



MATRIX®



Job Interview Guide

How to stand out from the crowd

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Understanding the Virtual Interview

For better or for worse, remote working has permanently altered the hiring landscape. Hiring managers must face new realities when it comes to sourcing, interviewing, and hiring top candidates.

What are candidates doing to stand out in virtual interviews and how are they making themselves look attractive to employers?

Virtual interviews pre-COVID were not as good as they are today. Especially with the professional hires, today people are really taking it seriously because they know they may not get another shot to connect with hiring managers in a more personal or in-person way. So, they are dressing up a little bit more and preparing better for virtual interviews.

Some things should seem obvious:

- **Don't take your interview in your bed.**
- **Make sure you have a good background behind you.**
- **Sit up straight.**
- **Smile and be engaged.**
- **Make eye contact.**

Even on the very high-level technology roles, with individuals who can code with the best of them; some managers are quick to reject candidates if they don't think the candidates have taken the interview seriously.

We've even had clients reschedule interviews at the last minute and say, 'hey, I can't talk to you now, can we reschedule in an hour?' And then an hour later, the candidate is driving in their car for a previously scheduled appointment, and obviously distracted during the interview. That can be a deal killer. So, if schedules do change, try to pick a new time where you are in a good interview environment and can focus

Clearly, we're still trying to figure it all out and need to give each other some leeway. Even with the best intentions, sometimes the Wi-Fi is going to go out, or a dog's going to bark because a package just got delivered. Hiring managers are in the same situation as the candidates at home, and they probably see those things happen on meetings they have internally with their teams. Everyone needs to be agile and empathetic.

Prepping for a Virtual Interview

1 Practice & Prep.

Whether you are recording a one-way video interview or attending a two-way Zoom call, practice filming yourself talking about your resume/experience as a way to warm up to the camera. Think of some of the commonly asked interview questions and rehearse your answers, looking directly into the camera. Also make sure the camera is at eye level or a little higher. When the camera is too low then the interviewer can be looking up your nose – which is not flattering for anyone!. Questions such as “Tell me about your background” or “Please explain why you are a fit for this position” are good questions to practice with. Practice with your recruiter, a friend or family member over Zoom to see how you look and sound. Your recruiter will be able to coach you on your presentation and may be able to share some of the hiring manager’s “hot buttons”.

2 Check for technical issues such as internet bandwidth and noisy feedback.

Get that ironed out before the actual call so you can ensure there are no technical glitches. Generally speaking, it is better to join a Zoom or Skype call using your phone for the audio and be careful not to join both via phone and computer audio or you will get terrible sound feedback. An easy way around that is to use headphones with your phone and mute your computer while you use that for the visual aspect.

3 Prepare your background.

Proper lighting and background are important to consider. Natural lighting works best. Being near a window is great if the light shines on your face. Having a window behind you can create a lot of glare and can create a silhouette effect which makes it difficult for the interviewer to see your face. Do not take a Zoom interview or record a video interview in your car, outdoors, or in your home with children or pets in the background making noise. Your barking dog is not cute during an interview. Make sure you are in a well-lit, clutter-free room.

4 Close out your other apps

It’s a good idea to close out any apps you have running before beginning the interview. Email or Facebook notification sounds are unprofessional and a distraction. The only thing you should have in front of you during a Zoom interview is the interviewer and your resume/ notes. If you are looking away from the camera frequently, or checking your phone, you will come across as disinterested.

5 Be an Active Listener.

Maintaining natural eye contact during a video interview means you look at the camera and not the screen (this take a little practice). If you look at the screen, it could seem like you are staring downwards, which won’t leave a good impression. Smile, nod your head in agreement and use words of acknowledgment when the interviewer is speaking. Ask thoughtful questions to show interest and preparation, but never interrupt the speaker. Asking for clarification on points he or she is making shows you are actively listening and engaged.. Feel free to ask the interviewer if it is ok to take notes during the interview. Having a pen and a notebook in your hand will keep your hands occupied and show that you are engaged and interested.

Handling Open-Ended Questions with the STAR Method

You're in a job interview, and things are going well. You've engaged in some friendly small talk with the hiring manager, and you're nailing your answers to the questions you're being asked.

