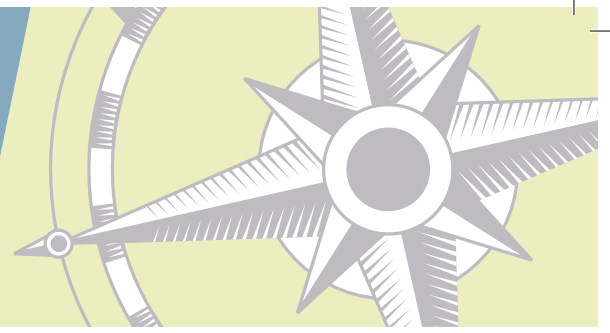


A Good Interview



The keys to a successful executive or promotion interview include preparing in advance, answering the questions effectively, sharing your personal brand authentically and following up after the interview.

Before the Interview

Eleven is the magic number!

Come prepared with the following eleven items:

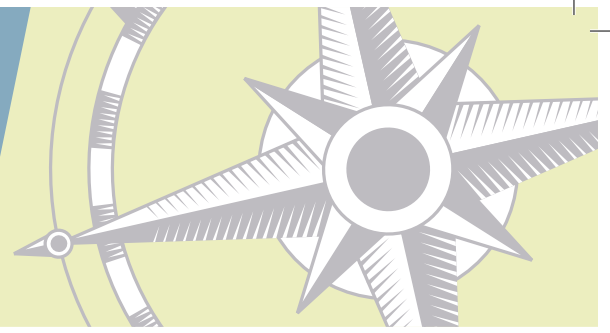
- ✓ **3 reasons why you're right for this new position or leadership role**
- ✓ **2 successes stories**
- ✓ **1 failure story**
- ✓ **2 impact numbers that demonstrate your ability to make the business grow or be more successful**
- ✓ **3 ideas/actions you want to do in this new position**

Find out about the interviewer before you walk in the door: talk with others who have been interviewed by the person in the past, know about the person's background ... know what will resonate and what won't.

Find out everything you can about the role or position. Talk to those who have had the job – anyone with knowledge about the opportunities and responsibilities. It's not appropriate to ask basic questions in the interview, such as: "What growth opportunities do you see for me in this new position?" You really should know that before you walk in the door.

Make sure you project a confident, professional appearance. Choose carefully what to wear, and it should go without saying, but dress for the role you want, not the role you currently have. Clothes help express who we are, but now is not the time to make a fashion statement. Keep it simple and modern in style. Don't "dress to impress," dress to project yourself as a confident leader.

Take the time to brainstorm at least twenty questions you might be asked, and think how you would answer them. Consider typing out the possible questions and your answers. This process helps you "cement" your story in your mind, making you more confident when it's time for the real deal. You'll also see how similar themes could work for many different questions.



During the Interview

If all you do is just answer the interviewer's questions, there's a good chance you didn't authentically sell your personal brand. You must weave in your messages, show your passion for the new role, and let the interviewer know what you'll do for the company if given the opportunity.

Whatever you do, please don't focus the majority of the interview on your past accomplishments ... you're getting this opportunity because of your past accomplishments, so make sure you get in two ideas/actions you want to do in this new position. In other words, drive forward, not backwards.

If possible, get out your three reasons why you're right for the role, right up front, either before the first question is even asked ... or during one of your first answers. It's important for you to work in your "agenda" items at or near the beginning, in hopes you get questions based on the items. Here are two ways it's possible:

1) Before the First Question: Have an Opening Statement:

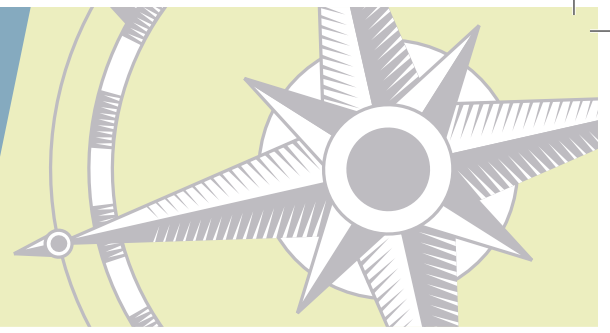
"Thank you for considering me. I think my revenue growth, strong team engagement and ability to manage in tough times, have made this opportunity for me possible." (If you do this, it must be very quick!)

2) In Your First (or Second) Answer:

"Sue, I look forward to answering this question because it ties into one of the key reasons why I think I've been given this opportunity. When it comes to revenue growth, I'm proud of what my team and I have accomplished. For the fiscal year, we've seen a 15% increase in net profit as compared to last year. A recent article in the Wall Street Journal noted that most businesses in our industry have had a "break even" or negative growth year. I would also like to share with you the other two reasons ... strong team engagement and ability to manage in tough times."

It's usually best to keep your answers short and on point. Some people make the mistake of going too deep into the weeds on every question, rather than giving the high level answer. It's a fine line as to which is appropriate. Go into the weeds when you can work in one of your key messages. If not, it's usually best to go with the high level overview. Long answers can feel drawn out and create the perception that you're "all over the place" with your answer.

If you are being interviewed by several people during a panel interview, make sure when you answer their questions that you don't keep your eyes on them during the entire answer. Your answers become "uninteresting" for the others in the room.



Instead, start your answer with direct eye contact to the questioner. After a few sentences, start moving your eyes around to the others in the room, as if you're talking to them too. When you're about to end, return to the questioner with direct eye contact and wrap up your answer. Very few people do this well, so you will stand out if you accomplish it.

We often must answer difficult questions, and even acknowledge failures we've had. If you appear uncomfortable, the interviewer might perceive that you're not confident enough for the new role.

Meet the difficult questions head on and keep your answers short. If at all possible, try to end your answer on a neutral or positive note. Follow-up questions often come from what we say at the end of our answers.

If asked about a leadership failure, acknowledge what went wrong quickly, tell what you learned from the situation and share how it has prepared you for this new role. Again, try to end on a neutral or positive note.

Don't let the interviewer's timeline in a question stop you from sharing a good story to drive your point home. For example, what if you're asked: "Tell me about a leadership failure you've had ... let's say in the past six months?" Don't let the six month timeline stop you from sharing a failure story you've prepared. Simply say: "Actually, what comes to mind happened eighteen months ago, when I was unsuccessful at ..."

When the interview is wrapping up, make sure you thank the leader for his/her time, and if appropriate, hit your main message on the way out the door. For example, "Thank you again for talking with me today. This job is a great opportunity. It lets me continue to grow the business and build an even stronger team. I appreciate your consideration." (This only works if it feels natural and authentic. Don't force it, but remember that the last impression you make may make the difference.)

After the Interview

Rarely does anyone write a thank-you note. You should do so ... on nice, personalized stationery. A thank you note by email isn't the same.

Whether you get the job or not, try to get some critical feedback from the leader about what worked well in your interview and what didn't. It's how we all get better.

“ By Jeff Black, World Renowned Communication Expert & President of Black Sheep ”