the one you are interviewing for as well as to a desirable organizational culture that allows you to do your best. For example,

The perfect job would be one in which I would be allowed to fully use my talents. I would hope I would be given an opportunity to work on important projects and eventually given responsibility to head up my own team. I work well in group settings and enjoy taking initiative in developing large and complex projects.

■ What would you change about this position as well as our company?

Be very careful in answering this question. While you know some things about the company, you probably don't know enough to be so presumptuous as to offer solutions to their problems. After all, changes you propose may negatively affect

someone's pet project. You would merely demonstrate your ignorance of the internal dynamics of the organization before you had a chance to settle in to learn how the organization really operates. Be tactful and thoughtful in your response. It's best to indicate you need to learn more about the organization. You are not about to rock the boat before you have had a chance to climb aboard! For example,

I'm sure there are things I might want to change about the position once I begin work. However, I'm not prepared to make any proposals at this time. I usually take some time to learn about the organization and the people I will be working with. I would want to consult those who are most affected by my position to see what they feel needs to be changed. As for changes in the organization, I would hope to give you an answer to that question within a few months. I need to get a firm grasp of how the organization operates as well as learn more about the organizational goals and those I'll be working with.

■ **What type of person would you hire for this position?**

The answer to this question is simple – someone like you who meets the employer's expectations. For example,

I would hire someone who has depth of experience, clear goals, and a proven track record of performance. I also would want to feel comfortable with the person. Without a doubt, I know I would hire me, myself.

■ **What similarities do you see between this and your current/most recent position?**

Obviously you want to focus on similarities that emphasize the strengths you brought to your current or former position as well as the areas of responsibility that you liked.

What makes this position different from your current/most recent position?

Focus on areas in which the firm where you are interviewing has an advantage over your present/previous firm. You might say, for example, *"The management team seems more supportive."* *"The company goals are more in line with my philosophy."* *"The work is more meaningful (or more challenging.)"*

■ Have you ever been fired or asked to resign? Why?

Be careful in how you answer this one – be honest but not stupid. If you were fired or were asked to resign, admit it in a different language. And then explain the circumstances in as positive a manner as possible – without being negative toward your former employer. People get fired every day, often for no fault of their own. What's important is how to explain the situation. What have you learned from the experience? For example,

Twelve years ago I resigned after meeting with my employer over several unresolved issues. We both reached an amiable agreement in which I left voluntarily in exchange for three months severance pay. We had several disagreements, mostly concerning management policies. We both thought it best that we part company rather than continue in what was becoming a difficult situation for both of us. In looking back, I realize I was young at the time and thus less willing to listen and compromise. If I were doing it over today, I would have worked more closely with my supervisor and attempted to better understand his point of view rather than try to persuade him to adopt my proposals. Nonetheless, we parted on good terms and are still friends today. I learned a great deal from this experience and know I'm better for having left that job.

Other situations differ. For example, you may have been fired because you refused to follow unethical or illegal directions:

I was let go at ABC Trucking Company three years ago. I could have stayed, but my supervisor asked me to falsify the accounts to avoid payroll taxes. I refused to do so and was immediately locked out of my office and terminated. This was a difficult period for me financially since I remained unemployed for nearly three months. But I don't regret what I did. Honesty in the workplace is very important to me. No job is worth breaking the law over. In fact, my former employer is now under indictment for tax evasion.

■ How long have you been looking for another job?

Whatever you do, don't answer this question by indicating you have been looking for a long time. You may sound desperate or incapable of finding work with others. If you have been looking for a while, emphasize how selective you are in settling for a quality employer. For example,

I've been exploring the job market for the past few months. Since I'm looking for something very special that fits my particular interests and skills, yours is only one of very few positions I've seriously considered.

Are you willing to relocate?

You'll have to supply the answer to this question. Obviously, if you are unwilling to relocate and the job requires relocation, don't expect to be considered further for the position. At the same time, you may want to appear "open" on this question, especially if relocation is an option as long as you know where you will be going. Employers today understand the serious implications of relocation for spouses and families. For example,

It depends on where I would be required to relocate. I do have a family with a working spouse and school-age children. Since a relocation decision affects them as much as me, this is something I would need to discuss with them. Where would I expect to be relocated and within how long after joining the company? Does the company provide relocation assistance for working spouses?

■ How many days per month are you willing to travel?

Again, this is a question only you can answer. Try to find out from the interviewer how often you would be expected to travel. Do this by turning around the question:

I'm not sure about the extent of travel involved with this position. How many days per month would I be expected to travel? And where would I normally travel to?

■ What are your salary expectations?

Watch out for this question. It should be the very last question you address – **after** you have had a chance to learn about the worth of the position as well as demonstrate your value to the employer. This question is most appropriate for a separate type of job interview – salary negotiation. It should arise after you have a strong indication you will be offered the job. But the interviewer may try to raise it earlier in the interview. You should answer this question in the same manner we suggested you should answer the question about taking a cut in pay. Delay the question or turn it around so the interviewer begins revealing to you his pay range for the position:

What would be your pay range for someone with my experience?

If the pay range indicated is compatible with the figures your research has led you to expect, you can put the bottom of your expected salary at the top of the employer's range. For example, if the interviewer indicates that the company's range is \$39,000 to \$42,000 and this is consistent with your understanding of industry pay, you can either indicate your acceptance of that range or leave yourself some negotiating room for later on in which case you might respond:

My expectation was in the range of \$42,000 to \$45,000, so we are talking in the same ballpark.

How soon could you begin work?

If you need to resign from your present job, you may be expected to give at least a two-week notice. However, more notice may be expected for high-level positions. You might turn the question around by asking

When would you want me to begin work?

If he says immediately, ask for two to four weeks, which is a normal time frame for individuals who must leave one job for another one.

You can also expect specific questions relating to your technical expertise, management abilities, and specialized knowledge. These will vary considerably with the position, organization, and individual. For example, if you are interviewing for a computer programming position, you will probably be asked questions about the specific equipment you use, are capable of using, or want to use. If you are interviewing for a management-level position, expect questions relating to "situations" you are likely to encounter, such as how you would deal with a subordinate who by-passes the chain of command in reporting directly to your superiors, who consistently arrives late to work, or who does not work well with co-workers on projects requiring cooperative efforts.

Illegal Questions

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 makes discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion, or national origins illegal in personnel decisions. The Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 includes questions related to disabilities as being illegal. Questions that delve into these areas as well as others, such as age, height, or weight, are also illegal, unless they can be shown to directly relate to bona fide occupational qualifications. If a question relates directly to the job, it is usually legal to ask.

Most interviewers are well aware of these restrictions and will not ask you illegal questions. However, you may still encounter such questions either because of ignorance on the part of the interviewer or blatant violation of the regulations. As we noted earlier when discussing

“personal” questions, many interviewers may ask these questions indirectly. However, some interviewers still ask them directly.

