

Appendix A

156 Action Words to Make Your Résumé Jump

Sometimes, it's all in the way you say it. Using strong, action words can give your résumé a bit more "oomph!"
The following list will get you started.

Clerical or Detail Work	
Approved	Purchased
Catalogued	Recorded
Classified	Reorganized
Compiled	Retrieved
Dispatched	Screened
Implemented	Specified
Monitored	Tabulated
Prepared	Validated
Processed	

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Communication Skills	
Addressed	Lectured
Arbitrated	Moderated
Arranged	Motivated
Authored	Negotiated
Corresponded	Persuaded
Drafted	Presented
Edited	Promoted
Enlisted	Publicized
Formulated	Recruited
Influenced	Translated
Interpreted	Wrote
Creative Skills	
Acted	Instituted
Concentrated	Integrated
Conceived	Introduced
Created	Invented
Established	Originated
Fashioned	Performed
Founded	Revitalized
Generated	Shaped
Illustrated	
Financial Skills	
Administered	Computed
Allocated	Forecast
Analyzed	Managed
Appraised	Marketed
Audited	Projected
Balanced	Researched
Calculated	

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Helping Skills	
Assessed	Facilitated
Assisted	Familiarized
Counseled	Fixed
Demonstrated	Partnered
Diagnosed	Referred
Educated	Rehabilitated
Expedited	Represented
Management Skills	
Assigned	Improved
Attained	Increased
Chaired	Led
Contracted	Organized
Consolidated	Oversaw
Coordinated	Planned
Delegated	Prioritized
Developed	Produced
Directed	Recommended
Enhanced	Scheduled
Evaluated	Strengthened
Executed	Supervised
Forced	
Research Skills	
Collected	Interviewed
Criticized	Investigated
Determined	Reviewed
Evaluated	Summarized
Examined	Surveyed
Extracted	Systematized
Inspected	

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Teaching Skills	
Adapted	Encouraged
Advised	Explained
Clarified	Guided
Coached	Informed
Communicated	Instructed
Enabled	Stimulated
Technical Skills	
Architected	Operated
Assembled	Overhauled
Built	Programmed
Coded	Redesigned
Designed	Reduced
Developed	Remodeled
Devised	Repaired
Engineered	Solved
Fabricated	Trained
Initiated	Upgraded
Maintained	Utilized

Appendix B

Answers to Behavioral Interview Questions

There may be no "right" answer to behavioral interview questions, but there certainly are a lot of wrong answers. In this section, we'll give example responses (or discussions) for five common behavioral questions and highlight what makes these strong responses.

- Tell me about a time when you gave a presentation to a group of people who disagreed with you.**

"In my last team, I became concerned with a decision the team was making on how to extend our small-business accounting software to personal users. My team thought that we should just create a slightly tweaked version, and I disagreed. I thought we should build a brand new piece of software, and I presented this proposal to the team.

Most of the work I did to smooth over this presentation was actually before the presentation. I spoke with each of

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the key decision holders—namely, my manager, the tech lead, and a VP—prior to the meeting. I talked with them about why they felt we should do one thing versus another, and then gathered additional data based on their responses.

Then, in the presentation, I presented the new data and focused the conversation not on convincing them, but rather on understanding what would need to happen for us to make a different decision. We had a very fruitful decision as a team, rather than anyone feeling like we were fighting. We were able to set guidelines to guide our decisions. When we reconvened the next week, I was able to show that we could hit the targets they needed, and that we should reverse our decision. The decision was taken to senior management, who ended up agreeing with the new proposal. We saved our company about three million dollars."

This candidate has shown herself to be analytical, data driven, and collaborative. She made a point of showing how she sought feedback from her team, while still effectively asserting her opinions. She shows herself to be a good teammate and leader.

While this story has a "happy ending," this is not strictly necessary for an effective response. A candidate could, instead, give a humble answer about how she made a mistake in the presentation, and what she learned from it. In fact, the next response is about just this.

- Tell me about the biggest mistake you made on a past project.**

"The biggest mistake I made was when I filled in for our tech lead. She had just left for maternity leave, and I was responsible for developing a new schedule to get us to the next milestone. I was embarrassingly off in my estimate.

Here's what had happened. I really wanted to do a good job (I knew this was essentially a trial for a full-time tech

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lead position), so I solicited input from everyone on the team about the schedule. Each person gave me their estimates, and I compiled these into a greater picture of when we'd do what. I showed it to everyone; they all thought it made sense. And management was impressed that Milestone 3 would be finished in just three months, when Milestone 2 took six. In retrospect, that should have been my first clue.

We ended up finishing after five months, but only after cutting several features. We had agreements with some external suppliers, and we just couldn't let it slip anymore.

I did a few things wrong here that I corrected when I created the Milestone 4 schedule.

First, I didn't factor in risk and all the dependencies. Even if everyone gives a great estimate, things go wrong and you need wiggle room.

Second, I didn't realize that just as I'm trying to impress people as a new (even if temporary) tech lead, everyone else is also trying to impress me. They wanted to show me that they were A+ candidates and gave overly optimistic estimates.

Third, I should have done more to discover the potential risks. Rather than asking, 'Does this look OK?', I needed to ask people, 'What's the weakness here? What do you think is the most likely thing to go wrong?'

