

YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO CAREER
SUCCESS

The Professional Guide to Nailing Your Interview
by Mike Anderson

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Introduction

A little background on me, and why I am writing this book. I have more than thirty years of front line business experience in several industries. I have been a C level executive for the better part of the last fifteen years. For those of you who may be unfamiliar with the term “C” level executive, the “C” stands for Chief as in Chief Executive Officer, also known as the CEO. Most companies have a number of C level executives running the business. Those executives go by the title of CEO or Chief Executive Officer, COO or Chief Operating Officer, CFO or Chief Financial Officer, CIO or Chief Information Officer and CMO or Chief Marketing Officer. The C level executives are the highest six to eight executives that set the strategy for the business.

During my time in the C level suite, I have had many opportunities to read thousands of resumes, interview hundreds of candidates, and hire scores of employees. (By the way, a *score* is the verbal description of twenty of something.) Many of those candidates have been incredibly well prepared and impressed me with their resumes. Others seemed to write their resume on the back of a napkin during lunch, full of typos and misinformation, and didn't even know what business the company for which they were interviewing was even in. Sometimes, even when their resume was well done, they interviewed in such a horrible, unprepared way that I almost felt compelled to give them the answers to the questions I was asking. I did not of course, but the interview was probably more painful for me than it was for them. The questions most interviewers ask are all well known and for which are very easy to prepare.

For these reasons and many others, I have decided to write this series of eBooks to share my experience and to give you access to one of the people, a C level executive who is responsible for making the hiring decision for your dream job. I hope that after you read these books you will be able to obtain your dream job, move up the corporate ladder, and eventually help someone else you feel may be deserving.

Thank you,

Mike Anderson

email: mike.anderson@directyourcareer.com

Part One – They called, now what?

So, you check your voice mail for the 100th time, frustrated that you've sent out a gazillion resumes, but no one has called you back. You dial the numbers, enter in your password, listen to your friends tell you about their day, your Mom is upset that you never call, and a telemarketer wants to know if you need someone to clean your carpet - “buy one room and get two free.” Ugh, why can't I get a call back???



But, then you strike gold. “Hello, Michelle, this is Janet Murphy from Acme Industries. We've received your resume, and we would like to schedule an interview with you. Please call me at 713-555-1233 at your convenience. Thank you.”

Oh, my, gosh!!! Someone called! What do I do? What should I wear? I, I, I Wait. Breathe. Be calm. First, be sure not to delete that the voice mail. Did you write down the number, the caller's name, and the company? Get a pen. Get some paper.

But DO NOT DELETE THAT VOICE MAIL!!!

Ok, I am exaggerating a little, but not completely. So what *do* you do now?

Well, of course you have to call them back. But, before you do, you need to

prepare yourself. The first thing you need to do is to re-read the resume that you sent Acme. If you've read my book “The Professional Guide to Creating a Killer Resume”, you’ve probably tailored the resume you sent to Acme to the industry they are in and the specific job to which you are applying. Therefore, you need to re-read it in an effort to understand what Janet Murphy may be interested in. By re-reading your resume you will be in tune with the persona you were trying to present to them. In other words, if you applied for a sales job, you need to remember the key points of your sales experience. If the position was in Marketing or Communications, then Ms. Murphy may want to know about those points. You simply want to be prepared.

Next, gather your thoughts. You want to be calm, but enthusiastic. The call may go very easily, but if the phone call is a short phone interview, you need to be prepared for that situation as well. You need to have collected your thoughts and have your wits about you. Sorry for saying, but don't call when you are tired, stressed, in a bad mood, or hung over. Make sure you are as sharp and witty as you would want to be for a face to face interview.

The third point is to make sure you have a quiet, private place to call her, and that you have time to talk. Invariably the interviewer will ask “Is this a good time to talk?” That is because they are employees too. They understand the risk candidates take by calling their prospective new employer from their current job. So, make certain you have a private place, and time to talk. The place could be your home, your car, or just outside.

The bottom line is that you have one chance to make a good first impression, and

even though Ms. Murphy is only the first interviewer, she is also the gatekeeper. She may not have the power to hire you, but she probably has the authority to put you in the “No” pile just from this call. Your mission is to get past her and get yourself a face to face meeting.