Just when you start thinking you have this interview cinched, you hear the interviewer ask, "Tell me about a time when..."

For some, open-ended interview questions are tough to answer. You must think quickly on your feet. That's why they ask the questions that way - to test you under pressure.

Here's the good news. There's a strategy you can use to come up with impressive answers: the STAR (situation-task-action-result) interview method.

What is the STAR interview method?

The STAR interview technique offers a straightforward format to answer behavioral interview questions — prompts that ask you to provide a real-life example of how you handled a certain kind of situation in the past.

They often have telltale openings like:

- **"Describe a situation when..."**
- **"What do you do when..."**
- **"Have you ever..."**
- **"Give me an example of..."**

Thinking of a fitting example for your response is just the beginning. You also need to share the details in a compelling and easy-to-understand way, without rambling and giving an unfocused response.

The STAR method is a structured manner of responding to a behavioral-based interview question by discussing the specific situation, task, action, and result of the situation you are describing. It also gives you a chance to highlight how you use your professional experience, abilities, and personal strengths to overcome business challenges and meet goals.

The key is to answer these open-ended questions with a solid example to give the manager more confidence in your abilities.

- **Situation:** Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.
- **Task:** What goal were you working toward?
- **Action:** Describe the actions you took to address the situation with an appropriate amount of detail and keep the focus on your role. What specific steps did you take and what was your individual contribution? Be careful that you don't describe what the team or group did when talking about a project, but what you did. Use "I," not "we", when describing actions.
- **Result:** Describe the outcome of your actions and don't be shy about taking credit for your behavior. What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? Make sure your answer contains multiple positive results.

Make sure you are giving clear and concise responses, while also demonstrating good depth of knowledge. Don't hesitate to ask for validation – did I answer your question?

Prior to your interview, search on the internet for "common interview questions" and think ahead about common questions relating to your skills set and the requirements for the job – prepare your STARS in advance. Practice your answers to make sure they are clear and concise. Have both the job description and your resume printed in front of you for reference during the interview.

Have examples and be prepared to answer questions relating to:

- **Managing project from beginning to end**
- **Project phases**
- **Project control processes**
- **Funding approval experience**
- **Relationship management**
- **Risk mitigation planning**
- **Navigating the organization**
- **Negotiation**
- **Interaction with key stakeholders**
- **Communication**
- **Creative thinking**
- **Attention to detail**
- **Adaptability**
- **Escalation**
- **Thinking on your feet**
- **Systematic problem solving**

Answering the Hardest Interview Question: “What Is Your Biggest Weakness?”

Your main goal in an interview is to show your strengths and answer why you would be the best fit for the job. When the tables turn and the interviewer asks what your biggest weakness is, many candidates freeze. You do not want them to know why not to hire you. But there is an easy way to answer this question without ruining your chances.

First, be honest. But counteract that weakness with its corresponding strength. By using the list below, you can turn this question into another chance to show off your strengths.

Disorganized	---	Creative
Inflexible	---	Organized
Stubborn	---	Dedicated
Inconsistent	---	Flexible
Obnoxious	---	Enthusiastic
Emotionless	---	Calm
Shy	---	Reflective
Irresponsible	---	Adventurous
Boring	---	Responsible
Unrealistic	---	Positive
Negative	---	Realistic
Intimidating	---	Assertive
Weak	---	Humble
Arrogant	---	Self-Confident
Indecisive	---	Patient
Impatient	---	Passionate

Source: Dave Kerpen, CEO, Likeable Local, NY Times Best-Selling Author & Keynote Speaker

Examples of how this could work for you during the interview:

- *“My biggest weakness is that I can be stubborn, but this is because I’m dedicated to every decision I make and every task I encounter.”*
- *“My biggest weakness is that I can be overcome by my strongest passions. Unfortunately, that can come off as impatient, but I apply my passionate thinking to everything I set my mind to.”*
- *“My biggest weakness is that I am an optimist, sometimes to my detriment. In most settings, my positivity is appreciated, but sometimes this can lead to unrealistic goals and aspirations in the workplace. It is something I am continuously trying to improve.”*

Closing the Deal on a Job Interview

Want to improve your chances for landing a job? Take a page from the successful sales approach. It's all about closing. All sales reps must close the deal, or they risk losing a prospective client. Guess what? The job interview is a sales process. You are selling yourself to the hiring manager for a job.

