

Acing the Interview

A field guide to getting it right when
answering job interview questions that you
weren't expecting

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Dedication

I want to dedicate this book to my loving wife, Robin, for tolerating the long hours I spent in my office while writing. Robin is also my first-level editor. I am thankful for her keen eye that catches those little typos of mine that frequently come when I get in a hurry to put out a new book. She keeps me in check, and I am so grateful to have her in my life. I am also grateful to you, the reader, for choosing to invest your time in this book. Your commitment to self-improvement is inspiring.

Thank you, my dear. IWINIL

Introduction

So, you finally landed an interview. Now what? If you are like most people, your interview is two or more days from the time you were notified of the interview. It's crunch time.

You know your field of work inside and out, and you are confident you can ace this interview. Regardless of what questions they ask about how to do your job, you've got this covered. And perhaps you do, but what about those, shall we say personal or off-the-wall questions? Are you ready to answer those?

In my 60+ years of life, I have attended many job interviews and have been interviewed by people from all walks of life. Some people hosting the interview can be stone-cold, while others seem to be jolly. I have also met with compassionate interviewers about my cause, while others couldn't care less about my desperation for a job. As for a career, most of them don't see me, or anyone else, working in a position for the long haul.

As I remember, in the '40s, '50s, and '60s, young men graduated high school, found decent jobs they enjoyed, and bought modest homes. They married, had some kids, stayed at that job for 30 years, then retired. It was a good life, a simple life, a life well lived.

It's not that easy anymore. In today's world, you may find yourself working at 3, 4, 5, or more companies in that same 30-year span. It seems to have become the new norm, and I'm not sure that it's for the best.

I know many people in today's job market who long for that sense of long-term job security and some who prefer to change career paths to climb that corporate ladder to success. But remember, regardless of which category you fall in, we all are job seekers at one point or another. Almost all employed people have endured the dreaded interview process. There are exceptions to this rule. I have occasionally been recruited by a company, bypassing the interview altogether, but those instances are rare.

This eBook is for everyone who must endure an interview in today's fast-paced working world. The landscape of interview questions has shifted over the past few decades; as a job seeker, it's crucial to keep up with these changes and be fully prepared for each interview. I hope this book will equip you to confidently navigate these new interview waters.

About this book

A bout This Book

Although this book primarily focuses on common interview questions, there are some additional sections you may want and need in preparation for your upcoming job interview. Chapter 3, for example, discusses interview questions that should never be asked! They are not just personal and often referred to as “loaded” questions; they are also illegal. Neither you nor the interviewer can ask or discuss these topics during an interview. Following that interview, if you are hired, you are not legally allowed to discuss these issues during employment.

This book is for anyone who has found themselves in the job market, whether due to a layoff or a desire to advance their career. No matter your career path, each section is tailored to equip you for a successful job interview.

The 'Suggested answers' section is a valuable resource. It provides a framework for your responses, with some text in brackets []. This is where you can insert job-specific information to make your answers more relevant and impactful.

I hope you find this book helpful and can learn something new before you start your job search.

Chapter 1

Common Interview Questions

Question 1: *Tell me about yourself.*

This is your 30-second elevator pitch. If you haven't already prepared one, you should know. Job seekers commonly create an elevator pitch within a day or two of being let go from or leaving their current job. In reality, you should have this speech in your thoughts every day, employed or not. As you climb that ladder to success in your career, it's imperative that you are always prepared. You never know when you will get an offer and need to pitch yourself to a higher-level employee for a promotion or to a prospective new employer at a moment's notice.

Why they ask this:

This is a way for the interviewer to get a quick overview of whether you will be a good fit for this company and, more specifically, for this role. At this point, they want to hear your elevator pitch. They are asking: What experience and training do you possess that makes you the best candidate for this job?

Suggested answer:

I have always been passionate about [insert something related to the job you are interviewing for], and my career experience has allowed me to (choose appropriate verb provide/enhance/deliver/develop) [insert something you've accomplished that is related to the job].

What I'm most excited about is [highlight what you are most looking forward to in the job]. I thrive when I [something related to job]. For the past [insert years of experience] as a [insert current job title], I've leveraged my [insert key skills from the job posting] to ensure [insert outcome].

My strengths are: [include your top strengths matching the job posting keywords]. I continually receive [insert feedback that you get from management, clients, or peers]. That's why I'm excited about this opportunity; it would allow me to combine my key strengths and make an impact [insert something related to the job or the organization]. I believe I would be a great fit at [insert Company name].

Question 2: *What's your biggest weakness?*

You may think this is a loaded question, and I suppose it is in some instances. Getting this one correct is not as important as getting it right on some of the other questions you will be asked, but getting it wrong can cost you the job. Answer this question honestly, but not too honestly. You don't want to tell them that you have a gaming addiction or gambling problem. Keep your answer focused on your work habits.

Why they ask this:

They want to see that you are human, not just a walking robot. It also lets them see that you do have a weakness, that you have identified that weakness, and that you have learned how to deal with and overcome that weakness.

However, be careful with your answer; it may cause more damage than good. For example, if you have a weakness for puppies and a weakness for speeding, I would mention the former weakness, not the latter.