Women are more likely to face illegal questions than men. Some employers still ask questions regarding birth control, child care, or how their husbands feel about them working or traveling. The following types of questions are considered illegal:

- Are you married, divorced, separated, single, or gay?
- How old are you?
- Do you go to church regularly?
- Do you have many debts?
- How many children do you have?
- Do you own or rent your home?
- What social or political organizations do you belong to?
- What does your spouse think about your career?
- Are you living with anyone?
- Are you practicing birth control?
- Were you ever arrested?
- What kind of insurance do you carry?
- How much do you weigh?
- How tall are you?
- Do you have any particular disabilities?
- What do your parents do?
- Have you ever been treated for depression?
- Do you ever been diagnosed with ADHD?
- Have you ever sued an employer or coworker?
- How often do you see a doctor?
- Have you had any mental health or psychiatric problems?

Although we hope you will not encounter these types of questions during your job search, you should consider how you would handle them if they arise. Your decision should be thought out carefully beforehand rather than made in the stressful setting of the interview. It must be your decision – one that you feel comfortable with.

You may want to consider the following suggestions as options for handling illegal and personal questions. If you encounter such questions, your choice may depend upon which is more important to you: defending a principle or giving yourself the greatest chance to land the job. You may

decide the job is not as important as the principle. Or you may decide, even though you really want this job, you could never work in an organization that employed such clods, and tell them so.

On the other hand, you may decide to answer the question, offensive though it may be, because you really want the job. If you get the job, you vow you will work from within the organization to change such interview practices.

There is yet a third scenario relating to illegal questions. You may believe the employer is purposefully trying to see how you will react to stressful questions. Will you lose your temper or will you answer meekly? Though a rather dangerous practice for employers, this does occur. In this situation you should remain cool and answer tactfully by indicating indirectly that the questions may be inappropriate.

For example, if you are divorced and the interviewer asks about your divorce, you could respond by asking, "*Does a divorce have a direct bearing on the responsibilities of _____?*" If the interviewer asks if you are on the pill, you could respond, "*Yes, I take three pills a day – vitamins A, B, and C, and because of them, I haven't missed a day's work in the past year.*" The interviewer should get the message, and you will have indicated you can handle stressful questions.

A possible response to any illegal question – regardless of motive – is to turn what appears to be a negative into a positive. If, for example, you are female and the interviewer asks you how many children you still have living at home and you say, "*I have five – two boys and three girls,*" you can expect this answer will be viewed as a negative. Worlung mothers with five children at home may be viewed as neither good mothers nor dependable employees. Therefore, you should immediately follow your initial response with a tactful elaboration that will turn this potential negative into a positive. You might say,

I have five – two boys and three girls. They are wonderful children who, along with my understanding husband, take great care of each other. If I didn't have such a supportive and caring family, I would never think of pursuing a career in this field. I do want you to know that I keep my personal life separate from my professional life. That's very important to me and my family, and I know it's important to employers. In fact, because of my family situation, I make special arrangements with other family members, friends, and day-care centers to ensure that family responsibilities

never interfere with my work. But more important, I think being a mother and working full time has really given me a greater sense of responsibility, forced me to use my time well, and helped me better organize my life and handle stress. I've learned what's important in both my work and life. I would hope that the fact that I'm both a mother and I'm working – and not a working mother – would be something your company would be supportive of, especially given my past performance and the qualifications I would bring to this job.

Here you were able to take both an illegal question and a potential negative and turn them into a positive – perhaps the most tactful and effective way of dealing with a situation other interviewees might respond to in a negative manner.

You should decide before you go into the interview how you will handle similar situations. If you are prepared for possible illegal questions, you may find your answers to such questions to be the strongest and most effective of the interview!

7

Handle Yourself Nonverbally

TODAY MOST PEOPLE RECOGNIZE THAT HOW THEY communicate is itself a message. In fact, your nonverbal communication may convey both the bulk of your message and be more believable than your verbal statements. Indeed, communication studies suggest that in many situations approximately two-thirds of what is communicated is through nonverbal means, and because we know that nonverbal behaviors are the harder to control, we tend to give greater credence to these messages.

The Nonverbal Edge

We also hear from people who conduct screening interviews that the initial decision whether to screen a person out of or into a future interview – made during the first three to five minutes of the face-to-face session – is seldom changed even though the entire interview may be five to ten times that length. What are the interviewers responding to? Certainly not primarily to the content of the verbal interchange, but rather to initial reactions to nonverbal cues.

Thus how you dress for the interview, how well you control the outward signs of nervousness, and how dynamic you are as you talk to the employer will all contribute to the overall impression that will weigh in heavily on the outcome. Strategies to help you be a winner in these areas will be the focus of this chapter.

A Winning Image

Appearance is the first thing you communicate to those you meet. Before you have a chance to speak, others notice your appearance and dress and draw inferences about your character, competence, and capabilities. Image has the greatest impact on the perceptions others have of us when they have little other information on which to base judgments. This is precisely the situation a job applicant finds himself in at the start of most interviews.

Many people object to having their capabilities evaluated on the basis of their appearance and dress. *"But that is not fair,"* they argue. *"People should be hired on the basis of their ability to do the job – not on how they look."* But debating the lack of merit or complaining about the unfairness of such behavior does not alter reality. Like it or not, people do make initial judgments about others based on their appearance. Since you cannot alter this fact, it is best to learn to use it to your advantage. If you effectively manage your image, you can convey positive messages regarding your authority, credibility, and competence.

Much has been written on how to dress professionally, especially since John Molloy first wrote his books on dressing for success in the 1970s. Although some expectations for dressing have changed in the past decade, for most job interviews it is still best to err on the side of conservatism.

*Most interviewers
screen candidates
in or out during the
first 3-5 minutes of
the interview –
primarily based on
nonverbal cues.*

Dynamite Images for Men

It is important to know the range of options you have available from the most powerful professional look to a less powerful but still acceptable

business look. The most powerful attire for a male to wear to an interview is a suit. Let's look at power suits in terms of color, fabric, and style. The suit colors that convey the greatest power are navy blue or medium to dark gray. Usually the darker the shade, the greater amount of authority it conveys to the wearer. However, you would do well to avoid black, which in our society is a color for funeral or formal attire; also, it conveys so much authority as to be threatening to an interviewer. If you want your attire to convey a bit less authority, then navy, gray, camel, or beige are other acceptable colors for a business suit. Still less power could be conveyed by choosing to wear a sport coat and slacks rather than a suit. Again, you have a range from which to choose and still be within the bounds of acceptable business attire. A navy sport jacket with medium gray slacks is a strong but less authoritative look than the matched jacket and slacks. You must make your choice based on your goals and what you believe to be appropriate to the situation and the job for which you are interviewing. There may be times when you purposefully select this slightly less professional, yet acceptable, choice and choose not to wear a suit. Remember, though, the interviewer expects you will be on your best behavior, and this applies to your appearance as well as how you conduct yourself. Most applicants choose to dress as if they were after a job several levels above the one for which they are actually interviewing.

Your suit should be made of a natural fiber. A good blend of a natural fiber with some synthetic is acceptable as long as it has the look of the natural fiber. The very best suit fabrics are wool, wool blends, or fabrics that look like them. Even for the warmer summer months, men can find summer weight wool suits that are comfortable and look good. They are your best buy.

