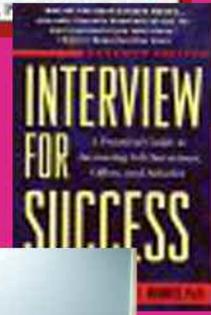
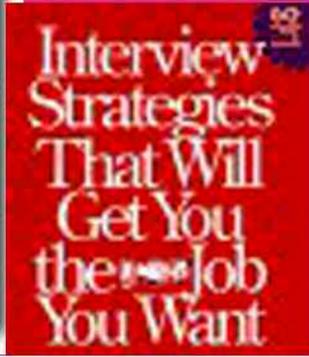
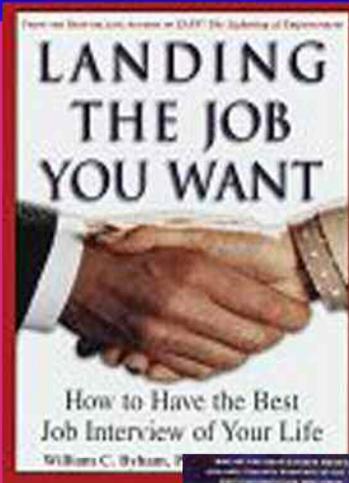


# JOB INTERVIEWING



On-Campus Interviews





# Competitive Interview Prep

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# Competitive Interview Prep

You finally have an interview! Your moment of truth has arrived. Whether your interview is on campus or off, it is important to make the most of it. Because to be successful, you should always seek to retain control of the process, and the only way to do this is to have control over the final decision. You can always walk away from a company that you later decide you have no interest in, but you need to remain in positive control to retain the power to pick and choose. Your objective in every interview should be to take yourself one step further toward generating the job offer. You can do that by doing your very best in each and every interview. Treat every interview as if it were the only one you will ever get with that company and your only opportunity to convince them that you are the right candidate for the position. Although there may be several interviews before the eventual offer, you must score positively in each interview.

Successful interviewing begins with preparation. Read the following sections to be fully prepared before your first interview. And reread the information for additional pointers as your interviewing approach matures over time.

## Preparing for an Interview

### The Truth about Interviewing

"But it seemed to go so well! We talked about everything...campus life ...the weather...the football season. I just don't understand why I got a rejection letter..."

Beware the interview that gets too chummy. It may be that the interviewer has already rejected you and out of politeness passes the remaining time talking about everything *but* you.

The truth about interviewing is that most initial interviews only last about five minutes. Sure, the actual interview always takes longer than that; twenty, thirty minutes, sometimes even an hour. But the interview is usually over in five minutes or less. If you have not convinced the interviewer by the five minute point that you are the right person for the job or at least a contender who should be taken to the next level, it can be next to impossible to recover. Recoveries do happen but they are very rare.

In that first five minutes of the interview, there are many critical aspects that should be noted: your appearance, your grooming, your handshake, your personal presence, your eye contact, your articulation, and, most importantly, your personality. Notice that there was no mention about your coursework, your GPA, or your work experience. That is what got you to the interview in the first place. But it is the "soft factors" that will take you to the next level.

Having taken the right courses, having good grades, and having related work experience are all important selection criteria, but they do not matter one iota if you are not a strong personal fit for the company you are interviewing with.

The truth is that most interviewers are seeking individuals who are able to personally present themselves well in a face-to-face interview. They are seeking to recommend those who will be a good reflection upon themselves and their selectivity. Most interviewers naturally gravitate to specific "critical success factors" that have worked for them consistently.

### Top Ten Critical Success Factors

With all the different questions an interviewer may ask, you may wonder what exactly the employer is looking for. Following is the list of the top ten critical success factors that nearly every employer is seeking:

- Positive attitude toward work
- Proficiency in field of study
- Communication skills (oral and written)
- Interpersonal skills
- Confidence
- Critical thinking and problem solving skills
- Flexibility

- Self-motivation
- Leadership
- Teamwork

Show your competence in as many of the above critical success factors as possible and you will rise above the competition.

### **Do you have It**

The key element to successful interviewing is not your experience, your grades, what classes you took, your extracurricular activities, or any of the other basic necessities. Those skills are what got you the interview. The key element to successful interviewing can be summed up in one word: attitude. If you want to rise above others with better experience, better grades, or better anything, you need to work on developing a highly positive work attitude.

Your attitude determines whether you "make the cut" or you are discarded. Remember, there are plenty of competitors with the ability to do almost any given job, especially at the entry level. The way most employers differentiate at the entry level is by a candidates' attitude toward the job.

Your attitude is everything. It determines whether you will "make the cut" or you will be discarded.

Your attitude is often what recruiters remember when the dust has settled after reviewing ten, twenty, or even one hundred candidates - the one who was sincerely willing to put forth their very best effort. If you have the attitude of wanting to do your very best for the company, of being focused on the company's needs, of putting yourself forth as the person who will be committed and dedicated to fulfilling their needs, you will likely be the one chosen.

Why is attitude so important? Because most companies already have their full share of multi-talented superstars who care about no one but themselves. Ask any manager who the most valuable member of his/her team is, and they will point not to the overrated superstar, but to the person who has the "can do" attitude, the person who can be counted on in any situation, the person who truly strives for excellence. Give them a team player who is achieving at 99% and they will take him/her over a flashy superstar who is running at 50% efficiency any day of the week. And so will 99% of all hiring managers.

Don't worry if you are not "superstar" quality. If you can show the interviewer, in your words and actions, that you are ready to put forth your very best effort toward achieving excellence, you will be chosen over the superstar.

You can show your winning attitude in the way you present yourself. Incorporate the actual words "positive attitude," "excellence," and "striving to be my best" into your interview language. Then show by your stories and examples how these words positively affect your life. Show the interviewers when, where and how you have put forth extra effort above and beyond the call of duty. Show them how you beat a deadline, how you excelled in a project, or how you made a difference by going the extra mile.

If you can show them, by words and examples, your "can do" attitude, it is you they will hire, while all of the superstars will receive polite rejection letters to add to their growing collections.

### **Do your Homework**

You've heard the cliché, "Practice makes perfect." Although perfection in interviewing is something you would like to strive for, it is probably unattainable, but practice does position you better. Before you go through an actual interview, you should first go through at least one mock interview. Nearly every college campus offers access to a career counselor who can take you through a mock interview, also known as "interview coaching". Sadly, fewer than 5% of all graduating students take advantage this service. And fully 95% end up stumbling through several interviews before they have any practical sense of what and how they are doing because that is when the rejection letters start arriving. But rejection letters offer you nothing in the way of constructive criticism toward future improvement other than point out to you in the starkest terms that you failed your interview.

The mock interview is more than just a chance to work out your interview jitters. It is an opportunity to practice your interviewing technique and answers live. It provides a chance to hear constructive feedback from someone who can guide you toward improving your interviewing style and presentation.

Just one mock interview will result in a marked improvement in your interviewing skills. Why? For the same reason that a speech is not a speech while it is still on paper or just floating around in your head. It is not a speech until you give it verbally. The first time you give it in front of an audience, it will come out nothing like what you prepared (remember your first speech in Speech 101?). It is the same with interviewing.

It is not enough to look at an interview question and say, "Yeah, I know the answer to that one." You need to practice your answer, live, in front of someone else. This is not the time to talk to yourself in the mirror; seek out a professional and practice.

Ideally, have the session videotaped. That way, you will have two opinions, the mock interviewer's and your own. Remember that there is a totally different perspective in listening to your self saying something contemporaneously versus the "out of body experience" of watching yourself later on videotape. Just as your voice always sounds different on tape, so do your answers. "Did I really say that?" Yes, you did. You'll be glad you captured that image on tape which can later be erased, rather than in a potential employer's mind's eye?

Go through at least one mock interview. For maximum effectiveness, review your answers and then go through a second mock interview. Even if you ace the second mock interview, it will be well worth it since it will give you that needed confidence for your first real interview.

### **The Insider**

The very best thing you can do to prepare for an interview with a specific company is to interview someone who is already on the inside. There are two basic methods of finding this person.

The first is to use your network. If the interview was the result of a network contact, call them to thank them for helping you set up the interview, and then proceed to ask for further information about the company. If you don't have anyone on your first level who works at the company, ask those first level contacts if they know anyone who is working there.

When you think you know all there is to know about the employer, you are only halfway there. Ask someone on the inside to give you a reality check.

The second alternative is to seek out an alumnus working in the company. Check with your school's Career Center, the Alumni Office, or both to find out if any former grads are working at the company. The ideal insider is an individual who went straight out of your college into the company, the more recent the better.

When you have located this contact, call him/her as far in advance of the interview as possible. Make sure you have done your homework so your contact doesn't have to give you all the laborious details you should already know. Ask about the person (or persons) you will be interviewing with; personality, likes, dislikes, any hot buttons. Next, ask them about the company. What are the primary issues of focus within the company; profitability, quality control and improvement, global markets. Finally, ask about the interview process. What are the basic steps in the process?

Note that the range of questions you can ask this person is far greater than what you can ask in the course of an interview. And it will give you insider information that can make you a standout in the interview.

### **Company Information**

How important is company information? Any candidate who has read the "President's Letter to the Shareholders" will be light years ahead of the competition. Take special note of the information that can be gained from the corporate annual report. Annual reports will not only provide you a summary of the company's operations for the past year and plans for the year ahead, but it will also give you access to all of the current lingo and buzzwords that are in play within the corporate corridors. Some companies even have yearly "themes." Know what these are and you will score an instant hit with your interviewer. You will be viewed as a true insider for having access to and using information that less than 1 percent of the business market and far less than 1 percent of the entry level job market is reading.

## Dress for Success

While the college campus may be the perfect forum in which to exhibit your flair for the latest in fashion style or to make a statement, the interview is not the place to do so. With very few unusual exceptions, sandals and sweatshirts are out, oxfords and business suits are still in. I don't like a necktie any better than the next person, but for men it is still a fact of life in interviewing. Even though many companies have relaxed their internal dress code, interviews still follow the conservative standard. If you buck the trend, you'll most likely find a rejection letter in the mail box.

Unfortunately, most college grads are woefully under-prepared with proper interview dress. They feel they can "get by" with what is already in their wardrobe. Dress for the world outside college is quite different from the campus scene. Remember that stylish is not conservative. You should be doing the talking, not your clothes.

You should be  
doing the  
talking, not  
your clothes

This is not to say that you need to go out and buy a whole new wardrobe. Go for quality over quantity. One or two well-chosen business suits will serve you all the way to the first day on the job and beyond. Then, when you are making some money and have a chance to see what the standard "uniform" is for the company, you can begin to round out your wardrobe. No one will fault you for wearing the same sharp outfit each time you interview. If you have a limited budget but desire some variety, you might consider varying your shirt/blouse/tie/accessories as a simple way to change your look without breaking your wallet.

For those who need a quick review of the basics, follow these guidelines for successful interview dress:

### Men and Women

- Conservative two-piece business suit (solid dark blue or grey is best)
- Conservative long-sleeved shirt/blouse (white is best, pastel is next best)
- Clean, polished conservative shoes
- Well-groomed hairstyle
- Clean, trimmed fingernails
- Minimal cologne or perfume
- Empty pockets--no bulges or tinkling coins
- No gum, candy or cigarettes
- Light briefcase or portfolio case
- No visible body piercing (nose rings, eyebrow rings, etc.)

### Men

- Necktie should be silk with a conservative pattern
- Dark shoes (black lace-ups are best)
- Dark socks (black is best)
- Get a haircut; short hair always fares best in interviews
- No beards (unless you are interviewing for a job as a lumberjack!)
- Mustaches are a possible negative, but if you must, make sure it is neat and trimmed
- No rings other than wedding ring or college ring
- No earrings (if you normally wear one, take it out)

### Women

- Always wear a suit with a jacket; no dresses
- Shoes with conservative heels
- Conservative hosiery at or near skin color (and no runs!)
- No purses, small or large; carry a briefcase instead
- If you wear nail polish (not required), use clear or a conservative color
- Minimal use of makeup (it should not be too noticeable)
- No more than one ring on each hand
- One set of earrings only

If you are still unsure about the specifics, check out a copy of John Molloy's [New Dress for Success](#) or [New Women's Dress for Success](#). While these books may seem to have a rather conservative slant, it is the norm in most of the professional marketplace. It is almost always better to be higher than the standard than lower.

If you are still not sure how to dress for the interview, call the employer and ask! That's right, call. But this is one time when you do not want to call the Hiring Manager, instead, ask to be put through to Human Resources and say:



*"I have an interview with \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_ department for a position as an \_\_\_\_\_. Could you please tell me what would be appropriate dress for this interview?"*

Sure, you run the risk of someone in Human Resources thinking you are a social imbecile, but that's a lot better than having the Hiring Manager distracted by inappropriate interview dress. While many work environments have shifted to business casual as the work standard, business suits are still the interview standard. When it doubt, it is almost always better to error on the side of conservatism.

One final note on interview dress: while it goes without saying that your interview clothes should be neat and clean, very few interviewees give the same time and attention to their shoes.

What about shoes? Yes, shoes. Many corporate recruiters will form first impressions based solely (pardon the pun) on shoes. These people do not have a shoe fetish, they just subjectively make a judgment that those who pay attention to details like their shoes are also likely to be diligent in their work life. And it is not just that person's opinion. Many have said that you can judge a person by their shoes. You will find that many ex-military officers, many of whom have found their way into management positions in corporate America, are especially aware of a person's shoes. It is not enough to be clean, pressed, and ironed. Make sure your shoes are conservative, clean, and polished.

business suits are still the interview

### **Glasses or Contacts**

For those who have the option of glasses or contacts available, consider it wisely. Your choice of eyewear can also be considered a part of your interview dress. There are preconceived notions as you are probably well aware, of what wearing glasses connotes. Specific potential positives include attention to detail, focus and intelligence. Potential negatives include awkwardness, shyness and lack of human interaction. While these stereotypical attributes are obviously just that, stereotypes, they are still extant in our society.

If you have the option of wearing contacts versus glasses, use the following as the guideline for which to wear:

- Contacts - people positions - consulting, sales, advertising, customer service, etc.
- Glasses - data/things positions - accounting, information systems, engineering, etc.

If you do choose to wear glasses, wear a pair with more conservative frames. While there is little you can do to change the preconceived stereotypes surrounding the wearing of glasses, you should be aware of the potential positives and negatives and adjust accordingly.

### **Show and Tell**

If appropriate, feel free to take samples or copies of your work to the interview as concrete examples of your capabilities. Use reports, projects, photos, programs, or whatever it is that provides a tangible example of what you have done. Its one thing to say "I developed a report," and quite another to actually show the report you developed.

While the types of samples you use may vary, they can include any information developed either through capstone-level classes or work projects (do not show proprietary, sensitive, or classified work). Following are a few examples that have been used successfully:

- Programs and system design specs by an Information Systems major
- Complex financial analysis done by a Finance major

- Working product prototype developed by a Mechanical Engineering major

Be fully prepared not only to "show" but also "tell" about your sample. Be ready to answer any and all possible questions that might come up. This should not just be a casual sample; it should be an example of your very best work. It should stand as the icon of what your capabilities are. If you are extremely proud of something you have done, show them and tell them why.

If possible, you might want to consider using your show and tell samples as "leave-behinds" for the company to look at later. There is usually not enough time within the course of the interview to fully explore a good "show and tell" item. This also puts another "hook" into the company for necessary future contact.

Although using a sample as a "leave-behind" should only be done if the item is reproducible and non-proprietary, you might want to consider leaving behind "sample only" items with an employer, if you are truly interested. Tell them: "I'll just pick it up when I'm here for my next interview" or, if this is your final interview, "I would be more than happy to pick it up on my start date." Presumptuous possibly, but it may also be your golden opportunity to close the sale!

### **Raspberry Fudge Swirl in a Plain Vanilla World**

Success in interviewing involves being fully prepared, but it's more than that; you must stand out in a world of "plain vanilla" job candidates. What particular strengths make you uncommon? What makes you unique? Be ready to differentiate yourself. Be ready to show your "competitive advantage." And be ready to load on the nut topping, whipped cream and cherry if they ask for it.

Your job is  
to sell the  
interviewer  
on you

Even though you have probably already gone through this exercise in a self-evaluation phase of career planning, it's important to go through it one more time: you should know how you measure up against your competition. Note your competitive differences. Don't go along with a mistaken impression that you can sell yourself based only on your own personal value. Identify your specific advantages for each specific employer. Be ready to articulate that advantage in very precise language.

You have to be ready to take on the competition. Remember, your competition is sitting there in the classrooms with you. You need to know and understand your greatest strengths in relation to them. It is only by differentiating yourself that you can lick your competition.

### **Interview Psychology**

The night before your interview, spend some time with a friend or family member, telling them why you would be the best for the position. Use superlatives galore! The purpose is to put yourself in the right frame of mind for the interview, so that you truly believe you are the best possible candidate for the job.

### **Believe**

Before you can possibly convince the interviewer that you are right for the job, you have to believe it yourself. It's amazing how many candidates seem tentative and reluctant to express confidence in their abilities. Remember, you are all alone once the interview starts. No one will sell you if you don't sell yourself. How can the interviewer believe in you if you don't believe in yourself? The interviewer is not there to sell you on their company until after you sell them on you. Once you have sold them on you, they will sell you on the position and the company, but not until then. So don't expect the interviewer to tell you why you are right for the job; that is your job.

Share your  
vision with the  
interviewer.  
If he/she is  
unable to see  
it, lend your  
"eyes" so they  
may also see.  
It is your  
vision, but you  
must give it  
away for others  
to see it and  
help you  
achieve it.

### **Piling on the Praise**

Maybe you are the shy type who is uncomfortable talking about yourself in a positive way. There is still a way for you to prepare yourself mentally for the interview. Remember the story of Pygmalion? In Greek mythology, Pygmalion sculpted a beautiful ivory statue of a woman that was given to the king of Cyprus. Pygmalion believed so strongly that the statue was real that it was eventually given life by the goddess Venus.

Our TV/movie generation may know the story of Pygmalion and his statue through a modern stage/movie version: Professor Higgins and Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*. Eliza is transformed from a common flower peddler to an elegant lady through the power of continuous positive reinforcement on the part of Professor Higgins. If others tell you that you can do something, and tell you this long enough, you will eventually come to believe it yourself and live it in your life.

To see a simple example of the power of this technique in action, notice what happens to you when you smile for an extended period of time. Right now, as you are reading this page, think of something or someone pleasant or amusing that makes you want to smile. Hold that smile until you finish reading this section. The end result will be that your body will react to the smile in a very positive way. You will eventually feel like smiling naturally without having to consciously think about it. And, interestingly enough, if others walk by while you have that silly grin on your face, they will probably begin smiling too.

We create images in our mind of how things should be. If these images are believed, they can eventually become self-fulfilling prophecies. If we change the image, we change the result. So if others tell you that you are the very best person for the job long enough and sincerely enough, you will eventually come to believe this and act upon it in a positive way.

This is not some useless psycho-babble, it really works. The key is to pick someone as your supporter who is very sensitive and willing to back you in your efforts. Significant others work great, assuming the relationship is supportive. Moms are also great for this role. Let your supporter in on the fact that you have an interview coming up, and tell them you need their help in pumping you up. Ask them to please lay it on thick, with the best praise they can muster for the occasion. If possible this should be the last person you speak with the night before or even the day of the interview.

This is also a very effective child rearing technique for later in life. Tell your kids they are loved and wanted and they will believe you. Tell them they are wicked and worthless and they will also believe you. Make sure you do the former.

### **Visualization**

The use of mental visualization can be extremely helpful in preparing for your interview. You can, by visualization, experience your coming interview, including a rehearsal of how you would react in specific situations.

First  
impressions  
count. Often  
for far more  
than is

Many great athletes prepare for competition through visualization. And many of the great feats of history have been accomplished first through visualization. Sir Edmund Hillary, the first person to scale the heights of Mount Everest, was asked by a young reporter how it felt to be the first man to touch the peak of Everest. Hillary replied that it felt exactly the same as each of the previous times. What the puzzled reporter failed to understand was that Hillary had already successfully scaled Everest many times through visualization.

In preparing for the interview, go through the motions in your mind. Anticipate the questions which may be asked. Visualize yourself as confident and self-assured, not cocky, just confident of whom you are and the benefits you can provide the employer. Play the part over and over again until you feel you have truly lived it. Visualize your success until it becomes reality.

### **Confidence**

There is a very simple key to successful interviewing which can be learned from a couple who successfully traveled around the world on a sailboat. As most of their needs were supplied by the wind and the sea, a great deal of money for their journey was not required although they did occasionally have need for provisions. So when they made a stopover in the port of a distant land, they would often seek short-term work, usually just enough to replenish their supplies. To compound the difficulty of this task, they were always foreigners in a foreign land, seeking limited-term work, and asking at or above the local prevailing wage. Yet they were always successful.

Their secret was simple confidence; confidence in whom they were, in what they could do: "I can do this job and do it well." They did not beg for work. They walked into a company with the confidence that they were able to make

immediate contributions, confident that they were profitable employees and their confidence came through loud and clear. They found work in every port, near and far.

Every company, whether in the U.S. or abroad, seeks confidence when considering hiring new employees. If you lack it, you will be refused. If you show confidence, it will cover for a multitude of shortcomings in other areas. Lack work experience, confidence will overcome. Confidence is the great counterbalancing factor for entry level college grads.

When recruiters are interviewing college students for entry level opportunities, one of the first things they look for is confidence. The confidence factor is one of the most quickly recognized skills in the brief on-campus interview and one of the most highly reliable predictors of future performance.

How do you gain this confidence? Through preparation, knowing who you are and what you can do, and practicing over and over until you are not only confident in yourself, but also able to project that confidence to others. The interviewer must become confident in your ability to do the work. Then, and only then, will they be willing to invest in you.

### **Never Be Nervous Again**

If the thought of interviewing makes you nervous, it's important to get that emotion under control. The interview is your opportunity to be at your best. If you allow nervousness to control your presentation, your image may be forever shrouded in the cloud of nervousness that blocked the interviewer's total view of whom you are.

We get nervous because of the unknown. We are seeking approval, but we are unsure of ourselves and how we will be perceived. We are afraid we won't get approval, which makes us nervous. And to compound the problem, our increasing nervousness makes it even more difficult to gain that approval, thereby compounding the basis for our fears. Uncontrolled, nervousness can destroy our ability to effectively interview.

But it doesn't have to be that way. In public speaking, many are often confronted by crowds of hundreds and sometimes even thousands. Do they get nervous? You bet; every time. Is anyone aware of their nervousness? Not unless they are seen in the few minutes before they go on stage, before they have successfully applied a simple technique. This simple technique allows them to overcome their fears and successfully speak before thousands of people they have never met before. And it will help you in meeting with and speaking to people you have never met before in the interviewing situation.

A certain level of nervousness is to be expected during any interview. But how you react to it will determine the overall impact.

The technique is a simple contraction of the abdomen in combination with rhythmic breathing that will allow you to fully overcome your nervousness in any situation. To understand how to use this technique, sit forward in a chair, arms outstretched, as if you are grabbing oars in a rowboat. Take a deep breath, then slowly pull back your arms and contract the abdominal muscle just below the rib cage. As you continue to let out air, roll the contraction of the muscle downward, just above your pelvic region, centering on your navel. Keep you muscles tight until all of the air has been expelled. Count to three (don't breathe in yet!), then inhale deeply. Repeat this simple process two or three times and you will find that your body is completely relaxed.

To better understand the technique, stop by a gym and sit down at one of the rowing machines. You will gain a firsthand feel for the relaxation brought on by the series of muscle contractions and deep breathing that comes naturally during this type of workout.

So how can this apply with interviewing? Obviously, you don't want to go through all the visual animations in front of the interviewer, but you can still effectively apply this technique. Simply take in a deep breath through your nose, then contract your abdominal muscles in the "top to bottom roll" discussed above as you slowly exhale through slightly parted lips. Hold it at the bottom, take in a deep breath, and you are ready to go. If you are still nervous, simply repeat the technique one or two more times. Even if you are not nervous at the time, it is always a good idea to use this technique as you are waiting to meet with your interviewer. During the interview, you can use it while the interviewer is speaking to keep any potential nervousness in check.

What if you are overcome by nervousness while answering a question? Simply pause, take a deep breath, exhale and contract, and then continue. Your nervousness will be noticeable to the interviewer due to the pause in your answer, but the five-second drill will also show that you are seeking to control your nervousness. If you are able to successfully overcome, the interviewer will never hold that pause against you. They will admire your self-control and the positive, proactive action you took to put the interview back on a successful track.

This technique is virtually unnoticeable to anyone nearby. Many professional speakers make it a habit to apply this technique or similar techniques several times before going on stage, whether they are feeling nervous or not. You could be seated next to the speaker and be completely unaware of what they are doing. Yet they will effectively put away all their nervousness and prepare them for a dynamic presentation. You can do the same in preparation for your interview.

Why does it work? Very simply, the muscle contractions prevent the introduction of chemical imbalances into your system that can cause nervousness. The deep breathing helps to dissipate any chemicals that have already been released. It forces the body to prepare physically for the upcoming task. The body begins to focus on producing positive endorphins that will be needed for the anticipated "rowing" ahead. And this exercise will give your mind the opportunity to focus positively on the actual task of interviewing.

