

Winning the Interview Game

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Winning the Interview Game

EVERYTHING You Need to Know to LAND the JOB

Alan H. Nierenberg

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*To Marsha, Tara, and Erin,
the most important people in my life*

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PREFACE

If you are planning to interview for a job, then you have found the right book. You may be graduating from high school or college, transitioning between jobs, or seeking a new job while employed. Regardless of age, level of seniority, or area of expertise, this book will give you a strong competitive edge over the hundreds or thousands of competing candidates.

An Overview

Winning the Interview Game: Everything You Need to Know to Land the Job presents the interview for what it is—a game. There are many players who affect the outcome of this career game and you must learn how to deal with each group. Competing candidates and the judges representing everyone on the other side of the hiring desk are the major players. You must defeat your competitors and convince the judges that you are the one who can perform the job and should get the offer. The role of these players in the interview game and how you should interact with them are discussed in the book.

In describing how to prepare for and play the interview game, *Winning the Interview Game: Everything You Need to Know to Land the Job* will provide information not widely known by most job seekers. You will obtain first-hand knowledge from my experience on the other side of the interview desk as the current owner of an executive search firm, with previous experience as a vice president-human resources and a corporate hiring executive. I was also a job seeker several times in my career. I have personal experience with every approach presented in the book and have coached numerous job seekers whose interview experiences are reflected throughout its pages.

Although each interview is different, there are many components that are the same or similar. This book takes advantage of those similarities by providing a step-by-step approach to achieve your most important objective: to convince interviewers that you have the skills required to perform the job being discussed and that you are excited about applying those skills at the interviewer's company.

Empty Your Mind

Before learning a new system of self-defense, an aspiring martial artist must succeed in removing old habits from his or her mind. The student needs to absorb the philosophy and choreography of each class session, learn the basics, and not improvise in the early years of instruction. Adaptation to the student's physical abilities will occur over time. And so it is for this text. Prepare for the interview, develop and execute your strategy, apply proven tactics and you will be able to adjust your approach for each interview after you master the basics.

And don't be afraid to explore every opportunity to play the interview game. Put out of your mind previous negative experiences and prejudices as well as self-imposed obstacles that may prevent you from finding a new job. Do not say that you will *never* work at another startup, another Fortune 500 company, or another company that requires driving more than an hour to the office or one that requires mass transportation to get there. Go with the flow and you will be pleasantly surprised with the outcome.

Many self-imposed restrictions in a job search usually are based on previous experiences that went bad. Move through the search process as quickly as you can and analyze each situation in which such obstacles are slowing you down. In virtually every interview opportunity, you should be able to identify job acceptance criteria that will be strong incentives to accept a particular position, regardless of the perceived negatives. For example, if you were a casualty of a dotcom that ran out of funding, you should now be prepared to reduce the risks in a new company by insisting on a sign-on bonus and a higher salary before accepting an offer. Do not refuse to in-

terview for a job that might be a three-hour drive from home. If you succeed in getting an offer, you have the option to demand temporary living expenses for a period of time, home visits each weekend, a telecommuting option, and a subsequent relocation with your family. If the company refuses to satisfy your request, you have the ultimate power to reject the offer and continue your search.

Very often job seekers will not go on interviews if the title is one level below their previous title or compensation is 10 percent or 20 percent below what they recently earned. This is the wrong move. Do not let either of these issues stop you from going on a first interview, which is so difficult to obtain. You might exceed your expectations by impressing interviewers and causing a hiring manager to realize that an upgrade in title and/or salary is warranted. Consider every opportunity to schedule an interview before eliminating any job possibility.

The Game

The more you play the interview game, the better you will get, and the more job offers you will receive. As in any game, you must learn the rules, understand the players, and know how to reach the finish line. The book is organized into three parts.

