

# **55 INTERVIEW TRAPS**

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## **and how to avoid them**

*“Job offer belongs to candidate  
who knows how to avoid interview traps.”*

*- Martin Spingarn, Career Counselor*

**Uncover the “popular beliefs and assumptions”**

**Locate interview traps, avoid them,  
and land your dream job.**

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*Catherine L. Lee*

- ✗ **Small Talk Is Chitchat.**
- ✗ **Name Is Only a Symbol.**
- ✗ **Make a Positive Out of a Weakness.**
- ✗ **Interview Is All about Selling Yourself.**
- ✗ **It's Not What You Know; It's Who You Know.**
- ✗ **Now I've Bagged the Job, I Can Talk My Dream.**

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# INTRODUCTION

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Having a job interview is a major step towards getting your dream job. When you are in the race with 500 applicants for one job position, you cannot afford to make any mistakes in your job interview. Many job seekers fall prey to at least a few of many interview mistakes that trap them into losing the chance to advance their career. Job seekers' "popular beliefs" based on false assumptions are the most deadly yet latent traps blocking their way to job offers.

There's nothing easier, more natural – or more dangerous – than to latch on to those "popular beliefs." Job seekers do it all the time, as they mistakenly build their interview philosophies on foundations of half-truths and falsehoods, such as "candidate who is most qualified gets the job" or "interview is all about selling yourself."

There are quite a few books about interview. Why this one? Because the others stop at the critical point when you are about to fall in interview traps. They lack clear recognition of the traps and practical advices of how to avoid them. This book explores the reasons for many candidates' failures, uncovers the "popular beliefs and assumptions" that lead candidates astray, and helps you avoid the traps and land your dream job. The focus of this book is on location of the traps and advices of avoiding the traps. The language of this book is concise and right to the point.

Over the years, both as a corporate Human Resources professional and now as an Executive Search Consultant, I have personally interviewed hundreds of candidates for various positions. This interview experience has taught me a valuable lesson: qualified candidate doesn't necessarily get the job offer; job offer belongs to candidate who is well prepared and knows where the interview traps are and how to avoid them.

## Chapter 1. POPULAR BELIEFS

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### “Candidate Who Is Most Qualified and Prepared Gets the Job”

Nine years ago I interviewed for my third job as a HR Generalist. I was the most qualified candidate and was certainly very well prepared for the interview, as recalled by my former interviewer John Veruski who is now my good friend. I didn't get the job because I fell into the interview trap set by a popular advice – “you should always make a positive out of a weakness.” Here's the failure part of my conversation with John:

- ☺ **John:** Tell me what your greatest weakness is.
- ☺ **I:** Often, I get a little too focus on my work. My husband complains about my not giving reasonable amount of time to my family.
- ☺ **John:** Well, that's not you. That's your career counselor.

I was caught, reciting the career counselor's advice, at best, or lying about myself, at worst. I lost my credibility. Everything I said before and after was doubt to the interviewer. I didn't get the job because I fell in the interview trap – “You should always make a positive out of a weakness.” The interviewer didn't set the trap; I did.

Your popular belief “Candidate who is most qualified and well prepared gets the job” is a trap set by yourself. The job offer doesn't necessarily belong to the qualified candidate who is well prepared for the interview. Candidate who knows how to avoid those interview traps gets the offer.

### “Interview Is All about Selling Yourself”

MDI, a major Internet company in LA, posted a DBA position that attracted more than one hundred applicants. Having been interviewed by the hiring manager, our friend Paul got the job. “Way to go, Paul!” I asked, “How did you market yourself in the final

interview?” “I didn’t market myself much.” Paul said, “Most of the time the manager talked about how he handled his job and how he got promoted. I was just listening and admiring.”

Interviewers are human beings, too. They also have pride and vanity towards their jobs. Once speaking about their own careers, they start to forget the time and everything else. Some may even go on and on until the time is up. Given the chance, you should trigger such conversation to happen by asking for his management style or philosophy. Then you listen and admire. Asking questions to further clarify his style and philosophy will show that you really are interested in everything he has to say. You could make small comments like “I think that’s really important,” “I don’t think there are a lot managers who really develop their staff, as you obviously do” or “I think the best managers share that philosophy.” At the end of the interview, perhaps as you’re standing up to get ready to leave, you could say, “I would really like working for you.” Whatever you say must be genuine. Any hint of apple-polishing will actually cost you the job.

Remember that interview is NOT all about selling yourself. Interview is also about complimenting the interviewers. While demonstrating your qualifications, try to compliment the interviewers as well. Do not get flushed when chipping in small words like “Really?” Or “How did you make it?” Or “You must be working really hard!” Or “Yeah, it is tough for anyone in this position!” Or “Wow, you ARE the great one.” No one in the human world turn down compliments and admiration. In return, you pass the interview safely.

### **“Name Is Only a Symbol”**

My friend Brad Longfellow, the director of IT department with 360Netcom, recalls an applicant who kept referring to him as Mr. Longman. She didn’t get the job. I have also met some people who insist on changing my name from Catherine Lee to Catherine Leo. If you can’t remember the interviewer’s name, or are unsure of the pronunciation of it, ask the receptionist. Don’t take it for granted. Name is not just a symbol. To some

people, nothing is as important as their names. This is especially true for a candidate when it comes to a job interview.

### **“The More Detailed, the Better the Answer Is”**

I once asked a candidate a simple question, “What is your strong point?” and was inundated with a 30-minute list of his strengths – nine in all – with multiple examples of how he had used them in his former job. I tried several times to switch topics, but he persisted. Apparently he was fully prepared for such questions, but I was unable to learn much of what I needed to know about him.

Many interviewers see over-talking as self-indulgence or an attempt to control the interview. You should be alert to the interviewer’s subtle clues and respond to his specific needs for information. If your answers are too long and too detailed, the interviewer may, at best, think you cannot distinguish the important from the trivial; at worst, label you a “motor mouth.”

### **“It’s Time to Answer, Not Time to Ask”**

Most interviews conclude with the interviewer asking if you have any questions. The worst thing to say is that you have no questions. Having no questions shows you are either not interested or not prepared. Interviewers are more impressed with the questions you ask than the selling points you try to make during the interview. Before each interview, make a list of five questions you will ask. Take out your list when they ask if you have any questions. This demonstrates you are prepared and thorough. In some cases the interviewer starts the interview by asking if you have any questions. In such instances you will be well prepared to handle this situation.

## **“There’s Nothing to Lose When You Ask Questions”**

Asking a few job-related questions in an interview is good. Asking too many questions is annoying. Asking dumb questions is bad. The following are a few examples of the most frequently asked dumb questions:

### **💀 Dumb Question 1: “*What convinced you to come to Globalcom*”?**

Such questions may only be asked after a mutual interest or personal relationship has been established. They should go only to the individual with whom you might be working. If you are not sure about it, just back off.

### **💀 Dumb Question 2: “*So what is it exactly that you guys do*”?**

If you don’t know and couldn’t be bothered to find out, it tells the interviewer you have no right to be in this culture where people are proud of what they do.

### **💀 Dumb Question 3: “*Why do I need to fill out the application? It’s all in my resume*”.**

Treat the job application as your first assignment for the company. Who needs someone who resists work even before they are hired?

### **💀 Dumb Question 4: “*How am I doing so far*”?**

This question inappropriately puts the interviewer on the spot. No matter how great you are doing in the interview, if you ask questions like this one, all your previous efforts are wasted.

### **💀 Dumb Question 5: “*With all the restructuring going on, would I still have a job a year from now*”?**

Instead of asking a question that shows a professional, thoughtful approach, the candidate simply asks a question that shows personal insecurity.

### **💀 Dumb Question 6: “*Do you think mergers will results in more layoffs in this industry*”?**

Asked this way, the question shows insecurity rather than insight.



- 💀 **Dumb Question 7: “Why are you interviewing me when you are laying off other people”?**

Again, insecurity. The last person employers want to hire would be someone who feels insecure.

- 💀 **Dumb Question 8: “There are so many people you have to deal with here. How do you make sure that your point of view prevails in the end”?**

You can show that you have a bad attitude by asking questions like this one.

- 💀 **Dumb Question 9: “With all this emphasis on teams at Globalcom, how would an outstanding performer really stand out”?**

This question suggests a Me First attitude that is a one-way ticket to the exit.

- 💀 **Dumb Question 10: “I read some news on the Internet about a machine that can translate English into 121 languages. How will that impact on Globalcom”?**

Remember to show the relevance between the technology and your job. Otherwise, you will give the impression that your head has been lost in cyberspace.

- 💀 **Dumb Question 11: “UniveralBiz just bought WorldLink. What does that mean for Globalcom”?**

The problem with this question is that although the question indicates knowledge of a fact, it doesn’t indicate you have given the fact any thought or related it to your potential employer.

- 💀 **Dumb Question 12: “Are you guys in Globalcom going to contribute to the environmental improvement”?**

If you are not certain that the company tries to be a good corporate citizen, don’t raise the subject at your interview. You should be very careful about not raising an appropriate subject in an inappropriate way.

- 💀 **Dumb Question 13: “How do you feel about having so many foreigners running this place”?**

Raising sensitive topics like this one in your interview, you shoot yourself in the foot.

💀 **Dumb Question 14: “*My real interest in this job is to get my foot in the door with Globalcom and then switch to another function. Is that possible*”?**

A question that is badly asked. The proper way to ask should be something like this: “*If I perform well in this position, where could I be in three to five years?*”

The first seven words are an important part of this question.

Some candidates tend to ask loaded questions that reveal strong beliefs, such as “Do you really believe you should be operating plants in China where human rights are ignored?” Such questions can convey a sense of superiority, confliction of beliefs, or even contempt, and are much worse than the above-mentioned dumb questions.

## **“It’s Not What You Know; It’s Who You Know”**

The other day Brad, the director of IT department with 360Netcom, told me that he almost hired the wrong guy. “The interview went so well that I was about to offer him the job right away. Then I changed my mind because he mentioned he went fishing together with our CEO Mr. Paulo last summer. I myself never had the opportunity going fish with Mr. Paulo...”

