

Chapter 1

Job Interviews Are Reality Shows. Really!

In This Chapter

- ▶ Why job interviewing is showbiz
 - ▶ Presenting your best self in an interview
 - ▶ Looking at what's new in interviewing
 - ▶ Ten concepts to make you a star
 - ▶ More ideas that win Oscars
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Are you on edge about that big job interview in your future? Try putting unnamed fears to rest by anticipating the worst thing that can happen to you. Among unappealing scenes are these possibilities:

- A. Blowing the interview and feeling like a total loser for days after stumbling and mumbling your way through the ordeal.
- B. Feeling glued to a hot seat as they beat the answers out of you and realizing that you're going to be sick if you don't leave immediately.
- C. Slip-sliding as you come through the door, physically falling on your good intentions (hey, this is a PG-rated guidebook), and losing all hope of leaving behind a professional impression.

Situations A and B are common. Even C isn't unheard of. Perhaps you saw the video of Miss USA taking a tumble and bottoming-out as she made her grand entrance in a recent Miss Universe competition. It happens to the loveliest of us.

Still worried? Exhale. You've come to the right book. Take the suggestions to heart that I offer within these pages and horror situations A and B won't happen to you. As for your odds on situation C, that's between you and your inner-ear balance.

This work is dedicated to making sure that nothing you can control goes wrong. I offer proven tips on how to take the duck tape off your mouth, dry off your sweaty palms, and step out into interview spotlights with a quality of confidence you never thought could be yours. Dim the lights and raise the curtain on your quest for a new gig.

Interviewing Is Theater

Job interviewing is major furniture in the employment drama. Because it's the do-or-die step in the difficult process of getting hired, leading career coaches spend the majority of client-coaching time on interviewing drills.

Once you're inside an office and engaged in an interview, your entire future may rest on how successful you are in presenting yourself to a stranger across a desk in 15, 30, or 60 minutes.

These self-presentations have been described as everything from school final exams to mating rituals, but here's the real secret:



Job interviews are show biz. Like reality shows on TV, interviews are based on reality but in fact are staged. And, as in reality shows, only one survivor beats out the competition to win the prize.



The most successful interviews require solid preparation to learn your lines. At each meeting, your goal is to deliver a flawless performance that rolls off your tongue and gets the employer applauding — and remembering — you.

And because interviewing is show biz, you're allowed to have some fun learning your stagecraft.

Actors teach law students how to act

Actors and acting coaches are showing up in law school classrooms to coach students at law schools across the nation on story-telling, posture, tongue-twisters, and how to establish rapport with clients, according to one of them, the University of Dayton in Dayton, Ohio.

The theatrical simulation programs not only teach students how to sharpen verbal interviewing

skills but give them insight into how their mannerisms, listening skills and even posture may affect the people they are trying to work with and influence.

At the end of the semester, the future legal eagles receive a DVD for job interviews that shows them in action.

Why “Be Yourself” Can Be Poor Advice

A scene in the movie *Children of a Lesser God* reveals a speech teacher (William Hurt) and a deaf janitor (Marlee Matlin) duking it out in a jolting battle of wits.

In a climactic verbal battle, the janitor signs to the speech teacher, “Let me be me,” to which the speech teacher replies, “Well, who the hell are you?” There is no answer.

The troubled janitor isn’t the only one who has trouble with that question. The bromide — “Be yourself” — is very difficult to articulate with consistency. Be yourself? Which self? Who is the real you? Our roles change at various times.

Your role: Job seeker

Jerry is a father, an engineer, a marathon runner, a public speaker, a law student at night, and a writer of professional papers. Will the real Jerry please stand up?

Jennifer is a loving daughter, the best salesperson in her company, a pilot, a tennis player, and a football fan. Will the real Jennifer please stand up?

Jerry or Jennifer could duck the which-self question by asserting unchangeable inborn traits: *I am the same as my feelings. If I suppress or alter my urges I am being untrue to myself. I am not being authentic.*

Wrong! Shuck the superficial thinking. If you enjoy improving yourself, isn’t that a form of “being yourself”? Remember too that each of us has all kinds of urges, some of which are lofty and admirable while others are base and unattractive.

Don’t make the mistake of pretending you’re stuck with one identity — that’s not who you are.

Who you are at this particular time is a person playing the role of job seeker. The stranger across an interviewing desk is playing the role of interviewer.