Suggested answer:

My biggest weakness is being a perfectionist. Sometimes, I have to step back and tell myself the project result is satisfactory so that I can move on to the next one and put this one behind me.

Question 3: Why should we hire you over the next person?

This is not a time for your elevator pitch, and it certainly is not a time for you to brag about how great you are. I know that it seems like the best time to make yourself shine while making your competitor look bad, but it's not.

Why they ask this:

What they are really asking is, what can you bring to the table that the next guy cannot? What special skills or knowledge do you possess that can help this company more than the next guy?

Suggested answer:

This is where you tell them specifically, with some detail, how you can resolve an issue that you found in their company. This allows you to showcase your talent and apply it directly to the job offered.

Remember, every aspect of this answer should be directed at what you can do for the company that the next person may be unable to do.

Question 4: *Why do you want to leave your current position?*

This is going to be one of those trick questions. In most cases, they don't care. However, you should treat every question as if you're getting the job is based on that sole question.

Why they ask this:

Some employers want to ensure that you are seeking another position for financial or career development reasons. They want to ensure that you are not simply bored with your current job or have problems with your boss or coworkers.

Suggested answer:

I have reached my maximum level with my current employer and want to continue my career path and development in this field. I am very passionate about [job title or role] and want to continue growing in this industry.

Question 5: *Where do you see yourself in 5 years?*

Okay, think about this question before you blurt out the most common answer, which is the wrong answer. I will admit that I too, in my younger days, stated that I wanted to be president of the company. While that response gets a good laugh, it's the last thing they want to hear.

Why they ask this:

This question is based on planning and growth. If you tell them you want to stay in the same position, doing the same task every day, then the interviewer sees that as no potential. If you tell them you want to be president of the company, then they are left to believe you are not taking this seriously, so why should they? Try to keep your answer in the probable realm. Give them a realistic five-year goal that you have set for yourself.

Suggested answer:

I want to achieve the level of [job role] lead or perhaps manager. I'm not sure how quickly a person can move up the ladder here at [company name], but I like pushing the envelope and getting promotions based on my performance.

Question 6: *Why do you want to work for this company?*

Here is a chance to show that you have researched the company and its successes and failures. This is also another option for you to showcase your specific talents, which would fit the company's needs.

Why they ask this:

Here again, they are wanting to know why they should hire you. You will find that they ask this question several times in an interview, but it will always be worded differently.

Suggested answer:

I like where [company name] is going with [what they do] with [their process or product], and I want to be a part of the team that drives this to the market. I agree with your mission statement and company policies. I

have always envied [company name] for those reasons. Joining [company name] aligns directly with my career path and goals.

Question 7: *What is your current salary?*

This question could easily fall into chapter three, illegal interview questions, but nonetheless, it is asked far too often. It's one of those borderline questions you don't have to answer; in most cases, it won't cost you the job.

Why they ask this:

If they do ask this question, it's usually to find out where you fit in with their pay scale. If you are accustomed to making two or three times what they are offering, they may feel that you will be insulted and leave soon after being employed or you may demand much more than they can afford.

When you answer this question, use a yearly amount, not an hourly pay, even if you are paid by the hour.

Suggested answer:

In my current position, I bring in [annual salary] per year plus an annual bonus of [typical bonus pay]. However, I do have some wiggle room on that dollar amount and/or the bonuses.

Question 8: *How did you get along with your former boss?*

Personality check. If you are difficult to get along with, it often shows in your answer to this question, and that's what they are trying to bring to the surface. You will want to answer this with finesse and grace, especially if you did not get along with your former boss.

Why they ask this:

A big part of the hiring process is based on your personality. A business wants to know that you will be a great fit within their team and will not bring a lot of conflict or uneasiness. This is a benefit for both the company and you. The last thing you want to do is work for a company whose values differ or conflict with yours.

Suggested answer:

We got along quite well. We shared the same interest in events outside the office and belonged to the same [name an activity like “bowling league”]. Our values, views, and work ethic were aligned, so our work relationship was enjoyable and productive.

Question 9: *What are you hoping to gain from this job?*

This one is similar to question number six (above). Once again, focus on your points of interest in the job you are applying for. How will your goals align with the duties of the job? You may think the interview is all about you; on the contrary, it’s all about the company and how you would fit in with this company.

Why they ask this:

They want to know how you will benefit this company as a team member. They may verbally be asking what you expect to gain, but in reality, they are trying to see what they will gain by hiring you.

Suggested answer:

I hope to bring a fresh set of eyes to [something about the job] to both improve [production, performance, sales, etc.] and my skill set. The more I learn about [something related to the job], the more I enhance my skills to do an even better job in the future.

Question 10: *What is your desired work location?*

This is a fluid question. As we have seen with the recent pandemic, working remotely suddenly went into overdrive. Today, some companies still want people in the office, while others want remote workers. Each scenario provides its own benefits and drawbacks.

Before the interview, check out the company and see if they prefer remote or in-house workers. Adjust your answer accordingly.

