

Chapter 1

Job Interviews Are Show Biz. Seriously!

In This Chapter

- ▶ Why job interviewing is Drama 101
 - ▶ Spotting what's new in interviewing
 - ▶ Auditioning your best self in an interview
 - ▶ Applying seven concepts to make you a star
 - ▶ Putting into practice more ideas that win Oscars
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A resume or profile functions as bait to snag a job interview. The interview is the decisive event when a hiring authority decides whether you'll be offered the job.

Because the job interview is the single most important part of getting a job — and you may not have interviewed in awhile — any number of unfortunate scenarios may be sneaking into your subconscious, including fears of these confidence-disturbers:

- ✓ Stumbling and mumbling your way through the ordeal
- ✓ Being glued to a hot seat as they sweat the answers out of you
- ✓ Forgetting your interviewer's name (or the last place you worked)

Exhale. You've come to the right book. Take the suggestions within these pages to heart, and you'll head into every interview feeling confident, calm, and well prepared. What more can you ask?

Interviewing As Theater

When you're engaged in a selection 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. Making life-altering decisions during this micro slice of time isn't real life — it's 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 the competition to win the prize.

The most successful interviews for you require solid preparation to learn your lines, showing your future bosses that you're smart and quick on the uptake, as well as able to communicate and not likely to jump the tracks.

At each meeting, your goal is to deliver a flawless performance that rolls off your tongue and gets the employer applauding — and remembering — you. Perfect candidate, you!

But what about all the people who tell you, “Just be yourself and you'll do fine in your interview”? That advice doesn't always work for you in the theater of job interviewing.

Why “be yourself” can be poor advice

A scene in the movie *Children of a Lesser God* features 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. Jennifer is a loving daughter, the best salesperson in her company, a pilot, a tennis player, a football fan, and a history buff.

But at this time in their lives, Jerry and Jennifer — like you — are playing the role of a job seeker. Similarly, the stranger across an interviewing desk is playing the role of interviewer.

Getting real about the job seeker role

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 turning your back on authenticity. To do less than play the role of a hard-charging job seeker courts unemployment — or underemployment.

Why “be natural” can be poor advice

First-cousin advice to urging you to “be yourself” in a job interview is the “be natural” admonition. On the whole, 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 and authentic as an excuse to display your warts or blurt out negative characteristics.



Never treat a job interview as a confessional in which you're obligated to disclose imperfections, indiscretions, or personal beliefs that don't relate to your future job performance.

Job interviews are time-centric. Every minute counts in the getting-to-know-you game. And to really know someone in a brief encounter of 15, 30, or 60 minutes is simply impossible. 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 or unshined shoes, or because you don't feel like smiling that day.

The things you've done to date — your identification of your skills, your resume and profile, your cover letter, your networking, your social media efforts — all are wasted if you fail to deliver a job interview that produces a job offer.

Because job interviewing is show biz, make the most of your critical brief encounters by learning the acting skills of storytelling, using body language, establishing rapport, and more in this modern interview guide.

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 technology and trends that are affecting job interviews. Here are highlights of the contemporary job interview space.

Curtain going up on tech trends

Classic interviewing skills continue to be essential to job search success, but more technology firepower is needed in a world growing increasingly complex, interconnected, and competitive.

The new tech trends revolutionize all components of the job search, including the all-important job interview. Here are examples of technological newcomers and how they change interviewing practices:

- ✔ **Lighting up screens:** Both live and recorded video job interviews are coming of age, requiring that you acquire additional skills and techniques to make the cut. Chapter 3 is a primer on how you can outflank your competition by presenting like a pro in video interviews.
- ✔ **One and done:** Automated and recorded phone screening services permit employers to ask up to a dozen canned screening questions and allow candidates up to two minutes to answer each question. Informed interviewees anticipate the questions and must hit their marks the first time because there are no do-overs on recorded answers. Read about this technology in Chapter 2.
- ✔ **The real deal?** Credibility issues are surfacing for multitalented job seekers (or those with a checkered work background) who, by posting various resumes and profiles online, come across as different people with different skill sets. This development can be a knock-out punch for you in a tight job market where employers have plenty of candidates on offer. Sidestep the emerging problem of identity contradictions in interviews by following the advice offered in Chapter 16.
- ✔ **Deep web woes:** Employers can hire a service to dig deep beyond the usual suspects (Facebook and Twitter) to check out your online history. The service rakes through closed databases in the deep web, leaving virtually no secrets unrevealed. If the deep web reveals negative information, you may get a chance to defend yourself in an interview — or you may never know why you struck out. See Chapter 16 for more information on this 21st-century sleuthing tool.

