

INTERVIEWERS' SECRETS REVEALED

How to ACE your next job interview!

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INTRODUCTION

You catch yourself glancing at her notepad, looking at the upside down writing and wondering what she just wrote about you. Was it good or bad? As she sits across the table from you, she smiles. Is that the polite smile or the, “You’re doing well,” smile? You think, “If I just knew what she wanted, it would be so much easier.”

We all want to be mind readers during a job interview. What does the hiring manager want? What does she think of me? What about my application is of greatest interest? What about my background is of concern? How did I answer that question? Am I talking too much or not enough? What are her pet peeves?

What could I say that would help me land this job?

While this e-book cannot answer all these questions, it will answer many questions interviewers wonder about and stress over every day. More importantly, this e-book offers an insider’s view of what interviewers want to hear.

Who is this e-book for?

I wrote this e-book for talented people involved in a job search. Interviewing is difficult for everyone, not just the under qualified. Every day, intelligent and creative people get TBNT (thanks, but no thanks) letters from companies with which they have interviewed. Getting an offer is hard work, and may involve skills and knowledge

different from those of the positions you seek.

This e-book is for anyone looking for a new job that wants to have an edge.

The goal of this e-book

I would like to help smart and talented people land the jobs of their dreams. If you are looking for a new job, you should assume that you will have competition. I assume you want to do everything you can to have an advantage over your competition. You recognize that you need to prepare well to improve your competitiveness for the role.

The goal of this e-book is to share the point of view of the interviewer such that it will help you prepare for an interview and perform well. I offer suggestions about the way to answer common behavioral questions, how to paint your experiences in the best light, the questions you should ask during the interview, and much more. I also offer a list of pitfalls to avoid and common causes of red flags.

I hope you find this e-book helpful. Good luck!

Note: To avoid having to write he or she and him or her, I use the female gender to refer to the interviewer and the male gender to refer to the interviewee.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

You should have a reasonable expectation that the hiring manager has defined what she is looking for and has spent the time to review the resumes that most closely match her needs. You can also expect that she has prepared several questions for the interview.

What about the hiring manager? What does she expect from you? The hiring manager expects that you will have researched the company and thoroughly reviewed the job posting or description. She will also expect that you take the interview process seriously and will be a true professional.

Researching the position

Most companies post job description, but sometimes all you have is a short advertisement. When you receive an invitation for an interview, ask the person extending the invitation if she would e-mail the job description to you. It also helps to look at the other positions the company to learn what is important to them.

Research salary data for similar positions to determine a general pay range that you should expect. Determine your salary requirements based on your needs and qualifications.

Researching the company

The internet has simplified company research. Before your interview you should:

- ✦ Thoroughly review the company's website. Look at the product pages, the media section (read all recent press releases), management team bios, and the employment section.
- ✦ If the company is public, check out their annual report and their profile on Hoover's Online.
- ✦ Use your favorite search engine to do a general article search about the company.
- ✦ Do a search for the hiring manager's name (for example "Lisa Haneberg" or "Lisa Haneberg" Intel).
- ✦ Review relevant trade journals (many libraries will have these available for review).

Professionalism

You don't want to do anything that will detract from your candidacy. Here are a few tips for the days or weeks leading up to your interview:

- ✦ Do not pester the human resources person with frequent phone calls or emails. It is fine to ask relevant questions, but do not call more than is absolutely necessary.
- ✦ Ensure that you know the location for the interview and how you will get there. Do not be late!
- ✦ Regardless of whether the workplace has a casual dress code, always dress professionally for an interview (appropriately for the industry). Look sharp, polished, and clean.
- ✦ Bring a pad of paper and a pen for taking notes. It is bad form ask for these items and doubly bad form to not take notes at all.
- ✦ Bring extra copies of your resume (and portfolio, if appropriate).

Preparing Your Information

Expect that the company will ask for references and prepare a list that includes phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Make sure your references know that you are putting their names on the list. You don't want them to be surprised if they receive a call and you want to make sure they are willing to provide a reference. Interviewers rank references as follows (from most desirable to least desirable):

- ✦ Former managers (or even the manager of your manager)
- ✦ Former employees
- ✦ Former peers
- ✦ Former customers
- ✦ College instructors or other teacher types
- ✦ Friends who worked with you
- ✦ Friends who did not work with you
- ✦ Relatives

Fill a list of 5-6 names with people from the top three categories. Do not give an employer a list of friends or family members, because it will make her wonder why you do not want her talking to your former managers.

