

Conquer *Interview* Objections

Triumph Over Barriers:

- Disabilities
- Age • Time Off
- Unemployment



**Robert F. Wilson and
Erik H. Rambusch**

CONQUER INTERVIEW OBJECTIONS

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Introduction

Most job interviewing advice is reduced to one of two sharply contrasting approaches. On one side of the table are the “Just answer the questions and don’t make waves” advisers. On the other are those who insist that the only path to success is to “Show the interviewer that you’re in charge.”

Limiting interview participation to answering direct questions makes it difficult for an interviewee to address his own agenda. An accomplishment or skill crucial to performing the job may never come up if it is not part of the answer to an interviewer’s question. And because it is not dealt with, the interviewee’s known qualifications remain incomplete.

There are a couple of problems with the “take charge of the interview” alternative, as well. First, the interviewee is so intent on prosecuting his case aggressively enough to generate a job offer that he forgets he is the interviewer’s guest. By interrupting the flow of the interviewer’s questioning to pursue his own agenda, he risks being rude or obnoxious, offending the one person who—at that moment—is in a position to help him the most. This approach usually is doomed as well because the interviewee (taking charge at full speed) doesn’t hear critical nuances of the position and its requirements. His strategy has dulled his listening capacity.

There is a third approach—more effective than the first two because it treats the interview experience neither as a petition for mercy nor as a confrontation. Instead, it views the job interview as a genuine business meeting between a buyer with real needs (the prospective employer) and a seller with the potential to fill those needs (the job seeker).

Conquer Interview Objections hones in on three critical ingredients of any well planned sales call that spell the difference between Sale and No Sale:

- Identifying the buyer's needs
- Overcoming objections
- Making the close

To a job finder, "identifying the buyer's needs" translates to learning all of the requirements of the job—including unique character traits that may require probing questions to uncover. "Overcoming objections" means recognizing and neutralizing specific soft spots in one's candidacy. "Making the close" becomes asking for the job.

Yet logical as it sounds, these three valuable techniques are rarely employed in the job interview. Why? Because they are perceived as being tactically so chancy—not to mention anxiety-producing—that most interviewees avoid the perceived risk rather than probe for unasked questions that may damage their chances for the job.

Conquer Interview Objections identifies and demystifies these crucial aspects of the job interview and converts them to the powerful, competitive tools so important in a volatile economy. It teaches the job seeker when and how to apply these techniques in an effective, non-threatening manner to create a win-win situation—the best possible climate for a productive job interview benefitting both sides.

For answers to job-search problems that precede the interviewing process, be sure to take a look at our companion book, *Conquer Resume Objections*.

PRONOUN/ADJECTIVE GENDER ALERT

Throughout this book our contribution to controlling the rampant use of "his or her," "his/her," "s/he," and "he/she," as well as various annoying single subject-plural pronoun combinations, has been to generally characterize *job seekers* as male and *interviewers* as female. This is hardly an ideal solution, and to some may be equally annoying. We're open to suggestions.

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Contents

1. Research and Reconnaissance	1
Information Gathering	2
Interviewing Outside an Industry or Function	3
Market Research	4
General Interest and Industry-Specific Directories	5
Other Library Sources	5
The Target Company as Source	6
Maximizing Opportunities	6
Four Avenues to Market	7
Networking	7
<i>Setting Up Your Network</i>	8
<i>Accomplishing Network Objectives</i>	8
<i>Overcoming Network Call Objections</i>	9
<i>Specific Network Questions</i>	10
Executive Recruiters and Employment Agencies	11
<i>Marketing Tactics With a Recruiter</i>	11
<i>Employment Agencies</i>	14
Newspaper and Magazine Advertisements	14
Direct Mail	15
Reconnoitering Your Target Company	15
With a Current Employee	16
Former Employee	18
Former Direct Report to Prospective Boss	18
Competitor	19
Vendor	19

