

## Interview Errors – Yours and Theirs<sup>1</sup>

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You aspire to a new challenge: a new job, a promotion or even a lateral transfer within the organization. When you are invited to an interview, the first thing you should do is **congratulate yourself** for making it farther in the process than the vast majority of other aspirants.

### The Interview

Your interview is not a conversation, a confrontation or a competition—it is a **consultation**. At the completion of the process, both you and the organization will be required to make critical decisions, foremost among them whether or not there is a good **fit** between their needs and yours.

The potential employer's sole reason for recruiting is to identify and retain someone to competently address an organizational challenge—to **solve a problem**.

Your role in the interview, therefore, is to construct and deliver a clear and convincing pitch that demonstrates **unique suitability** to be the one to take on the organizational challenge—to solve their problem.

### Begin interview preparation by asking yourself these questions:

1. **Have I conducted sufficient research** to identify the most pressing problems to be confronted by this position?
2. **Can I successfully** address these problems?
3. **Do I want to** address these problems?
4. **Will I thrive and add to my competencies** when addressing these problems?
5. **Is my nature compatible** with the way the organization goes about solving problems?

### The Interview Ritual

Interviewers probe for the three Cs:

- **Competence**  
Proof of meeting the minimum standards needed for the position: the knowledge, skills, abilities, aptitudes and attitudes
- **Capacity**

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Evidence of the ability to not just maintain current competence, but also grow with the organization and the evolution of the industry

➤ **Chemistry**

Probably the most critical of the three — absolutely the most subjective

Interviewees seek to establish the three Ds:

➤ **Differentiation**

Why I am the best choice for this opportunity?

➤ **Declaration**

Attestations of your ability to rapidly provide value to the organization by applying your skill set to their needs.

➤ **Delivery**

A review of your past successes with a high degree of specificity and explanation of how the same skill set addresses their challenges.

Too often interviews yield poor or inconsistent hiring decisions due to a lack of understanding or acknowledgement of the true purpose of the interview:

- Interviewers (even those with several years “experience”) are not adequately prepared to probe for success factors and waste time with superficial exchanges
- Interviewees (even those with several years “experience”) are not adequately prepared to proactively guide the interview toward a consultation exploring their unique abilities to serve the needs of the employer

Both interviewing and being interviewed remain more art than science. The end game must become for each of the parties involved to objectively evaluate the other, assess the potential for mutual benefit and determine the level of “fit.”

Both may not fully appreciate the number of errors commonly made during the interview process. Interviewers must be trained, but more importantly, interviewees must learn to assist interviewers in overcoming errors and discerning each interviewee’s “best self.”

## FINAL THOUGHTS

**The end game of the interview is a dual evaluation of the potential for mutual benefit—an assessment of “fit.”**

- Go into the interview understanding you own that half of the decision
  - Prepare relevant questions about the organization, the position, the culture and more.
  - Respond to interviewers' questions with poise, clarity and substance
    - Demonstrate your interest by coming prepared.
    - Inquire about performance requirements.
    - What do they expect
    - What could you do to exceed those expectations?
- The organization does not have all the power and is not the sole decision maker.
  - The organization assesses you for a position.
  - You assess the organization to determine if you want the position.
  - If you're in a situation where you can wait for the right position with the right organization, you have the upper hand.
  - Prudent aspirants turn down jobs that don't offer the right fit.
- You're going to spend a huge amount of time at work, so it must be with an organization you esteem and with colleagues you respect.
  - Engage your interviewers.
    - Ask what they like best about their jobs.
- Ask for the job.
  - If the interview has gone well and you want the job, ask for it. It's so simple, yet rarely done.
- If there is no offer, find out what's preventing one.
  - Once you know the objections, you can respond and address those within your power.

Following is a partial listing of common errors made by interviewers and by aspirants with possible reactions to enhance your interview success. Note there is space provided for you to add to these listings to create a personal guide for addressing interview errors – yours and theirs.

Best of luck to you.

# INTERVIEW ERRORS – YOURS AND THEIRS

## The Interviewer

Common Interviewer Errors	Possible Aspirant Reactions
Not building rapport at the outset of the interview	<b>Build it yourself</b> ✓ Offer a handshake ✓ Gather raters' names and cards if possible ✓ Thank them in advance for taking the time to conduct the interview ✓ ✓
Not understanding the job intimately—the essential job functions	<b>Questioning: “As I understand this opportunity from my research...”</b> ✓ ✓
Not having and reviewing a valid (current) Job Description	<b>“As I understand this opportunity from my research ...”</b> ✓ ✓
Not understanding the job intimately—the essential job functions— nor reviewing the job description	<b>Questioning: “As I understand this opportunity from my research...”</b> ✓ ✓
Not reviewing the applicant’s résumé and application	<b>“Would you like me to briefly review my background and qualifications...?”</b> ✓ ✓
Not having a good grasp of the KSAs necessary for success on the job	<b>“Positions such as this typically require...”</b> ✓ ✓
Not knowing the immediate challenges the position will face	<b>“Can you share some of the challenges faced by the former incumbent...?”</b> ✓ ✓
Not probing for critical success factors	<b>“My research suggests that to be successful I should initially focus on... “</b> ✓ ✓
Not being trained anent the laws and rules of interviewing	<b>If you decide to continue, provide a very brief response and steer in a new direction...</b> ✓ “May I tell you about a time?” ✓
Not actively engaging in the process	<b>Highlight your passion and eagerness to assist the organization...</b> ✓ ✓

