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Australian & New Zealand Edition

Successful Job Interviews

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- **Out-prepare the competition**
- **Make a great first impression**
- **Give the best answers to make-or-break questions**
- **Ask the right questions about the job and the employer**

Joyce Lain Kennedy



Australian & New Zealand Edition

Successful Job Interviews

FOR
DUMMIES[®]
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by Joyce Lain Kennedy

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Contents at a Glance

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Part I: Getting Started with Job Interviews</i>	7
Chapter 1: Honing Your Job Interview Skills.....	9
Chapter 2: Getting Past Screening Interviews	31
Chapter 3: Interviewing via Video	41
Chapter 4: Preparing for Different Types of Interviews	49
<i>Part II: The Power of Researching and Rehearsing</i>	73
Chapter 5: Research Is Your Ticket to Success	75
Chapter 6: Understanding Personality Tests	85
Chapter 7: Showing You the Money	99
Chapter 8: Dressing for Success	119
Chapter 9: Rehearse Away the Stage Fright	135
Chapter 10: Looking Good with Questions You Ask	145
Chapter 11: Leaving a Good Impression.....	153
<i>Part III: Presenting Yourself as the Best Candidate</i>	167
Chapter 12: Interviewing Tips for School Leavers and Graduates.....	169
Chapter 13: Star Turns for Prime-Timers	177
<i>Part IV: Answering Questions with Confidence</i>	187
Chapter 14: Tell Me about Yourself	189
Chapter 15: What Do You Know about This Job and Our Company?	207
Chapter 16: What Are Your Skills and Competencies?	213
Chapter 17: How Does Your Experience Help Us?	221
Chapter 18: Talking about Your Special Situation	229
Chapter 19: Answering a Questionable Question	249

***Part V: The Part of Tens* 257**
 Chapter 20: Ten Ways to Win Rave Reviews259
 Chapter 21: Ten (Or So) Tricky Questions to Watch Out For263

***Index*..... 269**

Table of Contents



***Introduction* 1**

About This Book	2
Foolish Assumptions	3
Icons Used in This Book	4
Beyond the Book.....	4
Where to Go from Here.....	5

Part I: Getting Started with Job Interviews... 7

Chapter 1: Honing Your Job Interview Skills 9

Being the Successful Candidate.....	10
Why 'be yourself' can be poor advice.....	10
Why 'be natural' can be poor advice	11
New Faces, New Factors in Interviewing.....	12
Interviewing in the digital age	12
Expect new kinds of interviewers	13
Overcome the job-hopping objection.....	14
Learn new lines for small-business jobs	15
Polish your storytelling skills	16
Focus on fitting in.....	16
Seven Concepts to Help You Win the Interview.....	17
Go all out in planning ahead.....	17
Distinguish screening from selection interviews	18
Verify early what they want and show how you deliver	19
Connect all your qualifications with a job's requirements	19
Memorise short-form sales statements about yourself	20
Win two thumbs up from the hiring manager, and you're in!.....	21
Negotiating with strength.....	22
Interview Coaching Tips	23
Play the likeability card.....	23
Style your body language.....	24
Be positive.....	24

- Start your interview on the right foot.....25
- Remember that interviews are a two-way street.....25
- Agree to take pre-employment tests.....26
- Keep your ears up and your eyes open28

Chapter 2: Getting Past Screening Interviews 31

- Two Basic Steps in Job Interviewing31
- Hot News about Screening Interviews.....32
- Sounding Qualified on the Phone.....33
 - Phone interview essentials34
 - Make phone appointments.....34
 - Project your winning image35
- Acing Automated Phone Screens37
- Pushing the Right Buttons: Computer Screens38
- Screening Survival Skills Are Now a Must-Have39

Chapter 3: Interviewing via Video 41

- Winning the Video Interview.....42
 - Chatting through Skype.....42
 - Getting ready to video interview43
- Rock the Video Job Interview46
- During the Interview47
 - Movements and posture.....47
 - Facial expressions and speaking.....47
 - Virtual handshake48

