



THE **LUKSAN** GROUP, LLC.

Interview Preparation

- MASTERING THE ART OF INTERVIEWING
- ON-SITE INTERVIEW BEST PRACTICES
- 10 REASONS TO NOT ACCEPT A COUNTEROFFER

Abstract

Be prepared and at your best when it comes time to interview for your next career move. Learn and review the fundamentals of interviewing, questions to be prepared to answer and ask, and know how to sell yourself and your skills for the role. Also, familiarize yourself with best practices while at an on-site interview, and know the reasons why accepting a counteroffer from your current employer might not be such a great idea.

Mastering the Art of Interviewing

To a large degree, the success of your interview will depend on your ability to discover needs and empathize with the interviewer. You can do this by asking questions that verify your understanding of what the interviewer has just said, without editorializing or expressing an opinion. By establishing empathy in this manner, you'll be in a better position to freely exchange ideas and demonstrate your suitability for the job.

In addition to empathy, there are four other intangible fundamentals to a successful interview. These intangibles will influence the way your personality is perceived, and will affect the degree of rapport, or personal chemistry you'll share with the employer.

1. **Enthusiasm** -- Leave no doubt about your level of interest in the job. You may think it's unnecessary to do this, but employers often choose the more enthusiastic candidate in the case of a two-way tie. Besides, it's best to keep your options open -- wouldn't you rather be in a position to turn down an offer, than have a prospective job evaporate from your grasp by giving a lethargic interview?
2. **Technical interest** -- Employers look for people who love what they do, and get excited by the prospect of tearing into the nitty-gritty of the job.
3. **Confidence** -- No one likes a braggart, but the candidate who's sure of his or her abilities will almost certainly be more favorably received.
4. **Intensity** -- The last thing you want to do is come across as "flat" in your interview. There's nothing inherently wrong with being a laid-back person; but sleepwalkers rarely get hired.

Keep in mind, most employers are aware of how stressful it can be to interview for a new position, and will do everything they can to put you at ease.

The Other Fundamentals

Since interviewing also involves the exchange of tangible information, make sure to:

- Present your background in a thorough and accurate manner;
- Gather data concerning the company, the industry, the position, and the specific opportunity;
- Link your abilities with the company needs in the mind of the employer; and
- Build a strong case for why the company should hire you, based on the discoveries you make from building rapport and asking the right questions.

Both for your sake and the employer's, never leave an interview without exchanging fundamental information. The more you know about each other, the more potential you'll have for establishing rapport, and making an informed decision.

Basic Interviewing Strategy

There are two ways to answer interview questions: the short version and the long version. When a question is open-ended, we always suggest a candidate say, "Let me give you the short version. If we need to explore some aspect of

the answer more fully, I'd be happy to go into greater depth, and give you the long version."

The reason you should respond this way is because it's often difficult to know what type of answer each question will need. A question like, "What was your most difficult assignment?" might take anywhere from thirty seconds to thirty minutes to answer, depending on the detail you choose to give.

Therefore, you must always remember that the interviewer's the one who asked the question, so you should tailor your answer to what he or she needs to know, without a lot of extraneous rambling or superfluous explanation. Why waste time and create a negative impression by giving a sermon when a short prayer would do just fine?

Example: Let's suppose you were interviewing for a sales management position, and the interviewer asked you, "What sort of sales experience have you had in the past?"

Well, that's exactly the sort of question that can get you into trouble if you don't use the short version/long version method. Most people would just start rattling off everything in their memory that relates to their sales experience. Though the information might be useful to the interviewer, your answer could get pretty complicated and long-winded unless it's neatly packaged.

One way to answer the question might be, "I've held sales positions with three different consumer product companies over a nine- year period. Where would you like me to start?"

Or, you might simply say, "Let me give you the short version first, and you can tell me where you want to go into more depth. I've had nine years of experience in consumer product sales with three different companies, and held the titles of district, regional, and national sales manager. What aspect of my background would you like to concentrate on?"

By using this method, you telegraph to the interviewer that your thoughts are well organized, and that you want to understand the intent of the question before you travel too far in a direction neither of you wants to go. After you get the green light, you can spend your interviewing time discussing in detail the things that are important, not whatever happens to pop into your mind.

Don't talk yourself out of a job! Nothing turns off an employer faster than a windbag candidate. By using the short version/long version method to answer questions, you'll never talk yourself out of a job.

