

# Job Interview Essentials

A Guide for Candidates



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## Introduction

***Why should we hire you? How do you handle pressure? What are your strengths and weaknesses?***

Why do people get nervous during job interviews when they're asked questions like these? The answer is simple. People feel nervous because they know they're being judged. They're being judged on their personality, their body language, the logic behind their responses and the quality of their clothes. This is why extensive preparation before a job interview and the implementation of strategic answers is vital for your chances of success.

That's where this book steps in. It provides you with a range of tools to analyse interview situations and prepare for them thoroughly. In addition, it steps you through answering techniques and strategies that will help you land a potentially life changing job.

In the first chapter, we consider the stages of the interview, including what to expect before, during and after the formal interview process.

In chapter two, we look at specific speaking strategies to make your answers sound professional, logical and intelligent. By implementing these strategies, you'll find that your responses are transformed, from being ordinary clichés to powerful statements that leave a real impression on the interviewer.

In the third chapter, we investigate the four key areas that you should focus on during the interview: employment experience, education, business skills and personal attributes.

In chapter four we analyse example questions and answers, as well as the key strategies that are used in the answers. This is particularly useful to help you get the

feel of the flow of job interviews, and the types of phrases that interviewers expect to hear.

In chapter five, we list fifty common interview questions, arranged into biographical, behavioural and technical questions. We then conclude by looking at ways to prepare for the interview, including final checklists that make it clear what to remember and what to avoid during the heat of the job interview.

We wish you luck as you embark on your journey and hope that the information contained in this guide helps you reach the next stage of your brilliant career.

# Chapter 1 - Job Interview Stages

## 1.1 Research the organisation and industry

Research thoroughly. Start with the company website and then conduct an advanced online search in order to gain as much information as you can about the organisation. You might also look at key competitors, industry magazines and websites to gain as many insights as you can into the issues faced by the organisation. If the company is listed on the stock exchange, you should be able to download their company reports and financial information, which should give you insights into their direction and strategy.

Take notes as you research the organisation, which can be studied and turned into questions that you can ask during the interview. Having a deep knowledge of the organisation and intelligent questions for the interviewer is an excellent way to turn the interview into a conversation, where you are fully engaged and able to demonstrate your commitment.

## 1.2 Confirm the details of the interview

To approach the interview with confidence you need to know as much about the interview as possible. Consider contacting the organisation to find out what type of interview it is, who is conducting it, how long it will take, the focus of the interview, and whether or not there will be a test of technical knowledge, either written or spoken. You can also ask if documents such as a Curriculum Vitae and academic transcripts are required.

Make sure you know where the building is, how long it will take to get there, and any other information that help you feel your best in this situation.

### 1.3 Practise interview questions and answers

This is a crucial step. Once you have researched the organisation, you should revisit the job selection criteria to carefully match the position to your four focus areas of employment experience, education, business skills and personal attributes.

Predict the questions that will be asked and write them down. You should also write down your answers to see if they are logical. Ask a friend to role-play the interview with you. They should put pressure on you, asking you about your weaknesses, and difficult decisions you have had to make in the past. Get your friend to give you objective feedback, as the more practise you get at answering these types of questions, the better.

Refer to chapters four and five of this eBook for example questions, answers and strategies.

### 1.4 Consider your social media profile

Many potential employers conduct a search into candidates by typing their name into search engines and seeing what appears on social media sites. If you have social media profiles, ensure you run a profile check on yourself to identify the way you will be perceived by others. Consider removing photos and editing profile information that would be considered unprofessional.

### 1.5 Dress professionally

New clothes make a fantastic impression. Ask anyone who has conducted hundreds of interviews and they will tell you about the importance they place on candidates being well-groomed, with clothes that are fashionable, well-fitting, crease-free and spotless.

## **Men**

For professional job interviews men should wear a two piece suit. This includes a dark coloured jacket and trousers, a light coloured shirt and an English style tie. In particular, men should pay special attention to the shirt, ensuring that the collar is stiff and well ironed, the top button is done up and the cuffs are showing. Even though it's important to wear freshly polished shoes, the same amount of attention will not be paid to the shoes as to the shirt. Ensure the tie is tied tightly and it matches the shirt and suit jacket. If you're uncertain if your clothes match, ask for a second opinion, or even a third.

Personal grooming includes being cleanly shaven, with hair brushed and clean teeth and clothes. You must also wear deodorant, as there's nothing worse than body odour that is apparent from poor personal hygiene or unwashed clothes.

## **Women**

Women should also wear a dark colored business suit, with the ideal length of skirt being to the knee. While women are free to be more creative with appearance than men during an interview, it is important to wear makeup that looks conservative yet professional. One mistake women sometimes make is wearing makeup that is different from what they normally wear. While it is necessary to look good during an interview, this is not the occasion to experiment with extra makeup and new colours.