The style of your suit should be classic – well-tailored and well-styled. Avoid suits that appear trendy unless you are applying for a job in a field where being on the forefront of fashion is valued. A conservative suit that has a timeless classic styling will serve you best not only for the interview, but it will give you several years of wear once you land the job. Select a shirt color that is lighter than the color of your suit. White long-sleeved shirts still are most acceptable with a business suit, although many pin stripes or solid colors are seen in the hallways of companies today.

A silk tie will look better than other fabrics. Make sure the width is current and select a pattern that goes with the rest of your outfit, looks good on you, and is fairly conservative. Dark, classic shoes and dark socks

will complete your "success" look. For more details on dress for men, see JoAnna Nicholson's *Dressing Smart for Men* (Impact Publications, 2003).

Dynamite Images for Women

Few men would consider wearing anything other than a suit to a job interview, especially an interview for a managerial or professional position. Women are often less certain what is appropriate. The attire that will convey the greatest professionalism, authority, and competence is a suit – with a matching skirt and jacket. However, a slightly less powerful look, but one that gets high marks today is to wear a base – slurt and blouse – of one color paired with a jacket of another color. If the slurt and blouse are a solid color, the jacket may be a plaid, ideally repeating the blouse and skirt color, as one of the colors of the plaid. This combination conveys the look of a suit, but is more individualistic, slightly less powerful, and very much in style. Dark colors will convey greater power than lighter colors. Gray, navy, or camel are conservative, but not your only choices.

Similar to men's suits, your suit should be made of a natural fiber, or a blend of a natural fiber with a synthetic that has the look of the natural fiber. The very best winter-weight suit fabrics are wool or wool blends. For warmer climates or the summer months, women will find few summer weight wool suits made for them. A fabric that has the look of textured silk or silk blend is a good choice.

Your suit style should be classic: well-tailored, well-styled, and avoid trendy looks unless you are certain it is appropriate for the business where you are applying. It is better to err on the side of conservatism – usually better tolerated than a mistake in the other direction. A conservative, classic styled suit will last for years. Indeed, you can afford to buy good quality clothing if you know you can wear it for several seasons.

Buy silk blouses if you can afford them. Keep in mind not only the purchase price of the blouse, but the cleaning bill as well. If you don't buy silk, look for blouse fabrics that have the look and feel of silk. Long-sleeved blouses have the greatest power look, and necklines should complement the lines of the suit jacket and not be too revealing.

*Your suit style
should be classic:
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styled, and avoid
trendy looks.*

Give your outfit a finished look by accessorizing it effectively. Silk scarves or necklaces that enhance your outfit, but don't call undue attention to themselves, can help complete your polished look. A basic pump – dark, if your skirt color is dark – with little or no decoration and a medium heel height is best.

You may choose to carry a purse or attache case, but not both at the same time. It is difficult not to look clumsy trying to handle both a purse and an attache case. One way to carry both is to keep a slim purse with essentials inside the attache case. If you need to go out to lunch, or any place where you choose not to carry the attache case, just pull out your purse and you're off!

Let Nervousness Work for You

Anyone about to face a job interview experiences some nervous anticipation. The degree of nervousness will differ from one person to another, but it is a basic human response to a threatening situation. Most job applicants indicate they wish they could rid themselves of their feelings of nervousness. Although an understandable desire, even if you could do so, the result would be counterproductive.

The feelings you may describe as nervousness – a queasy feeling of "butterflies" in your stomach, sweaty palms, a dry mouth, an increased heartbeat, or knees or hands that tremble – are the physiological manifestations of an increased flow of adrenalin. This physiological reaction to what you perceive as danger can be just as useful to you as you prepare to "do battle" in the interview as it was to our caveman ancestors who faced a different kind of jungle out there. The caveman when faced with a dangerous situation made a decision to stand his ground and fight or to flee. In either case adrenalin was his ally and helped him to fight more fiercely or flee more rapidly. It will work for you, too, if you will learn to manage it rather than trying to fight it.

A limited amount of controlled nervousness will actually keep you on your toes and help you do a better job in the interview than as if you were overconfident and complacent. How can you best manage this nervousness? First, by recognizing it for what it is – an asset – and trying to manage it rather than worlung against it. Most important, be prepared for the interview. You must do your data gathering on the job field as well as the organization prior to the interview. Anticipate questions you are likely

to be asked and formulate your own questions based on information you wish to acquire on the organization. Practice responding to likely questions – not by memorizing answers, but trying to talk through answers in different ways to convey the "gist" or basic content.

Experience is the best teacher, so the more interviews you engage in the better you will become and the more comfortable you will feel. Accept opportunities to interview and critique yourself after each one. Learn from your experience and you will do even better the next time. Leave yourself plenty of time to get to the place of the interview. You do not need the added stress of fearing you will be late because you misjudged the travel time or got into an unexpected traffic tie-up to upset your nerves at the last moment.

Project Composure

As you wait in the outer office to meet with the interviewer, channel your nervous energy productively. Often there are materials about the company on a table along with other reading material. Pick up material about the company and really read it – don't just pretend to. You may learn something about the organization you can comment on or ask questions about in your interview. If nothing about the company is available, pick up a business magazine. Since you are already on display, make your choice of reading material a positive statement about you.

You can better control your nervousness by following advice often given to public speakers. As you walk into the interview room, try to take a few slow deep breaths. If you breathe from your diaphragm, as you should, you can do this subtly so the interviewer will be unaware of it. This should relax you a bit. Although it 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. Try to be other-directed. Rather than concentrate on your needs and fears, concern yourself with the employer's needs and questions.

The receptionist may direct you to the interviewer or the interviewer

*The more you can
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you will feel.*

may come out to meet you. Either way, stand up to your full height before you take a step. Look alert, forceful, and energetic. If the interviewer comes out to meet you, walk over and shake his or her hand firmly.

If you are sent to a room where the interviewer is standing, walk toward him and shake hands. If he is seated and does not look up, stand up, or offer a handshake, you should wait a moment and then sit down. However, wait for the interviewer to initiate the conversation.

Project Dynamism

Applicants invited to an employment interview have already been screened in. The employer believes they possess at least the basic qualifications for the job, such as education and work experience. At this point the employer will look for several qualities in the candidates that were not discernable from paper qualifications – credibility, intelligence, competence, spontaneity, friendliness, likability, and enthusiasm. In the end, employers hire people whom they like and believe will interact well on an interpersonal basis with the rest of the staff.

Your enthusiasm is one of the most important qualities you can convey. In fact, studies indicate that three major components define credibility: expertise, trustworthiness, and dynamism. The first two components we can all relate to readily. We know we must be perceived as competent and honest. But dynamism – that's news to many job seekers. What it means is that you need to be a dynamic individual who exudes enthusiasm and drive. A dynamic person is more believable than one who comes across in a flat, low key manner. He also conveys the impression that he is a doer, someone who can get things done. So you need to let your enthusiasm show. Granted this can be overdone, but try to project yourself in a dynamic manner.

The following are some nonverbal behaviors that will reinforce what you say in a positive and dynamic way.