Playing the role most appropriate to you at a given time, and playing it effectively enough to get you the job you deserve, isn’t dishonest. To do less courts unemployment — or underemployment.



When you give a ShowStopping interview performance, you aren’t being phony. You’re simply standing back from the situation and looking at it with dispassionate eyes, seeing which type of information and behavior is likely to result in a job offer and which is likely to leave you out in the cold. You can’t do so if you are too busy staying true to your most easily assumed self-identity.

Outtake: Forget about being “natural”

What about being *natural*? Isn't natural better than artificial? Not always. Is combed hair natural? Shaved legs? Trimmed beard? Polished shoes? How about covering a cough in public? Or not scratching where you itch?

Being natural in a job interview is fine as long as you don't use your desire to be natural as an excuse to display or blurt out negative characteristics.



Never treat a job interview as a confessional in which you're charged with disclosing imperfections and indiscretions that don't relate to your future job performance.

Nor should you treat a job interview as social dialogue in which you share cultural, sociological, political, sexual, or other viewpoints. Don't download your personal beliefs on interviewers in the name of "being yourself" or "being natural" — or, for that matter, "being honest."

Society cannot survive totally natural behavior. Neither can your unrefined behavior survive at job interviews. To really know someone in a brief encounter of 15, 30, or 60 minutes is simply impossible — even when you repeat that encounter multiple times. How can you compress a lifetime into 15 to 60 minutes? You can't, unless you present your biography with the same 30-seconds-per-story speed that television news uses to cover the state of the world.

Instead of real life, each participant in an interview sees what the other participant(s) wants seen. If you doubt that, think back: How long did you need to really get to know your roommate, spouse, or significant other?

If you insist on being natural, an employer may pass you over because of your unkempt beard, unshined shoes, or because you don't feel like smiling that day.

The price for ignoring self-improvement is too high. All the things you've done to date — your identification of your competencies and skills, your job-lead management, your resume, your cover letter — are pointless if you fail to deliver a job interview that delivers a job offer.

New Faces, New Factors in Interviewing

Are you having trouble staking out your future because you can't close the sale during job interviews? This mangled proverb states the right idea:

If at first you don't succeed . . . get new batteries.

Recharge yourself with knowledge of the new trends and changing developments that impact your job interviews. For the one-minute reader, here are highlights of contemporary happenings.

Expect new kinds of interviewers

If the last time you trod the boards of job interviewing you went one to one with a single interviewer, usually a white man or woman, get ready for a different set of questioners, like these

- ✓ A veteran team of six managers — individually or collectively
- ✓ A hiring manager (especially in technical and retail fields) who is two decades younger than you
- ✓ Someone of another color or heritage

Turn to Chapter 5 for a broader picture of group interviews, and to Chapter 17 for a good tip on interviews with younger bosses.

Watch for new calls for a fast start

Because you can't count on being on the job more than a few years — or, in contract assignments, a few months — the hiring spotlight lasers in on competencies and skills you can use from Day One. The question is: *What can you do for our company immediately?*



You can come across as ready to blast off if you do enough research on the company's goals (increase revenues, reduce costs, acquire new market share, land larger accounts, create a technical breakthrough), think about how you can help the company reach those goals, and are ready to speak the insider jargon of the industry.

If the job you're applying for isn't at the professional or managerial level, research the nature of the company's business, assume that it wants to make or save money, and stock up on a few good words used in the industry.

Scope out more ways to show your launch speed in Chapter 2.

Find out about the new way to meet

Although the video interview has been tried since the 1970s without becoming a mainstream hiring technique, it may work this time around because the

tools to do it are better than ever. Webcams attached to computers make it easy and cheap for an employer and job seeker to see and talk to each other no matter where each is hanging out — around a block or around a globe.

A surge of video interviews is expected to supplant the familiar phone *screening* interviews (discussed later in this chapter and also in Chapter 5). Other “vids” will be used as substitutes for traditional fly-in meetings to avoid the expense of physical travel.

Get your technology lift in Chapter 3.

Focus on fitting in

Disappointed job seekers who ask employers why they didn’t get hired are often told they aren’t the best “fit” for the job. *Fit?* What exactly does “fit” mean in employment? That question seems to be on more lips than ever as some seemingly well-qualified people don’t receive job offers while others who are less qualified are welcomed aboard.