In terms of hair, it is often best to look natural during an interview with hair that is clean and shiny. Importantly, hair should never cover the face, as this may give the impression you're hiding information.

As they say, first impressions last longest. In particular, the first thirty seconds is absolutely vital to your success in the interview and clothing is what tends to be noticed first.

## 1.6 Entering the interview

Remember to switch off your phone and be prepared to offer a firm handshake, smile and introduce yourself to the interviewer. After you introduce yourself, it's polite to thank the interviewer for the interview opportunity.

The opening dialogue may be like this:

***Candidate: Good morning, my name's Gary Williams. (during handshake)***

***Interviewer: Hi Gary, pleased to meet you. Take a seat.***

***Candidate: Thank you very much, and thanks for the opportunity for the interview.***

***Interviewer: It's a pleasure.***

It's a good idea to mirror the tone and style of the interviewer or interviewers. If their tone is serious and formal, you should consider matching this. If they are more casual, you may choose to be more relaxed. However, you should not attempt to be overly familiar with the interviewer, as there needs to be a professional distance kept when meeting in this environment.

## 1.7 Body language

Body language is one of the most crucial elements for success during job interviews. According to research, the way you move, stand, shake hands and sit will tell the interviewer just as much information as the verbal answers you give. Most importantly, you need to enter the interview with strong, confident and positive body language, with plenty of smiling and consistent eye contact.

A weak handshake may cost you a job. As you approach your right hand should be vertical, with thumb pointed towards the ceiling. Your handshake should be firm and last for about three seconds and you should introduce yourself as you give the handshake. During the farewell handshake be sure to thank the interviewer, before

briskly exiting the room. Note, if you're applying for a sales or leadership role, the quality of your handshake will be even more important to your chances of success.

Consider your smile to be one of your most powerful weapons. Smiling will help to conceal your nerves, while triggering positive emotional responses in the interviewer. By maintaining a smile, no matter which question you're answering, you're able to project positive energy.

When you're talking you should keep your head straight and not fidget with objects on the table such as papers and pens. Don't lean back in your chair, but lean slightly forward, demonstrating that you're engaged in the discussion. It is a good idea to keep your hands clasped in front of you, while occasionally using your hands to emphasise important points.

Another good body language strategy is to mirror the body language of the interviewer, while not copying the exact movements. In this way you're trying to match the tone of the interviewer and make him or her feel at ease with your body language. It's also a signal that you like the person you're speaking to, and that you're developing a positive rapport.

## 1.8 Small talk

Job interviews often start with small talk. This is a chance to build rapport with the interviewer and demonstrate your personality. Take this small talk seriously, as you're being judged on your friendliness, your personality and your ability to get along with colleagues. In most circumstances, you should wait for the interviewer to start the small talk. If you feel you need to start it yourself, make sure it is friendly, topical and not controversial.

Think about how you would respond to the following questions and comments:

***Did you have trouble finding us today?***

***Do you know this part of town?***

***How did you get here today?***

***Pretty warm weather today, isn't it?***

***You didn't get wet, did you?***

## 1.9 Formal introduction

Most interviews begin with formal introductions. This is a chance for the candidate and the interviewer to provide information that is relevant to the job and the organisation. If the interviewer gives an introduction, listen very carefully to try and uncover any extra information that you missed in the advertised job description or during your research stage. There may also be clues in the introduction that will help you give answers that pinpoint the exact requirements of the position.

If there's a panel, the introduction will most likely explain which departments each of the panel members represents. Although you will probably be nervous at this stage, it's important to keep composed so you can remember first names and ask pertinent questions during, or at the end of the interview.

When it's your turn to introduce yourself, try to keep your answer approximately two minutes long, and focus on information that is particularly relevant to the position. In your introduction it's a good idea to summarise your four focus areas as they relate to the position: employment experience, education, business skills and personal attributes. This is a part of the interview you should practise carefully.

Remember, the idea is to summarise the four focus areas during your introduction. Keep in mind that you will have a chance to expand on each of these four areas in greater detail throughout the interview, and that this initial introduction is simply a chance to 'introduce' these areas.

## 1.10 Behavioural questions

The first specific questions you often hear in a job interview are usually called 'behavioural questions'. The purpose of these is to see how you behave in certain situations that often found in the job you're applying for.

It's worthwhile trying to predict the behavioural questions that you might be asked. They are often related to the key skills required for the job, or the points listed on the selection criteria. For example, if the job you're applying for occurs in a busy office, you may expect to be asked about how you handle pressure. If the job involves speaking with customers on the telephone, you may be asked about how you handle difficult customers, or your philosophy towards customer service.

