



## PILLARS OF A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

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### Overview

The job interview should always be viewed in exactly the same manner as a professional field sales call on a new prospective company. All of the same rules of a successful sales call can apply to a successful interview! We represent a lot of candidates with wonderful track records that seem to leave their 'sales hats' at the door when interviewing for a new position.

\*\* A great number of our client companies conduct an initial phone interview to determine chemistry with the Hiring Manager or from Human Resources to do an initial qualifying conversation, especially if a relocation may be required. It's VERY IMPORTANT for the phone screen to go well, or there WON'T be a site visit! Following are the Pillars for a Successful telephone interview:

### Pillars

1. Assuming it's a scheduled conversation and you know when the call will come in: Summon up ENERGY and enthusiasm. Be the person the Hiring Manager is HOPING to hear on the other end. Answer clearly; speak up loud enough to be clearly understood. Put a smile in your voice! Modulate your tone the way you do with friends. Don't be flat and monotonous. Would YOU want to work with someone who sounds bored all day!
2. Prep for the call and have a GRABBER question about the opportunity available early in the call (about how your new role will impact the organization, not 'how many sick days do I get'. Mention you've been looking forward to this call and if it's in a different area of the country, ask about the weather (or if there are weather-related storms, inquire about how the caller / company have withstood the condition).
3. Remember, throughout the call that verbal cues are all you and the Hiring Manager are able to go on, so amp up the enthusiasm.
4. Use prepared 'crib sheets' to remind you of outcome statements, anchor stories (read below) and quantifiables that can be inserted at the proper time. Have a tablet available to make notes. Better to write than be clacking away on a PC.
5. Make sure you have 5-15 questions prepared, so the conversation doesn't become stilted.
6. Close for the site visit. That is your call goal.
7. Close warmly and ALWAYS ask for their e-mail address. Send a prompt, correctly spelled thank you e-mail.

Call the recruiter to debrief.

### Pillar 1: Treat the interview like a sales presentation

The first pillar of a successful interview is to treat it EXACTLY THE SAME as you would a sales call!

The next pillar of a successful interview is preparation for the interview. A Sales Professional or Business Development Manager would rarely go on a sales call without adequate preparation. But, many of our candidates believe that without a glimpse of the company's interview style, it would be difficult to prepare, so they attempt to 'wing it'. BIG MISTAKE!

## **Preparation:**

**Company info:** Find out all you can about the company, its products, its market share, the hiring manager, etc. This research has never been easier. Try to get all the information you can, you can never be too prepared! Research articles, press releases and new product introductions on the company. If it's publicly held, much information can be gleaned from the proper use of search engines and meta search engines, such as MetaCrawler, which utilizes multiple engines such as Google and Yahoo. The Internet is a good way to gain an insight into the company in question AND an edge in the interview process.

**Personal:** While we can't always know the company's interview style, WE CAN prepare ourselves to answer a variety of typical interview questions. The first preparation is to take a walk down memory lane and to select 3-4 anchor stories to assist in providing concrete details of our own career track record.

Anchor stories are outcome stories from our own experience that a. have a successful outcome b. address goal orientation, i.e., successfully detailing acquisition of a new/difficult account c. solving a customer problem by going above and beyond the call of duty d. detailing a particularly creative, persistent or unusual tactic to improve a process or shop floor procedure.

Prepare yourself for a successful interview by reviewing correct answering theory which is as follows:

1. Listen carefully to the question! Ask for clarification and restate the question in your own words, if necessary. No interviewer will recommend you for hire if you don't answer the question asked. Great candidates / interviewees are great listeners. 2. Next, answer the question asked--briefly, but whenever possible, supplying concrete examples from your own experience to amplify your point. This is where you successfully utilize your 'anchor stories' in a creative way. The two advantages of this answering approach are: a. You reveal important info on yourself b. You reveal a lot about your personal business philosophy. Remember to summarize your answer after the example. Perhaps, even ask the interviewer if your answer adequately met his question.

## **Pillar 2: Preparation**

The second pillar of a successful interview is in the preparation. Learn as much as you can about the company, prepare anchor stories on your successes, listen carefully to the interviewer's questions, answer succinctly, with use of concrete details.

