



TOUGHEST INTERVIEW SITUATIONS

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GETTING AN INTERVIEW

1. How do I secure that elusive interview?

The fact to remember is that you will not always be successful but if you wish to try you need to consider what is a creative yet practical and professional approach. It may be something as easy as calling around eight in the morning or at six at night. It may be a need to send a letter requesting a meeting the old fashioned way → by regular mail and then following up as you promise in the letter with a phone call on the day you said you would. It may help to get a neighbor to intercede. All these and a variety of other approaches (at a sporting event, at the train station) may be just the act that will make you succeed.

On the other hand do not spend too much time trying to convert someone who is not impressed (for whatever reason) with you or your presentations. Seek out those who are impressed with your work. The time spent with these people may be much more productive in both the short and long runs.

CHANGING JOBS

2. With all your experience why would you want to take an entry position job?

Why do you? Do any of these responses fit the bill?

Simply because of all my experience I am better able to evaluate what I want to do at this point in my life.

This (career change/job opening) is what I have wanted to do for a while. I have taken classes.... (What have you done to evidence your interest in making a change)?

I realized that my prior career path would not lead me to what I wished to do. In order to re-position myself, I am starting in the beginning.

It is worth it just to be able to work in this organization. I have looked for job openings here in ___ department for ages; I am a fast learner and see proving my value to the organization quickly, once given a chance.

Go with 'real' reasons as much as possible. Tell the truth but cast your decision in the best possible light...a positive move to make for both you and the organization that hires you.

3. Why do I want to leave my present job? Is it OK to answer, "The pay is too low?"

It may be the truth but it does sound crass. How about...I am looking for an organization that can best use my abilities and skills. You do not want to come across as someone who will move to the higher bidder. Also, research the companies where you are applying and find some positive reasons (not to do with salary or challenging you) for making the move.

4. When asked on an application, "If presently employed, why do you wish to change positions?" what do you put down?

This same question is usually asked in interviews as well so it is important to have a good answer. If you decide to leave your current employer, it is also wise to be consistent as to the reasons that you are leaving, keeping in mind what your employer will say, if asked.

It already sounds like you have positive reasons for wanting to work for the new company---go with that. Use your research to put forth several points about the company that you feel will be a great match (for the company) and suit your particular skills and experiences. Emphasize the fact that this opportunity to work for them is 'just what you have been looking for' and then go into several ways you can add value to the organization.

Remember, when asked why you left, do not downgrade in any way your prior/current employer. Leave the interviewer with the feeling that you have only been associated with winners! Do not go into the 'I can retire from

this job' aspect; it can have negative connotations. Present yourself as a vital, enthusiastic employee who can offer experience to their organization for many years to come. If appropriate, point out that you are not just 'looking around' but are sincerely interested in working for this particular company and that you are not a 'job-hopper' but are interested in a long-term career move.

CRIMINAL RECORD

5. I have just been released from jail. Any suggestions about interviewing with a felony record?

Since this question is part of almost every application form, this subject will come up regardless whether you bring it up or not. The question on the application is usually asked this way. "Have you ever been convicted of a felony? If yes, please provide the details." This gets the matter out in the open as soon as the application is completed. Be ready to provide the details. We suggest you jot down the details -- dates and final charge(s) of conviction as well as venue. The key here in terms of do's is to be open and honest, but do not say more than is asked. This is where the application really helps. This way you can mention it in writing for all to see and you cannot be accused of hiding information later. If there was any jail time and it was for an extended period (more than three months), there is terminology that may be provided by social workers and career counselors so that you are honest but not sharing more than you need to. Less than three months need not be mentioned unless all time needs to be accounted for elsewhere on the application.

In terms of don'ts -- do not lie on the application or during any interviews in the hope of the employer not finding out. Last, before starting your job search, take advantage of any public job counselor assistance, such as the Vera Institute of Justice. Additionally, there is always help at the unemployment office and good career counselors will know employers who have identified themselves as being interested in hiring persons with a felony record. Also keep in mind that this is a tight job market. There are more jobs than applicants so it is a good one because employers may be more willing to accept a felon than in a job market with loads of applicants for each job. Remember if the question is not asked on the application or during an interview, you are not responsible for mentioning it.

DIVERSITY

6. How do you work with a conservative group of men when you are a minority/woman?

Before answering this question, every employee must realize that every environment is unique because it is shaped to a great extent by the persons (and their uniqueness) who comprise the work unit. That said, let us add that the more an individual understands each person in his/her work unit, the more effective that person will be. You are obviously practicing this tenet by recognizing what appears to be a dominant and pervasive personality trait of each of the men who comprise the work unit.

If your assessment is correct, these individuals are very traditional in their approach to work (male as the breadwinner), and chivalrous toward women regardless of race. To be effective, check these assumptions to see if they are correct then act appropriately. There are positive aspects of this profile -- respect for others, team spirit, a "do unto others" mentality. Regardless of whether they do not like you initially, by acting consistently and looking for the person most likely to befriend, you are likely to get along with each of them sooner or later. Even if they are biased toward you for either race or gender (or both) reasons, look for opportunities to build a working relationship and with persistence, you will build at least a reasonable working relationship that may go no further but that's okay -- if, that is, you feel the effort is worth it.

If not, start looking for other jobs. If you continue to feel uncomfortable and you are not happy about the environment, move on. Good luck. Just remember, life is too short to tolerate what you determine to be unacceptable. Perhaps you need to because jobs may be scarce so stick with what you are doing but make real efforts to find another job while you continue to work in that environment if it is just not acceptable for you.

7. I am a female seeking a job in a male-oriented profession. How do I show the interviewer that I am not afraid to get my "pretty, clean hands dirty"?

Words would not suffice with some interviewers who still do not 'get it'. Even so, listing jobs and projects where your support and involvement entailed getting dirty would be the best route. Tell some stories:

- This is what I did (the results)
- This is why it was important
- This is how I/we did it

Include some examples of 'we' projects. Illustrate your effectiveness in how you can work with and support a team effort. Let your experience speak for yourself... If they cannot see the results for themselves based on what you have achieved and accomplished, then they lose. And, would you really want to work for a place like that? Make a list now of key achievements, major responsibilities and projects that show you are hands-on... flesh them out with some details and you have a group of stories to tell. Make the stories concise and have them illustrate key skills...managerial as well as skill-related.

FIRST JOB/EARLY CAREER

8. How would you describe an ideal job and an ideal job environment?

This is a question intended to draw you out so that the employer gets to see what you value and determine if what they are able to provide an environment and opportunity in sync with what you seek. As part of your preparation in the quiet of your own thoughts, you should come up with the answer to this question and based on your answer then seek out employers where you would be able to find your ideal job. There are as many variables as there are organizations but for starters, the ideal job may be one that creates a product (for example, a car) or provides a service (package delivery) that is top quality. A company with great management. A company on Fortune magazine's Most Admired List. A company with great career opportunities.

You get the point I am sure. Determine what your hot buttons are when looking for the next job. During the interview, filter your answer so that it is being given to one who is looking for great employees. If you are there because they have great benefits and challenging work, emphasize the challenging work. In any instance, remember to evaluate your next supervisor because the research shows that that relationship will be your most important regardless the organization.

9. How do I answer the question "What are your career goals?" if I am a recent college graduate?

This is a fair question and one that you should be preparing yourself for before the interview. When interviewing for jobs, you should always have career goals? It is not too complicated. Think along the lines of, "If I were to join this company, where would I be in 5? 10 years? Is that what I want at this time?"

Now you may beat the interviewer to the question by posing it first. Even if s/he beats you to the question, you should answer the question not with your real ideals in mind but with a thought toward the reason for the question being to get the job.

First you are never interested in continuing to your education as far as the interviewer is concerned. If you take that approach you are sending a message that the organization owes you the opportunity to give you an education -- not what the organization wants to be obliged to do. So what might your career goals include? How about a position of great challenge and responsibility? Notice you are not saying you want a title. Rather you want the opportunity to show that if given the chance you will demonstrate your ability to contribute to the organization in ways that it needs you to. The result? -- Both you and the organization will grow from that relationship.

As a recent graduate, if you think in terms of "value-added," you can't go wrong and quite frankly you will show yourself to be a real team player interested in advancing the organization while it provides you the opportunities to do so. This changes the discussion from the education, or the VP title or even the interviewing manager's job to bolder more demanding but also more solid interests that are better aligned with the organization that is considering you today for what it will need five and ten years from now. The outcome will more likely be a better "fit" for you due to the preparation and attention you gave to determining your career goals from the start.

10. What goes on in a second interview?

The first campus interview is basically an informational interview---you learn about them and they learn about you. Now the 'real' interview is scheduled. Do some research on the organization, the market and the industry.