You can use this technique in a variety of circumstances in which you need to focus your mind and body: overcoming anxiety, anger, fright, tension, nausea, even a simple case of stomach butterflies. You can overcome interviewing nervousness, and much more, just by using this simple technique.

## **Interviewing Process**

From the interviewer's side of the desk, there are four distinct steps which they go through in the entry level hiring process:

1. Marketing - getting our company name out on campus
2. Screening - initial review of a candidate's qualifications against our basic criteria
3. Assessing - reviewing a candidate's behaviors against our critical behavior profile
4. Selling - encouraging chosen candidates to choose our company over the competition

The first two steps above take place on campus. The final two take place at the company-site interview. It is the fourth step where you want to find yourself, where you are being courted as the employee they want. But before you get to that stage, you will need to pass the first three steps. And the opening steps are right there on campus.

### **Know Your Competition**

Your competition is sitting there in class with you, sitting in the interview waiting room or shaking hands with the interviewer in the time slot just before or after yours. All those students you have been competing with for grades are now your direct competition for jobs, at least for the jobs that come calling to your campus. They are the same ones who blew the top end of the curve on the last test. But keep in mind that this is not the chemistry final. It is not how much you know, but how well you communicate. The 4.0 student who cannot interact with anything outside of a test tube will have as much or more difficulty finding a job than others.

Know your competition and what they have to offer. Know yourself and what you have to offer. Be ready to differentiate and sell yourself based upon your unique skills.

### **What to Bring**

When you report for your interview, bring your 9"x12" portfolio/folder, two copies of your resume, copies of your top three letters of recommendation, any company information you have gathered, and any show and tell information you may want to use, nothing more, nothing less. It is advisable to not take notes unless you are specifically asked to take an action which you need to record for memory. Remember who is interviewing whom.

### **The Waiting Room**

The interviewing waiting room is your initial face-to-face connection point with your potential employer. Use this waiting room area as the preparation location for your interview. Always, always, always arrive at least ten to fifteen minutes early. This will give you the time necessary to do a quick final review before the actual interview. Get a drink of water on the way there, to avoid the cotton mouth syndrome.

A smiling face  
can work wonders  
with a weary  
interviewer.

When you arrive at the waiting room, check in with the secretary or administrator. If you do not already know the name of the interviewer, find out and write it down. Ask if there was anyone on the schedule before you. If not, or if that person canceled, be prepared for a potential early start. This can work strongly to your advantage, since it will give both you and the interviewer additional time. Ask how long the interview is scheduled for, so you have an idea of how much time you will have. While waiting for the interviewer, take out your resume and review it one last time. Know it front to back. Visualize and mentally rehearse some of the standard answers. Think through some of your compelling stories to utilize in your behavioral answering.

The interviewer may be drinking coffee and sometimes will ask you if you want some. Refuse the offer. You will need your hands and mouth free to accomplish the task at hand. The interviewer is merely being polite. Avoid candy and gum, or you will be marked off the interviewers list even before you enter the interviewing room.

### **First Impression**

As you wait for the interviewer to greet you in the waiting room, prepare to make your very best initial impression. Choose a seat that is facing the door or hallway where the interviewer(s) will approach. There will likely be several companies interviewing concurrently for a variety of different positions, so there may be several other anxious students seated in the waiting area. Be constantly conscious of the entryway, and when you see an interviewer approaching, make immediate eye contact and smile. Anticipate each interviewer as if he/she is the one who will be interviewing you. The interviewer will normally walk into the waiting room and announce the name of the next interviewee, or possibly check with the receptionist. Even though you may end up making eye contact with several interviewers from other companies who will be interviewing someone else, treat each one as if they are your interviewer. By anticipating this initial contact, you will be sharp and alert when you do make your connection. And their first impression of you will be of someone who has a high level of anticipation and readiness.

If you try to  
control the  
interview, you  
will be  
rejected.

### **Make Eye Contact**

Eye contact is an area of importance that many give lip service to, yet fail to implement in actual practice. If you have difficulty maintaining eye contact, try this simple technique to lock in a strong first impression. Concentrate on noticing and remembering the color of the person's eyes as you shake hands. In doing so, you will not only show excellent initial eye contact, you will also create interest in your eyes, which will be clear and focused.

If you have difficulty maintaining eye contact due to discomfort at looking someone directly in the eyes, use this technique instead. Simply look at them directly in the nose. You will not have the discomfort of direct eye contact, yet the person you are speaking with will perceive that you are making eye contact. Just make sure you don't become so preoccupied with nasal staring that you end up being distracted from the interview.

### **Make a Personal Connection**

No matter how good you look on paper, no matter how well you present yourself, no matter how well you answer their questions, you will not get the job unless you make a personal connection with the interviewer. The interviewer needs to know from the very start that you are someone they can trust to represent them and their company. How do you establish that trust? Simple, at the very beginning of the interview, when the introductions are being made, concentrate on looking directly and solidly into the interviewer's eyes, giving them your sweetest and most endearing smile. Think of it as a "shy smile," or a "cute smile." The bottom line is to make it a warm and friendly smile. Then think about the fact that you are truly pleased to be there in the presence of this person. Establish that personal connection both physically and mentally with the interviewer.

How do you know when the connection is made? When they return your smile in a comfortable, relaxed manner, you are connected and ready to communicate on a personal level. Remember, most interviewers only hire people they are comfortable with. If the connection is not made, they won't hire. So take the time to establish that personal connection.

### Personality Matching

Following this technique is the secret to successful interviewing. If you read nothing else, read this. There is a simple key to success in interviewing that very few people utilize. It is the process of mirroring the personality of the person to whom you are speaking, a process that is referred to as "Personality Matching." It is based upon the proven fact that we like people who are like us. It is the halo effect in action. Anyone who is like me must be a good person. The result: instant rapport.

Any good salesperson is aware of this simple technique. Want evidence? The next time you get a call from a telemarketer, do not hang up. Instead, stick with them a few minutes just to hear their pitch. You will probably know pretty quickly if you are dealing with a "greenie" who is reading from a script or a seasoned professional. If it's a "greenie", give them a polite "no thank you" and hang up, but stick with the pro through the entire call.

Make an effort  
to meet me at  
my level and I  
will attempt to  
meet you at

In the beginning of the call, talk to them in a very quick and upbeat voice, possibly somewhat higher in pitch. If they are good, they will follow right along with you, matching your tempo and pitch. If not, they are still a greenie, operating in their own little world, and you should end the call. But if they follow along, here comes the fun. Gradually slow down your rate of speaking and lower your voice in both volume and pitch. Guess what? The true pro will follow you all the way down. Surprised? Don't be. Just as a telemarketing pro is trained to do this and at this point may not even be conscious of what they are doing, any good marketing person does the exact same thing. Whatever the industry, the most successful salespeople are the ones who meet you, the customer at your level.

In the same way, the best interviewees are the ones who have the ability to meet the interviewers at their level. "Wait a minute. Shouldn't that be the job of the interviewer?" No! The only interviewers who have actually been trained at interviewing, Personnel/Human Resources, are usually not the ones who make the final hiring decision. Even some of the best interviewers are totally unaware of this technique or are unwilling to apply it.

So how does one do this "personality matching thing?" First match the voice and then the physical characteristics of the interviewer. In matching the voice, the most important aspect is to match the rate of speaking (tempo), and then match the pitch. In matching the physical characteristics, it is most important to match or at least reflect the facial expressions, then the posture (sitting back or forward, etc.). Although you should not be trying to "mimic", you should attempt to closely match him or her.

Interviewing is  
a game in which  
the interviewer  
deals the  
cards, but you  
hold all the  
aces. It's up  
to you to play

To be effective with this technique, you need to first understand your own personality range. For some of us, it is quite wide and variant. For others, it may be narrower. As an example, some consider themselves to have a very wide personality range, very comfortable in matching both the very flamboyant and the very subdued. Each type is at an extreme end of their personality range. Most people, however, operate in a somewhat narrower personality range. The key is to be able to identify your personal bounds of comfort.

So what do we do if the person we meet with is talking a mile a minute? Should we try to artificially match that person, if it is outside of our personality range? Quite simply: no. To attempt to act like someone we are not would be "faking it." It's better known as being two-faced and in the business world it can be a real killer. Some people end up getting sucked into this trap in order to get the job, and then go through a continual living hell as they are forced to fake it for the duration of the job. Don't do it. But you should be aware of what your personality range is and be willing to move fluidly within that range to accommodate the personality of the individual with whom you are meeting.

Personality matching does not mean perfect matching. It does mean that we should do our best to come as close as possible to matching the other person's personality within the bounds of our own personality range. Keep in mind

that there is no "perfect personality" since what is perfect to one will always be lacking in some way to another. Perfection is relative to the recipient. Remember that.

As a side note, think about someone you truly dislike. In most cases, it's because the person is outside your personality range, usually in the upper extreme, too loud, too pushy, too cocky, too egotistical, too stuffy, etc. They are "too much" of something that you do not embrace in your own personality. If you have a "too much" area in your own personality, you are best advised to bring it under strict control, not only in interviewing, but in your life in general.

If you put into practice this one technique, you will likely increase your chances of success dramatically, and not just in interviewing. Personality matching is a technique that you can use in virtually all areas of human.

Every interview  
is a new  
opportunity.

### Handshake Matching

Apply the same principle of "Personality Matching" to handshakes. Don't get confused by the "too hard" or "too soft" handshake psychology baloney. There is no absolute when it comes to handshakes because the effectiveness of the handshake is defined by the recipient. So is the handshake unimportant? No. But it would be wrong to attempt to come up with "the perfect handshake." There is no such thing, since each person receiving your handshake has their own definition of perfection. It's relative to the person who has your fingers in their grasp. Therefore, a truly effective handshake is going to be a "mirror" of the handshake being offered. Match the person's handshake the same as you would their voice or posture.

While personality matching is dynamic and takes place over an extended period of time, the handshake lasts just one to two seconds. So how do you adjust? Use a medium grip handshake, placing your hand so that the soft skin between your thumb and forefinger comes in contact with the same location on the recipient's hand. Then be prepared to squeeze down on the gorilla or lighten up on the softie, as necessary. Don't get into a wrestling contest. Again, just as with personality matching, you don't have to match the extremes, just move to that end of your "handshake range." Practice a few times with a friend, or better yet, practice with a loved one.

### Interview Process

In its simplest form, the interview consists of three distinct steps:

1. Establish rapport
2. Gather information
3. Close

Small talk is  
fine if it's  
sincere; if not,  
you have just  
tallied points  
against you

It is vitally important to understand these basic steps in order to be successful in your interviewing. Each step carries with it a different focus and emphasis. Each step has its own protocol and requirements. And successful completion of each step is critical for you to go on to the next step in the process, whether that be another interview or the actual job offer.

It is important to note that there is a dual responsibility for successful completion of each of these steps. The employer has a responsibility to follow through in each step, yet you have a greater responsibility. If the employer fails in his responsibility, the company will potentially fail to hire a qualified candidate. But if you consistently fail in your responsibility, you will fail to be hired. So you need to take personal responsibility for your side of the interview process.

The establishing rapport step is where the vital first impressions are formed. Some employers will claim to be able to make a decision about a candidate in thirty seconds or less. The truth is that you will set the tone for the interview through your physical appearance and initial responses. If you start off poorly, you can recover, but only after a Herculean effort. Your personal appearance will speak volumes before you ever utter a word.

Many interviewers are analyzing you in reference to the company culture. Does this person fit in? Would this person represent our company well? Would others feel I made a good selection in recommending? And the small talk is actually big talk, since it will greatly affect how you are perceived in the eyes of the interviewer. It's not necessarily the words you say, but how you say them.

Your verbal articulation and vocabulary will be noted, especially any variance, positive or negative, from the standard. If you have done your interview homework and have fully researched the company, the words will flow smoothly. If not, it will show. This is where your positive attitude and confidence will establish the tone for the interview. And this is the step during which you have the opportunity to make your personal connection with the interviewer.

In the gathering information step, the employer will be asking questions and matching your answers against their critical success factors. Some of the questions will be closed-ended, such as "What was your GPA?" Others will be open-ended behavioral questions, such as "Can you give me an example of a time when you had to make an unpopular decision?" While preparation is important, your honesty and sincerity in answering should be evident. Most interviewers are keenly aware of when they are being snowed. The questions in this step will usually be probing questions which drill deep into your background, attempting to get past the interview veneer. Although you may have pre-sold the interviewer in the establishing rapport stage, you will need to solidify the employer's view in this stage. The outward questions are designed to answer the inner doubts. You will be judged on:

What you say is  
not nearly as  
important as  
how you say it.

- attitude (Are they always this pleasant or is there someone evil lurking beneath the surface?)
- work ethic (Will they really work hard or are they just looking for a cushy job?)
- intelligence (Does this person really understand the industry concepts or is he reaching?)
- honesty (Is the person really this good or are they just acting?)

You will be subject to the individual whims of each individual interviewer, often not by design, but due to lack of training. The only individuals who have truly been trained to interview (Human Resources) usually do not have the hiring decision. So the hiring manager interview is usually less structured and more subjective. And in the end, an imperfect decision will be formed from an imperfect interview process. If you have not sold the interviewer by the end of this step, you will have great difficulty in resurrecting.

In the close step, the interviewer will set the hook for the next step. If you have succeeded to this point, the conversation will center round the interviewer selling you on the company and the next steps in the hiring process. If you have failed to this point, the conversation will center on the football team, the weather, or any other neutral subject which provides for a clean disengagement. If your interview was successful, there will usually be an indication of future steps. You may be given further company information which is reserved for only the select few.

No matter what your view of the interview to this point, it is important to personally close the interview by establishing continuity of the process. Understand what the next step will be. "We will be reviewing all of the candidates and getting back to you," is not necessarily a close-out, although it is the standard response when there is no interest. Make certain you understand the next steps and be prepared to follow up on your side. Always pursue each interview as if it were your last. You can always back away from it later if you truly have no interest, but you cannot back away from a company that you failed to impress.

Understanding the basic steps of the interview is only the starting point. You need to be fully prepared for different personality styles, different interview styles, and different questions. You need to master your ability to present the very best you.

### **Non-Verbal Communication**

Many interviews fail because of lack of proper communication. But communication is more than just what you say. Often it is the nonverbal communication that we are least aware of, yet speaks the loudest. Following are the top five nonverbal communicative gestures, ranked in order of importance, when it comes to interviewing:

- **Eye Contact** - Unequaled in importance! If you look away while listening, it shows lack of interest and a short attention span. If you fail to maintain eye contact while speaking, at a minimum it shows lack of confidence in what you are saying and at worst may send the subtle message that you are lying. Do not just assume you have good eye contact. Ask, watch, and then practice. Ask others if you ever lack proper eye contact. If they respond that they did notice, ask if it was during speaking or listening. Some people

maintain excellent eye contact while listening, but lose eye contact when speaking. Or vice versa. Watch yourself on videotape. It does not necessarily have to be your mock interview; in fact, if you were videotaped informally where you were not aware you were being taped, this will provide even stronger evidence. Then sit down with a friend and practice until you are comfortable maintaining sincere, continuous eye contact.

- **Facial Expressions** - It is amazing how many college students are totally unaware of the sullen, confused, or even mildly hysterical expression plastered on their faces during the entire course of an interview! It is almost as if four years of college has left some students brain dead or worse. Some interviewers have been known to hang humorous labels on these students, such as "Ms. Bewildered" (who looked quizzical during the interview) or "Mr. Psycho-Ax-Murderer" (who looked wide-eyed and determined to do something, although you dare not ask what). Take a good, long, hard look at yourself in the mirror. Look at yourself as others would. Then modify your facial expressions, first eliminate any negative overall characteristics that might exist, and then add a simple feature that nearly every interviewee forgets to include, a smile! Not some stupid Bart Simpson grin, but a true and genuine smile that tells the interviewer you are a happy person and delighted to be interviewing with their company today. You do not need to keep the smile plastered on for the full interview, but remember to keep coming back to it. Think about it, who would you rather spend thirty minutes with?
- **Posture** - Posture sends out a signal of your confidence and power potential. Stand tall, walk tall, and most of all, sit tall. Height is not what's important, posture is. When standing, stand up straight. When you are seated, make sure you sit at the front edge of the chair, leaning slightly forward, moving within an overall range of no more than 10" back or 20" forward, and intent on the subject at hand.
- **Gestures** - Contrary to popular belief, gestures should be very limited during the interview. So please don't use artificial gestures to try to heighten the importance of the issue at hand. It will merely come off as theatrical. When you do use gestures, make sure they are natural and meaningful.
- **Space** - Recognize the boundaries of your personal space and that of others. If you are typical of most Americans, it ranges between 30 and 36 inches. Be prepared, however, not to back up or move away from someone who has a personal space that is smaller than your own. Hang in there, take a deep breath, and stand your ground. For most of us, merely the awareness of our personal space is enough to consciously prompt us to stand firm when speaking with someone. If you have a smaller than average personal space, make sure you keep your distance so that you do not intimidate someone who possesses a larger personal space. P.S. If you want to have fun at a social gathering, step inside the personal space boundary of a friend. With some practice, you can back them up around the entire room without them even being aware of what is happening. But beware. It can also happen to you.

Your words tell  
me a story but  
your body tells  
me the whole  
story.

### Winning the Body Language Game

Everyone uses body language during the interview, whether they realize it or not, but very few think about in advance and modify their body language to produce the most positive effect. Body language is merely the smaller, less prominent nonverbal cues that we give others while communicating. Following are some typical interpretations of body language cues:

- **Openness and Warmth:** open-lipped smiling, open hands with palms visible, unbuttoning coat upon being seated.
- **Confidence:** leaning forward in chair, chin up, putting tips of fingers of one hand against the tips of fingers of other hand in "praying" or "steepling" position, hands joined behind back when standing.
- **Nervousness:** smoking, whistling, pinching skin, fidgeting, jiggling pocket contents, running tongue along front of teeth, clearing throat, hands touching the face or covering part of the face, pulling at skin or ear, running fingers through hair, wringing hands, biting on pens or other objects, twiddling thumbs, biting fingernails (action itself or evidence of), tongue clicking.

- **Untrustworthy/Defensive:** frowning, squinting eyes, tight-lipped grin, arms crossed in front of chest, pulling away, chin down, touching nose or face, darting eyes, looking down when speaking, clenched hands, gestures with fist, pointing with fingers, chopping one hand into the open palm of the other, rubbing back of neck, clasping hands behind head while leaning back in the chair.

As you can see, there are far more negatives than positives, possibly more than we are consciously aware of. This list is given not so that you can artificially adopt the positive body language techniques, but more to help you recognize and avoid the negatives. If you have a habit of doing any of the above negatives, remove that action from your pattern of behavior before it sends the wrong signal. Concentrate on removing it now so you will not have to think about it during the interview.

Give them a reason to hire you and they may do exactly that.

And keep in mind the opposite side of the desk. As you talk with an interviewer, be aware of although not preoccupied with, their body language and nonverbal cues. Do not try to read in more than is actually being communicated, but try to develop a sense of the interviewer's reception of you. The most obvious example is the smile connection, when your smile brings about a smile from the interviewer. Do your best to stay connected with your interviewer, both verbally and nonverbally.

### Check Nonverbal Cues

Be careful that you do not just give lip-service to the concepts listed previously; practice them with a Nonverbal Interview. Unlike the mock interview, this one does not require a great amount of preparation, just an observant friend. Ask the friend to ask questions, but instead of focusing on your answers, ask him/her to make note of your non-verbal gestures and body language and the messages being sent. Or play back your mock interview video with the sound off. The results might surprise you.

## Interview Questions

### Eight Types of Interview Questions

Interviewing is not a science, nor is it an art form. It is simply an imperfect form of human communication designed to increase the predictive validity of potential employer-employee relationships. And it is very imperfect. There are basically eight types of questions you may face during the course of an interview:

1. **Credential verification questions** (This type of question includes "What was your GPA?" and "How long were you at . . . ." Its purpose is to place objective measurements on features of your background.)
2. **Experience verification questions** (This type of question includes "What did you learn in that class?" and "What were your responsibilities in that position?" Its purpose is to verify experiential features of your background.)
3. **Opinion questions** (This type of question includes "What would you do in this situation?" and "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" Its purpose is to subjectively analyze how you would respond to a scenario. The reality is that "Tape #143" in your brain kicks in and plays when you recognize the question and play back the pre-programmed answer.)
4. **Dumb questions** (This type of question includes "What kind of animal would you like to be?" or "What do you think flubber is made from?" Its purpose is to get past your pre-programmed answers to find out if you are capable of an original thought. There is not necessarily a right or wrong answer, since it is used primarily as a test of your ability to think on your feet.)
5. **Math questions** (This type of question includes "What is 1000 divided by 73?" to "How many ping pong balls could fit in a Volkswagen?" Its purpose is to evaluate not only your mental math calculation skills, but also your creative ability in formulating the mathematical formula for providing an answer (or estimate, as can often be the case).

6. **Case questions** (This type of question includes problem-solving questions ranging from: "How many gas stations are there in the U.S.?" to "What is your estimate of the U.S. online retail market for books?" Its purpose is to evaluate your problem-solving abilities and how you would analyze and work through potential case situations.)
7. **Behavioral questions** (This type of question includes "Can you give me a specific example of how you did that?" or "What were the steps you followed to accomplish that task?" Its purpose is to anticipate predictable future behaviors based upon past responses.)
8. **Competency questions** (This type of question includes "Can you give me a specific example of your leadership skills?" or "Explain a way in which you sought a creative solution to a problem." Its purpose is to align your past behaviors with specific competencies which are required for the position.)

It is interesting to note that the first four types of interview questions listed have a predictive validity for on the job success of just 10 percent. And 10 percent predictive validity is the same level that is generated from a simple resume review. Math questions increase the predictive validity to 15 percent since it tests intelligence, commonly a key competency for most positions and case questions raise the predictive validity to 25 percent and slightly higher for consulting positions. Behavioral and competency interviewing, on the other hand, yield a predictive validity of 55 percent; still far from perfect, yet much more reliable for most interviewers.

Interestingly, the first four question types are still the favored approach by most untrained interviewers, simply due to lack of experience. Behavioral and competency interviewing is gaining greater acceptance by trained interviewers because past performance is the most reliable indicator of future results, especially when it is tied to the specific competencies for the position. Many companies have modified this approach with specific critical behavioral interviewing to target those behaviors which provide the highest correlation with the required competencies for highly predictive positive results.

### Ten Tough Interview Questions and Ten Great Answers

Mental fear of the unknown is often what produces the physical symptoms of nervousness. In addition to preparing yourself physically, you also need to prepare yourself mentally. The best way to prepare mentally is to know what may be coming. Fear of the unknown can only exist when there is an unknown. Take the time to understand some of the "standards" when it comes to interviewing questions.

The following are some of the most difficult questions you will face in the course of your job interviews. Some questions may seem rather simple on the surface, such as "Tell me about yourself", but these questions can have a variety of answers; the more open-ended the question, the wider the variation in the answers. Once you have become practiced in your interviewing skills, you will find that you can use almost any question as a launching pad for a particular topic or compelling story.

Others are "classic" interview questions, such as, "What is your greatest weakness?" which most people answer inappropriately. In this case, the standard textbook answer for the "greatest weakness" question is to give a veiled positive, "I work too much, I just work and work and work", which ends up sending the wrong message. Either you are lying or, worse yet, you are telling the truth, in which case you define working too much as a weakness and really don't want to work much at all. Think about it.

Make the  
interviewer's  
job easy for  
them. Make them  
want to hire  
you

The following answers are provided to give you a new perspective on how to answer tough interview questions. They are not there for you to lift from the page and insert into your next interview. They are there for you to use as the basic structure for formulating your own answers. While the specifics of each reply may not apply to you, try to follow the basic structure of the answer from the perspective of the interviewer. Answer the questions behaviorally, with specific examples that show clear evidence backs up what you are saying about yourself. Always provide information that shows you want to become the very best \_\_\_\_\_ for the company and that you have specifically prepared yourself to become exactly that. They want to be sold. They are waiting to be sold. Don't disappoint them!

1. **Q - Tell me about yourself.**  
**R -** My background to date has been centered round preparing myself to become the very best \_\_\_\_ I can become. Let me tell you specifically how I've prepared myself . . .
  
2. **Q - Why should I hire you?**  
**R -** Because I sincerely believe that I'm the best person for the job. I realize that there are many other college students who have the ability to do this job. I also have that ability. But I also bring an additional quality that makes me the very best person for the job, my attitude for excellence. Not just giving lip service to excellence, but putting every part of myself into achieving it. In \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ I have consistently reached for becoming the very best I can become by doing the following...
  
3. **Q - What is your long-range objective? Where do you want to be 10 or 15 years from now?**  
**R -** Although it's certainly difficult to predict things far into the future, I know what direction I want to develop toward. Within five years, I would like to become the very best \_\_\_\_ your company has. In fact, my personal career mission statement is to become a world-class \_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_ industry. I will work toward becoming the expert that others rely upon. And in doing so, I feel I will be fully prepared to take on any greater responsibilities that might be presented in the long term.
  