Chapter 4: Preparing for Different Types of Interviews 49

- Mastering Interviews by Objective49
 - Screening interview.....50
 - Recruiter general screening interview50
 - Recruiter search interview.....51
 - Selection interview with an employer.....53
 - Combination interview54
 - Interviewing for internal promotion54
 - Second interviews and beyond55
- Mastering Interviews by Interviewer58
 - One-to-one interview.....58
 - Group interview58
 - Serial interview59
- Mastering Interviews by Technique.....60
 - Behaviour-based interview61
 - Directive interview64

Nondirective interview	65
Stress interview	65
Mastering Interviews at Different Locations.....	67
Mealtime interview.....	67
On-campus interview	69
Job fair interview.....	70

***Part II: The Power of Researching and Rehearsing* 73**

Chapter 5: Research Is Your Ticket to Success 75

Using Social Media for Background Research	76
Mastering Online Searches	76
Asking Questions about Potential Employers	77
Size and growth patterns	78
Direction and planning	78
Products or services	79
Competitive profile and financials	79
Culture and reputation	80
The job role and you.....	80
Preparation Rocks!.....	83

Chapter 6: Understanding Personality Tests 85

Personality Testing Means Business	85
What You May Not Know about Personality Tests	86
Asking questions before the test.....	87
Removing the mystique of personality tests.....	87
Most popular general traits	89
Who's most likely to use tests.....	89
Peeking into privacy issues.....	90
Making the Grade on Job Tests	91
Visualise yourself fitting in.....	91
Watch for combination tests.....	91
Beware of absolutes	92
Choose answers suggesting positive traits	92
Avoid answers suggesting negative traits.....	93
Be alert to replayed questions	93
Anticipate integrity test questions	93
Take practice personality tests	95
Sample Personality Questions	96
Concerned That You Didn't Do Well?.....	96
Keep On Keeping On	97

Chapter 7: Showing You the Money 99

First Things First.....	100
Finding Out How the Salary Market Works.....	100
Discussing Salary and Benefits with Recruitment Consultants.....	102
One salary for recruiters, another for employers.....	103
Handling salary boxes in online applications.....	104
Negotiating in the Moment.....	105
Giving and taking at the right times.....	106
Understanding why salary questions come early.....	108
Stalling Money Talk with Smart Replies.....	109
Considering More Factors That Affect Job Pay.....	111
Getting Your Worth's Money.....	112
Finding your place in the range.....	112
Plot your salary history carefully.....	113
When the offer isn't right.....	114
No flexibility? Make creative suggestions.....	116

Chapter 8: Dressing for Success 119

You Are What You Wear.....	119
Starting Well to End Well.....	120
Minding the Three Commandments of Style.....	121
Dress to fit the job and the job's culture.....	121
Think of interviewing attire as a costume.....	122
'Look the part, and the part plays itself'.....	123
Changing with the Times: Dress Codes.....	123
Can you be overdressed?.....	124
What to do about body art.....	125
Selecting from the Basic Types of Interview Wardrobes.....	126
Remaining conservative.....	127
Cruising business casual.....	129
Working in casual wear.....	131
Selecting creative fashion.....	132

Chapter 9: Rehearse Away the Stage Fright 135

Refocusing Attitude Can Calm Nerves.....	135
Three steps to fright-free interviewing.....	136
More techniques to stop stressing out.....	137
Unlock the Power of Body Language.....	138
Stage Directions for All Players.....	142

Anticipating Interview Trapdoors	143
Disruptions	143
Silent treatment	143
Take One . . . Take Two . . . Take Three . . .	144

Chapter 10: Looking Good with Questions

You Ask 145

Asking Selling Questions before the Offer	146
Asking Self-Interest Questions after the Offer	148
Drawing Out Hidden Objections	149
Asking Certain Questions Very Carefully	150
Ending Suspense by Asking the Right Question	151

