

Interview DOs and DON'Ts

Interview Dos

- ✔ Dress appropriately for the industry; err on the side of being conservative to show you take the interview seriously. Your personal grooming and cleanliness should be impeccable.
- ✔ Know the exact time and location of your interview; know how long it takes to get there, park, find a rest room to freshen up, etc.
- ✔ Arrive early; 10 minutes prior to the interview start time.
- ✔ Treat other people you encounter with courtesy and respect. Their opinions of you might be solicited during hiring decisions.
- ✔ Offer a firm handshake, make eye contact, and have a friendly expression when you are greeted by your interviewer.
- ✔ Listen to be sure you understand your interviewer's name and the correct pronunciation.
- ✔ Even when your interviewer gives you a first and last name, address your interviewer by title (Ms., Mr., Dr.) and last name, until invited to do otherwise.
- ✔ Maintain good eye contact during the interview.
- ✔ Sit still in your seat; avoid fidgeting and slouching.
- ✔ Respond to questions and back up your statements about yourself with specific examples whenever possible.
- ✔ Ask for clarification if you don't understand a question.
- ✔ Be thorough in your responses, while being concise in your wording.
- ✔ Be honest and be yourself. Dishonesty gets discovered and is grounds for withdrawing job offers and for firing. You want a good match between yourself and your employer. If you get hired by acting like someone other than yourself, you and your employer will both be unhappy.
- ✔ Treat the interview seriously and as though you are truly interested in the employer and the opportunity presented.
- ✔ Exhibit a positive attitude. The interviewer is evaluating you as a potential co-worker. Behave like someone you would want to work with.
- ✔ Have intelligent questions prepared to ask the interviewer. Having done your research about the employer in advance, ask questions which you did not find answered in your research.
- ✔ Evaluate the interviewer and the organization s/he represents. An interview is a two-way street. Conduct yourself cordially and respectfully, while thinking critically about the way you are treated and the values and priorities of the organization.
- ✔ Do not expect to be treated appropriately. If you believe you were treated inappropriately or asked questions that were inappropriate or made you uncomfortable, discuss this with a Career Services advisor or the director.
- ✔ Make sure you understand the employer's next step in the hiring process; know when and from whom you should expect to hear next. Know what action you are expected to take next, if any.
- ✔ When the interviewer concludes the interview, offer a firm handshake and make eye contact. Depart gracefully.
- ✔ After the interview, make notes right away so you don't forget critical details.
- ✔ Write a thank-you letter to your interviewer promptly.

Interview DON'Ts

- Don't make excuses. Take responsibility for your decisions and your actions.
- Don't make negative comments about previous employers or professors (or others).
- Don't falsify application materials or answers to interview questions.
- Don't treat the interview casually, as if you are just shopping around or doing the interview for practice. This is an insult to the interviewer and to the organization.
- Don't give the impression that you are only interested in an organization because of its geographic location.
- Don't give the impression you are only interested in salary; don't ask about salary and benefits issues until the subject is brought up by your interviewer.
- Don't act as though you would take any job or are desperate for employment.
- Don't make the interviewer guess what type of work you are interested in; it is not the interviewer's job to act as a career advisor to you.
- Don't be unprepared for typical interview questions. You may not be asked all of them in every interview, but being unprepared looks foolish.
- A job search can be hard work and involve frustrations; don't exhibit frustrations or a negative attitude in an interview.
- Don't go to extremes with your posture; don't slouch, and don't sit rigidly on the edge of your chair.
- Don't assume that a female interviewer is "Mrs." or "Miss." Address her as "Ms." unless told otherwise. Her marital status is irrelevant to the purpose of the interview.
- Don't chew gum or smell like smoke.
- Don't allow your cell phone to sound during the interview. (If it does, apologize quickly and ignore it.) Don't take a cell phone call.
- Don't take your parents, your pet (an assistance animal is not a pet in this circumstance), spouse, fiancé, friends or enemies to an interview. If you are not grown up and independent enough to attend an interview alone, you're insufficiently grown up and independent for a job. (They can certainly visit your new city, at their own expense, but cannot attend your interview.)

Answering the “So What?” Interview Question

Tips on how to serve up your accomplishments with context in order to ace the senior-level interview.

Rob Sullivan



In the last article, “[Stop Taking Yourself for Granted](#),” we looked at strategies to acknowledge and appreciate the impact you have had on organizations and individuals. Now, we’ll take that to the next level with a four-part formula for quantifying your accomplishments and telling your stories in a memorable and compelling way.

The single biggest mistake people make when it comes to sharing their accomplishments is providing results without context. Saying that you grew revenue by 15 percent without noting the market conditions or goals doesn’t say much.

In other words, you haven’t answered the question, “So what?”

How did your approach compare to what the average person might have done? This is an important point many people miss.