Why they ask this:

They want to know if you are comfortable working in an office (or remotely if that's the case). Another variation of this question is: Are you more comfortable working in the office or on location? If the company does 90% of the work on location (remote), you want to tailor your answer to that. But be honest with them; after all, you will be miserable if you are uncomfortable working on a job site when you prefer working in the office.

Suggested answer:

I am just as comfortable working in the office as working on-site (remote). But, if I had a choice, I would prefer working [on-site or remotely], whichever the company prefers.

Chapter 2

Uncommon Interview Questions

Since the questions in this chapter are not the norm, most will have a scenario before the actual question. I have encountered these questions during actual interviews. As mentioned before, it's better to be over-prepared than under-prepared.

The interviewer will set the stage with the following dialog before they ask question number 11, listed below.

Scenario:

While you are at lunch, one of the employees assigned to you leaves a note on your desk asking to see you when you return. However, your manager and your director (your manager's boss) have also left notes on your desk asking to see you when you return from lunch.

When you do get back from lunch, you read each note carefully and must decide which one of the three people you should see first, second, and third. You work in a production environment making, well, let's say, your company makes widgets. Remember, production is a priority.

Question 11: *Tell us what order you would meet with these three people and explain why you chose that order.*

I don't know if you will ever find this question in any of the PDFs or job search videos, and you may never be asked this question in an interview.

However, it's better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. Yes, I said that before, but it bears repeating. With that much said you are probably wondering what the correct answer is. For most employers, there is no right or wrong answer.

Why they ask this:

This question is often asked to determine how you think on your feet, so to speak. They are looking to see how you respond to such an unusual question. Not just the verbal response but also the body language. Did you fidget, bow your head in thought, or say a lot of "ums" while preparing your answer?

They want to see someone who can make a quick decision on the fly when confronted with a situation that is out of the norm.

Suggested answer:

There are nine different ways to answer this question. It doesn't matter which option you choose; choose one quickly. Here is the answer that I provided during the interview. Yes, I got the job, but I really don't believe my being hired hinged on this one question.

My Answer:

Step 1: I would go to my employee and resolve the issue he/she had.

Why? Because those issues are usually more common in nature and easy to resolve. This way, production does not stall any longer than necessary.

Step 2: I would go to my director next (my boss's boss).

Why? I want to see what he/she has for me to do or fix. Since he/she is the director, I don't want to keep them waiting too long.

Step 3: I would visit my boss last to see what he/she needs.

Why? If my director has a task that contradicts or interferes with what my boss wants done, I can tell my boss about the conflict. He/she can discuss it further with their boss and get back to me once an agreement has been reached.

Changing the order does not affect your answer. This is a question with a hidden agenda. They want to see how you react and resolve issues in general.

Question 12: Tell me about a time that you failed at something.

First, let's understand what they are asking. They are not asking for an instance of total and catastrophic failure on your part. Failure could simply mean that you were not successful at something. You worked on a project and set a goal to reach, but you fell short of that goal. As in the "Suggested answer" below, show where you tried something and failed, but you did get close to the goal. This shows that you can maintain a positive attitude, even during a failure.

Why they ask this:

They want to see that you realize you make mistakes and can own up to them and deal with them. It doesn't matter that you failed; it matters that you see your shortcomings and can let them go or hone your skills for next time.

Suggested answer:

I started a new project [project name or description] at my former company to bring in 500 new accounts last year. I didn't hit that goal, but my idea did generate 450 new accounts.

Question 13: *What makes you tick?*

This is where you discuss your passions and interests. Don't mention your love of cats or dogs unless you're applying at a pet store or animal humane society. Try to direct the answer back to something that aligns with the company and job you are applying for.

In the "Suggested answer" below, the employee is applying for a tech-related role. Just alter the answer for the role you are applying for.

Why they ask this:

With this question, they are trying to determine whether your personality will fit well with their work culture. Are your hobbies and interests in line with their values? You might not be a good fit if you are into punk rock and this company is about country music. I know that's a lame example, but it gets the point across.

Suggested answer:

I love all things tech and geeky. I am passionate about new technology, but I also enjoy old tech gadgets. Since this role concerns new tech, I feel that I will fit in nicely with the company's staff members.

Question 14: *Regarding projects, do you prefer starting, working on, or finishing a project?*

Is there a right or wrong answer to this question? Technically, no, but sometimes they want a specific answer, and you're getting it right is a chance. This falls into a personality type of question. But generally speaking, there is no right or wrong answer.

Why they ask this:

While this really has no correct answer, they may be looking for someone who is a self-starter. If so, modify the "suggested answer" below to accommodate that scenario. Otherwise, use the "suggested answer" as it is.

Suggested answer:

I really don't have a preference; I enjoy all three phases of any project. While I love the thrill of starting a new project, I also love the satisfaction of completing a project. But on the other hand, I enjoy getting into the meat of the project and fully immersing myself in it.

Question 15: *Have you ever left a job because of a mandated vaccine requirement?*

Hold on, let's call HR (Human Resources). This question really should be in the "Illegal Questions" section below. It involves your medical histo-

ry, which is not allowed in interviews. However, with the recent pandemic, this question has sometimes made its way into the job interview.

It's important to note that you are not required to answer this question, and they cannot dock you for refusing to respond.

