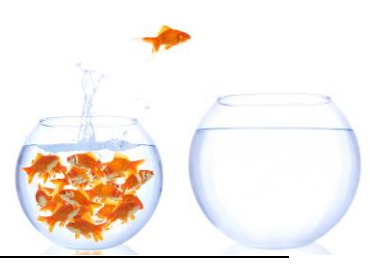


# The Art of “Telling”

## Strategic Interviewing Skills

*Distinguish yourself from the crowd.*



***You never get a second chance to make a first impression!***

### **Purpose of a Job Interview:**

The job interview is a strategic conversation with a purpose. Your goal is to persuade the employer that you have the skills, experience, and ability to do the job and that you fit into the organization and its culture. At the same time, you can gather information about the job and organization to determine if the job and work environment are right for you.

### **Preparing for the Interview**

#### **Before you go . . .**

- Self-assessment: strengths, skills, contributions and goals. Know what you want to do and your personal and professional goals.
- Research the employer to learn as much about them as possible and to verify your interest.
- Assess the needs of the employer so you can match your strongest qualifications to their needs.
- Listen to yourself talk. Use complete sentences, avoid rambling/slang, unnecessary words (um's, ah's, ya know's, I think, kinda, gotta).
- Practice your hand shake and assess your eye contact. Both are indicators of self-confidence.
- Anticipate questions about your strengths, weaknesses, why you chose to apply for the job and why they should hire you. Read the job advertisement – it contains clues about the questions likely to be asked.
- Develop a set of “scenarios” – situations you can draw upon to provide examples when answering questions.
- Participate in a mock interview in the Career Center.

#### **Dress and Grooming . . . .**

- Exceed expectations. The emphasis should be on appropriate dress; there is no rule that fits all people, however, dressing conservatively should be observed.
- For men, a suit and tie is best or a long sleeved shirt and tie is acceptable. Wear dress pants over khakis.
- For women, a suit (pants or skirt) is best or a dark skirt or dress pants with a blouse or twinset is acceptable. Avoid dresses or khakis. Avoid plunging necklines and short skirts. Coordinate shoes and purse.
- Avoid flashy colors, loud fashions, excessive jewelry, strong perfume/ cologne. Clothing should fit correctly and be neatly pressed. Shoes should look new and be and polished. Socks should match pant color.
- Avoid smoking before an interview or eating foods which may cause bad breath.
- Some organizations have piercing and tattoo policies. Dressing conservatively suggests that tattoos be covered and piercings be removed.

#### **During the Interview . . . .**

- It's ok to be a bit nervous. Be yourself. **Smile and be enthusiastic!** Let your true self shine!
- Plan to arrive for your interview 10-15 minutes prior to the appointed time. Greet the receptionist.
- Be sure to use a firm handshake and eye contact when greeting the interviewer.
- Wait until you are asked to be seated before doing so.
- Pay attention to your nonverbal behavior and body language. Your tone of voice, posture, gestures, etc., all give clues about your confidence and attitude. Face the interviewer in an open, relaxed manner. Nod at appropriate times to show that you are listening. Control nervous habits (cracking knuckles, drumming fingers, rocking in the chair etc.), and smile throughout the interview.
- Maintain a comfortable amount of eye contact during the interview, without staring. If you are interviewed by a panel, answer the person who asked the question directly, while still making eye contact with others.
- Bring a padfolio and pen, copies of your resume, references, and job description. Use the padfolio to record names of those interviewing you and to record information you receive and questions you may have.

## Communicating Effectively . . . .

- Speak clearly and enthusiastically about your experiences and skills. Be professional, but don't be afraid to let your personality shine through.
- Listen carefully. You may be asked multi-part questions, and your ability to recall all the parts of the question may be part of the examination. Thus, you need to focus and concentrate on what is being said, both explicitly and otherwise. Your answers should be concise and to the point. Use your notebook as a tool.
- Be positive. Employers do not want to hear a litany of excuses or bad feelings about a negative experience. If you are asked about a sudden job change, or a weakness in your background, don't be defensive. Focus instead on the facts (briefly) and what you learned from the experience.
- Don't be afraid of short pauses. You may need a few seconds to formulate an answer. The interviewer may need time to formulate an appropriate question. It is not necessary to fill up every second with conversation.