The Prudent Use of Questions

Beware: An interview will quickly disintegrate into an interrogation or monologue unless you ask some high-quality questions of your own. Candidate questions are the lifeblood of any successful interview, because they:

- Create dialogue, which will not only enable the two of you to learn more about each other, but will help you visualize what it'll be like working together once you've been hired;
- Clarify your understanding of the company and the position responsibilities;

- Indicate your grasp of the fundamental issues discussed so far;
- Reveal your ability to probe beyond the superficial; and
- Challenge the employer to reveal his or her own depth of knowledge, or commitment to the job.

Your questions should always be slanted in such a way that shows empathy, interest, or understanding of the employer's needs. After all, the reason you're interviewing is because the employer's company has some piece of work which needs to be completed, or a problem that needs correcting. Here are some questions that have proven to be very effective:

- What's the most important issue facing your department?
- How can I help you accomplish this objective?
- How long has it been since you first identified this need?
- How long have you been trying to correct it?
- Have you tried using your present staff to get the job done? What was the result?
- What other means have you used? For example, have you brought in independent contractors, or temporary help, or employees borrowed from other departments? Or have you recently hired people who haven't worked out?
- Is there any particular skill or attitude you feel is critical to getting the job done?
- Is there a unique aspect of my background that you'd like to exploit in order to help accomplish your objectives?

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Questions like these will not only give you a sense of the company's goals and priorities, they'll indicate to the interviewer your concern for satisfying the company's objectives.

Give It Some Thought

Here are seven of the most commonly asked interviewing questions. Do yourself and the prospective employer a favor, and give them some thought before the interview occurs. Why? First, it won't help your chances any to hem and haw over fundamental issues such as these. (The answers you give to these types of questions should be no-brainers.) Secondly, the questions will help you evaluate your career choices before spending time and energy on an interview. If you don't feel comfortable with the answers you come up with, maybe the new job isn't right for you.

1. Why do you want this job?
2. Why do you want to leave your present company?
3. Where do you see yourself in five years?
4. What are your personal goals?
5. What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
6. What do you like most about your current company?
7. What do you like least about your current company?

The last question is probably the hardest to answer: What do you like least about your present company?

Rather than pointing out the faults of other people ("I can't stand the office politics," or, "I don't get along with my boss"), it's best to place the burden on yourself ("I feel I'm ready to exercise a new set of professional muscles," or, "The type of technology I'm interested in isn't available to me now."). By answering in this manner, you'll avoid pointing the finger at someone else, or coming across as a whiner or complainer. It does no good to speak

negatively about others.

Money, Money, Money

There's a good chance you'll be asked about your current and expected level of compensation. Here's the best way to handle the following questions:

1. *What are you currently earning?*

Answer: "My compensation, including bonus, is in the high-seventies. I'm expecting my annual review next month, and that should put me in the low-eighties."

2. *What sort of money would you need in order to come to work for our company?*

Answer: "I feel the opportunity is the most important issue, not salary. If we decide to work together, I'm sure you'll make me a fair offer."

Notice the way a range was given as the answer to question one (1), not a specific dollar figure. However, if the interviewer presses for an exact answer, then by all means, be precise, in terms of salary, bonus, benefits, expected increase, and so forth.

In the answer to question two (2), if the interviewer tries to zero in on your expected compensation, you should also suggest a range, as in, "I would need something in the low- to mid- eighties." Getting locked in to an exact figure may work against you later, in one of two ways: either the number you give is lower than you really want to accept; or the number appears too high or too low to the employer, and an offer never comes. By using a range, you can keep your options open.

Some Questions You Can Count On

There are four types of questions that interviewers like to ask:

1. There are the resume questions. These relate to your past experience, skills, job responsibilities, education, upbringing, personal interests, and so forth. Resume questions require accurate, objective answers, since your resume consists of facts which tend to be quantifiable (and verifiable). Try to avoid answers which exaggerate your achievements, or appear to be opinionated, vague, or egocentric.
2. Interviewers will usually want you to comment on your abilities, or assess your past performance. They'll ask self-appraisal questions like, "What do you think is your greatest asset?" or, "Can you tell me something you've done that was very creative?"
3. Interviewers like to know how you respond to different stimuli. Situation questions ask you to explain certain actions you took in the past, or require that you explore hypothetical scenarios that may occur in the future. "How would you stay profitable during a recession?" or, "How would you go about laying off 1300 employees?" or, "How would you handle customer complaints if the company drastically raised its prices?" are typical situation questions.
4. Some employers like to test your mettle with stress questions such as, "After you die,

what would you like your epitaph to read?” or, “If you were to compare yourself to any U.S. president, who would it be?” or, “It’s obvious your background makes you totally unqualified for this position. Why should we even waste our time talking?” Stress questions are designed to evaluate your emotional reflexes, creativity, or attitudes while you’re under pressure. Since off-the-wall or confrontational questions tend to jolt your equilibrium, or put you in a defensive posture, the best way to handle them is to stay calm and give carefully considered answers.