In the workplace, “fit” essentially refers to how an individual fits into a company’s culture. Company culture is expressed in the values and behaviors of the group, which forms a kind of “tribe” or, to use an analogy from high school, an “in crowd.”

The culture typically flows from company or department chieftains: If the boss wears long sleeves, you wear long sleeves; if the boss shows a sense of humor, you show a sense of humor; if the boss works until 6 o’clock, you work until 6 o’clock.

An expert consultant on the inner workings of workplace fit, Mark A. Williams, further explains the concept:

“Fit is the elusive match between your profile and that specific combination of unspoken and informal social, behavioral, and cultural criteria unique to every organization. By answering questions such as *who do I feel comfortable with?* and *who seems most natural in the role?* or *who’s most likely to blend into our culture?* your next employer will determine who gets the job.”

When you’re given the not-the-best-fit-for-the-job rejection, the reason is

- ✓ A convenient short and legally safe answer
- ✓ A cover story, or
- ✓ The hiring decision makers perceive that you won’t fit in well with the “tribe.”

When the reason really is the fit issue, decision makers may think you can do the job but that you won't do it the way they want and, furthermore, they just don't feel at ease with you.

Rather than lose sleep over a fit-based turn-down, move on. Do better pre-interview research. At least you won't waste time on companies well-known for being a fortress of round holes when you're a square peg.

Bone up on fit and corporate culture in Chapter 6, and in Mark A. Williams' book, *Fit In! The Unofficial Guide to Corporate Culture* (Capital Books, 2007).

Cut out the loyalty oath

Answers to certain questions are pretty much the same year after year, but watch out for one humdinger requiring a new response: Why do you want to work here? The old "I'm looking for a home and I'll be loyal to you forever" statements don't play as well as they once did.

Companies typically no longer expect that you will stay with them forever — nor do they want you to. They may not even want to see your face a year from now. Doing the math, managements don't want to have to deal with high health insurance and pension costs. Many employers now solicit contract employees — no muss, no fuss in getting them out the door when a project's finished, or when a decision is made to outsource the work.



Rather than pledge eternal fidelity, talk about your desire to do the work. Talk about how you are driven to funnel substantial amounts of productivity into the job quickly. Talk about wanting to use your superior technology skills. Talk about your interest in work that excites you, work that matters. Talk about work that — with its combination of work-life balance and stimulating tasks — is too tempting to pass by.

But fidelity? Pass on that as a theme song; it won't make the charts.

Stock up on what you *should* say instead of talking about loyalty in Chapters 18, 19, 20, and 21.

Revisit the dramatic pause

In face-to-face live interviews, allowing a few moments of silence to pass, pausing to look at the ceiling or glance out an open window — taking time to think — can make you look wise and measured in your response. Pauses

can raise the ante by reflecting disappointment in a salary offer. Pauses can suggest that you're reluctant to travel 50 percent of the time but you're a team player and will consider the requirement.



A pause is effective body language and works great in live face-to-face interviews. But today's interviewer may call on a telephone or use online video interviewing where dead air time can make you appear dull-witted rather than contemplative.

Moral: Exercise judgment in using the reflective pause as a communications tool. (When you just don't know the answer immediately, that's another story; stall by asking for clarification.)

Rely on Chapter 3 for details on video body language and Chapter 8 for salary negotiation.

Polish your storytelling skills

Behavior-based interviewing is said to predict future performance based on past performance in similar situations. The behavioral interviewing style is not new but it seems to be more popular than ever.

Advocates of the behavioral style claim that it is 55 percent predictive of future on-job behavior, compared to traditional interviewing at only 10 percent predictive. The reasoning is "If you acted a certain way once, you'll act that way again." Hard proof of this claim is hard to come by. But, for you as a job seeker, it doesn't matter the least bit whether the claim is true or false. The behavioral style is such a big deal with employers today that you need to know how to use the style to your advantage.

It works like this: Interviewers ask candidates to tell them a story of a time when they reacted to such and such a situation. *How did you handle an angry customer? Can you describe an example of a significant achievement in your last job?* The more success stories you can drag in from your past, the more likely those interviewers using this approach will highly rate your chances of achieving equivalent success in the future.

Read more about behavior-based interviewing in Chapter 5.

Learn new lines for small-business jobs

Have you grown up professionally in a large-company environment? If so, carefully consider the answers you give when applying to small companies. That could happen sooner than you think if you're forced into an involuntary

change of employment. Prime-timers in countless droves are discovering that the small company sector is where the action is for them.



