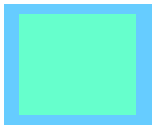




Interview Techniques

Your complete guide to interview success.



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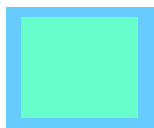
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Introduction

Confidence is infectious, so is lack of confidence, no more so than in your interview. Reaching out to strangers is something we all do on some level but let's be honest here; convincing your future boss that you are the best one for the job is something we would all rather avoid if possible. The rate interviews change may mean that in years to come you can be interviewed in a less painful manner, but in the meantime we have to deal with the interview for what it is, a process implemented by organisations to identify, scrutinise and evaluate the best potential employee by use of questions and analysis of your answers.

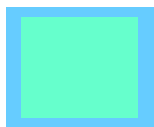
So, the question you may be asking now is, do I need to prepare for interview and if so, how?

This book is an amalgamation of my experiences as an interviewer, an interviewee and coaching over 600 people in how to pass interview during the last 10 years. Some of my findings have been surprising, for example, I previously assumed that learning great answers to questions was the best way to prepare for interview, but I now know this is not very helpful in the actual event. Learning lines in such a manner is useful for the amateur dramatics society but your interview performance is a unique, considered one that requires mental agility and thinking on your feet. This short book will guide you through how to gather evidence on yourself, your achievements and experiences, which you can then apply with confidence to any interview situation.

I have included a list of 150 possible questions for you to practice on, only because I know how much you want to actually read some interview questions. But when you do, remember there no guarantees, any question can be asked and any answer given.

The only thing I know for sure is that the more you prepare now, the better your chances of success are.

.....well, you didn't think you could just wing it did you?



types of interview

The most common type of interview is still the 1-1 interview, because most positions are within small to medium sized businesses where the manager will do the hiring. If you are being interviewed by a medium to larger sized organisation, having an open mind and up to date knowledge about interviews will help you to be fully prepared.

Interviewing has changed considerably during the last 10 years. Employers and businesses are continuously adopting new ways to find the best candidates, which has resulted in the mass introduction of competence based panel interviews by larger organisations.

An average interview lasts 45 minutes, during which you need to do up to 80% of the communication.

competency interviews

- **How can you tell if you are going to have a competency based interview?**

If the potential employer has sent you a Person Specification along with a Job Description before the interview then you need to prepare for a competence interview. Since emerging in the 80s, this type of interview has now become common practice in both the public and private sector.

- **What to expect in a competency interview**

Questions that require you to provide specific evidence in your answer i.e.:

'can you describe a time when you have demonstrated exceptional customer service'

'when have you had to make a difficult decision at work?'

- **How to prepare for a competency interview**

Read the person specification; this tells you exactly what the employer is looking for. It details the essential and desirable criteria needed in order to perform the job competently.

Your interview questions will be directly linked to each essential criteria. You have no idea how they will exactly word each question, but you can guarantee they will ask you a question relating to that competency. So try re-wording the criteria into an interview question i.e.:

Essential Criteria / Competence:	Interview question:
<p>Ability to communicate complex financial information clearly to customers and non-finance personnel, to ensure complete understanding.</p> <p>Excellent verbal communication skills, able to build rapport and relationships at all levels throughout the business.</p>	<p>Can you describe a time when you have had to explain financial information to others? How did you know that they fully understood it?</p> <p>Describe how you have developed key relationships in your present role; give detail on who the relationships are with and how have these relationships been beneficial?</p>

You may find it useful to use **STAR** below, in constructing your evidence for competency interviews:

- Situation:** give the interviewer a context by describing the situation.
How, when, where and with whom?
- Task:** what situation or task were you faced with? Describe your objective.
- Action:** tell the interviewer what your specific actions were.
- Result:** the end result – be specific about any benefits of this result or any figures that you could use.

Our experience of interviewing shows that most candidates forget to tell the interviewer about the result. Candidates can also be prone to not mentioning their specific contribution.

It is difficult to succeed at a competency interview unless you prepare properly in advance. It takes time and practice but is the only way you can make sure you have your best examples ready when you need them.

▪ **For the eager to prepare:**

According to a Learning and Development survey, the most popular words found in employer competency frameworks are, in order:

- communication skills
- people management
- team skills

- customer service skills
- results-orientation
- problem-solving

This could be useful in your interview preparation if you want to be prepared as early as possible for an interview – there are some people who start preparing for an interview even before they apply for a job. However, if you are reading this book, then you are already doing more to prepare than most people you will compete against.

panel interviews

Panel interviews are where 2 or more people are interviewing you. The average number is 3 but can range up to 8 depending on the position.

- **Why do employers use panel interviews?**

They are a cost effective and efficient way of selecting the right candidate. It reduces the perfunctory need for a second interview as all the decision makers are interviewing you together. This doesn't mean you definitely won't get a second interview, it is just more unlikely.

- **Do I have to shake hands with everyone and remember all their names?**

You do have to shake their hands before sitting down. By doing so, you are politely bringing them into your space and they have to acknowledge your presence. It creates a positive and confident first impression.

If they do not offer to shake your hand first, this could be because they have already decided to hire someone else they have just interviewed. So roll your sleeves up, shake their hands and convince them you are the best one for the job.

- **Who can I expect to interview me on a panel interview?**

Usually a representative from HR and your direct line manager. There are no rules though so if you are unsure of how many people will be there you have two choices; ring in advance to ask or prepare yourself to expect a panel of 4, just in case.

- **Who will ask the questions and who should I respond to?**

Direct your responses to everyone. This is actually quite hard to do in practice. Everyone on the panel needs to hear your answers and if you just give your attention to the person who asked you the question the others will not listen as attentively.

Questions are usually evenly distributed. Your line manager is more likely to ask you technical questions whereas you can expect more generic competence questions from HR.

- **What if there is one person who is not asking any questions, how do I react?**

Still include them in your responses. All other candidates will probably ignore them. So by doing so will make you look good.

1-1 interviews

When asked, most candidates report they would prefer to be interviewed by one person than a panel. Perhaps it seems a little less intimidating, but in reality the 1-1 interview can vary enormously.

With the aid of a piece of paper and a pen you could amuse yourself for a moment by jotting down the different types of manager you could expect to face. Starting on the 'good' you could have a manager interviewing you who treats you well, is polite, well prepared and has actually read your CV. On a sliding scale towards 'bad' you have the manager with their feet up on the desk, determined to intimidate you with randomly plucked, politically incorrect questions that they fire at you in between answering the telephone which is only necessary to remind you that they are important. With this manager, it does not matter too much what you actually say, they are too busy telling you about themselves to listen anyway.

There is of course, a lot of grey area in between, but an open mind is an advantage in a 1-1 because anything can happen.

- **How can I tell if the manager is well prepared or not?**

A well prepared manager will have a copy of your CV in front of them and a list of questions they have prepared in advance. Their desk will be tidy and they have taken care to minimise interruptions.

When faced with such a situation you can expect they will listen to your answers and take note of what you say.

- **How do I respond if the manager seems very unprepared?**

You need to make it easy for them to recruit you. If it is clear that they have no specific questions to ask you, suggest the following as soon as you can:

'I have a copy of my CV with me; shall I talk you through my skills, experience and what I can offer this role?'

You are being polite and ensuring that you do the 80% of the talking needed in order to be offered the position. If you follow the 5 steps to interview success in part 2 you will have enough material ready to do this well.