## Tips for Virtual Interview

In today's global workplace more and more employers are opting for the Skype, Live Messenger or video interview to save money and access more candidates. Here are some tips for excelling in during a virtual interview:

- An interview is an interview - all the general rules of a job interview apply.
- Dress for the occasion so the interviewer can picture you in his/her workplace to feel mentally prepared.
- Choose your colors wisely - It's best to wear neutral, solid colors. Shades of black, navy or grey look best on video. Avoid colors that match your skin and hair tones. Avoid plaids, stripes, and glittery jewelry.
- Create a professional environment free of messiness and distracting background items.
- Find a quiet place as the microphone picks up background noises that may become distracting.
- Get the technology right – Use a professional username and ensure all technology is in working order well in advance of your interview. Connect with a friend to test your system, sound, and background.
- Watch out for transmission delay and adjust your conversation accordingly.
- Look straight into the camera for effective eye contact and smile to convey your confidence.

## Answering Interview Questions

The Most Important Interview Question of All: “Why should I hire you?” This is the most important question of all to answer well! In order to answer questions purposefully and provide evidence of why you should be hired, read between the lines to understand what is really being asked and tailor your answers accordingly. Most questions are designed to find out about your self-management skills and personality, but interviewers are rarely this blunt. The employer's *real* question is often to gage your qualities such as dependability, work ethic, personality, and potential to be productive and stay on the job for an extended period of time.

Think of the interview as a conversation, *not an interrogation*. While the interviewer's has a chance to learn about you, it's also your chance to see if the company and job will be a good fit for you.

## Use the “STAR” Technique:

- **Situation or Task:** Describe the situation that you were in or the task you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you had done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation might be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.
- **Action you took:** Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did/the impact you had, not the efforts of the team. Emphasize what you did, as opposed to what you might have done, although the interviewer might want to pursue that thread too.
- **Results:** What happened? What were the results? How did the event or activity conclude? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

## QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT FACE

### *Traditional Questions*

#### **Questions About Yourself:**

- Tell me about yourself.
- How would you describe yourself?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What are you doing to achieve your goals?
- What achievements have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- Tell me about a difficult decision you had to make and how you handled it.
- How well do you work under pressure?
- How well do you work with others?

#### **Questions About Career Goals:**

- What type of job are you interested in?
- What are your career goals, both short and long-term?
- What would you like to be doing five or ten years from now?
- How will employment with us contribute to your career goals?
- How do you define success? What personal characteristics will contribute to your success?

#### **Questions About School/Education:**

- What courses do you like most in college? Least?
- What are your plans for continuing your education?
- How has your education prepared you for this position?

#### **Questions About Previous Experience:**

- What have you learned from past jobs?
- How does your previous experience relate to this job?
- What did you like most/least about your last job?

#### **Questions Specific to the Job:**

- Why do you want to work here?
- What do you know about this organization?
- What kind of boss do you like to work for?

### **Behavioral Interview Questions**

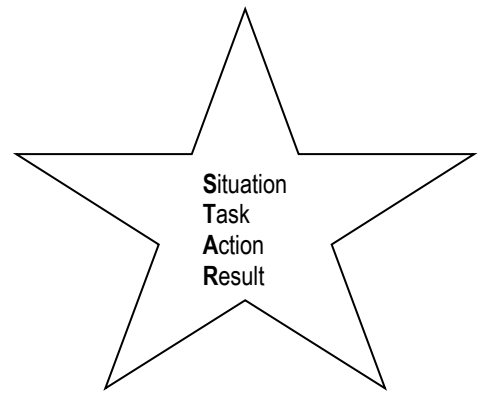
Behavioral interviewing is based on the notion that the best predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations. The interviewer will identify the skills necessary for the particular job opening and then ask you to give examples of when you used those skills in previous work situations. Open ended questions are often asked to give you the opportunity to describe your experience.