4. **Q - How has your education prepared you for your career?**  
**R -** As you will note on my resume, I've taken not only the required core classes in the \_\_\_\_ field, I've also gone above and beyond. I've taken every class the college has to offer in the field and also completed an independent study project specifically in this area. But it's not just taking the classes to gain academic knowledge - I've taken each class, both inside and outside of my major, with this profession in mind. So when we're studying \_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_, I've viewed it from the perspective of \_\_\_\_\_. In addition, I've always tried to keep a practical view of how the information would apply to my job. Not just theory, but how it would actually apply. My capstone course project in my final semester involved developing a real-world model of \_\_\_\_, which is very similar to what might be used within your company. Let me tell you more about it . . .
  
5. **Q - Are you a team player?**  
**R -** Very much so. In fact, I've had opportunities in both athletics and academics to develop my skills as a team player. I was involved in \_\_\_\_ at the intramural level, including leading my team in assists during the past year - I always try to help others achieve their best. In academics, I've worked on several team projects, serving as both a member and team leader. I've seen the value of working together as a team to achieve a greater goal than any one of us could have achieved individually. As an example . . .
  
6. **Q - Have you ever had a conflict with a boss or professor? How was it resolved?**  
**R -** Yes, I have had conflicts in the past. Never major ones, but certainly there have been situations where there was a disagreement that needed to be resolved. I've found that when conflict occurs, it's because of a failure to see both sides of the situation. Therefore, I ask the other person to give me their perspective and at the same time ask that they allow me to fully explain my perspective. At that point, I would work with the person to find out if a compromise could be reached. If not, I would submit to their decision because they are my superior. In the end, you have to be willing to submit yourself to the directives of your superior, whether you're in full agreement or not. An example of this was when . . .
  
7. **Q - What is your greatest weakness?**  
**R -** I would say my greatest weakness has been my lack of proper planning in the past. I would over commit myself with too many variant tasks, then not be able to fully accomplish each as I would like. However, since I've come to recognize that weakness, I've taken steps to correct it. For example, I now carry a planning calendar in my pocket so that I can plan all of my appointments and "to do" items. Here, let me show you how I have this week planned out . . .
  
8. **Q - If I were to ask your professors to describe you, what would they say?**  
**R -** I believe they would say I'm a very energetic person, that I put my mind to the task at hand and see to it that it's accomplished. They would say that if they ever had something that needed to be done, I was the person who they could always depend on to see that it was accomplished. They would say that I always

took a keen interest in the subjects I was studying and always sought ways to apply the knowledge in real world settings. Am I just guessing that they would say these things? No, in fact, I'm quite certain they would say those things because I have with me, several letters of recommendation from my professors, and those are their very words. Let me show you . . .

9. **Q - What qualities do you feel a successful manager should have?**

**R -** The key quality should be leadership - the ability to be the visionary for the people who are working under them. The person who can set the course and direction for subordinates. A manager should also be a positive role model for others to follow. The highest calling of a true leader is inspiring others to reach the highest of their abilities. I'd like to tell you about a person who I consider to be a true leader . . .

10. **Q - If you had to live your life over again, what would you change?**

**R -** That's a good question. I realize that it can be very easy to continually look back and wish that things had been different in the past. But I also realize that things in the past cannot be changed, that only things in the future can be changed. That's why I continually strive to improve myself each and every day and that's why I'm working hard to continually increase my knowledge in the \_\_\_\_\_ field. That's also the reason why I want to become the very best \_\_\_\_\_ your company has ever had. To make positive change. And all of that is still in the future. So in answer to your question, there isn't anything in my past that I would change. I look only to the future to make changes in my life.

In reviewing the above responses, please remember that these are sample answers. Please do not rehearse them verbatim or adopt them as your own. They are meant to stir your creative juices and get you thinking about how to properly answer the broader range of questions that you will face.

### **Fifty Standard Interview Questions**

It is not enough to have solid answers only for the above questions. You need to be prepared for the full spectrum of questions that may be presented. For further practice, make sure you go through the required mock interview and for further review look at some of the following questions:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What do you want to do with your life?
3. Do you have any actual work experience?
4. How would you describe your ideal job?
5. Why did you choose this career?
6. When did you decide on this career?
7. What goals do you have in your career?
8. How do you plan to achieve these goals?
9. How do you evaluate success?
10. Describe a situation in which you were successful.
11. What do you think it takes to be successful in this career?
12. What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction in your life?
13. If you had to live your life over again, what would you change?
14. Would you rather work with information or with people?
15. Are you a team player?
16. What motivates you?
17. Why should I hire you?
18. Are you a goal-oriented person?
19. Tell me about some of your recent goals and what you did to achieve them.
20. What are your short-term goals?
21. What is your long-range objective?
22. What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
23. Where do you want to be ten years from now?
24. Do you handle conflict well?
25. Have you ever had a conflict with a boss or professor? How did you resolve it?
26. What major problem have you had to deal with recently?
27. Do you handle pressure well?

28. What is your greatest strength?
29. What is your greatest weakness?
30. If I were to ask one of your professors to describe you, what would he or she say?
31. Why did you choose to attend your college?
32. What changes would you make at your college?
33. How has your education prepared you for your career?
34. What were your favorite classes? Why?
35. Do you enjoy doing independent research?
36. Who were your favorite professors? Why?
37. Why is your GPA not higher?
38. Do you have any plans for further education?
39. How much training do you think you'll need to become a productive employee?
40. What qualities do you feel a successful manager should have?
41. Why do you want to work in the \_\_\_\_\_ industry?
42. What do you know about our company?
43. Why are you interested in our company?
44. Do you have any location preferences?
45. How familiar are you with the community that we're located in?
46. Will you relocate? In the future?
47. Are you willing to travel? How much?
48. Is money important to you?
49. How much money do you need to make to be happy?
50. What kind of salary are you looking for?

Don't just read these questions, *practice and rehearse the answers*. Don't let the company interview be the first time you have actually formulated an answer in spoken words. It is not enough to think about them in your head - practice! Sit down with a friend, a significant other, or your roommate (an especially effective critic, given the amount of preparation to date) and go through all of the questions. Make the most of every single interview opportunity by being fully prepared!

### **One Interview Question That Nearly Every College Student Fails**

Here it is. The one question that nearly every college student fails to answer properly and will continue to send students to their interview ruin is:

*"Why did you choose to attend this college?"*

You have spent the last several years knocking the college, the professors, the administration, the dorms, the food in the dining halls, whatever, and now you suddenly need to come to its defense. And if you have not thought of an answer before the interview, you definitely will not come up with a valid one on the spot.

So think about it in advance. What is the real reason you are attending your college? Is it because of the academic program? Is it because of extracurricular programs, athletics, being close to home, a "Party" school, great dating opportunities, or everyone else turned you down?

Once you acknowledge your true reason for attending, you will need to temper your response with some directed reasoning, tie in what it is about your college that makes it worthwhile from the perspective of the employer. Your response should emphasize what it is about the school that makes it an attractive training ground for this employer. You need to talk about your college as the ideal training facility for becoming a \_\_\_\_\_ with that company. You might find it best to give a "process answer" such as:

*"I originally decided to attend State U. because of its strong general academic reputation and its close proximity to my home, which gave me the opportunity to continue working at my part-time job. During the years I have spent here, I have come to truly appreciate the depth and breadth of the \_\_\_\_\_ curriculum. It has given me an excellent foundation for becoming an immediate contributor in the field."*

Lay on the superlatives, but don't get mushy. You will come to appreciate your time at college later in life, but for now, a few well-chosen words about why it is #1 for you in your career will suffice.

### **One Question to Ask Every Interviewer**

The opportunity for you to ask a question often comes only at the end of the interview. In fact, you are typically offered the chance when the interview is over: "Are there any questions that I can answer for you?" However, there is a question you should ask of every interviewer as early as possible during the course of the interview: "Can you tell me about the position and the type of person you are seeking?"

Properly positioned, this question can provide you with your single greatest opportunity for understanding more about the job and your ability to fill the role. The answer can show you the specific areas of need which you should address during the course of the interview. So it is important to inject this question into the interview as early as possible. You can do this with an out-take question. As you finish an answer, use it as a lead to your question. Be careful not to use this technique as an attempt to control the interview. You merely need to use this technique to inject this critical question.

For example, in answering a "What do you know about our company?" question, you can answer directly with what you know about the company (you have done your research, right?), then state that you do not know as much about the specific position. Turn your answer into the out-take question: "Can you tell me more about the position and the type of person you are seeking?"

Find the strategic opportunity to inject this question as early as possible in the process. Then, as appropriate, frame your answers around what they are seeking in the person to fill the position. Stay within practical and ethical bounds in directing your answers, yet keep in mind the perspective of the interviewer and seek to meet their needs for the position. You will be further ahead in the interview than if you merely take shots in the dark, hoping for your answers to magically hit the mark.

## **Responding to Interview Questions**

### **Being Sincerely Honest**

If you have a tendency to use phrases such as, "To be honest with you," "Just between you and me," "Well, I'll be completely honest about this," or other such qualifiers, eliminate them from your vocabulary. Think about it. A person who uses such a qualifier is implying by its usage that they typically are not being honest. If you are being honest all the time, which you should be, there is no need to use this kind of qualifier.

There are no perfect questions and there are no perfect answers. Just

### **What to Do If You Are Asked an Illegal Question**

The interview is going along smoothly. You are psyched that "this may be the one." And then it happens, out of nowhere. "Are you considering having children?" Or, "How long has your family been in this country?" Or, "Your people place a high value on that, don't they?" Or, "You've done amazingly well for someone in a wheelchair. How long have you had to use one?"

On the surface the question may seem innocent enough. And most of the time, they are truly asked in innocence. Yet the structure and format of the question is entirely illegal. So what do you do? How do you respond?

First of all, it is important to understand the difference between an illegal question and a criminally liable question. Even though a question or comment may have been stated in an illegal form, it does not necessarily mean that a crime has been committed. There is a difference between criminal liability and civil liability. For there to be criminal liability, it requires establishing a motive or intent. Most illegal questions are asked in ignorance, not with malicious intent. Yet there can still be civil recourse, even when there was no criminal motive or intent.

In our politically correct society, we often cry "foul" at the slightest deviation from the accepted standard. But the reality is that most illegal interview questions are asked in true innocence, or better stated, in true ignorance,

ignorance of the law, ignorance of what questions are considered proper, ignorance of how the information may be used by others in a discriminatory way.

Ironically, most illegal questions are asked when the untrained interviewer is trying to be friendly and asks a seemingly innocent question about your personal life or family background. Therefore, any attempt by the candidate to assert their constitutional rights will merely throw up the defense shields and will put an end to mutual consideration. Warning lights go on, sirens sound, and the interviewer begins backing down from what may have been an otherwise very encouraging position.

So what is the proper response? The answer is up to you, but my recommendation is to follow one of two courses of action: answer in brief and move on to a new topic area, or ignore the question altogether and redirect the discussion to a new topic area. The interviewer may even recognize the personal misstep and appreciate your willingness to put it aside and go on.

Unless the question is blatantly discriminatory, and yes, blatant discrimination does still take place, your best option is to move on to other things. But if it is blatant and offensive, you have every right to terminate the interview and walk out.

While laws vary from state to state, there are some definite taboo areas with regard to interview questions which employers should avoid. Following is a brief list of some of the questions that employers should not be asking:

- Questions related to birthplace, nationality, ancestry, or descent of applicant, applicant's spouse, or parents (Example: "Pasquale--is that a Spanish name?")
- Questions related to applicant's sex or marital status (Example: "Is that your maiden name?")
- Questions related to race or color (Example: "Are you considered to be part of a minority group?")
- Questions related to religion or religious days observed (Example: "Does your religion prevent you from working weekends or holidays?")
- Questions related to physical disabilities or handicaps (Example: "Do you have any use of your legs at all?")
- Questions related to health or medical history (Example: "Do you have any pre-existing health conditions?")
- Questions related to pregnancy, birth control, and child care (Example: "Are you planning on having children?")

It should be noted that just because an illegal question has been asked does not necessarily mean a crime has been committed. It is up to a court of law to determine whether the information was used in a discriminatory manner.

### **Don't Commit One of the Worst Interview Sins**

One of the worst "sins" an interviewee can commit is to speak in generalities rather than specifics. It is not enough to say, "I'm a very goal-oriented person." You have to back it up with specifics. For example: "I'm a very goal oriented person. In fact, I regularly update a list of personal and business goals with specific time frames. Since I started keeping this goal list three years ago, I've successfully reached or surpassed over 95% of these goals. I'm confident that the other 5% are also within reach in the coming year."

Don't force the interviewer to continually prompt you for full answers. They will soon grow weary of the process and give up.

If you are prone to using generalities, a sharp interviewer will usually follow with the behavioral question "Can you give me a specific example?" So beware! In fact, a favorite dual interview question of interviewers is: "Do you consider yourself to be goal-oriented?" That to date has been answered 100% of the time with "Yes", at which time the interviewer will follow with: "Can you give me a specific example? It's amazing how many people could not answer the second question or worse yet, attempted to snow their way past it. The best answers come from those who didn't even need the prompting of the second question, but gave specifics in response to the initial question. That is what a good interviewer will be looking for.

An important aspect of being specific is to use the quantitative approach. Don't just say, "I increased productivity." Instead use, "I increased staff meeting productivity 25% in one year within our department by implementing a video teleconferencing system for participants at our other location on campus, thereby reducing unnecessary travel time. And as a by-product of this focus on the needs of our employees, meeting attendance is up over 10%. In fact, the teleconferencing system was showcased in the August newsletter. Let me show you a copy."

## Answering Techniques

### Competency Answering Technique

Competency interviewing can often be the most difficult type of interviewing, both for the interviewer and the interviewee. For the interviewer, it requires understanding the competencies required for success in the position, which often can include a detailed analysis of the position as well as current employees who have succeeded in the position (and their common competencies). Yet when performed accurately, it can produce highly successful results.

An example of a competency is intelligence. The specific competency for a position may require someone with a minimum intelligence level. Competency-based questions which can probe this competency could include:

- "What were your SAT (or ACT) scores?" (the SAT and ACT provide a general guideline to IQ and general intelligence)
- "Describe how you learn new things." (gives the interviewer an opportunity to drill down on any specifics to better understand your learning style and approach)
- "What is your IQ?" (yes, they might actually ask that question and yes, in general, they can)

Don't tell the interviewer how you would do it; tell them how you did it

These are just a few sample questions on one specific competency (intelligence). Other competencies which may be measured may include creativity, analytical reasoning, strategic skills, tactical skills, risk taking, integrity, drive, organizational skills, teamwork, willingness to change, enthusiasm, ambition and life balance, just to name a few. A fully developed competency model may have as many as 30-50 different competencies that are being evaluated. And yes, it can produce a more grueling interview process.

For the interviewee, it may not be readily apparent that the interviewer is evaluating you on a competency-based model. And even if you are aware of a competency question, you likely will not know what the requirements are for the competency for the position. Just because there is a competency being measured for a position does not mean that it must be at a high level for success. Successful competency interviewing focuses on those key competencies which are critical to success in the position.

So how do you answer competency questions? You should answer first by probing key competencies. If you have the opportunity to ask a question in a competency interview (or almost any in-depth interview, for that matter), it should be this one:

- "What do you consider to be the top three key competencies for this position?"

Or, stated in another format:

- "What do you consider to be the top three critical success factors for this position?"

Note that with both questions, you are hitting both hot button phrases; "key competencies" and "critical success factors." In fact, if you ever hear the phrase "CSF" being used in a business setting, they are likely talking about "Critical Success Factor." or "CSF's" for short.

Either question will drill to what the interviewer considers to be the key competencies for the position. It will then be your responsibility to answer how you fit each one of these competencies. There are three approaches you can use to answer:

1. Answer the three competencies in summary format as your response to their reply.
2. Answer each of the competencies in your following interview question responses.
3. Post interview in your thank you letter.

You must be ready to align these competencies with your background in order to win the position. Don't worry though, since almost none of your competition will be going this extra step. Just by making a sincere and focused effort, you will set yourself far apart from the field.

P.S. Don't be surprised when you get a different answer to this question from each interviewer. Seldom is an employer so well organized and process driven that all of the interviewers are in complete synch on the top three competencies needed for each position. But use that diversity of opinion as an opportunity to emphasize those aspects of your background that are the most important for each individual interviewer.

### **Behavioral Answering Technique**

From your side of the desk, the behavioral interviewing approach can appear somewhat difficult at first. The interviewer will be consistently drilling down to specific examples in your past. When you have difficulty coming up with a specific example, a well-trained behavioral interviewer will not let you off the hook, but will provide you with a prompt to continue thinking until you can provide an example. The dreaded silence which follows can be uncomfortable, very uncomfortable, unless you prepare in advance.

As you consider the variety of questions which can and will be posed over the course of a series of interviews, keep in mind that you will not always have the right answer to every question. But if you are well prepared, you will have a variety of examples to draw from which will give you the background to formulate your answers.

The Behavioral Answering Technique involves answering questions with specific examples, whether or not you have been asked to provide them. This technique works in lockstep with an interviewer who is following a behavioral interviewing approach, yet it works even better with those who are not. Because you will always be providing examples and stories which make you a real person, these real experiences can benefit a future employer.

So as you go through the exercise of interview preparation, carefully consider all questions in an "example" format. Keep in mind the "Can you give me an example ..." follow-up that is the cornerstone of the behavioral interviewing approach. Be prepared to use examples from your work, classes, and extracurricular activities. And be ready to offer up not just any example, but your very best example.

### **Sneak Preview Technique**

A variation on the Show and Tell Technique is to provide the company with a sneak preview of what they can expect of you as an employee. While Show and Tell looks backward at material you have developed in the past, the Sneak Preview Technique focuses on the future. This technique works well when you have been given an indication, perhaps in a previous on-campus interview or phone interview, that there is a certain level of proficiency which the company is seeking. Take this as your cue to prepare for that question in advance.

If you are just like everyone else, the interviewer is not interested. They are not hiring everyone else.

An example of the use of this technique comes from a Multimedia Developer, who was asked in an initial interview if he knew a particular multimedia presentation software package. While he acknowledged that he did not at the time, he promised to research the package and provide a demo of his results at the next interview.

He found the presentation software to be very similar to one he had worked with extensively. After developing a full presentation based on company marketing materials, he presented the results in the office of his future manager. He noted that the presentation was put together in his spare time with little training. The company would, of course, receive a much higher level of performance upon hiring him full-time in the position. That sneak preview not only landed him a job offer, but also expanded the scope of initial responsibilities on the job and his overall pay.

### **Proof Positive Technique**

Another variation of the Show and Tell Technique and Sneak Preview Technique will provide you with a way to fill a stated need, especially in a later or final interview. The need for a required proficiency may be requested in the

form of a "Have you ever . . ." question. If the answer is no, you can still show proficiency by offering to provide them with the output or results in a short period of time. This is an ideal way to answer the unanswerable question. Ask the interviewer for time to solve the problem, and then take it home; do your research, prepare your result and present your solution. Then ask for the job.

You cannot prepare for this in advance, as with the previous techniques. But it is an excellent way to respond to an interview question for which you have no previous experience to reference. Everyone says they are a fast learner. This technique is your way to prove it.

For example, a Computer Science major was asked if he had ever developed Web pages in HTML. He stated that he had not, but went on to say that he was a quick study and to prove the point, he would take the corporate flyer which he had been given, put it in HTML format and deliver the result via e-mail by 8:00 a.m. the following morning. He went straight from the interview to the library, spent the better part of the evening reading and researching other Web sites and delivered the final product on time the following morning. Proof positive indeed!

### **Compelling Story Technique**

Once you have grown accustomed to the Behavioral Answering Technique, you can expand your answers by turning your examples into compelling stories. Instead of merely providing an example that suits the question, weave the example into a compelling story with personality, flair and interest. Captivate your audience by providing the details and nuances that bring your story to life.

We all love to hear a good story.

Consider yourself the author of a piece of fiction. As you put your plot into words, you must give life and meaning to the characters and surroundings. Provide the same in telling your compelling stories. Build the framework and background for the story. Add the elements of interest and intrigue. Give the plot twists. And show how the hero, you, saved the day in the end.

We all have compelling stories in our past. We tell them to our friends, our family, and our loved ones. We laugh, we cry, and our hearts yearn for more. Yet we sometimes lose these stories over time, or bury them in our long-term memory bank, only to dredge them up at reunion time.

The key to retaining these compelling stories for your interviewing is to write them down. Go over the questions and bring to mind the stories you can weave to provide your example in living color. And as another compelling story occurs to you or as you find yourself in the telling of another interesting tale, ask yourself if the story will provide potential substance in your interviewing. If so, write it down.

After a period of time, you will have a collection of compelling stories to guide you through your interviews. As you become proficient in angling these stories to fit your needs, you will find yourself steering to these stories to illustrate your points.

One example of a compelling story was told to an interviewer by a recent college undergraduate, who answered the interviewer's question about her organization skills by telling how she planned and organized the alumni dinner during homecoming weekend, including full details of the management of twenty different student volunteers and coordination with six different campus departments. The event was a resounding success, but there were several challenges which she needed to overcome. And each of these challenges provided a compelling story of its own, as she was able to show her ability to plan, organize, and develop a team toward eventual success. In the end, she received a personal letter of recommendation from the President of the university, which she presented to me as validation of her extraordinary efforts.

Another compelling story was given to an interviewer by a current student in reference to a question about his lower than expected grade point average. He related to me the amount of work which he had put in to finance his college education, averaging thirty hours per week and occasionally putting in as much as fifty hours per week. He was eventually promoted to department manager, even though the employer knew he would be leaving after completing his degree. He recounted the story of the meeting with the employer in which he tried to back away from the management responsibilities, asking that one of the other department employees be promoted. The employer called in the four other workers in the department, who each personally asked that he take on the job as their manager. This

student successfully shifted the focus from his lower than expected grades to his outstanding performance on the job by the use of a compelling story.

By maintaining eye contact you will know if your story is connecting with the interviewer. This is where the interviewer will show their interest. If your story is not connecting with the interviewer, decrease the amount of detail and drive home your point quickly.

Depending on the personality type of the interviewer, you may need to adjust the length of the story, yet compelling stories work with all personality types. With the extreme driver or analytical personality types, you will need to keep the details to a minimum, while quickly making your point. Usually two or three shorter stories are better than one long story. At the other extreme, for feeling personality types, you will perform better with a longer story and more details. How do you detect the difference in personality types? By continuously striving to stay personally connected with the interviewer. If this connection appears to be lost or fading during the telling of a compelling story, shorten the story and come to your point quickly. On the other hand, if you have a captive audience who is hanging on your every word, provide all the necessary details.

The key to using compelling stories is that stories are remembered. Stories are what make you human. Stories are what put a face on you in the mind of the interviewer. And stories are what they will come back to when you are being sold to others internally. When that time comes, you have given your interviewer ammo for helping others to see why you should go on to the next step in the hiring process. Or be offered the job.

### **Pregnant Pause Technique**

If you are succeeding in presenting a series of compelling stories during the interview, you will likely develop a rapport which places the communication on a more interactive level.

However, as you are presenting information during the interview, you may need to test the waters with the length of your answers. This can be done easily with the Pregnant Pause. As you are telling a story or example, pause at the conclusion of the story. This will be the cue to the interviewer to take back control with another question or redirection of the original question. But if the interviewer continues eye contact during the pause, use this as a cue to go on and provide another example.

Most interviews do not have established ground rules, agendas, or programs. They can and do change and adapt based on the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. So how long should your interview answers be typically? It is always a good idea to keep your answers within a two minute maximum. But you will have no idea at the outset if the interviewer has two questions or twenty. By proper use of the pause, you give the interviewer the opportunity to stick with their overall plan and schedule. And, if appropriate, you can continue to give further details or an entirely new example.

A side note to the pause is the converse reaction; an interviewer should not have to interrupt your answer. If you are interrupted, give control back to the interviewer. Take it as a tip that you will need to shorten and tighten up your following answers.

One additional side note: never interrupt or finish a sentence for an interviewer. Even if they talk extraordinarily slow, be patient. Remember, they are the one who holds the ticket for admission.

### **Quotable Quotes Technique**

If you want to add credibility to what you say about yourself, tell the interviewer what other people have said about you. The best quotes are not words others have said about you to you, but about you to others. The best way to provide this information is to quote the other person, referring to your-self in the third person.

When you can quote what others have said about you, you have elevated the view of who you are to the shoulders of others. From that vantage point, your value increases substantially. Take note of what others say about you. And be ready to quote the quotable.

*"My boss always said that if something needs to get done, give it to Jane and you know it will not only be done right away, it will also be done right."*

*"My professor once told my academic advisor, 'Tim is the one person I can continuously count on to give a 110% effort in every class.'"*

*"My coach called me 'The Dave' and coined the phrase, 'Give it to The Dave' when he had a game that needed saving. Even now, after I'm no longer on the team, he still uses 'Give it to The Dave' as his way of saying that it's time to put in the closer to win the game."*

### **Hero Technique**

Has there ever been a time in your life when you saved the day? "Hero" stories almost always make compelling interview stories. Was there a time when you put in the above-and-beyond effort? Or maybe a time when you did something that dramatically changed the course of events, for the positive, of course. Or perhaps even a time when you were a true hero, by saving someone's life or an act of great bravery? If so, work the story into your collection of compelling stories.

