

4 Interview Secrets

That will land you a job offer

By Susanne Aronowitz

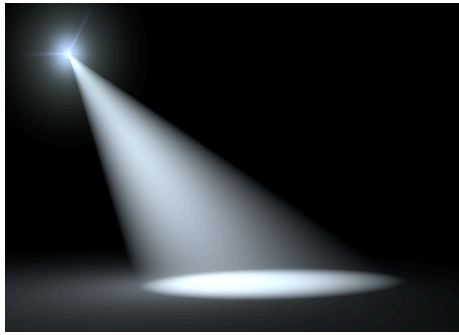
Does this sound familiar? You are a strong job candidate. You have a good reputation in your field, and always spend time preparing for your job interviews. Yet inexplicably, you never seem to get the job offer, and you're feeling increasingly frustrated and demoralized.

If so, you are not alone. After seeing this pattern repeat over and over, I wanted to understand what was getting in the way of obtaining a job offer. I started observing how candidates prepared for interviews, and I was able to identify **four key behaviors** that were interfering with their success. When I began sharing these insights with my clients, they saw an immediate improvement in their interviews, and a corresponding increase in job offers.

I want to share these insights with you, and provide you with strategies to boost your job search success.

1. Interviews Are A Conversation, Not A Performance

A lot of us prepare for an interview as if it's an audition. We memorize our lines, put on our costume, step on to the interview stage, and recite our rehearsed script. After our performance, we anxiously await someone to judge whether we were good enough to get the part.



The problem is that by putting ourselves in the spotlight, we create a huge blind spot. When the light is focused solely on us, we cannot see our audience. We have no idea what they need or expect from us, and we miss cues that would have enhanced our performance. Without understanding the employer's expectations, we can miss the mark; we might have performed an

impressive Hamlet, but they were expecting Hamilton.

This is why we find interviews to be so difficult. We feel like we are being evaluated based on unknown criteria, and this fear of judgment triggers the flight-fight-freeze reaction that interferes with our ability to succeed on the interview. (Have you ever drawn a blank in response to an interview question? If so, you know what I'm talking about!)

I propose taking a different approach.

Rather than entering the interview as if you were giving a performance for harsh critics, treat it as an opportunity to **connect** with your future employer. When you conceptualize it as a two-way conversation instead of a one-way audition, the whole dynamic changes.

The first goal in approaching your interview is to find a way to talk WITH the employer, not AT the employer.

2. Understand What's In It For Them

When you shift your mindset away from fear of judgment and toward curiosity, you shift the balance of power and boost your confidence. Rather than focusing simply on "what do I want to tell the employer about me," focus your preparation on this central question:

"What can I learn about this organization that will help me understand and anticipate their needs?"

By shifting your attention from what *you want* to tell them to what *they need* to know, you bring the employer into the spotlight with you.

The employer you are speaking with has a problem, and they are looking for their next hire to solve it. They don't *really* care about your hopes, dreams and passions, or the quirks of your past employer. What they want is for someone to make their work easier for them. And the best place to start doing that is at the interview.

a. Preparing for the Interview

With some careful preparation, you can avoid the mistake my clients were making: they were approaching the interview solely from their own viewpoint. They had memorized some stories about their past work experience, but these anecdotes were either too general, too rooted in the candidate's personal goals, or too bogged down in the minutia of their prior employer's culture. As a result, their interviewers couldn't recognize their value.

Well before the interview, carefully review the job description. Dig in deep; identify to the specific skills they are seeking and the expertise they expect. When examine the entirety of the role, ask yourself:



What problem is this position designed to solve?

What opportunities can the person in this role create for the employer?

Next, take it a step broader and review the organization's website, social media profile, and any mentions in the press to determine:

What can you learn about this organization's culture?

What successes do they celebrate, and are these consistent with your values and goals?

Are you encountering any negative information? If so, what would you like to ask the interviewer?

What industry trends, pressures and opportunities are having an impact on this organization?

The final step is to talk with colleagues who are familiar with the organization, the specific hiring manager and team you are interviewing with, and the larger industry context. Pay attention to what they share:



What are their impressions?

What insights can they share about the culture, strengths, and challenges?

What do you notice about what they do (and don't) share?

Before the interview, assess what you've learned from your due diligence. Are you getting a picture of this employer's needs, culture and strengths? **With these insights, identify your specific qualities, skills, and expertise that will align directly with the employer's needs.**

As you begin to understand what your prospective employer's priorities and pain points are, find ways to address them. Don't get caught in long-winded stories that showcase your former employer's priorities. Instead, use what you understand about the prospective employer's needs to carefully curate the anecdotes to show that you can address their issues. Think about stories that demonstrate these qualities in action, and develop questions to explore these themes directly with your interviewer.

b. At the Interview

Regardless of whether your preparation yielded helpful insights about the employer, use the interview to engage the interviewer in a conversation to reveal what's important to them. Consider asking questions like:



As the manager of this [department] [practice group] [organization], what keeps you up at night?

What was the person who held this role unable to do that you hope the new hire will do?

If I join your team and we fast-forward to a year from now, what will success look like?

What are the next challenges that your team will be addressing in the next year?

What new opportunities have you identified for your team in the coming year?

These questions elicit information about the hiring manager's expectations and create an opportunity for you to address them. Be prepared to share your specific ideas on how to address the employer's challenges and opportunities to show how you plan to contribute to the success of the organization.

3. Forget About "Winning" The Interview

Most job seekers are so focused on "winning" the interview game that they fail to assess whether this is even a job they want. They minimize red flags or fail to seek the information that will help them determine whether this job will be a good fit for them. You don't want to win the interview battle but lose the job satisfaction war.

Before you enter the interview, be clear on your needs and goals, and prepare some questions to elicit the information you'll need to assess whether this job will fit the bill. What do you need to learn from this employer to identify whether this job will be a good fit for you?

What are your expectations for the role?

How do you envision this role progressing?

What is the environment in which the position operates?

How is success measured here?

What resources are available to support my growth in this role?

Another tactic that works is to imagine that you've already received the job offer, and you are starting the job in a few days. Ask about the things you would want to know to help you launch successfully in your new position.

What advice would you offer to be successful in this role?

What challenges should I be aware of in this role?

What would you recommend I focus my attention on in the first 30, 90, and 180 days on the job?

Who do you recommend I build relationships with to ensure success in the role?

When you start visualizing yourself in the role, you make it easier for the employer to see you there, too.

By the time you complete your interview process, you will have gathered the information you need to assess whether this is an environment in which you can flourish. If it's not your dream job, will it bring you closer to achieving your career goals?

4. Most Interviewers Are Not Experts At Interviewing

I'll let you in on another secret: many interviewers do not have special expertise in conducting job interviews. They may be specialists in their practice area or field, but that does not always translate to being an effective interviewer. These interviewers may not know the most artful way to formulate questions that will draw out the information they are seeking. They may base their decisions on an emotional "gut" reaction, rather than an analytical assessment of the candidates' strengths.

Use this to your advantage! The employer's clumsiness may limit their ability to get the information they need from the other candidates. By understanding

their priorities, you will begin the interview ten steps ahead of the pack. Demonstrating your ability to anticipate the employer's needs is an effective way to model the leadership you would bring to the new role.

By engaging your interviewers in a conversation, showing genuine interest in their work, and demonstrating your value proposition, you will eliminate most of what makes interviews so stressful. And most importantly, you will make it obvious that you are the best candidate for the job.