Customer	20
Wrapup	20
General Interest and Industry-Specific Library	
Sources	21
Industry-Specific Directories	21
On Computer	23
Additional Reading	23
2. The First Impression	25
Misreading the Interviewer	26
Four Interviewer Personality Types	29
<i>The Thinker</i>	29
<i>The Driver</i>	29
<i>The Visionary</i>	30
<i>The Friend</i>	31
Physical Appearance	32
Basic Business Dress	32
Neatness	33
Hygiene	33
Body Language and Mannerisms	34
Mannerisms	35
Other Causes of Fear and Discomfort	35
Vocabulary and Diction	35
Problems of New Citizens	36
Preparedness	36
Poor Listening Skills	37
Inattentiveness	38
Missing Nuances	38
Hearing What You Want to Hear	38
Active Listening	39
Additional Reading	40

3. Becoming the Ideal Candidate	41
Know Your Target Company's Problems	41
Prepare Your Questions Beforehand	43
Ask Questions That Define the Job	44
Take Notes to Retain Crucial Information	48
Listen for the Questions Behind the Questions	49
Summarize Periodically	51
A New Generation of Interviewers	51
Qualifying the Job, the Company, and the Boss	54
Additional Reading	55
4. Testing for Predictable Objections	57
Recruiters Know Objections	58
Types of Interviewer Objections	59
Objections Thought of and Asked	59
Overcoming a Job Loss Objection	60
Objections Thought of But Not Asked	63
Objections Thought of That Couldn't Legally Be Asked	64
Objections Thought of After the Interview	65
Using Questions to Neutralize Objections	65
<i>Smoking Out Objections</i>	66
Overcoming Objections—The Process	66
Listen to Understand the Objection	67
Acknowledge the Objection	67
Neutralize the Objection	68
Objection-Illuminating Questions	70
Wrapping Up the Interview	80
Anticipating Objections for Follow-up Interviews	80
Additional Reading	81

5. Overcoming Camouflaged Objections	83
Smoking Out Camouflaged Objections	84
Objections About Age	85
<i>Advantages of Hiring Older Workers</i>	85
<i>The Age Objection</i>	86
Objections About Gender	89
Objections About Physical Disability	92
Objections About Race, Color, and Nationality	96
Miscellaneous Camouflaged Objections	98
Anticipating Objections	102
Stylistic Objections	102
Adjusting Your Style to the Interviewer	104
Additional Reading	105
 6. Making the Close; Negotiating Compensation	 107
Wrapping Up the Interview	108
Restate Your Qualifications	108
Reaffirm Your Interest in the Job	109
Ask Where You Stand with the Other Candidates	109
Evaluating Your Interview Performance	110
Interview Follow-up Letters	111
Anticipating Objections for Follow-up Interviews	118
References	118
Check Out the Company	122
Negotiating Compensation	123
Preparing to Talk Money	123
Your Negotiating Power	124
The Negotiating Process	124
The Employment Contract	125
Additional Reading	128

7. Flourishing On Your New Job	129
Maintaining Bridges	130
Keys to Job Longevity	130
Mastering the Job	130
Joining the Team	132
Tracking Your Performance	133
Growing in the Job	136
Negotiating a Raise	137
Keeping a Paper Trail	139
If You're "Irreplaceable"	140
When to Go Over Your Boss's Head	142
A Parting Shot	143
Additional Reading	144
Appendixes	
A. Thinker, Visionary, Driver, Friend: Four Interviewer Personalities	147
B. It Worked for Them	157
Index	197

Research and Reconnaissance

During the late 1980s, management consultant W. Edwards Deming shook up the American workplace with a philosophy he called “continuous quality improvement.” Deming and his followers challenged the American notion of individualism for its own sake and proposed putting power in the hands of the workers instead. (Because Deming previously spent 30 years working toward the same end with government and corporate leaders in Japan, this movement is sometimes called the “Japanese school of management.”)

For many top-down-run U.S. companies, such a revolutionary notion will take a while to catch on, deeply rooted as existing corporate hierarchies and power bases are. Nevertheless, the signs are real that permanent change is on its way. Teamwork and shared management are examples of Deming’s theories that are becoming real alternatives in the workplace.