You will be expected to have done this for two reasons:

- ✓ How will you know if you want to work there without some research into the company?
- ✓ How will they know how serious you are about the job unless you have looked into it?

In addition to the company, what do you know about what the job may entail? What key skills are needed, what are the priorities and how would you handle them? This most likely will be a more 'in depth' discussion of the job and how you would add value to the company.

Review the information you received at the 1st interview: What must you know to accept the job if it is offered to you? What information must you get at this second interview? What did you learn from them about the organization and the job? Why should they hire you? Why do you want this job? You may meet with department heads and potential co-workers that would have first hand knowledge of the job---this would be a great opportunity to learn more about the position as well as illustrate your research and knowledge of the job.

11. What do you want to do with your life?

What are your long-term career/life goals? Have you made any? You might say:

I have come to know that I love advertising. I enjoyed writing copy when I first started and now that I have directed several major ad campaigns I know that I love it even more. I know this is my career for life. I do not want to limit myself in what capacity I would work in advertising because I have an interest in all phases and realize that I have a lot to offer as well as a lot to learn.

A pat answer such as "I only want to work for ____ company forever." will not pass. You need to establish credibility and show that you are serious about your career and life choices. Name a work-related, long-term goal that would not exclude you from fulfilling it at the hiring organization.

12. How do you let the interviewers know you want this job really bad without making it seem like you are begging for the job.

The best ways to show you want a job:

- ✓ Research it. Show you have enough interest and energy to learn about the company and the position. Go the extra distance...most candidates don't.
- ✓ Match yourself. Adopt a "You need ____" and "I can provide ____" attitude. For example, the company needs someone that is a fast learner...it will be on the job training. Give specific examples of new skills that you have learned and responsibilities taken on. Target the position and the organization.
- ✓ Show your enthusiasm...you can start making a contribution immediately. You are ready to go.
- ✓ Ask for the job and then, in closing, restate why YOU are well suited for the position.
- ✓ Get details...when will they make a decision, where do you stand.
- ✓ Follow-up---regardless of their responses to you in the interview, send a thank you letter that refers to specifics of the interview "The information about ____ was particularly interesting because ____". Give a strong closing...reiterate (in a concise manner) why you want the job and why you are suited for it.

Then...you have done everything that you can. If you have any inside tracks to the company or the position, use them. If you can get someone to refer you, even better. And if the answer is still no, wait a few months and send another letter expressing your interest in the organization. Ask if there have been any recent openings. Include an updated resume (surely you have not just sat around for those months!). Thank them again. Any more than that would probably be perceived as aggressive.

13. I'm 20 and looking for my first career. I learn extremely fast and get bored with jobs quick. I'm looking for an office job but most of my experience is in construction. How can I get my foot in the door and which career doors should I be looking at.

There are lots of things to do in an office. Are you just looking for indoor work? What skills do you have to offer? Some skills ---- ability to follow complex instructions, able to work well with others, communication skills, being able to plan and execute a plan of action, as well as being dependable---- are transferable skills.

Looking over your education and work history, what skills do you have to offer an employer? How can you 'prove' that you are a fast learner? What was the last thing that you learned and why was it important to learn it quickly? If you get bored with jobs quick, it may mean that you are taking jobs that do not suit you. No employer will hire someone that they perceive they will have to 'challenge' to keep interested.

Do an analysis of your work history...what you liked and did not like about each job. If you had all the choices in the world, what would you like to do? Why aren't you pursuing that now? What must you do to achieve that goal? It is acceptable to take interim jobs to glean knowledge and training to achieve a long-term career goal...just do not present this aspect to a future employer.

14. What are employers looking for in people when they come for a job interview?

Usually, three main things are looked for in an interview (combined with the resume):

- ✓ Can do: does the person have experience, qualifications to be able to do the job? Education, work history, skill inventory can all provide insight into this.
- ✓ Will do: have they done this before? In similar situation/environment? Assesses potential---"they have performed in past=they will perform for us in future"
- ✓ Fit: will this person be a part of our team? How will they 'fit' into the department? This looks to interpersonal skills, how the person accomplishes tasks, management style.

15. It's my first job. How can I convince the interviewers I will be able to handle the job despite my lack of experience?

Look over your courses, part-time and summer jobs (if any); do not neglect any other activities such as clubs and sports. Now, think about all the skills that are needed to perform the job you are interviewing for. Lots of skills are transferable and highly valued such as communication, delegating, organizing. First think in terms of verbs or things that must be done – such as, "completed," "executed," or "provided." Next, think of adjectives that should describe the person doing the job such as calm, patient, incisive, creative.

Now that you have this list of what is needed for the job (verbs and adjectives), come up with as many examples of these attributes in your experience and/or coursework as you are able to identify. For example, if you had completed several extensive reports, they involved research, time management and organizational skills. Tell short stories as examples of 'proof' of your expertise.

Being able to translate college experiences to job-needed skills is an art in itself. If you are not certain of the qualities needed for the job, do some research on it yourself. Talk to professional organizations or individuals in the field. Make sure you do some research on the organization you want to work for. Show them that you are interested and motivated by the fact that you did your 'homework' before applying. This 'skill-matching' exercise can also give you your key selling points and areas to highlight in your resume and marketing letter.

16. I am a recent graduate applying for work within the administrative area of the health sector. I have not worked in this particular field before; so I've applied for receptionist positions to gain initial experience. How do I answer the question: 'You have a degree. Isn't this position below your capabilities?'

Your logic is sound so just remember that you are really prepared to answer the question as you have stated above. The person you are facing doesn't know your thinking though so why assume s/he does? Make the person a fan. Let them know your thoughts and ask them as a professional if your thinking is correct. If nothing else you will turn this meeting into an informational interview with the possibility that the skeptic you are meeting with will

suggest alternative directions and sources to turn to. Get him/her to talk about how s/he got into the field and what advice s/he could now give you. Worst-case scenario -- the interviewer continues to be of no help, benefit from the experience by learning to deal with someone who needs to be convinced of your worth. From this experience you will be all the more grateful the next time you meet an interviewer who really thinks you have a lot of potential.

Just for the record some organizations in the entertainment industry really value the receptionist function and hire recent college graduates as a preferred practice and use the position as an entry level position so that s/he can really get to know the organization while considering the next career step.

FOLLOW-UP

17. I had the interview and understand the employer is debating among five candidates for two positions. I'm looking for ideas on a follow up approach that might enhance my probability to be one of the selected ones.

Have you sent a thank you letter for the interview? If not, be certain to mention one or two particulars of the interview that were of interest to you...what you learned to make you want to work there even more, for example. Then, in the second part of letter, reiterate why you feel you would be ideal for the position...skills, background, enthusiasm whatever you are selling. Lastly, thank them for their time and ask for the job. You would be surprised how many do not send a follow up thank you and do not ask for the job. Send a letter to each of the persons you interviewed with. If you have already done so and have not heard from the organization, a polite phone inquiry as to the status of their decision or your candidacy would not be out of line. Again, state simply why you are best for the position and ask for the job.

If they have excluded you from the process, you can ask for feedback on your candidacy. Did they feel you did not have sufficient skills, experience...would they share with you any comments or suggestions? Would they consider you for another similar position if one opens?

On a final note, sometimes candidates are hired and either are no-shows on the start date or do not work out. If you are still certain that you want this job, several weeks down the road, send another follow up letter reminding them of your application/interview and ask them to please keep you in mind. That is what you need to do to keep your name and candidacy active.

18. I just interviewed for a sales job and sent thank you notes. What is my next step?

You did the right thing when you sent two notes to the persons you met with. Whether you asked for the jobs or not at that time, you have already sent the notes so now you need to leave the past behind you. You are sensitive to the fact that you are also interviewing for a sales job so you should be sales savvy.

This is the plan of action we would suggest.

First, try to recall what the owner said about what the next step would be. If he said they would get back to you by ___ and there is no word a business day or two later, try to call him. Don't ask if the position has been filled. Rather take a positive approach and mention that you are following up because you hadn't heard and would like to know the status of your application. Once that is said, be quiet and listen carefully to the answer.

If he did not mention what the next step would be and you didn't ask, remember to do so next time (that is what all effective sales professionals always do -- and all others should too). In the meantime, call this week to follow-up and ask for an update. You are looking for a sales position so be sure to be persistent but not annoying. We suggest you call and leave one message. If you do not get a response in twenty-four hours, try again but don't leave another message. According to one research study it takes an average of eight attempts to get through to the person you seek. You might try at the beginning or end of the working day.