Why they ask this:

In most instances, the interviewer is not worried about you leaving your last job over a mandated vaccine. They are most likely looking at your commitment and moral standing.

Suggested answer:

I was one of many employees who left [company name] company due to a change in company policy that we felt conflicted with our personal values. Normally, I would devise a compromise with the company, but such a drastic change was a deal breaker for several of us. However, my performance never wavered, and I consistently received excellent performance reviews from my boss and co-workers.

Question 16: *Do you require us to use pronouns when addressing you?*

This is another tricky question that might have fallen into the illegal question section below. However, in today's world, it's a very likely scenario. I believe this falls into the same category as asking someone their age or religious beliefs. However, since the subject is on the table, you must tell them where you stand. Bear in mind that if you are applying to a pro-pronoun company, you should let them know your preferred pronouns. On the other hand, if you are applying to a company that puts very little into pronouns, then steer clear of this topic.

Why they ask this:

Some companies are all about getting your pronouns correct. Other companies want to know the answer to this question because they are against using pronouns in the work environment. It depends on the com-

pany's policy and mission statement, which you should read before the interview.

If you are applying to a company that does not endorse pronouns, they may turn you away for fear that you may be “high maintenance” and require a lot of accommodations.

Suggested answer:

While I do (or do not) support the use of pronouns, my experience and work history will have a far greater impact on my ability to do [name of job position] than my use (or lack of use) of pronouns. Our discussion should revolve more around the position than pronouns.

Question 17: *Have you ever argued with a co-worker, and how did you handle it?*

This is clearly a question about how well you work with others. You really need to think back on an instance that fits this question and discuss something related to the job you are applying for. Don't talk about something completely off in left field; keep your focus and discussion around the job you are applying for. Every answer you provide should reflect something about the position you seek to fill.

Why they ask this:

Here, they want to know two things: you are human, and you have the ability to make compromises to effectively complete your tasks, even when confronted with opposing views on how to do that.

Suggested answer:

I wouldn't say we argued, but we did disagree on a process and how it should be executed. Eventually, we set aside some time to meet in a conference room and each presented our arguments for and against a specific solution. After a detailed discussion, we finally agreed on the correct process, shook hands, and left the meeting with both parties satisfied.

Question 18: *Tell me what you know about this company.*

Before you get to this question in the interview, and before you even get to the interview, you really should have researched the company. Who are they? What is their product? When and where did they start? Why was the company formed?

You want to know as much as you can about this company; after all, you will be spending 40 hours every week there. It will be your home away from home.

Why they ask this:

They want to know that you are truly interested in this position and desire to work for their company—enough so that you have researched them and decided that you are in line with how this company operates.

Suggested answer:

[In this response, provide some basic company history in bullet-style format. Don't get too in-depth; remember, they know this company better than you do.]

Question 19: *Are you comfortable with our “Mission Statement”?*

Again, research the company you want to work for. If their mission statement varies greatly from your moral standards, you may not want to work for them, and they probably won't hire you.

Why they ask this:

They want to ensure you're a great fit for the position and the company's social network. Just because you are qualified for the position doesn't always mean that you will be a good fit inside the company.

Suggested answer:

I have read your mission statement, and it aligns directly with my values and principles. I support [name some parts or parts of their mission statement] and incorporate those values into my daily life.

Question 20: *What do you expect from us?*

Most people use this question to indicate their desired salary or work environment during an interview. Don't make this mistake. This is where you want to focus on your growth within the company, both in the position and in your knowledge.

Why they ask this:

In this question/answer, they want to know if you expect to gain additional training to improve your job performance.

Suggested answer:

I expect a work environment conducive to getting the job done and a degree of additional training as needed to be a greater asset to the company.

Chapter 3

Illegal Interview Questions

The seven deadly sins of an interview, listed below, are questions you and the interviewer should avoid. If you are asked any questions that fall within these seven categories during your interview, you have few options for skirting around answering them. The best way to avoid these questions is to simply call them on the carpet and remind them that they are not allowed to ask them. Here are three ways to avoid answering these types of questions.

1. Dodge the question: Try to redirect the conversation to something that is actually relevant to the job you are applying for.

2. Contact HR: If you have the opportunity, contact Human Resources (HR) and inform them of the types of questions your interviewer has asked you. Try to be specific when talking to HR.

3. Report the issue: You may want to contact the BBB (Better Business Bureau) or a similar authority. Again, be specific in what you report.

With that said, let's review some of the interview process's seven categories or seven deadly sins.

1. Personal Information

Questions about your personal information, such as age, marital status, sexual orientation, etc., are definitely off the table and cannot be brought

up by either side. In other words, they cannot ask for this information, and you should not volunteer for it.

2. Family and Childcare

An employer may not ask about your family planning intentions or situation. Childcare arrangements, pregnancy status, or anything involving your personal home life should be kept off the table during an interview.

3. Disability and/or Medical History

Asking about a candidate's disabilities or medical history is strictly prohibited. This can lead to discrimination against qualified candidates with disabilities. An employer cannot restrict you from employment if you require special accommodation (within a reasonable limit) to do the job you are applying for, such as an ergo keyboard or special chair.