When answering behavioural questions, be sure to emphasise your business skills and relevant personal attributes. It may also be suitable to may use the Situation – Task – Action – Result – Lesson strategy, also known as the STAR(L) method of answering questions. This approach will be discussed in the chapter three.

Typical behavioural questions include:

***How do you feel about working in a team?***

***Describe a time when you faced a great challenge at work.***

***How do you manage your time efficiently at work?***

***What are the keys to effective communication?***

***How do you handle learning new software programs?***

## 1.11 Technical questions

Once the interviewer has a general understanding of how you react in certain situations in the workplace, you may be asked a number of work-related questions to gauge what you know about the organisation and the specific tasks you will be required to do on a daily basis.

Typical technical questions include:

***How has your education prepared you for this position?***

***What experience do you have in this field?***

***What do you know about how this organisation operates?***

***How do you think you can contribute to this organisation?***

***What do you know about this industry?***

***What do you think are the most important challenges that our organisation faces?***

When faced with work-related or technical questions, you're expected to draw on your knowledge gained from education, as well as your experience gained from similar job roles in the past. If you don't have direct experience from previous employment, you should discuss any group related projects at college or from voluntary organisations.

## **1.12 Biographical questions**

The purpose of biographical questions is to find out information about the candidate on a deeper level. Therefore, this is the part of the interview when you will be asked about your reasons for entering the industry, your particular strengths and weaknesses, and your goals for the future.

To answer biographical questions thoroughly, you need to spend time before the interview, getting clear in your mind how you would approach questions that delve into your motivations for choosing your career path. It is recommended you use the Specific – Measureable – Achievable – Relevant – Timed (SMART) approach to answering these types of questions. Again, chapter three has more information about SMART answers.

Make certain you know what your career goals are. For example, your long term goal might be to become a senior manager in a medium to large sized finance company, preferably based in the central business district. When you have a clear career goal, you can base your answers around whether or not they match your career goal.

Typical biographical questions include:

***Describe your strengths and weaknesses.***

***What are your short-term and long-term career goals?***

***Why did you choose this career?***

***What gives you satisfaction?***

***How would a former colleague or manager describe you?***

It's important to stay focused on the job you're applying for, even when answering biographical questions, as you don't want to get side-tracked by stories that may not be exactly relevant. In other words, even though you will be talking about your personal goals and strengths, make sure you do it in a way that corresponds with the goals of the organisation.

### 1.13 Questions for the interviewer

At the end of the interview, you are expected to ask questions, in order to clarify any information you're unsure of following the interview. By asking pertinent questions, you are demonstrating that you have an understanding of the organisation and the wider industry. Under no circumstances should you decline to ask a question. This shows you don't have a critical approach to evaluating whether or not you want to work for this organisation, as well as giving the impression that you're under-prepared for the interview.

The best questions you can ask are questions that naturally flow from the interview itself. In other words, try to ask questions that aim to clarify information that was introduced during the interview, but which was not covered in detail. Alternatively,

you might ask questions that were prepared before the interview. While this may be fine in some cases, they might not naturally flow from the interview conversation, and therefore can feel contrived. Keep in mind you should ask at least two or three questions at the end of the interview, in order to show how engaged you are in the opportunity.

In most cases, you should avoid questions related to salary, as it's usually up to the employer to broach this subject with the candidate. You should also avoid making the interviewer any offers or deal that don't relate to the position being discussed, as this can make you come across as opportunistic. In most cases, where there is more than one interview, the area of remuneration will usually be addressed in the second or third interview.

Questions you might ask include:

***What are the key performance indicators for this position?***

***What type of professional development opportunities does your organisation offer?***

***If I am successful, what can I expect to be doing on a daily basis?***

***How large is the team I will be working with?***

***What do you think are the biggest challenges facing the industry?***

***What's the work culture like in this organisation?***

***What's the next step in the process?***

Although the questions above are common, the best questions will be specific to the actual interview, and demonstrate a level of critical thinking and professional engagement on behalf of the candidate. Usually the right question to ask will occur to you during the interview itself, so be sure to remember this question, even while you may be discussing something else.

## 1.14 Exiting the interview

Once the interviewer has answered your question or questions, you should follow the signals sent by the interviewer. It's important to maintain eye contact at this point, to stand up, and again express your thanks for the opportunity as you offer a firm handshake. Maintain a strong and confident posture as you leave the room.

## 1.15 Follow up

Depending on how the interview finished and the size of the organisation, you may or may not want to send a follow up email the day after the interview to once again thank the interviewer for the opportunity.