Emphasize different aspects of your work personality than those you emphasize when interviewing for a big company. Interviewers at big companies and small companies have different agendas.

Among the reasons that owners of small ventures reject former big-company people are these stereotypical perceptions: People who come out of Big Corporate America often are thought to be

- ✓ Unaware of the needs of small business
- ✓ Too extravagant in their expectations of resources and compensation
- ✓ Too spoiled to produce double the work product their former jobs required
- ✓ Unwilling to wear more than one job hat at a time
- ✓ Deadwood, or they wouldn't have been cut loose from the big company

Chapters 17, 19, and 21 can help you with this issue.

Get ready for the global job interview

For professional jobs, the basic format of interviews globally is Western-style accomplishment-oriented, but cultural interviewing differences among nations still matter. Newcomers to the United States may be surprised to learn, for example, that they aren't expected to dress up in pinstriped suits to interview for a technology job, nor are they encouraged to speak extensively of family and other personal issues.

Americans who hope to work overseas for the first time may be surprised at such local customs as those of China, where interviewees are expected to nod, showing that they're listening and understanding the Chinese speaker who is communicating in English, or of certain European countries where a female candidate might be asked directly, "Are you pregnant?"

Chapter 4 tackles the emerging body of buzz about international interviewing.

Ten Concepts to Make You a Star

To get hired, press to impress! Read these ten super tips to make the hiring gods choose you at job interviews.

Amplify your preparation for top billing

Preparation makes all the difference in whether you get the best offers as you face intense scrutiny, probing questions, and employers who are afraid of making hiring mistakes. You must show that you're tuned in to the company's needs, that you have the skills to get up to speed quickly, and that you're a hand-in-glove fit with the company.

Fortunately, never in history has so much information about companies and industries been so easily accessible, both in print and online.

Chapter 6 gives tips on researching your audience.

Distinguish screening from selection interviews

As hiring action is concentrated increasingly in smaller companies, the separation between screening and selection interviews fades, and the same person may do both types. But traditionally, here's how the types, which I cover in Chapter 5, differ.

Screening interviews

In large organizations, interviewing is usually a two-stage process. A human resource specialist screens out all applicants except the best qualified. The screening interview is frequently handled by telephone or online video interviews rather than in-person. Survivors are passed to a manager (or panel of managers) who selects the winning candidate.

Screeners are experienced interviewers who look for reasons to screen you out based on your qualifications. Screeners can reject, but they cannot hire. They won't pass you on to hiring managers if your experience and education aren't within the specifications of the job.

When you're being interviewed by a screener, be pleasant and neutral. Volunteer no strong opinions. Raise no topics, except to reinforce your qualifications. Answer no questions that aren't asked — don't look for trouble.

But do remember smile to a lot. You're in your close-up.

Selection interviews

By the time you're passed on to a hiring manager or panel who makes the selection, you're assumed to be qualified or you wouldn't have made it that far along the channels of employment. You're in a pool of "approved" candidates chosen for the selection interview.

At a selection interview, move from neutral into high gear if the person doing the interview will be your boss or colleague. No more bland behavior — turn up the wattage on your personality power. This is the best time to find out whether you'll hit it off with the boss or colleagues or fit into the company culture.

Verify early what they want and show how you deliver

Almost as soon as you're seated, ask the interviewer to describe the scope of the position and the qualifications of the ideal person for that position.

You've already done this research when you're going for ShowStopper status. Use this question to confirm your research. If you're wrong, you must know immediately that you need to shift direction.



If you're dealing with multiple interviewers, direct your question to the senior panel member and wait for an answer. Then gaze around the group and ask, "Does anyone have something to add to the description?"

Confirming your research or gaining this information on the spot is the key to the entire interview. This technique permits you to focus on the factors upon which the hiring decision is made, without taking verbal detours that don't advance your candidacy.

Take the steps described in Chapters 2 and 5 to hit marks that show you're it! You're the one.

Connect all of your qualifications with a job's requirements

If a quick glance at your notes reminds you that the interviewer missed a requirement or two listed in the job posting when describing the position's scope and the ideal person for it, help the interviewer out by tactfully bringing up the missing criteria yourself. Keep it simple:

I see from my notes that your posting asked for three years of experience. I have that and two years more, each with a record of solid performance in —



Your purpose in doing this is to demonstrate that you take this job possibility seriously, an attitude that the employer will applaud. Winning job offers by targeting your interview performance to a company's requirements is a logical follow-up to the resume targeting strategy that I explain in my book *Resumes For Dummies*, 5th Edition (Wiley, 2007).