Part I: Let the Game Begin: The Preparation

This part of *Winning the Interview Game: Everything You Need to Know to Land the Job* prepares you for your first interview. Chapter 1 describes the rules of the game and follows a hypothetical job seeker named Susan who has just scheduled an interview. The chapter identifies information to gather and knowledge to acquire before the interview.

Part II: Game Plan: Interview Strategies and Tactics

Part II takes you almost minute-by-minute on Susan's interview. This part provides insight into the typical interview and its common vari-

ations. Chapter 2 describes the initial ten minutes of the interview where the first and most critical moves of the game are executed. These early moves are important because they create a great first impression, establish rapport, and set the tone for the remainder of the interview. Chapter 3 describes how to respond to the barrage of questions throughout the middle of the interview and provides guidance on how to deal with sensitive and difficult issues interviewers like to address. Chapter 4 takes place in the last ten minutes of the interview and includes how to leave a lasting impression. The chapter discusses how to handle the different types of interviewers, such as peers and subordinates. In addition, advice is provided for winning in other interview settings, such as a telephone or videoconference interview. Chapter 5 provides guidelines on how to maneuver through second and subsequent interviews and how to differentiate yourself from the competition.

Part III: Winning Move: Enjoy the Moment

Part III describes the final hurdles for job seekers to overcome before an offer is presented. Chapter 6 addresses salary and reference issues and walks you through the landmines of negotiating, juggling, accepting, and rejecting an offer. A description of background checks and an approach to convince the company psychologist you have the right personality for the job are also presented. The chapter and the game end when you show up on the first day of work and make the wonderful transition from being unemployed to being a success in your new job. The last valuable piece of information presented in the book is how to plan for the next interview game while you are in the process of settling into your new job.

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Joanne Pobiner, Certified Image Consultant, President of Paramount Image Management, and professional member of the Association of Image Consultants International, who contributed her outstanding advice on how to step forward with a winning appearance and achieve a notable first impression.

Chuck Duvall, a specialist in videoconference systems, who provided excellent advice for interviewing at a videoconference center.

PART I

LET THE GAME BEGIN: THE PREPARATION

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**Prepare for Perfection:
Before the Interview**

Susan finally got her first job interview after an intense four months of searching. Four months of searching to get a one-hour job interview is a realistic statistic in these times. It could be another few months, or more, before she has the next interview. This places immense pressure on her and other job seekers to learn and apply effective interview skills.

Susan must convince the first interviewer, and possibly additional five or ten interviewers, that she is the candidate who should receive the coveted job offer. Read on to uncover the secrets of getting beyond the front-line human resource professionals and executive recruiters (the gatekeepers) to the hiring manager and a job offer.

How Susan Got the Interview

One morning Susan received a call from a friend she contacted a month earlier, “Hi Susan, it’s Tom. An acquaintance of mine is the vice president of human resources at a local company, and they are looking for a marketing manager. If you are interested, I will give you the contact information.” She obtained the contact name, Scott Gilbert, vice president-human resources and graciously asked Tom if she could assist him in any way. Susan was excited when she hung up the phone. She immediately reviewed the company’s web site and called Scott to introduce herself as Tom’s friend. Scott’s administrative assistant, Amanda, answered the phone and requested that Susan e-mail a copy of her résumé. Within an hour, Susan received a call from Scott’s internal recruiting manager. The purpose of that call was for the recruiting manager to ensure that Susan had the experience necessary to warrant an interview with Scott. The telephone interview and other interview formats are discussed in Chapter 4. Susan made a compelling case for an interview with Scott, and she had

one week to prepare before the scheduled interview. This was the call Susan worked so hard to receive. The following chapters walk you through the steps she took to win the interview and a job offer.

Rules of the Game

Interviewing is like a board game—competing players all have the same starting point and the winner is the player who accumulates the most points along the way. The starting point for the interview game is when a job seeker has a scheduled interview with a company executive or search professional who is trying to fill a specific job. The game ends on the first day of a new job.