4. Religious Beliefs

Asking prospective employees about their religious affiliation, places of worship, or religious practices violates their rights to religious freedom. Conversely, you should not impose your religious beliefs or practices on your co-workers once you have obtained a position after the interview.

5. National Origin and Citizenship

This one might be a marginal call. While employers may not ask about your citizenship in an interview, they often ask about your legal right to obtain work in the country where you are applying for a job. Asking for your "right" to work differs from asking where you are from.

6. Race and Ethnicity

A person's race or ethnic background cannot be a determining factor in a decision of employment. However, I have encountered this very instance in jobs that I held in the past. It was a situation where the job was a government contract, and we were required to hire a certain number of employees based solely on their race. Although I felt it was entirely wrong, I had no say in the matter.

Generally speaking, race or ethnicity should not determine who is hired and who is not. Experience, skill, work history, etc., should be the only determining factor in job placement.

7. Political Affiliations

Your political party preference is your own opinion and does not affect your ability to obtain a job at any business or company.

Bonus:

Now, we have a new set of interview questions that may soon become illegal. Nonetheless, I have seen this category on some recent job applications: “Pronouns.” In chapter 2 of this book, question number 16 addresses this topic.

Chapter 4

10 Common Mistakes to Avoid During a Job Interview

This section will discuss some of the dos and don'ts of applying for and interviewing for a job. Over the years, I have learned these tips and tricks as an interviewer and interviewee.

1. Don't apply to multiple positions at the same company

This is a mistake I made several years ago, and it cost me a job and possibly a career. If you're like me, you have worn many hats at almost every job you have ever had. With that comes a wide range of skills you may have honed over the years. Just because you have a variety of sub-jobs doesn't mean you are a professional at each one. It only means that you have some exposure to them. If you are a web developer and consequently built a simple database to house your company's products, this doesn't make you a professional DBA (Database Administrator).

Stick with your web-dev jobs and indicate that you have some database experience. Alternatively, you can rebrand and seek a DBA position only as a Junior DBA. If you use a platform like LinkedIn or Indeed, you need to focus on only one line of work. If you build your LinkedIn profile around web-dev work and Indeed profile around a DBA position, employers will get confused and bypass you altogether.

2. Don't show desperation

This is true in several aspects of life. If you are too desperate, the interviewer will pick up on this emotion and wonder why you are so desperate. He or she may wonder if your desperation is due to too many previous rejections from other companies. Your interviewer may be wondering what they missed that other companies caught during the interview process. So, they may dig deeper, looking for the reason(s) you were rejected by other companies.

Don't confuse desperation with enthusiasm during the interview. While you don't want to show desperation, you want to show enthusiasm about obtaining the job. The interviewer wants to see that you are very interested in this particular position and your answers during the interview should reflect your desire to land this particular role, specifically with this particular company.

3. 'I work too hard' or 'I'm a perfectionist'

This is usually the answer given after the interviewer asks, "What's your biggest weakness?" And as you may have guessed, both answers are wrong. Saying that you work too hard or are a perfectionist makes you sound inauthentic.

Bring up your weaknesses and follow each one with a plan to overcome this weakness and how that could impact or supplement your role at this company in a positive way. Always think in the positive sense! Be careful of the weakness you discuss; make sure it is job-related. On the reverse, don't mention that you are a raving alcoholic, manic-depressant, or chain smoker. These are personal development problems and have nothing or very little to do with the job at hand. That is if you don't let these habits interfere with your job performance.

You want to discuss a weakness that is more in line with the job's duties. Remember to keep focusing your answers on the duties listed in the job description.

4. I Don't Know

Simply put, If you don't know, just say, "I don't know." But don't leave it at that. Saying I don't know indicates that you are human and not the smartest person in the world. The employer doesn't really want that "know everything" person; they can't afford to pay them what they are worth. They want someone who can admit that they don't know everything.

My best advice is to say "I don't know" if you really don't. The last thing you want to do is lie your way through an answer. They will know you are lying, and that will be the end of the interview. The adage, "fake it till you make it," does not work in most interviews.

However, follow that "I don't know" answer with a way for you to overcome it and work on how you can learn this new concept while applying it to something about the job you are applying for. This will be difficult in most situations, so practice this answer based on something in the job description before you go to the interview.

5. Transferring Blame

Never transfer blame to a co-worker or boss during an interview. This makes it sound like you can't or won't take responsibility for your actions or inabilities. If you messed up on something in the past, own up to it and provide a solution that helped you correct that problem. One of my favorite aphorisms is, "Don't bring me a problem without also bringing me a solution."

If possible, avoid saying anything negative about your current or former coworkers or boss. No one really likes to hear negative statements. If you have to use a negative statement or scenario, try to find humor in it and bring that up so all will have a good laugh.

Again, never transfer blame; face it and deal with it.

6. Don't show that you have been hurt or wronged

Showing that you have been hurt or wronged at a job often reflects a degree of desperation or revenge. The interviewer doesn't want to see that you are taking this job to "one up" a coworker. If you have been wronged in the past, keep it there, in the past. If you need to discuss it in an interview, structure it as a learning opportunity and explain how you took that negative situation and made the best of it.

