

# **You're Talking Yourself Out of Getting the Job**

## **by giving wrong answers to interview questions**

*Christian Schoyen, leading U.S. job expert, life architect, and author - ASecondLife.com*

Everyone knows that the first step to securing a job is a compelling and convincing resume. But most people don't know that the next step, the job interview, is so important that if you make a handful of common mistakes, you'll blow your chances and walk away empty-handed.

**The Problem:** You've got the right education, experience, and references, all presented on a well-put together resume. It's getting you job interviews, but no job offers.

**The harsh truth:** A good resume gets your foot in the door, but the right qualifications (background and experience) are only the first step toward getting the job. A potential employer wants to know what it would be like to have you around the office every day—your personality and attitude. That comes through in your job interview.

**The Solution:** Being prepared to properly answer the questions you'll be asked greatly increases your chances for success. Knowing what recruiters and potential employers are looking for and how they think gives you a distinct advantage.

### **The Job Interview Secrets No One Tells You**

As the founder of a successful global headhunting firm serving Fortune 500 companies for over twelve years, and author of the books: *A Second Life, God is giving you a second chance*, and *Secrets of the Executive Search Experts*, well as self help books on "how to get the job," I have coached thousands of people who have gotten the jobs they wanted. Some of the secrets I shared with them:

#### ***Don't talk yourself out of the job!***

When a prospective employer invites you to a job interview, it means your skills meet their requirements and your chances of getting the job are great. The rest is really up to you. Nine out of ten people can shift the outcome of an interview toward acceptance, rather than rejection, if they know what to do—and not do.

- Learn the questions and answers before the interview.

Before an interview, practice giving the right answers to the questions you may be asked—which are usually very universal. The potential employer wants to get to know you better; have you elaborate on your skill set; and figure out if you are a high flyer, go-

getter, just a “warm body” who will make no additional contribution outside of minimal expectations—or worse than that, a flat-liner who will actually drag down their company.

- Stay on point.

If a conversation appears casual, don't be tricked into thinking you don't need to stay on point and cover key information. Many job seekers are thrown off-balance when a potential employer asks about a hobby, non-work related activity or common interest in the middle of an interview. Answer briefly, but then get back to the real topic at hand: the work done by the company and how you can make a valuable contribution. The reality is: this interview is your only chance to get this job. So don't close your one window of opportunity by screwing up the conversation.

- How to tell them about yourself.

Every company considers it a great test to see how effectively a job candidate communicates. Practice the format and structure of possible job interview situations—meaning how to get to the point and sell yourself convincingly and engagingly.

Don't make the mistake of taking only five minutes to tell a prospective employer about yourself. The interviewer will wonder what kind of life you have if you can describe it in such a short amount of time. Don't focus completely on your skill set and say nothing about yourself as a person, or you'll lose your potential new employer before you're halfway through.

### ***Questions most commonly asked during a job interview.***

Here are the eight universal questions usually asked during a job interview, followed by how to effectively answer them:

1. Please tell me/us about yourself.

*Answering Question #1:* Focus on hard facts that the employer needs to know. First of all, convince them that you can do the job you're interviewing for. Talk about specific relevant job experiences in your background. Companies prefer, for the most part, to hire people who have successfully done the same job, or something similar, elsewhere. If our work experience matches up with what the potential employer needs to have done, then the risk factor that you'll screw up is very limited.

But before hitting the hard facts, share information about yourself as a person. Everyone likes people who start out by saying where they are originally from and a little about their personal situation. Then go on to where you went to school and run through

your work history. Big time gaps in work history are not good; neither is jumping from job to job if you don't have a good explanation for why.

2. What do you do outside of work, or what non-work related interests do you have?

*Answering Question #2:* Companies ask a job candidate this question because most really do want to hire stable people with good, balanced lives.

