

INTERVIEWING STRATEGIES THAT WIN

**How to build your confidence,
ace your interview and get the job you want.**



**By Dr Edward Gifford Ph.D., M.Ed., M.A.
Angela Gifford M.Couns., M.Ed.**

Interviewing Strategies That Win:

How to build your confidence and get the job you want

Contents

1. Preparing for your interview

- Understanding the purpose and process of the interview
- Understanding the recruiting and selection process
- Researching the company and the position
- Identifying non-verbal behaviour that helps or hinders effective communication in the interview process
- Identifying interview formats and sequence
- Adapting your achievement statements to match the requirements of the position
- Anticipating and practising typical questions asked in interviews
- Identifying questions to ask in the interview
- Using role play and other practice strategies
- Maintaining mental and emotional robustness

2. Strategies to apply during the interview

3. How to follow up the interview

Meet the authors

Dr Edward Gifford

Ph.D.

Master of Education (M.Ed.)

Master of Arts (M.A.)

Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)

Diploma in Education (Dip.Ed.)

Diploma of Management

Cert. IV Training and Assessment

Cert. IV Coaching for Life and Business

Advanced training in ACT



Edward is a professionally trained coach specialising in executive, leadership and careers coaching, as well as workplace coaching. He is also a business adviser and mentor. Edward's consulting services focus on leadership development, career transition, strategic thinking, team building, workplace engagement and work-life integration. He is a business skills mentor and coach for Queensland Government.

Edward has been coaching full time since 2000 and has over 3000 hours of personal, executive, careers and workplace coaching experience.

Edward is passionate about improving the purpose, performance and productivity of organisations through leadership development and people development, as well as team building and engagement, using an integrative work-life framework and 'getting everyone on the same page'. As evidence of his passion and ability, Edward has led his own coaching academy over the past ten years and has developed and implemented a number of highly acclaimed leadership and coaching products.

Edward is an experienced public speaker, having presented over fifty keynotes and guest-speaking addresses at conferences and meetings of professional associations. His highly developed interpersonal skills, his enthusiasm, substantial experience and knowledge have significantly contributed to personal and organisational transformation.

Edward has also developed a comprehensive and very successful outplacement and career transition program for executives and senior professionals.

Angela Gifford

Master of Counselling (M.Couns.)
Master of Education (M.Ed.)
Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)
Diploma in Education (Dip.Ed.)
Teachers' Certificate (WA)
Teachers' Higher Certificate (WA)
Cert. IV Coaching for Life and Business
Cert. IV Assessment and Workplace Training



Angela is a coach, trainer, researcher and writer with over 1500 hours experience in coaching and counselling.

Angela is passionate about the 'human factor' in partnering with organisations and individuals. She views each person in an organisation as having 'significance' and sees individual, group or organisational dysfunction as a symptom of meaninglessness and purposelessness. Her preferred career outplacement and coaching model, ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Training), is a model for optimal psychological functioning. It lends itself ideally to educating people towards behavioural change in a non-condemnatory manner.

The prospect of helping people in their careers to find their way to what constitutes a full and meaningful life lived in alignment with their values, despite what life might present to them, is most attractive to Angela.

As evidence of her energy and interest, Angela has been involved in the running of the coaching programs since 2001 in a variety of roles. These include administration, research and writing, as well as being a sounding board, presenter and proofreader. Jointly, Edward and Angela have developed and implemented a number of highly acclaimed leadership and coaching products and services.



Introduction

This report will show you how to build your confidence and excel in your interview to get the position you want.

It provides interview advice, points from interview coaching, and knowledge on interview techniques to assist professionals and executives like you in your career move and career transitioning.

The saying ‘knowledge is power’ is true when it comes to personal and professional preparation for a job interview.

In fact, approximately 80% of interview success depends on interview preparation.

By reading this book, and implementing the information it provides on how to improve your interview skills and techniques, you will be in a much stronger position to gain your position of choice with your employer of choice.

Here is a glimpse of some of the great free information we have provided. You will learn how to:

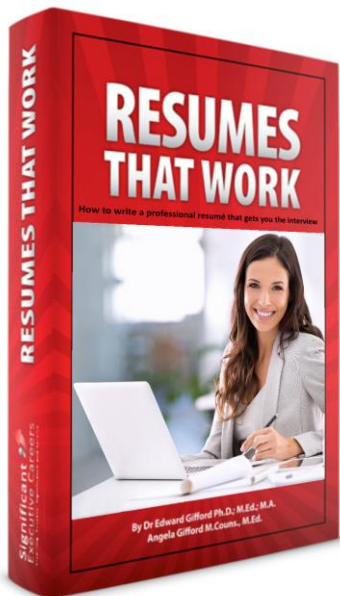
- ✓ build your confidence, ace your interview and get the job you want
- ✓ discover the “hidden” secrets of successful interview preparation
- ✓ nail your next job interview: seven powerful tips
- ✓ prepare your job interview: ten vital steps
- ✓ make a huge impression from a distance in an interview at which you are not physically present
- ✓ showcase your personal brand in a job interview
- ✓ answer difficult interview questions such as employment gaps, redundancy, salary packages and being overqualified
- ✓ discover the 4 key areas of interview questions and prepare for and answer these confidently





- ✓ prepare and use personal career stories effectively and appropriately to enhance credibility
- ✓ inject 'sizzle' into your interview by bringing your resumé to life
- ✓ prepare relevant and insightful questions to ask at the interview
- ✓ quietly and competently demonstrate the top 20 interview tips in your interview
- ✓ confidently prepare for a second interview and subsequent interviews, including psychometric testing.

Dr Edward Gifford





Preparation is the Key

The old saying 'knowledge is power' is extremely apt when it comes to your personal and professional preparation for your job interview. It is surprising that even at the Executive level, candidates fail to prepare or practise for the interview adequately.