Collect the information typically requested on an employment application. This includes education, dates of employment, employer address, supervisor, salary, employer phone number, and reason for leaving. If you took time off with good reason (two years off to take care of family) it helps to indicate this on your resume or application. The person reviewing your work history might eliminate you because of unexplained gaps in employment.

Get to know yourself

Before the interview, you will want to review your work history, accomplishments, strengths, and weaknesses. The next section offers several suggestions for preparing to put your best foot forward.

Prepare a statement about why you left each position. Be able to share your work history in a way that shows how you have come to this point in your career. Be prepared to share the reasons for lateral or backward moves. Having a nontraditional career progression is fine as long as you can address your decisions in a way that seems reasonable and smart.

Your skills

Create a list of your skills and competencies. This is not a time to be modest. Most people have many more skills than they credit themselves.

Your natural strengths

List your 5-7 greatest strengths. Ask former managers, peers, or friends if you are unsure.

Your weaknesses

List 3-5 weaknesses. In what ways do you drive people crazy? What aspects of your work have been most difficult? Have prior managers defined areas in which you need to improve?

Your key success stories

After you review the behavioral interview information in the next section, think of 3-5 key stories that you think demonstrate many the qualities the interviewer is looking for.

By the way, the work you have done in this section can help improve your resume as well as prepare you for the interview.

WHAT EMPLOYERS WANT TO HEAR

Employers Want to Hire Rock Stars

The hiring manager wants to hire a highly talented person who is also a great fit for the job and company. This person is what I call a rock star. For each position and company the criteria for whom might be a rock star changes, but here are some common characters:

- ♦ He is sharp, smart, and picks up on ideas quickly
- ♦ He has been and can become the go-to guy
- ♦ He is interested in and engaged in his work
- ♦ He sees and shares problems, concerns, ideas, and possibilities
- ♦ He is a consummate professional and a positive role model
- ♦ He is likely to fit the culture of the company
- ♦ He will add to the team's skills and abilities
- ♦ He will need minimal direction to get the job done
- ♦ He takes the initiative to get the work done and does whatever it takes to meet important objectives

You will want to come across as a rock star!

The interviewer will most likely use a combination of behavioral and standard questions to determine if you are the best candidate for the job. By predicting the questions and preparing responses, you will have a powerful advantage over your competition.

Behavioral Questions

Many companies use behavioral interview questions. Behavioral interviewing is based on the belief that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance. Behavioral interview questions ask for specific examples of past performance and behaviors. They seek to understand what you have done and how you have approached your work in previous situations.

If you are unprepared for the rigor of behavioral interview questions, you may be caught off guard and be unable to sell your strengths.

Key Point: Even if the company does not use behavioral interviewing, candidates who prepare for behavioral interviews will perform better. Behavioral responses are also effective when faced with an inexperienced interviewer (because you are helping her out by providing great answers). The more you can do to highlight your talents in a way that is easy for the interviewer, the better.

The anatomy of a behavioral interview question

Behavioral interview questions ask you to:

- ✦ Recall a specific situation from the past
- ✦ Share your involvement or role in the situation
- ✦ Share how you approached the situation
- ✦ Share your results

Behavioral interview questions allow the interviewer to create a mental picture of you in action. Through your response, she gets a feel for how you will likely go about doing your job.

You have the opportunity to give the interviewer what she is looking for, and then some.

Behavioral responses

A comprehensive behavioral response will share the following pieces of information (as suitable to the situation):

- The situation
- Your role
- Your approach to the situation
- Your actions
- The roles of the other people involved
- Your results
- What you learned/would do differently next time

Don't make the interviewer work for this information! Practice using these transition phrases (in several ways and wordings) that will help you answer the questions fully:

"My role was..."

"My approach was..."

"The results were..."

"One thing I learned was..."

"The most difficult part was..."

"The steps I took were to..."

"Once I determined ____, I then ____"

"If I were going to do it all again, I would ..."

Your behavioral response should not become a long story. Most interviewers have 12-20 questions to get through during the interview. Your response should last only 1-2 minutes. Get to the point while ensuring you cover all the elements.

How behavioral interview questions are selected

There are millions of possible behavioral interview questions. The 10-15 questions that a company selects reflect the qualities that are MOST important for this position. The questions will change for each position. This is important information for you, because as the interviewer asks the initial questions, you can get a good idea of what's important to the her.

Dissecting behavioral interview questions

Below are two tables of typical behavioral interview questions. One covers general questions and the other covers questions appropriate for management positions. The questions are in the left column and my advice and analysis of the question's purpose are in the right-hand column. The purpose of these tables is to develop your ability to diagnose the purpose of behavioral interview questions. When you are able to determine what the interviewer wants from the question, you will be able to offer the best possible response.