The difficulty with true hero stories can be in finding a successful bridge to the story. But with careful thought, you will find ample opportunities.

A recent interviewee told of the time when he literally saved someone from drowning in a lake, while cutting his feet on sharp objects trying to get to the drowning victim. This story came after a question about reaching goals in his life. Not sure how he got there? His bridge, after telling about his career goal of working for the interviewers company, was to say that he was very strong at keeping focused on the goal and not letting side issues deter him from achieving the objective. And he then went on to tell the story of how he saved the drowning victim, in spite of injuring himself in the process. He only realized he had cut his feet after he had carried the girl out of the lake. Thus, his focus is confirmed and the story is now ingrained in me, probably for posterity.

Another interviewee told of the time that she was given a surprise party by a customer of the company she worked for. They were all so appreciative of the hard work that she put in that they gave her a going away party when she went back to school. This story was given in response to a question about how responsive she was of the needs of others.

Another interviewee told of the time that he hit the game-winning RBI in the final game of a softball tournament. He told the story in response to a question about teamwork and did it in a way to show that all the members of the team had contributed to the final outcome, even though he was the one that was carried off the field by his teammates. He used it as an example to show how he valued the bonding of the team and how each member was able to perform at a much higher level than would have been possible individually.

Be confident in who you are and what you can bring to the job and position. Then pass that confidence to the interviewer, so that he/she may share your level of confidence with others.

And finally, another interviewee told the story of sinking the eight-foot putt for victory on the first hole of sudden-death playoff in a golf tournament. He was asked a question about his ability to handle pressure and he used the story to show that he actually thrived on pressure and performed at his peak while under pressure.

Hero stories play well in the minds of interviewers. We all love to hear a good story and hero stories are often some of the best. Think about the times in your life when you were the hero. And begin to weave your hero story or stories into your interviewing answer repertoire.

### **Parroting Technique**

If a question is unclear to you, it is entirely appropriate to ask a clarifying question or paraphrase the question to make sure you understand. "Parrot back" the question in your own words to make sure you have the correct

meaning. Don't assume or make a "best guess" of what the interviewer is looking for. They are the only ones who truly know what they want, so a well-placed "Just so that I understand, what you are asking is ..." question will serve you far better than treading down an unknown path.

The Parroting Technique will also serve you well as a temporary stall when you do not have a ready answer.

### **Safety Valve Technique**

What do you do when you have been asked a question that you know you have a good answer to, but cannot think of it immediately? Don't get caught using the typical "I know the answer to that and I will give it to you as soon as I can remember what it is" line that is most often blurted out either figuratively or literally by some. Instead, use the Safety Valve Technique. Basically, this technique allows some of the "steam to escape" while you formulate your answer. If handled well, it will appear almost seamless to even the most experienced interviewer.

You have full control over your answers. Make certain they are good ones.

Here is how it works. The interviewer has just asked you a question for which you know you have a good answer, but you just cannot think of it at that moment. First of all, repeat back the question with the Parroting Technique. This will buy you a few precious seconds before going on to the next level.

If you still cannot put together the answer, you have two "safety valves" left. First, comment on the importance of the question and its context, "I understand the importance of this in regard to ..." If you still haven't formulated your answer, turn the question back to the interviewer for comment, "Can you tell me how \_\_\_\_\_ (subject area) specifically plays a role within your company?"

This technique takes some practice to avoid the "snow job" look, but if you practice it enough, you will find yourself quite ready and able to squeeze precious seconds out of even the most seasoned interviewers.

### **Reframing Technique**

The word "control" is often used with regard to interviewing. Often it is used incorrectly, by giving the interviewee the impression they should attempt to take full "control" over the questioning in the actual interview. This is, quite simply, a terrible mistake. If you attempt to take one-sided control of the interviewer and the interview, you may win the initial battle, but will certainly lose the war. I will let you take control, but I will press the "reject" button as soon as you leave my office.

The right use of "control" in the interview is your ability to control both the context and perspective of your answers. You can do this effectively by utilizing the Reframing Technique. To do this, you should always attempt to answer the questions as straightforwardly as possible initially, but then reframe the original question to illustrate an area of your background that can further enhance your overall image. This requires a thorough understanding of your strong points so you have a planned direction and course. By properly using the Reframing Technique, you will find yourself covering the same core topics which reflect your greatest strengths in nearly every interview, regardless of the questions used as the launching point.

For example, if you are asked who your favorite professor is, you might give a short answer about a particular professor, and then reframe the question by telling why that professor is your favorite. "She has the ability to tie in all of the classroom theory with practical business applications; in fact, it was her inspiration that encouraged me to participate in a two-week internship over Winter Break, where I combined my classroom knowledge with practical experience in the field of \_\_\_\_\_."

Reframing can take many forms, but at its best there is always a solid connection between the original question and the reframed emphasis. If the reformatting of the original question goes into a totally unrelated topic area, it will be counted against you. The key is to stay within the same general frame and use the question as a launch pad in a new, yet related direction. When done smoothly, the interviewer will not even be aware of the slight shift in focus. And you will have the opportunity to put forth your strongest points. Know your strong points and all the bridges you can use to reach them so that you can use reframing to your advantage in the interview.

### Experience of a Lifetime Technique

One of the most difficult questions at the entry level can be the "experience" question. If you have applicable work experience in your chosen occupation, great! Make the most of it and capitalize on this area to differentiate yourself from your competition.

But what if you don't? What if your experience consists primarily of flipping burgers at McDonald's? Don't answer apologetically, as most do, that you really don't have any real experience to speak of. Instead, use the Experience of a Lifetime Technique to solidify your background and confirm your ability to do the job: "Thank you for asking me about my experience. I understand the need to review my past experience to determine whether or not I'm able to accomplish the tasks necessary for this job. I have, in fact, had a lifetime of experience that is directly related to this job. For example, I've learned ..."

Then go on to relate life experiences and what those have taught you or how they have prepared you for this job. These responses can include the generic, which would apply:

- to any position ("I've learned the ethics of hard work and seeing a job through to completion, whatever the cost, during my summers working for my uncle on his farm. One summer, my uncle broke his leg, and the entire family counted on me to . . .")
- to the specific ("I've learned through my classes how to utilize object-oriented development tools to efficiently develop modular systems that can be used across a series of platforms. In fact, in the capstone project in my final year ...").

Then close by detailing your personal attributes: "I've learned that for a company to succeed, it needs people who are ready and willing to put forth their very best effort, people who aren't afraid to work hard, people who are dependable. That is the experience that I bring to you and your company."

Modify the above to suit your own needs, but please don't regress to the "I really don't have any experience" line. The interview is as good as over the minute you say it.

### Articulation Factor

The ability to articulate your background is a combination of good preparation which you have full control over and vocabulary/enunciation which you have little control over. Your "smartness," "sharpness," "quickness," "aggressiveness," and "brightness" are all attributes that are evaluated based upon your articulation. If you have "lazy lips" you may want to practice enunciating and forming your words more clearly. And whatever you do, don't continually reach for elusive words to perfectly portray your thoughts and feelings. Any practiced interviewer prefers an individual who is comfortable within their vocabulary level than one who is always searching at the level above.

In practicing your articulation, take careful note of the "quickie" words which we tend to develop in our everyday speech pattern. Words like "gonna", "yeah", "ya' know", and "kinda" are all killers. They can make you sound uneducated and coarse, and they have a habit of repeating. We have all probably had a parent or sibling point out the use of "ya' know" in our speaking.

Use words you know  
and are  
comfortable with.  
Don't use words  
you think the  
interviewer thinks  
you should know

In addition, you may have particular words or phrases which you use for emphasis which can become particularly pronounced in the interview. These would include "to tell you the truth" and "truthfully" and "basically" and "OK, well" and "Like, . . ." As a side note, one interviewer once counted the number of times a candidate said, "to tell you the truth" after it became particularly repetitive. She said it over fifteen times, and the interviewer began to question her truthfulness.

Make sure you are fully prepared for the interview, on your background and background on the interviewer's company. Proper research will help you formulate your answers in a clear and succinct manner. Nothing will kill an interview quicker than someone who cannot recall personal events.

### **Dirty Dog Theory**

We all love the dog, except when he needs a bath, the same with interviewing. Professional interviewers have conducted countless interviews where things seemed to be going just fine, when suddenly the interviewee began a series of complaints about others. And suddenly the spotless interviewee has become hopelessly stained.

Is there anything worse than a complainer? Nope, nothing is worse. We all know one, and we all want to distance ourselves from that person, company or otherwise.

So remember that the interview is not your forum for griping. If you gripe about your current or past employers or professors or make note of any shortcomings in your life of missed expectations (even though they may be few!), you have just relegated yourself to the position of "complainer." And complainers are all too common already within most companies. Why would any company hire new complainers? They won't. Be positive about everything. Case closed.

Don't make  
excuses for  
shortcomings.  
Instead, point  
to your  
strengths

### **Abraham Lincoln Technique**

It goes without saying that talking down the competition is a no-no. But talking about the competition can be quite different, if handled appropriately.

When Abraham Lincoln was arguing a case in court, he would usually argue both sides of the case to the jury. He would first take the opponent's side of the issue and then his client's side. But note: he was always very precise in bringing out more favorable facts for his client than for his opponent. Both sides were covered on a positive note, although his client's side was always more favorable.

At IBM, they followed this same principle. They were not allowed to talk down their competition. They could acknowledge them and their products, yet IBM employees never put them down. They were required to sell IBM on the strength of IBM, not on the weakness of others. Their customers appreciated their willingness to accept the competition and seek to rise above on their own merits rather than try to push the competition down to a lower level.

So if you are confronted with a comparison to your competition, be prepared to fully acknowledge the strength of your competition, and then follow with what you feel are your own greater assets.

An example in applying this technique is how to handle the potential negative when the interviewer asks why you are lacking in a particular area, be it grades, work experience, extra-curricular activities, etc. You need to first speak well of the others. Then you need to establish your own case, which can also include using the Reframing Technique. An example would be in response to a question about a low GPA:

*"I'm sure that there are many who have put more time and energy into their GPA than I did--and I congratulate them on their efforts. Grades are important, but my overall focus has been to develop myself as the very best accountant I can become. For me, this has involved not only time in the classroom, but also time in applying these skills in real world situations. Because of that focus, I have spent 15 to 20 hours per week working as a bookkeeper during my final two years. While I was not able to devote myself full-time to pure academics, I feel the combination of academic and work experience has more fully prepared me for the accounting field than full-time academics alone."*

### **Pride of Ownership Technique**

Not sure how you are doing in the interview? Want to greatly increase your odds? You can do both with the Pride of Ownership Technique. To use this simple technique during the course of the interview, simply start giving your replies and asking your questions in terms of ownership, as if you are already part of the company. One way is to formulate the last part of your response to a "Teamwork" question with, "What kind of departmental structure will I be working in with your company?" Note the important difference. You are not asking, "What kind of departmental structure does your company have?" This is detached. You need to attach yourself, take pride of ownership in the company.

There are two reasons for attaching yourself to the company in your responses. First and foremost, it will establish the link between you and the company. This is critical in helping the interviewer visualize you actually working for the company; the offer will never come if they cannot get past this step. Second, it provides you with instant feedback as to how you are doing within the interview. If the interviewer balks at your question or reshapes it by unlinking, especially by adding the "if" word in restating your question, you have a pretty good indication that you have not fully sold them on you. But if they accept your language and begin talking about you as if you are a part of the company, you are probably in a good position to close the sale.

The perceived value of any product is directly proportional to the number of people fighting for it.

### Competitive Posture Technique

It's important to maintain a competitive posture in the interview. The employer should be aware that they are not your only suitor. But remember that there is a delicate balance between letting the employer know you really want to work for them and that if they don't make an offer, you will go with another company. The best way I can illustrate it is with the dating game. Sure, you love him/her and only him/her, but if things don't work out, there are plenty of other him/hers banging on your door asking for a date. Right? Well, maybe it doesn't equate directly to your personal life, but you get the drift.

This posturing is very simple to incorporate into your interview language. Frame it in the form of a simple 1-2-3 engage/disengage/re-engage statement. Example:

1. After what I've heard from everyone here at the company, I'm more convinced than ever that I would be an excellent contributor to your team. Just say the word and I'm ready to come to work for you.
2. Of course, I do still have several other interviews currently pending.
3. But at this point in time, yours is the company I would most like to work for.

If you feel comfortable with closing the sale, you can add the "Are you ready to make an offer?" question to the last statement above. The point is that you have put a limited time offer on your enthusiasm, if they want you, all of you, they better move quickly and decisively.

### Money Response Technique

If the "money question" is asked early in the interview, as it often is, the best response is: "What would a person with my background and qualifications typically earn in this position with your company?" The best response, if asked late in the interview process is: "I am ready to consider your very best offer." This is one time you don't want to be specific. If you give specifics you lose, you will either be too low or too high, costing yourself thousands of dollars or possibly even keeping yourself from getting the job.

There is more to life than money. But money does provide a good start.

If you are pressed by the interviewer for specific numbers, don't put them off with more than one "end run" response. First, make sure you have done your homework on the expected salary range for your field. The salary surveys usually are skewed toward the high end, so take them with a large dose of conservative adjustment. The best surveys are from those who graduated within the last year in your major from your school. You can possibly locate such information through your Career Center, Alumni Office, or your personal network of contacts. A business grad from Stanford is going to be earning a lot more than a business grad from Podunk U. Know the "going rate" for your major, your school, and the field that you are considering entering. And make sure you know it before you get propositioned with the money question.

Armed with this information ask the interviewer: "What is the general salary range for new hires in this position?" If the entire range is acceptable, respond with: "That would be within my expected starting range, depending on the entire salary and benefits package." If only the top end of the range is acceptable, respond with: "The upper end of the range is what I have been discussing with the other companies that are currently interested." If the range is below your expected starting salary range, respond carefully with: "The other companies I am currently speaking with are considering me at a salary somewhat higher than that range. Of course, money is only one element and I will be evaluating the overall package." Do your best not to get pinned to specific numbers, but if they do mention a number and ask if it would be acceptable to you, respond by saying: "I would encourage you to make the formal offer. What is most important is the opportunity to work for you and your company. I am confident that your offer will be

competitive." Remember, don't do any negotiating until you have a formal offer in hand. When that finally happens, seek guidance on shaping it into the best offer.

### **Lockdown Technique**

If you are truly interested in the job, one thing you should do at the end of the interview is recap:

1. why you feel you are the best candidate for the job (give two or three of your strongest attributes and/or qualifications), and
2. restate your interest in the position by asking for the job

Don't expect the employer to make the first move. Let them know of your interest and desire to work for them.

If you want  
the job, tell  
me so.

It is interesting to note that less than 1% of all college students actually ask for the job.

It's almost as if they assume it to be a given, but it's not. So those who take this extra step will put themselves far beyond the rest of the competition. If I know that you want the job, that you really want the job, it makes my job as the interviewer that much easier and will greatly increase the odds of an offer either on the spot, it does happen, or in the very near future.

Remember that you cannot close the entire sale except with the person who can actually make the entire purchase. So if you are interviewing with Human Resources, close by asking to move forward to the next step in the process, which will likely require meeting with the hiring manager. When you interview with the hiring manager, you are ready to close on generating an offer.

## **Interviewing On-Campus**

### **Ace Your On-Campus Interview**

Do not take your on-campus interview lightly. Although it was "free" to you and easier to come by than direct contact with the company, the competition is intense.

To ace your on-campus interview, you should read and study all of the information contained in this document; all of the preparation, all of the questions, all of the techniques, and all of the strategies. Be prepared in advance. If you treat every interview as if it were your last in both a positive and a negative sense, you will be more focused on affecting the end result.

Consider the on-campus interview for a moment. You will be spending twenty to thirty minutes in a tiny cubicle with a total stranger. This person will subsequently decide whether you will ever have a chance of working for their company. The best you can hope for is to avoid being disqualified, which only takes you one step further into the interviewing maze. One little mistake, one little error, and you could be history.

Welcome to the  
competitive  
world. Welcome  
to reality.

Actually, the entire process seems rather absurd, except for the fact that you will not get a job without playing the interviewing game. And on-campus interviewing is often the starting point for the interviewing process.

On-campus interviewing is not simply meeting with three, five or even ten companies and then picking the one you want to work for. To maximize your on-campus interviewing success, you need to first maximize both the quality and quantity of the interviews, and then maximize your interview efficiency. It is not enough to just "show up" for the interviews and hope that someone will miraculously offer you a job. You have to perform at your peak to gain any mileage from on-campus interviewing.

On-campus interviews are a gift. They will be by far the easiest interviews for you to find. But you should not depend exclusively on it to guarantee you after-graduation employment. There are far more companies than just those that are visiting your campus. Many of the best companies may not be visiting any campuses. So make sure to also take note of the additional sections on how to reach out to these "other" companies.

On-campus interviewing is a gift. Spend it wisely.

### **Bragging Point Technique**

After the initial introductions are made, there is usually a long, silent walk back to the interview room. It may be a short period of time, but it can often feel like a death march. Instead of walking silently behind the interviewer, take the opportunity to establish a basic level of rapport. As you begin "the walk," whether it is 5 feet or 500 feet, comment to the interviewer, "I appreciate the opportunity to meet with you today." Wait for a response, and then prompt with a well-selected bragging point about the interviewer's company, showing that you have done your research.

A bragging point is something the employees of the company would be particularly proud to note. It can usually be found in the President's letter to the shareholders in the company's annual report. An example would be: "I understand that your company has been growing at over 30 percent per year for the last five years. It must be an exciting time to be working for XYZ." Always choose what you feel will be the number one bragging point for the company. Turn the tables and look at it from the employer's point of view. What would be their selling point in attracting new employees to work for their company? When you show that you have detailed knowledge of the company in one area, it will be assumed that you have even greater knowledge about the company. Set up this bragging point as an opener on your way to the interview room and you will not only show your knowledge of the company, but you will also set a level of rapport which will guide you through the course of the interview.

### **How to Immediately Impress an On-campus Recruiter**

If you have done your job well in researching the company, carry the company information with you to the interview, not packed away in your folder, but out where it can be seen. Most recruiters will notice immediately that you have an advanced edition of what they may have been giving to others at the end of the interview. It shows that you have done your homework.

Where to get this information? The Career Center usually will have a company folder with materials gathered from past visits. Do not worry if the information is 6 months or a year out of date, since it will give the recruiter the opportunity to update you on the latest.

Make sure you know the information inside and out. This is not just a prop for show, since you will be expected to know more about the company if you have it. Be ready and willing to demonstrate your basic understanding of the company when asked. Good preparation will always impress an on-campus recruiter, whose day often consists of explaining, over and over, what their company does; finally, someone who understands in advance. You have made an instant connection.

### **Securing the Company-Site Interview**

You know the feeling. You have just completed an on-campus interview with a company that you are truly impressed with. You really want to work for this company. It's almost like falling in love all over again, well, maybe you don't spend every waking hour thinking of them, but the butterflies in the stomach seem fairly familiar.

So you sit back to wait for them to take the next step. And then it happens, the infamous "Dear John" letter. How could this happen? How could they possibly fall for someone else when you are the only one for them? How could they possibly give their heart to another?

On-campus is only the first step. You need to pass the company-site interview before an offer will be made.

In job search, as well as romance, you cannot sit by the phone waiting for it to ring. You snooze, you lose.

Just going through the motions of the on-campus interview is not enough to secure the company-site second interview. And in almost all cases, the second interview is the next step toward the eventual prize of the job offer and meaningful life after college.

The first and most important step toward securing the second interview is to establish continuity at the end of the first interview. The typical "Do you have any questions?" should leave you open for two select questions about the company; remember to do your research in advance so that these questions are appropriate and specific to the

employer. You might even test the waters with a Pride of Ownership question to establish the connection between you and the company.

Then on to your final series of closing questions: "From everything I have heard today, combined with my research about your company, I am very interested in going on to the next step. Please let me know, are you interested in me?" I know, it sounds rather bold. But remember, you are in love! Now is not the time to woo from afar. Let them know where you stand, which gives you the right to ask the reciprocal question. Assuming they have at least a mildly encouraging response, ask your final question: "What is our next step?" Take careful note of the actions that need to be taken. This will be the chart for your course in securing that vital company-site second interview. And if one has not already been offered, ask for a business card.

### **On-Campus Final Impression Technique**

Want to leave an excellent final impression? Write out your "Thank You" note immediately after the interview and hand-deliver it before the interviewer leaves at the end of the day. Final decisions for company-site callbacks are usually made the same day, so strike while it still matters. If you were not the last interview on their schedule, sit down in the waiting room and scribe your response on the "Thank You" stationery that you brought with you. Then give the card to the receptionist and ask them to please pass on the card to the interviewer. If you are the last interview of the day, write a very quick note and get it to your interviewer before he or she leaves; most recruiters spend a few minutes organizing the accumulated information before departing. You can even have part of the note, the "thanks for your time" opening, pre-written ahead of time. Then track the person down before he or she leaves the building; beware of alternate escape routes.

If you are unable to get your thank you card to the interviewer, call the office and ask for the interviewer's voicemail. When messages are checked that evening, your personal thank you will make a lasting impression.

If you are unable to do any of the above, send an e-mail thank you to the e-mail address on the business card.

By taking these simple steps, you will definitely stand out from the crowd.

## **Interviewing at the Company Site**

### **Company-site Interviewing Success**

The company-site interview is often the final step in the interview process before an eventual job offer. However, you first need to survive the close scrutiny that comes along with it. Instead of just meeting with one person, you may be meeting with three or four. Instead of a simple half-hour interview, you may be subjected to a half- or full-day of interviews, and tests, but all with the promised reward dangling within your reach.

The company-site interview is also your final opportunity to evaluate the company. You will be given the opportunity to see the inside of the company and meet with some of the key people. Possibly some of the people you will be working with. And you will gain a better understanding of the true work environment.

### **Voice Warm-up Technique**

Have you ever been awakened by the phone in the middle of the night? "Ha-l-lo?" And you wonder where that frog-like voice comes from? Your vocal cords are simply not warmed up yet.

The same thing can happen at the company-site interview. You have little opportunity to actually speak until you arrive at the company-site. And then you are expected to talk nearly non-stop for the remainder of the day.

Take the time to warm up your voice on the way to the interview. If you are driving, turn on a radio station you enjoy and sing along. Top of your lungs is just fine. If you are taking a cab, either spend time talking with the cabbie or ask to have the radio turned on. Again, sing along, although a little more quietly than if you were in your own car.

In any case, use and stretch your vocal cords before beginning your day of interviewing. You will benefit with a clear and resonant voice.

### **Lobby Waiting Technique**

As you arrive at the company, take note of the surroundings. If this is the corporate headquarters, take note of the grounds and buildings. These are often major sources of pride for image-conscious companies.

When you arrive in the lobby, you should step up to the receptionist, state your name (present one of your networking business cards if you have them), who you are there to see, and the time of the appointment. Note that you should say you have an "appointment," or "meeting" scheduled, not an interview.

The receptionist will phone your contact and will inform you of your status. "Jane will be with you in just a few minutes. Feel free to have a seat." Do not sit down. Instead, walk around the lobby, looking first at the walls for plaques and awards. Read them all. And if there is a product display, study it closely. Next, look for employee newsletters or other internal documents which may be displayed by the waiting room table. Finally, take note of the industry trade magazines which are being displayed.

This information will give you a very practical feel for the corporate culture, as well as an excellent starting point for rapport-building small talk throughout the day.

### **Sponsor Preparation Technique**

Your sponsor has a vested interest in your doing well at the company-site interview. This person, who may have initially been a screener, is now someone to include in your preparations. You will be the personal representation of what they view as a potential new employee. In a way, their professional reputation is on the line whenever a new person is brought back to the company-site. No one wants to hear the dreaded, "Why did you invite that person back?"

So take advantage of this turn of the tables. The person who was against you is now for you. Be prepared to ask some questions:

- "Who will I be meeting with?"
- "What is this person's background?"
- "What will they be looking for in the interview?"
- "Will there be any other activities scheduled during the day?"
- "What can I do to prepare myself further for your company?"
- "Can you send me additional material about your company?"

You have a free opportunity not only to ask the questions, but to ask for recommendations. You will get a true insider view of what it takes to be successful at your company-site interview. Your sponsor is now your advocate. Build your personal connection to your mutual benefit.

### **Final Arrangements**

Your sponsor will be taking care of setting your schedule and providing you with advance materials. If you have not already filled out an employment application, ask if one will be required. If so, ask to have it sent out in advance, so you can fill it out neatly and completely. Note: "See Resume" is not an appropriate answer on an employment application. Make sure you print your neatest, since you will be judged by your penmanship.

Don't assume anything in your arrangements. Get all the details ahead of time

Your sponsor will also have the responsibility of coordinating your travel arrangements to and from the company-site, although the actual details might be delegated to an office assistant. And yes, you probably will have to skip some classes to interview; it's allowed.

There are four categories of travel expenses which can be incurred in your visit to the company-site:

- travel (air, train, or auto)
- local transportation
- lodging
- food

In most cases, your arrangements will be made for you by the employer. The general rule is the higher the expense, and further the distance, the more likely the employer will be to make the arrangements for you. However, if you are just across town, it may be presumed that you will find your own way without any expectation of compensation for the minimal expense incurred.