Chapter 11: Leaving a Good Impression 153

Making a Strategic Exit	154
Your parting sales pitch	154
Leaving the door open	155
How Hard Should You Sell?	156
Follow Up or Fall Behind	157
Email	158
Other digital media	159
Telephone calls	160
Priming your referees	161
Your After-Interview Checklist	162
Onward and Upward	164

***Part III: Presenting Yourself as the Best Candidate* 167**

Chapter 12: Interviewing Tips for School

Leavers and Graduates 169

Playing Against Type: Busting the Stereotypes	170
Beating a Bad Rap on Work Ethic	171
Tips for School Leavers and Graduates	172
Scripts for School Leavers and Graduates	173
Good Times and Your Future	175

Chapter 13: Star Turns for Prime-Timers. 177

Performing to Counter Age Prejudice	178
Age and job performance	178
Age and money	179
Age and attitude	179



Outing Elephants: Addressing Age Issues 180
Overcoming the Overqualified Label 181
Mastering Top Tips for Prime-Timers..... 184
Keeping Your Career Fit 185

Part IV: Answering Questions with Confidence 187

Chapter 14: Tell Me about Yourself 189

But First, Who Are You — Really? 189
 The problem with multiple identities 190
 Examples of online multifaceted identities 190
Answering a Very Broad Question about Yourself..... 193
 Shade your answers to pack a punch 195
 Narrow the question 195
Writing Your Marketing Pitch..... 195
Raising the Curtain on Specific Questions about You 197
Mastering More to Tell about Yourself 204

Chapter 15: What Do You Know about This Job and Our Company? 207

Understanding the Job, Company, Industry — and How They All Fit Together..... 207
The Questions 208

Chapter 16: What Are Your Skills and Competencies? 213

Taking the Competency-Based Interviewing Approach..... 213
Recognising Skills Questions..... 214
Answering Questions about Your Skills..... 215
The Questions 216

Chapter 17: How Does Your Experience Help Us? 221

Making Your Experience Relevant..... 221
Answering the Questions..... 222

Chapter 18: Talking about Your Special Situation 229

Pulling Back the Curtain	229
When You've Long Been in the Same Job	230
When You've Served Prison Time	231
When You're Shoved out the Door.....	233
When Sexual Orientation Is Up for Discussion.....	235
Be clear about your prospects	236
Disclosing is a highly personal choice	236
When You've Worked Everywhere	238
When Gaps Drill Holes in Your History	240
When You're Demoted a Notch.....	241
When People in Recovery Interview.....	242
When Women Are Put on the Spot.....	243
When Disabilities Are Revealed.....	245

Chapter 19: Answering a Questionable Question. . 249

Defining Illegal Questions	250
Defining Inappropriate Questions	251
Think First, Answer Second	251
Redirect Inappropriate Questions	252
Rehearsing Dickey Questions	253

Part V: The Part of Tens..... 257

Chapter 20: Ten Ways to Win Rave Reviews. 259

Master the Art of Storytelling	259
Go in Knowing Your Lines	260
Leave the Begging to Others	260
Share the Stage with Dignity	260
Perform with Confidence.....	260
Avoid Ad Libbing Ad Infinitum	261
Keep in Mind the Interviewer Is Not Your New Best Friend	261
Know That Faulty Assumptions Equal Faulty Interviewing	261
Keep Emotions out of the Interview	262
The Power of Asking Questions.....	262

Chapter 21: Ten (Or So) Tricky Questions to Watch Out For 263

- Why've You Been Out of Work so Long?264
- If Employed, How do You Manage Time for Interviews?.....264
- How Did You Prepare for This Interview?.....265
- Do You Know Anyone Who Works for Us?.....265
- Where Would You Really Like to Work? Doing What?.....265
- What Bugs You about Co-workers or Bosses?.....266
- Can You Describe How You Solved a Work/School Problem?.....266
- Can You Describe A Work/School Instance In Which You Messed Up?267
- How Does This Position Compare With Others You're Applying For?267
- If You Won The Lottery, Would You Still Work?.....267
- When You're Uncertain.....268

***Index*..... 269**

Introduction

If you'd rather fight off an alien invasion than be grilled in an interview, take heart — you've come to the right book. With the help of dozens of interviewing authorities, I make your interviewing challenge easy, successful, and even fun.