The rules are simple. An interviewer hosts the meeting in an office setting where a friendly conversation takes place between two people. The interviewer takes the lead role and asks candidates a series of questions mainly about qualifications to perform the job. Other topics include delving into personality and determining how likeable the job seeker will be to the staff. The interviewer evaluates each response and determines if the candidate will be invited back for another interview. From the candidates' perspective, they must respond to each question with completely honest answers. Any lies appearing in a résumé or told to an interviewer will automatically disqualify the candidate at any time. If misinformation is uncovered after a new job begins, the new employee will most likely be fired.

Job seekers must focus on the end game of getting a job offer. Contrary to a commonly held belief, the best qualified candidate does not always win this game. Although an offer can be attributed to many factors, such as who a candidate might know, the winning candidate usually exhibits the following qualities:

- Possesses basic skills and experience required for the position.
- Satisfies the needs of the recruiter, human resources professional, hiring manager, and other interviewers.
- Establishes rapport with interviewers and creates the perception of being like them.
- Exhibits impressive displays of energy and passion.

- Demonstrates a personality compatible with the hiring manager and the responsibilities of the position.
- Possesses qualities that differentiate the individual from competing candidates.
- Presents a detailed understanding of company products, culture, industry, and politics better than most employees.

If you have these qualities, you are among possibly three to ten competitors who are at the starting gate and waiting to be interviewed by company management. Arm yourself with inner confidence and knowledge of the interview journey that lies ahead.

Game Preparation

Winning players begin the game with an intense interview preparation. How the newly acquired knowledge gained as part of the interview preparation is used during the interview separates the great players from the rest of the group.

Capable management consultants have a particular skill that is extremely relevant to interviewing. Sarah just joined the consulting staff of a prestigious management consulting firm. She has an M.B.A. from a top school and four years of information technology experience at a manufacturing company. She completed her company's consulting orientation program and was given her first assignment. She had three days to prepare for an initial meeting with the vice president-information technology at her first client. The company manufactured battery products, and Sarah knew nothing about the battery business. What was she to do? Sarah had been told that her company's clients expect consultants to know all about their business, and she had to convey that impression at a meeting in just three days. She spent most of her waking hours learning everything about the company, industry, product lines, management, and customers. Consultants do this all the time. In her first client meeting, Sarah was able to create the perception that she had a good understanding of the industry, its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Why did Sarah go through this grueling preparation?

6 Let the Game Begin: The Preparation

- To satisfy client expectations of understanding their business.
- To instill self-confidence.
- To perform her consulting assignment in a stellar manner.

Job seekers should have the same motivation to convince interviewers that they understand and value the company's business. Hiring managers prefer candidates with a passion for and an understanding of their business over candidates who have no idea what the company does. Spend hours and days of research gathering information identified in this chapter with the objective of learning more than your competition. Use this knowledge to differentiate yourself and to create a perception of extensive knowledge. Your goal in this preparation is to know as much or more than most employees in the company you are about to interview with.

All job seekers should have a good understanding of the industry in which they work and the functions performed in the position for which they are interviewing. Sufficient knowledge and background information must be demonstrated to convince interviewers that you understand the business and will have a very short learning curve to become productive. Conveying information during an interview is like answering a question on a final exam—it makes no difference if you learned the answer the night before or the month before, as long as you have the correct answer. To ensure that a comprehensive approach is taken to conduct the required research, organize this project around the company and its industry, the profile of the people you might meet, and the pertinent aspects of the position for which you are interviewing.

The Company and Its Industry

This information is helpful regardless of the job being sought. It makes no difference if you are interviewing for the most junior or the most senior position or for any functional area of expertise, such as administration, financial, marketing, human resources, or sales. You will acquire an aura that differentiates you from common candidates.