As most organisations are extremely busy, it may take up to two or three weeks to hear about the outcome of your interview. It's not advisable to repeatedly contact the organisation about the outcome, unless you believe there is a particular issue that needs to be clarified.

## Chapter 2 - Focus Areas

In order to stay focused during your interview and avoid getting distracted with irrelevant information, you need to remain focused on the following four areas: employment experience, education experience, business skills and personal attributes.

### 2.1 Employment experience

Approximately 60% of your interview should be spent talking about your employment experience that is relevant to the position you are applying for. Therefore, of all the four focus areas, your employment experience is the most crucial to your chances of success.

By discussing situations, examples, projects and wins that you have experienced in previous employment you are giving the interviewer confidence that you're bringing practical knowledge and skills to the job, which will give you a head start. The key, of course, is to keep it relevant.

If you don't have a great deal of relevant professional experience, be conscious that you will be competing against other candidates who will be stronger in this area. Therefore, you need to practise speaking in a convincing way about the limited experience you have, or make an outstanding effort in the other focus areas.

### 2.2 Education experience

Academic qualifications are essential for most professional jobs. It's therefore imperative that you highlight the relevant study that you have undertaken, including courses in which you achieved high grades and relevant awards and achievements

that you have attained. You should mention what attracted you to study these subjects in the first place, and how you are passionate about excelling in these areas.

You might also focus on formal and informal professional development that you have undertaken at a previous position that will be beneficial in your new role. For instance, you should mention any full day training courses that you might have taken, or an online course that you studied in the evenings.

## 2.3 Business skills

These are the business skills that are transferable between different jobs, which are sometimes called 'soft skills'. Some of these skills can be acquired through on the job experience, while others are learnt through training courses. In any case, it is worth highlighting your business skills as a way to further enhance your likelihood of success.

Some of these business skills include:

- Administration Skills
- Business Etiquette
- Business Writing
- Conflict Resolution
- Creative Problem Solving
- Customer Service
- Interpersonal Skills
- Leadership Skills
- Management Skills
- Negotiation Skills
- Presentation Skills
- Project Management
- Public Speaking
- Sales Skills
- Teamwork Skills
- Time Management
- Workplace Communication

## 2.4 Personal attributes

Personal attributes are qualities that make you stand out from other candidates.

When mentioning your personal attributes, keep in mind they will sound more authentic when they can be backed up with concrete examples so they sound authentic. Also keep in mind that some personal attributes will be more suited to particular jobs than others.

Strong personal attributes include:

- Accurate
- Adaptable
- Analytical
- Creative
- Detail-focused
- Dependable
- Diplomatic
- Diligent
- Efficient
- Energetic
- Enterprising
- Enthusiastic
- Ethical
- Experienced
- Fair
- Firm
- Flexible
- Genuine
- Hard-working
- Honest
- Innovative
- Intelligent
- Intuitive
- Logical
- Loyal
- Mature
- Methodical
- Meticulous
- Organised
- Outgoing
- Personable
- Practical
- Positive
- Punctual
- Reliable
- Resourceful
- Self-disciplined
- Self-motivated
- Sincere
- Strategic
- Team-orientated
- Tidy
- Trustworthy
- Well-presented

## Chapter 3 - Strategic Answers

### 3.1 ARE

ARE is a strategy that allows you to give a full answer which is logical and informative. When using this strategy, you can extend your answers for as long as you feel is appropriate, without having to pause with 'um' and 'ah' as you think of what to say next. The concept is described below and an example is provided in Chapter 4.4.

#### A - Answer the question

It sounds simple, but you'd be amazed at how many candidates, particularly when nervous, actually fail to answer the question. Make sure you don't fall into this category by answering the question directly.

For example, if the interviewer asks the question 'what gives you satisfaction in the workplace', you should be specific with your answer, by giving an answer such as 'constant improvement gives me a great deal of satisfaction'.

Whatever the question, be sure you answer it, before moving to the next stage.

#### R - Reason for your answer

You should follow up your answer with a reason. To continue the answer about constant improvement giving you satisfaction, you should state that there are two reasons for your answer. Firstly, the organisation will experience great benefits in productivity whenever there is constant improvement within workplace processes. Furthermore, on a personal level, constant improvement leads to greater job satisfaction, which in turn boosts performance and results. Over the long term this

will lead to career progression, which is something that you're striving for within this industry.

## **E – Example**

At this stage you can expand your answer with an example that proves your point. Continuing the example about satisfaction and improvement, you can describe an actual case in which you came up with a workplace solution that added value to the organisation. On a personal note, you might also describe how this solution gave you better insights into how to improve other areas of the business, and that your confidence was greatly enhanced following this experience.