For purposes of this book, the assumption of empowerment is consistent with the way you will learn to interview. Part of this has to do with your state of mind and attitude as you go through the interviewing process.

Knowing that the individual interviewing you may one day be *your boss* can affect your performance. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to prematurely assume the position of underdog (employee reporting to employer) to the extent that you fail to ask—and to answer—

the penetrating questions that will help you and the employer decide whether you want each other.

INFORMATION GATHERING

The interviewing process begins with information gathering. Your success in any job interview is almost entirely dependent on the quantity and quality of the research that establishes your strategy for that first meeting. There is no way you can be perceived as the solution to an employer's problem, after all, if you don't take the time to learn what one or more of those problems are—and why they have come to be.

Not long ago the human resources department of a Wall Street area financial newspaper chain—part of a foreign-owned business information corporation—interviewed 25 candidates as part of its search for a circulation director. These 25 men and women were selected from more than 200 respondents to display advertisements placed in publications most likely to be seen by interested candidates.

Although the company was not identified in the ads, there was no question that in the week or two it took to arrange an interview, those contacted about the position could find out as much about it as their investigative skills allowed.

But what happened? The opening question in each interview was: "*Before we discuss your background and our needs, would you please tell me what you already know about our current publication and chain of newspapers*"?

A composite standard response went like this: "*You are well known in the industry—I've heard your name numerous times in my [various sales, circulation, and marketing positions]. And yes, I believe you are owned by a foreign company.*"

This was the full extent of all 25 candidates' preparation—the *top* candidates' preparation. Not one called the office beforehand to inquire about the company. Even more surprisingly, few if any had used other sources of information to learn something about the organization—even though they expressed interest in being employed there.

Sound preparation for a job interview is good sense for a number of reasons:

- *The more a job candidate knows about a company and the way it works, the more realistically he can project himself as a company problem solver on a permanent, full-time basis.* Learning from customers, vendors, and competitors—as well as from current and former employees about a company's weaknesses and problem areas—adds a dimension of objectivity that information supplied by the company sometimes lacks. Being able to converse knowledgeably about a company's strengths and weaknesses also allows a candidate to be viewed as a professional who thoroughly investigates a situation before acting on it. A prospective employer can more easily visualize the candidate's ability to perform his duties on the job in a consistently effective manner.
- *The more a person knows about a company, the more likely it will be that he is perceived as a problem solver.* Speaking easily and lucidly about such matters as new product-line additions, a current advertising campaign, or recent public statements by company officers permits a candidate to use up-to-date—yet non-proprietary—data in a way that leads to greater rapport with a prospective employer, and thus a better opportunity to deepen the relationship.
- *The more a person knows about a company, the easier it will be to decide whether he wants to work there.* Finding out about relationships between departments, divisions—and, perhaps most importantly, managers and staff—helps to recognize the value a company places on performance and how it rewards employees for exemplary performance.

Interviewing Outside an Industry or Function

If you are changing careers—even slightly—from your current industry or function, planning and positioning become even more important. It also requires extensive repackaging of such written credentials as your resumes and cover letters (topics dealt with more thoroughly in our companion book, *Conquer Resume Objections*.)

You have passed at least the first test in the process simply by getting the interview in the first place. But because you will be seen by some interviewers as an industry or functional alien, your qualifications will be called into question in ways that may surprise you.

For this reason it is essential that you speak with some knowledge of your target company's customers, competitors, and clients, as well as its infrastructure. Extensive interviews with individuals in your new industry or function are a must. Read on for specific suggestions.

MARKET RESEARCH

The following two examples show how market research can make or break a product. First example: Years ago Ford Motor Company launched a new model car without adequately testing the market waters. Management was solidly behind it—they even named it after one of Henry's grandsons. From both engineering and manufacturing standpoints, the Edsel was a fine automobile. But when prospective buyers saw its bizarre front end ("funny looking" to some; plain "ugly" to others), they avoided Ford showrooms in record numbers. It took the company years to recover its financial and credibility losses. It will take longer to eliminate "Edsel" from the industrial lexicon as a synonym for failure.