- *Corporate Background.* Mission, strategies, history, office locations, annual report (call company shareholder services department for a copy).
- *Overview of Company Organization.* Number of employees. In which industries do company divisions compete? In what division is the position for which you are interviewing?
- *Press Releases and Industry Analyst Opinions.* Excellent information source to impress interviewers. Check several times, particularly on the day of or day before the interview.
- *Major Products and Their Competitive Advantages.* Have you used any products, do you have a hobby that involves the company's products, have you visited company stores or branch offices? Learn why the company's products are better than competing products. Call the company marketing department for public information provided to customers.
- *Revenue.* Worldwide revenue by country. Where does the money come from? You might have extensive experience with a particular source.
- *Company Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.* This SWOT analysis is performed in most M.B.A. programs.
- *Competitors and Competing Products.* You might be very familiar with a competitive product and can convert that knowledge to a positive impression during an interview.
- *Research and Development Programs.* Are these projects at the leading edge of their industry? Are adequate resources devoted to research and development?
- *Current and Target Customers.* You might have personal contacts that could provide you with this difficult-to-obtain information.
- *Overview of the Industry and Where the Company Appears Relative to Size and Growth.* Is this a growing or stagnant industry? Is the company a leader or industry follower?

- *Financial Data and SEC Filings.* Extensive information is available for public companies, including backgrounds of board members and the executive team often with compensation, recent earnings, income statement, balance sheet, ROI, and financial facts.
- *Company Accounting, Law, or Consulting Firm.* You might know someone to call for networking purposes.
- *Partnerships, Mergers, Acquisitions, Joint Ventures, and Other Activities that Could Eliminate Current Job Openings or Create New Ones.* Is the company in an acquisition mode or is it looking to be acquired? You might have contacts at other companies where these activities are being planned.
- *Social Responsibility.* Identify organizations supported by the company; you might be involved with the same organizations and identify networking contacts.
- *Career Opportunities.* Awareness of other job openings and position descriptions might provide insight into what personal and professional qualities are being sought.

People Profiles

The first people you should find out about are the interviewers. This background information is less important for recruiters because most have a common purpose to find, evaluate, and submit qualified candidates to client management. You will only meet a recruiter once. However, it will be helpful if you can talk to someone who was interviewed previously by the same recruiter or recruiting firm.

Gathering intelligence on company executives is a critical component of advance preparation. Determine the background of the interviewers, the management team, and the board of directors. Become as familiar with these backgrounds as employees might be. For company managers, look for commonality with your background, like having previously worked for the same company, holding similar titles, attending the same schools, belonging to the same professional or not-for-profit organizations, or performing a particular function (e.g., writing visual basic programs, negotiating alliances

with other companies or selling the same products). Prepare for each interview by summarizing and presenting your experience in a way that mirrors the profile of each interviewer. More about this in Chapter 2.

Details About the Position

Some fortunate job seekers will be given a detailed position description that can serve as a roadmap for interview preparation. Alternatively, others might get an oral summary or a one-line description. Determine the requirements as best you can, including the functional responsibilities, technical experience and political interaction with other departments, parent organization or other companies. Try to obtain some of this information in the telephone call that resulted in scheduling the interview. Always ask for a written position description if there is one.

The position description might identify elements of which you have limited knowledge, and the preparation period should be used to learn more about these areas so that you can carry on a basic conversation. If you are seeking a programmer or information technology position and have limited knowledge of a required language or software package, then learn it before the interview. Find a tutorial on the web and learn the software package's functionality and features to enable you to discuss during your interview. Some financial positions require experience with the Sarbanes-Oxley Public Company Accounting Reform and Investor Protection Act. Even if you have no hands-on experience with the requirements of the SOX, as it is often referred, learn the basics of how public companies must be compliant and you can still impress an interviewer.

Where to Begin

There are two obvious starting points. The first is the recruiter or person who introduced you to the company. Most recruiters have met or spoken with human resources executives and hiring managers to obtain the position specifications. The recruiter should share background information on key staff (i.e., tenure with the company, pre-

vious experience, personality) and annual reports and other company literature that they have.