Lean slightly into the interview. If you sit with a slight forward lean toward the interviewer it communicates your interest in what the interviewer is saying as well as in the interview proceedings. Your forward lean should be so slight as to be almost imperceptible. Be careful not to overdo this. You do not want it to be so obvious the behavior calls attention to itself.

- **Make frequent eye contact with the interviewer(s).** Eye contact establishes rapport with the interviewer. You appear interested in what is being said, and you will be perceived as more trustworthy if you will look at the interviewer as you ask and answer questions. To say someone has “shifty eyes” or cannot “look us in the eye” is to imply they may not be completely honest. To have a direct, though moderate, eye gaze in our culture conveys interest as well as trustworthiness.
- **Project a pleasant facial expression.** A face that appears alive and interested conveys a positive attitude. Smile enough to convey your positive attitude, but not so much that you will not be taken seriously. Some people naturally smile often while others hardly ever smile. Monitor your behavior or ask a friend to give you feedback. Certainly your facial expression should be compatible with what is being discussed; avoid smiling inanely all the time. Ideally your face should reflect honest interest in the dynamics of the interview. Give the interviewer facial feedback rather than an expressionless deadpan.
- **Convey interest and enthusiasm through your vocal inflections.** Though not a visual component, vocal inflection is a critical element of nonverbal communication. Your tone of voice says a lot about you and how interested you are in the interviewer and the organization. Your voice is one of the greatest projectors of dynamism available to you. Use it effectively both in the face-to-face interview and in a telephone interview.

Project Class and Competence

The way you stand, sit, and walk – essentially how you carry yourself – has a bearing on how others perceive you. According to John Molloy, the “look” that impresses interviewers the most is the upper class carriage – the look of class.

Even if your background is not upper class, as a youngster you were probably prodded by someone in your family to improve how you stood, sat, or walked. Comments such as “*Keep your shoulders back,*” “*Keep your head erect,*” or “*Don’t slouch*” were good advice. If you did not pay much

attention to such advice, it would be to your advantage to do so now. The look of class and competence includes the following behaviors:

- Keep your shoulders back.
- Keep your head erect.
- Avoid folding your arms across your chest.
- Avoid sitting or standing with arms or legs far apart in what could be described as an "open" position.
- Use gestures that enhance your verbal message.
- Nod your head affirmatively at appropriate times, but do not overdo it.
- Project your voice loudly enough to be heard.
- Articulate clearly – do not mumble.
- Use good diction.
- Use pauses for emphasis.
- Watch your pace – avoid talking too fast or too slowly; many nervous people tend to talk rapidly.

*If ~~you~~ concentrate
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Perhaps as much as anything, people with class always make the other person feel comfortable. Wait a minute, you say, I'm the one who is uncomfortable. Perhaps, but focus your attention away from yourself. Give your attention to the other person and you may be surprised how well the interview can go.

If you concentrate on what is being said rather than how you are doing, you will most likely create a good impression on the interviewer. Being other-directed

with your nonverbal communication will make you seem more likable and competent than many other candidates who remain self-centered and nervous throughout the interview.

8

Questions You Should Ask

EVEN WITH THE BEST INTERVIEWER, YOU WILL NEED to ask questions. Remember, you have a decision to make, too. Are you really interested in the job? Does it fit your goals and skills? Will it give you the chance to do something you do well and enjoy doing? Will it give you the opportunity to move in some of the directions you want to move? Use the interview situation to probe areas that will provide answers to these and other questions that are critical to your future.

Ask Questions

When should I ask questions? What questions should I ask? How often should I ask a question? These are some of the concerns of applicants preparing for a job interview. For the most part, there are no hard and fast answers – each situation is different. However, there are some guidelines that should help you as you try to analyze your particular interview situation. Some authors have suggested that the applicant ask questions about 10 percent of the time – wait until the interviewer has

asked about nine questions and then it is your turn. This advice seems a bit contrived. The interview should be an interchange of questions and answers between both parties. Both have decisions to make and need information to help them evaluate where they want to go from here vis-a-vis the other.

Normally the framework and the flow of the job interview are determined by the employer. As the interview progresses there are likely to be points at which something the interviewer has said raises a question in your mind. If it makes sense to ask the question at this juncture, go ahead. If your question follows up something mentioned by the interviewer, this will most likely advance the flow and not disrupt the pace of the interview. If you are a sensitive listener you should be able to determine whether a question will be well received by the interviewer.

Interviewers are often more impressed with the quality of a candidate's questions than with the content of his answers.

Normally near the end of the interview, most employers will ask an applicant if there are any questions he has that have not been answered. At this point you have the opportunity to ask questions that have not been raised as part of the ongoing dynamics of the interview.

What kinds of questions you should ask as well as those to avoid – at least until you have been offered the job – are the focus of this chapter.

Questions About the Company

We assume you have researched the company prior to the day of the interview. You already have information gathered from corporate publications and, if the company is a large one, from business directories found in your local library. You went online and checked out the company's website. You have talked with employees and former employees in the community to get a handle on the human dimension of worlung within this company. So you should not have to ask basic questions about what the company does, or the size of the company – either in terms of assets or number of employees. To ask questions about matters that you should have been able to find out from a bit of basic research wastes valuable interview time that could be better spent on other issues and

does not impress the interviewer with your resourcefulness.

Questions you might want to ask about the company would revolve around areas not likely covered in materials you could have read previous to your interview. You want to know something about the following:

Stability of the position and firm.

Opportunities available for advancement.

Management and decision-making styles – teams, hierarchies, degree of decentralization.

Degree of autonomy permitted and entrepreneurship encouraged.

Organizational culture.

Internal politics.

Your questions may cover some of the following areas of inquiry:

- Why is this position open? Is it a new position? If not, why did the previous person leave? If the person was promoted, what position does that person now hold?
- How important is this position to the organization?
- To what extent does the company promote from within versus hiring from the outside?
- What plans for expansion (or cutbacks) are in the immediate future? What effect will these plans have on the position or the department in which it is located?
- On the average, how long do most employees stay with this company?
- Tell me about what it's really like working here in terms of the people, management practices, workloads, expected performance, and rewards.
- How would you evaluate the financial soundness and growth potential of this company?

- If you had to briefly describe this organization, what would you say? What about its employees? Its managers and supervisors? Its performance evaluation system? Its promotion practices?
- If you had to do it all over again, would you have made the same decision to join this organization? Why?
- Assuming my work is excellent, where might you see me in another five years within this organization?

These are not necessarily the exact questions you may want to ask. For example, if yesterday's paper mentions downsizing plans at the company, then go directly to a question as to how that will affect the job and department. Also, this is not an exhaustive list of all the company-related questions you may need to ask pertinent to **your** situation. These questions should provide you with a starting point from which to devise the questions you need to ask.

Questions About the Job

Your questions about the company were designed to get a sense of where the company is headed and perhaps its corporate philosophy. Questions about the job will relate more specifically to the day-to-day activities you could expect if you were to join this organization. You may wish to ask about some of the following concerns.