This section covers a range of essential information, skills, understandings and attitudes for maximising the success of interview preparation. These include:

- understanding the recruitment, screening and selection process
- researching the company and purpose and process of the interview
- understanding the position
- understanding your resumé/CV
- identifying non-verbal behaviour that helps or hinders effective communication in the interview process
- interview formats and sequence
- anticipating and practising typical questions asked in interviews
- identifying questions to ask in the interview
- using role play and other practice strategies
- maintaining mental and emotional robustness.

Understanding the purpose and process of the interview

Your resumé or CV is a 'marketing' and 'selling' tool. If it gained you an interview, it has achieved its purpose. Likewise, the interview can be thought of as an opportunity to 'sell' to your prospective employer the benefits you can bring to the organisation.

As in any good sales process, you should first seek to understand the 'needs' of the employer. Then you 'sell' your achievements and benefits in a way that targets the needs and requirements of the position.



Employers will not 'buy' you on your features alone (strengths, skills, knowledge and experience), as impressive as these might be. As in any 'sale', they want to know what's in it for them. It is essential to 'sell' the 'sizzle' (the benefits), not just the steak.

Your achievement statements developed for your resumé are central to this 'sales' process. Having the right mindset is essential in positioning and preparing yourself for the interview. And just remember, 80% of your interview takes place even before you have it!



Understanding the recruitment and selection process

As part of your preparation, you will need to clearly understand the recruitment and selection process for the position you are applying for.

At an executive level, organisations will generally choose to use the services of a recruitment agent to screen and put forward suitable applicants for interviewing.

Essentially your interview begins at this stage, whether it is via a phone conversation, an email or a subsequent face-to-face meeting, should you pass the initial recruitment screening process.

Assuming the outcome of your meeting with the recruiter is positive, an appointment will be arranged for you to meet with the employer/board for an interview.

So begin with the end in mind. Treat the recruiter respectfully and act professionally in all encounters, imagining the recruiter to be as important as the employer. The recruiter is the gatekeeper of the interview.

Like any relationship, you need to identify which recruiters are the right match for you – ones who are the most helpful and who you can build good rapport with.

Also understand that the recruiter's role is not to find you a job or position but to establish whether or not you are suitable for their client. The recruiter will not look to secure a position for you. They are being paid to fill a gap in the organisation so their responsibility is to the organisation, not to you.



Key tips in dealing and meeting with recruiters

- Always call the recruitment consultant before making an application (just to clarify a few key points and definitely not to ask about the position as you already should have read this thoroughly).
- You are then in a more informed position to send through your resumé and you have already commenced building a relationship. This is so much better than just sending in your resumé without establishing a connection.
- Don't try to get a meeting at this stage but when you send in your resumé refer back to the phone conversation you had with them. Address the letter to the recruiter by name with correct spelling and never "To Whom It May Concern". If you do, then that will be the end of the process!
- Be sure your resumé clearly articulates your key achievements (Refer to our resumé book) and make sure it's tailored to the position you are seeking.
- Remember that recruiters are usually very busy and that your application will be one of a large number. So, in a competitive job market, they will be looking for reasons to put you in the "no" pile rather than include you in the "yes will look again" pile.
- Once you have submitted your resumé to the recruiter, follow up with a phone call a few days later making reference to your previous call, checking that your application was received and asking when they expect to short list for interviews. The key in all of this is to be professional and proactive without being pushy.
- If you do all of this correctly, you put yourself in a stronger position to receive preferential treatment but it's certainly not guaranteed. You can only do your best.
- If after all of this you get a 'thanks but no thanks' response from the recruiter, follow-up and seek some advice and feedback on what you could do better for future applications. You may even seek another meeting. You never know what position might be coming up next.
- What you are looking to do in all of this is to create an ongoing relationship with recruiters who are the right match for you. Just as it takes 11-13 touches to gain a sale with a prospect in business, so too you need to look for lots of opportunities and ways of creating "touches" with your recruiters of choice to gain a "sale" for your position of choice.
- Just a few final tips – when you meet with the recruiter, make sure you can clearly articulate your value proposition including your transferable skills and key achievements. Ensure that you know your career or position objective and have written this as a SMART goal for yourself. Be clear about the type of position you are looking for, the industry and organisation you are interested in and the type of remuneration you are expecting.
- Remember that the recruiter is primarily a sales person so you need to ensure your relationship is built on professionalism and trust just like any other sales relationship.



Researching the company and the position

In preparation for the interview it is essential that you know and understand the company and the position you are applying for,.

This is covered in the Resumé Ebook *Resumes that Work* under *Researching Your Personally Selected Position*. The context for that research was an evaluation of whether you could see yourself working for the company rather than just preparing for an interview.

Activity 1 – Company research (See next page for template)

Make a list of the areas you have researched about the company in preparation for your interview. You may use the *Job Table Framework* below or make up your own.

What **resources** would be most helpful to you in your company research? List 3-5 sources.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

These might include:

- company website
- advertising brochures
- ‘LinkedIn’ – to find people who have dealt with, worked for, or are currently employed by the company
- customers, suppliers
- www.google.com.au – company name entries
- www.seek.com.au – company profiles and recruiter profiles
- www.asx.com.au – Australian Stock Exchange



- www.abs.gov.au – Australian Bureau of Statistics
- www.brw.com.au – Business Review Weekly
- www.austrade.gov.au/asd – Austrade
- www.ibisworld.com.au – company research
- http://au.biz.yahoo.com/p/index_name.html – Australian and New Zealand finance company profiles
- Publications available from a public library or the library of the Australian Stock Exchange, including annual reports, *The business who's who of Australia*, *Kompass Australia*, *the Australian Government Directory* and the *Directory of Australian Associations*.



Job Search – Position 1

Industry/field: _____

Organisation: _____

Location: _____

Function/role/job title: _____

Responsibilities: _____

Key contacts: _____

Who's who: _____

Culture and values: _____

Purpose and vision: _____

Management style: _____

Employee relations: _____

Products and services: _____

Financials: _____

Growth: _____

Suppliers: _____

Positive factors

Negative factors

Additional questions to research

How to research the company

Some advertised executive positions lack detail. In preparing for an interview, it is wise to uncover as much information as possible regarding the expectations and criteria of the role and the qualifications required. This will enable you to target your statements about your strengths, skills and achievement to those criteria. Expectations and criteria could be, for example: 'raise public profile'; 'improve commercial performance'; 'marketing and finance skills'; 'visionary leader'.