- **What to expect in a typical 1-1 interview**

Usually they feel more informal and you feel more relaxed because it is just one person. Typically they are conducted in the manager's office which gives you the advantage of checking out the tidiness of your future boss. As such, the interview can often take place across a desk. This is not the best scenario for an interview as the desk creates a barrier but you are on your best behaviour and need to sit where the allocated chair is. If your interview is in a small to medium sized business, remember there is a strong chance that the manager will be a self-taught interviewer and may well ask you some questions you were not expecting and perhaps some that they shouldn't even legally ask (more on how to respond to those later).

- **interview following an agency referral**

If you are using an employment agency and they are sending you for a 1-1 interview, then always take a copy of your CV with you. Agencies frequently email/fax your CV over but the employer may not have printed it off, or even have looked at it. The agency will have told the future employer that they will only put forward high calibre people for an interview, people that they have interviewed themselves already and certainly looked at their CV to assess they meet the employers criteria. So, on this basis the 1-1 interview with the employer can sometimes seem very informal, the manager assuming that you can do the job already; they just need to check that you fit in and they like you.

It is unlikely though that you will be the only candidate being interviewed. The agency will have put forward a few others to ensure a successful outcome.

first and second interviews

first interviews

- **Should I hold back any information at the first interview if I know I am going for a second interview?**

If you know in advance that you may be going for a second interview, then treat the first interview as the only interview, don't hold any information back on the assumption you will need to save any material for later. In doing so, you may never reach the second stage.

- **Should I assume there is going to be a second interview or not?**

Quite often, you will be unaware that there is a second interview process until you have passed the first stage. Sometimes managers themselves decide to conduct second interviews after the event because they have realised they simply don't have enough information to make a clear decision on the best candidate.

Writing notes after your interviews will give you something useful to refer to before the second stage.

- **How many candidates on average are interviewed at first interview stage?**

Typically 5 candidates will be interviewed at first interview stage. At second interview it is normally 2.

second interviews

organisations use second interviews to simplify the decision, during which they may probe more into areas that you didn't cover fully the first time.

- **How to prepare for a second interview**

Refer to your notes from the initial interview; carefully reflect on the questions they asked first time round and the responses you made. Were there any areas you think you gave a weak response to? If so, you need to prepare more in this area for the second interview.

Did you conduct yourself as you wanted to in the first interview? Without being too harsh on yourself, reflect on how you think you came across. If you don't think you gave your best impression then you will make up for this at the second interview.

Consider any areas that you were not assessed on that you were expecting the first time. They could come up at the second interview.

- **Will the same people be present at the second interview?**

Possibly. Quite often you may experience a new face. You may even be asked the same questions again in some areas. Don't be alarmed if this happens, they were listening the first time! They may just want the new face to see your wonderful responses.

- **If the same people are there asking similar questions, can I repeat my answers from the first interview?**

Yes, but not word for word and make sure that you have plenty of new material too. It can be a mistake to give shorter responses the second time round, better to convey a good level of detail; it is unlikely you will lose a job offer because you gave too much information. You still need to be doing 80% of the talking second time round.

internal interviews

If you are progressing up the career ladder with your existing employer, an internal interview is very likely if your employer is a medium to larger sized organisation. Smaller businesses are more likely to have positions that develop organically and managers more likely to bestow a promotion without the need for an interview.

- **will they interview external candidates as well**

Many organisations advertise all positions externally. So, even if you have been with your employer for 10 years and are already doing the job you are applying for, there is a strong chance that you will be competing against 'outsiders'. Don't take this personally, it is often a best practice recruitment policy they have in place that they are adhering to.

- **what are the disadvantages of competing against external candidates**

External candidates have the advantage of automatically offering a fresh face, which is always appealing to employers.

They can exaggerate their evidence because the interviewer can only check so much in an interview.

You may be more bashful because you don't want to appear that you single-handedly achieved something when you know you had the support of others. You will be concerned that your achievements will be questioned, scrutinised more. The external candidate does not need to worry about this.

An external candidate can play the part and convey the level of energy, motivation and new ideas that can excite your existing employer. They may work for a successful competitor, which your employer will find appealing on many levels.

- **what are the advantages of competing against external candidates**

If you have a proven track record of performance then the employer will genuinely want to hire you. They are aware that by giving the position to an external candidate in the face of an existing high performing employee will de-motivate you and you will probably leave at some point for a position elsewhere.

However, be honest with yourself, look at past performance reviews you have had, if you don't meet your targets or objectives then be realistic about your promotion prospects. In the interview panel will be managers and personnel that you are likely to be familiar with. This can help you to relax a little in the preparation for your interview.

You can also refer back to previous interview experiences with your employer; you were successful in the past so there is every chance you can be successful in the future. It is easier to visualise the actual interview which also helps you to prepare for the event confidently; you can imagine where you will wait, the interview room and where you will be sitting.

There will be people interviewing you that have seen you at work; they know how others regard you in the work place and what your strengths are.

This is the only time you can use the jargon commonly used in your workplace because the interviewers will understand it. Using jargon in the correct way helps to form bonds between those we are communicating with.

You can talk with conviction and realism about the role, changes you would implement, how you would manage the team and your ideas on future projects and developments.

▪ **How to prepare for an internal interview**

Gather all your performance reviews and read through them. Your interviewers will do the same, particularly HR, so you need to read them as objectively as possible.

Prepare evidence as for a normal interview, in line with the person specification and competences but pay particular attention to practising your material out loud before the interview. You need to feel really comfortable talking about your skills, achievements and experience in front of your existing employer. Use jargon if appropriate but don't skip detail. For the purpose of the interview, assume they know nothing about you.

Add previous weight if possible. If you have been employed by them less than 5 years then you may be able to use some of your previous experience in your evidence. Sometimes employers overlook the fact we have developed a wider range of skills in previous roles that could be relevant to your future post. This can help you create the fresh face of an external candidate.

Talk to your direct line manager. Ask them for their support and guidance, depending on your relationship with them, they may give you more help than you expect. I have known line managers to give practice interviews, sneak previews of questions and details of who else is being interviewed! Don't worry if yours doesn't, but you never know if you don't ask.

▪ **How to behave in an internal interview**

Don't flaunt the fact you are an internal candidate by being over familiar. This makes it very difficult for the interview panel to assess you fairly and professionally against all other candidates and may backfire on you. Wear something different for the interview. You need the panel to see you a little different to avoid them switching off during your responses. Look the smartest you have ever looked at work, it shows that you care.

Shake their hands on entering the room. You are setting the scene that you are a confident professional and are acknowledging the formality of the occasion. This will make the panel feel comfortable evaluating your responses and asking their questions. Remember internal interviews work both ways: employers, particularly line managers, can feel very uncomfortable interviewing internal candidates.

Address your responses as evenly as you can to all present, even if you have negative opinions about some people on the panel. Conversely, if you are quite friendly with one person, try to avoid being too familiar, this will only alienate others on the panel.

Prepare a good set of questions that show you have thought about the position.

Shake hands again at the end.

Send all present a thank you email straight after the interview.

group interviews & tests

If you are applying for customer focused roles there is a chance that you may experience a group interview. A group interview is effective for the employer in identifying people who communicate with confidence, consideration and clarity to others. It is easy to see this in a group setting where you may be asked to do any of the following:

- 1) Discuss a current affair topic
- 2) Discuss a work scenario and how you would handle it
- 3) Make something as a group (could involve brick, paper or plasticine!)
- 4) Role play

▪ Is there anything you can do to prepare for a group interview?