- How did this opening occur? Is it a newly created position or did someone recently leave the position?
- Tell me about the nature of the work I would be doing most of the time.
- What kinds of peripheral tasks would likely take up the balance of my time?
- What would be my most important duties? Responsibilities?
- What types of projects would I be involved with?

What kinds of clients would I be working with?

What changes is management interested in having take place within the direction of this department?

What is the management style of the person who would be my supervisor?

In what ways is management looking for this function [the function performed by the department I would be working in] to be improved?

What have been the major problems [barriers to reaching department goals] in the past?

What will be the major challenges for the person who is hired?

How often will I be expected to travel?

Not all of these questions may relate to your specific situation, and you may be able to formulate many others that do. Use this listing as a guide to the type of information you may need to better determine whether this job would be a good fit with your skills, work style, and goals.

Questions About the Work Environment

How happy you will be in a job involves more than the work you will be doing. The people you will be working with, the way your performance is evaluated, and the support the company gives its employees in terms of training and development are issues that will affect how you feel about the organization once you are on the job. Consider asking questions relating to these areas of concern:

Can you tell me something about the people I would be working with? Working for?

How is performance evaluated? How often, by whom, what criteria are used? Does the employee have input into the evalua-

tion? Do you have an annual performance appraisal system in place? How long has it been operating? How does it relate to promotions and salary increments? How do employees feel about this system? What changes do you feel need to be made in the system?

Can you tell me something about the company's management system? How do supervisors see their role in this company? Tell me about my immediate supervisor.

Is there much internal politics that would affect my position? Will I be expected to become part of anyone's group? How controversial is this hiring decision? Would you say all employees feel they are dealt with fairly by management? Who is considered the most powerful or influential in my division?

Does the company provide in-house training? Does it support employees taking advantage of outside training in areas where it does not provide training programs? Is there support for employees returning to school for additional formal education?

How open are opportunities for advancement? Assuming high performance, to what other positions might I progress?

Questions to Ask At the Close

Assuming the interview has progressed to its final stage and you have asked questions about the organization, the job, and the work environment, you may breathe a sigh of relief. But you are not finished yet. Remember, you need to ask questions that will establish what you do from here. You do not want to go home and wait for weeks hoping to hear about this job.

Assuming you are still interested in the job, tell that to the interviewer. Ask when she (or the management team) expects to make a decision and when you could expect to hear. Then take the date a day or two after she has indicated a decision should be reached and ask, *"If I haven't heard from you by ____ (date) ____, may I call you?"* Almost always the interviewer will indicate you may call. Mark the date on your calendar and make certain

you do call if you have not heard by then.

This is also a good time to ask the employer if there is any other information they need in order to act on your application. If you still have questions concerning the job, you may want to ask the interviewer if there are two or three present or former employees you might talk to about the organization. He should provide you with the names and phone numbers. Be sure to contact them.

Questions About Salary and Benefits

The employer may bring up the salary and benefits issues earlier, but you should avoid asking benefits-related questions until you are offered the job. This means that, even though it is of great interest to you, you withhold asking questions about salary, vacation time, sick leave, working hours, medical insurance, and any other benefits issues. There will be time for that if you get the job offer. Of course, if the employer raises these issues, you may ask questions in response to what he has raised. But even then avoid letting this area become the all-consuming focus of discussion prior to the job offer.

After you have been offered the job, you should ask benefits-related questions. If it has not already been discussed, you will want to ask about the

salary range for the position. Try to talk in terms of a **range** rather than a single salary figure. Discussing a range will give greater flexibility for some negotiation. Usually there is room for some negotiation in arriving at a salary. Your research on the field – especially information gained from informational interviews – should give you an indicator of what the going market rate is for the job in question. Thus you should know whether the figure or range quoted is at the low, high, or mid range and decide whether to accept it or attempt to negotiate a higher figure. For further information on negotiating salary, you may wish to look at one of our other books, *Dynamite Salary Negotiations*, which is also published by Impact Publications.

You may wish to ask how often salaries are reviewed. Starting at the

*Try to talk in terms
of a range rather
than a single salary
figure. This will give
you greater room
to negotiate a
final figure.*

high end of the salary scale for your industry may not seem like nearly such a good deal when after three years on the job you still haven't received an increase. You will probably wish to know how salary increases are determined – annual cost-of-living increases, a merit system, or a combination of both. How large are the increases on average?

You'll probably want to establish what other benefits the company offers. Large companies may offer both a plan for term life insurance and medical insurance. You may wish to probe what deductible the medical insurance covers as well as whether the employer pays the entire cost or only a portion of the cost of health insurance. Many companies will pay the health insurance cost for the employee only. The employee must pay the additional cost for family coverage. **As** the cost of medical plans continues to rise, employers often require the employee to pay a greater portion of the cost of insurance than was once the case. Smaller companies may or may not have insurance plans to cover employees.

Larger companies are more likely to have retirement plans than smaller organizations. It is reasonable to inquire whether there is a retirement plan and how it is structured. Do you have to spend the rest of your life with the company before you are vested? Some large companies may offer profit sharing plans.

You will probably want to know about the leave policy. Some organizations designate a certain number of days each year for leave, whether sick or personal; others offer leave designated as numbers of days of sick leave and days of personal leave. How many paid holidays employees get each year as well as vacation days are likely to be benefits of interest to most applicants.

More and more large organizations are also providing day care opportunities for employees' children. Some companies give employees a choice of employer-paid benefits, but may not make all available as fully paid by the company. Many two-career couples do not need health insurance provided by both employers. For example, a couple may choose company paid health insurance through one spouse's employer and the other may select a paid day care arrangement through the other employer.

Smaller firms may not be able to offer many of the benefits mentioned above, but nonetheless may offer attractive employment opportunities. Questions about benefits should be raised prior to your acceptance of a job offer.

Questions About Relocation

If accepting a job offer necessitates moving to a new community, you need to determine what moving expenses your employer will pay. The most generous can include the cost of shipping your household goods to the new community; a per diem to cover hotel accommodations and food for travel days and perhaps a week or two after arrival in the new community while waiting for your household shipment to arrive; a portion of the closing costs on the home you are buying in the community; and even a guaranteed sale of your house in the community you are leaving. However, as the economy tightens, you are likely to find fewer employers able or willing to subsidize your move to this extent and more and more job applicants willing to accept employment without these subsidies. In many cases, all the expenses of a community move may be yours to pay. But whatever the case, you need to have a clear understanding of who will pay which expenses before you decide whether to accept the job.

Be sure you have a realistic estimate of the cost of living in the new community before you accept a position as well as prior to negotiating your salary. What appears to be a large salary increase over your present or most recent previous job may actually be the equivalent to a cut in pay if you are moving from a town in the midwest to southern California, New York City, Boston, or the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

For more information on questions to ask at a job interview, see Richard Fein's *101 Dynamite Questions to Ask At Your Job Interview* (Impact Publications).

9

Follow Up, Follow Up, Follow Up

THE INTERVIEW IS NOT OVER UNTIL YOU OR SOMEONE else has been offered and accepted the job. The fact that you conducted an interview or a series of interviews with an employer should not give you pause to relax. If you really want this job, you should focus on doing several things during the post-interview period. While you closed the interview once, when you left the interview site, you need to further close it through post-interview activities that will maintain the attention and interest of the employer.