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 possibilities:

- ✓ 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 15 for a good tip on interviews with younger bosses.

Showcase your ability to start fast

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 remain 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 buzzwords used in the industry.

Scope out more ways to show your launch speed in Chapter 6.

Overcome job-hopping objection

The current employer-driven job market makes it easy for companies to buy into the “job-hopper objection” and, as a matter of policy, turn away unemployed candidates and people who've held three jobs in five years. Unfortunately, many of these automatic rejects have been trapped in a cycle of frequent layoff's, part-time work, temp assignments, seasonal employment, contract jobs, freelance gigs, and company shutdowns.

Some companies refuse to hire so-called job hoppers, claiming that they'll quit before employers can get a return on their training investment — or that, if the unemployed candidates were any good, they'd be on someone's payroll.

What's a sincere, hard-working person to do? Try this quartette of basic rebuttals:

- ✓ **Say varied experience beats repeated experience.** Explain how your dynamic work history makes you a far more vibrant and resourceful contributor than if you'd been stationary for four years.
- ✓ **Briefly explain departures.** Give a reasonable, short, even-toned account of why you left each job. (It wasn't your fault.)
- ✓ **Review your accomplishments.** You can't change the amount of time you were on certain jobs, but you can divert the focus to your accomplishments and contributions. Employers are impressed by candidates who are good at what they do, even if they had only a short period of time in the role.
- ✓ **Confirm interest in stable employment.** Forget the "loyalty" chatter. Make a point of your intense interest in a stable opportunity where you can apply all your considerable know-how for the employer's benefit.

Chapter 19 offers more suggestions on how to maximize the value of your experience.

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.

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.

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

Stock up on what you *should* say instead of talking about loyalty in Chapters 16, 17, 18, and 19.

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. Such a move can 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 the ones you emphasize when interviewing for a big company. Interviewers at big companies and small companies have different agendas.

Among the reasons 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 15, 17, and 18 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 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 may be asked directly, "Are you pregnant?"

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

Polish your storytelling skills

Behavior-based interviewing is said to predict future performance based on past performance in similar situations. The behavioral interviewing style isn't 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-the-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." Solid 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 a certain situation. *How did you handle an angry customer? 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 the 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.

Focus on fitting in

"We chose another candidate who is a better job fit" is another familiar reason that seems to be heard today more often than before when explaining to a disappointed job seeker why someone else got the job.

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.

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
- ✓ A belief that the hiring decision makers perceive you won't fit in well with the "tribe"

When the reason really is the fit issue, decision makers may think that 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.

Instead of losing sleep over a fit-based turn-down, move on. Do better pre-interview research (see Chapter 6). At least you won't waste time on companies well known for being a fortress of round holes when you're a square peg.

Seven Concepts to Make You a Star

You've heard it said over and over that you have only one chance to make a first impression. It's especially true for job interviewing, so make that first impression pay off. Read these seven super tips to make the hiring gods choose you at job interviews.

Go all out in planning ahead

Preparation makes all the difference in whether you get the best offers as you face intense scrutiny, field probing questions, and reassure 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 tons of tips on researching your audience.

Distinguish screening from selection interviews

As hiring action is increasingly concentrated in smaller companies, the separation between screening and selection interviews fades: 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 screening specialist eliminates all candidates except the best qualified. The screening interview is usually conducted by telephone or video interviews instead of face-to-face in the same room. 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 don't meet 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 to smile a lot.

Selection interviews

By the time you're passed on to a hiring authority 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 in a selection interview, ask the interviewer to describe the scope of the position and the qualifications of the ideal person for it.

Although 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.

(Insider's note: This super tip was shared with me by several career management hall-of-famers, including the late Bernard Haldane.)

How can you adapt the tell-me-what-you-want tip when you're dealing with multiple interviewers? That's easy: 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 ideal person description?"

Confirming your research (or gaining this information on the spot) is the key to the entire interview. You now know for sure the factors upon which the hiring decision is made and how to target your answers.