Thinking that knowing the big name can help you get the job. Wrong! When it comes to interview, don’t you believe the popular saying: “It’s not what you know; it’s who you know.” With few exceptions, hiring managers are more interested in hiring people who can help them compete in the cutthroat marketplace than in running a country club. Trying to gain an edge by dropping names will make most interviewers think: can’t this guy make it on merit? Claiming to know top executives in the company may often be perceived as a threat.

## **“I’m Experienced; I Don’t Need Much Preparation”**

I still remembered the time when I interviewed for my fourth job, the position of Senior Consultant with a Web service firm. In the middle of the interview, I was asked why I wanted to leave my present position as the HR Generalist. Taken by surprise, I stated, “Mainly because they gave us too many assignments.” As soon as I said it, I know it didn’t sound right; the look on the faces of both interviewers confirmed this suspicion. I’d stuck my foot in my mouth, and spent the next 10 minutes extricating it. I quickly explained that my company gave my department so many projects that we were unable to guarantee the service quality. I told them how many projects we handled each week and they determined it was about twice more than their department handled.

I must have done a pretty good job since I did get the offer, but I certainly learned a valuable lesson. To prevent saying something you might regret, you need to practice telling your stories and giving answers to the common interviewing questions, no matter how experienced you are for interviews. Preparation is the best way to avoid the foot-in-mouth situation.

## **“Dress Up for Every Interview”**

This summer, Mr. Lopez was interviewing for another job while he was still working at an investment bank. He called Ms. Hanigan, who was interviewing him for the job as a Research Associate, to explain that he worked in a company with a casual dress code. “Would it be all right if I came to the interview casually?” he asked, “I don’t want to red-flag my employer.” That afternoon, he came to the interview, “medium-dressed”. He got the job.

There is a fine line between looking respectful and looking ridiculous, career counselors say. “Nobody wears three-piece suits anymore,” says Kate Wendleton, president of a national career-counseling organization. “And women can wear too much jewelry or too much of a hairstyle. You can look overly dressed for an interview.”

When you're trying to make an impression in an interview, you want to prove that you are going to fit within the organization. If the culture is shorts and jeans, and you come in a fancy three-piece suit, it is not working. You didn't properly investigate the company's culture. It sends a little flag: Is this someone who has done homework and is going to be the kind of person who has the savvy to be part of the team? Sometimes I'd try to help the candidates before they face their next question, "Take off that tie; take off that jacket."

If the dress is jeans and a T-shirt, wear slacks and an open collar shirt. If it's slacks and an open collar shirt, throw on a sport coat. If it's a sport coat, throw on a suit. At least match it and go one step up, but don't go three steps down. If you have no idea what the company's dress is like, it's okay to ask the recruiter or hiring manager before the interview.

### **“Be on Your Best Behavior”**

With the fullest preparation, John went to the interview planning to be on his best behavior. With shoes polished, smile fresh, and a firm handshake, he greeted the interviewer with an amiable, professional demeanor. He started the meeting with polite chitchat, dutifully answered questions throughout the meeting, sat with an erect posture, and tried to do everything just right.

Everything seemed perfect. But, he wasn't offered the job. It wasn't because he was not qualified. It was because he couldn't establish a connection with the interviewer. In another word, the interviewer just didn't like the fine way he behaved.

Being stiff or overly formal is no way to win the interview. Not only does doing so mean you're less likely to be in control, but you are also less likely to connect with the interviewer. The interviewers are people, too. They appreciate candidates who are down-to-earth, personable and genuine. Think about how well you know your current or former

bosses or coworkers. Then remember when you were interviewed by them and how they seemed like such unknown commodities. An unfamiliar interviewer today may be a close colleague and friend tomorrow!

## **“Illegal Questions Should Be Answered Tactfully”**

Basically, an illegal question is one that delves into your private life or personal background. Title VII is a federal law that forbids employers from discriminating against any person on the basis of sex, age, race, national origin, or religion. Some questions are tricky because if the question is job pertinent, they may not be illegal. Following are examples of some of the questions:

"How old are you?" is an illegal question, but they may ask whether you are over eighteen years old.

"Are you married?" is an illegal question, but they may ask how you would like to be addressed (a common courtesy) and whether you have ever worked for the company before under a different name.

"Does your religion allow you to work on Saturdays?" is an illegal question, but they may ask something like, "This job requires work on Saturdays. Is that a problem?"

When asked an illegal question, instead of a defensive or angry reaction, some candidates would use a tactful response, for example:

- ☺     *"Do you have children?"*  
          *"If you're concerned about the overtime, that won't be a problem for me, my family life has never interfered with my ability to do a job."*
- ☺     *"How old are you anyway?"*  
          *"Are you concerned that I may not have enough experience?"*
- ☺     *"Were you born in Canada?"*  
          *"Could you explain how that might relate this job?"*

Although these responses certainly seem tactful, they can also seem reluctant and somehow confrontational, and therefore cost you the job. You shouldn't use it only if you are extremely uncomfortable or are quite certain you no longer want that job.

When it comes to hiring, illegal questions tend to arise not out of brazen insensitivity, but rather out of an interest in you. The employer is familiar with your skills and background, feels you can do the job, and wants to get to know you as a person. Outright discrimination these days is really quite rare. With illegal questions, your response should be straight and positive – that's the only way you're going to get the job offer, and getting this job offer allows you to leverage other jobs. The following answers may give you some inspirations of how to handle illegal questions:

***“What religion do you practice?”***

“I attend my mosque regularly, but I make it my practice not to involve my personal beliefs in my work. The work for the company and my career are too important for that.” or

“ I have a set of personal beliefs that are important to me, but I do not attend any organized services. And I do not mix those beliefs with my work, if that's what you mean.”

***“How old are you?”***

“I'm in my forties and have more than 15 years of experience in this field.” Then list your skills as they apply to the job.

***“Are you married?”***

Simply “No, I'm not.” or

“Yes, I am. Of course, I make a separation between my work life and my family life that allows me to give my all to a job. I have no problem with travel or late hours – those things are part of this line of work. I'm sure my references will confirm this for you.”

***“Do you plan to have children?”***

Simply “No, I do not.” Or  
“Yes, I do. But those plans are for the future, and they depend on the success of my career. Certainly I want to do the best, most complete job for this company I can. I consider that my skills are right for the job and that I can make a long-range contribution. I certainly have no plans to leave the company just as I begin to make meaningful contributions.”

## Chapter 2. FALSE ASSUMPTIONS

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### “They Don’t Know about My Work”

The people who will be interviewing you are usually old hands at the job. They don’t know about you, but they often well know about the job you are doing or have done. They are quick to notice inconsistencies, hesitations, and uncertainties. They may challenge something you say just to see how you respond. If you back off, change, justify, qualify, over-explain, or retract what you said earlier, they may suspect that you’ve been exaggerating or lying to them, and are likely to probe further.

When an interviewer responds to your statement with a skeptical look, a pause, or a comment – like "Really?" – you’ve got to keep your cool. Just smile politely, nod, and wait for him to continue. If you become uncomfortable, you can always ask, "Have I answered the question to your satisfaction?" or "Was there anything else you wanted me to talk about?"

### “Small Talk Is Chitchat”

The following was a small talk as the interview began:

- ☺ **I:** Is it raining outside?
- ☺ **Candidate:** Yes, thank goodness. I hope the rain washes out some of that pollen. My allergies are killing me.

I immediately saw a string of sick days in the candidate’s future as his work piled up and languished on his desk. I knew it because I suffered from allergies, too. No employers wanted to hire someone who has serious problems that could affect his work performance.



Some interviewers begin with small talks. Perhaps it is a way of breaking the ice, of putting both you and the interviewer at ease. Perhaps it is part of a plan to see what kind of person you really are. Whatever it is, you cannot afford to neglect small-talk questions. You should answer all small-talk questions positively. If the interviewer asks how you like living in the town, you'd better respond that it is very pretty this time of the year, even if you really hate the dirty streets and air pollution. You could also respond better to my "still raining" question:

☺ **I:** Is it raining outside?

☺ **Candidate:** Yes. It's been a dry month, and we really need the rain.

Or:

☺ **Candidate:** Yes, and the air is nice and clean. Very refreshing.

### **"Now I've Bagged the Job, I Can Talk My Dream"**

Brad, the IT Director at 360Netcom, told me that he had been interviewing a well-qualified candidate and was ready to offer him the job, the position of Business Analyst. Then he casually asked the candidate a simple question: "What would you do if you didn't get the job?" Without hesitation the candidate replied, "I'd sell my house, move to Calgary, and be a freelance translator." Immediately Brad had doubts about the candidate's commitment to his career. The candidate was called in for more interviews, but eventually went away without the job offer. He had let down his guard and expressed his until-then well-hidden desire to drop out. The momentary loss of control had cost him what was probably his best job prospect.

I don't mean to say that you shouldn't dream. But when you're being interviewed, your goal is to get offered the job you're interviewing for, not to talk about your dreams. Think about each question before open your mouth – especially those innocent little questions that come out of nowhere after you think you've bagged the job.

## **“It’s Not My Problem”**

When 360Netcom needed to fill an IT Director position some time ago, it considered and screened dozens of candidates. After a two-month search, one individual seemed to stand out. In a similar position for a major competitor he had performed in exemplary fashion, with three promotions in six years. From what the company could tell, he was a perfect fit. When the vice president of Information Technology asked the HR manager to invite him for an interview, the job was his to lose.

They met on Monday morning, right on schedule. After requisite small talks and coffee, the VP asked the candidate to describe his experience. 30 minutes later he exhausted the topic with virtual non-stop combination of entertaining stories and descriptions of responsibilities. His body language and eye contact were excellent; his delivery was faultless – including an occasional pause for positive dramatic effect.

It was at this point that the VP had to excuse himself for another meeting, leaving the HR manager to handle the official farewell. As he went out the door, he heard the HR manager saying: “Looks like you might solve his problem.” The candidate responded: “What do you think he’s looking for?”