Frequently during the summer, the process moves slower due to people being away for vacation. By following up (and practice your conversation before you call) you are demonstrating the effective professional they will be getting if they decide to make you an offer of employment. Do not take any lack of follow-up or communication on their end personally.

19. How long after the interview before I call to see if I have been hired? What do I say or ask?

Usually, at the end of the interview the candidate asks what the next steps will be. When will they make a decision? Getting a time frame helps. Sending a thank you letter after the interview also is an opportunity to restate your candidacy and remind them of this time frame. "As you said you would be making a decision next week, I will telephone you to determine my status." If you are in the dark about when they are deciding, call the person you met with: Thank them (again) for the interview. Ask for status on the hiring process; has a decision been made? If they have chosen and it was not you, you can ask for some feedback or suggestions (hired someone with more experience?). You can restate your interest in the organization and ask to be considered if any other related jobs open up.

20. After an interview, when do I write a thank you letter?

Send a letter within 24 hours of the interview to each of the persons that interviewed you. Mention specifics from the interview ("I particularly appreciated the tour of the facilities." "The information you provided about the planned new product line was very helpful in understanding the company's new goals and objectives. I look forward to being able to supporting those goals in a positive way.") Thank each person for the time spent in the interview. Second, make your pitch for the job again. State briefly your qualifications. "With my recent experience in graphic design for _____ Inc. and the concentration in print media, I feel that I am perfectly suited for the position of _____. After the interview, I am even more excited at the prospect of using my skills at _____ Company." Close with a statement of the next step: "You mentioned that a hiring decision will be made within two weeks; I look forward to hearing from you in that time frame. Of course, if additional information is needed, please contact me."

Even if you find out that you were not the chosen candidate, you have options. Follow-up for feedback. Was there something you could have done better in your interview or in resume preparation? Was there another factor that affected their choice? Follow-up with a letter at a later date if you really want to work at the company. Sometimes new hires are either no-shows or do not work out. "Several weeks ago I interviewed for the position of _____. I still remain extremely interested in working for _____ Company. (Go on to mention several points about the company or the position that you particularly like.) Close with another statement about your qualifications. Last, ask to be kept in mind if any additional openings occur.

21. Should I send a letter if I don't get the job?

Absolutely. The reason is that it is the professional thing to do and it is a small world. Even if you were not offered the job that you interviewed for, your note will remind them once more of who you are and it is quite possible the note will be a factor in tier consideration of you for another position. Just remember though the primary reason for sending the letter is that that action is demonstrative of who you are professionally.

GIVING NOTICE

22. My current job requires four weeks advance notice. How do I handle telling a potential employer that I need to give my current employer four weeks notice?

It is not a problem until you have a firm (in writing) job offer in hand that you wish to accept. Believe it or not, some companies will wait for a new hire to tie up loose ends. Be honest... after you accept the offer and you talk about starting dates, tell them about your current employer's requirement of four weeks notice. State that you would like to accommodate your current employer but you realize your new allegiance will be to XYZ organization. When do they want you to start? Try to negotiate a reasonable time frame that would meet both entities. Should they say "two weeks", then you will have to disappoint your current employer and only give two weeks notice. You might explain that you tried to get a time extension from XYZ. What is the worst they could do? You already have a firm offer, in writing. Will they refuse to give you a good recommendation?

GRADES

23. How do I handle questions about my grades or requests for my transcripts? I worked while in engineering and law school. I have C, and C+ avg. respectively. I'm just proud that I finished. I paid for

school myself. I lost my mom to cancer and my brother to AIDS. But recruiters don't care about that. How do I handle questions about my grades or requests for my transcripts?

There is a certain appreciation by organizations of those who have been tested by the fire. You never know how someone will react to pressure or difficult situations. Your story certainly will show that you can deliver despite difficulties. One of our most stated beliefs is that you cannot be a missionary---do not try to convert those who are not interested. If a recruiter cannot see the inherent value in your performance, their loss! But in a real world you still have to deal with these folks. Is there a positive trend that you can point out in your grades? Such as, consistently improving grades in certain subjects or specialties? A recommendation from an instructor attesting to your devotion to detail and deadlines? Since graduation (assuming that you did complete your studies), what have you been doing? How about those jobs that put you through school? Do they have any recommendations for you? Cast yourself in the best light possible and stress the ability to perform quality work and target more family-friendly organizations for job openings. They may have a more open-minded culture to see beyond letter grades.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

24. How should I answer behavioral questions?

Behavioral or "What if..." and "What did/would you do if...." are ways for an interviewer to try to put you into the picture. Situations that you might face on the job are presented and you are asked for your opinion or what action(s) you would take. Plan ahead...think about all the aspects of the job and what tasks are essential; what experiences can you bring to the interview? Can you tell some short stories about '...the time when....' to help them visualize how you perform? Tell about:

- the situation...what was the issue
- the task...what needed to be done and why it was important
- the actions taken...what you did/what you had others do
- the result...what happened because of your response

25. What is the best way to "close" an interview?

Being too original and 'gimmicky' is not the way to leave an interview knowing how to close is. Actually, being one of the very few interviewees that know how to close an interview is impressive in and of itself. Having intelligent questions to raise, inquiring about the next step in the interview process and determining what other information is needed for you to make a decision if the job is offered is quite enough to sell yourself! Close with a brief statement about how you fit the position (skills, experience, and interests) and thanking the interviewer for his/her time is wonderful. Follow up with a handwritten, succinct thank you note...restating your interest in the job. From experience, it is a rare interviewee that follows up with a thank you and actually asks for the job.

26. How do I answer illegal interview questions?

Interviewers may ask an illegal question for many reasons: Ignorance...they just lack the proper training and knowledge. Stress...they like to see how the candidate will react when put on the hot seat. They want to see what they can get away with; they are just dolts in the interviewer's seat. You have two choices:

If it will help your candidacy, you can answer. "I do not think that my marital status has any bearing on this position but, I do not mind telling you that I am unmarried." Politely refuse to answer. "I am sorry but my national origin really does not affect my candidacy and I do not feel that this question should be raised."

If the interviewer persists in raising illegal questions despite your politely refusing to respond, this may be a very telling sign that this is not the organization for you. Chances are this is not the first time he/she has raised these issues with candidates, and you should question any organization that tolerates this behavior. If you feel strongly, contact the president or the department head for a response. You may also contact the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or its state/local counterpart.

27. How should I answer a question when I don't know or am unsure of the answer?

First, try restating the question. It may be poorly worded.

Do you mean what would I do with _____? I actually never used that software program; we relied on _____ which I understand is similar.

I am not certain I understand what information you are looking for. Can you elaborate?

Off the top of my head, I do not recall how many employees I hired last year but I do have the information in my daybook. Can I call you with the number?

However---if the topic is something that you SHOULD KNOW, some area that is essential to the job and either you are caught unawares (not qualified) or unprepared (oh--- I meant to look up transportation options), then the only thing to do is admit that your mind has gone totally blank. "I should know that...but, my mind has gone blank. Can I get back to you on that?" Do not try to fudge...to make up answers for areas that can be checked or where subject matter expertise is needed.

INTERVIEWER

28. My interview took place over a span of about 1 1/2 hours. The employer did all the talking. What can you possibly do to avoid the interviewer from talking on and on?

We are aware of situations similar to yours where the candidates was unable to get more than a few words in and they were offered the jobs. As frustrating as it is, that is the nature of the person who is responsible for interviewing you. Remember the reason for being there -- if you will get a job by being quiet, nothing wrong with that except you may know little that you feel you need to know before accepting the offer. In that case get the offer in writing and then ask for another face-to-face meeting. Write down a list of questions you want to ask and raise them at that time. Here too is where the Human Resources department may be helpful. You may start by asking them the questions or at least letting them know you have these questions and see if they will help you to get the answers.

More frustrating is when you don't get offered the job because the interviewer is disappointed that you had nothing to say. And in fact this is the safer course of action. Look for opportunities during the interview to interject comments. In a pause add, "I think I know what you mean because I have been in similar circumstances where ... and this is how I dealt with it." Be specific and to the point and jump on any pause to briefly make a point. If you don't, you leave yourself open to the interviewer dismissing you even though you felt you never had a chance to make an impression.

29. How should I answer the employer's question when he seems to be discouraging me about his company?

Actually have someone who is interviewing you downgrading his or her company? How bizarre! Now, looking at your resume and raising concerns about whether you would be 'happy' here is another issue. "I see that in your last job you were promoted rapidly but here we follow a much more conservative course. In fact, we pride ourselves on our lack of turnover." Your response: "Turnover was the problem and reason for my fast promotions...people kept leaving and I ended up being the senior department person. I like the fact that people stay with an organization and grow with it, which is one reason I am attracted to your organization."