General Behavioral Interview Questions

(Note: the follow-up questions may only be necessary if the candidate does not answer fully. You will want to answer fully.)

General Questions	What the Interviewer is Looking For
<p>Have you ever had difficulty getting others to accept your ideas? Give me an example. What was your approach to overcome this? Did it work?</p>	<p>The interviewer wants to understand how well you influence others. She wants to hear that you build relationships and present your ideas in ways that others will want to hear. She wants to feel comfortable that if you, at first, don't influence the other person, that you will tailor your message to accommodate their preferences (such as level of detail, setting). She wants to hear that you recognize that it is your responsibility to communicate effectively and collaboratively.</p>
<p>Give me an example of a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty. What were the circumstances? What were the results?</p>	<p>She is hoping to find that you are willing and able to move beyond your basic job duties. Here's the approach I would take to this question: First, you can say that you believe that it is your job to do whatever it takes to help the company succeed, so there's little you would consider above and beyond. Then share an example of a time you were proactive and it made a big difference to the team/company.</p>
<p>Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on how others acted. How did you approach the situation? What were the results?</p>	<p>This is another influence question, but it is getting at how well you offer suggestions or coaching. You will want to share how you offered just what the person needed to hear in a way that they found acceptable. You will also want to stress that your ability to influence others is related to your willingness to be influenced by others. When you build a trusting, positive relationship, it is easier to help each other and not get defensive about it.</p>

General Questions	What the Interviewer is Looking For
Describe a situation where you showed teamwork or partnership. Who were the players? How did you approach the situation?	The teamwork question is often worded poorly (like here). What the interviewer wants to know is whether you have been a team member and how well you work with others. I would answer this question using an example of a time when the team needed to solve a problem and you got your teammates together to collaborate and solve the problem.
Describe a time when your schedule was suddenly interrupted? How did you respond? What was the result?	The interviewer wants to find out how you handle changes and your flexibility. You will want to communicate that you understand changes occur, you can respond to them, and that you think it is important to agree on the new priorities and get rolling. You may also want to share any of your techniques for keeping smaller interruptions from causing you lose focus on what's important.
Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to get out of a crisis or difficulty. Who was involved? How did it turn out?	The interviewer is looking for two things: 1. That you can solve problems in a productive way. 2. That you know when to ask for help and are not afraid to do so. When answering this question, you want to demonstrate the strength to deal with issues but also the maturity to know when to call for reinforcements.
Describe a time when you dealt with a stressful situation. What was the situation? How did you respond? What was the result? What did you learn?	The interviewer wants to know what stresses you out and how you deal with stress. You will want to show that you have constructive ways of dealing with stress. Don't say that nothing stresses you out. That is not what the interviewer is looking for and you will not be believable. Make sure your example is not too small, like, "When a copier gets jammed," because then the interviewer will think that you get stressed over nothing and may be high maintenance.

General Questions	What the Interviewer is Looking For
<p>Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic to solve a problem. What was the problem? How did you approach it? Who was involved? What were your results?</p>	<p>The interviewer wants to learn how you approach problems. She wants to see that you are mature and levelheaded and can make professional judgments that are in the best interests of the company. She will also be looking to see that you sought the appropriate amount of information and analysis before coming to any conclusions. This is NOT a time to share your fringe or extreme beliefs.</p>
<p>Give me a specific example of a time when you had to abide by a policy with which you did not agree. How did you communicate your disagreement? Was it obvious to others that you did not agree? Why/why not?</p>	<p>What the interviewer wants to hear is that you shared your concerns with your manager, and not with everyone at the water cooler. She wants to know that you will share concerns, but then work productively within the policy.</p>
<p>Describe a time when you completed an important written document. Who was the intended audience? How did you approach the project? What did you find most difficult about the task? What was your result?</p>	<p>This question exists to help the interviewer determine if you consider customer needs when deciding how to communicate to them in writing. She may also be testing your overall experience and comfort with producing documents, so you will want to share a few examples with varying lengths and audiences.</p>
<p>Share a time when you had to deal with conflict. What was the situation? Why did the conflict exist? How did you approach the situation? What was the result? Did you ever resolve the conflict? How? Or Why not?</p>	<p>Saying that you have not had any conflicts will not be believable. The assumption is that everyone has had conflicts. The interviewer wants to know how to you deal with differences of opinion/personality. She will want to hear that you were the proactive one, you talked about the situation openly with the other person, and that you were able to create a productive working relationship.</p>