Lastly, have paper, pen and a calendar at the ready. She may be telling you things you want to write down to review later. Some of things she may tell you is with whom you will interview, what to wear (although we will discuss that later), what to bring if anything, the address of the interview, phone numbers, and of course the date and time. You need to have your calendar ready so you can book the meeting and avoid making an awkward callback later to reschedule.

So, are you ready? I think you are – go ahead and call her. It will go fine.

Part Two – Research the company

So, you made the call. It lasted about twenty minutes, you were great, and Ms. Murphy was impressed enough to set up a face to face interview. You are going to meet with her, and then the hiring authority – aka “your new boss”. You have the date and time of the interview, the address and phone number of the office, the names of all the interviewers and their titles. She suggested that you bring several copies of your resume, but even if she didn't tell you to do so, you should **always bring at least three copies of your resume**. It really isn't their responsibility to have copies for everyone – it is your responsibility.

So now what do you do?



One of the biggest mistakes many candidates make is to not adequately research your new company before the interview. Learning about your prospective employer will

not only make you appear more prepared, but will actually give you more confidence.

And, with so much information available on line, that there is no excuse for not knowing as much about your prospective employer as would any current employee.

There are three major areas that you need to learn about:

- 1) products or services – What do they make or sell?
- 2) financials – What are their sales revenue, profitability, who is on the management team, the current stock price, and the historical performance of the stock.
- 3) corporate history and culture – How old is the company? Is the founder alive and involved? Do they wear jeans and tee-shirts or business suits?

Why do you want to know all this?

Well, there are many reasons, but mostly so that you are prepared for your interview. The interview may turn to a discussion of the company's products. If that is the case, you want to already know what they make, or services they provide. Or, if you knew that your new company was not profitable, the target of a takeover, or has had several senior managers come and go in a short time, you may not want to take a job with them, but that is your decision and knowing that upfront simply makes making that decision more factually based, and not full of surprises. Lastly, the reason you want to understand their culture is that if it is too loose or too strict for your personality type, you may not be a good fit to leave your current position. I worked somewhere once where you were allowed to bring your dog to work. I was ok with it, but there were a number of people who were not comfortable with barking dogs around the office

all the time.

There are a number of resources available to get information on your new employer. The first place to go is the company's own website. Companies use their website to tell customers what is going on in the company. You can find out the company's history, where the corporate headquarters are located, how many locations, offices, factories, or stores they have, and where they are located. You might learn they are a subsidiary of a larger company, or the parent organization. You can learn about the products and services provided, and you can often learn about the corporate history. I recently read a corporate website and found many funny pictures of the senior management team, giving me the impression that they felt having fun at work was important to them. Spend some time on your prospective employer's website. You will be surprised at what you can learn.

If your new company is a public company (ie: publicly trading stock on Wall Street like IBM or Wal-Mart), you can find out about them using Yahoo or Google. If you go to either search engine, you can enter their name and find out all sorts of things about them. You will see their stock symbol, the history of the stock, a company profile and a summary of the top five members of the management team, including bio's and compensation.

You can also look at whether the senior management team is buying or selling stock. Why is that important? Well, insiders will sometimes dump their stock if they feel it may go down when the public hears profit numbers. While that is an only a small indication of a company's success, I can say that if all members of management are

selling the stock of their own company, something may be amiss.

You can also find discussion boards on google and yahoo financial pages where stockholders and interested parties talk openly about the company. Those are basically “chat forums” where anyone can post anything they want. Much of that information is not accurate and simple company bashing, but it is amazing what you can learn from happy and unhappy stock holders. You could even post an anonymous question asking if Acme is a good company to work for, and what the benefits are. Don't necessarily accept the answer, but see what feedback you do get.

If your prospective employer is not a public company, it may be more difficult to find out information about them, but it is not impossible.

The first thing I suggest you do is to still start with google or yahoo, but also go to hoovers.com. This is a membership website, but you can get a huge amount of information for free as well. You will see information about the management team, sales, and a company profile. If you are a senior executive, you may want to invest in a Hoovers membership to get to the really detailed information.

You can also use LinkedIn, Facebook, MySpace and all of the other social networks to find out about the company, the person with whom you are interviewing, the culture, and whether you want to work there. Remember, some of the feedback you receive will be “sour grapes” from haters, so don't believe everything you hear.