Activity 2: Matching your stories and Features, Achievements and Benefits (FABs) to the position and role specifications

In the left-hand column of the table below (or using your own format), write the job-related specifications and tasks. Then, drawing on your experience, enter your strengths, skills and/or achievements, in the right-hand column to demonstrate your capabilities in that area.

Interview for the position of _____

Role: criteria/specifications/qualifications	Previous position and my achievements
1.	
2.	



Role: criteria/specifications/qualifications	Previous position and my achievements
3.	
4.	
5.	



Role: criteria/specifications/qualifications	Previous position and my achievements
6.	
7.	

Points to ponder

- How will you practise delivering this in the interview?
- What are the key learning outcomes of this activity for you?
- How does this differ from the achievement statements in your resumé?



Know your resumé/CV

Being prepared for your interview also means that you are able to speak fluently and confidently about any aspect of your CV or resumé.

- Practise memorising the four or five key strengths and skills recorded in your resume and demonstrating these on the basis of your achievements.
- Ensure you can speak fluently about your achievements through stories that match the criteria in the job application (memorise these stories if possible).
- To help you overcome nervousness, anxiety or fear, raise your confidence levels by practicing speaking into a recorder, in front of a mirror, or to your dog!
- Where appropriate, craft the first few words (or the beginning of a sentence) of a scripted response, e.g.
 - I have an excellent track record in ... (e.g. achieving targets in a competitive market). This is clearly demonstrated by ...
 - I have highly developed skills in ... / In my previous role as ... I / I demonstrated this in ... / In bringing this skill to ... I will be able to add high value to ... or: This means that ...
 - With respect to your requirement for a visionary leader who can raise the public profile, I am proud to be able provide you with examples of this ...
 - In terms of this position, my area of greatest strength, in which I can add most value to your organisation, is ... For example, in my role as ...
 - What I would bring to this position, therefore, is ...
- Use language that puts you in control. Avoid phrases such as “I think ...” or “This might be a good example of ...” or “Perhaps ...” because they suggest uncertainty and invite analysis or speculation.



Activity 4

Based on your resumé, prepare five questions you imagine you could be asked to demonstrate your ability to fulfil the role specifications/criteria. Then prepare the appropriate responses.

Question 1

Response

Question 2

Response

Question 3

Response

Question 4

Response

Question 5

Response

Now practise your responses out loud until you are fluent.

Interview styles and formats

Knowing about the types of interviews that might be used is also useful in your preparation. While most organisations tend to use the *Behavioural Interview* style, you need to be prepared for other formats and techniques. For example, to be suddenly faced with a *Stress* interview without knowing what was really going on would be extremely challenging.

1. Stress interview

This style of interview is rarely used. However, if the position you are applying for requires you to work under extremely stressful conditions, you could find yourself being questioned in the style of a *Stress* interview. Typical strategies include rapid fire questioning, criticism and sarcasm and direct challenges.

The best response is to maintain composure by staying positive and avoiding anger, retaliation and frustration.

Although it is unlikely you will have to face such a strategy, you could encounter an interviewer who unconsciously uses some of these techniques on a panel. You will be better able to cope if prepared.



2. Panel interview

A panel interview will have several interviewers and is commonly used for senior executive positions.

It is useful to quickly establish the important/most influential figures on the panel (if these have not been introduced at the outset). Clues will be to observe who is asking most of the questions, who is taking notes and who is observing and/or agreeing.

In preparing for a panel interview, rehearse with friends and family. To focus your rehearsal, practice the following:

- When responding to a question, look at the person who asked it.
- Maintain eye contact with everyone in the group to ensure all are included and to gauge the reaction to your responses.
- *Impress* the person who is dominating the interview, but don't overdo it.



- If the pace of questions is too fast, take a breath and pause for moment to avoid feeling rushed or anxious..

Question

If a panel member asks you a question similar to one you have already answered for another panel member, how will you respond?



3. Telephone interview

A telephone interview is just as significant as other styles, so be prepared. You only have your verbal skills and vocal communication to rely on. Some hints to help you are listed below.

- Turn off “call waiting” (and your mobile if using a land line)
- Have your documentation handy (especially your achievements)
- Have pen and paper ready, and a glass of water
- Stand when you speak and smile. This will give you greater presence, control over your voice and confidence
- Adopt a very professional mindset (imagine you had \$300 000 a year for the next five years riding on this phone call)
- Remove all distractions, such as noise, smoking, gum, etc.
- Ask for the names and titles of interviewers (check spelling)
- Turn off speaker phone, even if they have you on speaker phone
- Wait for the interviewer to finish speaking and don’t interrupt
- Let the interviewer guide the agenda, but have your questions ready
- Keep your responses concise and focussed. Long-winded answers without body-language cues will disadvantage you.

4. **One-on-one interview**

The interviewer and you! This is unlikely at a senior-level position.

5. **Dining interview**

A company could use this informal approach to meet with potential candidates for future positions. Alternatively, it could be used where several candidates are short-listed and the 'dining meeting' is part of the interviewing process.

Consider the following strategies to maximise your success. This is not 'rocket science', but sometimes little things can count a lot:

- Order a simple meal so that you can keep talking
- Refuse alcohol. as it diminishes thinking, responses and listening skills
- Don't smoke
- Take small bites, not big mouthfuls
- Practise good etiquette: no picking teeth, elbows on table, burping, slurping, talking with mouth full and so on!
- What else?

6. **Electronic interview**

This type of interview is mainly used for screening candidates when an organisation is hiring many people. Questions are posted and require choices from a list of responses. This would be an unlikely method for filling executive positions.