Not really, you won't know until you get there what to expect. Sometimes you won't even know that you are having a group interview until you get there. If this happens to you, just go with the flow. If you feel nervous, remember that everyone else will too.

▪ How should I behave in a group interview?

Having observed many group interviews including graduate ones, I have noticed that candidates often assume that being the dominant one will make them more successful. This is not necessarily the case. If you are going for a graduate trainee post, then clearly leadership skills are valued. However, in customer focused roles where you will be working as part of a team, this will be less important.

Candidates that do well in group interviews are usually the ones that:

- Listen to other people and let them finish before offering their own opinions.
- Have good eye contact.
- Smile when appropriate.
- Include everyone when communicating.
- Attempt to include others in a task.
- Offer encouragement to others.
- Actively seek the ideas of others.
- Treat others with respect.
- Generate good ideas and demonstrate common sense.
- Show initiative and problem solving abilities in tasks.
- Remain positive and motivated throughout the group interview.
- Appear to enjoy themselves and show ability to not take themselves too seriously.

tests

▪ **technical tests**

Technical tests are used at interviews to measure your ability in your profession such as typing or an electricians test to make sure you are up to date with your knowledge and skills. You can prepare in advance by swotting exam style. If you are an administrator doing a typing test, employers expect you to perform slower than you would normally; better to concentrate on accuracy rather than volume.

▪ **psychometric tests**

There are several on the market and all ask different questions. Often you are given a multiple choice of possible answers and you have to complete the test in a specified time. Research about psychometric tests indicates that they prove how you would like to be at work, not actually how you are at work. You can avoid this to some extent by avoiding responses that have 'I feel' in the answer, opting instead for the more 'I would do'. You can cheat these tests by selecting the answers you think they are looking for but you may be caught out by contradicting yourself later on.

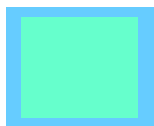
My advice is to think of yourself on a really good day at work and answer them as honestly as you can without blatantly revealing any weaknesses you know will go against you. The responses to these tests are generally fed into a computer system which then generates a lovely psychometric summary of you, detailing your skills, attributes and what you ate for breakfast. This is then used by the interviewer to affirm their worst suspicions of you, highlight areas needing extra probing in the interview or to affirm good qualities they knew you had already. Either way, they are not usually make or break in interview terms. Employers who use these regularly will also know that the results can sound a bit samey after a while.

- **emotional intelligence tests**

These tests are on the increase and are currently fashionable in the larger organisations for senior management posts particularly. Our IQ peaks at the age of 18, but our emotional intelligence keeps developing until our 40s. This is the underpinning value and reason of emotional intelligence tests. They are a slightly more sophisticated testing system and quite honestly there is little you can do to prepare in advance. Often when used, their results will be shared and discussed with you.

- **IQ tests**

These are normally around 20 minutes long and ask you a range of questions across the spectrum of mathematical, English and general problem solving areas. It is hard to prepare constructively for this kind of test. Attempt the questions that you find easy, make sure you read the questions properly, go back and try the harder ones later. These tests are used for several reasons: to see how you cope under pressure and to see if you can think clearly and make accurate decisions as well as assessing your general educational level.



how to prepare your interview material

When you think of your forthcoming interview(s), how do you visualise the interview? Sitting around a desk answering questions? Getting out of your car in your new nice suit? Or looking at a map trying to work out how to find your destination? Most people imagine themselves actually in the interview and consider the part where they respond to questions to be the most important part of the interview. However, when it comes to preparing for interview, many people spend a great deal of time researching the company and buying new clothes way before they start to prepare their material. So, if you can, start preparing your material now and worry about what you will be wearing, the company background and where the location is until later. That way, you won't fool yourself into thinking that you are prepared when you are not.

You will be talking for an average of 30 minutes during your interview.

Sandwiched between their introductions, description of the role, benefits package and your questions at the end is the part where you provide responses to questions. Your responses will be recorded and perhaps even individually rated against their competence framework.

Your chances of success at interview are significantly enhanced by doing some preparation well in advance of the interview (if your interview is tomorrow, don't panic – just keep reading and do the 5 steps to interview success below).

Your interview is a performance. You can practice and rehearse as much as you need to if you have time on your side. My advice is to try and avoid learning answers to questions you think may come up. There is a real danger that you will prepare fantastic responses to these questions but when the interview comes, they could ask a whole set of differently worded questions that you weren't expecting or even worse, you will avoid telling them some information because you are holding back for the right question.

An effective and more flexible way of preparing for interview is to have a wealth of material that you have prepared in advance, not learnt off by heart, but that you can draw upon and use in the interview. This includes your skills, achievements, competences and experience.

▪ five steps to interview success

Step 1: Talk about yourself out loud.

Trust me on this one. Most of us are not accustomed to talking about ourselves in a public setting.

On the day of your interview, you will have to communicate clearly, passionately and provide evidence about who you are in order to be offered the job.

The more you do this now, the easier it will be on the day. Making the leap from thinking to articulating seems to make a big difference here. By talking about yourself positively in the comfort of your own home you get the chance to laugh at yourself, chew over and reject a few phrases, practice your tone of voice and talk about what you are good at.

A good starting point at this stage is to read through your CV out loud.

Step 2: Provide more detail about your career experiences

Using your CV or similar as a guide, practice talking through each area providing much more detail this time. Your CV is the agenda for the interview meeting. Your CV represents about ¼ of the information they need to know about you in order to be offered the role.

When talking about your experience consider:

Outlining the nature of your organisation's work. Your interviewer may not be sure what your present employer does in which case it is a good idea to explain so they can put it into context.

E.g.: My present employer is an industrial vacuum business in the UK with £5m turnover employing 50 staff. Our customers include Sidebottom Quarries, Hedgeburton Recycling Plants and Mcquiver Building Services Plc.'

Explain the purpose of your role:

E.g.: My role as Sales Manager is to manage a team of 4 sales staff who cover Scotland, England and Wales. I account manage 30 key customers and my objective is to develop the recycling side of the business by 25% within 12 months.

Provide detail on your achievements:

Your interview material needs to be alive and full of evidence on the positive differences you have made in your present and previous posts. So, avoid talking about 'duties' or 'responsibilities' and focus your attention on what makes you good at your job and how you can prove this.

The following is to help you consider some areas on which you may have had a positive impact. These are a guideline to get you started and are therefore general; please do not worry if there are parts that do not apply to you. You do not need to write your responses word for word, the important bit is that when you talk about them in interview, you remember to cover the Situation, Objective, Action you took and the Result.

When you identify your achievements, note down the skills and competences you applied in the process; think about what it was about you that enabled you to achieve this.

I have no achievements!

If you are concerned that you have too few achievements then think about the work you have done. What are the tasks? Do you perform any of them well? If so, what is the benefit of you performing them well?

E.g.: I respond to incoming calls from customers who have a complaint about our service.

Can become: 'I have played an active role in maintaining the business of existing customers by resolving their complaints in a professional and friendly manner. By listening well and asking the right questions I can quickly work out the root of the customer's complaint before providing a solution that exceeds their expectations. Last year, I received an award for 'Best Customer Service' and I regularly train new staff on how to handle difficult customer situations effectively.