Not allowing 85% of the airtime to the aspirant	<b>Tell compelling stories (Differentiating Narratives in the PAR format) to refocus on your skill set</b> ✓ ✓
Not asking behavioral questions	<b>Restate behaviorally and respond to that behavioral question</b> ✓ ✓
Asking trivial or silly questions	<b>Short response, then use the topic to segue into an area of your strength</b> ✓ ✓

## The Aspirant

Common Aspirant Errors	Possible Aspirant Reactions
Not having a sense of your own true value and not convincing <u>yourself</u> that you are the best candidate  <b>Most of us are better than we think</b> <b>Use objective introspection and mock interviews to build your confidence</b>	<b>If you can't convince yourself—you probably can't convince anyone else</b> ✓ Don't be a commodity – be a unique asset ✓ KSAs – You got this! ✓ Essential Job functions – You got this! ✓
Not being able to comfortably articulate why you are a good fit for the position highlighting your own true value	<b>Don't tell it—sell it</b> ✓ Differentiating Narratives = stories ✓ <i>"If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten."</i> —Rudyard Kipling ✓ Transferable skills ✓ Passion for the position ✓ Enthusiasm shines through ✓ ✓
Not carefully reviewing and memorizing your own résumé and application	<b>Have a trusted advisor help you practice: Not until you get it right—until you can't get it wrong</b> ✓ ✓
Not minding your non-verbals	<b>Your Dress, Demeanor and Desire</b> ✓ Pick up on your meta-messaging ✓
Not being pleasant and respectful to drivers, clerks and receptionists	<b>No second chance to make a first impression</b> ✓ Everyone is watching you! ✓

Not completing due diligence before the interview by thoroughly researching the company.	<b>Do they know what they want — do you?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Job Posting</li> <li>✓ Job Description</li> <li>✓ Informational interviews</li> <li>✓ Tapping your network</li> <li>✓ Expanding your network to mine intelligence on the organization</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>
Not assessing their culture and your comfort with it	<b>You will spend a quarter of your life there</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Informational interviews</li> <li>✓ Tapping your network</li> <li>✓ Expanding your network to mine intelligence on the organization</li> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>
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Not knowing the immediate challenges the position will face	<b>Awareness implies competence</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ You can't explain how you will go about addressing their primary concerns if you can't identify them</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>
Not probing for critical success factors	<b>You can't measure without a yardstick</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ What gets measured gets done</li> <li>✓ What gets done well, gets rewarded</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>
Not actively engaging in the process	<b>If there is no passion, there is no need to interview</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Never “fake it ‘til you make it.”</li> <li>✓ Admit it if you don't know something and then explain how you would remediate that lacking</li> <li>✓ Be sensitive to <b>prompts</b>: “What can you tell me about your ability to...?”</li> <li>✓ Be sensitive to <b>requests</b>: “Give us an example of...”</li> <li>✓ Treat the interviewers as customers: They have desires; the company has needs</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>

Not actively listening	<p><b>Every interviewer provides cues to their needs—capture them</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Estimates are that we spend 25% of our waking hours listening—a skill we profoundly neglect</li> <li>✓ “How extraordinary is the fact that no effort is made anywhere in the whole educational process to help individuals learn how to listen well.” <sup>2</sup></li> <li>✓ Hear offers (I can’t give \$200 may mean they can give less)</li> <li>✓ Peter Drucker: “The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn’t being said.” In other words, much of the message is conveyed through nonverbal forms of expression like eye contact, posture, and hand gestures.</li> </ul>
Droning on	<p><b>Leave time for additional positive aspects of your background</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ 1-2 minutes is enough for a response unless they ask follow-up questions</li> <li>✓ Use Differentiating Narratives (PAR format) to <u>concisely</u> highlight your skill set</li> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>
Not working personal assets into the exchange	<p><b>Your “fit” and how you know it</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Your unique competence</li> <li>✓ Your work ethic</li> <li>✓ Your positive attitude: “Yes, but...” versus “Yes, and...”</li> <li>✓ Your capacity to grow</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>
Badmouthing former employers or supervisors	<p><b>Disparaging former associates suggests you will also disparage future ones</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Treat prior criticism as clues on how to improve. Be thankful.</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> Adler, M. J. (1997). *How to Speak How to Listen* [paperback]. Simon & Schuster.

<p>Not having well-reasoned questions and a carefully prepared closing</p> <p><b>What impression do you want to leave as you exit the interview?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>What do you want them to know?</b></li> <li>▪ <b>What do you want them to feel?</b></li> <li>▪ <b>What do you want them to do?</b></li> </ul> <p>✓ <b>Consider a killer interview closing question: "If I'm hired and you give me a stellar review a year from now, what will I have done to earn it?"</b></p>	<p><b>Never ask questions that you could easily answer if you had conducted proper research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ask intelligent questions that demonstrate your knowledge of the organization and how you share their aspirations</li> <li>✓ Show your engagement and background by asking, "Do you do X this way or that way?"</li> <li>✓ Show your desire to go above and beyond by asking, "What are the most important contributions I can make in the first six months on the job?"</li> <li>✓ Probe for secondary or collateral duties that may give you an edge</li> <li>✓ "Have I addressed your concerns sufficiently? Would you like additional detail on anything we have covered?"</li> </ul>
<p>Not ASKING for the position</p>	<p><b>MOST aspirants don't!</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Power of the ASK</li> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>
<p>Not saying "Thank you"</p>	<p><b>Manners always count</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "I believe I was given a fair chance to discuss my capabilities and I thank you for making the time for this interview."</li> <li>✓</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>
<p>Not negotiating next steps</p>	<p><b>Whom should I contact if I do not hear from you?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Is ten days a reasonable wait...?</li> <li>✓ How should I follow up?</li> <li>✓</li> </ul>