Second example: Procter & Gamble spent more than a year to learn that many customers wanted to buy whole, unbroken potato chips—no potato chip parts, no crumbs, just whole chips. Enter Pringles, the processed potato chip stacked in a can (last chip same as the first), every chip whole until eaten. Since the first successful Pringle can was emptied, other market segments have opened doors for Sour Cream and Onion Pringles, Barbecued Pringles, "Lite" Pringles, and Rippled Pringles.

The key difference in these two stories is that Procter & Gamble accurately identified and isolated a consumer desire (for an "unbroken chip"), and delivered on it. Ford, on the other hand, *assumed* its Edsel would be successful because the car was soundly engineered. Unfortunately, it didn't conduct sufficient market research to validate the assumption.

Similarly, your market research must ferret out prospective employers' needs, which in turn will allow you to present yourself as the ideal candidate to fulfill them.

A number of the research sources introduced in Chapter 4 of *Conquer Interview Objections* will be helpful to you in generating more information on companies with which you have arranged

interviews. These sources will be summarized here for easy reference.

General Interest and Industry-Specific Directories

Dozens of regional, national, and international business directories are available in most public libraries. They contain the information you need—not only for publicly held companies, but for private firms as well. Some of these directories are classified by industry, others by size of company. A selection of both general reference and industry-specific directories is given at the end of the chapter. If you don't see your specialty listed, ask a local public or university librarian for assistance. Try also the *Directories in Print* (formerly *Directory of Directories*), a research timesaver that will lead you to the directories of most possible assistance to you.

One of the best of the general directories is *The Directory of Corporate Affiliations*, published annually (with bimonthly supplements), by the National Register Publishing Company. A front-of-the-book index lists more than 5,000 parent companies—in bold-face, to distinguish them (in user-friendly fashion) from their 57,000 respective divisions, subsidiaries, and affiliates. For each of these you'll find an address, phone number, business description, stock exchange ticker symbol, annual sales, number of employees, and names of top corporate officers. Additional geographical and Standard Industrial Code (S.I.C.) indexes list all companies by city and state, and primary types of business. Another back-of-the-book feature is an index of "corporate responsibility"—a way to find in one place all of the human resource directors, CEOs, treasurers, and purchasing agents, among others. Five annual supplements document significant corporate changes, including acquisitions, mergers, and other dramatic name or status switches.

Additional DOCA volumes provide similar information for 8,000 U.S. private companies and 33,000 international companies.

Other Library Sources

Check out the special issues of leading business magazines and trade journals for annually updated marketing, sales, and product

development information. Also, ask about recent computer software that call out references to national companies in business and consumer magazines. One worth looking for is ProQuest, available in many public libraries. (A complete list of general interest and industry-specific sources appears at the end of the chapter.)

The Target Company as Source

Another good way to gather intelligence about the company for which you're interviewing is from its most recent annual report, 10-K (for a more detailed look at the company financials), or any descriptive literature available from its marketing or public relations departments. These publications offer a full range of information about a company's products and services, including recent projections of long-range strategies and objectives. Annual reports and 10-Ks will give you a better notion of a company's financial status and growth strategy. Call the company and tell the operator what you want. She'll connect you with the appropriate department.

Maximizing Opportunities

Though this book focuses on your performance in job interviews already scheduled, the reality is that you must continue to generate leads at target companies you haven't yet penetrated. The tendency is to let up a little on your job search efforts after you line up one or two interviews. If you do, though, and the expected job offer does not materialize for one reason or another, your pipeline is empty. Weeks could go by before you are able to set up initial interviews at new target companies, with a concomitant erosion of your precious cash reserves—not to mention confidence and morale.

To keep this from happening, treat even the most promising job opportunity as just that—an opportunity, which may or may not lead to a job offer. Such healthy skepticism will keep you more realistic about your job search as a whole, and motivate you to spend more energy on early steps in the process: identifying and contacting companies on your "A" list, until you exhaust it and prepare another list to replace it.