7. **Group interview**

On these occasions, candidates are in the same room, networking, problem-solving or performing, and are under observation. Again, this is an unlikely way of choosing someone to fill an executive position.

Styles of interview questions

1. Behavioural questions

This is the most common interview strategy. It is sometimes referred to as Situational Interviewing or Critical Incident Interviewing. It is based on the notion that **‘the best predictor of future behaviour is a person’s past behaviour’**.

Aimed at probing past performance as much as possible, it provides the opportunity to furnish *evidence* for the claims made, with *specific examples* drawn from experience. Your achievement statements are ideal preparation for this situation.

Typical questions would be seeking evidence pertaining to requirements for the position.

Giving your achievements a title

Read the dot points below. Supply an appropriate heading indicating the strength, achievement or skill being demonstrated, such as: Creative Flare; Project management; Leading teams; Stakeholder engagement; Mentoring and coaching.

- Tell me about a project or situation that can best demonstrate your ability to ... (e.g. lead teams). What was your involvement?

- Describe a situation in which you had to engage key stakeholders to align them with the project and gain their ‘buy-in’. How did you do this, and what was the result?

- Provide an example of the most difficult decision you ever have had to make. How did you reach your decision, and what was the result?

2. Technical questions

Penetrating questions are asked to determine your knowledge and skills in a particular field.

3. Theoretical questions

The interview places you in a hypothetical situation, e.g.: I notice in your resumé that you have not had any experience in ... How would you provide leadership in ..., given your lack of experience?

4. Open-ended questions

These questions seek more in-depth answers and are usually evidence-focused, e.g.: What would you consider to be your greatest achievement in your previous role?

5. Closed questions

A 'yes' or 'no' answer is required, e.g.: You have formal qualifications in marketing and finance. Is that correct?

6. Directed questions

Tight control of the interview is maintained, with specifically prepared questions being used to maintain a high degree of consistency in content and format. Uncommon for executive interviews, this process is more often used when there are numerous people conducting interviews with a number of candidates.

7. Non-directed

This *go with the flow* format allows the interviewee greater control over the interview. This is not an effective method, but if you find this happening, what strategies will you use to make it serve you best?



Typical interview questions

You will be much more confident at your interview if you can anticipate, think through and practise your responses to possible questions.

Basically, the interviewer(s) will focus questions to seek information on four broad areas:

1. *Can* you do the job or fulfil the role? (skills, knowledge, strengths, experience, achievements, benefits to the employer, learning potential and so on)
2. Do you really *want* this position? Or *Will* you do the job? (interest in the industry, organisation, position; work ethic; energy level and enthusiasm; outside variables that may affect your willingness and availability)
3. Do you *fit* in? (likeability, 'chemistry', communication, alignment with the company's purpose, vision and values, work and management style, dress and appearance)
4. How much will you cost?

Commonly asked interview questions

The selection committee or interview panel will aim at uniformity in how they approach the interview so that all interviewees are treated as equally as possible. The following questions are examples of the types of questions asked at interviews. Use them to **PREPARE** yourself for the interview and to **PRESENT** your 'selling points' to greatest advantage.

General open-ended introductory questions

A few general questions provide the opportunity for the candidate to introduce themselves succinctly and briefly. Examples:

1. *How did you hear about the position?*
2. *Tell me about yourself.*
(Here you can use a targeted version of your 60-sec. infomercial or elevator pitch.)



3. *In no more than two minutes, could you provide a brief overview of your career history?*

Questions to find out if you can do the job

(Skills, knowledge, strengths, experience, achievements, benefits to the employer, learning potential and so on)

4. *Thinking back over your career, which project is the real 'stand-out' achievement from your perspective?*
5. *What were the main frustrations you experienced in this project? Tell me about how you handled them.*
6. *Looking back on this project, what would you have done differently?*
7. *What aspect of this project did you most enjoy? Can you tell me more about that?*
8. *In terms of the position you are applying for, what do you think are the most important benefits you could bring to our organisation as a result of your experience in this project?*
9. *Anything else?*
10. *What have you learned about yourself as a result of your involvement in this project?*
11. *In terms of this project, what do you consider to be the key strengths and skills you used to achieve the outcomes you have indicated?*
12. *Tell me about another project from your career that clearly demonstrates your leadership capacity. What leadership qualities were successfully demonstrated?*
13. *What other evidence can you provide that would indicate you can fulfil this role?*

Questions to find out if you really want this position

(Interest in the industry, organisation and position; work ethic; energy level and enthusiasm; outside variables that may affect your willingness and availability)

14. *What was it about this position that really attracted you to apply? Anything else?*
15. *Why are you considering leaving your current position?*
16. *What important trends do you see coming in our industry? What do you consider to be the major implications for you if you are successful in obtaining the position?*
17. *Where do you see the opportunities for growth in our organisation? How would you position the company to take advantage of these opportunities?*
18. *How well is this position aligned with your personal lifestyle needs and wants, such as family, health, intellectual stimulation and so on?*
19. *What else do you like to do in your free time?*
20. *If you had complete freedom, what job would you choose?*



21. *Why do you work?*
22. *Why do you want to work here?*
23. *How does this position fit in with you career goals?*
24. *What salary package are you looking for in this position?*
25. *Give me an example of how you exceeded expectations in order to achieve your goal or get the job done.*
26. *Can you tell me about a project that really energised and motivated you and which you found personally and professionally fulfilling?*

Questions to find out how well you would fit in

(Likeability, chemistry, communication, alignment with Purpose, vision and values, work and management style, dress and appearance)