Without the benefit of a parallel universe in which to test our theoretical comparisons, this may be difficult to assess with any accuracy. Nevertheless, the temptation on the part of many humble souls is to believe that anyone faced with the same facts and challenges would have done the same thing. Not necessarily.

Why didn’t anyone think of this sooner? People may have recognized the problem or opportunity. They may even have come up with a way to address the issue. But if they didn’t take action, the insight is meaningless. Ideas are everywhere. Credit rightfully goes to the people who make things happen.

Converting your accomplishments into the STARs format will solve this problem.

- What was the **S**ituation
- What was your specific role or **T**ask?
- What **A**ction did you take?
- What were the **R**esults?

What was the situation?

This is where you explain what the real problem (or opportunity) was, why it was a problem, how long it had been a problem and what might have happened had the problem not been addressed. How and when did it become apparent that there was an issue?

What was your specific role or task?

Describe your role. How did you find yourself in a position to address the issue? Were you selected? Appointed? Elected? If you were selected or appointed, what was the title of the person who appointed you? Did you volunteer? Did you take on the project on your own initiative?

What action did you take?

How did you address the problem? What specific steps did you take?

What were the results?

This part is relatively straightforward, since it requires quantifiable evidence of your effectiveness. The biggest mistake people make in this area is limiting their thinking to dollars saved or earned. Money is just one quantifier. Challenge yourself to incorporate the other five:

- Time
- Quality
- Quantity
- Safety

- Compliance

Here's an example from one of my clients:

Situation/Challenge:

To address the waste and expense associated with the disposal of 30 55-gallon drums of waste coolant from machine operations per month. Disposal expense: \$4,500/month (\$150 x 30)

Task:

Selected by Operations Manager to streamline operations and reduce waste coolant expenditures.

Action:

Researched opportunities to recycle coolant and recommended a \$10,000, one-time investment in coolant recycling equipment.

Results:

- Total annual savings: \$162,000. Recycling process eliminated:
- \$54,000/year in disposal costs
- \$108,000/year in coolant purchases.
- ROI on \$10,000 investment: Less than one month.

When quantifying is a challenge

In some cases, the quantifiers may not be obvious. One receptionist I coached insisted there was no way to quantify her accomplishments. On the surface, that would appear to be true. After all, it isn't helpful, or particularly enlightening, to say, "I smiled at 87 percent of the people who walked in the door." However, when I probed further, she revealed that her company, on three separate occasions, had eliminated her entire division. Each time, she was hand-picked by the executive team and became the *only* employee to survive the layoffs. From a potential employer's point of view, that quantifier is like a third-party endorsement that says:

"She's great. That's why we went out of our way to keep her."

As you may notice, this isn't about bragging; it's about evidence. People who come across as braggarts are the ones who can't offer anything other than glowing generalities with no "reasons to believe."

Career Advice from TheLadders

- [Handling the Weakness Question](#)
- [Overcoming Pitfalls in the Senior-Level Interview](#)
- [Ten Interview Techniques That Work](#)
- [Help Them Say Yes In Your Next Interview](#)

Stick to the facts, and the STARs approach will minimize the likelihood that your stories will come across as bragging. Instead, you will be leaving it up to the listener to judge the value of your efforts. I call this the "It's a Wonderful Life Approach" to marketing yourself. In the movie "It's A Wonderful Life," George Bailey is given a chance to see what life would have been like for his family, friends, and town had he never been born. That is exactly what every job hunter needs to imagine as well. How are things different, preferably better, for your companies, co-workers, friends, and family? What happened—that might never have happened—were it not for your efforts?

If you can answer this simple question, you will be well on your way to uncovering the gold in your background and telling your story in a compelling way. Your goal is to find a way to get people to think:

"Wow, if she can do that for them, just think what she could do for us."

Do that and you will have succeeded in doing something most job hunters never do.

Rob Sullivan is a corporate trainer, inspirational speaker and professional development coach whose passion is helping people recognize, leverage and communicate the gold in their backgrounds. Rob has been a repeat guest on television and radio stations across the country including NBC, ABC and WGN. He has also been featured in "The Wall Street Journal" and as a guest expert on "Starting Over," a Emmy-winning reality show that airs nationally on NBC.

How to Answer the Tough Questions

(courtesy of www.Jobdango.com)

Below are some questions you may be asked in an interview, as well as some ways to answer those questions. Some questions are harder than others. You may not be asked any of these, but we've included them with some sample answers just in case.

Tell me about yourself.

This is a great opportunity to highlight some of your strengths. Keep your answer under two minutes. If at all possible, the information you give should be pertinent to the job you are interviewing for. Use your resume summary as a base to start, and don't delve too deeply into any one area. "I've worked in IT for the past seven years. I started as a programmer at BizStart, a small software company that develops business management tools. There I was involved in developing a sales automation tool, which at the time was quite innovative. The company's revenues doubled in the first six months after the product was released. Next, I worked at."