General Questions	What the Interviewer is Looking For
<p>Give me an example of a time when you tried to accomplish something and failed. Why did you fail? When did you know you were going to fail? What did you do to try to prevent failure? What would you do differently next time? What did you learn?</p>	<p>It is not realistic to say you have no examples of failure. It is not believable. The interviewer wants to hear that you did not try to hide the failure, that you were proactive in responding to it, and that you have learned from the experience. She does not want to hear your excuses or rationalizations about why it was not really a failure.</p>
<p>Tell me about a situation in which you had to deal with a upset customer or co-worker. How did you approach the situation? What did you do? What were the results?</p>	<p>The interviewer wants to hear that you did not avoid or try to pass off the person to someone else. She wants to hear that you acknowledged the person's feelings, asked questions to understand the situation, and determined what you could do to help.</p>
<p>Share an example of when you were able to anticipate or predict a potential problem. How did you discover this? Who did you involve? What did you do? What were the results?</p>	<p>The interviewer wants to hear that you took ownership of helping the department/company improve results and prevent problems. She wants to feel that you are observant and will share your concerns with others without having to be asked.</p>
<p>Describe the two accomplishments of which you are most proud. What was your role? How have these contributions helped the company?</p>	<p>The interviewer is seeking to learn whether you have been a good contributor. You will want to share situation where you did made a big difference. This is not a time to offer general examples like that you are loyal and reliable. The interviewer wants to hear about moments of greatness. Talk about an important project in which your role was instrumental.</p>

General Questions	What the Interviewer is Looking For
<p>Tell me about a peer that you have the most difficulty working with? What made it difficult? What did you do about it? What were the results?</p>	<p>The interviewer is seeking to find out whether you are difficult to work with. You will want to acknowledge differences, but down play any significance this has had for you. You will want to communicate that you believe difficulties must be worked through to build trusting and collaborative relationships. Do not go on and on about the qualities that made this other person difficult, especially if they are common (like the person was defensive or bossy). NEVER bash ex-bosses, peers, or co-workers in an interview.</p>
<p>Share an example of a time when you needed to motivate yourself to complete an undesirable assignment. What was it about the work that you did not like? What were the results?</p>	<p>The interviewer wants to know how you have gotten past low points in motivation. Everyone has to do tasks that are not enjoyable. How do you get past the natural urges to avoid or put off this work? The interviewer will want to hear about your techniques for making the work more desirable or your ways for getting the tasks done quickly and efficiently.</p>
<p>Share an example of a new idea of yours. How did you come up with the idea? How did you communicate the idea? What were the results?</p>	<p>The interviewer wants to know that you share ideas in productive ways. She wants to hear that you take ownership of helping the company improve and be successful and so you routinely will share new ideas you have with your manager or team members to get their input. She will also want to hear that you are flexible in letting others run with your idea and add their thoughts to it.</p>
<p>Describe a situation where tasks on your to-do list conflicted. How did you prioritize? How did you manage your time? What was the outcome?</p>	<p>The interviewer wants to find out whether you recognize what's most important and whether you have open and collaborative conversations with your manager and peers about priorities.</p>
<p>Describe a time you faced disappointment. How did you deal with the situation? With whom did you communicate? What was the result? What did you learn?</p>	<p>This question is dealing with setbacks and whether you let them stop your progress. The interviewer will want to hear that you acknowledge setbacks but that you quickly recover and get back into action again.</p>

Management and Leadership Behavioral Interview Questions

(Note: the follow-up questions may only be necessary if the candidate does not answer fully. You will want to answer fully.)

Management Questions	What the Interviewer is Looking For
Describe a time when you were working with a group that was uncooperative. How were they uncooperative? What did you do? Where you successful?	The interviewer wants to know how you deal with influencing groups of people. She wants to get a feel for what you call uncooperative behavior and wants to see that you own influencing and working well with diverse styles. Beware of coming across as difficult and opinionated if you describe everyday differences as being uncooperative.
Describe an unpopular decision you have made. What was the situation? Why was the decision unpopular? What was the result? Would you do it differently next time?	The interviewer is assessing a couple of things with this question. First, do you have the strength and courage to make decisions that others find unpopular? Second, do you involve others and seek their opinions, thereby reducing other's resistance? She wants to get the impression that you are a strong leader but that you are also inclusive and participative.
Describe a situation where you had to reprioritize the work of a group. How did you approach this task? How did you decide what is important? What happened to the items on the bottom of the list?	The interviewer wants to learn how you approach ensuring that your team members are focused on the right work. She wants to hear that you are proactive and can ensure that your team is effective. She also wants to hear that this is a regular part of your management practice and that you have the strength and courage to renegotiate or refuse to take on tasks that are at the bottom of the list.