The person who led you to the job opportunity may have personal relationships with one or more company employees. When you call to thank this person for the introduction, mention your upcoming interview. In that conversation, ask for the same information you would expect from a recruiter, and you may benefit from some excellent insights into company interviewers and products.

The next place to go is the company's web site. Follow every path and link. Some companies will make your job simple by having a robust web site with just about everything there is to know about the company. Go through the purchase process for a product and stop just short of entering your credit card number. See first hand how easy, or difficult, it is for customers to buy something. Print selected information that you want to read and reread until the moment of the interview.

There are numerous web sites that offer information on companies, industries and just about anything required for a research project. Go to the advanced search feature of popular search engines (e.g., www.ask.com and www.google.com) and enter key words such as company name, industry, product name, or other words or phrases that would identify some aspect of the target company. Search engines will produce web sites that supposedly have the answers.

Be creative. The Internet has a wealth of information, and it is clearly the place to conduct much of your research. However, job seekers should not limit their research to computer-driven searches. Time should also be spent in a public library, where the research librarian could identify material to review. There are numerous directories in print and electronic form that list names and contact information for human resources executives, hospital industry decision makers, industry associations, and many more types of listings.

Graduating college seniors should use the career placement office and college graduates should use the alumni career centers at their undergraduate and graduate schools. An outplacement firm is an excellent source for a senior executive whose previous company in-

cluded that service as part of a severance package. Career counselors at outplacement firms offer advice on where to find information to prepare for an interview.

Networking Groups

In addition to seeking out colleagues, friends, current and former business associates, members of professional organizations, alumni associations, and any other contacts that might know about the company or individuals with whom you will be interviewing, networking groups can be a very effective source of information. Members could refer you to associates employed at the company's banks, accounting firm, investment bankers, customers, suppliers, or they might know classmates, neighbors, or friends of key management staff. The challenge of finding insider contacts is not as daunting as you might think.

Marty was a member of a financial networking group comprised of financial analysts, controllers, and chief financial officers. He attended regular biweekly meetings and had gotten to know many of the forty members who are actively looking for new jobs. These are people he can trust. As part of his preparation for an upcoming interview, Marty decided to ask if anyone in the group had a contact at the company where he had an upcoming interview. At the meeting, he asked the members to respect his confidence and not to discuss the situation outside the room. Three members referred excellent sources. Marty spoke with each referral and he played his inside information very effectively during the interview. This is a common occurrence with networking groups, and job seekers can derive tremendous benefits through membership in selected groups.

It would be a major coup if you were to be referred to a person who worked, or works, at the company. Imagine if you were to find a former incumbent who is now at another company! Someone at a competing organization could be equally valuable. Another prize would be someone who interviewed at this company for the same or similar position. Be diligent and persistent in obtaining information about the company with which you will be interviewing.

What to Do with a Networking Connection

All of this contact information is powerful. It can uncover interviewer personalities, company culture, and an almost limitless number of facts for use during an interview. There is an issue to consider if the contact is an employee of the company or a close personal friend of an employee. Consider a worst-case scenario even if you request the person to keep your meeting confidential. How might your candidacy be affected if the interviewer scheduled to meet you uncovers the fact that you met with an employee to extract company information? You should assess the extent to which you can trust your source.

On the positive side, an inside contact could be the proverbial pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. You could learn the real scoop that helps you get a second interview. If you find out that one of your interviewers has a terrific sense of humor, then you might want to inject a bit of humor during that interview. If the interviewer is said to be a conservative, serious person, then you will want to be very business-like. If you decide against reaching out to the employee contact before the first interview, you can reassess the situation before the second or subsequent interview, if you get past the first one.

