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## Understanding Interview Process

Every step in the job search process is aimed at obtaining interviews. It is at that point, a potential hiring manager decides if you are right for the job, and, just as important, it is your time to evaluate whether the job is right for you. Most interviews follow a predictable format, with steps that both the interviewer and applicant follow to decide if both will benefit from working together.

The best interviews are ones in which both participants are equal and can have a mutually beneficial, interactive conversation regarding the opportunity at hand.

Think of an interview as the natural extension, the successful result of your effective networking. Many networking conversations actually become screening interviews, where influential contacts are assessing your qualifications, skill sets and experience relative to an opportunity at hand. "Perfect practice" of the basics builds the confidence necessary to perform well in formal job interviews.

Let's break down the basics into four areas...

1. pre-contact preparation/ research,
2. greeting and rapport,
3. questions/answers, and ...
4. meeting closure.

All four stages are equally important and deserve your consideration and preparation.

### The Three Phases of Every Interview

There are three things that must be discussed in every interview: First, the Candidate, a discussion usually conducted in the past tense to assess experience, knowledge, and skills... do they meet the potential employer's REQUIREMENTS?

Second, the job itself. Beyond meeting requirements, each Candidate must be judged for their potential to meet EXPECTATIONS. As important, will the Candidate "fit in" on the team and Company culture? This discussion occurs in the future tense... very obvious transition in a "good" interview.

Last, but certainly not least, is the quality of FIT. While this is the most subjective and dysfunctional part of the process, it is where both sides must come together for a desired outcome. When both sides like and find the other to be attractive, a “right” employment opportunity can result. This is also where the QandA can become more defensive in nature.

## **Research the company/position**

Second level research will help you to identify attractive companies. But, this is third level (in-depth) research. Learn as much as possible about the company, the position and the individual who will be conducting the interview. Your research goals ought to include developing information about the company’s products, people, organizational structure, successes (and failures), profits (and losses), capital spending, strategic plans, philosophy and labor climate.

Showing your knowledge of some of this information can give you added credibility over other candidates interviewing for the job.

### **Use the following research strategies:**

- ✓ Research the company web site, looking for information relative to your function and level... a company’s financial and annual reports can provide clues to their stability and market share. Don’t forget directories, trade journals, the “business press,” and databases of articles and other news.
- ✓ Ask a friendly recruiter, business acquaintance or stockbroker what they know about the company... and by extension, call people with whom you have networked and ask what they know about the company and/or individual conducting the interview.
- ✓ Check with the local Chamber of Commerce or Better Business Bureau.
- ✓ Call the company directly; request a sales brochure, annual report or other company information. Companies have to market themselves, too, you know!

## **Know the needs of the company**

Once your basic research is complete, you must next identify how your abilities, experience and expertise can meet the needs of the interviewer, the company and the job. This point cannot be over-emphasized. It is the company’s needs that you must fill, not your own. Surprisingly, however, by meeting the company’s needs, your needs also will be met.

## **Your VALUE PROPOSITION**

Prepare for your interviews (and networking meetings) by fully understanding the value you bring to a potential employer and hiring company. Incorporate portions of this information into your interview responses, or use some of the material in your interview closing remarks. Tell them why you are good at what you do!

## ANSWERING QUESTIONS EFFECTIVELY

The key to being successful in an interview is to answer each question well, with strong content and credible delivery.

To do this, you must anticipate and practice what to say, display confidence and enthusiasm and show that you have a positive attitude. The way you deliver your responses can be just as important as what you say.

Look directly into the interviewer's eyes; give short, crisp, smooth answers that don't sound memorized. Put energy and 'texture' in your voice.

Consider one of the following guidelines in answering questions relative to your communication strategy...

- ✓ **ANSWER the question.**
- ✓ **Highlight strengths**, giving examples as appropriate... plays to behavioral interviewer style and tactics. **Minimize weaknesses.**
- ✓ **At least address the issue of the question before**
  - Blocking
  - Turnaround
  - Answering in your terms
  - Confronting or changing the subject!

### Behavioral interview questions

Many employers are moving away from a resume-driven style of interviewing to a behavioral format. Behavioral interviews are very probing in nature and are based on the concept of "predictable future behavior."

In other words, what you have done in the past strongly suggests what you will do in the future. It is about patterns of behavior, both good and bad.

Navigating these interviews successfully requires that you know yourself inside and out. This will require a lot of introspection and soul-searching on your part. You must be able to:

- ✓ Know why you have made the decisions you have made that have brought you to this point in your life... and be prepared to explain and defend your decisions.
- ✓ Provide concrete, specific examples of where you have demonstrated the proficiency employers are seeking.

## Do you have any questions?

Have at least two questions ready. They could relate to: the procedures; the systems; reporting relationships; size of working group; equipment; or immediate goals of the department or position. Do not ask questions about benefits or holidays until you are close to a job offer.



## MONEY\$peak

### How do companies Pay?

Thanks to the **Fair Labor Practices Act** of the early sixties, salary administration is quite predictable. Companies are regulated/ audited to maintain the midpoints of their base salary ranges. Therefore the job market tends to collapse around salary range midpoints, regardless of job market conditions.

What is often very misunderstood is the difference between salary survey information, driven by reported salary ranges-and-salary offers made within the job market, driven by negotiated dollars. It is important to realize this simple fact of economic life. That's why we must always be prepared to negotiate!