Management Questions	What the Interviewer is Looking For
<p>Give me an example of how you have gone about setting team or department goals. What were your criteria? How did you approach the situation? How did you communicate the goals? Who was involved? How was performance to these goals tracked? What was the result?</p>	<p>The interviewer wants to learn both how you set goals and whether you make the process participative. She also wants to understand whether you set, then forget, the goals, or how you keep them current and in conversation. She also wants to hear that you measure goals and take steps to improve performance to goals if needed.</p>
<p>Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were unable to meet or achieve it. Why were you unable to achieve the goal? When did you know you weren't going to make it? What did you do to try to meet the goal? What would you do differently next time?</p>	<p>The question focuses on proactiveness and problem solving. The interviewer wants to learn how quickly you figure out that you are not achieving a goal and what you do to try and get the performance back on track. She does NOT want to hear that the goal was unmet because it was unrealistic in the first place and was handed to you, and thus it is not your fault. This response will make you appear to be a weak manager.</p>
<p>Share an example of how you have optimized team member motivation. How do you assess motivation? What is your approach? What were your results?</p>	<p>This is an important and tricky question. The interviewer wants to know whether you establish an environment where people want to do their best work. You will want to acknowledge that, while you cannot force motivation onto others, you can create a workplace where people feel included and important.</p>
<p>Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively. Why did you delegate the task? What was the result?</p>	<p>The interviewer wants to know whether you delegate appropriately. Most managers do not delegate enough. She wants to feel comfortable that you can assess the appropriate place for the task and are not too chicken to ask others to do the work. This is also a question that might tell the interviewer whether you tend to disempower or micromanage, so be careful not to say anything that makes you sound like a control freak.</p>

Management Questions	What the Interviewer is Looking For
<p>Describe a time when you set your expectations too high (or too low). What did you do? How did you correct the situation?</p>	<p>The interviewer wants to get an idea of the level of your expectations. Beware of coming across as having low expectations. You will get dinged more for having low expectations than for having high expectations. It is good to share that you have extremely high expectations of your staff but that you also know that for them to do their best work, you also have to have very high expectations of yourself.</p>
<p>Describe a time that you asserted yourself at a regular business meeting with peers and your manager. What was the situation? What did you say? What were the results?</p>	<p>The interviewer wants to know that you will be proactive and productive, not just a fly on the wall. You should share that you regularly participate at meetings and prefer meetings where lively debate and collaboration occur. She will also want to hear that you do not become bossy or directive in meetings. You will want to come across as a productive and active management team member, and neither passive nor overbearing.</p>
<p>Beyond your functional projects and tasks, in what ways have you helped the company improve its ability to manage, perform and react to change?</p>	<p>This question exists to help the interviewer learn what you bring to the table besides your functional skills. How will you help the management team improve its idea generation, analysis, and decisions? Will having you on the management team add or subtract from the overall effectiveness of the company? You will want to share what you think your greatest strengths are as a manager and leader.</p>
<p>What do you expect of your direct reports and how do you ensure that your expectations are clear? Share specific examples from your previous roles.</p>	<p>The interviewer wants to hear that you communicate and recommunicate expectations and that clarifying expectations is a regular part of daily communications. She also wants to hear that you have some regular one-on-one conversations with direct reports to ensure they are clear on the expectations and priorities. You should also share how you document expectations (e-mail after meeting, for example).</p>

Management Questions	What the Interviewer is Looking For
<p>Share an example of a time that you had to hire a new direct report. What is was your hiring criteria and selection process? Who took part in the interviews? What qualities were most important to you? Was the person end a great hire?</p>	<p>The interviewer wants to get a feel for how involved you are in selecting team members. The right answer, here, is VERY INVOLVED. She will want to feel that you take the hiring process seriously and that you know how to hire top talent.</p>
<p>Can you describe an example when you one of your ideas or initiatives provided a unique or special “value-added” benefit to your company that made a significant impact on the bottom line? What was the idea? How did you communicate it?</p>	<p>The interviewer wants to hear that you are willing and able to seek ways to improve the company and that you can effectively communicate your ideas. These big ideas do not need to happen every week, but she will want to hear that you have made several significant contributions by creating and communication fresh ideas.</p>
<p>Share an example of when you worked with a poor performer. Why was the performance lacking? What did you do? What was the result? What would you do differently next time?</p>	<p>The interviewer wants to hear that you do not avoid dealing with performance problems, so beware of saying the problem had been going on a long time (this shows you waited too long to deal with it). She will want to hear that you were open, clear, direct, AND supportive toward helping the employee improve. She will also want to get the impression that you will have the courage to terminate when that’s the right decision.</p>
<p>Can you provide an example of when you pitched an idea to senior management and it was turned down? How did you respond? What was the outcome?</p>	<p>The interviewer will want to hear that you know you need to pick your battles and that you have the strength to keep trying if it is important. She will want to get a feel for how you approach communicating with and influencing senior managers. She will also want to hear that if your suggestion is turned down, you will be professional and continue to support the current system.</p>