My achievements	Where, when, how and outcome (using STAR: Situation, Task Objective, Action you took and the Result)	Skills / competences I demonstrated
<p>Impact on others: <i>have I trained, mentored or advised others?</i></p>		
<p>Communication: <i>In writing, have I produced any reports, written anything that has been used by others?</i></p> <p><i>Verbally: who do I communicate with, internal and external customers?</i></p> <p><i>Have I delivered presentations?</i> <i>Do I contribute at meetings?</i></p>		

<p>Problem solving: <i>When have I solved a problem at work? Did I notice the problem or was it brought to my attention?</i> <i>Have people ever come to me to help them solve problems?</i></p>		
<p>Organisation: <i>Have I planned or organised projects or events?</i> <i>How do I organise my time?</i> <i>Do I always meet deadlines?</i> <i>Can I multitask?</i> <i>Can I prioritise my work well?</i></p>		
<p>Making improvements & initiative: <i>Have I generated any ideas that have improved efficiency or profits?</i> <i>Have I improved morale at work?</i></p>		

Step 4: Why do I want this job

Genuine enthusiasm for the job you are being interviewed for will carry you through the interview but you need to identify it before you can harness it. So be honest with yourself and write down why you really want the job. Try going one step further and writing down how your life will improve if you get this job.

One of the reasons that people don't perform well in interviews is if they are not too bothered by the outcome.

Step 5: What skills and capabilities do I have that will enable me to get this job

Use any information you have available about the job, such as the advert, job description and person specification. Write down the skills/competences that you believe the employer will be looking for and tick the ones you have. Once you have done this, you can go on to add a few more that you think will be an advantage.

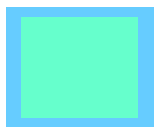
Having completed step 5, you are now in a stronger position to consider possible questions that may be asked.

- **This is my first interview, what can I talk about**

If you have little or no work experience, use your academic and extra curricular experiences to find your evidence. The employer will not expect the same level of answers as someone who has got career experience but you do need to be aware of your skills and capabilities with evidence to back them up if possible.

- **I have negative experiences in my life, should I mention them in the interview?**

If possible, no. This may be difficult to avoid if an unfortunate event has impacted on your work leading to gaps on your CV. Employers are usually sympathetic in an interview, but you can't expect them to hire you because they feel sorry for you. If you have to talk about something negative be as factual as possible and brief, rather than emotional. The Life Line below may help you identify your positive experiences and negative ones; if you find yourself dwelling on the negative at interview, remind yourself that you need to quickly change the subject.



getting ready for the interview

Interview check list:

- 1) **Confirm your attendance:** even if you are not asked to confirm that you are coming, I recommend you call in advance to confirm that you will be attending the interview; it is polite and gives you the chance to create an excellent first impression even before they have met you.
- 2) **Research the company:** you won't be expected to know everything including their share price (unless you are being interviewed for something senior or in finance) but you will be expected to have read their website and remember a few salient details. If in doubt, try to remember how many offices the business has, how many employees and if applicable, best selling products and customer base.
- 3) **Work out your route and book time off work:** make sure you book either the whole morning or afternoon off, or even better the whole day off if possible. If you are late there is a chance that you will never recover enough to be offered the post. Use the easiest mode of transport, avoid using a bike because you will arrive all hot, bothered and wet if raining. If feasible, go and have a look at the building in advance but obviously not in a manner that attracts attention! It will help you imagine working there.
- 4) **Plan your clothes:** what you wear depends on the position you are being interviewed for. It can be helpful for the employer to actually imagine you in the job during the interview so try to bear this in mind when making your wardrobe decisions and present yourself the smartest you would on a normal work day. On this basis, if you are going for a manual position, wearing a suit would not be necessary and the employer could find it difficult to imagine you getting your hands dirty. Corporate cultures are also in the process of change for men; particularly outside of London the wearing of ties is on the decrease for male managers. Ladies can now wear trousers for interview without being discriminated against. Ideally, have a look at their website and observe how employees are dressed if they have any pictures. In the same way that you wouldn't expect a CV with lots of gimmicks, flashing lights and pictures to be effective, your clothes also need to be classy, clean and understated so that they remember what you said rather than what you were wearing. You want to create minimum distraction with your clothes unless you are going for a creative/arts role in which case completely different rules apply. Try not to 'clutter' your first impressions by having more than essential jewellery and lots of bags.
- 5) **Prepare what to take with you:** take a copy of your CV, small note book, pen and anything else you can't live without for two hours. Give consideration to what you carry all of this in because creating a clumsy first impression with a bag strewn over your shoulder is not ideal. Aim for something you can hold in one hand, an A4 sized bag, leather zip file or coloured plastic wallet or similar can be ideal.

Write questions to ask them: prepare at least 6 quality questions to ask them at the end of the interview. This may seem like a lot, but if you only think of a couple, there is a strong chance they will provide answers to these at the beginning when they tell you about the job, leaving you looking under prepared. Employers value candidates who are genuinely enthusiastic about the job; one of the ways you can prove this is to really think about the questions you are asking.

Write your questions down exactly how you want to ask them so you don't have to worry about remembering them. At the end of the interview when they ask if you have any questions you can then respond with, 'Yes, I hope you don't mind, I have written quite a few down to make sure I don't forget them!' as you casually retrieve your note book from your bag/case. By having them written down, it makes you look organised. Don't ask for any details about money, benefits or holidays. Always ask some questions, it is a real mistake not to. Below and following are some examples to give you an idea of questions you could ask depending on the position you are being interviewed for.

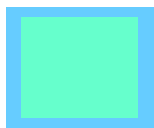
30 examples of possible questions to ask:

Asking good questions enables you to determine if you really want the position; they also help you to understand the needs and expectations of your potential employer. Below are a selection of a wide range of questions you could ask, selecting the right ones is an important consideration. Think about what you need to know in order to accept the position (without asking about benefits, salary or pension - the right time to ask about those is when you have been offered the position). Whatever questions you decide to ask, make sure you ask them in the right manner. You want to appear inquiring and honest rather than suspicious.

1. Is this an existing position or a new one?
2. If I am successful in securing this position, would the existing person be training me before they leave?
3. Is there a job description for this position? May I have a copy?
4. Would I receive any initial training and how long would this last?
5. Would there be any further career training after my initial training period?
6. How has this job changed over recent years?
7. How would you describe employee morale in the organisation at the moment?
8. How would my performance be assessed?
9. If I was successful in securing this role, can you describe the team I would be working with?

10. With my present employer, I have exceeded my objectives for the last 5 years and have been rewarded with 2 promotions. If I prove to be a consistently high performing employee in your organisation, what would be the next steps for me during the next 5 years?
11. Who would I report to?
12. Would I be responsible for anybody?
13. What happened to the last person who had this position?
14. Do you have a high turnover of staff?
15. How many people will I be managing?
16. What resources including budget will I have available to me?
17. How autonomous can I be in managing my team and the department?
18. Are there any problems faced by the department I would be joining?
19. How would you describe your organisational culture?
20. What do people seem to like the most about working here?
21. I thrive in roles where ideas for improvement or generating more profits are welcomed. Is this a company that encourages this in all its staff?
22. How has the present economic situation affected this business?
23. Is the company presently making profits?
24. Who are your main competitors?
25. I noticed that one of your competitors has expanded its operations to America; does this company have any plans for overseas expansion in the future?
26. Could you give me an idea of what my business objectives would be for the first 12 months?
27. What new services or products are being planned?
28. How would I find out about the success and progress of the company? Do you have meetings – would I attend them – how often?
29. Do you see any changes in the future that would affect the department?
30. Is there any further information you need to know about me at this stage?