Keep in mind, rather than speak about examples in a general way 'I used to do ABC...', you should speak about a concrete example.

## **3.2 STAR(L)**

STAR(L) is a speaking strategy that allows you to tell a story in the form of a complete answer, which is particularly useful when answering behavioural questions. The concept is described below and an example is provided in chapter 4.5.

### **S – Situation**

You should start by describing a challenging situation that you have faced in the past. You can discuss which organisation you were working for as well as who was involved, including, your team-mates, colleagues and/or manager.

### **T - Task**

Next you briefly outline the task you were expected to perform. This may include what you needed to do, the relevant key performance indicator, as well as any deadlines that were involved. Keep it relevant and brief.

### **A - Action**

In this step you describe the actions you undertook to accomplish this task. You might describe the way you used your educational knowledge, or the skills gained from previous workplace experience to complete the task.

### **R - Result**

What was the result? Here you need to emphasise what improvement in organisational processes resulted from your actions, and if relevant how you were recognized or rewarded for your efforts. This is where you really drive home the point, about your skills being a key factor for the successful outcome.

### **L - Lesson**

This final part is optional, but when used correctly it can demonstrate your value to the organisation as a reflective and strategic employee with possible leadership potential. This is where you explain the lessons that you learnt from this event, and how you used these lessons to improve your workplace efficiency for the benefit of the organisation.

## **3.3 SMART**

SMART is a speaking strategy that allows you to talk about goal setting and your career goals, either short-term, medium term or long term. This may be useful when answering biographical questions. Again, the concept is described below and an example is provided in 4.3.

### **S - Specific**

You need to be specific when describing a goal. If asked about your long term career goal, don't just say you want to be a manager, which is not specific. Instead say you want to be a senior sales manager within a fast growth organisation based in Melbourne (or the location of the job you're applying for).

### **M - Measurable**

Describe how can measure your achievement of this goal. For example, you may state how many people you plan to manage, and the type of functions you'll be performing at work.

### **A - Achievable**

You need to emphasise how you plan to achieve this goal, in terms of further education or by using your work experience and expanding your network within the industry.

### **R - Relevant**

Explain how this goal is relevant to you, given your particular educational and employment history. You may also mention your business soft skills as well as your unique personal attributes that will help you to achieve this goal.

### **T - Timed**

What are the timeframes for your career goal? You may break it down into short term (one - two years), medium term (five years) and long term (ten years).

## Chapter 4 - Common Questions, Answers & Strategies

In this chapter we look at common interview questions and some suggested answers. Each answer is followed by a quick overview of the strategy used in each case.

Keep in mind that it's important to always match answers to particular job roles, which means the example answers presented below may not be relevant to other job interview situations.

The candidate is Mike Taylor and he is being interviewed for a Sales Manager position at Waretec Trading.

### 4.1 Tell me about yourself.

**Answer:** As you know, my name's Mike Taylor, I'm currently working at Astor Holdings as a sales representative, a position I've held for the past two years. Throughout this period I've helped my division to increase net profits by over twenty-five percent by producing exceptional results in the accounts I've been associated with. Prior to working at Astor Holdings, I was a student at Melbourne University, where I achieved a distinction average in my Bachelor of Commerce. On a personal level I'm diligent and self-motivated with a high attention to detail, which are personal attributes that have contributed to my considerable success in the area of sales and customer service. Furthermore, I have gained significant knowledge and skills in important areas such as sales, negotiation skills, presentation skills and creative problem solving. I'm currently looking for a position that matches my career goal of being a senior accounts manager in a fast growth organisation within the technology sector.

**Strategy:** The candidate has focused on the four focus areas of employment, education, personal attributes and business soft skills and has concluded by briefly

stating his career goals for the future. Remember, the introduction is a great opportunity to start the interview on your terms, so it pays to prepare well for what you will include in this answer. Also note, it's not essential to provide and details and examples at this point, as these should be expanded on throughout the interview.

## 4.2 Tell me about your current job.

**Answer:** I've been very fortunate to have the opportunity at Astor Holdings as a sales representative. My role requires a great deal of communication, both internally with colleagues and managers, and externally with clients and occasionally suppliers. Astor Holdings offers a wide range of financial investment products that often require a deep knowledge of complex yields and dividends. One of my skills is being able to provide important information to prospective clients, without creating confusion and misunderstanding. In fact, I'd rate this ability to tell a complex story in a simple way as one of more focus strengths. In addition, I've gained valuable experience using customer relationship management software as well as receiving ongoing professional development training from the International Sales Institute. If I'm given the opportunity at Waretec Trading, I look forward to bringing this experience and knowledge with me into the new role.