One way to hedge these types of inquiries is to look closely at your resume and work history, comparing it to the organization and the job opening. The more points of congruency, the less likely will be challenges to your fitting in. And if you do get some strange person who insists this is a terrible company to work for (maybe he/she is playing with you or they may be on the verge of being fired themselves---understandably!!). What to do?

You have several options. If this is a game this person plays, what kind of an organization would employ someone like that? Is this a place you want to work? Just get through the interview as gracefully as you can, and write this one off to experience. A bad day for the interviewer? Could be. Not knowing what will come out of his/her mouth next can be stressful---keep your cool and try to respond in a non-committal, non-challenging manner. "This organization has a very poor benefit plan? Well, every person seems to have different needs at different stages of their career. I am more interested at this point in working and making a contribution to ___Company."

If this person is truly obnoxious and you feel strongly enough about your treatment (put you off the company entirely), then perhaps a letter to senior management is in order. They may be unaware of this person's behavior.

JOB FAIR

30. What is a Job Fair? What do you wear and what do you take with you?

Depending on the host, a job fair usually is hosted by one or a group of employers spotlighting different jobs. Sometimes the ads for the event will list the types of jobs. This can be a great way to practice your interview skills as well as break the ice with employers. Have a supply of fresh resumes and business cards to hand out. A portfolio (binder with a tablet inside) to keep your papers as well as to place those that you collect is a great addition to bring.

Number 1 suggestion--- wear comfortable shoes! You will be on your feet for the event. Dress as if you were going to an interview---because you will be. If professional pants suits are generally accepted in your work environment, then fine. It is better to dress a little 'up' than 'down'---look like you work there already! Do not ignore the other participants. You may collect information and make contacts. Take notes (discreetly) and follow up all leads with a telephone call and/or letter immediately.

31. I went to a job fair and one of the companies called me back and to schedule an interview with me, but I do not know what the job is for. How do I ask what job they are considering me for?

I met/interviewed at the recent job fair at ____ on _____. For which position/department am I being considered?

This is not a question you should have hesitated to ask when first contacted. At a job fair or career fair, those in attendance know that resumes are left with many organizations and that there are a host of opportunities available and to be considered.

JOB OFFER

32. I am interviewing with several companies. One is to make me an offer this Tuesday. - I want the opportunity to finish interviewing with my other two top prospects but don't want to loose this opportunity. How do I go about it? How do I respond so as to not discourage my primary opportunity at hand, but allow enough time to get through the exploration of the other two this week?

To start with, don't panic. You are in the ideal situation. You are being offered a position by more than one organization at approximately the same time. Whether there are two employers or ten offering you a job consider the following. As you receive the offers, ask each organization for time to consider the offer. If not asked do not offer why you want the time. Do not disclose more than you are being asked to share. Ask for time that will be within the time you are anticipating the offers coming from elsewhere. Be conservative and give an extra day because you are giving your word that you will reply by x date. Even if you do not have another offer, the higher up you grow in your career ladder, the more you should remain poker faced when given any offer and always ask at least for overnight to make a decision. Never say you need to discuss it with your spouse or anyone else but to give such an important decision the attention it deserves and also to be sure you do not want to ask for anything to sweeten the offer. Whatever date you promise to "get back to them by" -- stick to it.

If you ask for the time and you are asked for a reason. Be honest and share with the employer that you are anticipating another offer. Do not disclose anything else about the position or the organization. The mystery will enhance your value in the recruiter's eyes. Reasonable employers will appreciate your frankness and will also be pleased that others value you as much as they do. Let me also warn you that not everyone in the employment marketplace is reasonable. The irrational employer may give you a deadline and ultimatum or even withdraw the offer. Quite frankly if anyone does, it is better to see this behavior before you accept any offer to be sure you question whether you would even want to work there if they let you.

33. How do you turn down a job offer, which you have already accepted?

There are two sides to this issue. First, an acceptance is considered a commitment on your part. The employer has relied, most likely, on your acceptance and has closed the search and made plans for your arrival. Showing up, however, for a job that you no longer want makes you a poor hire. What changed your mind? Counter-offer? More \$\$\$ elsewhere? If anything, you owe the employer an explanation and an apology. If it was for more \$\$\$, do not get into a bidding war...neither will be happy. Second, most employment is 'at will' and the employer has the option of terminating your employment at anytime after you start work, for a good reason, a bad reason or no reason at all. So, you also have the option of rescinding your acceptance. Maintaining your reputation in the marketplace dictates that you not take this action lightly...and afford the employer an explanation immediately.

Because there are 'no shows', we always recommend following up on interviews when you are not chosen and really want the job...number two can be the winner. When accepting an offer, it is best to consider it carefully and wisely. Take notes as to why you are saying yes or no and hope the offer that you have relied on is not rescinded later!

34. I interviewed for an internal job promotion and received a job offer. However, I've decided that I'm no longer interested in the job. How do I turn down the job offer without burning bridges?

First, hopefully you have shared your decision with no one in the organization. There is an old saying once two people know something, it is no longer a secret. Second, be sure you meet with your current manager to obtain his/her advice if you have not already done so. Be sure to ask for information addressing future issues that may impact on your decision (for example, what is in store for you and what about him/her and their chances of staying, and the prospects for the unit you are assigned to). You may be surprised by some answers you obtain and in fact they may give you reason to reconsider your decision. Third, seek comments from colleagues in your organization who you know and who know you and the organization and obtain their comments also before you let your decision be known.

Then be sure to meet with the person who would have been your manager had you accepted the position and let him/her know your decision. Be sure the reasons you give are sound and appropriate, keeping in mind all the while that sooner or later you may be working with these folks. A safe one would be to say that although the new position is a terrific offer, you really enjoy your relationship with your current team and its manager. You feel that to leave at this time would not be beneficial to them or you due to _____. Be careful too to keep in touch with your network beyond the organization. You should always do so anyway but at times like this someone may try to damage your current status because they are disappointed with your decision.

35. I interviewed and was offered a job. However, I've decided to stay in my present job. Should I write a letter to the company that made the job offer? What should I say?

Always keep doors open for yourself. You should thank them for their time and consideration, and for the job opening. Depending on what reason you cited for wanting to leave your current job, you might cite situational/managerial changes. "As you recall from our interview, one reason I wanted to leave _____ Company was their unwillingness to add new products to their line. I felt it was getting more difficult to sell the same products to clients year after year, with nothing new to offer. Recently, the company made some management changes that will affect their marketing and production policies and I feel that I should invest some more time with them to see how this is carried out."

LAY OFF

36. I left my job as a legal secretary to work for another law firm as a paralegal. Two weeks later they laid me off due to lack of experience as a paralegal. I still want to apply for legal jobs (paralegal/legal secretary). Any advice on what I should tell a potential employer of why I left my previous employer?

First question that comes to mind is: Do you have the experience, skills and training to be a paralegal? How could the other law firm be so off base to hire you and then 'discover' that you do not have the experience? What information did you provide on your resume? What was discussed in your interview?

When in doubt as to your status when you have left an employer, you can always ask what they will say (the official version) if asked for a reference. Most employers only verify dates of employment. If you were there for only 2 weeks, I would consider leaving it off your resume entirely. You could say that you left your prior employer (legal secretary) because an opportunity presented itself that you felt would be a positive career move both for you and for the potential new employer. However, after you had quit your job, you discovered that the new position was not as it appeared to be and the employer could not make use of your (terrific) skill package.

As an exercise---List all the skills that you feel are needed to be a paralegal and to be a legal secretary---then provide specific examples of how you have these skills. For example, ability to use legal databases for research might be a probable skill needed. You would then cite your experience "did research for past 15 months on _____ database." This is skill matching...looking at what the job needs versus what you have to offer. If there are areas that you feel you are weak in, what are you doing to strengthen them? Recent classes, workshops, seminars should be considered.

37. I have been unemployed for two years due to a layoff. I enjoyed the two-year layoff doing self-employment tasks. However, now I would like to go to work for an employer. How do I address this in the interview?

Take comfort that you will not be the first (nor the last) interviewee to have this problem. One approach is to 'sell' this unemployed hiatus as an on-the-job educational process. Keep in mind that if you were engaged in professional activities you were not unemployed, but like you said rather "self-employed." Identify specific skills and experiences that you acquired over the past two years that can add value to an employer. Stress your self-reliance in being self-employed, being exposed to different management styles and situations, and your flexibility and people-skills that enabled you to be successful in this framework.