Try to ask some questions where the interviewer is likely to imagine you in the role to give you an answer. You are encouraging them to visualise you in the role within the organisation, which is what you want.



during the interview

your interview starts from the moment you enter the building. There is much more to the interview than the part where they ask you questions; if you get all the little things right from the moment you enter the building, it can only help you, so let's cover them in a bit of detail:

Making an entrance

- 1) Enter the building:** don't arrive too early, otherwise you risk bumping into other candidates. Try to arrive at your destination with plenty of time to spare but don't actually enter the building until 10 minutes before your interview, that way you give yourself time to calm your breathing and cool down before you enter the building.
- 2) Approach reception:** greet the receptionist with a huge smile, provide your name and explain that you are there to attend an interview. You will probably be asked to take a seat. Remember the receptionist is the one who will inform the interviewer you have arrived. I used to get additional 'helpful' comments from receptionists such as 'don't take this one on, he seems really grumpy' ...so be warned!
- 3) Waiting at reception:** ideally you want to remain standing with your hands behind your back to portray confidence while waiting; take in your surroundings and talk politely to the receptionist. However if you feel more comfortable taking a seat then consider carefully where to sit if you have a choice. You want to position yourself facing the door you think the interviewer will appear from. When sitting, place your bag/case either on your lap, on a table or by your left hand side so that when the interviewer greets you, you can quickly pick it up with your left hand while your right hand if offered is ready for a handshake. If you have a bulky overcoat, umbrella or any additional paraphernalia that is surplus to indoor requirements then ask the receptionist if you can leave them there. If they reply that they can't guarantee their safety tell them you are prepared to take a risk! You do not want your first impression to be bogged down with bags and bulky overcoats, it can make you look untidy.

There is some research that indicates if your first impression at this stage is excellent, it is easier to maintain this highly positive impression throughout the remainder of the interview. The 'Halo Effect' implies that if you look the part, the interviewer will also expect you to have prepared well for the interview and to be a strong candidate.

Reception chairs can often be comfy and quite low; resist the temptation to succumb to the comfy embrace of the chair - this is a time you need to be sharp and literally on the edge of your seat. Smile and have eye contact with everyone who comes through the door. It really does not matter if you smile at the wrong person. You may be tempted to pick up available literature and peruse the contents therein while the butterflies in your stomach are competing for space.

I believe there may be a more constructive way to pass the time while you wait. You can either observe your surroundings, watch people at work or passing through - they could be your colleagues of the future. What can you derive from the internal décor? Does it tell you anything about the company culture? Is there a management board? If so, take a look. If the reception area is quiet then talk to the receptionist. This is not only a great opportunity to find out more about the company but makes you look like you are already fitting in when the interviewer comes to greet you.

- 4) **Greeting your interviewer:** when you are greeted at reception, offer a firm handshake, have good eye contact and a genuine smile.
- 5) **Walking to the interview room:** from the moment you are greeted at reception, try to maintain conversation with your interviewer until you reach the interview room. Employers hire people that they like. By the time you have reached this stage, you have already proven to possess the skills and experience needed to fulfil the role. The interview is about exploring this further, seeing if you are a match for their needs and if they like you.
- 6) **Entering the interview room:** if you are having a panel interview the best first impression you can create is to enter the room while in conversation with the person who has greeted you at reception. This makes it look like you are almost attending an internal meeting and have the capacity to fit in easily with those around you in this organisation. All good stuff if you can do it. On entering the room you need to shake hands with those present before you take a seat when offered. If the interviewers don't stand or shake hands with you on entering it could mean one of two things; they genuinely have poor manners or they have decided who to hire for the job already. It could be the candidate they have just interviewed and seeing you has just become a formality. Don't be disheartened, it could be the candidate they have just interviewed, in which case winning them over is a challenge you can realistically face.
- 7) **Taking your seat:** if your seat is positioned directly opposite the interviewers across a table then consider re-positioning your chair slightly at a 45⁰ angle. This enables you to face towards the interviewers while opening up some space for yourself to glance away while gathering your thoughts between questions. Place your bottom at the back of the chair rather than the middle; it then makes it really easy for you to sit confidently and almost impossible to slump if you think you have made a mess of a question. You may be asked if you would like a drink; my advice is always to say yes to water, it gives you a legitimate prop in-between your responses and time to think.

Bring on the questions

Normally the interviewers will set the scene by telling you about the position and the company and explaining the format of the interview. Make sure you listen attentively to this information so you don't ask questions later about things they have already told you. During the interview, remember that you need to be doing most of the talking, so when they ask you a question try to provide as much detail as needed. Use STAR to make sure you cover all parts of your evidence. You can also exploit the 'recency' effect whereby interviewers are inclined to remember more about the beginning and end of your interview than the middle. So on this basis, make sure your beginning and end answers are powerful.

And be a realist, expect to mess up at least one question and if you do get over it quickly, you can always laugh at yourself or ask if you can come back to that one later. If you are very lucky they might just forget to ask you later. Sometimes interviewers ask you questions that are badly worded and you may be confused as to the information being sought. If you can't understand the question then just ask it they can re-phrase it. I can guarantee you that other candidates couldn't understand it either but maybe they plodded on hoping for the best.

▪ **Body language during the interview**

Try not to worry too much about what your legs or arms are doing; by sitting properly with your bottom in the back of the chair everything else will fall into place. Research in the field of linguistics has shown a direct relationship between socio-economic groups and body language; as a general rule the higher up on the scale you are then the less gesticulation and body movement you will do in interviews because you will use words to their full extent to communicate. Maybe this is why politicians hardly move when being interviewed under pressure. They have to appear cool and flapping arms around doesn't help to achieve this. Might be worth asking friends if you do anything annoying when under stress just in case!

If you want to convey honesty and openness while communicating a particularly delicate or important piece of information then lean forward with your palms open while talking. The direct opposite of this is the famous palm down authoritarian gesture of Adolf Hitler; palms can be powerful in communication particularly in handshakes.

Good eye contact is essential and it's necessary to maintain this with all people present in the room as much as you can to keep 100% of their combined interest. Smiling when appropriate makes employers more likely to warm to you; bear in mind that too much can have the adverse effect. Women smile and generally have more facial expressions when communicating so if you are a woman being interviewed by a male-only panel the advice is to mirror the amount of smiling and vice versa for men being interviewed by women. Research by Boston University revealed how subordinates smile more in the presence of dominant and superior people in friendly and formal situations, whereas superior people will only smile around subordinate people in friendly situations – so don't expect your future boss to smile as much as you would like in an interview.

Most of us are aware of negative body language signals such as folded arms. If you find yourself doing a double arm grip, literally folding your arms and holding each arm then you need to unravel yourself quickly. Also watch your interviewers for their signals, if they lean back with folded arms then you need to lean forward, be enthusiastic and work hard in your answers to win them back. If they are sitting and leaning forward followed by a hand

on chin gesture (deciding about you) then your chances of success at this point are above 50%.

- **The Graceful Exit**

Shake hands if possible, thank them for the interview and if you are not already sure ask when can you expect to hear of a decision. When leaving bear in mind that the interviewer will watch you leave so check the back of your outfit before the interview! As you are leaving the room, turn and offer another smile.

When you get home: trust me on this, send an email or short letter to the interviewer(s) along the following lines:

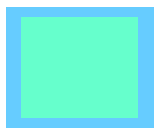
Dear _____,

Thank you for taking the time to interview me earlier on today. I really enjoyed the chance to meet with you and find out more about the position and the company. Having done so, I can fully appreciate how much you value your staff and customers and would welcome the chance to work for you in the role of Finance Officer.