**Strategy:** Always stay positive. Notice how Mike Taylor has focused on the positive, saying how he has been very fortunate to have the opportunity. This gives the impression that Mike is a prepared to say good things about the organisation, compared with another candidate who might use this question to speak disparagingly about a former manager or colleague. Importantly, he concludes his answer by mentioning how his knowledge and skills gained from his previous employer can benefit Waretec Trading.

### 4.3 Why are you leaving your current job?

**Answer:** I'm leaving this job because it doesn't exactly match my career goal. As I mentioned in my introduction, my career goal is to be a senior accounts manager in a fast growth organisation within the technology sector, which I hope to achieve within five years. Even though I had a very good relationship with my former managers and colleagues, I felt that I needed to change industries, from financial products to technology products, in order to fully realise my ambition.

**Strategy:** Here the candidate has emphasised his career goal as the guiding principle that influences his decision making. By using this strategy, he is showing that he is focussed, determined and well-organised in his decision making. Notice in his second sentence that the candidate is using the SMART method to explain his goal which is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timed. He is also using the question as an opportunity to give a compliment to his former manager, which gives the interviewer the impression that Mike Taylor is most likely a person who will speak positively about Waretec Trading in the future. Notice that this question is also answered with the Answer and Reason structure, while an example is not necessary.

### 4.4 What have you enjoyed most about this job?

**Answer:** There have been many aspects of my role at Astor Holdings that I've enjoyed. This is because I'm passionate about the area of sales and providing every one of my clients with the best possible customer service. However, if I was to choose one aspect, I'd say that it's been the challenge of discovering the exact needs of the clients, through a systematic process of needs analysis. For example, whenever I meet a potential customer for the first time, I start by researching the customer to find out as much as I can about their strengths, weaknesses and position in the market. Based on this analysis I write survey questions that are relevant to their situation. My experience has taught me that you should never

assume that you know too much about another organisation, so that the survey should attempt to uncover as much information as possible. Based on the survey results and my conversations with key players within their organisation, I will tailor a range of product offerings that I believe will meet their needs.

**Strategy:** The candidate has used the ARE strategy to answer this question. The first sentence is the Answer, the second sentence is the Reason and the rest of the information given is a specific Example that is relevant to the type of job function that will occur at Waretec Trading.

#### 4.5 Tell me about a time that you dealt with a difficult customer.

**Answer:** In my opinion, there aren't really difficult customers; there are only customers whose needs have not been fully met. About two years ago I was in a situation where I didn't do enough research into a potential client who wanted to buy five year company bonds. The challenge was to understand the type of portfolio that the client wanted, and how long they were prepared to wait in order to maximise their profits. Because my research was incomplete, the survey questions that I compiled did not match the types of issues that were relevant. As a result, I offered the client the wrong products, which caused a delay of about one month in the sales cycle. As soon as I realised my mistake, I arranged a meeting with my senior manager to discuss the situation and try to brainstorm possible solutions. My senior manager saw the solution immediately, which was to write a business letter and offer a five percent discount for the following financial period. The client accepted this and today our relationship remains strong, as this company is one of our most valuable clients. Importantly, I learnt a number of lessons from this experience; that the research stage is critical and that open and honest communication with senior management is vital to ensure the best business outcomes.

**Strategy:** Here the candidate is using the STAR(L) technique to give a complete and logical answer. The answer describes the situation, the task, the action and the result. Clearly by having a good result, the message remains positive in the eyes of the interviewer, even though the candidate has admitted a fault in his previous process. Perhaps the strongest aspect of this answer is the lesson learnt, which shows the candidate is humble and honest enough to know that lessons can be taken from challenging situations.

#### 4.6 What are your strengths?

**Answer:** I believe I have a number of strengths which are relevant to this opportunity. Firstly, I am excellent communicator. In fact, if you were to ask my references this question I'm sure they would confirm that my written and verbal communication skills are outstanding. The reason for this is because I pay particular attention when reading and listening. For example, whenever I read an email I focus closely on the explicit and implicit message that the writer is trying to give. Similarly with listening, I always encourage the speaker, in order to make them feel comfortable and confident to give me a clear and succinct message that I can respond to appropriately. My other strengths include being highly self-motivated, hardworking and organised. By utilising these attributes, I have been able to enjoy the success that I've had in helping to grow the business at Astor Holdings.

**Strategy:** The candidate has chosen to focus on his strength of communication, which he knows is a critical asset in the role of sales representative. He is letting others speak for him by pointing out what his referees would say, before expanding on examples of how he uses this strength. At the end he mentions three personal attributes as strengths, in order of importance to the new role.