I share with you lots of new things in this Australian and New Zealand edition of *Successful Job Interviews For Dummies*, ranging from the cosmic shift sparked by the rise of social media that changes what networking means, to increasingly popular video interviewing that changes how communication occurs.

What hasn't changed is the fundamental role in the employment process played by job interviews — those crucial meetings that seal the deal on who gets hired and who gets left on the outside looking in.

Remember that job interviews are a slice of performance art. They're staged theatrical sketches rather than in-depth investigations into life histories. That's why theatre and drama are comparisons used throughout this book, and I hope you have some enjoyable moments with the show-biz motif.

With the help of this book, you, too, can put in a Show Stopper performance — one that wins so much enthusiastic, prolonged applause that the show is temporarily interrupted until the audience quiets down.

Successful Job Interviews For Dummies, Australian and New Zealand edition, is packed with the essentials of performing Show Stopper interviews:

- ✔ Strategies and techniques
- ✔ Sample dialogue and research tips
- ✔ The best answers to make-or-break questions

About This Book

A book of contemporary interview arts, *Successful Job Interviews For Dummies* contains the distilled wisdom of hundreds of leading interview experts whose brains I've been privileged to pick for many years. By absorbing the guidance and tips I pass on in this book, you can interview your way into a job by outpreparing and outperforming the other candidates.

To assist your navigation, I've established the following conventions:

- ✔ I use *italic* for emphasis and to highlight either new words or terms I define.
- ✔ Web addresses appear in a special font to distinguish them from the regular type in the paragraph.
- ✔ Sidebars, which are shaded boxes of text, consist of information that's interesting but not necessarily critical to your understanding of the topic.

I use the following terminology to label specific roles and organisations:

- ✔ A *candidate* or *job seeker* is a person applying for a job. (*Applicant* means the same thing.)
- ✔ An *interviewer* is someone interviewing a candidate for a job. An *interviewee* is a candidate being interviewed for a job.
- ✔ A *human resources* (or *HR*) *specialist*, *HR manager* or *screeener* is an employer sentry who is conducting a screening (preliminary) interview.
- ✔ A *hiring manager*, *hiring authority*, *decision-maker*, *decision-making manager* or *department manager* is a management representative conducting a selection interview who has the authority to actually hire a person for a specific position.
- ✔ A *company*, *employer* or *organisation* is the entity you hope to work for, whether private and profit-making, or private and non-profit, or within the public sector.
- ✔ A *recruiter* (also called a *headhunter*) is an intermediary between the employer and you. *Internal recruiters* work inside the company, either as regular employees of the human resources department or as contract employees. *Third-party recruiters* or *independent recruiters* are external

recruiters, some of whom are engaged on an ongoing basis so know the employer organisation very well while others are engaged just for a one-off hiring recruitment campaign and are paid only when a candidate they submit is hired.

- ✔ A *career coach* (also called a *career consultant*) helps job seekers gain workplace opportunities. (A *career counsellor* and a career coach represent two different professions, although their work sometimes overlaps.)
- ✔ A *hiring professional* is any of the aforementioned professionals who is engaged internally or externally in the employment process.