I hope I provided enough detail during the interview for you at this stage, please don't hesitate to contact me on 07777 777777 if you need any additional information.

Best wishes,

Remi Jakhar



150 interview questions

Below and following are samples of commonly asked questions to help you prepare for your interview. These questions are provided to give you an idea of what to expect but there is obviously no guarantee that you will be asked any of them. Try to put yourself in the shoes of the person interviewing you; what questions would you ask to find out if you could do the job?

Most people are under prepared for interviews, which means they can easily get thrown off course by a difficult question. Preparing and anticipating as much as possible will increase your chances of keeping your nerve and getting a job offer. As a general rule of thumb the average length of an interview is between 45-60 minutes and remember - you should be doing 70% of the talking.

Overall the key to success in interviews is preparation and more preparation:

Opening Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Tell me about yourself 2) What attracted you to this position 3) Why do you want to work for us 4) What do you know about our company 5) What are you looking for in your next job
Experience	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6) What relevant experience do you have for this position 7) Can you summarise your experience to date for us 8) Describe your present role 9) How does your job relate to the overall objectives of the department and business 10) In your present position, what tasks take up most of your time and why 11) Your CV shows that you have been with your present employer for a long time with no increase in responsibilities, can you tell us about this 12) How has your existing job prepared you to take on extra responsibility

	<p>13)What is the hardest thing you have ever had to do at work</p> <p>14)Have you ever been fired</p> <p>15)Tell us how you have progressed in the last 5 years</p> <p>16)Why have you never worked</p> <p>17)Explain the gap you have between.....</p> <p>18)Why did you make the decision to take your present job</p> <p>19)Why do you want to leave your present position</p> <p>20)In what way does your current job not live up to your expectations</p> <p>21)What aspects do you find the most rewarding about your job</p> <p>22)Why have you been doing your present job for so long</p> <p>23)Why have you had so many jobs</p> <p>24)How long have you been looking for another job</p> <p>25)Why do you want to change careers</p>
<p>Education</p>	<p>26)What professional development have you undertaken that is relevant to this role</p> <p>27)What were your 3 main elected subjects in your final year of your degree</p> <p>28)Did you have to resit any exams during your studies</p> <p>29)What was your dissertation title and why did you choose that area to study in depth</p> <p>30)Why did you only obtain a 2;ii/third classification</p> <p>31)Why did you not do a degree</p> <p>32)What professional development would you consider in the future to progress your career</p>

<p>Communication</p>	<p>33) Who do you communicate with most regularly in your present position</p> <p>34) How do you build positive working relationships with others and can you give an example</p> <p>35) Can you recall a time when you have turned around a negative working relationship - how did you achieve this</p> <p>36) Can you describe an occasion when you have influenced or persuaded someone to do something</p> <p>37) Do you have any experience in delivering presentations - if so, to whom and for what purpose</p> <p>38) How would you describe your communication style</p> <p>39) Are you a good listener</p> <p>40) When have you had to negotiate in business? What was your objective and did you achieve it</p> <p>41) When communicating information to others, how do you know they have understood</p> <p>42) When have you had to prepare written information for others</p>
<p>Sales & targets</p>	<p>43) Can you tell me about a time when you have set yourself a goal to work towards, did you reach it</p> <p>44) During the last year in your present position, what percentage of the time have you met your targets</p> <p>45) Why have you not met all your targets</p> <p>46) How do you effectively manage a team of sales staff and manage your own customer accounts</p> <p>47) How often in the last 2 years have you exceeded your targets</p> <p>48) Tell me about the best sale you have made and why</p> <p>49) Tell me about the biggest deal that got away and what you learnt from it</p> <p>50) What makes you a good sales person</p> <p>51) Here is a pen, can you sell it to me</p>

	<p>52)What motivates you</p> <p>53)How much turnover have you directly contributed towards your present employer in the last 12 months</p>
<p>Project Management</p>	<p>54)What project management experience do you have</p> <p>55)Describe a recent project you have managed</p> <p>56)Imagine you are given a project to manage that involves interaction with all levels of the business, what levels are you most comfortable dealing with</p> <p>57)Tell me about a time when you were unable to complete a project on time</p> <p>58)Describe a project you have worked on that really challenged you</p> <p>59)Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively</p>
<p>Team Work</p>	<p>60)What does good team work mean to you</p> <p>61)What do you contribute towards a team</p> <p>62)Describe an occasion when you had to work as part of a team on a specific task, what did you do</p> <p>63)How would your present team describe you</p> <p>64)What kind of people do you like working with</p> <p>65)Do you prefer working with a team or by yourself and why</p> <p>66)Tell me about a time when you supported or helped a team member</p> <p>67)How would you describe your relationship with your manager</p> <p>68)What kind of people do you find it difficult to work with</p> <p>69)Have you ever trained a new member of staff in your previous roles</p> <p>70)Tell me about a time when you needed help and asked for it</p>

Staff Management	<p>71) Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular team decision</p> <p>72) How do you get the best out of your team</p> <p>73) Tell me about a time when you have managed someone you have not got on well with</p> <p>74) Describe an occasion when you motivated the team to achieve a result under pressure</p> <p>75) Tell me about a time when you persuaded team members to do things your way</p> <p>76) How do you know your team are performing well when you are not there</p> <p>77) Have you ever had to discipline a member of staff</p> <p>78) Do you have any training in recruitment and selection</p> <p>79) How do you feed back an employee's performance to them, do you have a procedure for this</p> <p>80) What behaviour do you turn a blind eye to</p> <p>81) How many people do you manage</p> <p>82) What was your staff turnover like during the last 12 months on your team</p> <p>83) Have you ever had to implement change? What measures did you take to ensure positive team morale was maintained during the process of change</p> <p>84) When did you last reward or recognise extra effort by a team member</p>
Leadership & Decision Making	<p>85) What makes you an effective leader</p> <p>86) How do you handle authority</p> <p>87) What have you done that shows initiative</p> <p>88) Do you consider yourself a risk taker</p> <p>89) What decisions have you made in the last year that have directly led to an increase in profits</p>

	<p>90) What is the best decision you have ever made at work and why</p> <p>91) When have you made a mistake that affected others</p> <p>92) What kind of decisions do you find difficult to make</p> <p>93) Tell me about a time when you were tolerant of an opinion that was different from yours</p> <p>94) Tell me about a time when you had to make an important decision with limited facts</p> <p>95) When have you been proved wrong at work</p> <p>96) What would make you a better manager</p>
<p>Problem Solving & Responsibility</p>	<p>97) Tell us about a problem you have solved at work</p> <p>98) When have you been creative in solving a problem</p> <p>99) Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem</p> <p>100) Tell me about a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventative measures</p> <p>101) Have you ever been involved in a 'crisis' at work? if so what did you contribute towards handling it</p>
<p>Organisational</p>	<p>102) How do you manage your work to make sure you achieve deadlines</p> <p>103) When did you last miss a deadline and why</p> <p>104) Tell me about a time when you had to cope with an additional work load, how did you handle it</p> <p>105) What steps have you previously taken to improve efficiency at work</p> <p>106) What software and office systems do you use to help you organise your work</p>
<p>Customer Service</p>	<p>107) Can you think of an occasion when you have delivered a service that has exceeded the expectations of the customer</p> <p>108) Describe a time when you have handled a customer complaint</p>