When the VP and the HR manager met for lunch, they agreed before the menus arrived that the candidate had struck out. Here’s what the VP said, “Why would I hire a person to identify my customer’s problems when he wasn’t smart enough to first find out what mine were?” That is precisely the point. If you don’t find out what your employer’s problems are during the interview, there is no way for you to project yourself as the candidate best able to solve them.

## “I Have Good References”

After the interviews, Paul knew that he was the best candidate for the position. From the satisfied smile on his interviewer’s face, he was pretty sure that the job offer was his. The next morning the interviewer called. Here’s their exchange:

- ☹ **Interviewer:** Paul, I’m afraid we’ve decided on someone else for the position. I’m sorry.
- ☹ **Paul:** Oh, I’m sorry to hear that. I thought I had all of the qualifications you were looking for. Can you tell me what went wrong?
- ☹ **Interviewer:** It’s not that anything went “wrong”. It’s just that we found someone with just a little bit better record than yours.
- ☹ **Paul:** Sorry to press the point, but it may help me in my next situation. The last time we talked, you were going to check my references. Was it something you learned during one of these calls that changed your mind? I can handle it, really. And if there’s some deep-seated problem with my candidacy, I should know about it now.
- ☹ **Interviewer:** Well, we did check your reference... nothing wrong, really. Good luck with your job searching!

The interviewer was under no obligation to tell Paul what went sour, but Paul immediately knew that he needed a new reference list for his next job interview. There were five names on the list including his colleagues and supervisor, all of whom he regarded as friends. He couldn’t believe it! At least one of them blew his chance. So he played investigator for the first time in his life, trying to find the slightest hint of who the “rat” was.

Paul was wrong. It turned out that the employer wasn’t dumb enough to check the references given by Paul. Instead, the employer called one of Paul’s counterparts – the person who did the same work as Paul did at the company and was the one most likely to level with Paul.

This is a typical story of reference checking. Don't assume that the company's list of references will stop with names you provide, and don't hope that an unfortunate incident with a past employer won't surface. Knowing that you'll try hard to avoid shooting yourself in the foot, your prospective employer realizes that the slate of names you provide won't include anyone who has negative things to say about you. To play safe, you can give your prospective boss a worst-case scenario for those references you think might damage you. If you're working with a recruiter or agency, have a call made on your behalf to get any bad news firsthand.

### **“I’ve Been Fired. There’s Nothing I Can Do”**

Make no mistake; this is a hard one. Getting laid off may not be your fault, but – at least as far as your former employer was concerned – getting fired is.

If you were fired, don't volunteer the information. Keep your resume noncommittal, and if the interviewer asks you why you left your last job, you might explain that your approach differed from management's, and then go on to detail the positive aspects of “your approach.” This may satisfy the interviewer, and it is probably the way to put your involuntary termination in a positive perspective. But remember, never blame other people for what happened to you. Demonstrate that you understand how you failed and, more importantly, how you will avoid repeating the failure. You learned from the experience, and the prospective employer will reap the benefits of what you learned.

Before hand, contact the employer who fired you. Ask him what he intends to say about you now. “Mr. Rodger, I'm in the process of looking for a new job, and I'd like to see how I stand with you. If you were asked as part of reference check, how would you describe the circumstances of my leaving the company? Would you say that I was fired? Would you say that I was laid off? Would you say that I resigned? My problem is that, every time I tell a prospective employer about my termination, I blow another shot at a paycheck.” This may persuade your former employer to use less pejorative terminology

in describing your departure from his company. If he is willing to cooperate, you may be able to skirt the entire issue of having been fired.

### **“They Know What I’m Doing Here”**

I once interviewed twenty people for an opening. After two rounds of interviews the selection narrowed to two candidates. One candidate had a strong background and interviewed well, but he never asked for the job and didn’t seem overtly enthusiastic. The other candidate had less experience and was not quite as smooth in the interview. However, she was very enthusiastic and specifically asked for the job, not once, but three times. Before I made the hiring decision I replayed the interviews in my mind; my choice was to hire the positive, persistent candidate. Her persistence was what I remembered most about the interviews.

Don’t assume that they know what you’re doing here. Just as the salesperson has to ask for the order, you have to ask for the job. While you should not be obnoxious in the pursuit of a position, you want to make it clear to the interviewer that you want the job and believe that you are a good match. Asking for the job in the interview is a good move. If you ask them for it and they were leaning something toward you, they just might say yes. On the other hand, if you want it, which you certainly do, but are shy of asking, they might think you lack enthusiasm for the job.

### **“Everyone Likes Sense of Humor”**

Teddy Miller, today the President of Globalcom Inc., was interviewed for a high position with Benchmark Inc., a giant Real Estate Development Company in San Antonio. Being asked about the reliable methods of analyzing the market trend for local real estate, he tried to be lighthearted by saying that he supported every way of analyzing

the local market trend except Feng Shui. Feng Shui is a ancient Chinese philosophy of analyzing how balanced the environment is created.

The interviewer – CEO of the company – looked up with a tight smile and slowly informed Miller that studying Feng Shui was his hobby and that he thought the philosophy had substantial merit. You can guess that the wisecrack caused his job. But it did teach him a lesson. “Think twice about making a joke or a wisecrack,” he summarized. “Any subject you choose, no matter how seemingly innocuous, has the potential for alienating the interviewer.”

Some hiring managers welcome humors because in their opinion sense of humor demonstrates you can keep work in a proper perspective. Other hiring managers want their questions taken very seriously, so being funny hurts your chance of getting hired. You may think you and the interviewer share a perspective on philosophy, politics, gender relations, and certain ethnic groups. Don’t go there. No laugh is worth insulting someone. So there’s always a risk of humor backfiring. If you think there’s the slightest chance of offending someone, keep your sense of humor to yourself.

Remember the following rules about being funny:

- ☺ Humor may be appropriate at the end of interviews, but use it sparingly.
- ☺ Poke fun at yourself only, nothing else.
- ☺ Follow the interviewer’s lead.
- ☺ Don’t force it.
- ☺ No sarcasm at any time.
- ☺ If in the slightest doubt, don’t.

## **“She Ignores Me!”**

Sam was stuck with the interviewer, the Vice President, who took call every few minutes, and even worse, made a call or two. There were people walking in to deliver or pick up papers. The interruptions and distractions could never let him finish a whole

sentence, let alone his well-prepared stories. His blood began to boil. He felt like saying to her: “Look, I don’t need this. If I wanted to be treated rudely, I’d take a ride on the subway. Good day to you, ma’am!”

Luckily, he didn’t say so. He secretly took a deep breath, and let his smile surface again, offering rapport-creating sympathy: “Wow! You really *are* busy. It certainly looks like you really do need some help here.” The interviewer put down that phone, really look at him for the first time, shake her head, and say with a bit guilt, “I’m sorry I’m just swamped. Up to my eyeballs. Yes, I do need help. Let’s see if I can get someone to take care of some work for me now ...” Instead of busting the interview, Sam actually used the interruptions and distractions to his advantage.

If you are interrupted and interviewer is obviously distracted, you need to keep the following in mind:

- Don’t take the interviewer’s distraction personally. She didn’t plan to ignore you.
- Try to use the interruptions and distractions to your advantage by saying something like “You really *are* busy! It’s obvious that I could be of great use to you in an environment like this.”
- Give her the time and space she needs: “Please, go ahead. I’ve blocked out ample time for this meeting.”
- Do not apologize. You’re not intruding.
- Don’t suggest rescheduling. Cooperate fully if the interviewer suggests rescheduling.
- Don’t give up.

## **“Interview Is a Solemn Meeting”**

I once coached a friend who was having a rough time finding a job despite excellent qualifications. After doing a little trouble shooting to identify any problems with her strategy, I realized her problem was simple. She believed that an interview is a

solemn meeting, so she rarely smiled during her interviews. I had her start concentrating on smiling as she walked into each interview – not a ply, but just a pleasant expression with the corners of her mouth slightly upturned, just like that pop culture item, the little yellow smiley face in Wal-Mart’s TV ad. From that point on, she started getting callbacks from the interviews, and the dramatic turnaround seemed more than a coincidence.

You’ve heard a million times that enthusiasm is contagious. If you don’t radiate enthusiasm and energy, then the interviewer is not likely to take much interest in you. If you forget to smile, or if you speak in a monotone voice, sound tired, or walk slowly or with slouched posture, you’ll turn off the interviewer immediately, no matter how well you’ve prepared for your stories, and no matter how effectively you communicate. A flat demeanor can negate all your hard work.



## Chapter 3. WRONG STRATEGIES

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### Instant Response

In *Sweaty Palms*, Anthony Medley tells a classic story about Jackie Robinson. Branch Rickey, general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, asked Robinson if he was willing to become the first black player in Major League Baseball. Robinson knew that if he accepted, he would face harassment from fans throughout the league. Robinson also knew that if he did not respond well to that pressure, it might prevent other black players from coming into the league for another decade or two. After pausing for several minutes, Robinson said he felt he was mature enough to handle the taunting and ridicule he would face in the coming years. Had Robinson responded immediately with, “Sure, I can handle it,” Rickey would have had serious doubts and might have sought another player.

Candidates often feel they must give instant responses to every question. While you would not want long pauses after every question, a significant pause is often the best response to a difficult question. If you answer an obviously difficult question too quickly, you can leave the impression of being a person who “shoots from the hip.”

A pause can demonstrate that you are a thoughtful person who wants to provide the most appropriate response. Pausing also gives you time to select the best example and therefore provide the best answer possible. When a question is asked, and you realize it is going to be difficult, look away from the interviewer and begin to consider a response. Looking away is the natural way all people ponder a question. To try to maintain eye contact while thinking is unnatural. With difficult questions, a pause of 15-20 seconds is reasonable. If you need to buy some time you might say, “That’s a good question,” “That’s a difficult question,” or “That’s a tough one.” This will give you another few seconds to think.