Foolish Assumptions

I assume you picked up this book for one or more of the following reasons:

- ✔ You've never been through a competitive interview and you're freaking out. You need a couple thousand friendly pointers from someone who's interviewed many of the marquee minds in the job interview business and lived to write about it.
- ✔ You've been through a competitive interview and assume the company sank like Atlantis because you never heard a peep from those folks again. Or maybe you could have done better and actually heard back if you'd have known more about what you were doing in this interview thing.
- ✔ The most important interview of your career is coming up. You realise that now is the hour to dramatically improve your interviewing success. You need help, and you're willing to learn and work for success.
- ✔ You've been through a slew of job interviews over the course of your career and have a hunch that some important things have changed (you just don't know what exactly). You want to catch up with the help of a trusted resource.

I further assume that you're someone who likes reliable, comprehensive information that gets to the point without rocking you to sleep. And I assume even further that you like your expertise with a smile now and then.

Icons Used in This Book

For *Dummies* signature icons are the little pictures you see in the margins of the book. I use them to focus on key bits of information. Here's a list of the icons you find in this book:



A bad review for a poor performance. This icon signals situations in which you may find trouble if you don't make a good decision.



This icon flags news you can use that you won't want to forget.



Bravo! This icon heralds star-quality lines and moves that prompt job offers.



Advice and information that can put you on award-winning pathways in your interview follow this icon. It lets you in on interviewing best practices.



Stop! Watch out! Read these warnings carefully.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the material in the print or ebook you're reading right now, *Successful Job Interviews For Dummies*, Australian and New Zealand edition, also comes with some access-anywhere resources on the internet. Check out the free Cheat Sheet at www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/successfuljobinterviewsau for some quick, helpful tips. For free extra companion material for this book, visit www.dummies.com/extras/successfuljobinterviewsau.

Where to Go from Here

On the stress scale of life, job interviewing ranks with making a speech before 500 people when you can't remember your name or why you're standing in a spotlight at a podium. The spot where you start in this book depends on your present needs:

- ✔ If you have a job interview tomorrow, quickly read Chapter 1 for an overview, followed by Chapters 20 and 21 for an instant infusion of key know-how. Additionally, go to the company's website to glean as much basic information as you can. Don't forget to read the company's press releases.
- ✔ When you have a few days before you're scheduled for an interview, read Chapter 1 and then flip through the Table of Contents to the chapters dealing with your most pressing concerns. Pay attention to Chapter 11, which reveals how to stack the deck in your favour during the closing minutes of your interview.
- ✔ When you have plenty of time, read the book from cover to cover. Practice recommended strategies and techniques. After you master the information in these pages, you'll have a special kind of insurance policy that pays big dividends for as long as you want to work.

Part I

Getting Started with Job Interviews



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Dummies content online.

In this part . . .

- ✓ Understand why interviews are similar to acting and what this means to you as the interviewee.
- ✓ Become adept at screening interviews, whether by phone, in person or using automated systems, and breeze through to the next stage.
- ✓ Get ready for your in-person interview and get a handle on video interviewing, whether it's used for a screening or selection interview.
- ✓ Master interviews no matter what type you encounter — focusing on the objective, the type of interviewer or the technique used.

Chapter 1

Honing Your Job Interview Skills

.....

In This Chapter

- ▶ Seeing how job interviewing is like acting
 - ▶ Spotting what's new in interviewing
 - ▶ Applying seven concepts to make you stand out
 - ▶ Putting into practice ideas that make a good impression
-

A resume or profile functions as bait to snag a job interview. The interview is the decisive event when a hiring authority decides whether you'll be offered the job.

Because the job interview is such an important part of getting a job — and you may not have interviewed in awhile — any number of unfortunate scenarios may be sneaking into your unconscious, including fears of these confidence-disturbers:

- ✓ Stumbling and mumbling your way through the ordeal
- ✓ Being glued to a hot seat as they sweat the answers out of you
- ✓ Forgetting your interviewer's name (or the last place you worked)

Exhale. You've come to the right book. Take the suggestions within these pages to heart and you'll head into every interview feeling confident, calm and well prepared. What more can you ask?