Check out additional information about presenting yourself as the logical hire in Chapters 2 and 18–22; additionally, depending on your status, get must-read advice in Chapters 15, 16, or 17.

Master a one-to-two-minute commercial about yourself

Almost certainly you will be asked to respond to some version of the “Tell me about yourself” question. You’re not helping yourself if you respond with the kind of question a 13-year-old might ask: “What do you want to know?” That approach makes you sound unprepared and naïve.

Instead, memorize a short description of your background (education, experience, and skills) that matches your strengths to the job.

After briefly relating the facts of your background, add a sentence or two about your curiosity, commitment, and drive to build mountains atop your already good skills base. A few well-chosen words enliven a dry recitation of facts with a splash of your personality.

Simply follow the techniques that I give in Chapter 18.

Seal the deal with a branding brief

Personal branding is becoming known for something — Jon Stewart for political satire and Tiger Woods for golf, for example. You don’t have to be famous, just consistent in your efforts to develop your brand. Your personal brand develops along with the buzz about you — good or bad, your professional reputation, and how you’re distinguished by characteristics and achievements — all salable distinctions in the marketplace.

Try to perfect a *branding brief* that tells your “story” — one that rolls off your tongue — in about 20 to 30 seconds, or in 100 words or less:

After I graduated from San Diego State University, I worked in the insurance industry until I took a break to start a family. That accomplished, I went back for refresher education and now, thoroughly updated, I’m looking for a new connection in either the insurance or financial fields.

A branding brief may also be called an *elevator speech*, *personal branding message*, or *profile summery*. By any name, you can use this summary with networking contacts to obtain an interview, or you can use it inside an interview (in your closing statement, for instance). Additionally, a branding brief

can be included as part of your longer one-to-two-minute commercial that I describe earlier in this section.

Find more ideas on preparing a branding brief in Chapter 18.



The difference between a commercial and a branding brief is length and content. A commercial is longer and more inclusive of details than is a cut-to-the-chase branding brief.

Win two thumbs up from the hiring manager and you're in!

As I discuss earlier in this chapter, given a choice of technically qualified applicants, employers almost always choose the one they like best. Despite the best efforts of supporters of “scientific” interviewing techniques to eliminate hiring by mutual chemistry, the vast majority of experts continue to say that more people lose job offers for personality factors than for lack of capability.

The psychological principles involved in winning friends and influencing interviewers have been around since the pharaohs ran the pyramid projects. For your purposes, remember this one:

We like people who are like us.

How do you encourage the interviewer to think “you and me against the problem” rather than “you against me”?

Beyond pleasantries, mutual interests, connecting with eye contact, and other well-known bonding techniques, watch for special opportunities:

- ✓ Suppose your interviewer looks harried, with ringing telephones and people rushing about interrupting your talk. Flash a sympathetic smile and commiserate: *It looks like you're having one of those days.* The subtext of your comment is *I understand your frustrations. I've been in a similar place. You and I are alike.*
- ✓ Or suppose you're showing a work sample. Ask if you can come around to the interviewer's side of the desk to discuss your sample. You are looking at it “together.”

Forget about age, color, gender, or ethnic background. Do whatever you reasonably can to make the hiring manager believe the two of you are cut from similar cloth.

To rewrite the famous 20th century Broadway wit and playwright Damon Runyon:

The part goes not always to those we like, nor the hiring to our twins, but that's the way to bet.

Pick up still more intel about the value of likeability in growing job offers in Chapter 2.

Allow interviewer to direct the improv

Some job search advisers seem to suggest that you take charge of the interview, directing the discussion in your favor. Not such a hot idea. Wrestling the interviewer for control can easily backfire when you appear to be usurping the interviewer's prerogative. As they say in show biz, you're stepping on the director's lines.



But what to do when a big void exists in what you're being asked to relate? The answer is the question. You can ask many variations of the "Would you like to hear about X?" inquiry and get your story told without seeming to take charge.

Chapter 11 reveals how to look good with questions you ask.

Show sensitivity for the hiring manager's dislike of interviewing

From supervisors to top executives, hiring managers tend to see interviews as encroachments on their already impossibly busy schedules. But they know they have to conduct them.