Quick advice about other general questions

Questions about strengths and weaknesses: EVERYONE asks this question, so prepare for it! You will not come across as credible if you cannot think of any weaknesses. They are likely obvious, so share the one or two areas where you still need to improve. Show a genuine interest and commitment to developing in the future (this applies to senior management candidates, too).

Questions about career goals and why the position interests you: Be open here, but not dumb. Your reason for wanting this job should leave the interviewer feeling good about you, not worried that you will be using the company to satisfy some personal goal.

Questions about reasons for leaving and employment gaps: Beware of showing attitude when the interviewer asks why you left a position or whether you were working between jobs listed on your application/resume. This interviewer has been given many a glare that suggested I was being rude and intrusive. These are valid and important questions, so expect and prepare to answer them. Do not lie, because you will likely get caught when the company checks your references. If you have been fired from a position, the best response is an open and candid one that stresses what you have learned from the experience. Don't say the reason for leaving a job was a personality clash with your boss. This is a weak reason and will send the interviewer running. Quitting one position before securing another one may seem like a rash and immature thing to do so be ready to offer a good explanation for why this was a good decision.

The most common interview questions

You will want to prepare answers to the most common interview questions. They include:

- ✦ Tell me about a little bit about yourself.
- ✦ Why are you interested in another position?
- ✦ What do you know about this company?
- ✦ What are your short-term and long-term career goals?
- ✦ What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- ✦ Why does this company interest you?
- ✦ What has been your most significant accomplishment?
- ✦ How would your previous managers and team members describe you?
- ✦ What makes you the best candidate for this position?
- ✦ What are your salary expectations?

First impressions are important!

Here are a few pointers that will help you make a great impression with the interviewer:

- ✦ Speak with a strong voice. Beware of coming across as too timid or weak. Practice projecting your voice if needed.
- ✦ Relax and enjoy the conversation – this is a two-way exploration.
- ✦ Share the points that you prepared in a relaxed and natural tone. You don't want to sound as if you have practiced.
- ✦ Listen well and try to read behind the lines of what the interviewer is saying.
- ✦ Always thank the interviewer at the end. Ask for business cards so you can write a thank you note to those with whom you have spoken.
- ✦ Be honest and open with your responses. Tell the truth in a positive manner.
- ✦ Be sure that you are meeting the interviewer's needs. If you are not sure ask her if you are providing the right level of detail to the questions.

RED FLAGS AND PITFALLS – WHAT CAN HURT YOUR CANDIDACY?

I have seen candidates do well during most of the interview but then get knocked out of the running based on one poor response. Here is a table of red flags and pitfalls that can harm your chances of landing the job:

When	Pitfall or Red Flag	Why this is a Potential Problem and What to Do About It
On the application or resume	Job hopping	<p>Concerns about reliability and commitment to the company. A company does not want to hire and train someone who will not likely stick around. Turnover costs companies big bucks.</p> <p>Remedy: If you have moved around a lot, address this upfront in your cover letter. Explain the reasons and communicate a desire and commitment to build a career with the company.</p>
On the application or resume	Gaps in employment	<p>The employer might be concerned that a gap is hiding a negative experience, like a termination or imprisonment (related to the job).</p> <p>Remedy: Explain any gaps of employment in your cover letter, resume, and application (all three, because you do not know which the person will review)</p>

When	Pitfall or Red Flag	Why this is a Potential Problem and What to Do About It
On the application or resume	Negative career progression	<p>Negative career progression means that you went backwards either in pay or position level. This is a concern because it might suggest that you were not able to perform successfully at the higher level.</p> <p>Remedy: Explain career progression choices in your cover letter, resume, and application.</p>
On the application or resume	Salary expectations too high/too low	<p>It's tough when companies require a desired salary figure. A salary expectation that is too high will likely eliminate you from consideration. A salary expectation that is too low might give the impression that you are not qualified.</p> <p>Remedy: Offer salary expectations only if requested. I prefer to say the expectations are negotiable based on the job requirements. If you must include an expected salary, add "negotiable based on job requirements," after the amount.</p>
On the application or resume	Reasons for leaving like "personality conflict" or "personal reasons"	<p>These reasons for leaving are a red flag that you may have left the company on bad terms.</p> <p>Remedy: Never cite a personal reason or personality conflict as a reason for leaving. Be more specific and positive. For example, if the personal reason was to care for a family member, indicate this. You should expect the interviewer will ask you why you left each position during your career, so it is wise to prepare answers.</p>

