



We'd Like to Have an Initial Interview With You!

PAGE MORAHAN, PhD, AND JUDITH KAPUSTIN KATZ, EdD

In previous columns, we described the importance of preparing an Executive Summary, used in conjunction with your curriculum vitae (CV) as a way of presenting your best qualifications for a position, and standing out from the crowd. And we discussed how, when responding to an ad or request for your CV/Executive Summary, you must always send them accompanied by a cover letter tailored to the specific position.

These two documents have done their work. Your application has stood out among the rest. You have been invited for an initial interview.

Now, how do you ensure that you stand out in the interview? The overwhelming considerations when hiring an individual are not only his or her qualifications. Only those who have already been judged as likely to be able succeed in the job are interviewed. So what is the focus of the interview? Things that can be seen and judged in the here and now in the interview process itself. Three main areas on which hiring decisions are made during an interview are:

- ❖ Communication
- ❖ Human relations—goodness of “fit”
- ❖ Enthusiasm, enthusiasm, enthusiasm!

Keep these in mind when answering all questions in an interview.

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The Interview Questions

Most interview questions fall into the following areas—so you can prepare your answers for each of these. The savvy interviewee quickly identifies the category, and gives an answer that best fits the interviewer's wavelength, and thus impresses the interviewers that this is the candidate they want to hire.

'Tell us about yourself'

In preparing your Executive Summary, you will already have prepared PAR statements. These are statements that look at your accomplishments in terms of Problems, issues, challenges or opportunities that you encountered, the Action you took alone or with others to solve or resolve these, and the Results or benefits that followed. You now craft stories around these PARs. In interviewing, it is essential to help people “hook

onto” your skills with personal stories and anecdotes. Remember, “facts tell, stories sell.”

This question is not a request (although it sounds like it) to give a boring list of your job history and educational background. It is however, a clear opportunity to relate how you have been preparing, so it might include some historical data to show how your career and educational experiences have led you along the path to the current opportunity in front of you. What you want to do is to look deliberate and planful in your career development.

The savvy interviewee then may give a menu of three to five possibilities from the list of PARs that relate most closely to the job. Ask the interviewer to choose one for you to elaborate on, such as: “Tell me what you'd like to hear more about.” Then give a 30- to 50-word PAR illustration or story—what you did, how you did it, the results you achieved. For instance, “In my last position, I designed and implemented a clinical education program that was rated the top in the school within 2 years...” After this, ask for feedback or fit with the job you're being interviewed for, such as: “Would an accomplishment like this be useful here?” And then you can create a dialogue, by asking, “What else would you like to hear about?”



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The choices of the interviewer let you know what's most important to them.

Examples of some "tell us about yourself" questions that you might be asked include:

- ❖ Tell us about yourself.
- ❖ You have three minutes in which to share whatever you wish that will help us to know you better.
- ❖ How do you handle conflicts?
- ❖ What experience have you had in ...?
- ❖ What role in ...have you had? (These can be good clues as to what the committee or person views as important to doing the job effectively.)
- ❖ Describe the most difficult decision you have had to make. What made it difficult and how did you work through to the decision?

'Why do you want to work here?'

Focus on their needs and what you bring to them, not why the position is good for you. The object here is to create a dialogue on specifics, and not give a vague monologue answer. Consider answering with some form of, "I don't know, yet. That's why I'm here today, to find out exactly how my skills can work here. ...And, let me tell you what I have learned and how my skills and experiences may match your needs."

Then you can present your research information to show you've done your homework, are enthusiastic, know the reputation of the organization and what you think their goals and challenges are. You can say something like, "This is what I know already about ...How accurate is this?" You can probe career possibilities by asking a question such as, "If you would hire me, where would you expect me to be in four years?" This will give you much more information about the real organizational mores and rules than if you say directly, "I expect to be promoted to ... in four years." Whenever you can, refocus the questions to your PARs so you can show how you can contribute to the organization.

Examples of some "why do you want to work here" questions include:

- ❖ What do you see as the challenges for ... (the position, the organization, the industry)? (Your answer will of course be based on your research so far.)
- ❖ Why are you interested in ... (the position, organization, industry)

'What's wrong with you?'

When interviewing someone for the first time, the interviewer's aim is to weed out people. You've already made the basic cut as far as credentials and skills. You need to prepare for these types of questions ahead of time. For example, if you do not have desired financial experience, how can you show equivalent expertise? "I know that the job asked for financial experience in department-level clinical practice. I have run ...division successfully for five years. While I have not yet had the opportunity to run finances for an entire department, when I took a physician-executive program, I became very interested in finance. I did a financial analysis of my medical school that



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the dean and I subsequently used with the chairs to show the trends of the school. I have also recently completed the ACPE certificate program on clinical practice financial management. What specific aspects of financial management are of most concern to you in the position?"

Some examples of typical "what's wrong with you" questions include:

- ❖ Everyone has strengths and areas that might need improvement. What are your strong points? And what are the areas that you believe need improvement?
 - ❖ Tell us about a time when you were less effective than you wished to be. What did you learn from it? What would you do differently from what you learned?
- Often, your tendency in response to questions such as these is to state a personality or behavioral pattern. Consider instead, directly addressing a lack of experience in the particular position, and how your related experience covers that.

'What salary do you want?'

Avoid answering this in specifics. Instead say something like, "I'm sure we can come to a reasonable and fair agreement on this if we find we have a synergistic match with your needs and my skills. We all know the AAMC guidelines, and I certainly believe we can work with those."

Be Ready for the Final Questions

The one question they often ask is:

- ❖ Is there anything else you want us to know that you believe would be helpful or that we failed to inquire about?

If there's something that came up that you want to expand on, you can do so, and/or if there's an area you researched and they didn't bring up, and you want to know more, you can ask about it.

The questions you should ask—so you can clarify what your potential new boss will need from you—are something like:

- ❖ One year from now, what will I have accomplished for you, so that you can write the best possible performance review?
 - ❖ What are your biggest priorities? What projects do you need done? In what order do you need to get them done?
 - ❖ What could I do in the first year on the job that would make both of us look like geniuses? (said with light humor!)
- There is one last question you should ask that will allow you to follow up persistently, without being a pest—and show your enthusiasm, communication and human relations skills. This involves getting agreement on when you will be re-contacting the interviewer. Make sure the "ball is in your court."

We'll cover the critical interview follow-up activities in a later column. ❖

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