Incorrect answers are: "I like to hang out at the bars," or "I have no interests except for watching television." Nobody wants to hire a bar hopper or someone who spends all of their spare time glued to the television. On the other hand, having too many outside interests can give the impression that they are likely to affect the quality of your work in a very negative way. I have seen numerous occasions where people say that maintaining their social life with friends is important to them—meaning their weekly outings with friends will always be more important than deadlines at work. A negative impression can also be given when people say they engage in a lot of sports activities, either as a participant or a fan, because it can mean that adjusting their schedule to attend or view a sporting event can interfere with or be more important than any activity at the company.

For the correct answers, the key is to show there is balance in your life. Safe activities to talk about are: going to the gym, spending quality time with family, and going to church, the movies, or the theater, etc. Having a unique interest, such as astronomy or something else mainstream (meaning not bizarre), will always be a positive. And because most companies want employees who have stable lives, being married or having a boyfriend/girlfriend is a great plus.

3. What are your strong points and your weak points?

*Answering Question #3:* Many job candidates are very comfortable talking about their strong sides, but have difficulty stating weak points. Being unable to do so gives the impression that you are not good at assessing yourself—when you may hesitate because you're afraid you might not get the job. The truth is, everyone has flaws. As a recruiter I don't mind flaws as long as they don't affect the person's ability to do a good job.

If little is revealed, the trick used by many companies is to then ask, "What would your current boss say about your weak points?" And, in most situations, a company that's considering hiring you will do an extensive reference check and may ask your former bosses this question. Bottom line, by being open you will come across as a person who has nothing to hide—but don't be so honest it's ridiculous.

A highly educated young man I considered recruiting a few years ago, nonchalantly answered this question by saying, "I'm lazy. I don't like to get up early in the morning."

Needless to say, I didn't refer him for an interview. During over 3,000 recruitments I have conducted as a headhunter, not once has a client said, "Find me a lazy, arrogant job candidate with no drive and initiative."

Some examples of the best way to answer this question is by saying things such as, "I speak only English and wish I had taken time to learn another language," or "I can seem too eager because I get so involved in my work," or "I wish I were better at speaking in front of large groups." These types of answers convey weaknesses that can be overcome. It's very important that your weaknesses wouldn't affect your job performance.

4. Tell me about the previous managers/supervisors that you reported to.

*Answering Question #4:* Never talk badly about your superiors or previous superiors (or your coworkers or former coworkers, for that matter). First of all, there's nothing for you to gain by doing so. Even if you feel your previous superior was totally incompetent, saying so will only backfire by reflecting badly on you. Secondly, it's a matter of showing respect. And by giving respect to others, you gain respect yourself.

Also, as a warning, I have seen companies and recruiters get so "buddy-buddy" with a job candidate during an interview that he/she drops his/her guard and speaks the total truth about a previous boss, which later in another setting boomerangs at the candidate in a negative way. To be safe, no matter what, just don't do it.

5. Where do you see yourself in the years to come?

*Answering Question #5:* This is also a trick question. When you have nothing to say, you come across as having no aspirations whatsoever and if you say too much about big plans, it looks like you're going to leave the job when a better position or opportunity comes along.

The correct answer is: "My main interest is this job. I want to excel at it and do my very best. That's my objective and main focus. As far as the future, I would like to believe that I will become better and better at what I do. If this means I will naturally grow into another position with this company, time will tell. But again, my goal is this job and being the best that I can be in this capacity."

6. What do you know about us?

*Answering Question #6:* The way you answer this questions indicates whether you are prepared. It's very important to know as much as possible about the company where you are applying for a job. By being able to tell them what you know, they see that you are serious enough to have done some homework before arriving for your interview. Also, by learning as much as possible about the company, you will be able to ask the

right questions and engage in an intelligent conversation about the company during your interview.

The key information to learn is the size of the company, the structure, products, services, history, the market, locations, etc., as well as details of the job you're applying for. Also know about any important events relating to the company and market it operates in that have been covered in the media. This shows that you follow the news and stay up-to-date on what is going on in the world. Plus, you'll come across as being very smart and truly interested in the company if you can figure out what competitors the company has and how the company's products/services are different (better!) than the rest of market.