What do you know about the position?

Familiarize yourself with the company before the interview. Find out about products, revenue, reputation, history, etc. When you've shown you know your stuff, ask the interviewer to tell you more about the company. "I understand you are looking for a data modeler with healthcare experience to work on a data warehousing project for a managed care organization. Could you tell me more about your needs?"

What are you looking for in a job?

What are your goals? The answer should be tailored to the position you are applying for. You might mention how you will be able to use certain skills you are interested in using in your new position; you might discuss the specific responsibilities and challenges the position will require.

What is your technical background, and what kinds of projects have you worked on?

Use your resume to walk the interviewer step-by-step through your technical-not work-history. Discuss specific skills you have acquired and how you have used them. Make sure you are prepared to discuss this information-don't just wing it.

What are some of your most significant accomplishments?

Tell a story about a couple of large, successful projects you worked on, or about a time when you overcame adversity to make a difficult project or task work. Focus on specific technical or personal skills you used.

In what areas do you need to improve technically?

Try to get the interviewer to clarify this question. Is he or she asking about specific technology? Platforms? This way you will better be able to target your answer. If appropriate, talk about a skill that is not required for the position. Since this position will require you to use your strongest skills, your weaker skill areas probably are not required.

What did you like most and least about your last job?

Do not ever criticize your former employer. Discuss positive aspects of the company, the job, your co-workers, or what you learned. Mention several things you liked about your last position. Mention ONLY ONE thing that you liked least-and that thing can echo why it is that you are leaving the company. "The company is large and stable, and I enjoyed that environment. However, I am looking for a smaller company environment where I can make a greater contribution."

How do you handle pressure?

Discuss the skills you have acquired-organization, prioritization, ability to communicate well with others-that help alleviate the stress of pressure in a job AND how you have used those skills successfully in the past.

Do you prefer to work alone or on a team?

It's best to provide a dual answer here-something that shows you are capable of operating independently when necessary and that demonstrates you are a team player when needed.

How would you describe your "ideal job"?

Cater your answer to the position and company you're interviewing with. Your answer may include discussion about your desire for an opportunity to use specific technical skills, your desire to learn additional skills, a specific work environment, etc.

If you were to hire someone to replace you in your last job, what kind of person would that be?

You want to turn this answer around to reflect well on you. Discuss the kinds of skills the job demanded-skills that mirror some of your strongest skills. Discuss the temperament required of the person in the position. Discuss the challenges of the position.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Answer this in general terms, and in reference to the company and opportunities available to you through this position. You might include comments about where you would like to be as a professional-don't limit yourself to growth within the company.

What kind of compensation are you looking for?

Don't get into specifics about compensation-there are many variables involved in achieving compensation that's fair to you and your employer. The proper and appropriate way to answer the question about money is to say, "Mr./Ms. [Interviewer Name], I am currently making [your present compensation], however, what is most important to me is the opportunity and the company. Based on what you have shared with me so far, I am really interested in this opportunity. If you are interested in me, I would like to entertain your strongest offer."

What do you do when priorities change quickly?

Discuss your ability to adapt and to communicate effectively with your supervisor and anyone you supervise. Talk about a step-by-step approach to examining new projects and tasks, determining where they fall into the greater scheme of things, rearranging current priorities, and getting buy-in from others involved.

Questions You Can Ask at the Interview

Toward the end of most job interviews, the interviewer will give you the opportunity to ask questions. You **must** ask at least one question; to do otherwise often signal the interviewer that you don't really have any interest in the job or the company. On the other hand, do not ask questions where the answer is obvious or readily available -- or when the topic has already been thoroughly discussed in the interview. And never ask about salary and benefit issues until those subjects are raised by the employer.

What follows are some examples of the types of questions you might ask at a job interview:

- Can you describe a typical day for someone in this position?
- What is the top priority of the person who accepts this job?
- What are the day-to-day expectations and responsibilities of this job?
- How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? And by whom? How often?
- Can you describe the company's management style?
- Can you discuss your take on the company's corporate culture?
- What are the company's values?
- How would you characterize the management philosophy of this organization? Of your department?
- What is the organization's policy on transfers to other divisions or other offices?
- Are lateral or rotational job moves available?
- Does the organization support ongoing training and education for employees to stay current in their fields?
- What do you think is the greatest opportunity facing the organization in the near future? The biggest threat?
- Why did you come to work here? What keeps you here?
- How is this department perceived within the organization?
- Is there a formal process for advancement within the organization?
- What are the traits and skills of people who are the most successful within the organization?

Source: [Quintessential Careers](#)