Question best for success. In my experience, the best candidates ask the best questions. Did you ever notice that in a typical interview or sales presentation, one question often unlocks the Pandora's Box of the prospect's needs and desires? You can differentiate yourself from over 80% of your competition for any position by questioning effectively.

The best question to ask of any (and EVERY) interviewer is: From your perspective, what are the three absolute requirements of the successful candidate for this job? (Listen carefully) The answer to this one simple question should provide you with all the ammunition you will need later to compose a summary close and to get that job!

Next, prepare a list of 20-25 company oriented questions. (It's highly doubtful you'll get the opportunity to explore a fraction of these, but, typically, in a 1-2 minute company presentation, the interviewer will answer the 3-4 most typical interviewee questions. Therefore, if you question

effectively, you'll distinguish yourself from over 90% of your competitors for the job. Most people, when asked if they have any questions, say, "No, I think you've answered most of my questions." WRONG ANSWER!

If I were hiring a person and they didn't want or feel the need to know about our company, the target market, our market share, what traits it takes to be successful; what shape the territory is in; why the position is open; when do they ABSOLUTELY need to have this position filled, etc., I'd be thinking--shallow person.

One note of caution--all of these questions should be 'you' oriented, as opposed to 'me' oriented questions, such as: What is a breakdown of the commissions? When do I qualify for vacation? How many sick days do I get? Is there a company car? These have their place ONLY after an offer is extended. Until there is an offer, you have nothing. The entire interview process is a quest for control. The hiring company maintains ALL control until an offer is tendered, passing control of the situation to the candidate. Your goal in EVERY JOB INTERVIEW is to get an offer.

Another great question is to ask the interviewer about his/her history with the company; where he/she came from prior to this company, etc. This not only is flattering, but establishes a personal as well as professional bond, that will imprint your candidacy in their mind's eye. If they're interviewing numerous people for your position, it will help them to remember you by your questions.

### **Pillar 3: Questions to ask**

The third pillar of a successful interview is to question right for success. The questions should be 'you' oriented, rather than 'me' oriented. The most important question is: What are the three most compelling requirements of the successful candidate for this position?

### **Pillar 4: Quantifiables**

Pillar four - Quantifiables. My Top Tier clients are much more focused on drilling into your education and work history for quantifiable successes, i.e., those which can be measured or quantified by a number or percentage. It is of the utmost importance to detail your successes with the most numerical precision possible.

For example, 'I was a part of a Quality Initiative to reduce our Vendor list from 200 vendors to 25 Preferred Vendors and 10 Secondary Vendors while reducing pricing on specific commodities by 5% annually. The result was, within the first 9 months of 2006, we successfully reached our Vendor numbers and reduced pricing by 8% with better terms and shorter lead times, reduced by 5 days per month.'

### **Pillar 5: Behavioral Questions**

Pillar five - Behavioral questions. More and more, our clients are utilizing behavioral questioning techniques to qualify their candidates. Following is a list of the most frequently asked behavioral questions. The key to successfully dealing with these questions is, preparation, preparation, preparation. Here is the list:

Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.

Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.

Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.

Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.

Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.

Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.

Please discuss an important written document you were required to complete.

Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.

Give me an example of a time when you had to make a split second decision.

What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.

Tell me about a time you were able to successfully deal with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).

Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the last year.

Give me an example of a time when something you tried to accomplish and failed.

Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.

Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.

Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.

Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.

Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem.

Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.

Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures.

Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.

Please tell me about a time you had to fire a friend.

Describe a time when you set your sights too high (or too low).

Tell me about a time when you had to solve a problem with very little guidance or direction.

Walk me through the most complex problem you have experienced to date.

How did you decide to go to Bentley College?

Give me an example of when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

Give me examples of projects/tasks you started on your own.

Give some instances in which you anticipated problems and were able to influence a new direction.

Describe some projects or ideas (not necessarily your own) that were implemented, or carried out successfully primarily because of your efforts.

Describe a situation that required a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?

Have you found any ways to make school or a job easier or more rewarding?