When faced with the questions, "Why do you want to work for us?" or "Why should we hire you?"--- which you will certainly be asked -- have specific responses that are customer-driven. In other words, after doing research on the organization and the position, both in your resume and cover letter as well as in the interview, give reasons why you are 'graduating' from self-employment and are ready, willing, and able to use the wealth of experience and skills you have accumulated. Show that you have the enthusiasm and energy to work for them (specifically) and that your flexibility and experience make you an excellent candidate. In short, you have been a sponge for the past two years soaking it all up and have so much more to offer! Wouldn't they be foolish NOT to hire you?

LONG INTERVIEWS

38. I am seeking a job and understand the interview is a very intense eight-hour interview. How should I prepare me for this interview?

Eight hours of interviews certainly is intense! You have to be comfortable thinking on your feet and may be interviewed by several different individuals in various departments. Part of the interview process may include testing. One initial step might be to call the individual who has set up this interview for you and ask what is involved, who you will be meeting with and what their titles/departments are so that you can properly prepare for the interview. This is a reasonable request to make if, in fact, the process is as lengthy and intense as you feel it will be.

LUNCH/DINNER INTERVIEWS

39. What are the do's and don'ts for lunch or dinner interviews?

DO remember it is an interview not a lunch or dinner date. DON'T bring your appetite.

DO remember the key points you want to make in the interview. DON'T try to get them all in while you are trying to chew.

DO remember to keep your wits about you. DON'T drink and interview.

DO be a courteous guest; DON'T order the biggest, most expensive item on the menu--follow your host's lead. Remember you are there for a job not the food. If he/she merely orders a salad, find one on the menu that you would like.

DO be simple. DON'T make this the time to try to use chopsticks, eat something messy (avoid drippy foods) or to order that really spicy dish on the menu to try to impress. No hamburgers if you plan to use your hands. No spaghetti.

DO wear something comfortable and suitable to the work environment. DON'T wear tight clothing that will cause you to fidget if the meal takes time.

DO thank the host for the meal. DON'T criticize service or menu.

DO end your meal as well when the host is finished. DON'T make a fuss if the order is wrong. If you must, take it.

DO send a prompt written thank you note.

MATERNITY

40. I have a job interview and my baby is due in three weeks. The company does not know that I am expecting.

Legally, the interviewer will not be able to ask any questions about your pregnancy, your marital status or your childcare plans. I am assuming that you are obviously pregnant so the subject will come up in the interviewer's mind. Secondly, what are your plans for a starting date? After baby is born? Playing the role of the interviewer and ignoring the pregnancy issue, obvious questions would be why are you looking now? Why leave your last job? Why are you looking to work here? A little research and planning on your part could go a long way towards impressing the interviewer as well as calming your fears. Is this a child/family friendly business? How can you tell in advance? Some signs include flexible working hours versus overtime on demand, childcare on premises, liberal maternity/paternity/childcare leave policy, women as well as men in management. Do you know someone who works there already?

The issue of your pregnancy cannot be ignored. It would be best if you offered a plan since they cannot ask and it will show that you are astute in anticipating their thoughts as well as being professional about your career. State your anticipated due date, when you feel you are able to start work and outline your plans for child care. If you have other children and have been through this before, bring this out....it shows that you are 'experienced' in balancing family and career.

It would be nice to operate in a world where, for women, childcare and family are not considered options but part of daily life in terms of a career. It is smart on your part to share your plans with a prospective employer. If there is or is not a spouse in the picture, that is still up to you to share with them. They cannot ask. Just state that you have childcare arrangements well in hand and provide brief details. "A trusted family member will provide daily child care and is willing to stay late on those days that I may have longer working hours. I have even made back-up arrangements with a neighbor who is home with their own children so I can concentrate completely on my work during the day."

41. I have been out of the work force for two years. At my last job I was laid off, and during my time off, discovered I was pregnant. I was unemployed during my pregnancy and during my son's first year. How do I positively explain this gap in employment?

The situation you describe is a common one when you consider the pregnancy. If you left the organization under favorable circumstances and can provide the name of a supervisor who would be willing to give a reference, not a problem.

Once you got laid off, you discovered you were pregnant so rather than look for a job when you knew it would involve a short period with interruptions for visits to the doctor, you felt it would be best to delay a return to work until you felt you could handle it again. Now you are ready. In fact, if you have a PC at home and have been using

it, please share this to demonstrate that you have been very interested in keeping your skills current. If you haven't been, it isn't too late to start. If you do not have a PC try your local library or schools. It will be enormously useful for your job search. The PC will help you to look for jobs on the Internet; it will also help you with resume and letter preparation, and allow you to easily research companies you are going to apply to and provide directions to get you there.

Looking at your time between jobs, if you have been able to be involved in any associations, professional groups or other business activities, be certain to mention that (although, anyone who has been a new parent will certainly be aware of the demands this new addition to your family has made upon you.) Although the interviewer is not permitted to inquire as to your childcare provisions, you may at the outset inform them that you have made comprehensive plans and are available to concentrate on their business during your work day. (Are you looking at organizations that are family-friendly and/or offer onsite childcare? This could be a great alternative for you and your child.)

MILITARY TO CIVILIAN

42. What makes you think your management experience in the military will transfer over as experience in the civilian workforce?

Besides being a question you may be asked, this is one that you should answer for yourself. Interviewers are looking for transferable skills. Make a list of all the skills and experiences you are offering and match them to the job opening requirements. Many skills such as communications, budgeting, managing and training are transferable. Give an example (on your list) of how you acquired and used each of these transferable skills. Be prepared to tell (short) stories to illustrate how you used skills in the military and how you can see yourself applying these same skills in the civilian workplace. This exercise will help you to focus on your 'selling' points as well as boost your confidence (you do have a lot of skills and experience to offer).

43. I am married to an Air Force officer. I move once every 3-5 years. I dread the questions, "Why did you leave your last job?" and "Where do you see yourself five years from now?" Is there a positive way that I can tell a prospective employer that I won't be with them for the next election?

Your plight is not such a terrible one. In fact in these times a stay of 3-5 years is considered a good track record and if in fact your past employers provide solid references many employers would be happy that they will have you for so long.

A couple of other comments. First do not share more than you have to. When asked where do you hope to be in five years, make a career statement ("I would like to become a project manager in Information Technology and use the experiences as a programmer analyst to get me there,") or a personal growth statement ("I would like to have my business degree.") Notice in both statements you do not need to mention where geographically you will be nor that it is a fact of life going forward that your spouse will continue to be reassigned on the same basis s/he was until now. If they ask what the prospects are going forward make a positive statement. In every assignment so far we have stayed at least three years and more typically have been in the same place for five. Separately, consider taking a job with a major employer and then when your spouse is reassigned, you could apply for a company transfer. Last, also consider telecommuting if and when your spouse gets reassigned. Many organizations do it and it would give them the opportunity to evaluate you before making that kind of commitment and it would show your flexibility. Just make sure you do your homework before raising the issue. Some organizations would not like the suggestion at all.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWERS

44. What questions should I ask the interviewers?

Other than specific questions about salary and days off (they give the wrong impression)---what do you need to know to decide if YOU want to work there? Do some research into the company, into the job and see if you can find someone who works there to give you an inside scoop. Determine what gaps in information you need to fill in such as, who will you report to, what do they feel is the most important aspect of the job, why is the job vacant, what happened to the incumbent? Questions about the work you would do, types of deadlines or responsibilities,

all these are excellent provided you have done some research and can show that you have a general idea about the job/organization (or else, why are you there?). Make a list of what you know and what you need to know.

45. I find that most of the questions I want to ask the interviewers are answered during the interview. I am at a loss as to what to ask. What do you suggest?

For starters mention the questions you were going to ask and repeat their answers. "I was going to ask you about the _____. But you already mentioned that the _____ was _____. Any research you do should lead to questions and those questions when answered lead to more questions. For example, when you research the company you are meeting with you find out that another company has just purchased them. You need to ask questions to determine the extent that the sale has been shared with the employees. If they are worried about their jobs is this a company that you should seriously be considering joining. In two months you may be out of a job if they continue to cut. In these instances it is not unusual for the last hired to be the first let go.

One more suggestion is to consider preparing generic questions that may be asked of any organization (and in fact should). "How does this organization treat its employees?" "Where does this organization plan to be in five years?" And the ultimate open-ended question "How is business?" -- especially if you think you know the answer.

QUALIFICATIONS

46. What if a person has years of experience, but no college degree to back it up?

There are many reasons why an employer might make a degree a requirement for hiring. One is a belief that essential training is received in college; writing, communication, and technical skills. Second, the employer may want to upgrade its staff by hiring college grads. Third, to maintain salary levels and promotional grades, a college degree is often used to demarcate different levels. A four-year college degree is often used to allow the person to "graduate" from clerical to administrative or professional status.