7. Why do you think you are a good match for this position?

*Answering Question #7:* This is your window of opportunity to put all the hard facts on the table, convey the ways in which you are a very good match and why you are so unique. Remember, just saying that you are a hard worker and a very pleasant person is a given. You need to come up with facts about what you can bring to the table that others cannot. By thoughtfully assessing yourself, your skills, and experience while approaching your job search, you will have a specific answer to this question. The things you say that stand out could determine whether you get the job or someone else gets it. So, think of facts related to your skill set, your experience, a network you may have developed, or strong job-related interests that will bear fruit in the near future.

8. What is your current salary?

*Answering Question #8:* Talking about salary can be challenging. If the new job is for a more prestigious company than your previous employer, and the new job tasks are more challenging, you may believe at the start of the process that the job is more important than the pay. But when a job offer comes through, most people change their minds, often saying something like, "But that's less than I have been making." Most companies know this will happen, so they pay close attention to the salary question to make sure they are not wasting time on the wrong candidate.

The reality is that everyone, including the job candidate, knows that when they have made a lot more money in the past and accept a big drop in pay for a new job, they are likely to grab the next position that comes along with higher pay and jump ship. This is understandable when someone has a number of years of experience and a certain lifestyle, expenses, and status quo to maintain.

When asked about salary, the trick is to first get the company to reveal a number. Your best approach is to just say, "If you feel I am a good fit for this company and this position, I am sure we will come to terms," or "The main thing is whether I fit the requirements of what you are looking for, and if that's so, I would be very happy to

receive an offer from you first, because I am very interested in this opportunity.” (Say this even if you are not.) By saying this you keep the focus on getting the job, while not disqualifying yourself because of salary demands. You can negotiate a salary once you know that you truly have their interest—by getting an offer, not before. If they know that in your current job you earn much more than the new position would pay, that’s a different story. Then you have to decide whether taking a pay cut is worth it to you, because they’re probably not going to meet or exceed your current salary.

When you learn at the start of the job search process that the salary range of a potential new job is below what you currently earn, you need to do some soul searching to decide if you still want the job. Simply ask yourself: Will this job take me further down the road to where I want to be in my career? If so, be prepared to answer their salary question truthfully by saying, “My pay today is ‘X’ amount of dollars and I know what my expenses are. I am not sure what your pay range is for this position, but I want to emphasize that at this point in my life, I seek to learn more and expand my skill set. This is more important to me than anything else, even if it means taking a pay cut.”

On the other hand, if you have no other choice but to accept a salary cut—whether it’s due to a bad economy, the chance that your current job may be eliminated, or because you feel unhappy and unfulfilled in your current job—ask yourself if this may be a chance to go in a better direction in life, where you will be experiencing new values and beliefs that can help you grow and evolve. If you believe this is correct, sincerely say to the hiring company that you are venturing into new territory where you genuinely want to try something new and different, and that the position in question is therefore of great interest to you.

Being honest—with yourself and your potential new employer—is the key here. Turn around and imagine that you are a company that is hiring. You don’t want to go through the entire hiring process and then shortly afterward see your new employee jump ship. Being honest will never backfire on you.

People need to look at the long term and understand that their own best interests should be driven by seeking knowledge and job growth more than immediate gratification, because the payoff down the road will be tremendously higher than just working for the paycheck and the ego. A hunger for more and more money is such a strong driving force that many people even go into fields/jobs/careers that don’t provide them with much fulfillment besides making money. Money is important, in that you should always try to ensure that you are paid market rate. But you should never turn down great opportunities because of greed for a short-term paycheck when the long-term payoff is usually greater when you are driven by a quest for knowledge in areas where your passions can thrive.

A proven system for making your job search more successful is detailed in the life manual, *A Second Life, God is giving you a second chance*. It contains an extensive chapter with detailed guidance on how to find a job, interview tips, winning the job and creating a job insurance policy once you've got the job. It also tells you how to fully develop all five key areas of life, so that if you are struggling in the job market, you won't feel like the world is going to end. Go to the Web site: [ASecondLife.com](http://ASecondLife.com) to download a free book excerpt and articles containing more job/career tips.