Suggest follow-up interviews be done on weekends or during the evenings to take the pressure off the interviewer's prime business hours.

Verse yourself in ways to make a hiring authority be glad he took time away from other duties to interview you; see Chapter 25.

Try not to talk money until you know they want you



When the salary question comes up at the beginning of an interview, say that money isn't your most important consideration — nor should it be at this point.

Admittedly, stalling salary talk until a better time is much more difficult today than it was a decade ago. But you should be holding out for the market value of the new job, not settling for an inadequate figure of your present or previous employment.

Only when you know the scope of the position and its market value — and that the company wants to hire you — are the stars in alignment to bargain in your best interest.

Read Chapter 8 for in-depth guidance on salary negotiation.

Take Home an Oscar from Any Interview

Rookie? Prime-timer? Clerk? Chief executive officer? No matter. You can do exceptionally well by following certain performance routines that succeed in any interview scene. Some of these suggestions are basic and familiar, but most people who haven't been on the interview tour for awhile can use the reminders.

Sing "I really, really like you!"

A likeable, relaxed, friendly smile carries you a long way on a carpet of goodwill: You seem like an agreeable person, and everyone likes to work with agreeable, sunny people. By the time you're invited to meet the decision maker, the employer has probably put you through a screening interview and believes you're qualified to do the job. Now the decision maker's question is: *Do I like being around you?*

When you find that you and an interviewer have something in common — perhaps by noticing sports trophies or pictures in the office — comment on it. You'll seem affable and likable. People rarely hire someone they don't like.

Soak up opening moves that make interviewers see you as an agreeable person in Chapter 12.

Style your body language

Interviewers observe everything about you: not only your dress and interview answers, but your body language, facial expressions, posture, carriage, and gestures. If you're a rookie, think dignity. If you're a prime-timer, think

energy. In between? Watch political candidates on TV for hints of what looks good and what doesn't.

Confirm that your body language is sending the "hire-me" message with tips in Chapter 10. Chapter 9's up-to-date data on dress and appearance add even more non-verbal firepower to your candidacy.

Be a treat: Act upbeat

Steer clear of negative words (such as *hate*, *don't ever want*, *absolutely not*, or *refuse*). And avoid such risky topics as the knock-down, drag-out fights you had with that bonehead you used to work for — never knock the old boss. Your prospective new boss may empathize with your old boss and decide to never be your boss at all.

Chapters 7 and 16 throw more light on avoiding a maze of negativity and looking as though you are a serial complainer who will never be satisfied.

Start your interview off on the right foot

Some advisers say that the first five minutes are the critical period of your job interview; others say that your window of opportunity for acceptance is only during the first 60 seconds. Why take a chance on who's right? Here are four tips to help you make a good impression right off the bat:

- ✓ Find out in advance what to wear (see Chapter 9) and where the interview site is located. Make a trial run if necessary.
- ✓ Be on time, be nice to the receptionist, read a business magazine while you're waiting, and — surprise, surprise — don't smoke, chew gum, or otherwise look as though you lack couth.
- ✓ Develop a couple of icebreaker sound bites, such as comments about a nice office, attractive color scheme, or interesting pictures.
- ✓ Don't sit until you're asked or until the interviewer sits. Don't offer to shake hands until the interviewer does.

During the interview, use the interviewer's name (but never use a first name unless you are old friends) frequently. And remember to make a lot of eye contact by looking at the bridge of an interviewer's nose. (Divert your gaze occasionally, or you're perceived as more creepy than honest.)

Track down more suggestions for making yourself a memorable candidate in Chapter 12.

Remember that you have a speaking part

Communication skills are among the most desired qualities employers say they want. Answer questions clearly and completely. Be sure to observe all social skills of conversation — no interrupting, no profanity. Just as you shouldn't limit yourself to one- or two-word answers, neither should you try to cover your nervousness with surround-sound endless talking. Aim for a happy medium.

Take in Chapter 18 for a savvy start on how to talk about yourself.

Agree to take pre-employment tests

No one likes those annoying pre-employment tests. Job seekers keep hoping they'll drop off the face of the earth but they're with us still. When you want the job, you're going to have to suck it up and test when asked. No test, no job.

Race to Chapter 7 for survival clues when you hope to be the last one standing after test time.