Once again, try to focus this discussion on how it could apply to the job you seek with this company and how it will benefit you and your future employer. As we mentioned, read the job description multiple times and focus every interview answer on something in that job description.

7. Eye Contact

This is key to convincing your interviewer that you are serious about the job. Maintain direct eye contact with each interviewer as they ask questions or comment about one of your responses. This eye contact is paramount if your interviewer is older, such as from the baby boomer era. Direct and steady eye contact shows that you have nothing to hide and are being straightforward and honest with them.

A firm handshake at the beginning and end of the interview is also a must unless one or both of you are germaphobes. If that's the case, then at least do a distinctive head nod out of respect.

8. I'm a Fast Learner

Never use this line in an interview, on your resume, or in your elevator pitch. In fact, strike it from your vocabulary altogether. It's so overused, and let's face it: Most people are fast learners, so you're not giving them anything new or unique. Don't believe me? Just ask them; they will tell you they are also fast learners.

Over the years, I have found that the ones who use this line are actually slow learners. It's not that there's anything wrong with being a slow learner; it's just something that should not come up during an interview. The

speed at which you absorb something is not as important as the ability to really understand and grasp the subject.

9. Dress Code

At one point, I was certain that everyone knew how to dress for an interview until I participated in a recent one. One candidate came to an interview for an office position wearing baggy shorts, a wrinkled T-shirt, and a jacket with one arm in the sleeve but not the other. Needless to say, he was not hired. “Dress for success!” There’s a reason that saying has been around for years.

If you’re applying for a job that involves mowing lawns or pouring cement, you won’t want to attend the interview in a three-piece suit. Instead, you should wear nice jeans or dockers and a polo shirt or dress shirt.

If you are applying for an office or lab position where the staff normally wears slacks and polo shirts, show up in slacks and a button-down dress shirt with a tie. (Not a clip on) A clip-on tie tells the interviewer that you are not taking this seriously. A traditional tie tells the interviewer that you are serious and are willing to go through additional steps to ensure you are the selected candidate.

You can see where this is going: dress one step up from what you would wear on the job, should you get hired.

10. Promptness

No one likes to be kept waiting, especially an interviewer. They have busy schedules, and you should respect that by showing up early for every interview.

As a general rule, I have always driven the route from home to the place of the interview at least one day before the interview. This allows me to time my trip and know exactly where I’m going before I need to go. My philosophy has always been, “I’d rather be an hour early than a minute late.”

Showing up on time or early for an interview is a crucial step in the interview process. It lets your prospective boss know you are responsible enough to get to work on time daily.

Chapter 5

The Six-Step Process to Landing a Job

1 . *Define What You Do Best*

Think about what you are good at and what your passion is. When these two align, you will have a direction or path to follow in your job search. That may sound a little simplistic, considering that I will naturally be good at something if I am passionate about it. This is not always the case, so you must find that specific task, hobby, or job that you both enjoy and are good at.

2. Start Your Job Search

Most people get these steps in the wrong order. They build a resume and then look for a job that fits that detail. On the contrary, you should start by looking for jobs in your field and read the job requirements and job descriptions. This will give you an idea of what employers seek in a candidate. You may also need to add some skills that most employers seek in that line of work. Some time back, I was looking for a job as a web developer, and I felt confident I could land a job easily because I had training and experience in HTML, CSS, and JavaScript. I quickly learned that prospective businesses also wanted ReactJs, NodeJs, and GIT experience. So, do your research before building your resume; you may need additional skills to compete in the market.

Keywords play an important role in the job-seeking process. Most companies nowadays use AI or some variation to pre-scan resumes, looking for keywords related to the job description. Pasting these keywords into your resume will help you stand out.

3. Building Your Resume and Cover Letter

As mentioned briefly in the last section, you must build your resume based on keywords and skills in job descriptions for positions that interest you.

Gone are the days when you could send a simple resume to prospective employers. Some 40 to 50 years ago, this is how it was done. If the hiring manager liked what he or she saw on your resume, they would hire and train you for the available role. You were not required to come into the company and hit the ground running, already having extensive knowledge of how to do the job.

In current times, it's quite contemplative of yesteryear ways. You must present and often demonstrate a high-level skill set to complete the interview process.

In today's highly competitive market, you must be trained and have some experience directly related to the job duties. Udemy is a great resource for obtaining additional skills. Just for the record, I'm not getting paid to promote Udemy; I have mentioned it here because I have used it extensively for training in SQL Server and JavaScript. In my opinion, it's one of the best training sites available today.

Once you have completed your resume, consider it a first draft. Never submit your first draft to prospective employers. Wait one day, longer, if possible, without looking at your first draft. Now, reread it word by word. Check your spelling, grammar, and punctuation if you need to, run it through Grammarly or ProWriting Aid. After completing a second or third draft of your resume, upload it to / and select a job description from

the provided list or submit your own job description. This free online tool shows how your resume compares to the standard job descriptions. Implement the changes the program recommends. This will be your final draft, but it's still not ready for submission to a company.