That said, what to do? Have you purposely not gotten a degree or was it simply not available to you? Not everyone can attend college, but college is becoming what a high school degree used to be - a requirement, even if it does not give the holder the practical experience someone like you may possess. You need to make a strong presentation of your practical skills and first-hand expertise. You might consider taking classes. Many colleges and universities offer life credits for your practical experience so you would not have to start at the beginning. You may enjoy this educational process. Lastly, you will probably have more success with a line manager...someone who actually does the work...rather than HR/Personnel. HR typically looks for the check-off points in a resume or in an interview, seeking to exclude or include individuals in their review of the stated requirements. Line managers, however, typically look for potential and practical experience. You might try directing your resumes to these people. If you can pass the gatekeeper, you will have a better shot. The question you might ask is "Why is a degree essential to the position?" and have strong responses to counter their stance.

REFERENCES

47. How do I choose job references?

First, the rule of thumb in choosing job references is to first select a pool of who among your professional acquaintances knows and is able to comment on your work. Once you have the pool, identify the three or four that you feel: a) know you best b) are accessible (that is, will return a phone call) AND c) will be able to give you a solid ringing, unqualified endorsement.

Don't stop there. The next step is to contact each of those on your "A" list and ask their permission for a professional reference. Be direct in asking for a reference. Be careful to detect any hesitancy. If there is, continue with the conversation to determine the accuracy of your assessment. If confirmed, don't share your hesitancy unless there is a real opportunity to do so. Otherwise just silently eliminate the person from additional consideration and consider his/her replacement on your "A" list. You need to use only cheerleaders for your references. If you get to pick, pick the ones who are your biggest fans.

48. What do I say if I don't want a prospective employer to contact my current employer?

Just say you would not like them to contact your current employer without your permission and not until an offer is extended. Whether you are in a good relationship or not with your current employer (and supervisor) it is very professional to state the request as mentioned above. In fact even if you were in the greatest relationship with your current employer it is not wise to allow any potential employer to contact them whenever they wish. You are a professional and you need to protect your situation at all times.

Also, consider why they may be raising this issue. If they are questioning your capabilities, do you have any former supervisors, clients/customers or other professional relationships that you could consider offering as an interim reference? This issue comes up so often that the interviewer should not be surprised with your "wait...do not contact my employer yet" response, but should be impressed that you thought ahead and offered alternative professional references.

49. I don't want the interviewer to contact all my previous employers, how should I tell her if I already put the phone numbers of my previous employers on the job application forms?

If you go back to a prospective employer and ask that your former employers NOT be contacted, you had best have a good reason because an explanation will certainly be expected. Interviewers can understand not contacting a current employer until a job offer has been made and accepted, but why not contact former employers? This is something they expect to be able to do and, if you are holding yourself out as a good, worthy candidate, your work experience is a valuable selling tool.

If there is something in your work experience that would tend to make you appear NOT to be a good candidate, it is best to confront it in the beginning --- once it appears that the interviewer is interested in your candidacy. Attendance problems, inability to get along with a particular supervisor, mistakes made on the job...they have seen and heard it all. Telling them that you do not want former employers contacted (even if you leave off the telephone numbers, they are easily obtained) will only raise suspicions and severely hamper your candidacy.

50. I have a written recommendation from my boss. However, I don't trust my boss to give me a good recommendation over the telephone. How do I keep the interviewers from calling my boss and at what point can I present the written recommendation?

First, congratulations because it seems that you negotiated the wording of your letter of reference before you departed. Very smart.

We suggest you ask your former employer to mention if called that the organization only authorizes written references. Second, an individualized reference letter will have more cachet than a "To Whom It May Concern" reference letter. Third on the application form, when asked for a phone number, consider only providing the main number and when asked for permission to contact, take that opportunity to disclose that all reference requests must be completed in writing.

As additional protection, work with the Human Resources department at your former organization, to alert them to your concern and ask them to consider the suggestion that all reference requests go directly to them instead. If such a program is not yet in place, encourage them to use you as the pilot.

RESIGNATION

51. Why did you resign from your previous jobs?

Resigned more than once? Is this the information you have provided or information that is being confirmed by former employers when contacted for references? Most employers merely confirm dates of employment, social security number and position held. That said, just remember that you should be expected to be asked this question wherever you go and if you are currently employed add "Why are you considering leaving your current position?" as another. Then be confident because by asking the question this way suggests that you chose to leave so you don't have to share that you were fired (if even you were and beware "mutual resignation" may infer the same thing) or any other negatives associated with your less than perfect situation.

When answering the question remember that you do not want your potential employer to hear a complainer speaking. This is not the time to share every negative thought you ever had about the organization and its management. Rather consider the positive reasons for leaving -- an opportunity to learn new skills, to join a different industry, even more pay if the bump was significant (most former employers won't share pay information but watch out because there is a trend to ask for a last pay statement to verify pay data).

You may have left too for reasons beyond your control such as downsizing and that reason is not considered a negative either in this very complicated job environment. Practice giving your reasons before going on the interview so that you have listened to yourself and, if available, even used a colleague as a sounding board to be sure what you are saying is said with confidence and is exactly what you wish to say.

SALARY AND BENEFITS

52. When do I ask for more money than the employer is offering?

To play it safe, ask for the offer in writing. Once you get it then is the best time to ask for more. Do it before and you risk never getting an offer at all. There is though one other time to consider, in spite of the risk, and that is when the employer first raises the subject.

Be careful too before asking for more money or anything else to make sure you know what you are getting first (namely make sure you understand what and the worth of the benefits and perks that come with the job). Take nothing for granted. Know the hours you are expected to work. What the time off policy is. Try to avoid asking all these questions -- better to ask for a copy of the employee handbook. If they refuse to give you one before work commences, then ask to speak to someone in benefits. That person will be more of an expert on what is being offered and you will be more certain the information is accurate.

Last, if you still feel they are "low balling" you on the money issue, try asking for it another way -- for example how about a bonus or salary increase after three months employment, or even an extra week of vacation. Be ready for "we can't pay you more because that is the rate that we are currently giving the others who are in the same position as you." Then you need to let them know that if they allow that to happen they may start to lose the others to competitors, if that is a valid opinion of yours. When you speak try to be as professional as possible -- "it seems that the pay being offered is slightly under the current market rate," may be an effective way to put it but if you take this approach be sure you have done your homework and cite facts and figures. Do not whine.

53. I have already negotiated a salary. What is the best way to negotiate benefits?

First---have a good idea of what your 'must have's' and 'nice to have's' are. What would be deal breakers and what you can give/take. It would also be a good idea to know what the company policies are. If all employees are entitled to 1 weeks vacation after 9 months of service, it would be silly to waste time negotiating for it. If you have commitments made before this job change was a possibility, what is the status of them? Own a time-share and you have signed up for January? Have to take your daughter cross country to visit colleges in April for a long weekend?

Second, see what they offer. If they happen to come upon the right mix, then wonderful. If you need more vacation time instead of other benefits, then see what their policy is. They may offer personal days that are flexible and that can meet your needs. Or... when can the subject be revisited? Many employers offer a 'menu' of benefits, knowing that different lifestyles and ages require different solutions. Health care benefits for elder care options or paternity leave? Be open-minded and have a realistic idea of what is possible and what you really want/need. If what you really want/need is not offered, will you then not take the position?

54. I will need to take a step back in salary. I don't know how to handle the question " What is your current salary"?

If you have proceeded along with interviews to the point when an offer is going to be made, that is the proper time to discuss salary. Otherwise, if pressed to disclose salary, talk in term of ranges and a compensation package. "My present compensation package is 'high five figures'" gives a lot of leeway yet is not in error. It is rare but some employers ask for W-2 forms or the last salary stub to verify salary. You do not want to get caught in a lie

(credibility is very important) so being up-front about willing to take a step back in order to invest in a new career can be impressive to an employer. Sharpen your sales skills...point out all the reasons why you are suited for the job, why you are making the move to a new career and why you want to work there. Compensation is a necessity but not your prime motivation.

55. How can I ask the interviewer to negotiate, after I have already given him my price? The interviewer acted as if the figure I gave was more than what he had in mind.

Don't we all wish at times to erase words that we have said? Try to elaborate on the compensation issue. "The amount I mentioned was what I would like...but there are other considerations and other amounts that I would accept. This would take into consideration all the benefits, my review date and other elements (bonus, ease of commute)." Then you could restate your interest in the company/job and why you are suited for it. It might work but if they are hard-liners, you probably talked yourself out of it.