Flesh out your story beyond a college degree

Education is a fulcrum for movement throughout your career but relying on it alone to pull you through a competitive job search is a mistake. The mistake grows larger with too many mentions of an illustrious alma mater, assuming that the school's marquee power is a hall pass to move forward.

For example, a couple of mentions of Harvard in an interview are plenty; interviewers get it the first time. They wonder whether the Harvard background is the singular “accomplishment” a candidate offers.

Instead, spell out your accomplishments with true examples — what you learned and what you can do with your degree that benefit the employer.

In marketing a three-dimensional you, think of your education as one dimension; your experience as a second dimension; and your accomplishment record as a third dimension. All are important.

Wait. Back up. If the interviewer is also a Harvard grad, three mentions is perfectly okay. And if three is good, maybe four or five is better.

Chapter 5 is headquarters for storytelling tips; Chapters 18-22 show you how to fill in the blanks for your campus experience and beyond.

Bring a pen and notebook with you

Making a note here and there is advisable, as long as you don't attempt to record a transcript. To illustrate, you need to jot down reminders to get back to the interviewer when you can't answer a question from memory.

Brownie point: Writing down what someone says is flattering to the speaker.

Keep your ears up and your eyes open

Don't just sell, sell, sell. Take time to listen. When you're constantly busy thinking of what you're going to say next, you miss vital points and openings. So work on your listening skills. When you don't understand an interviewer's question, ask for clarification.

Observe the interviewer's moves. Watch for three key signs: high interest (leaning forward), boredom (yawning or glazed look), or a devout wish to end the interview (stacking papers or standing up). After assessing where you stand with the interviewer, take the appropriate action:

- ✓ High interest suggests you're stopping the show and should continue.
- ✓ The remedy for boredom is to stop and ask, *Would you rather hear more about (whatever you've been talking about) or my skills in the ABC area?*
- ✓ When the interviewer is ready to end the meeting, first ask if the interviewer has any reservations about your fit for the job; if so, attempt to erase them.

And then go into your interview closing mode (Chapter 13). Gain a sense of timing and keep the door open for a follow-up contact by asking three questions: *What is the next step in the hiring process? When do you expect to make a decision? May I feel free to call if I have further questions?*

Fighting back on interview exploitation

You can lose your intellectual property through abuse of the job interview.

In the so-called *performance interview* for professional and managerial jobs, candidates are required to prove themselves with projects that demonstrate on-job skills, problem-solving capabilities, and communications abilities.

The employer asks for a proposal of how you would handle a company project or requests that you design a process the company can use. You're told to be ready to "defend your ideas" at the interview.

Unfortunately, sometimes the free-sample demand is incredibly time-consuming (say 80 hours) and costly (\$200 and up in materials and research). You do your best but suppose you don't get the job? In an example of shoddy ethics, your work samples may be given to the victorious candidate who then steals your viable creative ideas. In the following sections, I give you a few examples from stung readers of my newspaper and Web column.

Portfolio scam

When applying to an advertising agency for a copywriting job, the owner asked me to leave my portfolio for review. He kept the portfolio and called on all the clients whose work was shown in the portfolio! Since then, I always respond to requests to leave or send my portfolio with this statement: "I need to be there to clarify the work shown. I will be glad to bring it, and we can discuss my work at your convenience."

State government rip-off

When I applied for a significant and highly symbolic job with my state government, I was informed I had been selected but had to go through the formality of an interview with a key aide to the governor. As requested, I took materials and a plan for approaching the job's goals to the confirmation interview. A long, official silence followed before a form letter arrived stating that a less-qualified professional, to whom I was a mentor, had won the

position. The victor showed me the state's plan of action: mine.

Consulting caper

My husband, an expert in human resources, spent two long days interviewing in a small town with the owner of a family company and his son. He gave them an unbelievable amount of advice and information to help their meager HR program, process management, and integrated product development. All we got out of that was reimbursement for a 200-mile car trip, a bad motel, and meals. That was our first realization of how small businesses in particular get almost-free consulting work.

Training trickery

I was a candidate for a city's new training division chief. I had to spend several hours in the city's computer labs designing programs and leaving them on CDs. I knew that with my education and experience, I had done well.

A long-term firefighter with zero training experience got the job with the city and used my materials for new employees!