	<p>109) Tell us about when you last dealt with an angry or upset customer</p> <p>110) What does excellent customer service mean to you</p> <p>111) What observations have you made about customer service in your present role</p>
<p>Strengths / Weaknesses Self-awareness</p>	<p>112) What are people's greatest misperceptions about you</p> <p>113) If I were to call your manager, what would he or she say is the one thing on which you're relied the most</p> <p>114) If I were to talk with the people who know you best at work, how would they describe you</p> <p>115) Describe your 3 main strengths</p> <p>116) What has been your biggest lesson</p> <p>117) Tell me about a time when you were disappointed in your behaviour</p> <p>118) What are your weaknesses</p> <p>119) We all make mistakes, tell us what you have learnt from the ones you have made</p> <p>120) What would you change about yourself to improve your performance at work</p> <p>121) When did you last have to cope with change at work</p> <p>122) Tell me the last time you failed at something</p> <p>123) When was the last time you felt under pressure and why</p> <p>124) When was your work last criticised</p> <p>125) During your last performance appraisal in your present position, what were the main points discussed</p>
<p>Skills & Achievements</p>	<p>126) Having read the job description, what skills can you bring to this position</p>

	<p>127) What new skills have you developed in the last 3 years</p> <p>128) What are your main skills</p> <p>129) What skills do you think you will need to gain in order to excel in this post</p> <p>130) Describe your best 3 work achievements in the last 5 years</p> <p>131) What are you proud of</p> <p>132) Tell me about a time when you overcame an obstacle to achieve something</p>
Career Aspirations / Motivation	<p>133) What motivates you</p> <p>134) Why do you want this job</p> <p>135) What are your career objectives for the next 5 years</p> <p>136) Why do you think you would be good at this job</p> <p>137) How long would you intend staying in this position</p> <p>138) If you had to do it all over again, what would you do differently</p> <p>139) What part of this job motivates you the most</p> <p>140) What part of this job interests you the least</p>
Closing questions	<p>141) Why should we consider you a strong candidate for this post</p> <p>142) What can you offer us that someone else can't</p> <p>143) Why should we take on an external candidate when we could fill this post internally</p> <p>144) How many sick days have you had in the last year</p> <p>145) Do you have any holidays booked in the next 6 months</p> <p>146) With notice, can you work away on business when needed</p> <p>147) Do you have any special working requirements that we need to be aware of</p>

	<p>148) Can we check your references</p> <p>149) When are you available to work</p> <p>150) What salary expectations do you have</p>
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How to handle some tough questions

Don't worry about learning every answer to every possible question because it simply isn't feasible, but there may be some questions where you are unsure of what is being asked or how to respond; so here is a guideline to a few of the common ones:

- **Tell me about yourself.....**

Try to keep to the point and not explain the obvious such as your name and age. Your answer needs to explain who you are, a brief summary of your employment, skills developed and reason why you want the job.

'I am a managing director of a £5m turnover business with 12 years experience in the audio visual industry. I have increased profits by 200% in the last 3 years and have a track record of achieving success through good people management. I am customer focused and have a sound grasp on business issues from marketing to finance. Having successfully developed my present employer's business, I am now looking for my next career challenge and the chance to help another business increase profits in the next 2 years.'

- **You haven't got any direct relevant experience for this position, how do you know that you can do this role?**

'I have been considering a move into this kind of role for some time but only had the confidence to apply when I saw your advert. Having read the job description and person specification in detail, I know I have the skills needed in order to perform this role exceptionally well. Throughout my 15 year career, I have had 3 different jobs, all of which have required the ability to learn new skills and knowledge rapidly. My previous promotions have demonstrated my capacity to do this well. From what I have read about this role, you need someone with high level communication skills, a first rate organiser and the ability to handle extreme pressure. I have all these qualities in addition to a fresh approach and genuine enthusiasm for this field.'

- **Have you ever been fired?**

If you have been sacked the best way to communicate this if you have to, is to say you understand the employer had to take this action and that you have learnt from your experience.

Please note that if you have been laid off or made redundant then this is entirely different. Businesses make redundancies all the time in response to changing business needs, it is not personal nor a reflection on your work, so don't worry about how employers will regard it because they will understand. If you haven't been made redundant in your career then you are lucky so far! Most people do so at some point.

- **Why did you do your last job for so long?**

It does depend upon the type of job that you are going for. Generally the longer the service the more loyalty this demonstrates, which companies want because recruiting and training new staff is expensive. However, many people do the same position for 10 years plus, if this is the case don't worry about appearing stale. Your role will have definitely changed over a period of time so it is very important that you show exactly in what way your position has grown and developed. If you can't, it may be assumed you are unused to change and may take longer to settle in to your new job than other candidates. Most employers are ecstatic about hiring people who have shown commitment to another company because they will assume you will do the same for them.

- **Why have you changed jobs so frequently?**

If you have had a lot of jobs in the same field as the one you are going for you may face a bit of an interrogation as the employer will be wary of investing in someone who may leave quickly. However, if your job is sales orientated and you have brought in substantial increases in revenue then they are clearly more likely to take a calculated risk as they can expect a good return on their investment in you. In some positions moving around can be seen as a plus point such as IT where short-term contracts can keep your skills flexible and up to date. It does depend upon the role. If you are a recent graduate it is normal to move positions frequently in the first 1-5 years after graduating.

A good response I had from a candidate was:

'3 years ago while I was looking for my next career move, I decided to take initiative and approach all the companies I wanted to work for by phoning them and sending them my CV. I received 2 interviews and a job offer within a month. Because the company had a good reputation, I was so pleased to be offered the post that I accepted it without asking many questions myself. On starting the role, it became clear that due my experiences at xyz Ltd of managing large teams, I was expected to manage two departments across two sites, a role that had required two people previously. I rose to the challenge and implemented several new systems to drive improvement but to do this role well meant working over 50 hours every week which put a strain on my family

life. I raised my concerns to my manager but after a month nothing had changed. During which time, I had been contacted by one of the other companies I approached speculatively to fill a short-term contract for 9 months to cover maternity leave. Although the prospect was short, it offered an attractive salary and the possibility of progression, so I accepted. During this time, I received praise on the quality of my work and an excellent work review.

However, the contract came to an end after the 9 months which is when I applied to work for Smith and Sons Ltd where I have worked for over 18 months now. I am looking to move on now because I report to 3 directors and having increased profits by over 100%, I realise there is no room for progression and am therefore seeking a challenge within a larger organisation. ‘

▪ **Why have you been unemployed for so long?**

If you have a gap of more than 6 months you must expect the interviewer to probe into what you have been spending your time doing. What they are looking for is activity and self-motivation. Employers are wary if you have been unemployed long term and will want to know how you have been filling your time constructively. If you don't explain clearly what you have been doing, they could assume you have had a serious problem you are trying to hide. Ideally you should be able to demonstrate that you have maintained and improved your skills and link these skills to match their requirements. The key is to turn your unemployment into your selling point:

“The last 2 years have not always been easy as I have previously always worked consistently for 14 years until this point and I love working. When my last job came to an end, I decided to take a few months off and think about what direction to take my career while enjoying doing things of personal interest. However, when I decided to return to work I found it extremely difficult due to the changing economic climate. During the last 2 years I have kept myself busy and motivated. I have renovated my entire house to a high standard including installing a new kitchen and bathroom, I have also assisted in the care of my wider family including my children and parents which has been thoroughly enjoyable and rewarding. I have attended 4 business courses to maintain my skills and last year undertook 6 weeks voluntary work as a country ranger. I am very keen to resume my career and as you can see from my CV am a loyal and hardworking individual. I can offer strong practical skills in addition to initiative, motivation and an excellent work ethic. “

If you have experienced personal difficulties which were the reason you became unemployed you may not know how much, if anything, to tell the employer. If they ask you directly what were the circumstances that made you unemployed try to tell them something otherwise they may keep probing or become suspicious that you are hiding something unsavoury. Practice talking aloud before your interview, keeping your explanation very brief, factual and finished as positively as you can to move on. Employers will respect this and you do need to have an answer ready, whatever that answer may be. You should find that whatever your circumstances were, most interviewers will demonstrate sensitivity and will not push too much.