## Clarify Ambiguous Questions

In the middle of the interview, Jim was asked a frequently asked interview question – “What is the biggest mistake you ever made?” Without a thought, he asked for clarification: “Do you mean in my life or in my work?” “In your work of course.” Then Jim realized he made a wrong move. He had to spend the next five minutes talking about one of his mistakes in work. No matter how he tried to recover it, he still might be pictured as a person with a work failure.

Interviewers often ask questions that can be interpreted in more than one way. Questions like “What is the biggest mistake you ever made?” or “What was the biggest crisis you ever experienced?” are unclear whether the interviewers want job-related experiences or personal experiences. If asked to clarify, interviewers have to say job-related because they generally do not want to give the impression of probing into your personal life. However, you’d better not ask for clarification. Take a direction that is easier for you, safer, or will show you in a better light. Take the question about your biggest mistake for example. It’s usually easy and wise to simply mention a personal experience. The interviewer can always come back and say he wants a job-related example. But at least you gave an honest answer. Usually, if you give a good answer, the interviewer will be satisfied and will go on to the next question. Another reason not to ask for clarification on these types of questions is that it breaks the continuity of the interview and can make you seem awkward. You may also seem too cautious and afraid to take risks.

Here’s an interesting story a candidate told about his biggest mistake:

“A colleague of mine came to a party with his wife. She had put on a good deal of weight. Well, my colleague had been talking quite a bit about starting a family – and I just naturally put two and two together. ‘So when is the big day?’ My colleague’s wife just looked at me, ‘What big day?’ ‘The baby’ I said. ‘I’m not expecting.’ Well, you can bet that’s the last time I put two and two together like that! Fortunately, she took it all graciously – and seemed concerned that I was embarrassed. But I learned a lot about

never assuming something without getting the facts. I mean, she could have been a client or a client's spouse. The stakes are often higher than you think. It was a painful but valuable lesson."

## **I'm Competent; I'm Here to Lead**

I knew Sam was the perfect candidate for the QA position in Aplus Inc., a computer manufacturer in Houston. He had seven years of QA experience in the industry, and was the right employee employers were looking for. Unfortunately he failed the interview with the QA director. Some time later I knew the reason. Sam did such a great job showing his strong skills for the QA position that the interviewer – the QA director – felt threatening that some day Sam could replace him as the department leader. Sam was too aggressive showing his skills and potential as a team leader. He made the interviewer feel threatened.

Occasionally you'll get a sense that an interviewer feels threatened by you. This most often occurs if the person is not competent, has less knowledge than you have in your specialty, or has not been in the job long enough to have gained the full confidence of upper management. Books on management typically discuss the importance of hiring the best person possible, even if that person know more than you. The idea is that you can't be promoted until your replacement has been trained. People who are secure seek the best because those employees will make them look good and help them get promoted. In spite of this management premise, some managers will consciously or unconsciously not want to hire someone who is more knowledgeable or capable than they are.

A statement like "I certainly think we should be able get this department shaped up very quickly" will come across as threatening and egotistical to nearly anyone, especially a manager who has given a great deal of thought to the existing problems but has not yet solved them. A nonthreatening, yet positive statement might be something like "I believe I can certainly play a key role in tackling some of the issues. At Globalcom we faced

some similar issues and I think we came up with some good solutions. Some of them may be appropriate here as well.”

If you sense that your interviewer feels threatened by you, tone down your experience and results a bit. This is the only circumstance in which you might intentionally undersell yourself. If you determine that you are more knowledgeable than the interviewer, do nothing to give an impression that you feel superior. Avoid discussing things the interviewer may know little about. Do not correct him if you detect an error in something he has said. Of course, you should always be careful about correcting anyone during an interview. Once you get the job, you can then determine whether you want to work for that person.

## **Make a Positive Out of a Weakness**

Once I asked a candidate one of the most common interview questions "What are your weaknesses?" She replied: "I'm a perfectionist." I know that she just wanted to turn a weakness into a positive. After all, that is the kind of answer recommended by some interview books. The problem is that the answer is so planned and contrived that it sounds insincere and thus lacks credibility.

If you are asked, "What are your weaknesses?" giving a straightforward, totally honest answer is a mistake; the interviewer doesn't expect you to. Trying to make a positive out of a weakness is worse; your answer may sound fake – experienced interviewers are not that easily fooled. You should highlight skill that you wish to improve upon and more importantly describe what you are proactively doing to enhance your skills in this area. Interviewers really don't care what your weaknesses are. They simply want to see how you handle the question and what your answer may indicate about you. Highlighting an area for improvement demonstrates you are self-aware. Describing what you are doing about that weakness demonstrates you are proactive and seek to continually improve your talents.

## Keep Answers Short

Below is part of the conversation occurred some time ago between a candidate and me:

- ☺ **I:** So, you said your specialty is in writing ASP pages. Is that right?
- ☺ **Candidate:** Yes, ASP is my specialty.
- ☺ **I:** The Company is considering moving its Website from Unix server to Window 2000 server. Can you rewrite the company Web pages using ASP?
- ☺ **Candidate:** Sure, I can do that. No problem!

What's wrong with the candidate's answers? There are two problems. First, the answers are too short. They tend to end the conversation. Secondly, the answers are glib, lack of confidence and positive attitude. It would be a mistake if anyone got a job by answering questions like that. So, those answers are bad ones.

A better conversation could be:

- ☺ **I:** So, you said your specialty is in writing ASP pages. Is that right?
- ☺ **Candidate:** Yes, ASP is my specialty. I have been writing ASP pages at GlobalCross for the past three years, and I have coded the company's Web site from ground up. You might want to check; the URL is [www.globalcrossing.com](http://www.globalcrossing.com). I have also coded six other sites for the company's clients including the large e-commerce site WorldBuz.com. Do you need the URLs of the sites?  
.....
- ☺ **I:** The Company is considering moving its Website from Unix Server to Window 2000 Server. Can you rewrite the company Website using ASP?
- ☺ **Candidate:** I have checked the company's Website. Yes, converting the site into ASP pages would not be a problem for me. I agree with you, Windows Server is growing fast and starts to dominate the market. If I may ask, are there any other specific reasons that the company is considering switching servers?

It's a fact of life: when it comes to interview, there are more bad answers to any particular question than good ones. While it's impossible to list all bad answers to all interview questions, here are the general rules for answering questions:

- Avoid one-word or one-sentence answers – those answers end the conversation. Effective salespeople know that the best way to pitch his goods is to keep the conversation between the prospect and him going on. The more time the prospect invests in considering the proposition, the greater the chance of making the sale. Take your cue from the effective salesperson, and give answers that spark rather than conclude the conversation.
- Avoid negative answers. An interview is not the place to confess. Instead, it's the place to discuss your qualities and accomplishments. Anything you say in the interview should be positive. If you can't cast a problem into a positive, productive light, avoid saying it.
- Avoid transparently glib answers. Answers like "Sure, I can do that. No problem!" don't ring true. You should make your responses as positive as basic honesty will allow.
- Avoid answers that criticize your present/former employer, colleagues, or supervisor. Some interviewers may actually bait you into such responses. Don't take the bait.
- Avoid making things up. If you are caught making things up, you'll lose all your credibility. You won't lose points if you don't know the answer to all questions. If you don't know the answer, look at the interviewer in the eye and respond, "You've got me there." Or: "I don't know the answer to that one."
- When unsure, buy time. The best way is to repeat the question, especially if you focus on the heart of the question. If not overused, silence is also effective, especially if accompanied with a nod or a smile that suggests you are preparing a thoughtful, responsive answer.
- Get a better one. If a question is particularly difficult, try for a better one. Ask to have the question rephrased, clarified, or defined more sharply. Ask your own question or clarify or define a point yourself.

- “I don’t know, but...” There comes a time in each of our lives when we have to admit that we don’t know the answer. Rather than bluff and fumble around, try candor. “I don’t remember the exact number of ASP files I have coded during the past three year, but I have it in my records and will get it for you this afternoon.” Or “I don’t recall the production-increase future for that year, but I’ll check when I get home and phone you with the specifics.” We all have times when don’t know the answer, so don’t be embarrassed. Just tell the truth and commit to get more precise information, if you possibly can, within a specific time frame.

## Not to the Point

A candidate is interviewing for the Website developer position. Here’s part of the conversation:

- ☺ **Interviewer:** I’m not convinced that you’re right for this job.
- ☺ **Candidate:** I’m sorry to hear that. I want to add something to my previous speaking. You see, I also have excellent experience in server configuration. May I continue?
- ☺ **Interviewer:** No, that won’t be necessary. Server configuration is not what we’re looking for.

End of the conversation, as well as the chance for the candidate.

You have nothing to lose by taking the phrase “I’m not convinced” as an invitation to convince the interviewer once and for all that you are right for the job. Once again, the experience of veteran salespeople can serve to guide you. When a salesperson meets resistance, he probes for soft spots through that resistance by asking questions. You should do the same: “Why do you say that?” Or: “What will it take to convince you?” Let the interviewer tell you what he needs, then give it to him:

- ☺ **Interviewer:** I’m not convinced that you’re right for this job.
- ☺ **Candidate:** What will it take to convince you?

- ☺ **Interviewer:** I'm not sure that you have enough experience on Website development.
- ☺ **Candidate:** Of course, you can find people who have been developing Website longer than I have, but if you look at what I've accomplished in my position – 15 Websites including seven e-commerce sites with shopping card system – wouldn't you agree that I am an experienced Web developer?

Probe with your questions, invite the interviewer to review his needs, and respond to each of those needs. Each time you present your qualifications, invite agreement: "Wouldn't you agree?" In a stress interview, the interviewer's expressions of doubt are a challenge – or request – to you for more information, more reasons to say yes.