Finally, read job descriptions for the role you want to pursue from companies you want to target. Grab keywords and phrases from each and paste them into your resume. You will want a separate resume for each company you apply to. Next, build up your resume around those keywords and phrases. Don't forget to include numbers. Most recruiters want to see how you performed or how much your current or previous company did on a percentage basis. For example, "My most recent project, [project name], boosted sales by 20% year over year."

Cover letters are a must-have in today's job search strategy. A cover letter with specific company and job role details for each company you apply to should be written. No two prospective employers should receive the same cover letter. Granted, the cover letters will be similar, and you can use a basic template to create each unique cover letter. Personally, I found that AI can generate some nice cover letters by telling AI the details, job title/role, company name, addressee, etc. And it will produce a very nice sample. Expect to do some editing.

The cover letter should directly reflect two things: your resume and the job description. In your cover letter, highlight some tasks you have completed that are specifically called out in the job duties section of the job listing.

4. Submitting Your Resume and Cover Letter

Now that your resume and cover letter are ready to submit, you must do some housekeeping. My advice is to create a "Job Search" folder. Next, create subfolders and name them after the companies that you are applying to. Inside these sub-folders, place the unique resume and cover letter that

you submitted to that company. You should also create a basic text document listing dates, times, and contact info for all correspondence with that company. Follow the same suite with your email also. Create a “Job” folder and [company name] sub-folder; all emails from each company will be moved into the corresponding email folder.

Are you seeing a pattern here yet? Organize, organize, organize, and organize some more. You don’t want a prospective employer to call and find yourself stumbling around, trying to find out which job he or she is discussing. Having separate folders in your email and desktop will allow you to quickly get up to speed on which job the employer is discussing and any correspondence you may have had.

On a side note, I have been in the workforce for 50 years and have always maintained the theory that I have never been without a job. When I was “unemployed,” my job was to find a job. In short, treat your job search as a job itself. Put as much effort into it as you would a regular 8-5 job.

Cover letters should be duplicated. Most online applications allow you to submit a cover letter along with your resume. If a contact is listed, grab that information and send another copy directly to the hiring manager. If you can’t find the employer’s contact information, try going directly to their website to get it. Sending a cover letter to the hiring manager lets them know that you are interested in this position and working for their company.

LinkedIn is not a great place to do your job search unless you do it correctly. It’s best to use LinkedIn to post blogs about the type of job you are seeking. Keep these blogs current and post regularly. Once a week is optimal. If you’re looking for a job in accounting, post weekly finance articles. You can also provide links to additional financial articles. This lets

a prospective employer know you are serious and educated in that line of work.

Never use the “easy apply” button on any job search board. This sends a message to the employer that you are not serious about finding a job or taking the shortcut to job applications. If you are shortcutting your job search, the employer may feel that you are shortcutting everything, even your job.

When you find a job on a job board that interests you, get the company's information and go directly to their website to apply. Some companies ignore most of the applicants who apply through a job board. In my experience, I have applied via a popular job board only to find that 350+ applicants have also applied for that same job in 24 hours. Here's a helpful hint: instead of using job boards, research companies you would like to work for and navigate to their “career” page. If they have a position that fits your qualifications, apply directly to that company via their website.

5. During the Interview

Dress for success! I have heard that phrase many times; in my experience, it couldn't be truer. However, don't overdress for the interview. Don't show up in a three-piece suit if you're going to a warehouse picker position. As a general rule, you want to show up dressed one level up from the standing dress code. You must wear nice jeans or dockers and a polo shirt for that warehouse picker position. If the daily dress code for employees is slacks and a polo shirt, wear dress pants and a dress shirt with a tie. The tie needs to look professional, no Mickey Mouse or golfing ties.

Emphasize how your talents, skills, and career goals can benefit and improve the current projects and processes. Be as specific as you can regarding how your skills can improve or fix a current issue they have.

In some cases, they may present you with a problem they are having within the company; take advantage of that and offer them free advice on

how you would solve the problem. At this point, consider yourself the consultant that they hired.

6. After the Interview

Follow-up is key. A follow-up phone call, email, or letter (snail mail) carries a lot of weight and puts you above all the other candidates who have applied for the same position. This lets the employer know you are serious about obtaining this job and are not just fulfilling an unemployment requirement.

Your follow-up call or letter should include why you are a good fit for this position and this company. Discuss how you have the same values and goals as their mission statement. Mention at least three things that were discussed during the interview. Your follow-up should reflect eagerness to join their team, not desperation.

Chapter 6

Additional Job-Hunting Tips

Ten things that companies say to their employees or future employees that indicate a toxic workplace.

In this list, we look at some commonly heard phrases that hiring managers say to prospective employees that are red flags. As a general rule, if you hear any of these during your interview process, in most cases, you want to exit the interview and keep looking. Remember, this valuable information is not limited to specific jobs but applies to a wide range of them, ensuring its relevance and applicability to your job search.

1. “We work hard and we play hard”

This could mean you are expected to work long hours without notice and will not receive any additional compensation. You may be called back to the office after hours or expected to work weekends and holidays.

