

Conversation 23 – Real Interview Tips that Work

Purpose: This conversation will help you think about key points in preparing for a potential career-changing interview.

Background: Throughout my career, I have interviewed hundreds of people for positions ranging from entry-level laborers to executives (including corporate, non-profit, and higher education leaders with earned doctorates). For over thirty-five years in my various jobs, I've observed several key points worth sharing.

I strongly encourage folks to read through tips on LinkedIn, Handshake, and other job boards. But then, I challenge them to consider where they are now, and whether they're ready for an interview.

What are some of the most important things to consider when preparing for an interview?

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This is a tricky question because, arguably, there is no correct answer. Please read on. I outline some basics below.

Preparation to Ensure Success: The purpose of an interview is to showcase your skills, experience, and personality to a hiring manager or team in a short amount of time. That window may be in person, or online. This can be stressful but managed with some simple preparation. Here are the basics:

1. **Research the company:** Learn all about the job and the company. Know their mission, history, products, and services. The best candidates I have ever interviewed were those who related their *personal mission* to our *corporate mission*.

Pop quiz: In less than ten words, what is your personal mission?

2. **Practice your responses:** Be familiar with common interview questions. Practice responding with a friend or family member. Articulate your skills and experience in a clear and concise manner.

Who will invest an hour with you to do this? _____

3. **Dress appropriately:** Whether in person or online, dress professionally. Our society judges people on *first impressions*. If online, position your camera to frame a positive background or scene.
4. **Be on time:** Arrive on time or log in early. This punctuality shows your respect for the interviewer's time.
5. **Listen:** Instead of formulating responses in your mind, listen carefully to the interviewer's questions. Feel free to pause, reflect, and then provide examples of your experience.

Pop quiz: What are 3 tips for listening well?

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6. **Follow up:** After the interview, send a thank you email or note to the interviewer.

These six tips are rather generic, but there is the one key that is sometimes missed:

During the interview, you must convey how your education, experience, and personal mission align with their corporate mission. Say aloud: "I want my work to help move (the organization) toward your mission of x, y, z." (Fill in with their mission brief.)

Connecting your personal mission to their corporate mission will greatly enhance your potential of landing the job. You are demonstrating your understanding of the proverbial big picture, not just a task that you know how to do or a discipline in which you have a degree.

A lot of interviews will open with this: "Tell us a little bit about yourself."

Challenge: How will you begin your response? (This is key. You need to have a clear, strong opener.) For example:

I want to help _____ (organization) accomplish its bottom-line mission of _____ (2 or 3 words from their mission) by...

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Summary: Even if you are not actively looking for a new job, if you consciously work to demonstrate how your professional mission supports your organization's mission, you may receive offers or promotions that you had not even thought about.

General Reflections:

One thing that struck me about this topic was: _____

I'm still pondering (*and may seek more information on*): _____

As a result of this reflection, I plan to: _____