When	Pitfall or Red Flag	Why this is a Potential Problem and What to Do About It
During an interview	Talking negative about former or present bosses, peers, or team members	<p>When a candidate is willing to bash the people he has worked with, he is showing a lack of professionalism and planting a question in the interviewer's mind about whether he can get along with people. It is a HUGE red flag when candidates talk poorly about multiple people, especially more than one ex-boss. The interviewer will be concerned the problem is you not them.</p> <p>Remedy: Don't burn bridges and never speak ill of others. You can express points of disagreement, but do so in a respectful manner.</p>
During an interview	Vague answers, lacking specifics	<p>A candidate who talks in generalities gives the interviewer impression that he may be full of bull and may have misrepresented his skills and experiences.</p> <p>Remedy: Listen carefully to the question. Prepare examples before the interview.</p>
During an interview	Rambling	<p>The interviewer will think that this person cannot get to the point and is not an effective communicator.</p> <p>Remedy: Be thorough but succinct with your answers. Don't tell long stories, even if the interviewer is smiling. She is just being polite.</p>

When	Pitfall or Red Flag	Why this is a Potential Problem and What to Do About It
During an interview	Communication style too familiar	<p>It's good to be relaxed, but beware of coming across in a manner that is too familiar as it will put off the interviewer and make her wonder if you have this problem at the workplace, too.</p> <p>Remedy: Be pleasant, personable, and friendly, and professional.</p>
During an interview	Communication style too formal	<p>If you come across as being too formal, the interviewer may be concerned that you will not fit into the team.</p> <p>Remedy: Be professional and friendly. Show your personality as appropriate.</p>
During an interview	Dress too casual	<p>You are not taking the job interview seriously and you are not a professional.</p> <p>Remedy: Look your best.</p>
During an interview	Lack of knowledge about the company	<p>You did not prepare for the interview or care enough to do a little research. Is this how you would approach your job, too?</p> <p>Remedy: Know something about the company before you go to the interview.</p>
During reference checks	No references from your past employer.	<p>This will raise questions about why you do not want the interviewer to contact your former boss.</p> <p>Remedy: If there is a valid reason the interviewer cannot contact your former manager, state this on your reference list and include someone else from that company.</p>

When	Pitfall or Red Flag	Why this is a Potential Problem and What to Do About It
During reference checks	Making the HR person wait for reference information.	<p>Making the HR person wait will make her wonder if there is a reason you cannot find 3-5 people who are willing to provide a positive reference.</p> <p>Remedy: Prepare references before the interview.</p>
During reference checks	Asking your references to call the company	<p>If you ask your preferred references to call the company it makes the company wonder why you are doing this. Are you trying to stack the line up with positive references because others on the application might offer a poor reference?</p> <p>Remedy: If you are concerned about a reference from a previous employer, talk to the person and ask what type of reference you can expect. Let him or her know that you would appreciate it if they highlighted your accomplishments and strengths. Offer other references, but do not have them call the company</p>

QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK

Most people let the company own the interview process. They assume that the company is in the power seat and do little in the way of screening the company and hiring manager. I have interviewed thousands of people and few have interviewed me back.

You want to ask great questions for several reasons:

- ✦ It impresses the interviewer and gives her the feeling that you are smart and taking the interviewing process seriously
- ✦ You need to determine if this is a place you want to work!
- ✦ Your questions will help you gauge what's most important and tailor your responses accordingly.

As a candidate, you need to come across as pleasant and cooperative, but this does not mean you should let the company run the process. In fact, you will often get high marks for asking well thought out questions. Personally, when someone does not bother to ask good questions, I am disappointed at their lack of preparedness and professionalism.

Here are sample questions covering various topics. Select several from each topic and tweak them using your own language/words.

To learn more about the hiring manager:

- What do you like best/least about your job?
- What are your career ambitions?
- How do you manage people?
- What are your hot buttons?
- What do you find most stressful at work?
- Do you have fun at work?
- Of which accomplishment are you most proud?
- What is turnover like in the department? Why do people leave the department?
- How many people have you promoted?
- What do you like most about managing people?
- Tell me about your manager.
- Ask other people: What's it like to work for the _____(the hiring manager)?