27. *Give me an example of a situation, direction or policy that you followed through on, even though you didn't personally agree with it. How did that affect you?*
28. *We often have to work overtime in this company. How would that impact on your life in general?*
29. *Describe a situation where you wish you had acted differently with someone in your team. What happened? Can you tell me more about that?*
30. *Provide an example of a situation when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that person did not like you (or vice versa). What difficulties did you have to overcome? How did you address the situation? What was the outcome?*
31. *Tell me about the best team you have ever worked with or led? What made it so good, and what part did you play in that?*
32. *Tell me about the most difficult decision you have had to make in the work context. What made it so difficult? How did you arrive at your answer, and what was the outcome? Were you satisfied with it?*
33. *How important is it for you to get to know staff? What successful methods or strategies have you employed in the past?*
34. *In this role it is important to know what's happening throughout all levels of the organisation. What strategies worked well for you in finding out what was happening in previous workplaces?*
35. *If you were successful in gaining this position, how would you respond if you discovered that the stated organisational values were obviously not being lived out on a daily basis? Have you ever been in that situation before? What did you do?*
36. *Provide an example of a policy you conformed to that went against your principles or that you did not agree with. How did this sit with you? Would you do anything differently if the same happened again?*



37. *What do you think determines a person's progress in an organisation?*
38. *Give an example of conflict or a problem that arose in your dealings with another member of staff and outline how you resolved the situation so that a positive outcome resulted.*
39. *What would your former colleagues or boss say about you?*
40. *Of the employers you have worked with recently, which one's style did you like the most and why?*



Questions to ask the interviewer

Have questions prepared to ask the interviewer or the panel. This will ensure that you learn more about the company and the role. It will also demonstrate that you have done your due diligence and will highlight the areas that are important to you.

The types of questions you ask are very important. Centre these around the company and the role and expectations rather than around salary, personal benefits, hours of work, overtime, overall package and so on. These are best negotiated once you have a firm offer.

Activity 6

Formulate a list of 5-10 questions to ask the interviewer. (Several of these may have been answered within the interview). Here are a few to get you started.

1. If I were to be successful in gaining this position, who would I be reporting to? Or...
2. What are the reporting relationships and where does this position fit into the structure of the organisation/company/department?
3. I have researched your website to gain an understanding of your strategic direction and vision for the organisation. Could you please clarify for me the growth plans and strategic direction for the company?
4. Is there a formal on-boarding program for this position?
5. If I were successful in gaining this position, how would I know if I were achieving the required outcomes? How would you measure performance for this position?
6. Does this position have a career path? What might the future look like and what would be the likelihood for future promotions or opportunities?
7. What happens from here?

There are some further questions for your consideration on the next page.



Standard questions checklist

You may choose to add some of these to your list of questions for preparation or taking to the interview.

1. *If I am successful, what is the most crucial thing I can do in the first 90 days to ensure that I contribute positively to the organisation's success?*
2. *What would be the three most important goals or priorities I would need to achieve in the first 90 days?*
3. *What are the resources (budget, staff, equipment, software) available to me to reach these goals?*
4. *To what extent are these in alignment with the current strategic direction, or are they new priorities established with the new appointment in mind?*
5. *To what extent do these priorities and goals fit in with the vision and mission of the organisation?*
6. *What is the most crucial part of this role?*
7. *When was the last time the key stakeholders met to map out the strategic direction of the company? How does the strategic thinking process operate, and who is involved?*
8. *Would you please describe your ideal candidate? What do my qualifications and experience lack in comparison with your ideal candidate?*
9. *What key characteristics are you looking for in the candidate you appoint to this position?*
10. *What else can I elaborate on so that you have a better understanding of my suitability for this position?*
11. *If I am appointed to this position, how will I know whether I am doing the job well?*
12. *Six months from now, how will you know if you have hired the right person? Twelve months? Two years?*



13. *In your opinion, what is the most important contribution this company wants from its staff regardless of the level of the position?*
14. *To what extent would I be given a mandate and autonomy to deliver the projects and priorities for which I have been appointed?*
15. *To this point, what strategies have been used to align the purpose, vision, mission goals and values of the people with those of the organisation?*
16. *What words does the company want its customers to use to describe the organisation?*
17. *What aspects of this position would you like to see improved?*
18. *What strengths did my predecessor have that you would like to see continued?*
19. *What qualities did my predecessor have that you would like to see improved?*
20. *What plans does the company have to expand over the next five years?*
21. *How high a priority is placed on staff development and learning? What professional development opportunities would you like to see me involved in over the next two years so I can better contribute to the achievement of the company's goals?*
22. *What challenges would I immediately be confronted with if I took on this position?*
23. *What systems and technologies does the company have? Are these systems operating well? What new systems/technologies are required?*
24. *How is performance measured throughout the organisation?*
25. *Can you tell me a little more about the culture of the organisation and the team I will be working with?*
26. *Corporate culture is very important but can be quite difficult to define until someone violates it. What kind of staff behaviours would be seen as a breach of this company's culture?*
27. *What are the next steps in the job selection process? When can I expect to hear from you?*

It would be helpful if the interview structure made provision for asking questions both near the commencement of the interview and towards the end. This would enable you to probe and uncover the needs and challenges of the position in more detail. You can then tailor your responses and comments during the interview to meet these needs.



The interview

In this section we will explore a number of principles and strategies essential to the interview process.

Interview insights and top tips

1. Review your notes 24 hours before the interview, especially your achievements and how these, together with your experience, can benefit the organisation.
2. Research the location at which the interview will be held.

Note down:

- name of the company
 - company address
 - interviewer's name or main contact
 - telephone number (just in case you are delayed)
 - interview time and date
3. Allow yourself plenty of time for preparation and travel on the day of the interview.
 4. Concentrate on your strengths and your moments of brilliance and keep them in your mind for 30 minutes prior to the interview.
 5. Organise your portfolio.