Optionally, this may mean they often set unobtainable goals and constantly raise the bar. This, along with the long hours, can intentionally create a stressful work environment.

The “play hard” phrase may mean they don’t celebrate success during business hours but after hours in a public location. Either way, you are expected to attend a job-related event and are not compensated for those extra hours.

2. “We are like a family.”

This is common with small businesses, but some larger companies will make the same claim. I have never worked at a company where this was true. You are not my family; you are my coworkers and boss, and the relationship should be maintained at that level.

Granted, there are some organizations that are family-oriented, and staff bonds together like family members. Examples are the military, police force, and firefighters. However, a tech or financial industry position will not be family-oriented.

3. “We’ll promote you later.”

I have heard this one before: we’ll promote you after your three-month probation is completed successfully.” Alternatively, they may say they will promote you after six months or after your first year. Don’t fall for this unless they will put it on paper and sign it.

A hiring manager may make you this offer, but they leave the company three months into your new job. The company is no longer obligated to honor this verbal contract, and you’re stuck in a beginner-level position with beginner pay.

4. “You’re replaceable”

This usually means that they have very strict guidelines or goals that they expect you to hit on a regular basis. Failure on your part could result in termination. Essentially, they are saying that they do not value you as an employee. If you fail in any way, they will pull someone else off the street to replace you.

If you hear this during an interview or while working, refresh your resume and look elsewhere. This gives you the chance to reverse the situation and tell them that they are replaceable.

5. “We wear lots of hats.”

This usually means that you will be asked to do a variety of tasks and only be paid a lower salary for the position you were hired for. You should only do what you were hired to do.

Sometimes, you may need to do one-off tasks, but if you are hired to pull orders in a warehouse, you should not be expected to do inventory. A properly run company will hire an agency to do its inventory on a regular basis.

Any well-established company will allow you to do only the job you were hired for. The exception to this rule is a company that is just starting up and hasn't hired all the staff it needs yet. In this case, you may have to do multiple tasks until the company can get up to speed. More on that in section six below.

6. “We are in startup mode.”

Every company must start somewhere; in the beginning, it's common for the few employees on board to do multiple tasks. However, if the company is five years old or older, it should be out of “startup mode.”

If the company claims they are still in startup mode after five to seven years, then it's usually because they want to continue using you for multiple jobs at a lower pay rate instead of hiring qualified candidates for the other roles.

7. “We only hire the best.”

I would have to look the company up on websites such as GlassDoor. They may have a high rotation rate because they set their standards too high for their employees. We are all human and prone to mistakes. If a company doesn't want to see that, you should consider working somewhere that is a little more forgiving.

Having high standards is good, don't get me wrong, but some companies set the bar too high and don't compensate for that higher level. Compare their salary to competitor companies hiring for the same role.

8. “We’re always hiring.”

That is a major red flag. Why are they always hiring? This could mean that their turnover rates are really high, and you should question why.

If the company is starting up, this might be a term it uses, but it should drop it once it hits a growth plateau.

Usually, an always-hiring mentality means that they have a difficult or stressful work environment. Consequently, workers leave regularly to find better working conditions.

9. “We have foosball.”

When a company mentions it has a foosball table or volleyball court, a term that usually means it is a trendy tech company, it may be because it pays less than other companies. They throw in the foosball table as an enticement even though it may not actually be a trendy tech company, and you are still going to earn less than you would at a company that does not have a foosball table. Don’t trade a foosball table for a few dollars an hour less than what you are worth.

10. “We have a great HR team.”

When a company tells you it has a great HR (Human Resources) department that can handle all your issues, you must wonder why they need to mention this during your interview. It’s usually because they know there will be problems that you will need to address.

In my experience, going to HR with an issue concerning your boss almost always leads to the employee getting fired. It’s not right, but we work in the real world, and that’s how life goes.

Summary

There are a lot of conditions and stipulations when searching for a new job. Make sure you do your research and get yourself organized before you start applying for any position.

Create multiple resumes based on job descriptions that interest you. Tailor each resume to a specific company. Research each company to ensure it is where you would like to work. Remember, you'll spend 40+ hours at this facility; you don't want those hours to be miserable.

Be sure to visit my website, where you can find additional books.

<https://lostpagepress.com>

Thank you, and I hope you have learned something today.

About the author



Aubrey Love, the author of many tech documents, white papers, and blogs, lives in Southern Oklahoma with his wife, Robin, their collie, Sassenach, and the enduring spirits of their haunted home.

“I have been through more interviews than I care to admit, and I have sat on both sides of the interview table. I wrote this book to help others handle those difficult interview questions that you may not be adequately prepared for. I have encountered or asked all the questions in this book over the course of many interviews.”

Thank You

Dear Reader,

Thank you so much for taking the time to read *“Acing the Interview”*. I truly hope you found it insightful, helpful, and worth your time—whether you picked it up to expand your knowledge, sharpen your skills, or prepare for your next opportunity.

Writing this book has been a labor of love, and your support means more than words can express. As an independent author, every reader matters deeply to me. If this book provided value to you in any way, I’d be incredibly grateful if you could take a moment to leave an honest review on Amazon.

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With sincere appreciation,

Aubrey Love