Essentially, find out what you can before you go in.

Know the company, and why you want to work there.

Part Three – Dress for success

Ok, you've made it through the phone interview and now they want you to come into the office for a face to face meeting. It's too late to lose 10 pounds, and too late to go get a quick tan (well, I supposed a spray on would work) and you can't exactly get that MBA you were thinking about. All you can do at this point is get a haircut and make sure you dress for success.

Male or female, you must dress appropriately for your interview. When you arrive at the reception area for your interview, you will be immediately judged by your appearance. This is not the time to wear your best “gangsta” look or a plunging neckline revealing some very attractive, albeit inappropriate assets. Unless you are applying for a job dancing, you will get no points for that. You must dress appropriately and conservatively.



First, no matter what the HR department told you, if you are applying for an office position, you must business attire, or business casual attire. For men, this means that you must wear a sports coat and matching pants. If you have it already, I always suggest a blue blazer and gray pants. You do not have to do this, but I can tell you from

experience that wearing that outfit will not offend anyone and is generally more than acceptable in any situation. I suggest a white or light blue shirt and dark red or burgundy colored tie. If you don't know how to tie a tie, buy a clip-on or go to youtube and learn. And if you decide to learn, practice it many times before the of your interview to reduce stress. Lastly, wear black shoes and a black belt. Many of you don't know that your belt and shoes are supposed to match, but many people do and will notice it, believe or not. And make sure your shoes are clean, in good shape and shined. Men do not notice shoes as much as women do, but you don't know with whom you will be interviewing, so be prepared.

If you are sure that jacket and tie would be overdressing for the position, then go with something business casual, but make sure you are very appropriately dressed and that your colors coordinate. I suggest dark blue Docker-style pants, and black belt and shoes, and a light colored shirt either white or light blue. If you decide to wear a tie, make sure it matches. If you decide you don't, then be sure your tee shirt is clean and not tattered, and I suggest a buttoned down color.

For women, it is essentially the same. If you are interviewing for an office position, you must wear a conservative, dark colored business suit with jacket. Do not wear your skirt too short, or your neckline plunging or more than one button open. I know this sounds rather puritanical, but you are being judged by your appearance as well, and do not need anyone jumping to false conclusions about you.



For hair and make-up, less is more. Do not make yourself up as if you were going out on Saturday night. Be careful with the amount you use, and the colors of lipstick, nails and eyes. Smokey, dark eyes and bright red lips and nails will not say “I am ready to work” and some interviewers will prejudge you.

For both genders, be careful about how much perfume or cologne you wear. Two squirts is plenty for any interview. You don't want your scent to enter well before you do or to be left behind long after you've left. All things in moderation should be your code.

Make sure you have impeccable grooming. Shower that morning, and make sure your nails are clipped and clean. Look for dirt, paint, chipped nail polish, or grease on your hands. You will be shaking a lot, so be certain you are clean. Wash your hair thoroughly, make you brush your teeth and use mouthwash. If you need to touch up your roots, do so. Humans are quite visual and will judge you on your appearance.

Silly points? Maybe, but I would rather tell you than to have you lose the job over a poppy seed stuck in your teeth.

Last thing is get a good nights rest. Get to bed early so you wake-up refreshed, clear-eyed, and ready to go. Don't drink the previous night and you won't have any trouble sleeping or getting up. You want to have clear eyes, be in good voice, and have no puffy bags under your eyes.

Ok, you look fantastic, smell good, and are perfectly dressed!!

Good luck and go get'em!!!

Part Four – The Interview

The interview is scheduled for 9 a.m. You think you know the directions to the location, you have plenty of gas and all systems are go. I suggest you should give yourself enough time to arrive 15 minutes early. That way if you run into traffic or get lost, you have time to recover.

Last minute check list -

Dressed conservatively? ✓

Shoes clean? ✓

Cell phone? ✓

Three copies of your resume? ✓

Directions and any information Ms. Murphy gave you? ✓

Phone numbers to contact Acme if you get lost? ✓

Great! Looks you are ready to go.