Behavior-Based Interviewing

Recruiters, both contingency and retained, and human resources professionals responsible for recruiting may interview hundreds, or more than a thousand, job seekers each year. That intense experience puts most of these professionals at the top of their trade when it comes to conducting interviews and assessing job seeker skills. Assessments are based on a combination of the first impression and an interviewing style known as behavior-based interviewing. The vignette strategy described in the next section of this chapter provides an effective approach for job seekers to handle a behavior-based interview.

Behavior-based interviewing has been around for many years. The generally accepted premise is that past behavior and performance are reasonable predictors of future behavior and performance. Behavior questions avoid yes or no answers and require that you re-

spond with an actual experience or accomplishment. There are no hypothetical “what if” questions. There are only open-ended questions that require a description of actual experiences. Follow-up questions can be asked if additional details are required. The following are sample behavior-based questions related to a range of functional skills:

- Describe a recent accomplishment where you saved your previous company money. A follow-up question might be: What was your specific role, and how were you recognized by company management?
- How did you win your largest sale?
- What marketing steps did you take to achieve a 24 percent market share?
- How did you avoid an employee revolution when a company merger resulted in a change of employee benefits?
- Describe a quality improvement you implemented and the results achieved.
- Describe how you prepared a complex financial model and communicated the analysis to management.
- Describe a win-win situation you negotiated and indicate what each side believed it won.
- Describe the steps you took as a systems analyst when you developed the company web site.
- Describe what you did as the vice president-human resources when an employee informed you of a sexual harassment situation.
- How did you motivate others during the project you just described?
- Describe your most difficult experience handling a customer and tell me the outcome.
- Describe a situation where a co-worker had a difficult personality and how you handled it.

- Describe a situation when you took an opposing position and achieved your objective.
- What were the significant steps you took to reduce expenses and achieve a profitable year?
- What was an important decision you made, how did you arrive at it, and how did you implement it?
- How did you get your vice presidents to accept a recent strategic initiative?

The Vignette Strategy

Vignettes, or brief descriptions, should be used in every interview to describe knowledge, accomplishments, and experiences. A vignette should convince interviewers that you know what you are talking about and should replace the simple yes or no response to interview questions. Résumés are the first place vignettes should appear, interview preparation is where a career of vignettes should be summarized, and interviews are where vignettes should be presented.

The format of these mini-stories should include a company problem, action taken by you, and the outcome that benefited a previous employer. The vignettes, like the example that follows, should take between one and three minutes to recount. Interviewers may ask you to elaborate on certain aspects of the vignette or move on to another question.

*The company was poised to establish a new business venture and customers were confused about the direction the company was taking. **(problem)** I organized a team comprised of internal experts and line managers from the new venture. I then led the team in defining and communicating the new venture's mission and strategy to existing and potential customers. **(action taken)** The new venture exceeded revenue projections in the first three months of business because of an informed customer base and an effective strategy. **(resulting benefit)***

Vignettes should be organized in a logical order, perhaps by position requirement, to validate your qualifications for the job to be filled. For each required strength and skill, prepare a few factual vignettes based on your experiences and achievements. Sequence the vignettes from the most recent to the oldest without using dates. Document the vignettes to be delivered as arrows in a quiver during the interview.

These mini-narratives should convince interviewers that you have done what the job requires and have the ability to perform these same tasks again. They also serve to create a perception that you will have a short learning curve. It is essential to exhibit a sense of accomplishment, pride, and satisfaction when presenting each vignette to an interviewer.

Recent graduates will not have years of experience to create many vignettes. Often, just a few very relevant vignettes can impress interviewers. There are surprisingly many sources from which recent graduates can prepare vignettes, including individual accomplishments and skills obtained in part-time jobs, volunteer work, or internships. Responsibility as the captain of a varsity team can certainly produce leadership stories. Participating in an extracurricular activity, traveling for a semester abroad, or volunteering for a mentoring program are great sources for vignettes. Courses taken and projects completed, such as a complex financial spreadsheet, an engineering design, or a visual basic program are excellent examples. The key to being a top candidate is in the delivery—be focused, energetic, and exhibit passion.