It's Not Over Until It's Over

Once the interview is over, you still have work to do. This is not the time to sit back and wait to be called. For starters, as soon as possible after each interview and while it is fresh in your mind, record information about the encounter that you can review later. Try to be as specific as possible: list everything from the name of the person(s) you spoke with to the data you gathered regarding the position and organization; your skills that particularly fit the job requirements; and when the employer

indicated the next decision would be made. This is also a good time to mark on your calendar the date when you will place your follow-up call.

Next, within 24 hours, write a nice thank you letter, similar to our example on page 160. Express your appreciation to the employer for a good interview. Indicate your continued interest in the position, assuming this is the case, and briefly summarize your skills as they relate to the position. Close by indicating you are waiting to hear from her by X date – use the date she indicated she would have made her decision. Keep this letter focused and brief. The employer is a busy person and is not likely to appreciate nor read a lengthy letter. Bear in mind that, though it is a thank-you letter, it is a business letter. It should be typed using a letter quality printer and good quality business-size stationery and mailed in a No. 10 business envelope. At the same time, if you've been communicating with the employer by e-mail, which indicates you have permission to e-mail, go ahead and e-mail the letter in addition to sending a hard copy in the mail. Use the following e-mail attention line:

Thanks for meeting with me today.

At the very least, sending a thank-you letter is a courteous thing to do. However, you may get more mileage out of it than just doing the right thing. When your letter arrives, it will remind the interviewer of your candidacy. The brief summation of your skills as they relate to the job focuses her attention on the fit between you and the position. You have also reminded her that you expect to hear from her by a particular date. And if by chance you are one of the few to send a thank-you letter, you will have set yourself apart from the crowd.

Keep the Process Going

During the days that you are awaiting word from this employer, continue to network and apply for other positions that interest you. You need to continue to actively pursue jobs that fit your goals and skills. The time between an interview and a hiring decision may be weeks. Use this time constructively to promote your job search.

If you do not hear from the employer by the date specified, you must follow through and make the call to inquire whether a decision has been made. If they have not made a decision yet, your call will again put your

candidacy in their minds, and this may put you a few points ahead of others under consideration. Your dedication and follow-through will probably score a few more points in your favor. While follow-up alone will not get you the job, if it is a close decision and you call and the other candidate does not, your follow-up phone call could be your ticket to nailing the job!

Follow-Up Means You Follow Through

Do both yourself and the employer a favor. If you asked if it would be okay to call the employer in regards to the hiring decision, make sure you do. Too often individuals learn the importance of follow-up, but they only take it to the stage of seeking permission to follow up or they state they will call at a particular time. But when the time comes, they either forget to do so or they get cold feet and decide not to make that critical telephone call. If you said you would follow up on a particular date, make sure you do. Your follow-up actions will indicate to the employer that you are someone who also follows through in doing what you say you will do.

If you call and are told the decision has not been made, ask when you might hear from the employer and if it would be okay to call again in another few days. If, on the other hand, the decision has been made and you were not chosen, write another thank-you letter, similar to the example on page 161, in which you express your disappointment in not being chosen. Sincerely cite your appreciation for the opportunity to interview for the position and indicate your continuing interest in working with the employer. You may later discover this thoughtful letter will lead to a later job offer. Chances are you will be remembered by the employer as a considerate person. And in the end, that is what the job search and interview are all about – being remembered as someone who should be offered the job. Make sure you follow through your follow-up in a positive manner that will get you remembered for future reference.

If you are offered the job, you also should write a thank-you letter, similar to the one on page 162, in which you express your appreciation for the confidence given to you. This can be a very effective thank-you letter. It sets an important stage for developing a new and hopefully productive relationship in the coming months and years. It helps relieve the anxiety of the employer who may still be uncertain about his hiring choice.

In the end, how well you conducted the interview, including the quality of your presentation during this immediate post-interview phase, will set the stage in determining how well you will do on the job. The simple courtesy of a thank-you letter is the right thing to do for both personal and professional reasons. It will help you get off on the right foot to continued career success with this new employer.

Post-Job Interview Thank-You Letter

19932 Thornton Drive
Chester, GA 30019
April 9, _____

David Norton, Director
Marketing Department
Service International
1009 State Street
Atlanta, GA 31010

Dear Mr. Norton:

Thank you again for the opportunity to interview for the marketing position. I appreciated your hospitality and enjoyed meeting you and members of your staff.

The interview convinced me of how compatible my background, interests, and skills are with the goals of Service International. My prior marketing experience with the Department of Commerce has prepared me to take a major role in developing both domestic and international marketing strategies. I am confident my work for you will result in considerably expanding the Pacific markets within the next two years.

For more information on the new product promotion program I mentioned, call David Garrett at the Department of Commerce. His number is 202-726-0132. I talked to Dave this morning and mentioned your interest in this program.

I look forward to hearing from you on April 25th.

Sincerely,

Margaret Adams

Margaret Adams
adamsm@aol.com

Job Rejection Follow-Up Letter

564 Court Street
St. Louis, MO 53167

September 21, _____

Ralph Ullman, President
S.T. Ayer Corporation
6921 Southern Blvd.
St. Louis, MO 53163

Dear Mr. Ullman:

I appreciated your consideration for the Research Associate position. While I am disappointed in not being selected, I learned a great deal about your company and enjoyed meeting with you and your staff. I felt particularly good about the professional manner in which you conducted the interview.

Please keep me in mind for future consideration. I have a strong interest in your company and believe we would work well together. I will be closely following the progress of your organization over the coming months. Perhaps we will be in touch with each other at some later date.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Martin Tollins

Martin Tollins
tollinsm@earthlink.com

Job Offer Acceptance Letter

7694 James Court
San Francisco, CA 94826

June 7, _____

Judith Greene
Vice President
West Coast Airlines
2400 Van Ness
San Francisco, CA 94829

Dear Ms. Greene:

I am pleased to accept your offer and am looking forward to joining you and your staff next month.

The customer relations position is ideally suited to my background and interests. I assure you I will give you my best effort in making this an effective position within your company.

I understand I will begin work on July 1. If, in the meantime, I need to complete any paperwork or take care of other matters, please contact me.

I enjoyed meeting with you and your staff and appreciated the professional manner in which the hiring was conducted.

Sincerely,

Joan Kitter

Joan Kitter
kitterj@starpower.net

10

101 Answers You Should Formulate

READING THROUGH EXAMPLES OF RESPONSE STRATEGIES and answers to interview questions based on the point of view of the employer is a good start toward an effective interview, but your hard work should begin now. You need to take these questions and formulate your own answers that reflect the real you.

Prepare for the 101

A basic key to a successful interview is preparation. Even though you can never predict every question you will be asked, in most instances you can accurately predict 95 percent or more of the questions you must respond to. Most, perhaps all, of these questions will be similar in intent to the 101 questions found here. As you anticipate how you would respond if you encounter each of these questions in an interview, remember that you are formulating **your strategy** for a response. You should not try to determine the exact words you would use and then memorize them. To do this would be a big mistake. At best, your answer would likely sound memorized and you would greatly diminish your credibility. At worst, you might forget your memorized response in the middle of your answer!

