

In Part One of this interview, Tim looks at the best way to approach and prepare for that winning job interview.

As a successful career coach, Tim is often asked about questions that employers are likely to ask during the recruitment process.

‘It’s not that straightforward’, Tim explains, ‘interviews with an employer or a selection panel is not about providing formulaic answers to a bunch of questions. Nor is an interview a knowledge test, memory test or a test of eloquence’.

Hiring discussions or interviews provide the opportunity to show:

- **your values, passion, skills, experience, and talent, and**
- **why you are the perfect fit for the role, the team, and the organisation.**

Tim adds ‘employers want to see two key things during any interaction with a future employee – **authenticity**, and **leadership potential**, regardless of whether they are applying for CEO, manager, team leader or team member’.

Tim proposes that there are **three parts to any job interview or conversation**.

- The beginning (how to arrive)
- The middle (the content; answering the employer’s or selection panel’s questions)
- The end (how to successfully leave the room or end the call)

‘When I am working with my clients, we always tend to start with the questions as it empowers them to own the process from the very beginning, which in turn builds confidence and interest’.

Tim breaks down preparation for an interview into:

- Understanding the structure,
- recognising the intent behind each question, and
- techniques for answering the questions.

‘**Interview questions can be categorised into groups or clusters**. While the questions may seem straightforward, understanding the intent of the questions ensures that your answers will help the employer gain knowledge about you rather than delivering a formulaic answer that you think they want to hear’.

Tim provides some insight into the clusters:

- **Why do you want this job?** (A values question – how do you connect to the mission, vision, and values of your potential employer?).
- **What are your strengths and what are your opportunities for growth?** (Strengths can be straightforward – and for some a favourite topic – but you need to demonstrate authenticity and honesty about areas for improvement).
- **What is your leadership and/or management style?** (Complementary but different – this question is an important question if you are applying for any leadership position).

- **What are the challenges this agency/sector/market/business will face in the next three to five years?** (This question has many facets, but at its base is to see what you know about your potential employer but also to hear your ideas about how to meet their potential challenges).
- **If you were successful, what would be the things you would do in the next three to six months?** (is the focus key performance indicators and deliverables, or team members, or both?).
- **Tell me about a time when...?** (You will need to consider a range of scenario questions to see how you responded to real world successes and challenges – have you been learning and developing during your career?).

Arjun (one of Tim's clients) was grateful to have this insight before he was interviewed for promotion. 'I was far more confident before and during the interview having reflected on answers to these potential questions. I walked in the interview with my collected thoughts in my 'imaginary toolbelt'. When I was asked about what challenges me in the workplace, my answer was truthful and considered. And my referees acknowledged that I was self-aware and actively working on my weaknesses which was one of the reasons why I got the job'.

Tim adds that it is **not just about the content, but how you answer the questions**.

'I encourage my clients to answer succinctly, then provide the detail. It not only removes the waffle, but it enables you to keep within any time limits that have been established at the outset of the interview or discussion'.

- If you are asked what your strengths are, list them out (e.g., energetic, conceptual, logical, and dynamic) and then provide examples.
- If you are asked what are four challenges that face the agency, list them out (e.g., new legislation, rapid technological change, workforce recruitment and retention) and then provide details.

'Not only have you answered the question, but you may not have to explain each one. When the employer becomes comfortable that you have breadth and depth of knowledge, they are likely to move onto the next question.

Another one of Tim's clients, Juliette, **really liked Tim's analogy of the bridge and the valley**. 'I provided answers that allowed the employer to 'walk over the bridge' with me so they quickly understood my skills, experience and potential in the position and the department. I shudder to think about previous interviews where I 'waffled my way down the valley and the panel and I got lost in my word jungle'. My new Senior Executive has even asked me to train and mentor graduates in how to effectively brief members of the senior leadership team'.

Another key component of answering questions is to ensure that you take each answer to the **outcome – not just the outputs or actions**.

Tim explains 'If you are using an example of running a program or project, you want to link the success to the big picture not just good administration. So being on time and within budget is good, but when you can add what the program or project was established to deliver is key.

For example, building a hospital on time and within budget is good, but adding "and now the hospital has additional annual savings in operating efficiencies by combining two campuses resulting in more money for direct healthcare, has reduced ambulance commute times, and has a community health program that has reduced hospital admissions" connects the answer directly to the vision, mission, and strategy. This part of the preparation can take a bit of effort, but it will certainly make you stand out from other candidates.

Experienced coach Kylie Holyland of Ascend HR says that many of the people she works with get confused about how to provide evidence or to structure examples. 'I sometimes see people contorting their responses and experience to fit the STAR model and losing all ability to be focused and clear about what they bring to the role". Using Tim's interview structure makes life easier for the applicant, and assists the interview panel to focus on what really matters. Nothing is as tiring for an interview panel as sifting for the gold in a poorly structured answer'.

Tim concludes by saying 'there more nuance and subtlety to the clusters that can be explained during this short interview. I encourage potential or current job applicants to reach out to me so I can help you better define your life and career objectives, assess skills and strengths, and identify opportunities. If required, I can assist you to construct written applications, develop your LinkedIn profile, prepare for interview, and select personal and professional referees. Coaching packages are tailored to meet your needs and your budget'.

As we now know, job interviews are not providing formulaic answers to the employer's questions. **In Part Two**, we will ask Tim about how to arrive and successfully leave the room or end the call.