Ensure you have the following:

- resumé and spare copies
- reference sheet and spare copies
- written reference and spare copies
- certificates and other supporting documentation
- examples of previous work where appropriate (project plans, graphic design)



- patents if appropriate
 - powerful potential questions to ask.
6. Ensure you are appropriately groomed and well presented. (Poor personal presentation rates in the top 5 reasons why a candidate is unsuccessful.)
 7. Arrive ten minutes early and do some deep breathing to relax.
 8. Turn off your phone.
 9. Maintain a professional and polite demeanour with everyone you meet.
 10. Smile at people you interact with while waiting, or in the corridor.
 - Speak clearly as you introduce yourself to the receptionist and explain your appointment.
 - Maintain a professional posture while you are waiting. Take some discreet deep breaths.
 11. Greet the interviewer with a smile, good eye contact and a firm hand shake (if offered – no bone crushers!).
 12. Let the interviewer indicate where you should sit.
 13. Wait for the interviewer to sit and wait to be invited to sit.
 14. Don't place anything on the interviewer's desk. Put your portfolio and bag next to you on the floor. If you are sitting at a conference table it is OK to have your portfolio in front of you.
 15. Maintain eye contact throughout the interview with all the panel members.
 16. The opening conversation may 'break the ice' and let people get to know each other. Use it also to observe and ascertain the communication style of the interviewer/s and the body language, so that you can build rapport. Take note of the words the interviewers use and try to (inconspicuously) match and mirror their style and mannerisms. Here is a VERY brief description of the different representational preference people have:
 - **Visual** – Look out for phrases such as: 'I see what you mean...', 'Show me...', 'What a bright idea...', 'I see what you are saying...', 'You must be seen to be...', 'You will need to show that...', 'Let's look more closely at how ...'

Visual communicators will often be fast moving and energetic. They may be loud and controlling.

You will need to be **seen** to be right for the job.

- **Auditory** – They will often use phrases such as: 'That rings a bell...', 'It sounds as if...', 'I hear that you...', 'I hear what you are saying...', 'Tell me more about that...'

Another clue might be that they turn their ear towards you in order to hear you, and they listen very intently.

You must **sound** right for the job.

- **Kinaesthetic** – They will use such language as: ‘How do you feel about that...?’, ‘Let me try to ask that another way...’ ‘I’m not sure if I have really connected with...’ These people are very practical and pragmatic.

You must **feel** right for the job.

In general terms, this means that to build effective rapport in the interview you will need to quickly pick up on the representational style of the interviewer/s and then mirror, match and pace their movement and energy. This can work to your advantage so long as you are discreet and ‘read and respond’ to the communication style authentically.

17. Similarly, pay close attention to the posture, expression, breathing, movement, voice and language patterns of the interviewer/s and to your own.

18. Be aware that it is not **what** you say but **how** you say it and how you act that creates the greatest impact. Research into first impressions suggests that:

- 55% of the impact of your communication comes from visual/body language
- 38% of the impact of your communication comes from auditory/tonality (speed, volume and articulation)
- 7% of your impact on communication comes from words.

19. How you use *body language*, or *non-verbal communication*, will impact on the interview. Negative body language can weaken your message and communication as well as distract from what you are trying to convey. It is true that generalisations are being made in interpreting non-verbal communication cues. However, the meanings ascribed to the ones below are commonly accepted.

- **Poor eye contact** may convey evasion, indifference, insecurity, passivity, or nervousness
- **Head scratching** may indicate uncertainty or bewilderment
- **Lip biting** could indicate nervousness, fearfulness or anxiety
- **Foot tapping** often conveys nervousness or impatience
- **Folded arms** typically convey anger, disagreement, defensiveness or disapproval
- **Raised eyebrows** generally indicate disbelief or surprise
- **Narrowing eyes** may convey anger or resentment
- **Shifting in your seat** usually suggests restlessness, boredom or apprehension.

20. Minimise clutter in front of you during the interview and don’t fidget.

21. Focus your attention on what the interviewer is saying and asking.

22. Block out internal noise (unhelpful thoughts and worries) so that your attention is not diverted.

23. Focus your attention and energy towards the interviewer. Listen carefully to the information supplied and ask for clarification if needed.
24. Show enthusiasm and interest in the job.
25. Let the interviewer guide the questioning – refrain from dominating or talking too much.
26. When answering questions, focus on your achievements in a way that highlights your abilities and experience as they pertain to the requirements of the job. Draw powerfully upon your career achievements.
27. Market and ‘sell’ your strengths, experience, skills and FAB’s in a way that matches their needs.
28. Know your resumé so well that you can support all your claims accurately, enthusiastically and confidently.
29. Give clear, concise answers with a definite closure to each answer.
30. Answer questions by moving from a general response to specific examples.
31. Listen carefully to questions and try not to get caught up with irrelevancies.
32. Initiate questions of your own as you become more comfortable and confident. This means you can clarify issues as they arise.
33. Don’t be afraid of silence. It’s OK to take time to think about your responses.
34. It’s OK not to know an answer to a question. Being honest is better than bluffing your way through and losing integrity in the process.
35. Never comment negatively about yourself, your degree, your university, a lecturer, a former employer.
36. Ask your prepared questions at the appropriate time. Keep them straightforward. They can be insightful and probing, but avoid being esoteric and clever.
37. Always look for ways to position your strengths, skills, and FAB’s in support of the organisation’s needs.
38. Demonstrate your fit with the organisation wherever possible.
39. Confirm your commitment, enthusiasm and motivation.
40. Build on your existing knowledge about the company so you can be better positioned and informed if you succeed in moving on to a second interview.
41. When closing:
 - Convey interest and enthusiasm as the interview winds up
 - Ensure you know the next step in the interview process
 - Thank the interviewer(s) for their time and make a final expression of interest.



After the interview

To ensure you gain the most from your interview experience it is recommended you follow-up and follow-through in the following ways:

- Record, as best you can, the questions asked
- Reflect on how you answered these
- Reflect on how well prepared you were for the interview
- If you have not heard back after the specified time, call and ask about the status of your application and or a second interview
- If successful, ask for confirmation in writing, including start date, salary package and conditions
- If unsuccessful, ask for feedback and suggestions
- Write a brief note to thank the interviewer(s) for the opportunity of an interview.