So consider your answers in terms of basic strategies. What do you hope to convey as you respond to each question? Your goal is to convince the interviewer that you should be offered the job. So, as you respond, think in terms of the needs of the employer. How do your goals fit with her business needs? Keep this basic tenet in mind as you formulate your strategies in responding to questions you are asked. Try to make time prior to the interview to actually talk through your answers to questions. You may practice answering interview questions (which you have made into a list) posed by a friend or family member or you can read each question and then respond. Practice talking your answers into a tape recorder. Play back the tape and evaluate how you sound.

Do you exude confidence?

Do you sound dynamic?

Do you talk in a conversational style (rather than your response sounding like a "canned" answer)?

Do you speak without excessive fillers such as "*ah*," "*and ah*," "*like*," and "*you know*"?

Do you seem authentic and believable?

Do you appear likable?

The following questions have already been discussed in previous chapters as noted in the referenced page numbers for each question. Some of the questions may be phrased differently during an actual job interview. Try to give your best response to each question using a tape recorder. Then listen to your recorded responses and critique them.

Each time you talk through an answer, your words will be somewhat different since you have purposely not tried to memorize your response. You have thought through the strategy of your response, the gist of the message you want to convey, but you have not attempted to commit a response to memory.

Personality and Motivation

1. Why should we hire you? (page 120)
2. Are you a self-starter? (page 119)
3. What is your greatest strength? (page 109)

4. What is your greatest weakness? (page 109)
5. What would you most like to improve about yourself? (page 110)
6. What are some of the reasons for your success? (page 110)
7. Describe your typical workday. (page 111)
8. Do you anticipate problems or do you react to them? (page 112)
9. How do you deal with stressful situations? (page 113)
10. Do you ever lose your temper? (page 113)
11. How well do you work under deadlines? (page 114)
12. What contributions did you make to your last company? (page 115)
13. What will you bring to this position that others won't? (page 115)
14. How well do you get along with your superiors? (page 116)
15. How well do you get along with your co-workers? (page 116)
16. How do you manage your subordinates? (page 117)
17. How do you feel about working with superiors who may have less education than you? (page 117)
18. Do you prefer working alone or with others? (page 117)
19. How do others view your work? (page 118)
20. How do you deal with criticism? (page 118)
21. Do you consider yourself to be someone who takes greater initiative than others? (page 119)
22. Do you consider yourself a risk-taker? (page 119)
23. Are you a good time manager? (page 120)
24. How important is job security? (page 124)

25. How do you define success? (**page 124**)
26. How do you spend your leisure time? (**page 125**)
27. What would be the perfect job for you? (**page 129**)
28. What really motivates you to perform on the job? (**page 121**)
29. How old are you? (**page 135**)
30. What does your spouse think about your career? (**page 135**)
31. Are you living with anyone? (**page 135**)
32. Do you have many debts? (**page 135**)
33. Do you own or rent your home? (**pages 97 & 135**)
34. What social or political organizations do you belong to? (**page 135**)

Education and Training

35. Why didn't you go to college? (**page 103**)
36. Why didn't you finish college? (**page 103**)
37. Why did you select _____ college? (**page 02**)
38. Why did you major in _____? (**pages 92 & 98**)
39. What was your minor in school? (**page 98**)
40. How did your major relate to the work you have done since graduation? (**page 102**)
41. Why weren't your grades better in school? (**page 100**)
42. What subjects did you enjoy most? (**page 98**)
43. What subjects did you enjoy least? (**page 98**)
44. If you could go back and do it over again, what would you change about your college education? (**pages 99 & 102**)

45. What extracurricular activities did you participate in during college? (page 100)
46. Tell me about your role in [an extracurricular activity]. (page 100)
47. What leadership positions did you hold in college? (page 100)
48. How does your degree prepare you for the job at _____? (page 101)
49. Did you work part-time or full-time while you were in college? (page 101)
50. Are you planning to take additional courses or start graduate school over the next year or two? (page 102)
51. If you had a choice of several short training sessions to attend, which two or three would you select? (page 103)
52. What materials do you read regularly to keep up with what is going on in your field? (page 103)
53. What is the most recent skill you have learned? (page 104)
54. What are your educational goals over the next few years? (page 103)

Experience and Skills

55. Why do you want to leave your job? (pages 93 & 122)
56. Why have you changed jobs so frequently? (page 122)
57. Why would you be more likely to stay here? (page 122)
58. What are your qualifications for this job? (page 105)
59. What experience prepares you for this job? (page 105)
60. What did you like most about your present/most recent job? (page 105)
61. What did you like least about that job? (page 106)
62. What did you like most about your boss? (page 107)
63. What did you like least about that boss? (page 107)

64. Tell me about an ongoing responsibility in your current/most recent job that you enjoyed. **(page 111)**
65. How does your present/most recent job relate to the overall goals of your department/the company? **(page 108)**
66. What has your present/most recent supervisor(s) criticized about your work? **(page 113)**
67. What duties in your present/most recent job do you find it difficult to do? **(page 111)**
68. Why do you want to leave your present job? Are you being forced out? **(page 122)**
69. Why should we hire someone like you, with your experience and motivation? **(page 120)**
70. What type of person would you hire for this position? **(page 130)**
71. Have you ever been fired or asked to resign? **(page 131)**
72. What was the most important contribution you made on your last job? **(page 115)**
73. What do you wish you had accomplished in your present/most recent job but were unable to? **(page 115)**
74. What is the most important thing you've learned from the jobs you've held? **(page 120)**

Career Goals

75. Tell me about yourself. **(page 128)**
76. Tell me about your career goals. **(page 125)**
77. What would you like to accomplish during the next five years [or ten years]? **(page 126)**
78. How do your career goals today differ from your career goals five years ago? **(page 126)**
79. Where do you see yourself five years ~~from~~ now? **(page 127)**

- 80. Describe a major goal you set for yourself recently? **(page 127)**
- 81. What are you doing to achieve that goal? **(page 127)**
- 82. Have you ever thought of switching careers? **(page 127)**
- 83. How does this job compare to what would be the perfect job for you? **(page 129)**
- 84. What would you change about our company to make this your ideal workplace? **(page 129)**
- 85. How long have you been looking for another job? **(page 132)**

Why You Want This Job

- 86. What do you know about our company? **(page 128)**
- 87. What trends do you see in our industry? **(page 129)**
- 88. Why do you want to work for us? **(page 121)**
- 89. How much business would you bring to our firm? **(page 112)**
- 90. What similarities do you see between this and your current/most recent position? **(page 130)**
- 91. What makes this position different from your current/most recent position? **(131)**
- 92. Why are you willing to take a job you are over-qualified for? **(page 123)**
- 93. Why are you willing to take a pay cut from your previous [present] position? **(page 123)**
- 94. What would you change about this position? **(page 129)**
- 95. How long would you expect to stay with our company? **(page 124)**
- 96. How do you feel about working overtime or on weekends? **(page 114)**
- 97. Are you willing to relocate? **(page 132)**
- 98. How much are you willing to travel? **(page 133)**

99. What are your salary expectations? (page 133)
100. How soon could you begin work? (page 134)
101. Do you have any questions? (pages 147-155)

Unexpected Questions

You may not be asked any questions beyond the ones outlined in this book. If the questions you are asked do go beyond these, they will most likely fall into one of two categories:

Specific questions that relate to special knowledge or skills required for the job for which you are being considered.