If the issue is pressed again earlier in the interview process (you know they are not ready to make an offer)---and you know this will happen---plan ahead. See what figures are mentioned in ads for your position. Give a salary range...mid five figures, but not considering benefits or other compensation factors. Ask for more info---"What do similar positions here pay?" It gets like a poker game...no one wants to show their hand first. You do not want to be cut off...or give too low a figure and be stuck with it. "Well, without knowing what benefits are offered or having any information about reviews and salary increases, it is very difficult to say what salary I would accept. Since I am earning in the low five figure range, I was hoping for a small increase but, for the right opportunity and a great organization, I would consider a lateral move." Planning and research into the organization and market do help. You could also look online to see what other companies are offering for similar jobs in your area.

SECOND INTERVIEW

56. I was asked to return for a second interview. What is expected of candidates on second interviews? What questions will be asked?

Now is the time to refer to any notes that you made about the first interview. If you did not take notes afterwards, start this practice now. It will prove invaluable when you are invited for a second interview. What were the 'tough' questions you had to face? Have better answers this time. What were the areas of concentration in the interview? Most screening interviews deal primarily with qualifying you in terms of background experience...having you 'pass' all the hurdles. If your next interview is with a line manager (a non-HR person) your potential --- what you can do for them --- should be more of an emphasis. Update your research to show that you are interested and knowledgeable. Look for news articles about the company and the industry. Do you know anyone who knows someone who works for the company for some behind-the-scenes insight?

Have some strong responses to the traditional questions: Why should we hire you? What can you do for us? Look at your weakest areas in your background: what can you offer to offset perceived potential problems? If they made an offer, what would you accept? What else do YOU need to know about the company, industry, or job to be in a position to evaluate their offer? Do not forget--- the interview is a two-way street. This is your opportunity to evaluate them!

57. Do I send a follow-up thank you letter after a second interview?

Yes, you have even more to be thankful for, don't you? A polite restatement of your interest, qualifications for the job and appreciation for the time spent is always in order...yet seldom done by applicants. Showing good manners is always appreciated and keeps your name in mind in a favorable way. Send a thank you to everyone you met with not just the recruiter. Always follow-up on what they said the next step would be.

START DATE

58. If hired, how soon will you be able to start work?

Be honest...if you can start right now (you are currently unemployed) or if you feel that in good conscience you must allow 2 weeks notice to current employer, say so. If the interviewer does not raise the issue you certainly

should. "If hired, when would you expect me to start work?" and "When will you expect to make a hiring decision?" Most organizations know that individuals must wind up certain transactions before starting. If you are totally free to start immediately, point this out as a positive element in your candidacy. "One of the advantages of my being currently unemployed is that I can start immediately."

59. One company has offered me a job beginning next month. But due to some reasons, I will not be able to start until two months after the requested start date, how do I tell them?

Is this a sudden turn of events or were you not expecting a job offer so soon? In any case, explain the situation to the employer if you truly cannot start the new job until October. Is there any compromise possible--working part-time until then? Be aware of the risk of having the offer rescinded. You offered your services and employer may not be willing/able to wait.

60. When do you notify a prospective employer of nonrefundable vacation plans?

As we get closer to spring/summer, this is a more and more relevant question for any person changing jobs. Interviewers are usually sensitive and frequently bring up the issue. When they don't, I suggest you mention it after getting the offer, but before accepting. Timing is so important and this should be a matter subject to negotiation and therefore should be included with the final job offer. By gauging the reaction of your future employer you may get to see what you are in for before you quit your current job -- especially if he/she becomes withdrawn or angry at your request. If you have been dealing with an executive recruiter and/or Human Resources representative let them earn their keep. Bring it to their attention and allow them to serve as the messenger and also buffer for any initial adverse reaction. If you wait until a later moment, then you will be perceived as someone who purposefully waited and that will not be viewed as the most professional way to handle the matter.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

61. What steps can I take to increase my effectiveness in a telephone interview?

You are on an equal footing with all other distance interviewees over the telephone. Prepare an agenda in advance for a telephone interview. You have the same disadvantage in not being able to read the interviewer's reactions, nor gauge his/her concentration. You need to be certain to hit all your key selling points. Address the reasons why you want the job and why you are a great/best candidate. Also plan a strong closing:

I really appreciate the time in speaking with you Mr/Ms/Mrs. _____ about the position of _____ at _____ Company. The information about _____ makes it sound even more exciting! I am extremely interested in the position and feel that my background in _____/my _____ years experience in really makes me a strong candidate. What will be the next step? I certainly would be willing to meet with you in person.

If your telephone skills are not as strong as you wish, practice. Ask a friend to call you and hit you with some questions, then give you feedback. Also plan to have a comfortable area to take the calls, where you can sit and take notes or pace while you talk (another advantage to a phone interview to release some of that nervous energy!) Many candidates fail to ask for the job, respond to information given to them in the interview and leave with a strong statement. Not to mention asking what is the next step! Keep paper & pen & agenda by the telephone and have your notes on the organization and job ready.

TERMINATION

62. If you were fired from your last job for something like DUI (or any other violation of company policy), how do you answer the question "Why did you leave your last job?"

If you were fired from your last position for cause (whatever reason) and the employer will confirm this in a reference check, then you must face it upfront in an interview. Most employers will only confirm dates of employment for various legal reasons. Adopt a 'that was then, this is now' attitude. Be very business-like about this...no need to go into any gory details or emotional displays:

Unfortunately, I was going through a difficult time personally and I made some very poor decisions that impacted negatively on my work. I fully understand that I did not perform as expected and perhaps letting me go was the best move for both of us. I have gotten some counseling and have corrected the situation that had caused me so much stress. Additionally, I have taken some courses that are helping me to deal with stress management and I am fully committed to giving 110% to the job. Since leaving _____ I have been _____ (tell what you have been doing to show a positive attitude, employment, education...whatever.)

Admit there was a problem, no sour grapes with former employer and this is NOT a problem anymore because you have taken action - joined AA, do not drive.

63. My husband was fired for messing up two print jobs. What should he say to an interviewer when he is asked why he doesn't have a job?

This requires a three-part answer in preparation for any interview.

- What reason does he have to offer for the mistakes that occurred? Looking to the specific reasons and how they could have been prevented or mitigated (if at all) will certainly bolster his self-confidence.
- What will the former employer say was the reason he left? They should confirm that their (his and his employer's) stories are consistent before he goes to any interviews. Many employers, when asked for references, will only confirm dates of employment. If it is a 'small world' and the circumstances of his leaving could be common knowledge, then a different situation exists.
- Your husband is lucky to have you raise this question. You need to determine if your husband is in the best line of work for him. Should he have been fired for the errors he made? If so, may he repeat them again? What was the cause? Before your husband pursues the same line of work, work with him to determine what he should do next. This is a much more important issue than the interview questions he may get asked.

64. I've just been interviewed by phone. I didn't mention to the recruiter that I was terminated from my previous position. I informed the interviewer "my previous manager and I had contrasting management styles that were no longer suited for one another". I have another interview next week.

First your employer may disclose the circumstances surrounding your departure. In giving a reference employers have certain legal protection. It is being eroded today by jury decisions favoring the terminated employee but you don't want to go through the heavy distraction of a lawsuit. That said, your statement about difference of style is fine. Then be quiet. Also confirm the reference that is going to be provided from your former employer. To disclose any more than that is a poor decision. It sounds like the recruiter is impressed with you because he/she feels that you have the potential to handle the requirements of a job assignment they have.

WORK HISTORY

65. By mutual agreement, I left my former job after disagreements with my management. How do I handle questions regarding my former job?

What was the agreement when you left your employer---what is the 'official' reason for your leaving? Since most employers only go so far as to confirm dates of employment for references, the circumstances of your leaving may not be public information. But, as you probably know, it is a small world at times and there are indirect sources of information. If you can, confirm with your employer exactly what information they will release regarding your employment there. Assuming the employer will give you a good official referral, is there another person---a supervisor or department head---that would have first-hand knowledge of your work that you can ask to be a reference for you? This would NOT be the individual that had issues with you. This should be someone who could legitimately give you a great reference.

If your performance was not an issue, it is still difficult to bring up the interpersonal problems without calling your ability into question. Can you package it such that 'the parameters of the job changed' and have some example of an area that changed whereby you felt it would be in your best interest to leave the organization. "The expectations

of management were undergoing transition leaving me with unclear objectives/goals." "My supervisor's attention was being drawn to areas that I was unable to control and that was having a negative effect on my department."

Another question usually comes up...How do you deal with problem people at work/Describe a situation when you had to deal with a problem person. State briefly what the problem was: person had different agenda than you; was unclear in stating goals, whatever you can isolate from the problem. Then state the tactics that you employed to improve the situation and remain effective.