What did you do to prepare for this interview?

## **Behavioral Questions and why they're asked**

1. "If you stayed with your current company, what would be your next move?" A great opener that elicits information on several levels. Not only can you get a sense of what the applicant expects -- and, in turn, how that jibes with the position you're looking to fill -- but you might also tap into an underlying reason why the applicant wants to move on. Notes Paul Falcone, author of "The Hiring and Firing Question and Answer Book": "If the applicant says he wants to be a manager but the person above him has been there for 25 years, you can move on with the interview. But, if he says that he would hope to be promoted in six months, why would he leave that job? You may then get to the real reason why he wants to leave the company."

2. "What makes you stand out from others?" Another provocative query, great in part because most people get a little uncomfortable boosting themselves. Taking on that question in a reasoned manner may indicate someone with a good amount of self-esteem and some courage. By contrast, a tepid self-description can suggest a lack of gumption, something that's a handicap if you're looking to fill a challenging sales position. By the same token, an applicant who launches into a half-hour filibuster of why the Earth and several major planets revolve at his command may have an ego surplus, one that could devastate a business built around close teamwork.

3. "Tell me your greatest accomplishment." An ideal follow-up to question No. 2. An applicant who can recall a particularly satisfying project -- and talk about it in a balanced, comprehensive fashion -- indicates an employee who has a knack for hanging onto important details. But the question can also hint at an applicant who's good at thinking on her feet -- again, most of us feel weird talking about ourselves. If someone can piece together a provocative anecdote on the fly, they likely will be mentally nimble on demand. As Falcone notes: "Even the receptionist who says she used sticky notes that saved several pieces of fax paper a day has a good sense of what she did to distinguish herself from others."

4. "Give me an example of a time when you took the time to share a co-worker's achievement with others." On the surface, you may be trying to gauge how selfless an interviewee might be, how readily he'll put others ahead of himself. True enough, but the answer may also indicate if your potential employee is a strong motivator. Anyone who makes a point to boost an employee might also be trying to pump other employees in the process. That's a skill that's particularly useful for sales and marketing positions.

According to Del J. Still, president of Management Development Systems, a Dana Point, Calif.-based company that offers training in interviewing and employee hiring: "These sorts of questions offer you multidimensional analysis, so you get different kinds of information from just one question. In this case, you get a sense of what actions a person took in a particular situation."

5. "How many hours a week do you need to work to get your job done?" This question serves as a barometer of an applicant's work ethic and the hours he expects to put in with your company. Follow-up questions can identify whether someone who stays late is putting in extra time or just working inefficiently. A discussion about work hours also can be a telling indicator of how he might ultimately fit in with other employees. "You don't want someone with an 8 to 5 mentality working in a place where everyone usually stays until 7," Falcone says. "By the same token, you don't want someone working to 7 when everybody else is gone by 5. They're only going to resent him."

6. "Do you take enough time to make a decision?" Believe it or not, this last question is one you should pose to yourself, long before the interview is finished. Although it may hint at a business leader who's able to make sensible choices quickly, it actually refers to the interviewee sitting across from you. Believe it or not, Still says some 95% of all interviewers make a decision whether to hire or not within the first five to nine minutes of an interview. The time remaining is just self-fulfilling prophecy as the interviewer looks for information to justify the decision.

Don't make the same knee-jerk mistake: "Take lots of notes during the interview and evaluate him or her later," advises Still. "Don't ever hire on the spot. Withhold your decision until you can review enough information to make a rational decision. If you don't, you might end up putting someone in a job where they're just going to fail."

Give me an example of a situation that could not have happened successfully without you being there.

## **Pillar 6: Closing Strategies**

The final pillar of the successful interview is the closing strategy. If you, are unfamiliar with the term, "close," it simply means, asking for the order. Typically, sales professionals think of the close at the end of a call. In the interview setting it is best to think close early on, in the middle AND at the end of the interview. Utilize assumptive language and closing techniques during the question answering portion of the interview: "When I'm selected for territory X, I'll . . ." During your question asking portion: "Let's suppose I'm the selected account executive for your Northside territory--what will I be doing on a weekly basis?" or during the summary close:

"I'm confident that when I represent your company . . ."