Vignette Preparation and Examples

In addition to preparing vignettes relating to your functional skills and accomplishments, consider other qualities you can offer a prospective employer. Interview preparation should include vignettes that demonstrate your leadership, teamwork, supervision of a difficult employee, and a difficult project completed.

Vignettes should be typed and taken with you to the interview. Prepare the list on white bond 8½- by 11-inch paper and insert the paper into a notepad as the second page, hidden from the inter-

viewer's view. The vignettes will be used extensively in response to interviewer questions discussed in Chapter 3. The following are abbreviated samples of vignettes organized by functional discipline. They are brief, focused, and should take less than two minutes to present.

Operations

- Decision-support tools were absent in a Fortune 500 company. I utilized operations research techniques to build and implement decision-support systems. I developed an inventory control model and produced annual savings of \$20 million.
- Quality review procedures were nonexistent in a complex business plan for a new venture. I initiated and completed the quality review of processes and procedures based on ISO 9000 quality principles and oversaw implementation of its recommendations. The board of directors subsequently approved the plan.
- The cost of travel services provided by an independent travel agent was prohibitive. I evaluated the legal implication of terminating the agreement and assessed the feasibility of creating an internal travel function. I successfully negotiated a release from the contract, developed an internal travel function, and saved \$1 million annually.

Business Development

- The growth of a fledgling business required alliance partners to reduce costs and increase revenue. I initiated discussions with fifteen potential partners, evaluated their business proposals, and entered into partnership agreements with four organizations. The company experienced significant growth.

Financial

- Expense and capital budgets were not controlled and there was a risk of exceeding authorized limits. I instituted expense reporting and control procedures for a \$30 million budget and documented

the objectives and benefits of each project. This action increased management confidence and introduced effective controls over spending.

- The company had cash flow problems and was soon to have problems meeting payroll. I evaluated and negotiated banking relationships, gave numerous presentations, and obtained a \$15 million line of credit.

Marketing

- A significant rollout for a major product was planned, but emphasis was placed on technical aspects and less on marketing requirements. I determined customer needs, developed and implemented marketing recommendations, and introduced the product at a well-publicized media event. The rollout was successful and customer acceptance was excellent.
- The decreasing number of subscribers was causing a decline in revenues, and something was needed to keep the publication solvent. I executed marketing programs, which integrated print, TV, direct mail, and cross-promotion opportunities. This initiative increased revenues by 15%.

Information Technology

- The growth in the number of worldwide offices led to a confusing array of incompatible software and hardware configurations. I obtained the confidence of worldwide management and developed a global information technology plan with standard applications and systems. I then obtained funding and implemented the plan during a two-year period, which improved efficiencies and generated additional revenues.
- The information technology (IT) department's systems and databases were unreliable, the systems staff was not experienced, and costs were out of control. I led a reorganization of the IT department, reducing the number of locations from seven to five and the number of IT employees from 350 to 225. I developed

new procedures to optimize performance, reduce the workforce, and control project quality. Resulting savings was in excess of \$8 million annually.

- The contract negotiation process was too lengthy and disadvantageous to the negotiating team. I led a systems project to design and develop a contract management system used by chief negotiators and lawyers when negotiating large contracts with business customers. Implementation of the system resulted in reducing the negotiating time by 75 percent and I was given the annual company productivity award.