The important thing to do is NOT badmouth the employer. You have always worked with winners, and you have always performed on track. If pushed --- or if you are unable to put a positive spin on it---you can state that for unknown reasons a manager took a dislike to you that he/she was apparently unable to deal with in a professional manner. You attempted to discover what the problem was, to try to correct it but the individual was so uncooperative that it became a no-win situation. The key point is that it was their problem, their unprofessional behavior, their inability to express what area of your performance was in need of change (not improvement because you were already a great performer) that necessitated your moving on. You are not a quitter, but you are not stupid either!

66. How do you explain why you are now returning to work after many years of child rearing?

It is not so much why you are now returning, that is easy to explain, children no longer need attention, they are in school, and you have permanent childcare provisions in place. Of course, it is illegal for them to ask about your children and spousal situations but, since it will probably be brought up by you in explaining the gap in your work history, making a positive statement to ease their possible concerns about your commitment/availability for work, would definitely go a long way to putting yourself in a positive light.

It is the next question: So, what have you been doing over the past x years since you were employed? That can be a killer. Go over your activities, volunteer work, extracurricular activities, classes you may have taken, long-range projects that you may have supervised (such as major remodeling) and professional associations that you have kept up. What new skills can you offer? What value can you now offer as a more mature, experienced woman? If you have done nothing except child care for the past years (which is a full time commitment), what can you do now to bring yourself up to speed career wise? Have you kept up with trends and developments in your chosen field? How are your skills? Have you been using them or are they a bit rusty?

Do not forget doing some research on the organizations you apply to. Some are more family-oriented than others. What will be your reaction to required or frequent overtime or travel? Have good answers for these questions. These questions will probably be asked regardless of your marital status if it is a big part of the job requirements.

67. How would a person deal with questions as to why they might have been off work due to a previous injury?

More and more employers are looking into working conditions to reduce work-related injuries, particularly in the area of repetitive stress injuries and long hours spent at computer monitors. Employers know that a good employee is worth salvaging and rehab is built into many health plans. Since you were employed (presumably) during this period of rehab, why are you even going into this? Employers cannot ask about your health claims or medical expenses. Unless you are now physically disabled and seek protection under the ADA, why reveal this information? You were injured, you healed. Enough said.

68. I've had five different jobs in one industry for all my working life. Now that I'm looking to work in another industry, the question always comes up, "Won't you leave the minute a good job in your previous industry comes up?"

You have to first decide exactly why you wish to leave that particular industry. This is for your own internal analysis as well as for interview purposes. Are job opportunities lacking; have you gone as far as you can; are you getting bored?

On the other hand, why are you interviewing with us (with this industry?). Do some research and have plausible, specific reasons. Not just I want to leave____, or I want to learn about _____ (those responses make you a potential problem for the interviewing organization). Rather, have positive elements ready to point out based on:

- Your years of experience. You have proved to be a capable, dependable employee.
- Your transferable skills. Selling shoes and selling cars both require specific subject matter expertise but selling is selling. The same is true for other jobs and skills. Dealing with deadlines, difficult people, creating a budget, forecasting personnel needs...there are many skills that are in great demand that you can just pack up and go with. You need to both analyze the needs of the new industry/organization/job opening and match them with skills that you have already proven yourself to have. Have examples ready to provide and illustrate.
- Explain what you did. The interviewer may not be familiar with your prior positions in another industry and you may have to sell the similarities. A 'just like you' approach can go a long way in proving your candidacy.

Lastly, prove through your questions and responses that you do have a basic understanding of the new industry. In other words, do your homework. Check into recent articles about the industry/the organization. Who are their competitors? How has business been? You would be surprised at the appalling lack of information many applicants have about whom they are interviewing with.

69. I have been employed as a temp with different companies. How do I answer the question, "Why have I had so many employers in the last two years?"

First---redo your resume and stress the continuity of employment (presumably doing similar/related work) – especially if all these jobs were during a period when you were seeking only temp assignments. Consider combining all these assignments under one heading for the whole time period, “various temporary assignments” Use a functional resume to stress your skills, experience and qualifications. Include any and all skills that you have picked up at these various companies. Secondly, with the current interview pending, stress the number of years’ experience and it was a wonderful way to get on the job training in various companies. You will have to face the obvious question...why temp? Was it a choice or did you fall into it (took one job to tide you over while looking and more temp jobs came your way! success bred more success). One thing that is seemingly truer is that organizations are blending their employee staff with a mix of full-time and temp/contract workers. You were just ahead of the curve.

Do not apologize for being a temp. Be proud that you were so able to fit into different companies and make a contribution from day 1. You were reliable, a quick learner and you had to have obvious people skills to be able to be effective in different environments. Stress the positive aspects of temping. You got an education while earning a living and now, having seen what other organizations offer, you are able to target the job/organization where you wish to work as well as have a clear understanding of your personal skills and career goals.

70. I just resigned from a company where I was working for over four years. My paychecks bounced and my immediate supervisor was verbally abusive. How do I explain why I left the company?

A very simple approach would be that the prior employer seemed to be having some recurring cash flow problems that he would not permit your assistance in solving problems. You could then go into what you might have done to solve or at least diminish the problem HAD you been given the opportunity. This would allow you to show your problem-solving skills in a real life situation. Do not go into the abusive nature of the relationship. Except for the cash-flow glitch, you have always worked with 'winners'. Don't complain. State that you have no idea what the problem was or if it has since been solved, but that you felt that your skills and experience were not being utilized. You are not 'bad-mouthing' a prior employer, but merely puzzled by an anomaly that caused an untenable situation to continue.

You may be asked what kind of employers you do like to work for, what your priorities are and what you can do for the new prospective employer. To sum up, your position should be: a problem arose, you repeatedly attempted to solve it and offered assistance/solutions and, when you finally realized that for unknown reasons the employer did not choose to avail herself of your expertise (presumably why she hired you in the first place), only then did you leave.

71. I gave two weeks' notice before leaving my last job, but left before the two weeks were up because of a hostile work situation. How can I present this situation in an interview without sounding unreliable?

First, it should not be mentioned at all. It will only come up if you choose to disclose the details -- which it would be very unwise to do. If asked "Are you still at the organization?" Your answer should be a brief "My last day was ____." Add if you feel comfortable doing so, "I left without another job because once I decided to seek another opportunity I wanted to give it my complete attention."

If for whatever reason it is disclosed that you left with less than two weeks notice, then you might add that they and you felt it would not make sense to stay once you decided to leave. They and you then put together an orderly transition plan and once it was in effect you were able to depart. Watch out for this last one especially if you are giving your supervisor as a reference. Be sure to get him/her to share with you what he/she will be saying to any inquiries regarding your departure.

72. I was laid off the week after September 11th, 2001. I have three excellent references from that company. Since that time I have interviewed with several companies, made infamous interview blunders in regards to "what are your weaknesses, and held a couple of part time positions that have nothing to do with my profession. I now have another interview scheduled with a firm for a position in my profession. How do I address the fact that since 2001 I have not been offered or held a long-term position. I am not sure what to say.

First, although it may only be small consolation, right now a lot of folks have been unemployed a very long time. There are reports in the media that frequently mention that more than two million jobs have been eliminated since the recession started. The few employers that are currently hiring are aware of this as well.

That is frequently part of the problem unfortunately. With so many people out of work, employers feel that they are in the driver's seat and will be able to get the greatest talent for the lowest price. The impact on applicants is that they are frequently ignored if they do not specifically fit what the employer seeks.

We have two suggestions. The first you may already have done and even if you have already done it, circumstances change so try it again. Work with your former employers and school teachers especially at the post-high-school level for suggestions (individuals as well as organizations) that you should approach. Second, make research part of your daily exercise to try to identify organizations from the newspapers and other media channels where you will learn who has just landed a big contract and then try to call those organizations directly to offer your services. Congratulate them and then encourage them to take you for the specific contract mentioned.

Second, consider the effect of technology on your profession and carefully assess your state-of-the-art proficiency. Then set up a plan to get and stay current. An action plan that involves getting out and being in an outside setting where you mingle and interact with fellow professionals (even if many others are also unemployed) is an effective means that will keep you sharp professionally. Stay current and when you do interview you can talk knowledgeably about the most recent trends and changes (and even software) affecting your profession.

There is hope on the horizon. With baby-boomers retiring at such a fast clip (voluntarily or not) there is forecast a major surge in job demands that the current remaining labor force will not be sufficient to fill. Just make sure that you are not professionally positioned for obsolescence and you will be fine. How quickly this will happen depends on the industry and the profession. Some recruiters are confirming though that after a sluggish two years they are starting to see improvement.