## **Thank-You Note**

What's wrong with sending a "thank-you" note to the interviewer soon after the interview is done? Absolutely nothing wrong. After all, all interview books and career consultants recommend it. It's just that the "thank-you" note won't help you at all. Just imagine that every candidate sends "thank-you" notes after interviews. Every interviewer receives "thank-you" notes after interviews. My wastepaper basket is full of "thank-you" notes during the hiring season. "Thank-you" notes have become as cheap as wastepaper.

I don't mean to tell you to do nothing after the interview. What I'm trying to tell you is that if you want to stand out of the candidates, write something with vivid details. Tracy's story may give you some inspiration.

I have known Tracy for quite a long time. Not long ago she was applying for a business analyst position. Disappointed, she came to me after being interviewed by the General Manager of IT Department. "My interview didn't go well," she said, "And too much competition. I won't get it." A week later, she told me she got the job! "How did you do it?" I asked, "You said the interview didn't go well, and there's too much competition ..." "I'm not very sure; probably because of the letter."



Now she knows the reason from her former interviewer, the general manager, who is her boss and friend now. She sent a nicely composed letter while other candidates sent empty short “thank-you” notes. As an interviewer myself, I share the same experience with the general manager. When I receive “thank-you” notes, I throw them away immediately. When I receive real letters, I can’t help opening and reading them. I got Tracy’s permission to attach her letter here. Note how she complimented the interviewer, clarified her understanding of the position, expressed her enthusiasm towards the job, and marketed her skills again in a pleasant, light tone.

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Dear Mr. McCormick,

Thank you for spending time interviewing me yesterday. I very much enjoyed our pleasant meeting and am looking forward to the opportunity of working with you at GlobalNetcom.

I am most impressed by the amount you have accomplished in such a short time as the General Manager of Information Technology who heads up five divisions. This morning, I looked at the company's Web site again. The worldwide fiber optic network that GlobalNetcom is planning and building brought me a strong feeling of connectivity, especially when I was looking at the network plan to connect China where I was born, and North America where I received my higher education. I remain very interested and enthusiastic about the business analyst position and believe that my education, professional experience, leadership competencies, and strong work ethic will definitely be great assets for GlobalNetcom.

I understand that you are seeking a business analyst/project manager who shares your vision and is open to implementing creative and cutting-edge changes. I share your vision and am looking for such a professional opportunity in the telecommunications field. I am looking for one that will allow me to create and implement policies and procedures to ensure the efficient use of internal resources, to refine and improve internal processes and to coordinate and build relationships at all levels including operations, enterprise planning, IT systems and corporate senior executives teams. I will be supporting internal IT projects, analyzing business information, gathering/documenting requirements and specifications, creating work plans, directing technical resources, tracking the progress of projects, communicating results, preparing ongoing

assessment summaries for the senior management team and ensuring all projects are completed within the allotted timeframe.

My formal education and training in engineering and business management, particularly in telecommunications, together with my working experience involving almost every aspect of the business cycle including design, production, business analysis, project management, sales, and marketing have equipped me with strong interpersonal, facilitation, negotiation, leadership and written communication skills. I understand business/technical concepts and terminology, possess the ability to quickly understand and articulate business issues and goals, and effectively build up relationships at all levels of an organization and am able to manage multiple projects concurrently.

I share your philosophy about the importance of communication skills. I understand that in business, good communication skills are not only the way that we express ourselves, but also, more importantly, the way that we work with people. I would like to share with you some of my philosophies that have evolved from working at ExcelTrans.

I helped start ExcelTrans from the ground up and expand the company into one that provides 13-language Website translation and promotion services to clients worldwide. Our continuously improving communication skills play an important role in this progress.

One of the skills that I have learned from work is the importance of keeping clients informed.

One example is when we were working on the project for EquipGeologging, a logging equipment manufacturer in the UK. One of our translators in Argentina experienced an emergency in the middle of the work and it became impossible for us to deliver the service within the time schedule. Thanks to the telecommunications industry, I was able to call and email the client, keeping them informed of our progress. Although our work was delayed for a few days, the client understood our situation, and as a matter of fact, was quite satisfied and returned for more service. He told me that what made him happy was the way I kept them informed during the process. I believe that keeping people informed helps establish close client relationships. I also ask my employees to keep me informed so that I know what they are doing, where they are heading, and how I can integrate their individual work into my planning.

Another important skill I have learned is to put myself in somebody else's shoes when communicating with them.

One of our largest clients is MGF Financial Group located in New York. They made an inquiry about our service, indicating that they planned to get part of their 500-page Website translated and promoted in three languages. The challenge was that they had a tight budget for the Internet marketing campaign. I organized a team of people analyzing their business and market needs and made a proposal. We earned the initial business and went on to receive repeat business. Later, the marketing director told me that they actually approached a few of our competitors before coming to us. What made us earn their business was neither our price nor our résumés; we won their business because we put ourselves in their position by analyzing their business and translating the needs into a proposal that worked within their budget, while other companies only submitted their quotations or pricing information. This experience taught me the importance of understanding the client's perspective and is something I use to guide my work on a daily basis.

Establishing personal relationships with clients is another communication skill I have learned through experience. As a manager, I truly understand the importance of this skill. GlobalBid, an Internet company based in Victoria, British Columbia, is one of our largest clients. I regularly visit with the managers even when there is no urgent business to discuss. Personal visits show my respect to them and help me to establish a good working relationship. The close personal relationship smoothens our business relationship and makes my daily work much easier.

One of my strengths is the ability to motivate staff from different cultural backgrounds to work together to achieve a common goal. At ExcelTrans, I manage 26 translators, eight proofreaders and five programmers who are based in different countries. Working with translators from one country requires a different strategy than working with translators from other countries. When I tell an American translator to correct a mistake, he/she may delightfully follow my instructions and make the same mistake the very next time. If I tell a Japanese translator to correct a mistake, he/she may feel embarrassed about the mistake and then quit the job. If I tell a German translator to correct a mistake, he/she may become angry and argue with me for the rest of my life. If I tell a Mexican translator to correct a mistake, he/she may simply ignore me until I threaten to fire him/her. I have realized that my level of cultural familiarity and ability to keep an open mind has helped me to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds.

My greatest success has been in transforming individuals into a working team and turning new programs into highly effective operations.

Maintaining an attractive and stimulating physical environment is one of the keys to the success of the operations.

I like the dynamic and fast-paced environment in your IT group. Though working at a big start-up company could be frustrating sometimes, it is also challenging and rewarding. I would appreciate you giving me the opportunity to work with you and to grow with the company. I enjoy learning and am looking forward to the possibility of this challenge.

Thank you very much again for considering me for this position.

Best regards,

*Tracy S. Chen*

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## Chapter 4. BAD BEHAVIORS

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### **Interview Conducted over Dinner**

Many interviews, especially those with candidates on the short list, are conducted over dinner. Managers sometimes simply like to dine out at company expense, of course; but don't assume that what you say and how you behave are off the record. Although the interviewer may tell you that he simply wants to know you better, be assured that he has specific objectives to cover during dinner. He may want to see how you conduct yourself in a more relaxed situation, whether you know the difference between consommé and a finger bowl, how well you hold your liquor.

Table manners are a large part of the minefield; people grow up with different ideas of what constitutes good dining habits. Over the years I have seen good candidates sink themselves by carrying on lively conversations with mouth running over with food, using knives and forks like weapons, sampling food from other persons' plates, obsessively separating a plate of food into individual sections, and stirring everything together into an unrecognizable heap, gesturing wildly with utensils, and, of course spilling their drinks into various laps. An interview over a meal provides hundreds of ways to get yourself evaluated on your eating habits rather than your skills.

Despite prudence in ordering easy-to-eat foods, accidents happen. If you spill something on the table, handle the situation. If your host does not immediately summon a waiter, you should do it. If you spill food or drink on yourself, wipe yourself off, summon a waiter, and ask for club soda. Dab a little on the stain. This time-honored method may or may not minimize the damage to your clothing, but at least it will demonstrate that you know what to do in a minor crisis. Apologize simply and quickly to those at the table. Don't apologize profusely or at length. This is an employment interview, not a seminar on mealtime catastrophe. You might, however, poke gentle fun at yourself: "Well, I hope this job doesn't require much eating!"

If you spill food or drink on one of the interviewers, you do have a more serious problem. Chances are, the “injured party” will be gracious and a good sport, but there may be unspoken resentment, and you will certainly look foolish. Accept the catastrophe as a test of your grace under fire. Apologize quickly, and then ask what you can do to help. Do not start wiping down your fellow diner. Suggest the club soda treatment: “Let me call the waiter over and get you some club soda for that.” Do not add insult to injury by offering to pay for dry cleaning, but do offer help: “I have a marvelous dry cleaner. Can I send you there – or take your suit there myself?” Finally, give voice to your embarrassment: “This is really embarrassing. I’m very sorry.” Then get on with the interview meal.

### **“Sit Closer to Make the Conversation Cordial”**

Unless it’s a “walk interview,” no interviewers let the candidate stand throughout the meeting. But, I can’t remember the number of times when a candidate sat before my nose and talk into my face.

Encroaching on another’s “personal zone” is a bad idea in any business situation; it’s particularly dangerous in an interview. A thirty-inch standard is a good one to follow: it’s the distance that allows you to extend your hand comfortably for a handshake. You should maintain this distance throughout the interview, and be particularly watchful of intrusions during the early stages when you meet, greet, and take a seat.

Applying this principle may seem simple, but how often have you found yourself dodging awkwardly in front of someone to take a seat before it has been offered? An interviewer’s office is the extension of her personal zone; this is why it is not only polite, but also sound business sense, to wait until the interviewer offers you a seat.

It is not uncommon to meet with an interviewer in a conference room or other “neutral” site. Again, wait for the interviewer to motion you to a spot, or, if you feel

uncomfortable doing this, tactfully ask the interviewer to take the initiative: “Where would you like me to sit?”

## **“Can’t Wait to Talk out My Qualifications”**

I’ve met so many candidates who were eager to speak. They felt the urge to demonstrate all their skills, but did not know how to react to my speaking. They were more interested in what they had to say than in what I wanted to say. It’s no doubt that they well demonstrated their skills, and also their “self-centered” personality. Who wants to hire a self-centered employee?

