

Part IV
Acing the Job Interview

by Stanley H. Davis

Previously we've discussed the right candidate from the employer's point of view, how to craft an engaging résumé, and how to conduct an effective job search. If you've absorbed this information, you're now ready for pointers on what to expect and how to handle an interview.

The interview offers an opportunity to share your brand. In the interview process, you're given the chance to demonstrate who you are, and what value you'd bring to a new position.

As you enter into an interview, there are questions you'll want to prepare for, such as describing your proudest accomplishment and greatest disappointment, as well as the more commonplace strengths and weaknesses questions. Some other common queries to be ready for include:

- "Why are you looking for a new job?"
- "Why did you leave your last company?"
- "Why might this job be the right job for you?"
- "How would you describe yourself and how you work?"
- "Why should we hire you?"

Your responses are only part of the equation. It's not just what you answer, but how you answer. You'll undoubtedly make a better impression if you've given thought to questions like these in advance, rather than answering them cold. This is not to say that you should memorize potential answers – and risk sounding rehearsed – but rather give thought to what your responses would be.

As you prepare for the interview, remember too that your résumé is just a summary of your career to date. Think about important details that didn't fit into your résumé, as well as how to generate additional interest in what you've done and how you've done it. To reinforce a point you may want to share a brief story, or a relevant experience from outside of work.

Also in preparation, take time to research the organization you're visiting. You won't be an expert, but your familiarity with the organization will shine through in your follow-up questions. Your homework will be valuable and will always impress an employer.

At some point during the interview, it's likely that discussion of your previous employers may come up. During this discussion, your ability to stay positive – even about the negative – is imperative. Responding with thoughts like, "the position wasn't a good match for me,

but it was a really good company to work for,” or “the experience was great and I was able to make meaningful contributions,” is one way to sidestep a less than positive career experience. As with any response, however, be prepared for the follow-up questions of “why” or “how.”

If an interview goes well you may be asked for references. Thinking about who that should be ahead of time can help avoid any awkwardness. Also, don’t be surprised if the prospective employer requires a background check. More businesses are recognizing the importance of confirming your education, driving, criminal, and even financial background, depending on the type of job you’re applying for.

At the conclusion of the interview, if you’re interested, make it clear that you’re excited by the prospect of the position. After the interview, communication from the employer may go silent for a while; if you haven’t heard anything in 10 days, don’t hesitate to check in.

Of course, another possibility is that you won’t receive this job offer. It’s also essential to be professional in defeat. If you received notification in writing, write them back. If the news is delivered by phone, be sure to convey that, while you’re disappointed, you appreciate the consideration and enjoyed the discussions. Everyone that you interact with is a potential advocate, and while this opportunity was not right, if you maintain your good impression, you’ll more likely be thought of when another opportunity arises.

As mentioned in previous articles, the job search process can test your self-confidence. So as a reminder, as you walk into the room for your interview, remember what you’ve accomplished, how good you are, and what you can bring to an organization. If you think you’re not the right person for the job, that will come across. The reason you’ve been called for an interview is because someone is interested in you. Make the most of the interview, and build on that interest.

Stanley H. Davis is founding principal of Standish Executive Search, LLC (www.standishsearch.com), the executive search firm advising mid-size and smaller companies positioning for growth, change or succession. He also chairs the Boston Exit Planning Exchange (XPX). He is a Providence, R.I., resident whose clients include companies from the Southcoast Region and the Fall River area. He can be reached at sdavis@standishsearch.com.