If you are flying to the interview, the flight expense is usually booked directly through the employer. Your tickets will usually be delivered to you via overnight courier, unless the time frame is tight, in which case they will be held for you at the check-in desk. If you are traveling by train, you may be expected to purchase the tickets and fill out an expense report for reimbursement. If traveling by personal auto, you will usually be given a set amount per mile, so be sure to reset your trip odometer before starting on your journey. When you fill out the expense report, you simply double your one-way mileage.

If you will be taking a plane or train, know what your local transportation arrangements will be. The most convenient is to use a cab and save receipts, but if the company is not located in a large population center, they may have a rental car for you or may even have a company car pick you up at the airport or station. If you are taking a cab, always ask for receipts. With a rental car, make sure you have the collision damage waiver. If the company is expecting you to pay for the car, you will need a credit card. Keep receipts for your gas and parking for later reimbursement. If the company is sending someone to pick you up, know the designated connection point and signals. Usually the pickup person will be standing with a company sign with your name on it.

Overnight lodging may be required, especially if you are traveling from a distant location. Again, this is usually taken care of by the employer. Most employers have arrangements with local hotels for out-of-town visitors. You may be required to use a credit card if you want to use any of the extra services in the hotel. It is not advisable to indulge in either the locked liquor refrigerator or the pay-per-view movies. Go to bed early and wake with enough time to fully prepare. Traveler's note: if you are flying, bring your interview clothes in a hanging bag and hang it in the storage area just inside the plane door. Never check it with your luggage, or fold it over, or store it in the overhead bin.

Food is always a covered expense when you are with the company representatives. However, most other meals, including breakfast and dinner, are usually on your own. Many hotels offer a continental breakfast included with the room. Always make sure you have eaten before your interview. You will need the extra energy for what can sometimes be a grueling schedule.

Know where and when you will be meeting with the employer. Get accurate directions and a map if you need assistance. If you are arriving the night before, an excellent psych-up activity is to drive by the company location and visualize your interview the following day. When it comes to traffic, always plan for the unexpected. Plan to arrive early. Keep in mind that it may take ten minutes to get from the parking lot to the front door and another five to ten minutes to get to the department location, so allow plenty of extra time. No one will fault you for being up to ten minutes early, but do not be earlier than that. Your target is five minutes early. If you have extra time, spend it reviewing company materials, your resume, and any additional information. Take a restroom break before you leave for the company, since many companies do not have restrooms available until you reach the inner sanctum. If there are restrooms available, stop by for one final visual and mental check. Look yourself straight in the mirror and say, "I am the very best person for this job. My job today is to convince the company of that fact."

This isn't the 30 minute on-campus interview with one person. You will spend the better part of a day meeting with several people who will determine your fate.

### **Company-Site Interview Process**

Usually you will initially meet with your sponsor. Depending on the company, you may have a published agenda for the day. This may simply include names and times of scheduled interviews, or may include additional information, such as titles and departments for each person, and the purpose of each interview.

The interviews can range from peer level to potential managers to executives. Many companies will have you meet with several different managers, any one of whom could be your potential manager. At the peer level, you may be given the opportunity to meet with one or two recent graduates who have just begun work with the company in the past year or two. The purpose of this interview is to give you a feel for what the company and the position are really

about. But do not let down your guard in this interview or get too chummy. Even peer interviews have input into the final decision. Interviews with potential managers two or three levels above your entry position are sometimes designed to give the executive the final rubber stamp, but often are included as the final sell for a prize candidate.

You may also be asked during the course of the day to take an exam or test. These tests are used to bring a level of objective standardization into the hiring process.

### Exams and Testing

Be prepared for the possibility of taking an exam or test. Asking your sponsor if there will be any other activities scheduled when making the final arrangements is designed to alert you to the possibility, yet it may still come up unannounced. Being asked to take a test is a good sign, because employers typically do not waste the time and money on testing someone they are not interested in. Following are the five basic types of tests you may encounter:

- **Intelligence/Mental Ability Tests**

These tests are designed to test your critical thinking skills, including problem solving, mathematical aptitude, and memory. They are usually structured in a format similar to the SAT/ACT.

- **Work Simulation Tests**

These tests are designed to provide you with example work scenarios or problems which you must work through to a satisfactory result. For example, a test for a Programmer position may ask the person to develop the program logic for a bank statement program.

- **Specific Skills Tests**

For many highly specialized professions, they will test your skills in specific areas. Many of these tests are tied into certification, such as the CPA or CNE. A subset of these certification tests is the specific skills test. These tests are designed to ask questions at a detail level. They are very specific and very accurate. You will be more likely to encounter these tests in technical professions, such as engineering or computers.

- **Personality Tests**

I did say objective, didn't I? Well, these tests are often the best indicator a company has of someone's personality. If you are familiar with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), you will understand the type of comparison questions: "Would you rather fly a kite or read a poem?" or "Would you rather read a book or fly an airplane?"

Don't try to fool a personality test. It is far smarter than either you or I.

- **Honesty Tests**

These tests are usually reserved for jobs in high security areas or where there will be access to trade secrets, merchandise, or cash. Many of the questions are repetitive comparisons ("Do you like chess better than poetry?" and "Do you like poetry better than chess?"), although some will ask for absolutes ("Have you ever told a lie?"). You know the answer. And the test knows if you are telling the truth.

While these tests are all an attempt at standardization and greater objectivity, they are all lacking to a certain degree. They still have a subjective element. Be prepared, both mentally and physically, for these tests. Many companies may not begin salary negotiation until after the person has completed the series of tests. The theory is that they are so beaten down that they will accept almost anything that is offered.

Following are certain points to keep in mind with quantitative (math, numbers, reasoning, objective) and qualitative (opinion, viewpoint, comparison, subjective) tests:

- **Quantitative Tests**

- Get yourself mentally psyched. Clear your mind of all else and focus on the test.
- Take time to fully understand the instructions before you begin.
- If it is a timed test, forget about the time. Simply stay concentrated on the test.
- If you have no idea, it is usually best to skip the question.
- If you are unsure of your answer, it is usually best to answer the question.

- If you can skip questions, skip the more difficult ones and come back to them if you have time.
- **Qualitative Tests**
  - Prepare yourself mentally for taking the test. Get into a positive frame of mind.
  - Take time to fully understand the instructions before you begin.
  - Do not try to fool the test. Always give your best answer.
  - Answer as the professional you, not the personal you.
  - Answer from the employer's point of view.
  - Incorporate qualities that have made you successful into your answers.
  - Resist any impulse to lie about who you are.

With any test, keep in mind that the purpose is to further qualify you for the position. Put forth your very best effort and do not show discouragement when you finish the test. If asked about the test, make a comment about it being "challenging" (for quantitative) or "interesting" (for qualitative).

## Phone Interviews

### Phone Interviewing Success

Many people do not think of phone interviewing as interviewing; "It wasn't an interview, it was just a phone call." It was still an interview and it could affect your potential career with an employer. So treat it with all the respect due a full interview.

### Three Types of Telephone Interviews

There are three basic types of telephone interviews:

1. You initiate a call to the Hiring Manager and he or she is interested in your background. The call from that point forward is an interview.
2. A company calls you based upon a previous contact. You will likely be unprepared for the call, but it is still an interview.
3. You have a pre-set time with a company representative to speak further on the phone. Also an interview.

### Telephone Interview Preparation

In preparing for your phone interview, there are several things you can do. To prepare for an unexpected contact:

- Tape your resume to a wall in view of the phone. It will be there for the call and will be a constant reminder for your job search.
- Keep all of your employer research materials within easy reach of the phone.
- Have a notepad handy to take notes.
- Keep a mirror nearby.

If the phone interview will occur at a set time, there are additional steps you can take:

- Place a "Do Not Disturb" note on your door.
- Turn off your stereo, TV, and any other potential distraction.
- Warm up your voice while waiting for the call. Sing an uplifting song to yourself.
- Have a glass of water handy, since you will not have a chance to take a break during the call.
- Speaking of breaks, if your phone interview is at a set time, make sure you answer nature's call first.
- Turn off call waiting on your phone.

### Phone Personality Matching Technique

A variation on the previously discussed Personality Matching Technique is to apply the same basic principles within your phone interview. Although you obviously cannot match the interviewer's physical characteristics, try to match the interviewer's speaking rate and pitch. Remember to stay within your personality range, but venture toward that portion of your range which most closely matches that of your interviewer. This is an excellent way to establish rapport quickly over distance and phone lines.

### Open and Available Technique

You have a major advantage in a phone interview which does not exist in a face-to-face interview. Namely, you cannot be seen. Use this to your advantage.

Have all of your materials on yourself and the employer open and available on your desk as you are speaking on the phone. This includes not only your resume, but also a "cheat sheet" of compelling story subjects which you would like to introduce. It can also include a "cheat sheet" about the employer, including specific critical points describing the employer and their products.

As I am speaking with you on the other end of the phone, I have no idea that you are actually being prompted from a document as you are speaking. All I can hear is a well-informed, well-prepared interviewee. Keep in mind that this preparation is not "cheating" at all. It is preparation, pure and simple.

So have your materials open and available when you are preparing for a phone interview. They are there to support you and enhance your value to the employer, who will greatly respect your ability to answer questions with focus and meaningful content.

### Stand and Deliver Technique

Here is a simple technique to increase the enthusiasm and positive image that you project over the telephone: stand up. Whenever you are talking with a potential employer on the phone, stand up. It gets your blood flowing, improves your posture, and improves your response time.

Keep you mind  
focused on your  
phone call.  
Remove all  
distractions from  
your line of  
sight.

It's interesting to note that many telemarketing companies have come to realize that standing can actually improve their sales, so they often provide the telemarketers with hands-free headsets that allow them to stand and pace back and forth. It helps give an action perspective to an otherwise passive activity. So apply this same technique to improve your telephone presence.

### Vanity Technique

While in college did you ever know a student who enjoyed flexing his muscles in the mirror; one who would do it for hours at a time, a little vain? Well, you should learn to do the same thing, except leave out the flexing muscles part. In prep for a telephone interview or any telephone contact, make sure that you have a mirror within view. Learn to look into that mirror consistently throughout the phone call, and smile. You will improve your telephone presence 110 percent just by using this simple technique. You will find yourself coming across much friendlier, more interested, and more alert. If you are at all self-conscious about seeing yourself in the mirror, you can use the mirror as an occasional checkpoint. But for most of us, seeing oneself reflected back gives us the kind of feedback necessary to make instant modification toward a more positive presence.

Remember, you are standing, so a wall mirror usually works best. You can pick up a small wall mirror for a limited amount of cash. It's worth it.

Try it the next time you are on the phone. But don't do it with your roommate around.

## Meal Interviews

### Meal Interview Do's and Don'ts

You may find yourself on a breakfast, lunch, or dinner interview or an "eating meeting" during your company-site visit. This is usually a good sign that you are under strong consideration. Following are some of the basic do's and don'ts:

#### Do:

- Wait for your host to gesture the seating arrangement
- Place your napkin in your lap as soon as you are seated
- Remember everything your Mom taught you about table manners - then put them to good use
- Order light; you are there to interview--eating is only the sideline

- Know what you are ordering; avoid exotic items
- Chew and swallow before you speak; no airborne food particles, please
- Be polite to waiters and waitresses, but not chatty
- Keep your elbows off the table (your mother was right!)
- Thank your host for the meal

**Don't:**

- Bring your briefcase; your portfolio is plenty
- Open your menu until your host has
- Become lax in your presentation style; it is still an interview
- Drink alcohol, even if your host offers
- Be indecisive in ordering--make a decision and stick with it
- Begin eating until everyone is served.
- Attempt to pay the bill or split the cost; it will be covered by your host
- Smoke, even if your host does
- Criticize the meal or the restaurant
- Order a doggy bag

A manager rejected a candidate after his meal interview. What happened? The candidate spilled soup on his tie. Mistakes do happen. But this candidate proceeded to lick off his tie...

**Ten Things to Never Order at a Meal Interview**

1. Spaghetti (*It's bad form to cut it, worse form to twirl the huge ball and worst form to slurp up the one that tried to get away...*)
2. Pizza (*Ever get hot pizza stuck to the roof of your mouth? Or pulled the toppings off in a clump right into your lap?*)
3. French onion soup (*This is the one soup that should come with a knife and a fork..*).
4. The most expensive item on the menu (*You don't want to be an asterisk on an expense report...*)
5. The least expensive item on the menu (*That includes anything on the kids menu...*)
6. Any fish with the head or bones still attached (*"Hey waiter, you forgot to skin and clean this here fish!"*)
7. Any food that requires you to lick your fingers when you're finished (*"Them there were the best ribs I've ever eaten..."* )
8. Any food that requires you to wear a bib (*Even if the little lobster bib does look good with your suit...*)
9. Any food in a foreign language, unless you are 100% sure of the pronunciation (*"Hey there, garcon, I'll have one of them there fillet mig-nons..."*)
10. Any food you're not sure how to eat (*Artichokes come to mind..*).

**To Smoke or Not**

The question is asked every time we enter a restaurant. The interviewer may turn to the interviewee and ask, "Which do you prefer?" Whether you smoke or not, always respond, "It's up to you." And if you do smoke, do not smoke, even if your interviewer smokes.

Smokers beware. Smoking is at an all-time low on the acceptance scale. You are not a protected minority, and you are definitely in the minority. Even the smell of smoke on your clothes can count against you. If you smoke, do not smoke the day of the interview, in fact, do not smoke after your last shower prior to the interview. And wear fresh clothes which are free of the tobacco smell. Tough rules, possibly, but there are enough sensitive noses and prejudiced minds out there that you should do your very best to avoid any and all potential negatives. And smoking is one area that most of society looks down on.

Smoking could be hazardous to your "career" health

If you do smoke, there will likely be an advantage to kicking the habit before you begin work, ideally, before you begin interviewing, given the potential negative impact it can have on the job search process. Most companies now force employees to smoke either in a designated smoking room or outside the building which can be especially rough in northern climates. The amount of time necessary for even the average pack-a-day smoker to get their nicotine fix can amount to over 10% lost productivity. This fact is not quickly ignored by the average manager. And

it may eventually work against you, either in your job search or in your professional career. If you have been looking for an incentive to quit, this may be your opportunity.

## Interview Wrap-up

### Questions to Ask the Interviewer

Following are additional questions you may want to consider asking at an appropriate point in the interview:

- "Why did you personally decide to work for this company?"
- "What are the three most important attributes for success in this position?"
- "What are the opportunities for growth and advancement for this position?"
- "How is your company responding to competition in the \_\_\_\_\_ area?"
- "What is the anticipated company growth rate over the next three years?"

Limit yourself to no more than one or two questions during an on-campus interview and no more than two or three questions during each company-site interview. Even if you are not able to get answers to all of your open questions before the offer is made, you will have one final opportunity at that point.

### After the Interview

It's not over 'til the fat lady sings. In the case of interviews, don't get lulled into thinking that your final "goodbye" is the end of the opera; Far from it.

A thank-you note may seem obvious, but be assured that the majority of students do not send them.

### Two Important Post-Interview Activities

There are two simple steps you can take to make a lasting impression after your interview and greatly increase your odds of success.

The first is to call the interviewer to thank them for their time. If possible, you may want to add additional information which was not discussed in the interview. An example would be: "I understand from speaking with the receptionist that Microsoft Office is your corporate software standard. I just wanted to mention that I'm also fully proficient in each of the tools in the Office suite." This phone call should ideally take place the same day. If you are unable to reach the interviewer directly, leave a voicemail message.

The second activity is to immediately write the interviewer a short note, thanking them for their time and reemphasizing your interest in the position. Then do your best to get it to them as quickly as possible. E-mail it, fax it, hand deliver it, messenger it, use overnight mail, whatever, but be sure they have it before the end of the following day. Ideally, you want to get it in their hands by the end of the day of the interview or first thing the following morning. The quicker your letter arrives, the greater the likelihood of affecting a positive impact.

Doesn't everyone follow up like this? Hardly, virtually no one calls after an interview and few take the time to write a thank you letter. Those who do write letters generally send them via the postal service, which can arrive as much as a full week after the interview. The simple gestures of a phone call and thank you letter can make a big difference in separating you from your competition.

And if you interviewed with multiple individuals, make sure each thank you letter is unique. Common language is acceptable, but do not simply change the name at the top of the letter. Your application, resume, and other materials will likely be stored in a single file, usually in the possession of the person guiding you through the hiring process. Your thank you letters will eventually find their way back to this central file. Yes, they do compare notes. And what seemed to be a unique and original note can actually work against you if there are two or three duplicates collected together in your file. It has taken a great deal of effort to get this far. Take the extra time to make this final impression a positive one.

### Third-Party Recommendation Technique

If you want to make a lasting impression on a potential employer, ask the individuals who supplied you with letters of recommendation to either call or write to the employer, giving an additional recommendation. This technique will instill confidence in the employer that they are making a wise decision in hiring you.

Obviously, this technique only works for you if you have a strong sponsor or two among your references. And it has the potential for abuse; you do not want to burden your reference in every interviewing situation. However, when you truly believe "this is the one," it may be time to cash in some chips.

If someone else also thinks you're great, give them a key role on your job search team.

Do not give in to the temptation of using a "fill in the address" pre-written letter from your reference. It should be unique and original, printed on letterhead or stationery. This technique works because it shows that others think highly enough of you to take the time to call or write. There is truly no higher compliment your references can pay you. So remember to thank them in word now and with a card and a small gift when the offer comes.

## Official Job Offers

### Generating Job Offers

Once the thank you letter has been sent, your role in the job search is to work toward an offer. By staying in close contact at least once a week with your primary company contact, you will be continually aware of the process. And the contact will be continually aware of your interest.

Always make sure you know the next step in the process by asking directly.

*"I am very interested. What is the next step?"*

If you are straightforward and direct, the contact will keep you posted as to your progress. If you are no longer under consideration, you will be informed. If there are further interviews pending or your background is being reviewed by others, you will be informed. If the company is getting ready to put together an offer, you will be informed. Stay close to your contact and be ready to act on a moment's notice.

So what is the very best statement you can make to generate the job offer? Simple, ask for the job:

*"I feel my background and experience are a good fit for this position and I am very interested. I am ready to consider your best offer!"*

Want to make it ever stronger? Replace "I am ready to consider your best offer" with:

*"I would very much like to work here. May I have the job?"*

OK, it may appear a little bold, but it is far and away the #1 way to generate a job offer, hands down.

The prerequisites of this approach are threefold:

1. You have already sold them on you as a candidate
2. They have already sold you on working for them and hopefully it shows in your passion and enthusiasm for the job
3. You are talking to the person who makes the hiring decision

OK, hold on, you might be saying. I can see having the first two, but how do I know who makes the hiring decision? Simple, ask "Who will be making the hiring decision for this position?" Ask HR, ask the managers, ask a peer level. Any of them can tell you. You just need to ask.

Then meet with that person last and tell them you want the job. Make life easy for them. If they're sitting on the fence, this may bring them over to your side.

This is not the time to be shy. If you want to get married, you have to pop the question! And no one says they are the only ones who can ask the question. This book is about breaking the rules in a good way. And this is one of the best ways to break the rules and generate a job offer.

### Early Offers

A rather nice situation, yet still perplexing, is to receive an "early offer" from one of the companies you have interviewed with. By "early," I mean in relation to other potential job offers. You may have had eight interviews in the last month, three of which resulted in second interviews, but one of which resulted in an immediate offer. Worse things can happen.

Yet it still creates a dilemma. Sure, if the offering company is your first choice, accept the job and send the others your regrets, but if not, then what?

### Price of Membership Theory

The first thing you should do when you receive an early offer is to make the other companies immediately aware of the offer. Your stock will go up markedly the moment you have been "put into play." It is simple human nature to covet what others have, and the price of membership has just gone up for those who want to join in the fight for the coveted prize. What is difficult to obtain always holds greater value. Interested players are now required to react immediately or lose you. If they are truly interested, they will react. If they have just been stringing you along with a load of others, they will cut you free. Be prepared: you may be isolated with your lone offer, but if you are good, you may receive multiple offers.

The second thing to do is ask the company who made the initial offer for as much time as possible to make your decision. The amount of time you request may depend on the other pending offers (have an idea as to when they might be ready to respond). One week to make the decision is common and you might be able to get as much as two weeks. But this is not the time to go out and start new contacts from scratch. It's time to wind down your search and cash in your chips.

### Multiple Offer Technique

If you are willing to entertain offers from other companies, it is your personal obligation to inform these companies of your initial offer as quickly as possible. You may have only one or two others that are even in the running. If so, restrict these multiple offer tactics to them.

Contact the person within the company who would be your hiring manager. Let that person know that you have received a competitive offer and tell the manager which company made the offer. The reason for giving out the company name is that you usually will not have to disclose the dollar amount, since most industry insiders have at least a general idea what others in the field are paying. Don't be surprised if the manager suddenly backs off, because they may realize that their company cannot match the other company's wage/benefit package or other perks. If you have scored your initial hit with an industry leader such as P&G in Consumer Products, Boeing in Aeronautical Engineering, Microsoft in Software, or another market leader, you may find it difficult to draw a second offer, except, perhaps, from one of the other wanna-be-giants. The true giants are tough to beat. It takes time to put together a competitive offer and some of second-tier companies may be just as willing to back away as to put up a fight. If this happens and you have a true preference for the other company, let them know in very direct terms that you are still more interested in them than the company that made the initial offer. Bigger is not always better.

You will find that once the first offer comes in, it is often quite easy to generate others. If you have done an excellent job of developing yourself differentially from your competition, employers will know they have to react quickly to sway you to their side.

The only thing better than getting your first job offer is getting your second one, And the only thing better than your second is your

Listen to your heart when deciding between multiple offers. It usually knows what is best for you. Your head will almost always choose the highest dollar offer. Your heart will choose the best employer

You may have the uncommon luxury of choosing who you want to work for. While others are scratching and begging for an offer, any offer, you actually have the difficult decision of deciding which company you like best. Keep all the negotiations open and honest. You will find that honesty is not only "the best policy," but also your greatest competitive advantage. If one company comes up \$2,000 short of what you would accept, discuss it with the appropriate party. The company would much rather shoot at a specific target.

### **Refused Offer Technique**

If someone you know receives multiple offers, you should congratulate them immediately. And if they are in your field, make sure you immediately contact the losing suitors. The refused offers will leave behind employers with jobs which have not yet been filled. Strike quickly and decisively. Even if it's not a company you have met with yet, there may still be time if you are willing to move quickly.

## **Successful Job Offer Negotiation**

In the excitement of the actual job offer, the tendency for many grads is to make the costly error of accepting the first offer that comes their way. However, the time frame from when the initial offer is made to when you accept is a golden opportunity for negotiation. If these two events are simultaneous, you will lose a chance to negotiate that you may never have again.

### **Ready to Negotiate**

Remember that you are not in a position to negotiate money and/or any of the other attachments until after the "sale" is made. So the information in this section should only be utilized if you are truly ready for salary negotiations.

How do you know when you are ready to negotiate? You are ready to negotiate when you have a "ready buyer." You are ready to negotiate when you hear anything from "We are ready to make the offer," to the formal letter offering you the job. Until that point in time, you are not ready to negotiate the "whats" of the offer. Until then, you are only negotiating the "ifs" of the offer. It is always the best negotiating posture to wait until you have the actual job offer in hand, in writing, if possible. Get the offer first, and then begin your negotiation.

Assuming that you have steadfastly put forth your "I am ready to consider your very best offer" response when the employer showed true interest at the end of the interviewing process, this should lead to the best possible initial offer from the company. I say "initial" because it is exactly that. Very few companies have offers that are "cut in stone", even those that say they do often give in to many of the "perks" that are requested.

### **Outstanding Questions**

No, we're not referring to questions that are considered to be wonderful, we are referring to questions that are still outstanding, questions not yet fully answered. If these questions still exist when the offer is made, you have two choices: ask them at the same time the offer is made, the best choice, or add them to your list of potential concessions you request when you accept. You should always be ready for the offer to come through, at any time, under any circumstances. If you are not ready in advance, you will miss the opportunity to ask some "free" negotiating questions that can give you additional career commitments above and beyond what has already been given. These questions are invaluable since they cost you virtually nothing from a negotiating standpoint.

Ask the questions now. You may not get another chance.

So if you are on your toes when the offer is made, you can ask these key questions (if yet unasked in the interview process) at little or no risk:

- "What are the promotional opportunities of the position?"
- "To what position/level?"
- "How and when will my performance be reviewed?"
- "Will this include a salary review?"
- "What kind of salary progression would be expected in the first three to five years?"

Be sure to take careful notes of the answers and who gave them. These may be the most "liberal" responses you ever hear with regard to your position. Don't be afraid to refer to these promises and guarantees later when they become

important in your work. But realize that they are not true job offer negotiations. They are "gifts" given to you at the time of your job offer, possibly never to be uttered again. Take careful notes.

### **Job Offer Negotiation**

If you have a true job offer in hand, the first thing you need to do is decide whether the offer is acceptable to you in its present form. In other words, if this is the very best you can negotiate, will you still accept the job? If not, you will need to take a different tack.