Beware of interview traps

Some reasons for interviewees being unsuccessful include:

1. arriving late
2. poor grooming
3. limp handshake
4. lack of confidence and nervousness
5. failure to make confident eye contact with interviewers (if face to face)
6. poor ability to express thoughts or listen
7. inappropriate emphasis on salary
8. making unsubstantiated statements, being evasive or making excuses
9. being over enthusiastic, overbearing, aggressive or conceited
10. being passive, indifferent and lack of enthusiasm
11. pervasive attitude of 'What can the organisation do for me?'
12. speaking unclearly, speaking too slow or too fast
13. poor knowledge of the organisation
14. negative remarks about previous employers and colleagues
15. lack of preparation about the company and not asking appropriate questions
16. no purpose or vague career goals
17. not asking appropriate questions about the position or the organisation



The second interview

As someone applying for a position at an executive level, you would generally expect to be interviewed a second time. The following information needs consideration.

- The interview panel could well be different and could include someone you would potentially be reporting to or working with quite closely.
- A first interview might centre around your qualifications, skills, experience and how your claims are supported in your interview. A second interview could well revisit the same questions but dig deeper.
- You may be given the opportunity to express your ideas or an opinion on an issue in more detail.
- You may be presented with a complicated scenario and asked how you would handle it.
- If asked about your achievements or to provide evidence of the way you handled a problem, use a different example to the one in your first interview, thereby ensuring you maintain interviewer interest.
- Realise afresh the importance of tying things back to how your skills, knowledge, experience and achievements are beneficial to this employer. Don't assume they know this. Make it clear. If they are looking at paying you the 'big dollar' salary, what would make you an attractive choice? Would they be able to justify it, from what you have demonstrated in your interview? How?



Preparation

As in the first interview:

- Know details of date, time (be early) and place, and have relevant phone numbers to hand in case they are required.
- Check dress and grooming.
- Ensure you know the names and positions of the interviewers, both for the interview and to write a thankyou note later.
- Take spare copies of your resumé with you, and paper and pen.
- Never assume you have the position until it is confirmed in writing

Expanding your knowledge

In addition to the basics, use the time between your first and second interviews to expand your knowledge of the company.

- Revisit the sources of research you used for the first interview. Are there any that have suddenly become more relevant e.g. industry publications, news articles, conference articles?
- Find out more detailed information about the employer. Even such things as the company philosophy, missions, goals and management style will be worth examining. Is the company's philosophy evident in the organisation or the community, or is it simply stated and not lived out?
- How did your predecessor/s handle the role? Is there anyone currently working in the company you could talk to so that you gain a more detailed picture? You can find out a great deal in this way and use it to advantage in your interview. Find out using LinkedIn.

Review notes from previous interview

- What areas were of most interest to the interviewer? Be prepared for more intensive questions.
- Were you given any pamphlets, brochures or other information in the first interview? Referring to one of these in an answer to a question shows you have been proactive. Linking something in them to something in your resumé is also useful, if you are given the opportunity.
- Which questions did you find most difficult in the first interview? Formulate possible answers and practise them because they could come up again.

Prepare insightful, relevant questions

Show your initiative and enthusiasm by preparing some new questions to ask on the basis of knowledge you gained in the first interview. These might include:

- *Given the company has just had a major review, what issues of critical importance might I need to address in the first six months?*
- *One project I heard about that greatly attracts me is ... What involvement is envisaged for me in this project?*
- *What professional development support is available for me as a potential newcomer to this organisation?*

This interview is your chance to find out what you still don't know, so ask the questions ... You may get to meet some of the people you could be working with. You may be taken on a tour to see offices, laboratories, workshops and so on.

- What impressions do you get?
- How do the employees come across to you?
- Do they seem engaged and energetic or resigned to their lot, present in body but absent in mind?
- If you are able to talk to them, how do they answer your questions?
- Do you meet anyone you might be working with? This is your chance to ask questions around the things you have observed and to consider if working in this organisation is still attractive to you.

After the second interview, write a note to the interviewers, thanking them for the opportunity and expressing your continued interest in the job, noting your eagerness to get started. Make it sound genuine rather than like a 'form' letter. If a recruiter was involved, report back to the recruiter on how things went, so that the recruiter can be well prepared for contact with the employer.



Answering difficult questions

Employment gaps

There are going to be some questions specific to your situation that you might find difficult. For example, if you have been unemployed for some time, or there are significant 'gaps' in your employment history, some questions will probe for reasons. Tell the truth and retain your integrity.

Salary

In the first interview, you would most likely have been able to deflect and defer questions around salary and salary packages to the second interview. If the question is pushed strongly in the first interview, and if you have not been able to deflect it, ask the interviewer for a salary range normally offered for this position.

In the second interview, you will have to address such questions and accept the possible consequences. If your previous salary was around \$300,000, and if you have discovered the ceiling for this position is \$200,000 but you are still interested, how can you best handle the negotiation to your advantage?

If the interviewer knows your current or last salary, you could direct the conversation around the position being a progressive step and also seek discussions around a salary package.

As in any sales situation, take the emphasis off the dollar amount and put it back onto your skills and the benefits you will bring to the organisation.

Overqualified

If you have very high qualifications and extensive experience, you may find that the panel members consider you 'overqualified' for the position. How will you handle that observation or perception most effectively?

Reviewing your personal situation

What area/s of questioning do you anticipate might be difficult for you?

- Using your own experience as an interviewer in a previous position, (if relevant) formulate some questions you would ask a person who presents with your circumstances.

- If you have not interviewed a potential employee before, imagine that you are an interviewer and that you are giving someone a 'hard time' with your incisive, probing questions. That 'someone' has identical skills and experiences to you. What questions would you ask?

- What made you ask *those* questions?

- What were you hoping to find out about the potential 'employee' from those questions?

- Change hats now, and answer those questions for yourself. How convincing are you?



Strategies to answer difficult questions

1. Employment gaps or being unemployed

There are a lot of people in this position due to retrenchments, redundancies, companies liquidating, family circumstances, moving interstate, projects or contracts finishing and so on. While it may not appear advantageous to be in this situation, try to turn it to your advantage by showing how you have maintained your knowledge of what has been happening in your field of expertise. Some ways of doing this are listed below. Add to these as appropriate.