## Situations in which Behavioral Questions might be based:

Tell me about the time when you...

**Provide** an example of when you...

**Describe** a time when you...



- Were disappointed in your performance.
- Made a major sacrifice to achieve an important goal.
- Worked effectively under a great deal of pressure or stress.
- Were really bothered by the actions of another coworker.
- Were especially creative in solving a problem.
- Felt really good about a decision you made and the process you went through.
- Used facts and reason to persuade someone to accept your recommendation.
- Utilized your leadership ability to gain support for what initially had strong opposition.
- Were able to build team spirit in a time of low morale.
- Were able to gain commitment from others to really work well as a team.
- Were particularly perceptive regarding a person's or group's feelings and needs.
- Were particularly effective on prioritizing tasks and completing a project on schedule.
- Were highly motivated and your example inspired others.
- Found it necessary to tactfully but forcefully say things that others did not want to hear.
- Were particularly effective in a talk you gave or presentation you taught.
- Had to make a decision you knew would be unpopular.
- Made a mistake and learned from it; failed at something and had to deal with it.
- Made an intentional effort to get to know someone from another culture.
- Set an important goal and were successful in reaching it.
- Conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Had to adapt to a new or different situation.

## Tips for Answering Behavioral Questions:

- Employers expect your responses to be specific and detailed - Use specific anecdotes and examples.
- The interviewer is interested in what your thoughts were and what your decision-making process was.
- If you are not sure what the employer is asking, restate the question or ask for clarification. (Can you be more specific? I am not sure what you are asking for.) In such a circumstance, you may ask if that is what the interviewer was looking for and if your response answered the question adequately.
- Review your own resume. Often interviewers will pull a detail from your resume and ask you to describe a particular situation. Be prepared to discuss experience or events in your resume in detail.
- Develop short (1-3 minute) stories that highlight the skills you possess. Draw upon examples from work or volunteer experiences, academic projects/situations, etc., in order to describe your skills.
- You may find one story fits a variety of different questions. **Don't overuse an example**, but it is all right to reuse one if a different skill can be highlighted.
- If your answers include any negatives, make sure to explain what you learned from the experience and how you have been able to change that behavior or response.
- If asked a question about which you have no experience to recount, tell the interviewer just that. Don't make up an example to fit a situation. You are not expected to have experienced every possible scenario. You might consider what you HOPE you would do in such a situation.

## How long should an answer be?

Take your cues from interviewers. If they speak in shorter sentences, respond in kind. One way to know if your answers are too long is if the interviewer interrupts you to ask another question.

## Asking questions of the employer . . .

Asking thoughtful questions can help turn the interview into a conversation. Don't just ask about benefits. Engage the interviewer(s) in a thorough conversation about the topics that are important to you. You want to learn as much about the position, company, and company culture as possible. This is your opportunity to verify if this is the position for you.

- Prepare questions ahead of time and formulate questions from your interview.
- Be certain that you ask what the next steps are in the interview process. Find out what stage they are currently in, and when you could expect some kind of a response.
- DO NOT bring up the issue of salary. Wait for the interviewer to introduce the topic; it may not come up until a job offer is made.

## Questions You Might Ask

1. If hired, would I be filling a newly created position, or replacing someone?
2. Describe the duties and responsibilities of this position?
3. How would my performance be rated?
4. What type of experience or training are you looking for in this job?
5. What type of training do you offer?
6. How will I be trained or introduced to the job?
7. How long should it take for me to get my feet on the ground and become productive?
8. What are the department's goals for the year?
9. How will I be evaluated?
10. Can someone in this job be promoted? If so, what positions would be available?
11. How would you describe a typical day on the job?
12. When will you be making your decision?
13. What are the most important skills needed to do this job?
14. Tell me about who will supervise me, and their style of supervision.
15. Who would I be working with?
16. How many people work in your department? In the company?
17. What type of equipment will I be using?
18. Does the company have an employee handbook?
19. Does the company have a dress code policy or are uniforms issued?
20. I want this job. Would you consider hiring me on a 30-day trial period to prove that I could do the job?