Protecting Yourself

How do you avoid abuse without taking yourself out of the running for a job you want when you're not sure about the real interview agenda? Here are two ideas:

- ✓ You can copyright your plan and place a valid copyright notice ©, along with the publication date and your name, on its cover as an indication of your underlying claim to ownership. For free information, contact the Copyright Office online at www.copyright.gov, or by mail at Registrar of Copyrights, Copyright Office, Library of Congress, 101 Independence Ave. S.E., Washington, D.C. 20559.

For easier reading, see an excellent guide, *The Copyright Handbook: What Every Writer*

(continued)

Needs to Know, 9th Edition, by Stephen Fishman (Nolo Press; www.nolo.com).

- ✓ You can bluff, hoping to create a theft deterrent by slapping a copyright notice and “Confidential — Property of (Your Name)” on your plan’s cover.

When you’re desperate or really, really, really want the job but don’t have the time, inclination, or money to respond in full measure, offer something like this:

I’m glad that you see I have the brains and talent to bring value to your company. I’m happy, too, that you have the confidence in my work to ask me to handle such a potentially important solution to your marketing challenge. With my background, I’m sure I could do an outstanding job on this assignment. But you do realize, I hope, that such an important project would require 80 to 100 hours of intensely focused work. I’d enjoy doing it, but, quite frankly, I have several other job interviews

scheduled that I really can’t shift around. Do you think a sample of substantially smaller scope would serve as well for your purposes?

With a statement like this, you

- ✓ Remind the interviewer that you’re a top candidate
- ✓ Promise superior results
- ✓ Bring a reality check to a sensitive interviewer about what’s being asked of you
- ✓ Let the interviewer know others are interested in you
- ✓ Propose to do much less work until a job offer crosses your palm

You can, of course, flatly refuse to part with advance goodies. In a seller’s market, you’ll probably be considered anyway. But in a buyer’s market, the likelihood is that you’ll be passed over when you decline to turn in a hefty free sample.

When Interviewers Chase You

When you’re hot, you’re hot — but even then the essential dynamic of a hiring episode is immutable: The employer has to be sold on you before a job offer will be yours to accept or reject.

Leverage is the ability to decide the outcome in a situation when you control what someone else wants. In job searching, leverage is your ability not just to get a job, but to get a job on your own terms.

Until a job offer materializes, until your deal moment actually clocks in, stay on message in the selling of your qualifications for the position. It’s much easier on the ego to reject an offer than to be left standing at the starting gate.

You find the tools to decide whether you should accept or pass on a job offer in Chapter 14.

Surviving a snippy interviewer

Short of taking out a restraining order, what should you do when an interviewer's manner is offensive?

That depends upon who's doing the talking. When the interviewer is the person who would be your boss, be certain that you're not misunderstanding intent. If conversation really is disrespectful, bail out unless you want to spend most of your waking hours dealing with a difficult person. Show class. Just say "Thank you for your time. I don't think this job is a good fit for me." (Payback: It may leave the interviewer regretful that you're the good one who got away.)

But when the interviewer is doing preliminary screening, give the employer the benefit of the doubt by assuming that the interviewer doesn't represent the entire company and will be working five floors below you in a subbasement. Here are a few coping techniques:

- ✓ Respond with a two-second non-answer, and then quickly ask a question: "That's an interesting observation. It reminds me to ask you what role would the person in this position play in the new company product launch."
- ✓ Pretend the rude remark is a dropped call that you didn't hear, pause, and talk about your accomplishments or skills.
- ✓ When an interviewer keeps interrupting or contradicting you, look puzzled and ask for clarification. "Perhaps I'm not following you correctly. Could you please restate the question or explain what you mean by — ?"

When all else fails, remember the words of English writer Joanne Kathleen Rowling, author of the Harry Potter books: "Yet, sadly, accidental rudeness occurs alarmingly often. Best to say nothing at all, my dear man."

- ✓ Smile and make a light remark: "Oh, do you think so? That bears watching."

Building Lifetime Confidence

This first chapter serves as an overview for the entire book. The remainder of these pages is wide and deep with the details that can help you gain a lifetime of confidence in your ability to sail through reality-show interviews and receive the best job offers.

Winning candidates are memorable

Comparing *American Idol* winners to job interview candidates, Phoenix career coach Joe Turner (www.jobchangesecrets.com) says it's the total package that counts. "You don't have to be the best singer, just the *most remembered*

decent singer. Same for the job interview. You don't always have to be the best candidate with the top skills. You do have to find a way to be the *most remembered* hireable candidate."