Note: This first chapter serves as an overview for the entire book. The pages that follow are wide and deep, with details that can help you gain a lifetime of confidence in your ability to sail through the drama of interviews and secure the best job offers.

Being the Successful Candidate

When you're engaged in a selection interview, your entire future may rest on how successful you are in presenting yourself to a stranger across a desk in 15, 30 or 60 minutes. Making life-altering decisions during this micro slice of time isn't real life — it's a performance.

The most successful interviews for you require solid preparation to rehearse what you want to say, showing your future bosses that you're smart and quick on the uptake, as well as able to communicate and not likely to jump the tracks.

At each meeting, your goal is to deliver a flawless performance that rolls off your tongue and gets the employer applauding — and remembering — you. Perfect candidate, you!

But what about all the people who tell you, 'Just be yourself and you'll do fine in your interview'? That advice doesn't always work for you when it comes to job interviewing.

Why 'be yourself' can be poor advice

The bromide 'be yourself' is very difficult to articulate with consistency. Be yourself? Which self? Who is the real you? Our roles change at various times.

Your role: Job seeker

Jerry is a father, an engineer, a marathon runner, a public speaker, a law student at night and a writer of professional papers. Jennifer is a loving daughter, the best salesperson in her company, a pilot, a tennis player, a rugby fan and a history buff.

But at this time in their lives, Jerry and Jennifer — like you — are job seekers. Similarly, the stranger across an interviewing desk is in the role of interviewer.

Getting real about the job seeker role

Playing the role most appropriate to you at a given time, and playing it effectively enough to get you the job you deserve, isn't turning your back on authenticity. To do less than play the role of a hard-charging job seeker courts unemployment — or underemployment.

Why 'be natural' can be poor advice

First-cousin advice urging you to 'be yourself' in a job interview is the 'be natural' admonition. On the whole, isn't natural better than artificial? Not always.

Is combed hair natural? Shaved legs? Trimmed beard? Polished shoes? How about covering a cough in public? Or not scratching where you itch?

Being natural in a job interview is fine as long as you don't use your desire to be natural and authentic as an excuse to display your warts or blurt out negative characteristics.



Never treat a job interview as a confessional in which you're obligated to disclose imperfections, indiscretions or personal beliefs that don't relate to your future job performance.

In job interviews, every minute counts in the getting-to-know-you game. And to really know someone in a brief encounter of 15, 30 or 60 minutes is simply impossible. Instead of real life, each participant in an interview sees what the other participant(s) wants seen. If you doubt that, think back: How long did you need to really get to know your flatmate, spouse or significant other?

If you insist on being natural, an employer may pass you over because of your unkempt beard or unshined shoes, or because you don't feel like smiling that day.

What exactly is a Show Stopper in job interviewing?

In the drama of job interviewing, a Show Stopper performance causes the interviewer to mentally shout, 'Bravo! More!' Your stunning impact quickly translates to a preliminary decision in your favour. If follow-up interviews, testing and reference

checking support that reaction, a job offer is on its way to you. The employer may continue to see other candidates to round out the interview process but, in reality, no-one else stands a chance of landing the job after you figuratively stop the show.

The things you've done to date — your identification of your skills, your resume and profile, your cover letter, your networking, your social media efforts — are all wasted if you fail to deliver a job interview that produces a job offer.

Make the most of your critical brief encounters by learning the skills of storytelling, using body language, establishing rapport and doing more of what's in this modern interview book.

New Faces, New Factors in Interviewing

Are you having trouble staking out your future because you can't close the sale during job interviews? This mangled proverb states the right idea: *If at first you don't succeed . . . get new batteries.*

Recharge yourself with knowledge of the new technology and trends that are affecting job interviews. Here are highlights of the contemporary job interview space.