Job offers do  
come.  
Really, they  
do

In either case, it is always important to know who is pulling the strings. It is usually the hiring manager, but not always. Hiring authorization may actually come from a level above the hiring manager. There may even be input from a Salary Administrator in Human Resources, although they are usually there for input, not for absolutes. The key is to know who makes the decisions. If you don't know, ask. Ask the hiring manager, the person you will be working for. Remember, it is always in their best interest to make this happen. Now that they have made you an offer, you have one foot in the door to their company. You have access to information that you didn't have prior to the offer.

### **Evaluating the Total Package**

While salary is certainly the most important element of a job offer, it is by no means the only point of consideration. The total package includes all of the benefits and other "perks" that are provided to you as an employee of the company. One of the biggest errors that many college grads make in evaluating an offer is to look exclusively at salary as the measure of acceptability. Benefits seem to be an ethereal element that will never actually be used. The Invincibility Factor ("I'll never be sick, disabled, die, or need to get my teeth cleaned") runs high among most new grads. If you have not been provided a formal benefits package to review by the time the job offer is made, ask that it be sent to you. If you are given the information verbally, take copious notes and ask clarifying questions on any areas you do not understand.

### **Evaluating the Benefits Package**

Benefits are not just for the twilight of your career. While we typically think of benefits as basic insurance coverage, a good benefits plan can include many additional perks that offer true tangible gains in relation to the competition. Following are some of the basic elements of benefit plans and what to look for:

- **General Coverage**  
Find out if there are any monthly or per-pay-period costs for the overall benefits plan (which will make an immediate and tangible dent in your take-home pay), who is covered (does it only cover you or does it also cover other family members and future family members), when each component of the benefit actually begins (some will begin the first day of work, some after 30 days, and some after one year of employment), and whether any of the benefits are taxable (life insurance is an example of a benefit that you can end up paying taxes on at the end of the year). If the benefits are provided cafeteria-style (where you can pick and choose which you will enroll in), find out if you can add additional benefits at a later date and what restrictions would be involved.
- **Medical Insurance**  
Consider the type of plan (Preferred Provider Option, Health Maintenance Organization, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, etc.), what expenses are covered (HMOs will often pay for preventive care expenses that others will not, etc.), deductibles (annual deductibles, per office visit deductibles, etc.), co-pays (percentage the company pays versus the percentage you will pay), exclusions for pre-existing conditions, and whether or not the plan has open enrollment (including any medical exams or other evaluations that may be necessary for enrollment in the plan).
- **Dental Insurance**  
Consider whether preventive care (exams, cleaning, X-rays, etc.), surgical care (root canals, etc.), and orthodontic care (braces, etc.) are covered and to what extent (deductibles, co-pay, annual, and lifetime maximums).
- **Optical/Eye Care Insurance**  
A great benefit if you need it. A great benefit even if you don't currently need it (most of us need it

eventually). Evaluate what expenses are covered, what the deductibles are, and what the annual and lifetime maximums are. Many companies now offer an "up to" amount of coverage that can include exams, eyeglasses, contact lenses, and even disposable lenses.

- **Life Insurance**

Although you are likely not planning your funeral arrangements yet, this benefit will become increasingly important as you add loved ones to your life. In the meantime, it may cover the basic expenses in the event of unexpected tragedy. Some companies will also provide you with the opportunity to purchase additional blocks of term insurance, although often at or above the going market rate. It is usually better to purchase additional insurance separately, but evaluate the costs--especially if the rates offered are stable for the duration of your employment.

- **Accidental Death Insurance**

As if it somehow matters how you die, some companies pay more if your death is of a more spectacular nature. If they offer it for free, take it. Don't buy additional amounts.

- **Business Travel Insurance**

Another variation on the accident insurance theme. Companies sometimes provide insurance to cover accidental death or dismemberment while traveling on business. Again, if they offer it for free, take it.

- **Disability Insurance**

One of those benefits that you will never ever care about until you really need it. Disability insurance is usually divided into short-term disability (which can sometimes include an allocation for sick pay) and long-term disability (which usually kicks in after six months to a year). Note the percentage amount, how that percentage may change over time, and what that percentage is based on.

- **Vacation**

Consider how many days are allowed in your first year, when they begin accumulating, when they may be used (can days be taken before they are earned?), how many days are allowed in future years, and the maximum number of days. Most companies provide two weeks (prorated from the hire date) during the first year and one additional day per year of service thereafter, with a maximum of four weeks vacation. Some companies, however, do not provide any vacation during the first year. Note also whether vacation days accumulate according to the calendar year or work year (based on your date of hire).

- **Holidays**

There are six standard holidays that nearly every U.S. company covers (New Years Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day). In addition, most cover the day after Thanksgiving, and some cover additional days, such as Presidents' Day and Martin Luther King Day (and then there is the U.S. government, which is a member of the Holiday-Of-The-Month Club). Many companies will offer six or more "set" holidays plus one or more "floating" holidays that can be used at the employee's discretion. In this case, these floating holidays usually end up being treated much the same as vacation days. If the company offers floaters and you are starting midyear, note how many will be offered to you during the first year.

- **Sick/Personal Days**

While most companies have moved away from having formal sick days for salaried staff (which encourages slacker employees to take them in spite of lack of actual illness, since they are already enumerated), some companies will also provide for a certain amount of personal days. Again, these can be thought of as pseudo-vacation days. But remember that when you take time off work to visit your sick Aunt Martha in Idaho, it will likely be applied against this time allocation.

- **401(k) Plans**

Your company's 401(k) plan can help you begin building a tax-deferred retirement nest egg early (start now and you will really be able to enjoy

Start your  
401(k) early and  
max it.

your retirement). Consider the amount of company matching (if any), and the maximum amount of matching and employee contributions. Also check the amount of time it takes to vest the company matching amount and whether there is a partial vesting during the interim.

- **Pension Plans**

Although this is the ultimate yawner benefit for 22-year-olds, these can and will make a difference to you later in life. Usually the company puts an amount into an account that silently accumulates for you over time. An excellent benefit that many companies are cutting back on.

- **Profit Sharing**

Profit sharing can be an outstanding benefit, assuming that the company is profitable and is expected to continue in the black. However, the amount of profit sharing provided is often at the discretion of executive management and may be stated as an "up to" amount or percentage. If you are unclear what that amount may be, ask what the company has paid, historically, for the last three years to individuals in a position similar to the one you are being offered. Forget any promises that it will likely be greater in the coming years. Even when you are dealing with historical figures, don't plan to spend the money until you have the check in hand. Anything can and will happen with the profit sharing wild card, even with the most conservative companies.

- **Stock Options/ESOPs**

Once the domain of executive management, stock options have recently been filtering down into the rank-and-file of companies through ESOPs, or Employee Stock Ownership Plans. While different from true stock options (you usually have to buy the stock at regular intervals at the prevailing market price), it gives the advantage of buying company stock at a discount from market value. While the discount varies, it usually is in the 10 to 15% range, which means that you make an immediate 11 to 17% profit (since you are buying at a discount). The stock purchase is often free of any broker commissions or fees. Some companies will allow you to sell the stock commission-free through their investment banking firm. Most will also allow you to reinvest your dividends commission-free to buy more stock. It is an outstanding benefit and you should immediately sign up for the maximum allowable (usually 5 to 10% of your base salary). Unless you have little faith in your company's financial performance (in which case you should ask yourself why you are working there in the first place), let the money grow as your career and employer continue to grow.

- **Tuition Reimbursement**

An especially important perk if you plan to pursue an advanced degree in your evening and/or weekend hours. Consider what types of course work are covered, the tax impact of the benefit (the IRS usually will only consider the benefit tax-free if you are studying within your current field), how the benefit is paid (some companies pay 100% for an "A," 75% for a "B," etc.), and the yearly maximum.

- **Health Clubs**

As part of the trend toward taking care of all of your worldly existential needs, some companies now offer free or reduced-rate memberships in health clubs. Some larger companies even offer on-site facilities so that you can work out in the morning, at lunch, or after work without having to leave the company location. It's a nice perk, depending on whether the facilities meet your personal needs.

- **Dependent Care**

As companies adjust to the workforce of this decade and beyond, they are examining the role of providing dependent care for their employees. This can include providing on-site child care facilities or allocating specified amounts for child care and elder care. Some companies, while not paying directly for these costs, will offer programs for allocating funds for these expenses from pretax funds. Although this benefit may not mean much to you now, probably one of the very best benefits to have is the ability to drop off your kid(s) next door to work in the morning, have lunch with them, and take them home with you in the evening, the parent of the new millennium.

- **Employee Assistance Programs**

Some companies have a formal program designed to aid employees in need of assistance. While this can sometimes be for mainstream needs (such as financial planning and tax assistance), it can also include drug/alcohol counseling and other types of crisis support. Just one more way to let you know that you are not on your own when you are in need of help.

- **Overtime/Travel Premiums/Comp Time**

While salaried employees are usually not paid overtime, some companies will compensate for time above and beyond an expected standard (usually 40 hours per week). This can take the form of overtime or bonus pay, a premium above and beyond standard pay for hours worked at out-of-town locations, and/or comp time (which converts extra hours worked into extra time off).

Paid overtime really makes a difference when you're working 50 to 60 hours per week.

- **Parking Reimbursement**

This often overlooked perk can amount to a great deal over time, especially if you will be working in one of the high cost parking (and living) cities such as New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles. This \$50-100/month coverage can easily amount to \$1000-2000/year in salary equivalence.

- **Commuting Cost Reimbursement**

While few companies will pay you for the commute to and from the office, some companies in high traffic/smog congestion areas will provide either company van service, a car pooling allowance, or commuter train/bus allocations to encourage their employees to use environmentally-friendly means of transportation.

- **Expense Reimbursement**

Almost all companies will pay you for direct business-related costs that you incur. However, how that cost is calculated often differs, with you picking up the difference. For example, using your car for business travel (above and beyond your standard commute) might be covered at anywhere from six cents to thirty cents per mile. That ends up being quite a difference if you are racking up the miles. Also, items such as business entertainment may only be reimbursed up to 80%. So if your job requires incurring business expenses, know what will be covered and to what extent.

### **Salary Comparison Calculator**

Is an offer for \$50,000 in New York City better than a \$30,000 offer in Des Moines? While there are a variety of cost-of-living comparisons available, one of the best is provided on the Web at a site called Homefair: <http://www.homefair.com/homefair/calc/salcalc.html>.

This cost of living calculator will allow you compare the actual cost of living in over one hundred different cities throughout the United States, giving you a better understanding of the true value of your offer. You simply select the base city, enter a salary, then a target city. The salary calculator will respond in seconds with the comparable salary in the target city. You will find yourself playing out several "what ifs" throughout the U.S. at this very well-designed site. You can also review salaries for over one thousand occupations at: <http://www.collegegrad.com/salaries/>.

And in answer to the original question, \$30,000 is worth more in Des Moines than \$50,000 in New York. But New York is a lot more fun than Des Moines. But Des Moines is a lot safer than New York. So it all evens out in the end.

### **Items You Can Negotiate**

If you feel the offer is unacceptable to you, you must determine what will make it acceptable. Remember that the answer is not always more money. Real estate agents are great at "restructuring offers" to make them more attractive, while the bottom line dollars remain virtually unchanged. The point is, there are more things than money that can make a deal happen. Following are some of the basic areas of job offer negotiation that can take place:

**Monetaries**

- Salary
- Promised Increases
- Yearly Bonuses
- Signing Bonuses
- Profit Sharing
- Stock Options/ESOPs

**Near-Monetaries**

- Benefits
- Overtime/Comp Time
- Company Car
- Travel Awards
- Relocation Assistance
- Expense Coverage

**Non-Monetaries**

- Title
- Training/Education
- Access to Technology
- Early Review Dates
- Travel Assignments
- Home Equipment Usage

Although there are many different areas which are subject to negotiation, it should also be noted that money is the first issue that needs to be resolved. If you are seeking \$30,000, and they are offering \$20,000, there is a major discrepancy. But it is quite different if they are offering \$29,000 and you want \$30,000. Is a \$1,000 differential going to keep you from accepting the position? Is it truly unacceptable? How do you determine what is acceptable and what is unacceptable?

Money isn't everything. 401(k) matching and stock options are nice too.

**Job Offer Checklist**

Have this job offer checklist ready by the phone for when the offer comes. If you don't, there may be important details you might miss. But even if you don't have it ready when the offer is made verbally, you can always ask for it to be sent out in writing, and then use this checklist to make sure that no detail is missed. P.S. Take note that this is a comprehensive list, every item does not necessarily apply to you or your specific offer.

Topic Area	Their Response	Potential Questions
Title		(Is it what was expected? If not, why not?)
Report To		(Is it who was expected? If not, why not?)
Start Date		Can we make it earlier? Later?
Base Salary		Payable monthly? Semi-monthly? Bi-weekly? Arrears?
Bonus		Is there any? Percentage? Tied to what specifically?
Commissions		Are there any? Percentage? Tied to what specifically?
Signing Bonus		Do they offer one? How much? Any conditions?
Profit Sharing		What is the criteria? History of payments past 3-5 years?
Stock Options		How are they determined? % underwater currently?
ESOPs/ESPPs		Percentage discount? Mark date?
General Benefits		What is my contribution amount? Myself? Family?
Health		PPO? HMO? Deductibles? Co-pays? Exclusions? Max?
Dental		Deductibles? Co-pays? Orthodontics? Max?
Vision Care		Exams? Glasses/contacts? Max?
Life Insurance		Set amount? % of salary?
Accidental Death		Coverage? Amount?
Business Travel Ins.		Coverage? Amount?
Short-term Disability		Period of time? Coverage?
Long-term Disability		Period of time? Coverage?
Vacation		Any flexibility in providing more? When does it increase?
Holidays		How many? Can any be flexed?
Sick/Personal Days		Covered? How many? Restrictions?

401(k)		Company match % and max? Max contribution amount?
Pension		Provide any type of pension? (most don't)
Tuition		Reimbursement rules and %?
Training		Other training provided? Who approves?
Health Clubs		Coverage?
Dependent Care		Coverage?
Relocation		What expenses are covered? Is there a cap?
Comp Time		Any work hours/days flexibility?
Overtime		Is there paid overtime?
Performance Review		When will my first performance review be?
Salary Review		When will my first salary review be?
Promised Increases		What % increases should I expect for the first 2-3 years?
Travel		% overnight travel expected?
Laptop		Will you be providing me with a laptop?
Cell phone		Will you be providing me with a cell phone?
PDA		Will you be providing me with a PDA?
Company car		Is a company car provided? If not, is mileage covered?
Parking		Is parking paid for?
General Expenses		Are all business-related expenses covered?
General		Is there anything else I should be aware of?

Remember, the above checklist covers some items like company cars, PDAs, etc. which may not apply to you. But you can use it as the basis to make sure that all the bases are covered.

### Balance Sheet Decision Technique

There is an easy way to determine whether an offer is acceptable. The method was originated by one of the wisest men in the history of our country, Ben Franklin; the name of the technique, The Balance Sheet Decision Technique. In weighing a difficult decision, he would take a sheet of paper and draw a line down the middle. Then he would put the heading "Reasons For" on the left side and "Reasons Against" on the right side. He would proceed to list the positive aspects of the decision on the left and the negative aspects of the decision on the right. Once everything was down on paper, the answer usually became obvious to him. Use the Balance Sheet Decision Technique in evaluating the initial offer.

Important: do not evaluate the position against what you want. Instead, evaluate it against the next best alternative. For some, that may be your present job. For others, it may be another job offer. And for others, it may be unemployment and continuing the job search.

You cannot negotiate that which you do not have.

Whatever you do, don't get caught in the "hope trap", comparing your offer against what you hope another company will offer. Until you have it in writing, you are comparing against vapor. Make sure all of your negotiations are on firm, solid foundations. Otherwise, you may find it all slipping out from under you. Objective #1 is to get the job offer. Then, and only then, can you begin to negotiate that job offer.

If the job offer is still truly "unacceptable" per the Balance Sheet Decision Technique, continue with the Unacceptable Offer Negotiation section below. Otherwise, what you really have is an acceptable job offer that you were hoping would be better. Read the Acceptable Offer Negotiation section for advice on how to potentially improve this type of offer.

### Unacceptable Offer Negotiation Technique

If your offer is truly unacceptable, you must communicate this fact in no uncertain terms to the decision maker while keeping the outlook for resolution positive. Example:

*"I am still very interested in working with you and your company; however (never use the word 'but'), at this point I am not able to accept the offer for the following reason: (state your reasoning succinctly and what part or parts of the offer are lacking). If you were able to \_\_\_\_\_ (give your proposed solution), I would gladly accept the position immediately. Are you able to help bring this about?"*

Let's make note of some of the key elements of this approach. First, you are putting at risk the job offer made to you since you are asking for a different offer. In terms of contract law, you have just made a counteroffer, which technically invalidates or rejects their initial offer. But if the initial offer is truly unacceptable to you, you need to be willing to accept the potential consequences.

Second, you need to communicate what is specifically lacking in the initial offer. Is it the position, the role and responsibilities, the money, insurance, vacations? You must name it specifically.

Third, you must provide a proposed solution. Tell them exactly what can be done to make things "right." You need to make it understood that if this could be changed, you would be willing to accept the position, immediately, on the spot. They will be much more willing to go to bat for you if they know that this is the last roadblock. Don't play the "you shot low so I'll shoot high" game. Be straight with them as to what it will take to make it happen.

Lastly, you need to appeal to their position and their vanity. "If it is in your power" is a positive challenge to the true power of the manager. If they really want you and your request is attainable, this will ice it. Very few managers like to admit that they are powerless to get what they want. So if it can be done, they will make it happen.

It's a given that the company wants you by the very fact that they made the initial offer. However, this does not guarantee that they will be able to respond to your request. Several factors may come into play. First, can they adjust the offer at all? Some companies have rigid "first offer is last offer" policies. And in most companies, salary administration is more rigid at the entry level since comparable parity, what they are paying others with similar backgrounds and skills, is much easier to define. If they cannot adjust the offer under any circumstances, you are wasting your time and theirs and they will probably tell you so. If they are fixed on the monetaries, you might want to consider attempting to negotiate the near-monetaries or non-monetaries since these usually allow for some flexibility. But if the offer is still truly unacceptable, give them a polite "Thanks, but no thanks" and take your leave of them.

Second, what is the magnitude of your request? There may be restrictions regarding pay level within the position or benefits offered (only VPs get company cars, etc.) that cannot change. Be ready to consider alternatives, if necessary (example: a hiring bonus or relocation assistance in lieu of higher pay).

Third, what are their alternatives? If you are the only person in the world who can fill this position, they have very few alternatives and must work to make the impossible happen. But if they have two others "waiting in the wings" in case you balk, they may not have much desire to negotiate.

Again, this negotiation technique is the best approach when the offer is truly unacceptable, but it does run the risk of the entire deal falling through if you cannot come to terms. So use it with caution.

### **Acceptable Offer Negotiation Technique**

In attempting to "sweeten" an acceptable job offer, the best approach is to play upon the ego and power of your new manager. Not in a negative way, but giving him a chance to "show his strength" within the company. You need to realize that you are in one of the strongest political positions you may ever be in with your new employer. Utilizing this technique can have the side effect of enhancing your future power within the organization, if used correctly.

The key to using this technique is to empower your new manager. You give him/her power in two ways: (1) by accepting (yes, I said accepting) the position, you give

Accepting the offer does not relinquish your ability to negotiate.

him/her power because he/she has added the desired person to his/her team, and (2) by asking for his/her assistance in meeting your further needs, you give him/her an opportunity to show his/her power within the organization. How to do this? Consider the following example:

*" \_\_\_\_\_ (name of boss), I'm calling you with some very good news. I would like to accept your offer and I'm looking forward to working with you and becoming a valuable member of the team. (Wait for their positive response.) I am committed to working with you, and as my future boss there is (are) a (two, three, some) minor issue(s) about the offer that I want to make you aware of. I don't know if you're able to make changes in this (these) area(s), but I'd surely appreciate your looking into that possibility. Namely, would it be possible to \_\_\_\_\_ (name changes)?"*

The beauty of this technique is that it provides two things. First, it locks in your acceptance of the job and takes that acceptance out of the negotiating. Second, it leaves open additional concessions that may be given to you at no cost. Please note that most books and articles on negotiating would argue against "giving away" your greatest negotiating chip, acceptance of the position. But this argument is correct only if you can afford to lose this chip. If that's the case and you truly want to "spin the wheel," you can use the information in Unacceptable Offer Negotiation outlined previously. But you risk losing the job offer entirely if you choose that approach. By closing out the offer acceptance portion, you have locked down the one thing you cannot afford to lose, yet you leave open other areas. Your retained negotiating chip is the hoped for "show of power" on the part of your future boss. Even if your boss is not able to deliver, the fact that you "turned over" your request to your boss will make him/her more willing to help you in any future needs. Even if all you get is exactly what was originally offered, you are given by default a future negotiating chip.

Everything is negotiable.

Why does this technique work? Simple, it's a win/win situation. The key to any successful negotiation is that each side should stand to benefit. In this example, the worst case scenario is that you will have the new job you want and the company will have the new employee it wants. The best case scenario is that your new boss will feel personally and professionally satisfied because of his/her ability to immediately enhance your new position by meeting your additional requests. Even if your boss is not able to get all or any of the concessions, he/she will feel privileged that you brought him/her this issue to handle and will then feel an obligation to help you in any future requests.

By securing the job offer acceptance, the greatest aspect of this negotiation technique is that it has zero risk, yet invariably persuades most managers to give in to some or all of the concession requests. Why, plain and simple, ego. Your new manager wants to show that he/she has the power to make things happen. At this point, you are both on the same side, working for the same goal. Later in your career your goals may conflict with your manager's, but at this time, if you can convince your manager of the value of your request, you will have a strong advocate on your side.

So if there are areas of the offer you are seeking to "redefine," this is a safe, effective way to test the waters. The risk is minimal, while the payback can be significant. It should be noted that this technique cannot be used for significant offer changes. If you need to make changes of great magnitude, you will probably have to follow through with the Unacceptable Offer Negotiation.

### **Floor Mats Technique**

A modification of the above techniques is a negotiating technique many of our fathers taught us about purchasing a car, which may be called the Floor Mats Technique. It goes something like this: you are sitting there in the car dealer showroom, having worked out all the major details (like options, price, delivery date, etc.), you pick up that magical pen as if ready to sign on the dotted line, then look up at the salesperson and say, "By the way, I assume you don't mind throwing in a set of those nice custom floor mats with the deal, right?" At which point the salesperson begins (again) to rant and rave about how much money he is already losing on this deal (aren't they wild?) and how he cannot possibly afford to throw in the floor mats, which cost over \$50 (retail, that is), which is more than he is even making on this entire deal. You calmly put down your pen, reply, "I'm sorry we couldn't make the deal happen," and head for the door (for the third time that day). The salesperson stops you just before you get into your car, calls you back in, tells you he will give you the floor mats for the discount price of \$25, and you get up to walk back out the

door again. He stops you again and says, "All right, you can have the floor mats!" which cost the dealership a total of \$7. He gives you the pen, you sign, he gets the sale, and you get your floor mats for free.

Great, you say, now I know how to get another \$50 thrown in when I go to buy my next car, but what does this have to do with job offer negotiation? Simple, just as our fathers knew that once the deal was "made" it was still possible to get a minor concession, the same thing applies to job offers. The only difference is that you don't have to walk out of the showroom and your new boss probably won't be ranting and raving like a lunatic car salesperson. You simply present a minor (it must be minor) negotiating factor in the "By the way, I assume \_\_\_\_\_, right?" format as if you assume it is okay. Examples:

"By the way, I assume my taking a week to spend with my family in Tennessee before starting would be okay, right?"

"By the way, I assume the plans that my family has made for vacationing at Disney World in late August won't be a problem, right?"

"By the way, I assume that my car phone expense while on the road will be covered, right," even if their employees don't have or use car phones.

Please take note: the only way this approach is "no risk" is if you are willing to give in, no matter if their response is a yes or no. Because even though dear old Dad was on his way out of the showroom over some stupid floor mats, he always would have gone back in and signed, even if they didn't go get him; he didn't want to start all over again either. Sure, it's a fun way to play a final bluff. But my Dad has always gotten his floor mats, they always gave in. Why? Because the cost of the floor mats is insignificant in comparison to the overall deal. So make sure it's insignificant and be ready to back off if your bluff is called.

But even if you get a "we can't do that" response, they will usually feel guilty that they couldn't and may even offer other concessions in exchange. Boy, this negotiating stuff sure is fun, eh? Yeah, it sure is, just don't get carried away. It is truly a once-in-a-job opportunity.

### **Salary Negotiation**

While there are many potential points of negotiation, salary is usually the primary issue. Keep in mind that any discussion of salary negotiation has the potential for reaching the unacceptable range and putting the offer at risk. So tread carefully through any salary negotiations.

Many companies have a fairly tight, although not airtight, salary range at the entry level. If you are able to show extraordinary educational or work experience, you may be able to extend the top end of the scale. Yet the magnitude of salary differentials will always be smaller at the entry level than at higher level positions. So do not get carried away, even if you have multiple offers in hand.

When discussing salary, always state that you are "hoping" for more, instead of "expecting" more. Companies are always more willing to fulfill your hopes than your expectations. And keep your personal budgetary needs out of the equation. Having a larger personal budget does little to inflate your worth from a company perspective.