Questions that are raised by unusual items or unexplained gaps or omissions on your resume or application.

Look over your resume. Is there anything that stands out? If you spent your junior year abroad – not in Paris or Spain – but in Timbuktu or your first job was in Inner Mongolia, these points are likely to raise questions simply because they are unusual choices. The interviewer is going to be curious about your experiences as well as what these choices say about you. If you have a two-year unexplained gap in your job history, this gap is bound to raise the question of what you were doing during this time. You need to be ready with honest, yet positive answers, that will further promote your candidacy rather than knock you out of the running.

If you have thoughtfully considered your responses and practiced responding with the gist of the message you want to convey, these questions should not throw you. However, if you haven't given such questions much thought, your responses are likely to show it.

Few questions should ever be answered with just a “yes” or “no.” Remember to provide **examples** as often as possible to support the points you make. If asked by the interviewer whether you are a self-starter you could simply respond “yes.” However, you will score few points for this monosyllabic response. It really says nothing except either that you think you are a self-starter or you think this is the response the interviewer wants to hear. But if you follow your “yes” response with an example or two of what you did that demonstrates you were a self-starter in your last

job (or in college if you have just graduated and have little work experience), you start to sell yourself. You want to impress the interviewer and you want to stand out from the rest of the applicants being interviewed.

Remember to use examples and use them frequently. The examples you use to support the assertions you make help to sell "you" to the interviewer. Examples make what you say about your skills and achievements more clear, more interesting, more credible, and more likely to be remembered.

Behavior- and Situation-Based Questions

Employers are increasingly incorporating behavior-based and situation-based questions in job interviews. **As** we noted in Chapter 2, "behavior-based" means that the interviewer asks you to describe how you responded when you faced an actual situation. "Hypothetical situational-based" questions don't ask for an actual situation, but ask you to consider a possible situation and describe how you would act if that occurred. These types of interview questions are an attempt to get applicants to do what they should be doing anyway: expanding their answers with examples that support the assertions they are making.

Be prepared to respond to these types of open-ended behavior-based and situation-based questions:

1. What would you do if. . . **(page 36)**
2. In what situations have you become so involved in the work you were doing that the day flew by?" **(page 34)**
3. If you were to encounter that same situation now, how would you deal with that person?" **(page 34)**
4. If you had a choice of working in our department A or department B, which would you choose? **(page 34)**
5. Why would you make that choice? **(page 34)**
6. Tell me about a recent time when you took responsibility for a task that was outside of your job description. **(page 34)**

7. Tell me about a time when you took action without your supervisor's prior approval. (page 34)

Always Ask Questions

One of the most important questions you can answer is #101 – *"Do you have any questions?"* The answer should be *"Yes, I have a few questions."* No matter how thorough the interview, no matter how much give-and-take, you should have at least two or three questions to ask near the end of the interview. Not asking any questions may hurt your chances of getting the job offer. During the interview other questions will probably come to mind which you had not anticipated.

When asked whether you have questions, you may indicate that many have been answered thus far, but you have a few additional questions. You should have jotted some questions down as you prepared for your interview. Feel free to refer to that list if you need to at this point. The fact that you have given thought to this aspect of the interview and have come prepared will be viewed as a positive by the interviewer. You may have questions, for example, about the relationship of this job to other significant functional areas in the firm; staff development; training programs; career advancement opportunities; the extent to which promotions are from within the organization; how employee performance is evaluated; or the expected growth of the company. You may want to ask questions that probe areas that were touched on earlier during the interview. For example, if the interviewer has mentioned that the company has an excellent training program, you may have specific questions: What kinds of training would you be offered? How frequently? How long do most training programs last?

If you are still interested in this job, be sure to close the interview by summarizing the strong points you would bring to the position and indicate your continued interest in the job and the company. Ask what the next step will be and when they expect to make a decision. Follow the advice in Chapter 8 on closing the interview and Chapter 9 on following up the interview. If you follow this process from beginning to end with intelligent answers and questions, you'll go a long way to nailing the job interview. Indeed, take the "Nailed or Be Nailed" job interview quiz again on pages 4-6. You should nail the job interview because your total score is above 150. Congratulations!

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The Authors

FOR MORE THAN TWO DECADES CARYL AND RON KRANNICH have pursued a passion – assisting hundreds of thousands of individuals, from students, the unemployed, and ex-offenders to military personnel, international job seekers, and CEOs, in making critical job and career transitions. Focusing on key job search skills, career changes, and employment fields, their impressive body of work has helped shape career thinking and behavior both in the United States and abroad. Their sound advice has changed numerous lives, including their own!

Caryl and Ron are two of America's leading career and travel writers who have authored more than 60 books. A former Peace Corps Volunteer and Fulbright Scholar, Ron received his Ph.D. in Political Science from Northern Illinois University. Caryl received her Ph.D. in Speech Communication from Penn State University. Together they operate Development Concepts Incorporated, a training, consulting, and publishing firm in Virginia.

The Krannichs are both former university professors, high school teachers, management trainers, and consultants. As trainers and consultants, they have completed numerous projects on management, career

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Their books represent one of today's most comprehensive collections of career writing. With over 2 million copies in print, their publications are widely available in bookstores, libraries, and career centers. No strangers to the world of Internet employment, they have written *America's Top Internet Job Sites* and *The Directory of Websites for International Jobs* and published several Internet recruitment and job search books. Ron served as the first Work Abroad Advisor to Monster.com. They also have developed several career-related websites: impactpublications.com, winningthejob.com, contentforcareers.com, and veteransworld.com. Many of their career tips appear on such major websites as campuscareercenter.com, monster.com, careerbuilder.com, and employmenteuide.com.

Ron and Caryl live a double life with travel being their best kept "do what you love" career secret. Authors of 19 travel-shopping guidebooks on various destinations around the world, they continue to pursue their international and travel interests through their innovative *Treasures and Pleasures of . . . Best of the Best* travel-shopping series and related websites: ishoparoundtheworld.com and contentfortravel.com. When not found at their home and business in Virginia, they are probably somewhere in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, the South Pacific, or the Caribbean and South America following their other passion – researching and writing about quality arts and antiques as well as following the advice of their other Internet-related volume designed for road warriors and other travel types: *Travel Planning on the Internet: The Click and Easy™ Guide*. "We follow the same career and life-changing advice we give to others – pursue a passion that enables you to do what you really love to do," say the Krannichs. Their passion is represented on ishoparoundtheworld.com.

As both career and travel experts, the Krannichs' work is frequently featured in major newspapers, magazines, and newsletters as well as on radio, television, and the Internet. Available for interviews, consultation, and presentations, they can be contacted as follows:

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