Interviewing in the digital age

Classic interviewing skills continue to be essential to job search success, but more technological firepower is needed in a world growing increasingly complex, interconnected and competitive.

The new tech trends revolutionise all components of the job search, including the all-important job interview. Here are examples of technological newcomers and how they change interviewing practices:

- ✔ **Video interviews:** Both live and recorded video job interviews are coming of age, requiring that you acquire additional skills and techniques to make the cut. Chapter 3 is a primer on how you can outflank your competition by presenting like a pro in video interviews.
- ✔ **Phone interviews:** Automated and recorded phone screening services permit employers to ask up to a dozen canned screening questions and allow candidates up to two minutes to answer each question. Informed interviewees anticipate the questions and must hit their marks the first time because you don't get the chance to go again with recorded answers. Read about this technology in Chapter 2.

- ✔ **Credibility:** Credibility issues are surfacing for multitalented job seekers (or those with a chequered work background) who, by posting various resumes and profiles online, come across as different people with different skill sets. This development can be a knockout punch for you in a tight job market where employers have plenty of candidates on offer. Sidestep the emerging problem of identity contradictions in interviews by following the advice offered in Chapter 14.
- ✔ **Web woes:** Employers can hire experts to scour the internet and social media (such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter) to check out your online history. Such a service rakes through closed databases in the deep web, leaving virtually no secrets unrevealed. If the deep web reveals negative information, you may get a chance to defend yourself in an interview — or you may never know why you struck out. See Chapter 14 for more information on this digital sleuthing tool.

Expect new kinds of interviewers

If the last time you trod the boards of job interviewing you went one to one with a single interviewer, usually a white man or woman, get ready for a different set of questioners, like these possibilities:

- ✔ A veteran team of six managers — individually or collectively
- ✔ A hiring manager (especially in technical and retail fields) who is two decades younger than you
- ✔ Someone of a different background or heritage

Turn to Chapter 4 for a broader picture of group interviews, and to Chapter 13 for a good tip on interviews with younger bosses.



Showcase your ability to hit the ground running. Because the new norm is staying in a job only for a few years — or, in contract assignments, a few months — the hiring spotlight lasers in on the competencies and skills you can use from Day One. The question is, *What can you do for our company immediately?*



You can come across as ready to blast off if you do enough research on the company's goals (increase revenues, reduce costs, acquire new market share, land larger accounts, create a technical breakthrough), think about how you can help the company reach those goals, and remain ready to speak the insider jargon of the industry.

If the job you're applying for isn't at the professional or managerial level, research the nature of the company's business, assume that it wants to make or save money, and stock up on a few good buzzwords used in the industry.

Scope out more ways to show your launch speed in Chapter 5.

Overcome the job-hopping objection

The current employer-driven job market makes it easy for companies to buy into the 'job-hopper objection' and, as a matter of policy, turn away unemployed candidates and people who've held three jobs in five years. Unfortunately, many of these automatic rejects have been trapped in a cycle of frequent redundancy rounds, part-time work, temp assignments, seasonal employment, contract jobs, freelance gigs and company shutdowns.

Some companies refuse to hire so-called job hoppers, claiming that they'll quit before employers can get a return on their training investment — or that, if the unemployed candidates were any good, they'd be on someone's payroll.

What's a sincere, hard-working person to do? Try this quartet of basic rebuttals:

- ✔ **Say varied experience beats repeated experience.** Explain how your dynamic work history makes you a far more vibrant and resourceful contributor than if you'd been stationary for four years.
- ✔ **Briefly explain departures.** Give a reasonable, short, even-toned account of why you left each job. (Convey that it wasn't your fault without ever using that phrase.)
- ✔ **Review your accomplishments.** You can't change the amount of time you were on certain jobs, but you can divert the focus to your accomplishments and

contributions. Employers are impressed by candidates who are good at what they do, even if they were only in a role for a short period of time.