To better establish the acceptable range for the position, ask what the hiring range and pay range is for the position. Most larger companies will have set ranges to work within, although many medium to smaller companies may have more flexible market-driven ranges. Following are some sample questions to ask in salary negotiations:

- "What is the salary range for the position?"
- "What is the hiring salary range for the position?"
- "Do you ever pay higher than that range? If so, for what reason?"
- "What is the average increase being given? After one year? Two years? Three?"
- "How often is the employee reviewed? For performance? Salary?"

In attempting to modify salary, you may find that the best you can achieve is a promise for tomorrow. If so, be sure to get it in writing from a person with authority to make it stick. And in the end, do not let salary be your only guide.

You are much better off making \$15,000 a year and happy than \$50,000 a year and miserable. The money will take care of itself over time when you are doing work that you love.

### **Friendly Advice Technique**

What do you do if you find yourself attempting to negotiate with someone who does not have the authority to negotiate or make changes? Do not attempt to negotiate, just simply ask for their advice. "What would you recommend . . . ?" or "How would you recommend . . . ?" questions will allow you to seek the individual's advice and counsel without putting them in the uncomfortable position of not being able to respond.

Take careful notes of the steps you are recommended to follow. Even though the individual may not have a great deal of personal authority, they may be willing to give you the keys to unlocking some of the doors in negotiating. These answers are being given to you without cost. Yet the value and payback can be substantial.

### **Relocation Expenses - Yours or Theirs**

Typically relocation expenses are yours. Don't even think about getting into the higher level relocation perks at the entry level. The best you can hope for is that they will pay for the cost of a U-haul or Ryder truck rental and/or your mileage in getting to your new location. Beyond that, you are on your own. Full service movers, house buy-outs, realtor fees, mortgage buy-downs, and other perks will be out there for you in 5+ years. Until that time, everything but the most basic moving and relocation expenses is likely yours.

### **Making Your Final Commitment**

In the end, you will need to make a commitment. It should be a commitment that you are willing to stand behind your acceptance. Companies spend money, commit resources, allocate training time, and shape schedules around your commitment. In addition, they will also be sending the "Dear John/Dear Jane" letters out to all of the "second place" finishers. So make sure that you are willing to stand behind your commitment.

## **Cutting the Ties**

### **Counteroffers**

So you have finally worked out and accepted the offer. If you are leaving the ranks of the unemployed or underemployed (or never employed), it's an easy decision. Yet many college grads often complete their degree while working full-time in their field, or have gone back to school to complete a higher degree.

If you are currently employed and are ready to move on to your new employer, the time has come to tell your current boss that you are leaving. And guess what? Now is probably not a good time for you to be leaving. In most cases when you decide it's time to go is not the time your company wants you to leave. So what happens? Your employer may try to make a counteroffer in an attempt to keep you from leaving.

Remember this: companies concerned with the best interests of the employees rarely make counteroffers. Only those companies that place corporate interests ahead of personal interests are likely to make counteroffers.

Why do counteroffers happen? Simple, while you have been planning to leave, the company has probably not been planning for you to leave. In most multitask jobs, you will almost always find yourself in the middle of a project or assignment that is important to the company and to your boss. It never looks good for a boss to have someone leave, unless the boss is the one who decided it would happen. Your leaving may "reflect poorly" upon your boss.

Picture the scene: you have just "broken the news" to your boss that you will be leaving. What does she think about; your happiness about your new position and new employer or does she think about your current job, how difficult it will be to fill, and how she cannot afford to lose you right now. And so she breaks into the "I didn't realize you were unhappy here" speech and begins probing to find the reason you are leaving; more money, higher position, more perks? Then guess what? We will offer you the same or better position if you will stay! Wow! Great! Right? *Wrong!* Remember this, unless you are a true gambler, the kind who likes playing the odds ten-to-one against winning, you should never accept a counteroffer. Why? Because counteroffers are almost always temporary! It's a temporary

If you think  
no one values  
you in your  
work, wait  
until you say  
you are  
leaving

"solution" provided by your boss so that she can remain in control. It buys her time. Time to get your project finished, time to get you to tell others in the company about all those key areas that only you know, time to find someone to replace you, time to train someone to replace you, and time for your boss to decide when you will leave the company. Don't buy it, ever.

Why do people accept counteroffers; usually for simple comfort. To go to work for someone else we have to step outside our comfort zone. The counteroffer gives us the benefits of the new offer with the comfort of staying right where we are. But there are several fallacies in that line of thinking. First, the reasons for leaving still exist, some of those reasons may be temporarily altered by the counteroffer, but they are still there. Second, it should not have taken an outside offer to prompt the change. Third, and most important, by giving in to the counteroffer, you lose control over your destiny and hand it over to someone else.

Some will say, "Oh, but they're giving me \$10,000 more per year, I was only making \$25,000 before. They really want me to stay because I'm so valuable and important to the company." But remember, \$10,000 more per year is only \$2,500 more out of your boss' budget if she can find someone to replace you within three months, when you may either be demoted or fired; "you're too expensive for us to keep".

"They wouldn't do that to me. They love me." Oh yes, they would. And no, they don't. This has nothing to do with love or any other emotion, this is strictly business. At the first mention of cutbacks, your head is already clearly marked for the chopping block. The money spent to retain you temporarily is worth not having to train someone from scratch.

Some bosses even play the "We were about ready to promote you/increase your salary/give you a company car" game in matching your offer, like it was going to happen all along. Don't believe it.

Here is the real zinger. If you do accept a counteroffer and then do leave at a later time (probably just a few months later), you no longer have that great job offer in hand. You might even be out on the streets. "They wouldn't do that to me!" Oh, yes they would! Just by virtue of the fact that you have "gone looking," you are no longer considered to be "loyal to the team." You are expendable from the very moment you accept their counteroffer!

So what is the best course of action if and when a counteroffer is made? Simple, just smile and say "Boss, I'm flattered that you consider me important and would like to keep me as part of the team. But I've made up my mind, I've made my commitment and I'll be leaving in two weeks. Please tell me what I can do to make the transition as smooth as possible."

Some companies may even resort to such bullying tactics as getting the boss' boss or even the boss' boss' boss to try to talk to you. Don't give in. Remain calm and professional. When they know you are unshakable, they will back down.

Some companies, when they see you won't accept the counteroffer, may try to pressure you into staying far beyond your planned departure date. For example: "You can't leave now, we're in the middle of . . ." or something to that effect. They may try to make you feel guilty: "You're leaving us at our greatest moment of need." Or they will play on the "training the new person" theme: "You need to give us time to replace you, and then train the new person." They will try to stall for time by asking you to stay longer than planned. It's your life, but my strong recommendation is never to ask your new employer to make a change to accommodate your old employer. Your loyalties are now with your new employer. The general industry standard is two weeks' notice, so you should in no way feel obligated to go beyond that. By changing your start date, you run the risk of putting your new job in jeopardy and artificially delaying your career. If you are even considering delaying your start date, talk to your new employer first. If there is any hesitation on their part, stick to the planned start date. Many companies have set start dates due to classes and training, so don't jeopardize your new job on account of the old one.

There is  
never a  
perfect time  
to leave one  
job for

Remember, under no circumstances should you give in to a counteroffer, no matter how tempting it may seem. And only under extreme circumstances should you consider altering the "terms of departure" and only after first checking with your new employer.

### **Give Proper Notice**

One of the tendencies with accepting a new position is to want to move right away. But even if the position is vacant at your new company, no ethical employer would ask a person who is already employed to start immediately. It's just not done. Even if you aren't happy with your current employer, you owe them the professional courtesy of proper notice.

How long? Two weeks is standard in almost every industry. Your current employer may wish it was longer, but two weeks is the standard and is all that you are obliged to provide. In certain situations, an employer might decide to immediately dismiss an employee who is leaving. While federal and state laws vary as to whether they are required to pay you for your two weeks' notice, your best defense in this situation, if you believe it is a possibility, is to notify your new employer of the possibility: "Given my current situation at ABC Co., it's possible that when I give notice they may ask me to leave immediately due to \_\_\_\_\_ (competitive reasons, just finished project, etc.). If that were to happen, would you like me to start with you right away?" This approach is especially useful if the position is currently vacant.

Remember: don't get bullied into giving more than two weeks' notice unless you are absolutely sure that this will fit your new employer's schedule. Only in extreme cases should you consider remaining more than four weeks after giving notice, unless, of course, your start date is later than that, which can often be the case with entry level hiring.

### **Don't Burn Those Bridges**

No matter how awful your previous employer was, no matter how terrible your boss was, no matter how evil your co-workers were, never ever burn your bridges behind you! It doesn't matter if you were the victim of sexual harassment or threatened with human sacrifice, take it up with the courts, but don't take it out on your boss or co-workers in person before you leave. The "take this job and shove it" attitude will get you absolutely nothing except a temporary feeling of superiority. Even if you were treated unfairly, don't sink to their level to get even. The most respectable thing you can do, *especially* when it was rough, is to leave with honor and dignity. Keep your head up and keep your mouth shut. You will leave with respect instilled in your character rather than disgust instilled in your heart.

And yes, burned bridges do come back to haunt you, in ways you least expect it. One scenario to think about is about a man who felt he had every right to tell his boss exactly what he thought of him, and did exactly that. Imagine his shock and horror when this former boss was hired by his new company over 4 years later, as his new boss! Needless to say, he lasted only a few months before he moved on to a new company. Another scenario involved a young woman who told off her boss when leaving the company and then found herself having to work with her less than a year later on a committee as part of her professional association.

Remember, no matter how large your geographical view of the world is, it's a very small work world out there. Even if your former bosses never have any contact with you, they may very well talk about you (negatively) to others, sometimes at every opportunity they get. So keep it civil and professional.

Look forward, not backward. If you really want to throw them for a loop, sincerely thank them for all the help they have given you. Do your very best work in the time you have remaining with the company, and make them realize what a gem they are losing.

## **Rejection**

### **When the Offer Does Not Come**

There is no worse feeling in your job search than finding out you didn't get the job. Whether by mail, phone, or fax, the message always seems the same, and probably is, since most companies use form letters for candidate rejection. But all is not lost! Before you start papering your walls with rejection letters, consider the following "resurrection" ideas.

### Rejection Reversal Technique

You go to your mailbox, hoping for mail. And there it is. A thin envelope bearing the return address of the company you interviewed with last week, a rejection letter. Not exactly the kind of mail you were looking for. Rejection can be difficult to bear, especially when it comes from the employer you were most interested in. However, you can use this as an opportunity to grow, learn, and possibly reverse the rejection.

Upon receipt of a rejection letter, immediately call the person who wrote the letter to request feedback. "What was I lacking in meeting your needs?" Then listen closely. If you are provided with a valid area of lacking, take note of it and politely thank the manager for taking time to speak with you. However, if the answer is based on an incorrect assumption, you may have an opportunity to correct the error. For example, if the manager states that you did not have a high enough GPA for their requirements and you simply failed to put your GPA on your resume, you have a potential for a possible turnaround.

We all love to get mail. Except for the kind that begins with "In spite of your excellent credentials ..."

A recent example of a turnaround occurred when a student friend of mine received a form letter rejection after the company-site interview. She was very interested in the company and had been certain that an offer would be made. When she called to inquire as to the reason, she was told that the position required that the person be available for travel in the first two years. "But I am available to travel. In fact, I would love to travel." Her contact seemed puzzled, but promised to get back to her. When the contact called back, he explained that one of the managers had written on an interview form, "Will not travel or relocate." She explained that while she did want to stay in the metropolitan area, she was more than willing to travel. What had been a simple interview misunderstanding had almost cost her the position. The company reassessed and made the offer by the end of the following day.

As difficult as this call may seem, it can produce excellent results. Minimally, you can learn about an area of deficiency which you can correct for the next employer. Maximally, it can provide you with the opportunity to reverse what would have otherwise been a dead end.

You cannot refute the unknown.

### Isolation Technique

If you are not sure you are getting the real reason(s) from the employer for your rejection, you can test the validity by isolating the specific reason given. For example, if you were told that you were rejected because of low grades, ask, "If my GPA were higher, would you have been willing to consider hiring me?" If GPA is the only issue, the answer will be affirmative. If not, other issues may come creeping out. This technique can become especially valuable when the primary answer is simply a smoke screen for something the employer is not initially willing to share with you.

A recent graduate, Peter, was rejected after final interviews due to what was termed "high salary requirements." He told the manager his salary range was flexible and asked, "At what salary range would you be willing to hire me?" "Actually, salary is not the only issue. We also received a rather poor report on you from one of the recent graduates from your school." Ah, the truth comes out! The "poor report" had come from a student who had difficulty working with Peter on a team assignment at school the prior year. Peter had not spoken with him in over a year, but it was now making the difference in getting the job he wanted. Peter took the initiative to contact the former classmate and invited him to lunch. Apparently, much of the "poor report" had to do with the classmate's view of how Peter would fit into the company culture. Peter used to have a beard and wore tattered jeans to class. All that had since changed, but that was the last image the classmate had of Peter. Peter brought him up-to-date on his accomplishments and even convinced him to write a letter of recommendation. Does all of this seem like a lot of extra effort? Possibly, but the bottom line is that company did eventually hire him.

You cannot lose that which you do not have.

Isolate the real reason. And change it if you can.

### Kamikaze Technique

A more aggressive version of the Rejection Reversal Technique and the Isolation Technique is to commit your self to turning the situation around and getting another interview. The Kamikaze Technique works well when you have been closed out at an early point in the process, especially with on-campus interviews that have gone awry.

What happens if you blow the initial interview with Human Resources or some other non-hiring manager? End of the line? Roll over and die? Not necessarily. Try going kamikaze. It's not necessarily crash and burn, although it does help if you have rather daring tendencies to help make it work.

What you need to do is contact the hiring manager, not the person you wowed or bow-wowed as the case may be in the initial interview, and explain the situation. You have already met with the personnel-type person and they have informed you that your background is very interesting, but not what they are looking for at this exact moment; standard blow off. If you sincerely had a bad day (illness, recent brain surgery, dog was being held for ransom, whatever), let them know. Valid excuses do count. The key is to let them know that you really want to go to work for their company and you would be willing to fly, drive, hitchhike, whatever, to be there and meet with them, even if just for 15 minutes. "Would you please give me the chance to prove myself with you personally?" You can even play to what is hopefully a giant "I am the manager" ego with the "After all, you are the hiring manager, right?" line. Let them know that you truly want to work for their company and that you will do whatever is necessary to make it happen.

Crash and burn, sure it happens. But remember, you have already taken a direct hit. So why not go kamikaze? The results might surprise you.

A recent college grad used this technique to secure a company-site interview after he got the standard rejection letter based on the campus interview. He called the Branch Manager, told him he would be in the Chicago area the following week, and asked for further consideration so that he could show his full experience level, including a recent project he had completed. The manager agreed to bring him in and put him through the paces. He aced the company's aptitude test, impressed all the key managers, and had a job offer in hand by the end of the week!

Yes, miracles do happen, especially when you do your part in helping them to happen.

### **Second Place Technique**

If you are told that you were "second place" or "second choice" in the hiring process, do not despair. Call the company back in two to three weeks to emphasize again that you are interested in working there. Why? For two reasons: (1) their first choice may not have worked out, the candidate may have gotten a counteroffer, a better offer, or just plain cold feet, and (2) it keeps you under consideration for any other position or future position that may come available.

Many who were initially "second place" have been hired after later being upgraded

The reality is that for every one hired, they may have told as many as five to ten others that they came in "second place." But if that is what they told you, take them on their honor and give it a shot.

### **Squeaky Wheel Technique**

One of the more difficult situations in conducting a job search is attempting to move the process forward with a less-than-enthusiastic employer. You can get caught in the waiting game, hoping for the phone to ring. Your job search is your number one priority, but it may be far down the list for the employer. And most job seekers simply give up. Do not include yourself among the quitters. Many jobs have been found through simple diligence and consistent follow-up.

If you have an employer who is unwilling or unable to move forward, continue to make regular contact with them. You may find yourself on a weekly schedule of calling only to hear a "nothing has changed" response. If their interest in you has not changed, but has simply stalled, continue your efforts to move the process forward. It may be at the lowest point that the wheel begins to turn.

Call me and I will respond. If you wait for me to call I will be too busy responding to the others who did call.

We recently interviewed a college student who did not meet our initial profile. In fact, we sent her an immediate rejection letter based on her resume. While we usually hire only Bachelor or Master degree graduates, she had only an Associate degree. And to make it even more difficult, her degree was ten years old. However, she kept in touch with us and asked what she could do to prepare herself for work in our field. I suggested further training to update her previous schooling. After she completed this training, she called me back again, asking to take our computer-based test to measure her increased knowledge. She did well,

but we still had no immediate openings for someone with her limited skills. Bottom line, she kept in touch with us until an opportunity became available. Instead of starting a search for available candidates from scratch, we went forward with the simple solution: we hired the squeaky wheel. And now she is on her way in the job of her dreams, but only because of her tenacity. Her rejection letter proves that "No" does not always mean no. Sometimes it simply means "Not yet."

"No" does not always mean no. Sometimes it means "not now."

## No Offers

### Graduation and Still No Job

I do not envy those who don the cap and gown without a job offer in hand. But don't give up and certainly don't let down in your efforts. This is not the time to take a vacation or "take time off." It's time to double your efforts and make a strong push forward. You are now truly full-time in your job search, and the quicker you make your mark the better, because the market is about to be flooded with about 400,000 other lost souls just like yourself. But with one very major difference, you have armed yourself for battle and are ready to push at the lines. Use the Napoleon Strategy, keep pushing at the lines until you see a point that is vulnerable, then put all your forces and energy into penetrating that area of possible access.

If you have not already done so, go back and read this document in its entirety. In it you will find several keys which can still unlock doors that might otherwise block your path. And never, ever give up. This is your moment of truth and you need to push forward with every ounce of courage and tenacity.

### Retracing Technique

The first thing you should do upon graduating without a job is to retrace your job search steps over the past year. You should immediately re-contact all the employers you interviewed with. If you interviewed at the company-site and failed to make the final cut, you should re-contact. If you interviewed on-campus and received a form letter rejection, you should re-contact. Even if you only went through a short interview on the phone, you should re-contact.

Why, several reasons. First, most employers have a minor attrition factor at the actual start date, when some of the accepted offers do not actually start; better offer, decided to go back to school, budding romance in another part of the country, joined the Peace Corps. For whatever the reason, when there is a dropout before the start date, there is an open position. And when it is this late in the process, few companies want to begin the hiring process all over again. In larger companies there are usually a set number of entry level positions which need to be filled for a full training class. You could be the right person at the right time.

Your new job is out there waiting for you to find it.

The second reason is that many employers will have made changes in their hiring demand during the intervening weeks or months. If that demand is greater, your notification of immediate availability can make you a prime candidate. Even if there is not an immediate need, any new openings that become available could have your name attached.

The third reason is that your availability has changed. Namely, you are available immediately. Since many medium and smaller companies operate within shorter time frames, they many have shied away from you when your graduation and availability was still months away. Your present availability could put you in immediate contention for any currently open positions.

The final reason is that even if you hit a "sorry, nothing is available" dead-end with the employer, you are given another opportunity to ask for referrals to other companies. Most employers are willing to help you by providing contact information for other employers who may be hiring.

So retrace your steps and notify all past contacts that you are still available. If you are uncomfortable in making this approach, use the excuse of updating the employer with your new address and phone number, which is vital information for employers to be able to reach you at a later date. And don't just stop with your employer contacts,

re-contact your whole network of contacts. There will be a renewed sense of urgency on everyone's part to assist you in your job search. Take advantage of it.

### **Ask for turn downs**

Contact all your friends and classmates who just graduated. If they have found a job, congratulate them. Then ask if there were any positions they turned down during the course of their job search. If the position and company are in your field, ask for employer contact information and their personal recommendation. The employer may not have filled the position yet, and the recommendation from their previously favored candidate may provide you with an immediate "in" for the position.

### **What to Do Next**

Reread this document, front to back. And do all the things you did not do the first time around. Job search requires a multi-faceted approach in order to be successful. Make sure you take advantage of every avenue available to you.

### **Job Search Schedule**

Congratulations. You have just accepted a full-time job, full-time job search, that is. Do not conduct your job search with anything less than a full-time effort. Without full-time commitment, you increase the amount of time you will be without work which decreases your attractiveness in the job market.

Following is a simple work schedule to follow:

7:30 a.m. - Early morning callbacks to contacts you were unable to reach the previous day.

8:30 a.m. - Off to the library or Career Center to do further research and write follow-up letters from the day before.

12:30 p.m. - Hit the telephone all afternoon. Do not stop until you have contacted every potential employer and every potential contact.

4:30 p.m. - Send same day follow-up e-mails or letters to the most promising contacts of the day.

5:30 p.m. - One last attempt to reach all those who were unreachable during the day.

In looking at the above, there is one major activity missing: interviewing. Until you spend the time to make direct contact with potential employers, there will not be any interviewing. There are worse things than having your day filled with interviews. When that starts happening, you will know that your new job is within reach.

### **Puppy Dog Close Technique**

What should you do when an employer says, "I'm sorry, we don't have any job openings", just give up? Cross them off your list? If you do, you are overlooking a large segment of the "hidden job market" that will remain hidden to you if you simply give up. By utilizing a common sales technique, the Puppy Dog Close, you can tap into this additional source of potential employment.

In brief, the Puppy Dog Close is a sales technique that is based (aptly) on a method that pet store salespeople use to sell puppy dogs. The idea is that while it may be difficult to get the customer to make a large commitment, buying the puppy, if we can break down the sale into a smaller component with a "guaranteed/no risk" offer, the customer may be willing to make an initial commitment.

Hiring is a risk. Reduce my risk and I may be willing to respond favorably.

For example, the pet store salesperson tells you that you can take the puppy home with you and if you don't like it, just bring it back. So what happens? You take the puppy with you, you play with him and run around outside with him, he licks your nose in the morning and waits for you faithfully at the door at the end of the day. And the sale is made. Not by the salesperson, but by the puppy.

How does this apply to employment? Think about the commitment you are asking a company to make. Based solely on a phone call or brief meeting, can you reasonably expect them to create a new job opening for you where none

currently exists, obviously not. Yet these same managers, who technically do not have any job openings, still have work to get done. In fact, many companies have had to reduce their staff while completing the same amount of work. So the work is there, but they just can't hire right now, that is, they can't hire permanent employees. But these same managers can usually bring in temporary workers to help out when needed. Here is the key; those temp workers are often the first ones managers will look to when attempting to fill a permanent opening. Sometimes managers with no openings will go out of their way to create an opening for an outstanding temporary worker.

Working as a temp is no longer the domain of part-time secretaries. There are as many different types of temp positions out there as there are permanent, everything from office to factory to professional to management. For example, Sandia has often had professionals working for them as temps or contractors. And when the hiring window opened they did not begin to interview or start a full-scale candidate search to fill our open positions. They hired the temps who were already working for them since they were known entities who had already proven themselves.

In application, the Puppy Dog Close merely requires you to get past the "no openings" response with the question, "Do you still have work that needs to be done?" By following this line of questioning, you can usually determine any potential "project needs" the company may have which usually are not long enough to require permanent workers. Offer to work for them as a temp on these projects. Then, if hired as a temp, work like you have never worked before. Be the superstar in the department, always willing to give that extra effort managers look for in hiring new people. Keep your eyes open for other projects, in that department and others. Many such temporary assignments can turn into long-term commitments. Make it known that you would like to be considered if a permanent opportunity becomes available.

Have an active application on file with Manpower, Kelly, or another low-markup agency which can be suggested as a facilitator for payroll arrangements if needed; many companies are unwilling to add temps to their own payroll for benefits and tax reasons. Note, however, that most temp firms do not actively market your professional skills to companies; they are reactive, not proactive. You need to be the one who markets your skills and suggests the arrangement; this approach is rather novel and companies will need the prompting.

The Puppy Dog Close is an excellent technique to use when you hear the "no openings" response. Does it always work? No, but it does add a unique approach that others are not taking, putting you in a position with very little competition for opportunities that may come up. You must believe in yourself and your ability to benefit the company you work for. Obviously, if you do a mediocre job, you will not be offered further work. But if you do your best to be an outstanding employee, you may find a job that is never advertised, never known to anyone outside of the company, and never known to be open until after you fill it. The Puppy Dog Close actually works better during high unemployment, since managers often have work that needs to be done but lack the ability to hire.

Try the Puppy Dog Close as an added tool in your job search. Minimally, you may find a temp job that gives you great experience and a valuable reference. On the other hand, it may provide you with a route into a company that might have otherwise ignored you. Remember, you don't need to be a salesperson to use this approach, the "puppy" (the quality of your work on the job) makes the sale in this win-win situation. Give it a try!

I may not be able to hire right now. But I always need help.

### **Freelancer Technique**

Similar to the Puppy Dog Close, the Freelancer Technique works especially well in those fields where freelancing, independent contracting, is commonplace. A recent college grad used this technique very successfully in the advertising field. He put together a full portfolio of services he could provide to local advertising firms, including freelance writing, design, and voice talent. He then contacted all the area advertising agencies, said he had some materials to forward to them, and asked if they would give him the name of the owner or creative director of the agency. They all did, and his first goal was achieved: he had the names of the target contacts. He then wrote letters to those individuals, introducing himself as a freelancer. He followed up these letters a week later with a phone call and virtually every person took his call! Several set up appointments to talk about potentially working with him on a freelance contract basis. These appointments, interviews, allowed him to show his work portfolio and open the door when future needs would arise. He then followed up with a thank you note.