## After the Interview . . .

Follow-up the interview with a thank-you letter. Employers regard this as evidence of your attention to detail, as well as an indication of your sincere interest in the position. Express your appreciation for the interview, their time, and reconfirm your interest in the position.

## Who gets hired after an interview?

It is a known fact that the candidate who comes out of the interview with a job offer is not necessarily the best qualified candidate. The candidate who gets hired after an interview is usually the one who made the best impression, is confident, and who has convinced the interviewer that he/she will fit into the culture of the organization.

## An Offer in Hand

Once you have the job offer -- **and not before** -- ask the standard questions about salary and benefits, such as:

- What is the salary?
- Is special compensation awarded for overtime? What is the differential for second-shift, third-shift and weekend work?
- What is the benefits package?
- Do you provide grants or financial support for continuing education?
- Are there special incentives for bilingual employees?
- Is there room for advancement? What is the career path?
- How do you reward employees for exceptional work?
- A couple of interview caveats: Never ask the interviewer any questions that could be construed as personal.

## Handling Illegal Questions

Various federal, state, and local laws regulate the questions a prospective employer can ask the job candidate. An employer's questions, whether on the application, in the interview, or during the testing process, must be related to the job you are seeking.

INQUIRY AREA	ILLEGAL QUESTIONS	LEGAL QUESTIONS
National Origin/Citizenship	Are you a U.S. Citizen? Where were you/your parents born? What is your native tongue?	Are you authorized to work in the United States? What languages do you read/speak/write fluently?
Age	How old are you? When did you graduate? What's your birth date?	Are you over the age of 18?
Marital/Family Status	What's your marital status? With whom do you live? Do you plan to have a family? When? How many kids do you have? What are your child care arrangements?	Would you be willing to relocate if necessary? Would you be able and willing to travel as needed for the job? Would you be willing and able to work on evenings, weekends, or overtime?
Affiliations	What clubs or social organizations do you belong to? What religion are you?	List any professional or trade groups or other organizations you belong to that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job.
Personal	How tall are you? How much do you weigh?	Are you able to lift a 50 pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as that is a part of your job?
Disabilities	Do you have any disabilities? Please complete the following medical history. Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations? If yes, list them and give dates when they occurred. What was the date of your last physical exam? How's your family's health?	Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job? Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job-related functions? As a part of the hiring process, after a job offer has been made, you will be required to undergo a medical exam.
Arrest Record	Have you ever been arrested?	Have you ever been convicted of ____? (The crime name should be reasonably related to the performance of the job in question.)
Military	If you were in the military, were you honorably discharged?	In what brand of the Armed Forces did you serve? What type of training or education did you receive in the military?

### What should you do on an interview if you are asked a question that is unacceptable?

There are three basic ways that you may choose to address in appropriate or illegal questions.

1. You may choose to go ahead and answer the question, if you desire to do so. However, keep in mind that when you provide information to a potential employer that is not job-related, you may in fact be giving an answer that could potentially prevent yourself from getting the job.
2. Refusing to answer the question is also an option, but the manner in which you phrase your refusal is of utmost importance. An outright refusal to answer a question on the part of a job candidate, even though it may be well within your rights to do so, may not be the most tactful way of handling an inappropriate question.
3. The third choice involves your probing for the intent of the employer in asking the question and responding with an answer that is appropriate. For example, the employer asks you; "Who will care for your children when you are on call?" You might reply, "I am able to fully meet the on-call and schedule requirements that this job requires." Another sample response you may give is: "I'd like to help you learn more about my particular skills and qualifications for this position, however, I'm having some difficulty in understanding how (name the particular issue: age, marital status, religion, etc) questions relate to my ability to perform this job.