## 4.7 What are your weaknesses?

**Answer:** Everyone has weaknesses, and I think it's important that we are able to recognize them and work on them in order to turn them into strengths. For me, I sometimes have trouble focussing on the big picture. This is because I consider myself to have a personality that focuses on details and strive to achieve towards one hundred per cent accuracy. To overcome this issue, I make time to speak to my colleagues about the big picture, of where the organisation is headed and the challenges faced in the industry.

**Strategy:** This question should be side-stepped, as there is no need to go into a lengthy discussion about your weak points. Wherever possible, keep your answer short, use positive language (say issue, not problem), and try to turn it into a strength.

## 4.8 How do you handle stress and pressure?

**Answer:** These days, I believe stress is a common part of many people's lives. Personally, I believe the best ways to handle stress are by implementing a range of best practise business skills, staying positive, and keeping fit and healthy by eating well and exercising regularly. In terms of pressure, to a certain extent I believe it is unavoidable in the modern workplace, mainly due to the wide array of technology options that have led to the feeling of being continually connected to colleagues and clients. There are also the key performance indicators and expectations that go with being a professional in the modern world. To deal with these effectively, I believe time management is the key, especially in regards to making priorities. For example, At Astor Holdings I start each day and each week by creating an action list. This list is organised according to tasks which are urgent and important, all the way to tasks that are not urgent and not important. By taking care of the most urgent and important tasks first, I am able to perform to the best of my ability, no matter how much perceived pressure there is.

**Strategy:** The candidate answers this question by demonstrating a good knowledge of transferable business skills, especially time management skills.

#### 4.9 What makes a good manager?

**Answer:** There are many qualities of a good manager. Firstly, I believe a good manager needs to have strong industry experience, in order to understand the key issues and challenges that present themselves on a daily basis. Furthermore, a good manager needs to be an excellent communicator, not just in terms of speaking and writing, but also in listening and understanding important aspects such as body language and empathy. Finally, I believe a good manager should empower his or her staff by having confidence in them, by setting a strong example, and in displaying leadership skills that help the team to reach their potential while providing excellent outcomes for the organisation.

**Strategy:** The candidate shows an understanding of manager attributes that are most likely relevant to the sales industry. Also, by ordering the response using signposting language such as ‘firstly’ and ‘furthermore’, the candidate is showing a logical and ordered mind, as well as the use of formal vocabulary. The knowledge of leadership skills demonstrates that the candidate has dealt with a successful manager in the past, and knows the attributes of a strong manager, which may suggest to the interviewer that this candidate may be considered for future leadership positions.

#### 4.10 Why should we hire you?

**Answer:** I believe I have a number of strengths which are relevant to this opportunity. Firstly, there is my employment experience, at Astor Holdings as we have discussed, as well as my previous sales experience at Delta Communications.

In addition, the strong theoretical knowledge that I gained at college has been complemented by significant in-house professional development training at Astor Holdings. In terms of business skills, I have advanced knowledge in the areas of sales, negotiation, presentation skills and customer service. Personally, I am hard-working, self-motivated and highly organised. Therefore, with my combination of experience, strengths and attributes, I firmly believe that I am the right person for this job.

**Strategy:** This is a similar question to the opening 'Please introduce yourself'. The best way to answer to this question is to mention and reinforce the four focus areas as they relate to the job being offered, with particular focus on relevant employment experience. If there is a focus area that has not been covered in detail in previous parts of the interview, it may be worth mentioning it to ensure that all the information that you believe is pertinent to the position has been covered.

## Chapter 5 - 50 Common Questions

In this section, the common questions are divided into biographical, behavioural and technical questions. Consider how you would answer these questions using ARE, STAR(L), SMART or any of the other strategies discussed in this eBook.

### 5.1 Biographical questions

1. What makes you the best candidate for this job?
2. How would you describe yourself?
3. What led you to choose your major?
4. How have you benefited from your university degree?
5. What kind of environment would you like to work in?
6. How do you think a friend or professor who knows you would describe you?
7. What are your short and long-term goals and objectives?
8. Why did you choose this career?
9. What motivates you to put forth your greatest efforts?
10. What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
11. Have you ever had any failures? What did you learn from them?
12. What is the most innovative thing you have done in your previous work or university experience?
13. Tell me about a good and a bad decision you've made in the last year.
14. Tell me about the most challenging change you've faced at work. What did you do? What were the results?
15. How would you describe your personality?