Like you, the interviewer feels as if he is performing. It’s more important to demonstrate that you hear and understand what the interviewer expresses to you than to tell him absolutely everything you believe he should know about you. When he is excited about something, get excited, too. If he expresses delight, smile in return. If he raises an issue that is clearly of critical importance to him, focus your gaze, bring your hand thoughtfully to your chin – show that the subject is of critical importance to you, too. Keep your self-restraint lively. Smile. Nod. React.

## **Take Control**

The interview was still in a rapport-building stage when out of nowhere an applicant said, “Well, let’s roll up our sleeves and really get to it.” This gave me an instant feeling of dislike. The applicant didn’t get the job. Another applicant entered the room, took off his coat, and announced, “Let’s get comfortable.” The result was the same. Some candidates just feel compelled to take control of the interview. This approach makes them seem arrogant. Who wants to hire a boss?

## Chapter 5. INAPPROPRIATE MOVES

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### **30 Minutes Early**

Nothing makes a worse impression than arriving late. How are about arriving early? Getting to the office building at 1:30 for a 2:00 appointment is good; presenting yourself to the receptionist at that time is not. When it comes to interviewing, only fools rush in. It pressures the interviewer – and could make it look as though you have nothing better to do than read magazines in the waiting room. Instead, go to a nearby restaurant for a last-minute cup of coffee and a final check of your hair and clothing.

### **The Bill in the Restaurant**

John was invited to a meal meeting with the employer - the final round of his interviews. This is a good sign because an “eating meeting” means that he was under strong consideration. He knew that the final interview could lead directly to the job offer. Everything went prefect until he found the bill on his side of table. Having hesitated for a while, he picked up the bill and offered to pay. Too bad he didn’t get the job because of such a minor mistake!

I know an interviewer whose favorite test of composure is to have the waiter, by arrangement, put the bill on the candidate’s side of the table. He then chats on, waiting for something interesting to happen. If you ever find yourself in a similar situation, don’t fall in the trap! Do not pick up the bill, however long it is left by your plate. When ready, your host will pick it up, because that’s the simple protocol of the occasion. By the same token, you should never offer to share payment.



## **The Handshake**

Every candidate knows that the first impression is important. But how many candidates know that offering handshake could cause damage to the first impression?

The tradition of handshake has been to extend your hand and give a firm, confident shake. But this may be the wrong approach in some situations. Some cultures view touching as too intimate. Many women consider a handshake too much of a male tradition. And some people, like one interviewer I know, are concerned about germs:

“I interview ten candidates a day. I don’t know how many of them sneeze on their hands. Odds are I got the flu every recruiting season. Also, I don’t want to give Mr. A the germs from Miss B by shaking their hands. So I generally try to avoid shaking hands by making an open gesture of where the candidate should sit. It doesn’t work all the time, so I have to regularly wash my hands between interviews. Every time when I see an candidate extending hand to me, I feel forced and nervous.”

If you initiate the handshake, some interviewers may think that you desire to dominate the interview; this is not a good impression to leave with one’s potential boss. So, a handshake today is a judgment call. If the interviewer extends a hand, go for it. Otherwise, smile big and wait for the invitation. If for any reason you do find yourself initiating the handshake, do not pull back; if you do, you will appear indecisive. Instead, make the best of it, smile confidently, and make good eye contact.

The handshake should signal cooperation and friendliness. Match the pressure extended by the interviewer – never exceed it. Ideally, the handshake should last for between three and five seconds, and should “pump” for no more than six times. (The parting handshake may last a little longer.)

Use only one hand; always shake vertically. Do not extend your hand parallel to the floor, with the palm up, as this conveys submissiveness. By the same token, you may be seen as being too aggressive if you extend your flat hand outward with the palm facing down.

## The Coffee

In the past interviews, I've seen more than a dozen coffee accidents. I'm not a cruel person, but I was really amused to see different reactions of the candidates. I won't list them here to entertain you, but you can launch your imagination.

If the interviewer offers you coffee, just say "no, thanks" to play safe – even if you feel you could really use a cup. To begin with, you probably don't need the added anxiety caffeine may produce. More importantly, in an interview, with your attention tautly focused and your nerves ratcheted up about as far as they can go, a cup of hot, dark coffee is just a catastrophe waiting to happen. If unfortunately the catastrophe does happen – you spill the coffee, the incident is not as destructive as you might fear insofar as the incident empowers the interviewer by giving her an opportunity to comfort you and help you clean up. Here's what you should and shouldn't do:

- ⊗ Don't try to minimize the accident. If the coffee is hot, stand up, and do what you can to get it off you.
- ⊗ Declare, "This is embarrassing! Can you direct me to the washroom?" Go to the bathroom and clean yourself up as much as you can.
- ⊗ Apologize: "I'm really sorry this happened. I hope I haven't stained your rug." But, don't grovel and don't put yourself down. Don't say, "I'm such an idiot!" "I can't believe I did this!" or the like.
- ⊗ Thank the interviewer for his help – even if he did nothing more than direct you to the restroom.
- ⊗ Above all, get on with the interview. After apologizing, continue: "I'm okay. We were talking about so-and-so. This is what I wanted to say before I so rudely interrupted myself ..."

## **Overcome Bad Impressions**

It's hard to get the toothpaste back into the tube, and it's almost as hard to overcome a bad first impression. I remember a candidate who disparaged a manager in his current organization, then, realizing that this made him sound judgmental, tried to recover by explaining that his versatility had enabled him to work well with the manager. Unfortunately, this comment only made him seem insincere. He dug himself in deeper during the rest of the interview by referring again and again to himself as a sincere, cooperative person who could work with just about anybody. Having made the original mistake, he compounded it by repeatedly bring my attention to it.

Try not to make mistakes in the interview. If unfortunately you made one, you should resist the temptation of covering it. Try to draw the interviewer's attention to other points that you are good at, and pray that the interviewer might forget about it.

## **Professional Argument**

Programmer Terry didn't get the job because, as he said, he got into a technical argument with the interviewer. That wasn't too strange since Terry was the kind of nerd who would do anything to defend his principles. He probably won the argument, but he certainly lost the job offer.

Getting into an argument is a danger inherent in discussions about the professional or technical details of a position: how a certain job is done. You may have one way of doing things, and the employer may have another. An employment interview is definitely not the time and place to get into a professional argument. If you find yourself drawn into one, step back. You won't win the argument in the course of the interview. You may eventually succeed in bringing about professional or procedural change, but only if you get the job. For now, stay cool: "I have to admit, Ms. Lee, that's not the way I've handled this problem in the past. I do think that my solution has merit, but I'm willing to work it

your way. The most important thing is that my skills should mesh with your procedures – especially if those procedures are working well for you.”

## **Strong Eye Contact**

Darren must have a perfect understanding about the importance of maintaining eye contact with interviewers. When he was listening, he stared at me. When he was answering questions, he stared at me. When he was asking questions, he stared at me. He stared at me throughout the interview. His strong and constant eye contact made me so nervous that I felt I was being interrogated. I tried to stare back, but I just couldn't as if I stole his money. I said to myself: “If I hire this guy, I'll have a miserable life.”

Getting and maintaining eye contact can be overdone. Studies reveal that in normal conversation, the speaker typically looks away 30-70% of the time. As a person begins to speak, he turns away while speaking, then periodically returns his eyes for several seconds to the person being spoken to, and then looks away again. It is the extremes that should be avoided. Appearing to stare at the person being spoken to makes that person feel uncomfortable and shows the speaker lacks social graces.

Eye contact must be maintained, however, by the listener. Whenever the speaker returns his or her eyes to you, your eyes must be on that person. The interviewer should not catch you looking around the room, looking out the window, or staring at the floor. Active listening requires you to keep a soft look on the interviewer to demonstrate interest and attentiveness.

## **Educational Pride**

I interviewed a candidate who graduated from a top business school with his MBA. He mentioned in the interview that his MBA was more valuable than a doctorate from a state-funded university. I was disgusted with what he said because I happened to get my

PhD from a state-funded university. Such attitudes tend to leave interviewers wishing the candidate had taken a course in humility.

You may be justly proud of your educational achievements, but this can be one of the triggers in your interviewer's mind field. Keep in mind that the interview may not have had your educational opportunities and may be sensitive about it. If you seem smug about your schools, degrees, and honors, you may gain a point or two on education but lose several on the interview. Don't let your educational pride become educational arrogance.

### **“I Like Your Tie”**

Most interviewers have heard comments like, “I really like your tie.” Most interviewers can quickly sense a less than sincere. It's hard to explain how, but many people can sense intuitively when someone is exaggerating.

To interview effectively, you must convey your credibility. You accomplish this by showing that you are truthful, sincere, and genuine. Genuineness comes through by showing that what you see is what you get. A genuine person does not put on airs or a false front. Of course you are trying to be your best, but you are not trying to appear to be something you are not. The great benefit of credibility is that once it's established, whatever you say from that point on tends to be believed. In fact, what you say will be believed unless you give the interviewer a reason to doubt you. Once you lose your credibility, everything you said before and everything you say after will come under greater scrutiny and there will always be an element of doubt about you. This is not the way to start a relationship. So do everything possible to establish credibility, and then do nothing to lose it.

## Chapter 6. POOR WORDING

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### **“I’m a People Person”**

Last week I interviewed a candidate. He stated, “I’m a people person” twice during the interview. Frankly speaking, his statement made me uncomfortable. With the exception of those who have psychiatric disorders of an antisocial nature, every human being has social needs to some degree. Yes, there certainly are some people who have less need for social interaction than others do, but even the strongest introverts enjoy the occasional encounter with another human. So calling yourself a “people person” is not a very distinctive moniker.

The statement is also not descriptive, so it adds nothing to the interviewer’s understanding of you. You interact with people on the job in a myriad of ways. So rather than saying “I’m a people person,” describe more specifically exactly how you like to interact with people on the job, and use strong action verbs to do so.