Using assumptive language to both open questions AND answers forces the interviewer to psychologically picture you as their next hire! This is a powerful tool that cannot be underestimated. I guarantee that if you insert 2-3 assumptive closes into your presentation in interview, you'll differentiate yourself from over 90% of your competitors. Substitute weak language like "If I'm selected", "I (hope, wish, feel)" with "I'm confident that; I know; In my experience; I've found that; I'm certain;" Power language works in any sales situation. Candidates that employ tentative, uncertain, unconfident language are questioned more.

## **End Closes**

End closes. As the interview winds to a close, it's obvious to most interviewees: The phone rings with the next appointment; the interviewer simply stands and puts a hand out, or looks at his/her watch. Before you walk out of that room, you MUST CLOSE! Here are a number of successful end closes to integrate into your standard interview demeanor:

1) Summary close. This is the traditional and safest, close. You simply reiterate the 3-4 compelling requirements the interviewer gave you (when you asked) and supply a succinct parallel to YOUR qualifications, indicating you meet or EXCEED their requirements. Then you ask for: a. the job b. the next step c. his/her recommendation for hire. If it's a first interview, it's doubtful a job offer is in sight, so you close to go to the next step. But, rest assured, if you don't close and indicate your interest in the opportunity AND your unique qualifications for the position, YOU WON'T BE CALLED BACK!

"Mr. Smith, before I leave, I'd like to thank you for your time and the information you shared. Based on your need for a stable, over-quota performer and a promotable type, I offer my own track record: 5 years with my current company, President's Club all 5 years and two subsequent promotions as evidence that I'm the person for your North side territory--where do we go from here?"

2) Humor close. If there's immediate chemistry, personal info has been shared and you are CERTAIN the interviewer can already see you for the position, it's possible to use an assumptive close that won't OVER FORMALIZE the end to a great meeting:

"Before I leave, Mr/Ms Interviewer, I have just two questions: When do I start and where do I hang my hat?" A touch of humor, a lighthearted demeanor and a definite acknowledgment of your interest in accepting the, as yet, unoffered position. **WARNING: NEVER USE THIS TYPE OF CLOSE WHEN THE INTERVIEWER HAS BEEN ALOOF OR HUMORLESS.** A humorless humor close is a nail in your coffin.

3) Two-step close. This is the best close I've heard in the past 10 years: "Mr. Smith, before I leave your office, I have a question: Is there ANYTHING you've picked up from either my resume or our discussion that would prevent me from going further in the interview process? "

(You've just asked a lawyer's question: One that will receive a courtesy answer.) Likely the answer will be, "Oh, no". On the off chance that a concern IS raised, you have a chance to rebut the objection. If the answer is 'No', you proceed to the REAL CLOSE. You've already painted the interviewer into a corner with your positioning question--he/she has just indicated they have NO concerns about your ability to do the job. Now, you nail it down: "Then, I have your recommendation to proceed to the second interview? Should we calendar that right now?" Or, "So, when should I expect a call to set up my next interview?" Or, "Who will my next interview be with?"

The beauty of this last close is that you use the interviewer's courtesy close and polite refusal to share any concerns as the springboard to your close. You take a potential negative and turn it into your reason for getting the position! A candidate taught me this close and used it successfully to get 6 recommendations for hire in an interview process with ONE CLIENT! It works! The best close DOESN'T always get the job, but the sales candidate who doesn't close strongly, NEVER GETS CALLED BACK!

The last pillar of successful interviewing is closing. Close early and assumptively. Get the interviewer to picture you successfully performing in that role and you've closed. Use power language to assumptively close throughout the interview. At the end of the interview select an appropriate response that leaves NO DOUBT that a. You're interested in pursuing them and b. you're the most uniquely qualified candidate, based on the interviewer's stated needs.

Remember to treat your interview like a professional solution sales call on a new prospect. Listen carefully, answer with concrete detail and close early, often AND at the end of the meeting. By utilizing all of the pillars of a successful interview, you'll build a strong foundation for your entire career!

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