### 5.2 Behavioural questions

16. Describe a situation where you have worked in a team.

17. Why would you be an asset to our department?
18. How would you be able to contribute to our team?
19. Describe the relationship that should exist between a manager and a junior employee?
20. What do you expect from your manager?
21. When was the last time you were criticised? How did you deal with it?
22. What major problem have you encountered in a previous job and how did you deal with it?
23. Tell me about a time when you have experience pressure at work.
24. In what kind of a work environment are you most comfortable?
25. What have you learnt from participation in extracurricular activities?
26. Tell me about a situation in your last job when you had to suddenly change what you were doing. What did you do? How did the change affect you?
27. Tell me the time when you were faced with conflicting priorities. How did you determine the top priority?
28. Describe how you organize your resources at work.
29. How do you manage your time in the workplace?
30. Describe a procedure you've used to keep track of items requiring your attention. Tell me about a time when you used this procedure successfully.
31. Discuss a time when your integrity was challenged? How did you handle it?
32. What would you do if someone asked you to do something unethical?
33. Have you ever experienced a loss for doing something that is right?
34. Have you ever asked for forgiveness for doing something wrong?
35. In what business situation do you feel honesty would be inappropriate?
36. If you saw a colleague doing something dishonest, would you tell your boss? What would you do about it?
37. What kind of people would you rather not work with?
38. Do you consider yourself a risk-taker? Describe a situation in which you had to take a risk.
39. Describe how you plan your daily or weekly activities.
40. Tell me about a time when you had to coordinate resources (people, processes, departments, equipment) to complete a complex project.

### 5.3 Technical questions

41. Talk about the knowledge you learnt at university.
42. What technical skills did you learn in your previous job roles?
43. Do you have plans for continued study? If so, what area do you plan to focus on?
44. Tell me about your previous role. What were your responsibilities?
45. Describe your ideal job.
46. What did you enjoy most about your last job?
47. What was the most difficult task you had to learn at your previous job?
48. Tell me about the most recent software program you've learned. How did you learn to use it?
49. Tell me about how you've integrated technology into your job. How did you learn how to use it? How long did it take you to learn?
50. What kind of project planning or administration did you do in your job at your previous work area? Tell me about one of projects you planned.

## Chapter 6 - Final Preparation

### 6.1 Self-preparation

1. Write down a list of likely biographical, behavioural and technical questions and write your answers in bullet points.
2. Write down examples of successes you have had at work.
3. Write your short term, medium term and long term goals in relation to working at the organisation, ensuring they are SMART goals.
4. Prepare a list of questions that you may be able to ask the interviewer.
5. Prepare an answer to the question 'Please introduce yourself'.
6. Prepare an answer to the question 'What are your strengths and weaknesses?'
7. Write a list of personal attributes that match the job description and write examples of how these personal attributes have helped you in your previous roles.

### 6.2 With a partner

1. Ask for your partner's opinion on your choice of clothes.
2. Encourage your partner to ask you difficult biographical and behavioural questions.
3. Ask your partner to ask you challenging technical questions related to the position.
4. Ask you partner for honest feedback on the content of your answers.
5. Ask your partner for honest feedback on the fluency and pace of your answers.
6. Ask your partner to quiz you about the organisation and the industry.
7. Practise asking your partner questions about the organisation and the industry.
8. Find another partner and repeat these activities.

### 6.3 What to avoid during a job interview

- Arrogance
- Old clothes
- Excessive fidgeting
- Gaps in your employment history
- Immaturity
- Excessive laughter
- Sarcasm
- Know-it-all attitude
- Lack of career goal
- Lack of enthusiasm
- Lack of preparation for the interview
- Language errors
- Mispronunciation
- Money focus
- Negative opinions of past employers
- Nervousness
- Poor personal hygiene
- Sloppy appearance
- Weak handshake

### 6.4 Final checklist

The day before the interview, go through this final checklist to make sure you have remembered the important aspects of a job interview.

- Know how to get to the interview
- Know how long it takes to get to the interview
- Have a clear understanding of the organisation
- Have a clear understanding of the industry
- Have a clear understanding of the job role
- Have clothes prepared
- Have shoes polished
- Know how to fix your tie correctly (men)
- Know which make up you will wear (women)
- Have mobile phone on silent
- Have documents printed on quality paper

- Predicted questions related to the job
  - Practised pronunciation of interviewer's names
  - Practised what to say during first meeting
  - Practised answer to 'Please introduce yourself' opening
  - Practised talking about employment history relevant to the position
  - Practised talking about education history relevant to the position
  - Practised talking about business skills relevant to the position
  - Practised talking about personal attributes relevant to the position
  - Practised the speed and volume of your speech
  - Practised likely questions with a partner
  - Understand STAR(L), AREC and SMART speaking strategies
  - Practised telling stories about past successes
  - Practised turning a weakness into a strength
  - Know a number of appropriate questions to ask at the end of the interview
  - Know how to give a final summary of you strengths, related to the position, focusing on the four focus areas of employment, education, business skills and personal attributes.
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## **Job Interview Essentials**

### **A Guide for Candidates**

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