To learn more about the position:

- What type of person is most likely to succeed/fail in this job?
- What type of person is most likely to succeed/fail in this department?
- Over the next year, what would a home run look like?
- How have past incumbents struggled/succeeded?
- How has this job changed and are there more changes needed?
- How will you measure the success of the person in this job?
- Describe the various positions in the department and how this position fits into the organization chart.
- Describe a typical day/week.

Note: Unless the interviewer brings it up, it is bad form to ask about pay or benefits on the first interview. If you are not sure when to discuss salary, ask the HR person when a salary discussion is appropriate. If you have a concern the salary might be too low, mention this when the HR calls to schedule an interview, she can usually tell you a rough salary range for the position.

To learn more about the company culture:

- ✦ What are some of the fun things the company does for its employees?
- ✦ What training and development opportunities does the company offer?
- ✦ How often does the company promote from within?
- ✦ Is the company conservative or relaxed, and why?
- ✦ Describe the work culture.
- ✦ Describe what it is like to work in the department.
- ✦ What do you like most/least about working here?
- ✦ Describe the pace of the organization?
- ✦ What is the expectation regarding working extra hours?
- ✦ Why do people leave the company?

To learn more about the company's success/health:

- ✦ Describe how the company is doing relative to its goals.
- ✦ What changes and new products are planned (they won't always tell you this)?
- ✦ Who are the company's competitors?
- ✦ What challenges does the company face in the near future?
- ✦ What reputation does the company have in the marketplace?
- ✦ Who are the target customers?
- ✦ What sets this company apart from the competition?

To learn more about the hiring process:

- ✦ How long has the job been available?
- ✦ When are you hoping to bring the new person on board?
- ✦ Tell me about what's next in the hiring process?
- ✦ May I ask how many candidates you are interviewing?
- ✦ How would you assess my qualifications versus what you are looking for?
- ✦ Do you have any concerns about my background?
- ✦ When should I expect to hear from someone?
- ✦ Is there any additional information I can provide?

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

After each interview, you will want to reflect on what you heard and how you feel about the job, company and hiring manager. Record the themes that were repeated during the interview as these define what is most important to the hiring manager.

Write a follow-up thank you letter. E-mail is acceptable and preferred by many, but write the e-mail like you would a professional business letter.

Your letter should touch on the following points:

- Reiterate your interest in the position
- You can add to any of your answers (not take back or change) from the interview. Did you forget to mention something? Mention it here.
- Show enthusiasm for the job and company. Share that you think you could make a significant contribution to the company.
- Close the letter by saying that you are confident you could be successful in this role and would welcome the opportunity to continue with the hiring process/come aboard.

Send a different letter to each interviewer unless the interview was done at the same time (sending the same letter addressed to all parties in the interview is acceptable in this case).

What if you do not hear anything?

It is okay to call or e-mail the HR person once after a respectable amount of time (for example, two weeks). Do not place multiple calls or emails and do not contact all the folks with whom you interviewed. It is not fun to wait, but the process often takes longer than anyone hopes. If you receive an offer from Company A but would prefer to work for Company B, give Company B a call and let them know your situation. **DO NOT** do this unless you have another offer, because it could backfire on you!

Conclusion

I hope this e-book has helped you prepare for your next interview. While there are many uncertainties involved with job interviewing, the more prepared you are, the better your odds are of landing a great position.

I wish you the best!

MILLION DOLLAR WORDS

(SAY THESE AND WATCH YOUR INTERVIEWER SWOON!)

1. Organization's success
2. Trusting and positive relationships
3. Proactive
4. Significant contribution
5. Discover and solve problems
6. Focus
7. Flexibly change
8. Engaged in the work
9. Remove barriers
10. Highly coachable
11. Open dialogue
12. Fast paced environment
13. Passionate about my work
14. Collaboration
15. Analysis
16. Results oriented
17. High Expectations
18. Goal oriented
19. High standards, but easy to get along with
20. I don't let that stop me
21. Disagree and commit
22. Success is fun
23. Whatever it takes

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Lisa, founder of Haneberg Management, is the author of *H.I.M.M. (High Impact Middle Management): Solutions for Today's Busy Managers*. She writes a management blog called *Management Craft* and is the author of an e-book called *100 Helpful Tips for Great Managers*.



Lisa has interviewed thousands of job candidates during her 20 year career. She is a human resources, training, and organization development professional and has worked with companies such as Cruise West, Amazon.com, Intel, Mead Paper, Black & Decker, and Beacon Hotel Corporation.

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Lisa offers talks on many business topics.

Fine print: Hiring preferences are a personal matter and opinions will differ. This e-book represents my opinions and is supported by many consistent observations and conversations with other interviewers over the years.