How many times have you concluded an interview not knowing how it went? Or thinking it went well—but not getting the job offer? Closing helps you avoid those problems.

Here are three “closing” questions you can ask toward the end of an interview that will help you do just that.

Disclaimer: This advice doesn't work for every job interview, or every hiring manager. Use your judgment on when it makes sense to use these approaches.

1

“What does your dream candidate look like?”

If somebody was to come along and have the perfect interview, or perfect resume, what would that look like? When you ask this question, you will get raw, unfiltered data which allows you to position yourself as that ideal candidate if you possess those qualities. Whatever answer the hiring manager gives, flip it around and talk about how you fulfill those qualities. If they say the ideal candidate has 10 years of experience, and you only have five years, you can talk about how your experience is worth 10 because of x, y, or z.

2

“I am really interested in this role. Are there any questions or doubts you have about my ability to do it?”

This is a reverse question because it tries to uncover any issues that might hold the interviewer back from hiring you and gives you the opportunity to discuss those concerns before you leave the interview. If you don't ask this question, the hiring manager will still have doubts and won't have an answer from you to overcome them. Your fate will be sealed. By opening the door to highlight a perceived deficiency, you are positioning yourself as somebody who is willing to work to overcome it. This tactic may work or may not depending on the severity of the doubt. However, you will never know if you don't ask the question. If you don't land the job, the net effect is that both you and the hiring manager realize the job is not for you. If you know you are not qualified, then it is a mismatch anyway.

3

“Do you have any feedback on how I presented myself?”

Hiring managers are interviewing people every day. By asking this not-so-traditional question, you differentiate yourself from all the rest. They will remember you as the person who really wants to knock it out of the park. Additionally, you'll be able to take direct feedback and implement it in your next interview.

In sales, it is a proven theory that if you can overcome your prospect's objections, they will have no choice but to agree to your offer. And while you are not doing the exact same thing for the same reasons, the logic holds true for landing a job. You are selling you. “Here's your problem. I am the solution. Do we want to move forward?”

Standing Out After the Interview

The Classic "Thank You" Letter (or Email)

It seems almost too easy. A simple thank you note that reviews what you talked about, and why you feel optimistic about the position and/or company. The personal touch that you add to this will be what sets you apart from the 20-100 other applicants. The interviewer will also be impressed that you paid attention to the small details of the process.

A Phone Call

Interestingly enough, following up 1-2 times a week during the interview process lets the manager know that you really want the position. The hardest workers in the world tend to be a bit pushy, but only because they know what they want, and will do whatever it takes to get it.

The Personal Touch

During the interview process, pay attention to what you talk about. Does the manager like sports? Do they like music? Do they enjoy literature? Whatever it is, find out. Once your second or third interview is complete, put something together that he/she would appreciate, and would tell them that you cared enough to be attentive to the small things. This creates a link between yourself and the manager, and something that could set you apart in the end.

Ask Questions (that you didn't ask in the interview)

Always be prepared to ask questions. Better yet, do research so that your questions show that you know things that you shouldn't yet. This can be very impressive to managers because it shows that you put in the effort to learn the company or industry. Nothing says "dedicated to this opportunity" more than putting personal time into it. That said, we all tend to forget things when the moment arises. This is another reason that the follow-up is so important; you can ask those questions. Plus, these managers do not want to be pressured to make the final decision too quickly. By devising a set of comprehensive and fact-based questions, you can add something to each call. Be honest. Tell the manager that you forgot to ask, or that you came across a new bit of information that you thought was interesting. This keeps your name in the manager's head and lets them know that you are still very focused on earning the position.

Do What You Say You Will Do

This will be, by far, the most important follow up. If you say that you will call them at 3, call them exactly at 3. Nothing is more frustrating than doing someone a favor and having them thank you by wasting your time. Not only this, but when a manager hires you, he/she is expecting to get what you presented yourself as in the interview. A candidate cannot rave about their dedication, hard work, and organization, then prove none of it when they begin the job.

About MATRIX

MATRIX pinpoints the solutions you need to discover and develop high-performing teams. Our blend of IT & professional staffing and agile consulting will take you further, faster.