Connect all 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 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 . . .

You want 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*, 6th Edition (John Wiley & Sons, 2011).

Memorize short-form sales statements about yourself

Almost certainly, you will be asked to respond to some version of the “tell me about yourself” question (see Chapter 16). You're not helping your hiring chances if you respond with a question that a 13-year-old might ask: “What do you want to know?” That naive approach makes you sound unprepared.

Instead, commit to memory a short-form sales statement (two minutes max, and preferably less than one minute) that describes your education, experience, and skills, and matches your strengths to the jobs you seek.

Some people call such a statement a “commercial,” while others prefer the terms “elevator speech” or “profile summary.” Whatever you call it, after briefly reciting the facts of your background, make your statement sizzle by adding a couple personality sentences about such traits as your curiosity, commitment, and drive to succeed.

The “personal branding brief” is another version of the short-form sales statement. Used chiefly by professionals, managers, and executives, it's incorporated into all self-marketing opportunities, including job interviewing.

In personal branding, you become known for something — Jon Stewart for political satire and Serena Williams for tennis, for example. You don't have to be famous to pursue personal branding, but you do have to be consistent in your efforts to develop your brand.

Your goal is 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. Now, thoroughly updated, I'm looking for a new connection in either the insurance or financial fields.

Learn much more about the pursuit of personal branding from renowned personal branding expert Dan Schawbel (www.danschawbel.com), who literally wrote the book (the best-selling book) on the topic, *Me 2.0: 4 Steps to Building Your Future* (Kaplan Publishing).



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

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

Likeability is a huge factor in choosing and keeping employees, as I note later in this chapter. Given a choice of technically qualified applicants, employers almost always choose the one they like best. For your purposes, remember this:

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 exchanging pleasantries, establishing 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.

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.

Play the likeability card

When you're up against a rigid requirement that you absolutely can't meet and that you're pretty sure is going to mean curtains for you in the interview, try this last-ditch compensatory response:

Let's say that you were to make me an offer and I accept. What can I do when I start to further compensate for my lack of [requirement] as I work hard to relieve your immediate workload?

Essentially, you're counting on your likeability. You're asking the employer to revert to the philosophy of hiring for attitude and training for skill. You're using the likeability qualification to plug your requirement gap.

As legendary recruiting guru Paul Hawkinson observes: "Likeability is a factor that can turn the tide in your direction. Although skill level and applicable experience trump at the beginning of the interview process, I've seen dozens of less-than-qualified people hired because the employer *liked* them better than the perfect candidate with the personality of a doorknob."

Everyone likes to work with agreeable, sunny people. People rarely hire someone they don't like.

Soak up moves that make interviewers see you as an agreeable and calm person in Chapter 10.

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 nonverbal firepower to your candidacy.

Be a treat: Act upbeat

Steer clear of negative words (such as *hate*, *don't ever want*, *absolutely not*, and *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 14 throw more light on avoiding a maze of negativity and looking as though you're a serial complainer who will never be satisfied.

Start your interview on the right foot

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 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, frequently use the interviewer's name (but never use a first name unless you're old friends). 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 11.

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 16 for a savvy start on how to talk about yourself.

Revisit the dramatic pause

In face-to-face live interviews, allowing a few moments of silence to pass, perhaps 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 that you're a team player and will consider the requirement.

Surviving a snippy interviewer

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

That depends on 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 nonanswer, 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. Can 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."



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, and 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.

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 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 16–20 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.

Winning candidates are memorable

Comparing TV reality talent show winners to job interview candidates, Phoenix career coach Joe Turner (www.jobchange-secrets.com) says it's the total package that counts. "You don't have to be the best

singer or dancer — just the *most remembered* decent performer. 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."

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-the-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. SE, Washington, DC 20559.

For easier reading, see an excellent guide, *The Copyright Handbook: What Every Writer Needs to Know, 11th 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 can 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.

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 displaying a 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 whether the interviewer has any reservations about your fit for the job; if so, attempt to erase them.

Then go into your interview closing mode (see Chapter 12). Gain a sense of timing and keep the door open for 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?*

Building Lifetime Confidence

This first chapter serves as an overview for the entire book. The pages that follow are wide and deep, with details that can help you gain a lifetime of confidence in your ability to sail through the drama of interviews and secure the best job offers.