- ✓ **Confirm interest in stable employment.** Forget the ‘loyalty’ chatter, but make a point of your intense interest in a stable opportunity where you can apply all your considerable know-how for the employer’s benefit.

Chapter 17 offers more suggestions on how to maximise the value of your experience.

Learn new lines for small-business jobs

Have you grown up professionally in a large-company environment? If so, carefully consider the answers you give when applying to small companies. Such a move can happen sooner than you think if you’re forced into an involuntary change of employment. Prime-timers in droves are discovering that the small business sector is where the action is for them.



Emphasise different aspects of your work personality than the ones you emphasise when interviewing for a big company. Interviewers at big companies and small companies have different agendas.

Among the reasons owners of small ventures reject former big-company people are these stereotypical perceptions: People who come out of Big Corporate often are thought to be

- ✓ Unaware of the needs of small business
- ✓ Too extravagant in their expectations of resources and compensation
- ✓ Too spoiled to produce double the work product their former jobs required
- ✓ Unwilling to wear more than one job hat at a time
- ✓ Deadwood, or they wouldn’t have been cut loose from the big company

Chapters 13, 15 and 16 can help you with this issue.

Polish your storytelling skills

Behaviour-based interviewing is said to predict future performance based on past performance in similar situations. The behavioural interviewing style isn't new, but it seems to be more popular than ever.

Advocates of the behavioural style claim that it is 55 per cent predictive of future on-the-job behaviour, compared to traditional interviewing, at only 10 per cent predictive. The reasoning is, 'If you acted a certain way once, you'll act that way again.' Solid proof of this claim is hard to come by. But for you as a job seeker, it doesn't matter the least bit whether the claim is true or false. The behavioural style is such a big deal with employers today that you need to know how to use the style to your advantage.

It works like this: Interviewers ask candidates to tell them a story of a time when they reacted to a certain situation. *How did you handle an angry customer? Describe an example of a significant achievement in your last job.* The more success stories you can drag in from your past, the more likely the interviewers using this approach will highly rate your chances of achieving equivalent success in the future.

Read more about behaviour-based interviewing in Chapter 4.

Focus on fitting in

'We chose another candidate who is a better job fit' is another familiar reason that seems to be heard today more often than before when explaining to a disappointed job seeker why someone else got the job.

In the workplace, 'fit' essentially refers to how an individual fits into a company's culture. Company culture is expressed in the values and behaviours of the group, which forms a kind of 'tribe' or, to use an analogy from high school, an 'in crowd'.

The culture typically flows from company or department chieftains: If the boss wears long sleeves, you wear long sleeves; if the boss shows a sense of humour, you show a sense of humour; if the boss works until after 6 pm, you work until after 6 pm.

When you're given the not-the-best-fit-for-the-job rejection, the reason is

- ✓ A convenient short and legally safe answer
- ✓ A cover story
- ✓ A belief that the hiring decision-makers perceive you won't fit in well with the 'tribe'

When the reason really is the fit issue, decision-makers may think that you can do the job but that you won't do it the way they want — and, furthermore, they just don't feel at ease with you.

Instead of losing sleep over a fit-based turndown, move on. Do better pre-interview research (see Chapter 5). At least you won't waste time on companies well known for being a fortress of round holes when you're a square peg.

Seven Concepts to Help You Win the Interview

You've heard it said over and over that you have only one chance to make a first impression. It's especially true for job interviewing, so make that first impression pay off. Read these seven super tips to make the hiring gods choose you at job interviews.

Go all out in planning ahead

Preparation makes all the difference in whether you get the best offers as you face intense scrutiny, field probing questions and reassure employers who are afraid of making hiring mistakes. You must show that you're tuned in to the company's needs, that you have the skills to get up to speed quickly and that you're a hand-in-glove fit with the company.

Fortunately, never in history has so much information about companies and industries been so easily accessible, both in print and online. Chapter 5 gives tonnes of tips on researching your audience.