Knowing salary administration strategy from the Corporate view, The Careerpilot is not surprised by the actual marketplace performance of today's professionals in career transition. Even in the "soft market" conditions of today's marketplace, Candidates have been seeing 15% increases to be commonplace... even higher with some highly marketable Candidates or from within high demand industries and companies. You can negotiate anything.

### Your POSITION "WORTH"

While potential employers recruit within well-defined salary ranges, your position's worth is so much more. This total value is what you seek to improve upon, and it has several variables...

1. Base Salary
2. STRUCTURED BONUS... paid in a regular and frequent paycheck
3. UNStructured Bonus... these are the elusive, discretionary money sources.
4. Benefits
5. Perks
6. First year vacation
7. Starting date, if currently employed!

## PRE-OFFER Negotiation

Staying with our context of effective PRE-OFFER Negotiation tactics, let's utilize the basic guidelines for answering questions effectively, this time relative to the discussion of money... "MoneySpeak"

1. **ANSWER THE QUESTION...** The implication, here, is that you have heard and fully understand the nature of the question.

If this is true, simply answer the question in a straight forward, brief manner, **BLOCKING** The Subject... and then stop talking! Often the challenges come in knowing when to stop talking.

*"I'm surprised **\$salary** is an issue this early in the process... I'd like to fully understand the work involved and your hiring requirements before we discuss dollars... could you tell me more about..."*

2. Don't miss this opportunity to **refer to your value proposition**. If they come right back to the "historical" salary issue... stay matter-of-fact, and TURN-AROUND the issue to assess their range.

*"Great, you must like my experience, knowledge and skills (think **KEYWORDS**)... what **IS** the salary range for this work? ... let's save us both some time and trouble..."*

3. **AT LEAST ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF A QUESTION** PRE-Offer salary discussion, illegal questions and other non-standard questions often call for extraordinary responses. Build on your value proposition by shifting language to position WORTH.

So, if they continue to probe your salary history, stay focused, get results... but never manipulate or deceive with your answer...

*"Last year? My position was **worth \$XX** (a true # based on all elements of position worth)... I'm certain this role pays competitively."*

Here are my "TOP TEN TIPS" for negotiating a new salary.

1. **Research your profession's salary range...** Check with recruiters in your field, the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook, and the Internet: "salaryexpert.com" and "salary.com" are two of my favorites.
2. **Select a target salary...** You may not get what you want, but having a specific objective can help you get close. Keep total "position worth" and your value proposition in mind.
3. **Prove your value with examples from actual experience.** Comparison discussion of significant increases over salary history are irrelevant and should be avoided; You're talking about the benefits you'll bring, not your past salary, which you may have had no control over.
4. **Don't initiate salary discussions...** Wait for the interviewer to bring the subject up, even if it's postponed to a second interview.

There are at least three tactical "scripts" to help you: BLOCKING, TURNAROUND and FORCING FEEDBACK.

5. **Move from "past salary history" to discussion of your "salary requirements", they're "negotiable."** ... Do the same on applications by writing "negotiable" in any box asking about salary details. If the form asks you to provide current salary, write, "to be discussed." Your advantage is to attach salary to specific JOB, not YOU.
6. **Be prepared to state actual past salary in terms of current market conditions...** but only when pressed.
7. **Discuss benefits and other negotiable items separately from salary...** Your advantage is to attach salary to the specifics of the JOB, not YOU and your skills and experience.
8. **Analyze all benefit packages...** with an insurance, investment or bank professional, even a trusted HR professional. They can help you understand benefit language and may look at the offer more objectively.
9. **ALWAYS consider the cost of living when relocating...** If it's higher, suggest some form of balancing compensation or other offset.
10. **Always assume a firm's first offer is negotiable**, never accepting the initial offer... Rather, express your strong interest, but state you always discuss decisions of this magnitude with advisers whose judgment you have relied upon for years. Tell your interviewer when you'll contact him or her with your decision.

By following the tips above, you'll increase your chances of receiving a pay increase or other significant improvement to your total position worth or value. Your mindset is directed toward a "total value" increase... practice tactics to develop that confidence and "poker face."



**ABOUT DFWCareerpilot... A FREE, WEEKLY WORKSHOP** event with a regular rotation of topical material covering a 12-Step Process **M.A.P. (MAHER Associates Process)** that will accelerate your job search success. Bob's presentation style is highly engaging and interactive, so never be shy with questions and/or supportive anecdotes.

**BE PREPARED** for Bob's two philosophies: Learn to Embrace The OTHER Job Market... and, fully optimize your efforts with a high tech/high touch approach!

1. His public Group on LinkedIn: **DFWCareerpilot**
2. **GO TO: [www.dfwcareerpilot.com](http://www.dfwcareerpilot.com)** and **FOLLOW** (register for) it to receive regular updates
3. Follow **DFWCareerpilot** on Twitter!



Bob Maher created his online presence, [www.careerpilot.com](http://www.careerpilot.com), in 1994. He has over thirty years of successful experience in Corporate Recruitment, performance management and Career Management Services. He is an entrepreneur and innovator in the use of information technology in the recruitment and employment process.

On the Founder's Council of the Association of Career Professionals - International and quite active in their Professional Development, Technology and Chapter Growth initiatives--a frequent speaker at industry conferences and seminars. The Institute of Career Certification-International has him reviewing the portfolios of incoming applicants. Bob was presented with the prestigious LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT award by The Association in 2006.