### **“I’m a Quick Learner”**

During interviews I have heard the phrase “I’m a quick learner” again and again. It is so common that it has become an interviewing cliché, the sort that makes me send the candidate’s resume directly to the proverbial circular file. What’s wrong with this phrase? First, it calls attention to the fact that you don’t know how to do something. Secondly, it makes the employer suspect that you can’t do anything unless being trained.

Instead of just saying you can learn that task or skill, talk about how you’ve done something similar. A better statement could be, “I haven’t used that program before, but it sounds similar to the one I taught myself on the first two weeks of my last job, so I doubt I’d have any trouble picking it up quickly.” The phrase “taught myself” has a much more powerful, positive impact than “I’m a quick learner.” And, bringing up a past

accomplishment distracts the interviewer from the fact that you lack a particular skill that is currently needed.

### **“Just Give Me a Chance ...”**

You are a consultant, a trouble-shooter, and a problem-solver – three in one. No matter how long you have been looking for a job, or how badly you want to win the interview, you are not desperate. By saying, “If you just give me a chance ...”, you not only appear desperate, but also imply that you have not proven yourself in the past. Employers don’t take chances. They don’t like the idea of gambling on anything less than a close-to-sure thing when it comes to hiring. Instead of pleading for the interviewer to give you a chance, you should put the effort into making your asset statements strong and credible.

### **“To Be Honest ...”**

The statement “I’m going to be honest with you ...” – and the related “To tell you the truth” – is probably the worst pet phrase I’ve ever heard in interviews. It raises major red flags in the listener’s mind. Does it mean you haven’t been honest up until this point? Or, is what you are about to say a lie that you have to cover it up with claims of honesty?

This is one of those statements that many people don’t even realize they say from time to time, but listeners clearly hear. If you feel the need to say it coming on, skip right over it and just state your case directly without this lead on.

There’re some other words, phrases and statements that can be dangerous because of the negative reaction they often trigger in others. So, don’t use the deadly words and phrases to jeopardize rapport. You should omit the following from your interview vocabulary:

**1. Individual words:**

Abandoned  
Accident  
Afraid / feared  
Arrested  
Bad luck  
Bored  
Can't / couldn't  
Cheated  
Fail / failed  
Fired  
Forgot  
Hated  
Incapable  
Miscalculated / misjudged  
Mishap / snafu  
Neglected / overlooked  
Non-negotiable  
Personality clash  
Ill / sick / disabled  
Stressed / overloaded / burned-out  
Unable

**2. Language that is abrasive:**

Absolutely not!  
Couldn't possibly ...  
I don't like the idea ...  
I'm right ...  
I resent ...  
No way!  
Now, listen ...



That can't be done.  
That's not the way I do it.  
That's settled.  
You don't understand ...  
You're wrong ...  
You're mistaken ...  
What exactly are you driving at?  
What kind of suggestion is that ...?

**3. Language that dodges responsibility:**

I knew nothing about ...  
It wasn't my business ...  
It wasn't my fault ...  
It wasn't my job ...  
That wasn't my responsibility ...  
So-and-so should have done such-and-such... , I don't know.

**4. Pointless or superfluous Language:**

Kind of ...  
I guess ...  
If you know what I mean ...  
Like (e.g. "I will do that, like, immediately.")  
More or less ...  
Sort of ...  
What I'm really trying to say is ...  
..., you know  
..., right?  
..., you understand?

## I, Me and You

Perhaps the fastest way of creating rapport is to *will* it into being through a few magic words. Those magic words are “we”, “us” and “our”. How do you do this? Read the following conversations twice and try to feel the difference of the speaking manner of the two candidates:

- ☺ **Candidate 1:** What do you see as your greatest need in the IT department?
- ☺ **Interviewer:** Definitely fulfillment – getting all types of projects done on time.
- ☺ **Candidate 1:** I understand. Working together, we could solve that problem. I managed a group of 12 IT professionals at 360Netcom, and fulfilled 36 projects assigned by the company and clients. I believe I could apply some the solutions here.
  
- ☺ **Candidate 2:** What do you see as your greatest need in the IT department?
- ☺ **Interviewer:** Definitely fulfillment – getting all types of projects done on time.
- ☺ **Candidate 2:** I understand. Working together, we could solve that problem. I managed a group of 12 IT professionals at 360Netcom, and fulfilled 36 projects assigned by the company and clients. I believe we could apply some of the solutions here.

By a simple switch from “I” to “we”, candidate 2 established some rapport with the interviewer. “We”, “us”, and “our” are words of inclusion, cooperation, coordination, and alliance – the very essence of rapport. So, you should take the opportunity to translate “I”, “me” and “you” into “we”, “us” and “our”

## Chapter 7. DUMB ANSWERS

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### **“I’m Mr. Perfect”**

When I asked the common interview question “What is the biggest failure you’ve had in your career?” I was thrown various types of responses. Some candidates claimed that they had never failed. Pretending you’re perfect and have never experienced failure in the course of your career only makes you look silly, or even stupid.

While you don’t need to confess all your failures, you have to admit to one failure – make it a good one! – and then talk about the steps you have taken to make sure that you’ll never fail in that way again. You’d better think of a failure that took place relatively early in your career and one that would seem completely unrelated to the job you’re interviewing for. Don’t ever admit to any personal quality that might hamper job performance, such as laziness or lack of concentration. After describing the failure, don’t declare, “it can never happen again.” This is an unrealistic assessment that will call your judgment into question. Never confess a huge work-related weakness: “I’ve always hated my bosses, but I think I’ll like you!”

### **“Everyone Likes Me!”**

When I asked the question “Tell me about the types of people you have trouble working with?” I sometimes got the answer “I practically can get along with all types of people.” This is another bad answer that makes the candidate look evasive, stupid, or both. So be ready with a real answer. Come up with a story, short and sweet, but very much to the point. One candidate I interviewed gave me what I thought was a good answer to this question:

*“I was discussing this problem with my boss just the other day. He told me I’m too impatient with slow performers. He told me that the world is filled with “C”, rather than*

*with “A” and “B” people. So, I guess I do have trouble with mediocre and poor workers. I don’t expect to ever accept poor work, but I’m learning to be more patient.”*

Was he really discussing this “just the other day?” Probably not, but who cares?  
It’s a nice touch!

## **Exaggerating**

When I asked, “What are your exact responsibilities in your department?” I sometimes get a hazy, vague explanation that indicates the candidate may be making it all up as he goes along which is inconsistent with his resume or previous answers. This is a “gotcha” question that is designed to clarify what you really do – how can you be doing the work if you said that’s your boss’s main function? – and set up a series of follow-up questions about why you exaggerated.

If you are asked this question, you should only cite the duties and responsibilities that match those claimed on your resume. You should give an answer that ties in with your answers to previous questions about your work experience. But be very careful; the more detailed these answers, the easier it will be for an interviewer to catch any inconsistencies. If you’ve been caught being vastly exaggerating the duties and responsibilities of your current position, that sound you heard was the door that just closed ... behind you ... on your way out of the interview.

## **“Does Your Boss Know It?”**

Sometimes I asked the question: “Where does your boss think you are now?” “I took a day of sick leave,” one candidate answered. While I can appreciate the candidate’s honesty, I personally don’t like to hear that a candidate has taken a sick day to talk with me. Who is willing to hire someone who shows little or no loyalty to the company that’s still cutting his paychecks?

Of course you can't mutter something like, "He knows I'm interviewing with you." If you're still employed, you should try to schedule interviews during lunch hour, after work, or on a personal or vacation day. Whatever the true is, interviewers will give you points for demonstrating your sense of responsibility to your current job by scheduling an interview not in your work hours.

### **"Better Commute"**

To my question "What interests you most about this position?" more than a dozen candidates, unbelievably, answered "I'll have a better commute if I get this job." The answer may be honest, but it sure wasn't the answer I wanted to hear! Unfortunately the candidates just lost a chance to demonstrate what they knew about our company and how the position they were interviewing for could contribute to its success, not to mention the chance of getting the offer, and having more responsibility and more opportunities. A better answer could be, "I've heard so much about Globalcom's different Internet services and e-commerce products that I've wanted to experiment with different ideas for them."

### **"I Dislike ..."**

Imagine this situation: a car salesman said to you: "Buy this car so that I can pay my mortgage and put my kids through college." Would you buy this car? Of course not. He didn't address your needs and benefits. The interviewer might ask you: "What do you most dislike about your current job?" If your answer were "my current job doesn't pay well," would he hire you? Of course not, because you didn't address the target employer's needs and benefits.

The "most dislike" question is asked in negatives. But even when you are invited to be negative, you should avoid negativity. While dissatisfaction with your current job may

seem to *you* a very good reason to change jobs, it fails to address the needs of the target employer. Your answers should always address the employer's needs. Anything negative you say will make the interviewer think that you are a complainer. Worse, his overall impression of the interview will be negative.

Consider something like: "I like everything about my current job." Then, go on to list some vital skills, abilities, and qualifications that job has given you or allowed you to hone. Conclude with: "I'm now ready for a new set of challenges and an opportunity for greater advancement and greater responsibility, an opportunity to bring all that I have learned to a more challenging and rewarding position."

### **"I Want to Grow"**

One of the most common interview questions is "Why do you want to leave (or did you leave) your present job?" A frequent response I've heard is some version of "I want to grow." It's not a bad response; as a matter of fact, it's better than "my boss is a jerk" or "I'm bored stiff." But it's definitely not a good one. To me, it can be interpreted as "I need more money" or "I want an office with a window."

Here's how to make the response better. Instead of allowing the interviewer's question to focus your response on why you want to leave or have left an employer, refocus your response on why want to *move* to the prospective employer. Consider something like, "I just don't get enough challenges at XYZ Company. I am eager to take on more challenges, and that I believe I will find with your company. I want an opportunity to apply my skill where I can really make a difference in the future of the company." Not only does this response transform a gripe into a laudable, positive motive, it adds the dimension of "what's in it for the employer."