Elevator Drill

An important element of preparation is a two-minute and a thirty-second version of your background and skills supporting the position being sought. The drill is recited upon being introduced to interviewers and other players anywhere, anytime, even during a brief elevator ride. The new acquaintance you met on the fifth floor could be your next boss. This introduction should be well rehearsed and continuously focused and refined. A version of the same drill is used during an interview in response to the “tell me about yourself” request discussed in Chapter 2. The following are the elements that should be included in the elevator drill:

- *Names of a Few Companies Where You Recently Worked, Particularly if the Companies Are Recognized and Well Known.* Working previously for a prestigious company creates the perception that the job seeker passed a tough professional test and obtained credible experience.
- *Industries in Which You Have Experience (e.g., Consumer Goods, Technology, Healthcare).* Stating one or two industries in which you have in-depth knowledge would be a big plus, especially if the person you are speaking with works in one.
- *Functional Position—Type of Position Being Sought (e.g., Web Developer, Controller, Engineer, Trainer, or Chief Executive Officer).* Support the desired functional position by stating

two or three strengths that are widely understood and marketable (e.g., for human resources: expertise in benefits, compensation structure, and 401-K administration).

- *Unique Qualification—Factors that Differentiate You from Competitors.* This is an opportunity to differentiate you from competitors by citing experiences or credentials that provide a competitive edge over other job seekers. Some examples include a combination of Fortune 500 and entrepreneurial experience when applying to a small firm, foreign language skills when approaching an international firm, or a recognized certification, such as the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) or Certified Management Consultant (CMC) designations.

Do I Ask Questions?

Yes! However, you should be in sell mode and convince interviewers that you have value to add and your previous experiences can satisfy what the company needs. Your goal in the first interview is to ask questions that show your interest and understanding of the position requirements. Establish rapport and impress interviewers before walking on the question tightrope.

As part of preparation, identify three or four questions that focus on clarifying the requirements of the position so that you can respond with your relevant experience. A by-product of preparing for the interview and asking questions is that the information you gather can be used as the basis for subsequent due diligence. Examples of questions you might ask during the interview could be: What would you view as a major accomplishment in the first six months? or Which departments does the position interact with?

A key principle is to resist the urge to ask questions that have even a remote appearance of being due diligence related, for example, how many vacation days, what are your financial projections, and what is the personality of the person my position reports to. Asking questions aimed at due diligence in early interviews will likely kill your candidacy. These questions could embarrass interviewers because the answers may reveal an inability to raise capital, an unprofitable busi-

ness, employee morale problems, or other sensitive disclosures. All such questions are too presumptuous and probing and should be asked after an offer is received, at which time you have every right to be informed of such critical information. Besides, these questions distract interviewers from assessing your experiences and skills.

Anticipate Questions to Be Asked

Every interview is filled with questions for the job seeker. Although Chapter 3 includes commonly asked questions and the rationale for recommended responses, do not stop there. Anticipate questions you might be asked about your industry, its trends, recent developments and current news items. Drilling down into the foundation of your functional and technical skills is an approach taken by some interviewers. Go to the company's web site and review open jobs they are trying to fill. Identify common job requirements and be sure to prepare for any questions that might be related to those skill requirements found in more than one job description. Review publications that list hundreds of possible interview questions. Identify a manageable number of most likely questions, list them with your planned response and practice reciting your answers in a natural, unrehearsed manner.

Practice, Practice, Practice

The best way to become proficient with interview techniques is to practice being a job seeker in an actual or simulated interview situation. Most job seekers have limited interviewing experience and should not use a real job interview as a practice session. This a great opportunity to seek help from a friend who is a recruiter, human resources executive, or hiring manager with considerable interviewing experience. Create a situation where you are interviewing for a job and your friend is conducting the interview. At the conclusion of the session, both of you will identify areas that require additional practice. Some examples might be to increase direct eye contact, speak with a confident voice, avoid slouching, be more animated, and appear more interested.

An even better approach is to rehearse using a video camera. Viewing the playback, everyone is surprised at how they sound and appear on screen, and additional areas for improvement usually are apparent with this technique. An improvement on this approach is to ask four or five friends to watch the videotaping and playback. You will get the most honest feedback from good friends.

You are now ready for your first interview. In Chapter 2, we rejoin Susan as she begins the interview game in her one-on-one interview with a vice president of human resources.