If you have a criminal record that needs disclosing, you may find writing a letter of disclosure helpful because you can spend time wording this carefully.

- **What are your strengths?**

If you don't know them then no one else will. If you get stuck on this one here's a few characteristics: Organised, industrious, adaptable, energetic, enthusiastic, hardworking, imaginative, team player etc. Whatever you do don't just tell – explain and give examples or they will have no reason to believe you.

- **What are your weaknesses?**

You have to be consistent with all your current answers so obviously if one of your strengths is having attention to detail you can't then say that your weakness is making mistakes when doing routine work. You have to say something and it has to be based on the truth, so the only way to answer this question is to think of something that you used to be bad at doing and why, then you can explain that you have learned from your mistakes and now it is not a problem.

Eg: "because I work very quickly and am very thorough I used to get impatient with colleagues if they could not keep up or made mistakes. I now understand that people all have different capabilities and strengths so now I am much more patient with everyone in the team. Last month, we were working on the new Euro fighter project and had a tight deadline to meet. The colleague I was working with on this project only has 2 years experience in this industry whereas I have 15, I found myself enjoying the chance to develop his skills and knowledge in this area and by working together and putting in a few extra hours, we achieved the deadline. It was rewarding to know that putting in the time now means that next time we work together we can work really efficiently."

- **What are your salary expectations?**

Before your interview, if you don't already know the salary then spend a bit of time researching on line about average salaries for the level of position for which you are being interviewed in your geographical area. If you are asked this question before you have asked your own questions then you may want to ask your questions first before offering a response. Try to avoid giving a figure first, let them make an offer; 'I believe you have a good understanding of my experience and how I could make a profitable contribution towards your business. If you are seriously considering offering me the position I would rather you suggested a salary in line with the current market and reflective of my experience because I am unaware of your budget for this post'. If they keep asking you though, I recommend you tell them your present salary and that your research into similar positions indicates that the salaries normally range between £ & £ K.

Tell me the last time you failed at something.

Again choose something that happened a long time ago that you have learned from.

E.g: "Once I was asked to do a project/task in a hurry. I didn't get all the information because I was under so much pressure and ended up making a huge mistake. I was really upset because even though I know everyone makes

mistakes I don't like to. I realised that no matter how busy I am I can only do what I fully understand so now if I am not 100% sure I make sure that I find out before going ahead."

- **Sell this object to me.**

You shouldn't expect this question unless you are going for a job that is sales orientated, requires quick thinking on the spot or imagination under pressure. But just so you are warned if you do come across this question it is crucial that you think before you speak and have a planned answer or you will just go trailing off. Be lively, interesting and convincing no matter how silly you feel. Ask some questions about the object before you sell it to show that you could not possibly sell something you have only a limited amount of knowledge about and it gives you more time to plan your answer. If you are going for a sales position and it's your first job you must first identify the needs of the customer, second explain the benefits of the product and how it can help them and third conclude with a reason to purchase now – special offer etc.

- **Why should we consider you for this position?** OR if the interviewer really wanted to see how you coped under pressure they might even say something like **"If I am honest with you I don't really think that you are cut out for this. Can you convince me that you are right for the job?"**

Quite often, the responses we give at the end of the interview are similar to those at the beginning to opening questions such as 'tell me about yourself' With this closing position, you have the opportunity to summarise who you are, what you are offering and a reason why you want the job. At this stage, it is important to deliver your response with enthusiasm and don't worry too much if you are repeating a few statements, in doing so you are just consolidating your strengths.

Don't be fooled at any stage if you think the interviewer is insulting you. They are not being personal but are just trying to identify the real you. So don't go off in a huff and never get defensive, see the question for what it really is. Keep your cool and deliver a strong, persuasive response that leaves them in no doubt that you can perform this role.

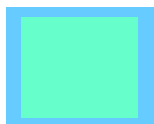
- **Politically Incorrect questions**

How old are you?

Since the introduction of the Age legislation in October 2006 employers should stay clear of this question. But if asked it is a difficult one to avoid. Through my experience of interviewing, candidates often consider themselves too old at anything over 50 and sometimes make the point of mentioning this in the interview; please don't mention your age because if you make an issue of it then it will become one. If you are near 65, and asked this question then explain how long you intend to work for and underline your salient strengths that you are offering.

Do you plan to have children soon?

Employers should really know better and not ask you this, but I keep hearing of cases where they do, so you need to be prepared. This is asked simply because employers want to know if you are going to leave early. Your best bet is to answer 'no' or if can't help being honest and say yes, then add that you do not intend to do so in the immediate future and in any case you are looking at this organisation and career on a long-term basis and if you were to have a family during the course of that career you would hope to stay with the company and continue to progress your career. Consider turning the question back on them and asking how many staff on the management team are women with children.



after the interview

The decision to hire you or not will probably be made in your absence so is there anything else you can do to influence a positive outcome? Most candidates will do nothing apart from wait. I recommend you do the following:

- 1) **Send the interviewer either a short letter or an email** to say thank you for the interview. This is also a chance to cover anything additional you think may be important at this stage. Sending a thank you is polite and makes you look keen and enthusiastic. It also has the capacity to elevate your position; if there is a decision to be made between you and another candidate then a good letter can help to swing the vote.
- 2) **Write down the questions** you can remember being asked and take a note of what you responded to each one. If you don't get offered the position, this is your only reference to work on to improve your performance next time. If you are not offered the position, it is unlikely the employer will give you valuable and very honest feedback.
- 3) **Apply for more positions** while you are waiting to hear. You have nothing to lose and knowing that you have further interviews lined up if you are not successful will help you handle a rejection better.

I've been offered the job! What do I do now?

Congratulations!! It's a great feeling if it's the job you really want. If you have asked the right questions then you should know if you want to accept the offer. If you are feeling uncertain then ask more questions before making a decision.

Never hand in your notice at your present position until you have received the job offer in writing from your future employer. Your offer letter will usually state that the offer is subject to the receipt of satisfactory references and include a probationary period, this is normal. Once you have received the offer, then you can hand in your notice and talk to the people you want to use to provide references. If you can, try to leave your present position on a really positive note with all your relationships at work intact because your paths may cross again.

Before you start a new position, why not try to have some time off to refresh before you begin your next career step; by this stage you probably need a break!

Good luck.

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This book is a work of fiction, written in the hope that it may assist people in their preparation for interviews.

The ideas suggested are solely those of the author, and are used only to increase or enhance the reader's awareness of interviews. No responsibility can be accepted for the views expressed in this book. They should in no way be construed as a judgement of good or bad interview techniques. This book is written simply to make you think about your interviews and to empathise with the interviewer to give you a wider understanding.

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