Result? In less than two weeks, he had gone from being a total unknown in the ad business to perhaps the best-known freelancer in the area. He came up with several freelance contracts, and eventually landed a job with one of the agencies he freelanced for as an account executive and chief copywriter.

Why does this approach work, because most companies will only talk about "employment" when they have a current active need. If he had sent out his material as a solicitation for employment, he likely would have gotten no response. But most companies are very willing to talk to freelancers regardless of their current needs.

The Freelancer Technique works well in all fields where independent contractors are commonplace, such as the creative fields (Advertising, Publishing, Writing, Arts), technical fields (Programming, Engineering), and specialty fields (Accounting, Legal, Medical). The side benefit is that the pay is usually quite good, anywhere from 25% to 100% higher than the average wage for similar in-house work, although you are on your own in the perks category.

It usually costs very little to establish yourself as a freelancer, other than a basic work portfolio and an outline of your services, and it often opens doors that would otherwise be shut. And it sure beats flipping burgers at McDonald's!

### **Work Down Under Technique**

Not Australia, but down under the position you are seeking. Again, this is a technique best used by someone who is unemployed or underemployed. If you cannot find work at the level you desire, you might consider starting at a lower level and working your way up. The days of "starting in the mail room" are not necessarily past. But these days the "mail room" may be in administrative, clerical, or other support positions. One college graduate who couldn't find a job in advertising took a job as a receptionist with a large ad agency. Within two years, she was working in her "dream job" as an ad copywriter handling one of the agency's largest national accounts.

### **Partially Employed Technique**

When looking for companies that may have an interest in your wares, consider working for a smaller company that is unable to hire someone full-time at the going market rate, but would be willing to bring you on part-time. By working part-time, you are often more able to gather higher level experience than if you sought a lower level, permanent, full-time position. And by working with a smaller company, the experience will likely be much broader, since each person often wears many different hats.

If you do outstanding work for them, they will be happy to give you an excellent reference. Or they may surprise you by offering you full-time work in some combination of duties. It's a start and often that is all it takes.

### **Temporarily Employed Technique**

If you are seeking both a way to keep busy and a way to gain valuable experience and contacts, temporary employment, or "temping," may be the solution. Most temporary help agencies are quite willing to work with new college grads, with assignments ranging from basic clerical to office administrative to para-professional.

It should be noted that general temping is different from the Puppy Dog Close selective temping in that you have little control over the assignment and company location. But it can provide you with an extra measure of experience to include on your resume and can help pay the bills until a real job comes along. Always keep your eyes open for new opportunities with the companies you work for. You are now on the inside and have access to otherwise unavailable information.

### **Voluntarily Employed Technique**

Even if you are able to locate temp or part-time paid work elsewhere, you may want to consider expanding your experience by volunteering for a local school, government agency, association, community service organization, etc. You can often work at the same professional level you are seeking as your long-term goal, so the experience will serve you well both on your resume and within the interview. Plus, not-for-profits often have good connections in the business community, so you may be able to develop further network contacts.

"Free" will almost always get their attention

### **Masters of The University**

Probably the most popular option for the perpetually unemployed is further schooling. But unless graduate study truly enhances your job search opportunities, you are only delaying the inevitable.

Why do so many students head off to grad school? Is it because they are so much more employable with the advanced degree, or is it to further enhance the academic and professional understanding of the field of interest; unfortunately, no. The majority of college students, over 60% by a recent poll, choose grad school not for the educational opportunities offered, but because it was preferable to having to go out and find a job.

Grad school is  
much less  
painful than  
the reality of  
unemployment.

Yes, it does look much better to go on to grad school rather than spending two years watching *Oprah* and eating Cheetos. If that is truly your only alternative, go hide from reality for a couple more years in hopes of a better job search later. But next time, conduct your job search correctly right from the start. In fact, begin to plan now so that you will be ahead of the game instead of behind it.

### **Don't Quit!**

Following is a piece of poetry that many have framed on the wall in their offices. They look to it when they need inspiration. Let's hope it will inspire you as well.

#### **Don't Quit!**

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,  
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,  
When the funds are low and the debts are high,  
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,  
When care is pressing you down a bit,  
Rest, if you must, but do not quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,  
As every one of us sometimes learns,  
And many a failure turns about,  
When he might have won had he stuck it out;  
Don't give up though the pace seems slow--  
You may succeed with another blow.

Often the goal is nearer than,  
It seems to a faint and faltering man,  
Often the struggler has given up,  
When he might have captured the victor's cup,  
And he learned too late when the night slipped down,  
How close he was to the golden crown.

Success is failure turned inside out--  
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,  
And you never can tell how close you are,  
It may be near when it seems so far,  
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit--  
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.

- Anonymous -

Your job is just around the corner, stay with it. Don't be afraid to work hard at finding work. In the end, you will succeed. I know you will. My thoughts and prayers are with you.

## New Job Preparation

Congratulations! Your hard work has finally paid off! Now what? First of all, get ready for one of the most enjoyable parties you have ever attended and you are the guest of honor. It doesn't matter if it's two hundred people at Mom and Dad's or just a celebration night out with a few friends or a loved one. Splurge! Spend a few bucks. Buy a bottle of nice champagne! After all, this is a pivotal event in your life and should be welcomed with a bang!

### First Things First

Make sure you take the time to get all of your paperwork in order. If the offer was made to you verbally, make *certain* you also get a written offer. The basic information you are looking for is the salary plus any promised bonuses and/or commissions, start date, and who to report to and when. Treat it like gold since that letter is an actual contract, but remember, it's not legally binding until you accept it. Make sure you put your acceptance in writing and keep a copy for your files.

Ask if there is any employment paperwork you can fill out before you actually report to work. Taking care of your paperwork now will avoid confusion later. Make sure everything is in order now and don't put it off.

### Conditions of Employment

While some may consider drug testing, credit checks, reference checks, and other pre-employment checks to be Gestapo tactics, they are a requirement for many companies. And, yes, in most cases they are legal. Remember that little section of legalese at the end of the employment application you didn't really read? Your signature on that document is what gives them the right. So be ready to live up to the terms that you have already agreed to. By the way, if you look closely at your acceptance letter, you may notice that the offer is contingent on you passing whatever pre-employment checks and/or tests they may have. Even if it isn't in the letter, it was probably contained within the application you signed earlier. Most employers consider these tests to be "conditions of employment," and these conditions can be in effect even after you have started with the company.

An example of this "condition of employment" clause being invoked occurred when a recently hired grad was found to have lied about some information on the employment application. There have been numerous cases of graduates who have been hired and then fired by the new employer based solely on the conditions of that document. As long as you have been straight and honest, this should not be a problem for you.

On the other hand, the pre-employment check that many college students fear most is the pre-employment drug screening and rightly so. A strong note of caution: if you have in the past or are presently using illegal drugs, you are strongly advised to stop using them, immediately! The day before, or even the week before, the test will likely be too late to achieve "clean" results. But if you make a commitment to steer clear far enough in advance, you may give your body enough time to detoxify and flush out. While many substances can clear in under a week, there are some that will stay with you much longer. I recently spoke with a graduate who had accepted employment, only to fail the drug test. Reason, he had used marijuana 31 days before the drug test and failed. Remember that many companies have a "zero tolerance" when it come to drug usage.

There is no simple answer as to how long drugs will remain in your system, since the answer is influenced by the specific drug half-life, intensity of the usage, method of usage, length of usage, tolerance, fluid intake, body size, body fat, metabolism and, most important, the specific range which the drug testing lab uses to signify a "positive" for drug use. But the following table provides some general guidelines for the amount of time a drug can be detected by most standard drug tests:

Drug	Detection Time	Drug	Detection Time
Alcohol	6-24 hours	LSD	1-4 days
Amphetamines	2-3 days	Marijuana (THC)	7-30 days
Barbituates	1 day to 3 weeks	Methadone	3-5 days
Benzodiazepines	3-7 days	Methaqualone	14 days
Cocaine	2-5 days	Opiates	1-4 days
Codeine	3-5 days	Phencyclidine (PCP)	2-4 days
Euphorics (MDMA, Ecstasy)	1-3 days	Steroids (anabolic)	14-30 days

Keep in mind that detection time listed above does not mean that the drug is fully expelled from your body within that amount of time, just that it has dissipated enough that it can no longer be accurately detected, or at least is not high enough to register a "positive" on a drug test. Most drugs are treated by the body as toxins which take time to eliminate. Rather than allow the toxins to potentially affect vital organs, they are often stored in fat cells, making them typically difficult to release or detoxify from the body.

The basic drug test used by most corporate drug testing programs is called a "Five-Screen" (or "NIDA-5" or "SAMHSA-5") which is testing for five types of drugs:

1. Cannabinoids (Marijuana, Hashish)
2. Cocaine (Cocaine, Crack, Benzoyllecognine)
3. Opiates (Heroin, Opium, Codeine, Morphine)
4. Amphetamines (Amphetamines, Methamphetamines, Speed)
5. Phencyclidine (PCP, Angel Dust)

However, many drug testing firms now offer a "Ten-Screen" which expands to include five additional drugs:

1. Barbituates (Phenobarbital, Secobarbital, Pentobarbital, Butalbital, Amobarbital)
2. Methaqualone (Qualuudes)
3. Benzodiazepines (Tranquilizers--Diazepam, Valium, Librium, Ativan, Xanax, Clonopin, Serax, Halcion, Rohypnol)
4. Methadone
5. Propoxyphene (Darvon compounds)

One major drug testing company is now offering the Ten-Screen for the same price as the Five-Screen. Result, most employers end up testing for more, rather than less. Other drugs that can be included in drug tests include:

1. Ethanol (yes, that's alcohol)
2. LSD
3. Hallucinogens (Psilocybin, Mescaline, MDMA, MDA, MDE)
4. Inhalents (Toluene, Xylene, Benzene)

If there is a drug out there, there is a drug test for it.

How about one more thing to worry about? Second-hand smoke from marijuana and crack cocaine can be absorbed into your hair. Problem, some companies are now using hair testing to determine drug usage. Answer, don't even hang around others who are doing drugs. It can still be absorbed into your system and produce a positive test result. "I didn't inhale..." is not a valid response. And sufficient second-hand smoke exposure can also cause failure of standard urine drug tests. You could fail both a primary and secondary test, with no recourse other than saying that it was someone else. It's just not worth the risk.

So if you have been exposed to illegal drugs, your best insurance for a clean drug test is to stop using them immediately, and not just temporarily, permanently. Drug test or no drug test, using illegal drugs and excesses of alcohol will eventually catch up with you, sooner if you are foolish enough to use them during work hours or later if you obliterate the rest of your life outside work.

Please note: this is not a lecture from Mom and Dad on the evils of illegal drugs. This is a straightforward and honest warning from someone who has seen the negative effects that drugs can have in the workplace. Illegal drugs have *no place* in work society today and *never will*.

If you are not a drug user and you fail the drug screening, it does happen, be as straightforward with the employer as possible, let them know that you are not a drug user and ask them if they would please do a confirmation test. Recent estimates from the *Journal of Analytic Toxicology* showed error rates of 5 to 14% for initial drug testing. Following is a list of over-the-counter medications which have been known to cause false positives in drug testing:

- Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin)
- Midol
- Nuprin
- Sudafed
- Vicks Nasal Spray

- Neosynephren
- Ephedra and Ephedrine-based products (often used in diet products)
- Detromethorphan
- Vicks 44

There are more, but suffice to say that not every drug test is accurate. That's why almost all drug testing companies ask you in advance what medications you are presently taking or have taken in the last 30 days. Make sure you list them all, even over-the-counter medications. Most reputable drug testing companies will either have a doctor or other medical professional personally interview those who fail a drug test to determine if there was a potential false positive.

If you do receive a failing grade actually referred to as a "positive" on your drug test, this is one test you do NOT want a positive, you want all negatives on your drug test, ask to be retested with a confirmation or secondary test. Most employers do not automatically perform the confirmation test since it is significantly more expensive than the initial test. However, if they are unwilling to offer retesting due to the expense, offer to pay the expense on your own and then use a different testing service, ideally a secondary testing provider recommended by the employer so that you won't have a credibility problem with the second test. If you are turned down in your request or you have additional problems, you may want to seek the advice of a competent attorney for further counsel on your available options.

### **Very Best Question to Ask Before You Start Work**

Want to really impress your new employer? Ask if there are any materials that you can read or study before you start work. Not only will it give you a jump start on the work at hand, it will place you very favorably with your future employer. One hiring official stated that of all the people that he had been involved in hiring over the years, this request was made only twice, and both times it was made known to everyone in the department, from line management on up to VP, that this person truly had "the kind of attitude that will go far in the company."

Even if you will be part of a formal training program, just the fact that you requested to go above and beyond will place you in good standing. And if they don't have any work-related materials, you might ask for a recommendation of outside reading (books, articles, etc.). It will be duly noted that you are a potential superstar in the making.

### **Announcement Letter Technique**

Remember all the hard work you put in to develop your personal network? Now is an excellent time to show them your gratitude. Send out an announcement letter about your new job to all of your network contacts. Let them know your new address, if you have it, both home and work. Yes, you have now entered the life of dual phone numbers and addresses.

By keeping in touch with your network, you have planted the seeds for future contact. And now that you will also be well-connected in the field, be sure to offer your support to anyone in need in the future. Once you have reached your initial goal, do not forget to extend a helping hand to others.

If your new job came directly through a network connection, it would be entirely appropriate to send a small gift, such as a box of chocolates, along with a personal note of gratitude.

### **New Job Proverbs**

Following is a collection of "new job proverbs" to assist you in the sometimes difficult world of work that is just ahead:

#### **First few days:**

- Know what your company does. Be ready to give a 30-second overview to anyone that asks, from your friends to your grandma to your next door neighbor.
- Understand your role in contributing to the bottom line of the company. Keep your eyes and your career focused on the big picture rather than your own little cube.
- Get a copy of your company's most recent annual report and read it cover to cover.

- Dress conservatively, at or above the conservative median within the company. You should always speak louder than your clothes.
- Remember the names of those you are introduced to. In your first few days on the job, jot down names until you remember them. They only have to remember one new name, while you have scores.
- Take the time to understand your company benefits plan. Don't wait until you need to use one of the benefits to understand it.
- Watch and emulate those who are successful in the company. Allow them to be your mentors from afar.
- Personalize your work area, but not too personal. Frame your degree and hang it on the wall. Put a small picture on your desk. Get a nameplate so everyone will know who you are.
- If your employer provides the option, have your paycheck set up for direct deposit. It will save you the time and hassle of depositing each paycheck and will give you quicker access to your money.

It's not a  
real job  
until the  
first  
paycheck  
clears the  
bank.

#### **Daily routine:**

- Rehearse what you need to accomplish that day during your morning commute.
- If you can take public transportation to work, do it. It not only saves energy, but gives you time to read. Always have profitable reading materials with you. And no, the daily paper does not qualify.
- If you drive to work, get in the habit of "reading" books on tape. It's amazing how much reading you can accomplish over the course of a year.
- Always carry a notepad or pocket organizer with you. If you drive, get a windshield-attached notepad. Get in the habit of writing down both your brilliant thoughts and daily reminders as they occur to you. Or you may lose them forever.
- Be a morning person. Always be on time.
- Plan your day in advance. Ten to fifteen minutes in the morning will equal an extra hour or more of productivity throughout the day.
- Develop a routine only where it increases personal productivity; don't get into the rut of doing something strictly as part of a routine.
- Be the first person to say "hello" to others in the morning. And say it with a smile.
- Never leave a half cup of coffee in the coffee maker for the next person. Always make a fresh pot.
- Keep a toothbrush and breath mints in your desk for bad breath emergencies. And remember, just because you can't smell your breath doesn't mean it's sweet and clean.
- Keep an extra shirt or blouse, pressed and boxed, in your car. Also consider having an extra tie or an extra pair of nylons available at the ready.
- Always check your appearance in the mirror before leaving the washroom.
- Arrive at meetings on time. Bring extra work that you can pass the time with while you are waiting for others.
- Don't doodle or daydream at meetings. If topics being covered are outside of your area, take out your pocket planner and review what you need to accomplish that day.
- Eat lunch in. You will save both time and money. Even just \$5 per lunch eating out (and it can easily be quite a bit more) adds up to \$2500 per year. Plus it's healthier to bring your own. Use a re-sealable lunch container and bring last night's leftovers or soup or pasta. And as a by-product, you will often be viewed as a hard worker for consistently staying in when others are going out.
- Go for a brisk walk each day. Park at the far end of the lot in the morning. Or stretch your legs during lunch. It will clear your mind and make you more productive for the remainder of the day.

#### **Work ethics:**

- Draw a solid ethical line and never cross it. Especially when others are encouraging you to do so.
- Integrity sold cannot be repurchased. Do not allow yours to go on the trading block, for there will always be a ready buyer.
- Integrity means doing what is right, even if it is unpopular, unfashionable and unprofitable.

- Develop a reputation for honesty and integrity. If you have failed in these areas in the past, your new job is an opportunity to start fresh. It is a reputation you must earn over time. And live up to that reputation at all times, at work and everywhere else.
- Don't use profanity, even when others do.
- Never tell dirty jokes, racist jokes or sexist jokes. And ignore those who attempt to share them with you.
- Don't lie, cheat, or steal, even when the temptation is great--stand for honesty and integrity in all you do, and you will be amazed how far it sets you above your peers.
- Make good on your promises. If you are not sure you can deliver, don't promise.
- If you are not sure, don't do it. That's your conscience talking. Listen closely.
- Always seek the good in others, and they will be more likely to find it in you.

True	ethics
are	not

#### **Interpersonal skills:**

- Talk 20% and listen 80%. And avoid those who talk 100%.
- Always take the opportunity to praise others who are worthy of praise. If someone has done well, take the time to compliment them.
- When someone is telling you a story, don't interrupt. And don't try to upstage them with a better story of your own.
- Smile. A lot. Even when you feel like frowning.
- If someone is confrontational with you, avoid the confrontation. Take time to cool off before you respond.
- Be the person in your office who makes everyone else smile. Everyone loves a cheerful person.
- Look for solutions, not problems. Anyone can identify problems.
- When someone compliments you for your work, don't say "it was nothing" or try to talk them out of it. Just say "Thank you" with a smile and move on. Nothing more, nothing less.
- Life isn't fair. And sometimes work isn't either. There will be some days when just getting through is the best you can do. Wait until tomorrow to see if things clear up. They usually do.
- Don't be a complainer. Every work environment has a person who feels responsible for the role of office complainer. Let someone else fill that role. And ignore them when they attempt to practice their art upon you.
- When you are unhappy on the inside, do your best to stay happy on the outside. Your inside will eventually get the point and come around.

#### **Office politics:**

- Show respect for your boss in everything you do. Don't join in when others who are boss bashing. It can be contagious.
- As a subordinate, you must be willing to submit to the plans of others. Submission is not found in obeying the requests of those you are in agreement with. True submission is found in obeying another when you are not in agreement.
- Never discuss your salary with your co-workers. Your refusal to discuss will drive them crazy wondering why you are making so much more than them.
- The work washroom is located at work. Don't let your conversation change to match the surroundings.
- When you are personally complimented for something that was a team effort, always give proper credit to the team.
- When others begin to criticize, fight the urge to join in the slaughter.
- Be a builder, not a destroyer.

#### **Education and Training:**

- Know and understand the company training program. And take advantage of it.
- Learn to match your training with application of what you have learned. Apply it and it's yours forever. Don't apply it and it's lost.
- Continue your education. Even if you do not pursue a formal degree, make learning a lifelong vocation. What you learn will affect what you earn.

- If you are a "hunt and peck" typist, learn to type properly. It will save you immeasurable time over the course of your career. And keep you from looking silly.
- Become fully computer literate. You don't have to be a computer wizard, but you do need to become proficient in the use of technology in your work. Stay ahead of the technology curve.
- Learn to become a team player. College rewards individual performance. Employers reward team performance.
- You probably don't know nearly as much as you think you know. It often takes the maturity of a lifetime to come to this realization, but if you are willing to acknowledge this fact early in life, you will capture a lifetime of learning and growth.

Your real  
education  
begins now.

#### **Financial:**

- There is more to life than the endless accumulation of wealth. There will never be enough money. You must find your wealth elsewhere in your life.
- Wealth and happiness are not the same thing.
- Buy stock in your company. If you are not willing to invest financially in your company, why are you investing your entire career with them?
- Read your company's annual report every year. And study the President's Message to the Shareholders. That's both the history of the past year and the next year's vision. Keep your career focused on doing your part in reaching that vision.
- Sign up for your 401(k) plan as soon as possible and have 10-15% automatically deducted from your paycheck. You will never have it, so you will never miss it. And you will be well taken care of later in life while others continue to struggle just to survive.
- Always pay your bills on time. Especially credit cards. And student loans. An unblemished credit record is an asset that should be cherished and protected.
- When someone offers you "the opportunity of a lifetime" in the form of multi-level marketing (a/k/a MLM, a/k/a network marketing), save your time and professional reputation with a polite yet firm "No thanks."
- Don't run a monthly balance on your credit card. If you can't pay it off, don't buy it.

#### **Extracurricular:**

- Limit yourself to one glass of beer or wine when dining out with co-workers or clients. And wait for someone else to order liquor first--don't be the only one.
- Don't drink at all at the Christmas Party or other company social activities; it's much more fun to watch others who are drinking.
- Don't do drugs and avoid those who do.
- Beware of office romances. Keep personal matters outside the work environment.
- Listen to your home answering machine message from the perspective of your boss. If you don't want the office to hear it, change it. Cutesy messages usually don't sound cute when played over a speakerphone at the office. And if it's real cutesy, they will probably tell others to call and listen to it.
- Join a health club. Go before work, during lunch, or after work. It will increase your level of energy in your life. You will look better and feel better.

#### **Career progression:**

- Know who your boss' boss is. This is the person who may either recommend or authorize your promotion in the future.
- Ask your boss to point out areas for continuous improvement.
- Become known as either the person who is the first in to work or as the person who is the last to leave. Or both. But don't do both forever. It's a good start in your career, but it's not a good life in the end.
- Develop a reputation as a problem-solver. If a problem lands on your desk, don't pass it on to someone else.

- Even if you receive a good performance review, ask what you can do to improve your future performance.
- Be aware of the work that is going on around you. These are your areas of potential future growth.
- Get copies of your competitor's annual reports. It will keep you in tune with your industry and help you to better understand and appreciate your company's competitive edge.
- If you love doing what you do, success will follow.
- Take others in your company out to lunch to learn more about their jobs and their departments. Let them do the talking. You do the listening.
- Learn to tap into the office network. Career progression is more like climbing a web than climbing a ladder. Make sure you tap into as many connection points as possible.
- No one owes you a living. No one owes you a job. You earn it, each and every day, all over again. And when you cease to earn your job on a daily basis, you will cease in your career progression.
- If you do more than what you are paid to do, you will eventually be paid more for what you do.
- Don't ask for a raise because you need more money. Ask for a raise because you are worth more money.
- When faced with earning \$20,000 and loving what you do versus earning \$50,000 and hating what you do, take the \$20,000 job and sleep well at night. Your life will be much richer than if you had taken the other job.
- Take the pillow test to assess your career satisfaction. When you take your head up off the pillow in the morning, are you excited about going to work? And when you lay your head down on the pillow at night, are you happy about what you have accomplished? The answer will not always be "Yes," but if it is consistently "No," it may be time to move on.

#### **Skills for a lifetime:**

- Life is never exactly what we want it to be. Life just is. It is what we make of life that will bring it nearer to what we want it to be.
- You are the best investment you will ever have. The dividends received on this investment will pay you back for the rest of your life.
- Be proactive in planning for the future. To get things in the future, you have to pursue them today.
- Expect great things from yourself and hope for great things in others.
- Set goals in your life. Break down your long-term goals into short-term goals. Then break down your short-term goals into annual goals. Then break down your annual goals into monthly goals. Then break down your monthly goals into weekly goals. Then break down your weekly goals into daily goals. Then break down your daily goals into tasks. And make sure it is all down on paper. Then do it. You are on your way to accomplishing all the goals in your life.
- Begin to use a Day-Timer, Franklin Planner, or other pocket planner religiously. It will quickly become your daily guide to accomplishing your goals in life.
- Be observant and learn from the mistakes of others so that they are not repeated in your life.
- When you do make mistakes, take responsibility for them immediately. Denial will only prolong and intensify the error. Acknowledge you were wrong and move on. And don't make the same mistake again.
- Every journey begins with a single step. And with each new step, the objective comes into clearer view.
- Don't put your ballet shoes in the attic. Do your best to keep your life multi-faceted.
- Always give back to those who are less fortunate than you. No matter how hard you have worked to get where you are now, there is always someone who has not had the same opportunities that you have had in life. Do your best to give something back.
- Stop to smell the roses. And listen when children speak to you.
- It's not where you start out in life; it's where you end up.

And finally, always remember that work should never be your sole purpose in life. No one ever said on their death bed, "I wish I would have spent more time at the office."