I corrected these things for Milestone 4, added in some comfortable padding, and we ended up coming in just ahead of schedule."

In this response, the candidate has been open and honest and admitted a genuine mistake. Many candidates give responses here about how they "took on too much at once" or "didn't ask for help early enough." While these may indeed be large mistakes, they're also very stereotypical and don't reveal that you can admit your faults.

Remember that this response is as much about learning about your mistakes as it is about understanding if you can be honest.

3. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a teammate who was underperforming.

"In this case, I was actually assigned to mentor the teammate. Vivek had transferred to our team from another division where, to the best of our knowledge, he was doing pretty well. The work was fairly similar, so we expected he would fit in well.

By his fourth week, we realized something was wrong and I was asked to mentor him. Most candidates have submitted at least a bit of code by then, but he hadn't submitted a thing. Every time I asked him about his progress, he said he was doing fine and was 'almost done.' I suspect that he was struggling in multiple areas and didn't want to expose himself by asking too many questions.

Partially based on his prior (rumored) performance, and partially because I just wanted to give him a second chance, I tried a different approach.

I pulled him off his current task (which should have taken him only a few days anyway) and put him on a new and pretty different project—one that he and I would be working side by side on. This allowed him to start fresh, and not have to feel stupid asking questions. It also allowed me to walk him through the project (outlining steps, etc.) without his feeling like I was micromanaging him.

He was able to get through the project with some help from me, but more importantly, I was able to understand exactly what he was struggling with. It turns out that, while he was smart and generally capable, he had some pretty substantial gaps in his knowledge that we needed to deal with.

For some topics, I ordered some additional books for him and taught him some of these areas myself. For others, which I felt the team could use a refresher course on, I had the whole team go through it.

He improved dramatically, and all without having to hurt his ego too much. Within three months, he was performing at expectations, and after another year, he was actually mentoring new hires himself."

The candidate has shown an awareness of other people and has demonstrated that she's a positive person who believes in others. She has proven that she is willing to get her hands dirty; she sat down and worked with Vivek side by side, and then taught him much of what he needed to know.

4. Tell me about a time when you had to make a controversial decision.

"I was responsible for engineering at a start-up when the economy tanked, and it became clear that we were not going to be able to raise more money for a long time. We had enough cash left to pay the six current developers for another two years—if we didn't hire anyone else. Unfortunately, we had just extended an offer to one more developer (whom we did really need), and had told another developer that he'd be promoted to a management role when that happened. It was 100 percent my decision how to handle this situation.

Rather than pushing out what was sure to be unwelcome news, I took the honest and open approach. I brought all the current developers into the room and told them what our cash outlook was. We discussed options as a team, but I asked them to not advocate any specific decisions at this point. I would talk to them all independently.

Everyone was able to see what was pretty obvious—that we couldn't afford additional people—but they felt good about the decision because they helped make it. It wasn't like their big bad manager was telling them that they wouldn't get the promotion or additional help that they needed.

Additionally, one developer took the opportunity to come clean with me. He had been considering striking out on his own for a while and thought this would be a good time to leave. He encouraged us to replace him with the new candidate. He would help train the new employee and field questions after he left.

The honesty and openness that I had shown with my employees made them much more welcoming of the changes and encouraged them to be open with me."

This candidate has revealed an important part of the way he deals with controversial decisions: full disclosure. Alternatively, other candidates might show that they build support around decisions before announcing them, or that they gather data to reconfirm the decision. Whatever your answer is, it will reveal how you solve problems.

5. Tell me about a time when you had to use emotional intelligence to lead.

"As a program manager, I am responsible for not only gathering requirements and planning a project, but also assigning who does what. My company is large and generally believes in its rigid hierarchies and levels of superiority. The oldest (tenure-wise, not age-wise) people get to pick what they want to do, and so on from there. The problem is that the younger employees get stuck with menial tasks, resulting in high turnover. I wanted to do away with this system, and I knew that I'd meet a lot of friction along the way.

The first thing I did was just observe. For the first project, I did it their way. This gave me a chance to see the

good and bad things, and get to know the people. As much I objected to their system, I didn't want to mess around with something I didn't understand.

The second thing I did was understand what the younger employees wanted to do. Some valued learning, while some valued visibility. Without making any promises to them about the future—I didn't want to get myself into trouble—I asked them to envision what things they'd want to do when they 'one day' have this ability.

Then, third, I went and talked to the senior people expressing, on behalf of the junior people, their desire to have additional learning/visibility opportunities. I asked them to do me a 'huge favor' and stressed that it was totally up to them: I asked them to let the younger people try out some bigger tasks but be mentored by the senior people. This allowed everyone to have a 'stake' in the important projects. Most people were happy to do this.

After this project was done, people were reasonably receptive to switching to this system full time. I realized that most of this issue is really about the ego, and as long as I respected people's seniorities (hence the 'mentorship'), they were pretty happy to work on some less important projects. So far at least, turnover has seemed to drop."

This candidate has demonstrated with this response an ability to understand people. He accurately saw the problems, understood the real driver (ego), and created a plan. He acted carefully and methodically, always making sure he really sees the full pictures. He's the kind of manager people want.