- *Membership of a relevant professional association*

This has the added benefit of enlarging your network from which to meet potential employers or at least to generate some leads.

- *Reading and researching*

Relevant books, articles, internet searches, trade journals and finance magazines keep you abreast of a rapidly changing scene.

- *Further study or voluntary work experience*

This demonstrates your efforts to use your time constructively, and you can perhaps show how something you have done is potentially useful in your new role.

- *Short industry-specific courses to fill knowledge 'gaps'*

Often it is hard to find the time to do these while you are working. Again, you can use this to your advantage in your resumé or in answers to questions.

- *Volunteer work*

Although not industry-related, you can draw on the benefits of community involvement, interaction with others, evidence of team work and so on.

Think about what you might say if you were sacked from a position. If you lie, you will most likely be found out, so that is not a wise strategy. Remember not to 'attack' or blame others. If you have a history of being sacked, you have more of a problem, unless you can demonstrate that you have now remedied the reason for the constant dismissals.

2. Questions around Salary and Salary Packages

Negotiations are usual at the executive level. You need to have done your preparation and research and have some idea of what is usual for someone with your set of skills and experience. As best you can, identify what the employer 'needs' and what you need. What is 'non-negotiable' for you? What might you be able to leverage? Try to avoid any discussion about salary until you are sure the interview panel has a good picture of the 'features' and 'benefits' of your application. Are there any indications to suggest that they *want you*?

Some possible sites are:

www.salaryzone.com.au

www.linkrecruitment.com.au (salary survey link)

www.aim.com.au (publications link)

What others have you found?

- You will probably be asked what your current salary is. If you do not want to disclose it directly, you could indicate that you are receiving a salary commensurate with others in the same role in other companies (if that is true!). Alternatively, you could mention a salary figure within a range (e.g. in the range of \$200–220,000).
- If your current salary is somewhat lower than what you have in mind, you could mention the base rate but then add a comment that with bonuses, car, etc. it exceeds \$... Being a little vague about the exact package or the figure that would make it attractive for you to leave your other position, could be helpful in getting to the best remuneration package the employer is going to offer.
- You may have been working in a situation where you have accepted a lower salary level for similar duties (e.g. in a small business) but are planning a career move back to the corporate sector where the salary is higher. To make it clear that such a low figure would not attract you, you can mention why the



figure was so low and couple it with a comment showing you know what others with your expertise and qualifications are receiving, saying that you expect to be looking at a similar figure.

- There are other ways: renegotiating bonuses after a time; taking on extra duties; swapping an unneeded car in the package for more money and so on.
- If you find yourself in a situation where there is a huge gap between what you want and what is being offered, and all the perks have been negotiated, you have to make a decision that you are prepared to live with in the long term. If you are offered the job, ideally you will have had time to consider the implications and to talk it through with your partner.

3. Questions about being overqualified

Due to job market fluctuations over time and other factors, it is quite possible that you might not get the high-level executive position you may have been aiming for. You might find yourself having to settle for a position at a lower level than you have previously occupied. You may also have had enough of the stress, long hours and ever-increasing responsibilities associated with an executive position and may decide that you are happy to take a position that is still challenging but not as demanding.

Whichever scenario is true for you, there will be some questions around it:

- Why do you want this job, when you have had an Managing Director's position with ...?
- Having had a MD position, how will you make the adjustment to having to comply with the requests of others?
- Obviously, in your role as ... you would have had a salary package much greater than what is on offer here. Are you able to come to terms with that? What effect would it have on your motivation?
- You are so experienced that you may lose interest in the job quickly and move on, and we will have to start the recruitment process again. How do you know this will not happen?
- To what extent do you think your peers might be intimidated when they find out how qualified you are? How would you handle that situation?

There are various ways to tackle these concerns, but be sure to try to pick up on, and emphasise, one of the aspects of the role that you know is important to the company.

You could mention that although you quite liked the administration (or ...) involved in your previous role, your real desire was for something more ... or ...

If your financial needs are fewer because your children have left home and finished their education, you could craft a reply around that. Again, it is important to underline what benefits you offer that the company really wants.

You could talk about your desire to work in a situation where you do not have to travel constantly, where you can have a more integrated life and yet where you can still contribute meaningfully to the organisation by using your highly developed expertise in ...

You could also mention that in the current tight job market, you are prepared to be realistic and accept a position you might not have considered in more buoyant times and in a different career phase.

You could mention your willingness to sign an agreement for a specified period if there were concerns that you might move on too quickly. Again, make sure that you are convincing about your desire to be offered the position.

Psychometric testing

At some stage in the interview process, you may be asked to undertake some form of psychometric testing at the request of the organisation.

Common tests measure verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning. There are also questionnaires based on occupational, personality and motivational factors, along with values-based questionnaires.

Practice tests are available online from sites such as the following:

<http://ww1.psychometricsuccess.com/>

www.acer.edu.au/onlinetesting/index.html

These sites are worth investigating.

Some questions may arise out the results of such tests.

If you are able to find out what tests the company or organization commonly uses, you may be able to prepare yourself not only for the test, but also for the interview questions.

1. **In this free report you have** learned how to prepare for an interview. This included the following:
 - understanding the purpose and process of the interview
 - understanding the recruiting/screening process
 - researching the company and the position
 - identifying non-verbal behaviour that helps or hinders effective communication in the interview process
 - identifying interview formats and sequence
 - adapting achievements statements to match the requirements of the position
 - anticipating and practising typical questions asked in interviews
 - identifying questions to ask in the interview
 - using role play and other practice strategies
 - maintaining mental and emotional robustness.
2. learned strategies that will assist you during the interview
3. learned how to follow up the interview to maximise your career success.

The next steps you could take

For further information on how we can assist you with your outplacement, career transition or career move, please contact us on +61 1300 629 344 or email edward@executivecareermove.com.au

Visit our website at www.executivecareermove.com.au for further resources.