## **“Yes, I’m a Risk-Taker”**

“Are you a risk-taker?” You may say to yourself: “That’s an easy one. There’s no reward without risk.” So you may simply answer yes. Then you find yourself be questioned about your prudence: “So you’re careless sometimes?” You fall in the trap.

Before answering any wide open question, you should ask for qualification: “How would you define ‘risk’? What do you see as an example of a possibly acceptable risk? I’d need to know the upside and downside. This is not a question I would answer without thorough knowledge of all the elements involved.” Whether or not the interviewer pursues the question, you have just demonstrated that you won’t take mindless risks. You look before you leap.

If the discussion of risk does continue, be sure to leave the impression that you are neither timid nor careless: “Look, I’m not interested in doing anything that would put the company at risk. Sure, there is no reward without risk, but risk can be managed, and management takes information and assessment. With the right information, I might be prepared to take certain risks.”

## **Secretiveness**

Some time ago I interviewed a candidate who had all the skills needed for the opening position. In person, he seemed an analytical, experienced individual. He gave specific examples of work experience on projects very much like the job he was being considered for.

Two pieces of information he didn’t volunteer were how much he had made in his last job and why he had left it. Because I was specifically instructed to explore these topics, I asked the candidate the standard questions, but I couldn’t seem to get anything from him. He was very skillful at deflecting the questions. He said, “I’m in the high-average range for my salary and years of experience in this type of work.” His reason for

quitting was “an unavoidable personality conflict which did not involve me, but the politics finally impacted on my job.” Although this candidate seemed very principled and technically capable, the way he handled these legitimate questions suggested that he might be very rigid and uncompromising. You can guess that I didn’t offer him the job.



## Chapter 8. TRAPS AND TIPS

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- **Avoid Traps** – The popular belief “Candidate who is most qualified and well prepared gets the job” is a trap set by yourself. The job offer doesn’t necessarily belong to the qualified candidate who is well prepared for the interview. Candidate who knows how to avoid those interview traps gets the offer.
- **Compliment Interviewers** – Remember that interview is NOT all about selling yourself. Interview is also about complimenting and admiring the interviewer. No one in the human world turn down compliments and admiration. In return, you pass the interview safely.
- **Remember Names** – If you can’t remember the interviewer’s name, or are unsure of the pronunciation of it, ask the receptionist. Don’t take it for granted. To some people, nothing is as important as their names. This is especially true for a candidate when it comes to a job interview.
- **Your Answers** – Many interviewers see over-talking as self-indulgence or an attempt to control the interview. If your answers are too long and too detailed, the interviewer may, at best, think you cannot distinguish the important from the trivial; at worst, label you a “motor mouth.”
- **Ask Questions** – Most interviews conclude with the interviewer asking if you have any questions. The worst thing to say is that you have no questions. Having no questions shows you are either not interested or not prepared. Before each interview, make a list of five questions you will ask.
- **Dropping Names** – Thinking that know the big name can help you get the job. Wrong! When it comes to interview, don’t you believe the popular saying: “It’s not what you know; it’s who you know.” Trying to gain an edge by dropping

names will make most interviewers think: can't this guy make it on merit?

Claiming to know top executives in the company may often be perceived as a threat.

- **Preparation** – To prevent saying something you might regret, you need to practice telling your stories and giving answers to the common interviewing questions, no matter how experienced you are for interviews. Preparation is the best way to avoid the foot-in-mouth situation.
- **Dress Up** – If the company's dress code is jeans and a T-shirt, wear slacks and an open collar shirt. If it's slacks and an open collar shirt, throw on a sport coat. If it's a sport coat, throw on a suit. At least match it and go one step up, but don't go three steps down. If you have no idea what the company's dress is like, it's okay to ask the recruiter or hiring manager before the interview.
- **Behavior** – Being stiff or overly formal is no way to win the interview. Not only does doing so mean you're less likely to be in control, but you are also less likely to connect with the interviewer. The interviewers are people, too. They appreciate candidates who are down-to-earth, personable and genuine.
- **Illegal Questions** – When it comes to hiring, illegal questions tend to arise not out of brazen insensitivity, but rather out of an interest in you. Your response should be straight and positive – that's the only way you're going to get the job offer, and getting this job offer allows you to leverage other jobs.
- **Small Talks** – You cannot afford to neglect small-talk questions. You should answer all small-talk questions positively. If the interviewer asks how you like living in the town, you'd better respond that it is very pretty this time of the year, even if you really hate the dirty streets and air pollution.

- **Talk Dreams** – Your goal is to get offered the job you’re interviewing for, not to talk about your dreams. Think about each question before open your mouth – especially those innocent little questions that come out of nowhere after you think you’ve bagged the job.
- **Employer’s Problems** – During the interview, if you don’t find out what your employer’s problems are and what they are looking for, there is no way for you to project yourself as the candidate best able to solve them.
- **Reference List** – Don’t assume that the company’s list of references will stop with names you provide. To play safe, you can give your prospective boss a worst-case scenario for those references you think might damage you. If you’re working with a recruiter or agency, have a call made on your behalf to get any bad news firsthand.
- **Being Fired** – If you were fired, don’t volunteer the information. Keep your resume noncommittal, and if the interviewer asks you why you left your last job, you might explain that your approach differed from management’s, and then go on to detail the positive aspects of “your approach.” But remember, never blame other people for what happened to you.
- **Ask for It** – You should make it clear to the interviewer that you want the job and believe that you are a good match. Asking for the job in the interview is a good move. If you are shy of asking, they might think you lack enthusiasm for the job.
- **Humor** – Some hiring managers welcome humors. Others want their questions taken very seriously, so being funny hurts your chance of getting hired. If you think there’s the slightest chance of offending someone, keep your sense of humor to yourself.

- **Interruption & Distraction** – If you are interrupted and interviewer is obviously distracted, try to use the interruptions and distractions to your advantage by saying something like “You really *are* busy! It’s obvious that I could be of great use to you in an environment like this.”
- **Smile** – If you don’t radiate enthusiasm and energy, then the interviewer is not likely to take much interest in you. If you forget to smile, or if you speak in a monotone voice, sound tired, or walk slowly or with slouched posture, you’ll turn off the interviewer immediately, no matter how well you’ve prepared for the interview, and no matter how effectively you communicate.
- **Pauses** – Candidates often feel they must give instant responses to every question. While you would not want long pauses after every question, a significant pause is often the best response to a difficult question. If you answer an obviously difficult question too quickly, you can leave the impression of being a person who “shoots from the hip.”
- **Undersell Yourself** – If you sense that your interviewer feels threatened by you, tone down your experience and results a bit. If you determine that you are more knowledgeable than the interviewer, do nothing to give an impression that you feel superior. Avoid discussing things the interviewer may know little about. Do not correct him if you detect an error in something he has said.
- **Weaknesses** – If you are asked about your weaknesses, giving a straightforward, totally honest answer is a mistake; trying to make a positive out of a weakness is worse – your answer may sound fake. You should highlight skill that you wish to improve upon and more importantly describe what you are proactively doing to enhance your skills in this area.
- **Eating Interview** – Many interviews, especially those with candidates on the short list, are conducted over dinner. Don’t assume that what you say and how you

behave are off the record. Although the interviewer may tell you that he simply wants to know you better, be assured that he has specific objectives to cover during dinner.

- **Thirty-Inch Distance** – Encroaching on another’s “personal zone” is dangerous in an interview. You should keep a thirty-inch distance from the interviewer. It’s the distance that allows you to extend your hand comfortably for a handshake. You should maintain this distance throughout the interview, and be particularly watchful of intrusions during the early stages when you meet, greet, and take a seat.
- **Listening** – It’s more important to demonstrate that you hear and understand what the interviewer expresses to you than to tell him absolutely everything you believe he should know about you. When he is excited about something, get excited, too. If he expresses delight, smile in return. If he raises an issue that is clearly of critical importance to him, show that the subject is of critical importance to you, too.
- **Handshake** – Handshake is a judgment call. If the interviewer extends a hand, go for it. Otherwise, smile big and wait for the invitation. If for any reason you do find yourself initiating the handshake, do not pull back. Instead, make the best of it, smile confidently, and make good eye contact.
- **Coffee** – If the interviewer offers you coffee, just say “no, thanks” to play safe. In an interview, with your attention tautly focused and your nerves ratcheted up about as far as they can go, a cup of hot, dark coffee is just a catastrophe waiting to happen.
- **Mistakes** – Try not to make mistakes in the interview. If unfortunately you made one, you should resist the temptation of covering it – you only compound it by

repeatedly bring the interviewer's attention to it. Try to draw the interviewer's attention to other points that you are good at.

- **Argument** – An employment interview is definitely not the time and place to get into a professional argument. If you find yourself drawn into one, step back. You won't win the argument in the course of the interview.
- **Eye Contact** – Eye contact must be maintained, however, by the listener. Whenever the speaker returns his or her eyes to you, your eyes must be on that person. The interviewer should not catch you looking around the room, looking out the window, or staring at the floor. Active listening requires you to keep a soft look on the interviewer to demonstrate interest and attentiveness.
- **Educational Pride** – Keep in mind that the interview may not have had your educational opportunities and may be sensitive about it. If you seem smug about your schools, degrees, and honors, you may gain a point or two on education but lose several on the interview. Don't let your educational pride become educational arrogance.
- **Credibility** – To interview effectively, you must convey your credibility. You accomplish this by showing that you are truthful, sincere, and genuine. The great benefit of credibility is that what you say will be believed unless you give the interviewer a reason to doubt you. If you lose credibility, everything you said before and everything you say after will come under greater scrutiny and there will always be an element of doubt about you.
- **“We”, “Us” and “Our”** – Perhaps the fastest way of creating rapport is to *will* it into being through a few magic words. Those magic words are “we”, “us” and “our”. “We”, “us”, and “our” are words of inclusion, cooperation, coordination, and alliance – the very essence of rapport. So, you should take the opportunity to translate “I”, “me” and “you” into “we”, “us” and “our”.