Even if it were possible to anticipate every interview question, memorizing dozens of stock answers would be impractical, to say the least. The best policy is to review your background, your priorities, and your reasons for considering a new position; and to handle the interview as honestly as you can. If you don’t know the answer to a question, just say so, or ask for a moment to think about your response.

Wrapping It Up

At the conclusion of your interview, you can wrap up any unfinished business you failed to cover so far, and begin to explore the future of your candidacy.

During your interview wrap-up, it’s a good practice to make the interviewer aware of other opportunities you’re exploring, as long as they’re genuine, and their timing has some bearing on your own decision making. The fact that you’re actively exploring other opportunities may affect the speed with which the company makes its hiring decision. It may even positively influence the eventual outcome, since the company may want to act quickly so as not to lose you. However, your other activity should be presented in the spirit of assistance to the interviewer, not as a thinly veiled threat or negotiating tactic. I’d advise you to play it straight with the interviewer.

And remember to maintain a positive attitude. In today’s job market, you’d be surprised how often victory is snatched from the jaws of defeat. The better your interviewing skills, the greater your chances of getting the job.

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On Site Interview Best Practices

- Always dress professionally - remember it is better to be a little over dressed than underdressed! *Men*: Wear a business suit. Preferably a white shirt, dark suit, conservative tie, polished shoes and haircut. Be CLEAN-SHAVEN!! *Women*: Blazer, blouse/button up, slacks, pant/skirt suit, hair and makeup neat and not overdone.
- Check out the company website to learn more about their business.
- PLEASE BRING enough copies of your resume for as many interviewers as you will meet. Have a copy of your resume for yourself and use it as your navigational tool. throughout your interview. Keep it on your lap and look at when necessary.
- Study your resume the night before. Remember you are the package and the salesman. No one knows your experience like you and no one can explain it like you!
- PLEASE BRING a note pad to take down important information - sometimes this is an immediate deal breaker that shows a candidate did not prepare.
- A firm handshake and good eye contact are essential. Stand up every time someone new enters the room and don't SLOUCH!!
- Demonstrate sincere interest in your interviewer. Ask them questions!
- Actively listen and *focus* on questions asked. Follow-up with a question when applicable.
- Describe your experience that is relevant. Know your experience/resume.
- Ask questions about the position not the benefits or vacation. There will be time for that later.
- Do not discuss salary. Money is an awkward subject and we will handle that for you.
- Elaborate when answering questions, don't say yes/no!!!!
- Focus on questions. Golden rule: if you start to repeat yourself, you're rambling.
- Let other's praise you (my last review said that my strengths are...)
- If asked to qualify your skills on a number scale, qualify your answer (I would rate myself an 8 because...).
- Practice polite manners.
- At the end of the interview ask "do you see anything in my background that would prevent me from doing this job?"
- Always close your interview by asking, "what is the next step?"
- Always ask for business cards so you can write your Thank you notes. Write them the next day!!
- ***Call the recruiter representing you immediately after the interview so they can be informed and assist you in your decision.***

10 Reasons to not Accept a Counteroffer

1. You have made your employer aware of your dissatisfaction. From this day on, your loyalty will be in question.
2. When promotions are considered, your employer will take your lack of loyalty into account.
3. Once the word gets out, your relationship with your co-workers will never be the same.
4. There could be a strong impact later on your sense of pride. You could feel like you've been bought.
5. When times get tough, your employer will begin the cutbacks with you.
6. Your company is likely to begin looking — immediately — for your replacement.
7. Statistics show that 85% of those who accept a counteroffer end up leaving — voluntarily or involuntarily — within one year.
8. You will probably wonder where the extra money is suddenly coming from. Is it just an advance on a raise you would have got anyway?
9. A counteroffer raises doubts about the type of company you work for. Why should you have to threaten to resign before they give you what you're worth?
10. The same circumstances that caused you to consider leaving will likely recur in the future.