You arrive at Acme without incident. You park in the visitors parking area. Before getting out of the car, turn your cell completely off, or put it on silent, not vibrate. Now you can go inside to the reception area and politely tell the receptionist your name and that you are there to see Janet Murphy. Don't add anything to that unless asked. She most likely doesn't care anyway.

You sit down and wait for a bit, and sharply at 9 a.m. Ms. Murphy comes out to greet you. She is very pleasant, smiling, and extending her hand to shake yours, saying “Hello Michelle, I'm Janet Murphy. It is a pleasure to meet you.”

You stand up, smile, and look confidently in her eyes. You shake her hand, giving her a firm grip (without breaking any fingers), and say it is very nice to meet her as well.

She takes you back to an interview room. She asks if she can get you anything, but you should decline. Never ask anyone to get you anything unless you just need it, like a water.

Most of the questions she is about to ask you really just a “chemistry test” similar to the ones she asked you on the phone. She will ask you to tell her about yourself. You should be prepared to talk about your current job, or if you are just out of college, what you want to do in life. She really isn't looking for right answers at this, just wrong ones. Her job is to size you up, not to hire you.



Don't say anything negative about your current employer. Don't talk about your job, co-workers or boss. Never come off as anything other than a happy employee

looking to better yourself.

Do not make jokes. You may be a really funny guy, and all your friends may tell you that, but this is not the time to be funny. Your job is to get this job. No one cares how witty you are.

Try to give short answers and not go on and on looking for the right answer. Interviewers have a built-in B.S. meter, so don't try to snow them. Just answer the question, or admit if you don't know the answer. That honesty will go a lot further than a made up answer will.

Don't be flirty with the interviewer. That can only end-up awkward no matter what, so just don't. This should go without saying, but do not use vulgar or profane language.

Once you get passed Ms. Murphy, the real interview begins. Good interviewers will ask a lot of open-ended questions to simply see how articulate you are. They want to hear your thought process and how you might reason out the answer to a problem. I have heard questions like “tell me about the best boss for whom you have ever worked.”

The goal of a question like that is to see what kind of boss you like, and therefore what kind of employee you might be. If you say something like “Well, my favorite boss just gave me the task to do and let me do it. He didn't come by every ten minutes to see how I was doing.” That answer says you are a self starter.

Some questions are more philosophical. They want to test your honesty. Don't try to out-think the interviewer. Just answer the question honestly. There is no upside

in trying to guess the right answer, but there is plenty of downside.

You need to be prepared for all sorts of questions during your interview. Some may be about your knowledge, some are a chemistry test (will you fit in the department), and others will be open-ended questions that are designed to simply allow you to talk. I have often asked open-ended questions to see if the candidate is articulate. Be prepared for this part of the interview by studying your resume. Know what you have written as your interviewer may ask you to explain something you claim to have done. Be prepared for the typical questions like "what are your strengths", "what are your weaknesses", "where do you want to be in five years".

Those questions always seem to come up, so be prepared.



Where do I see myself in five years? Right now, I'm seeing myself in your office... standing over your body, revolver in hand... I pull my resume out of your filing cabinet, slowly crumple it, and drop it onto your mangled corpse. Then I'm like "Vacation approved!" as I walk out the door.

Could be as soon as three years. You never know.

Sometimes interviewers will accidentally ask questions that are illegal in the U.S. They cannot ask you your age for example, but will sometimes ask what year you graduated high school to try to calculate your age. If you feel the question is inappropriate, try to dance around it and answer it vaguely. If they persist in getting an answer, call them on it and decide right then and there that you don't want to work for them. I promise, unless you are desperate for a job, that behavior is a flag that will make working there miserable later. Go to <http://www.hrworld.com/features/30-interview-questions-111507/> to see a list of illegal interview questions to see examples of what I mean.

If asked about your salary expectations, try to say that you are open. Many times the budget for the position may be lower than what your needs are, but hiring authorities have much more latitude to change the salary, and will do so if they like you. If they persist with the salary question, try saying that you would expect to be compensated fairly based on the responsibilities of the position, and if that fails, then give them your number. You should have one in mind just in case, but don't low ball. Ask for what you feel is fair. You can get salary information from salary.com, but remember that that site is not science, but a survey of similar companies and positions that is for research purposes only.



When the interview is nearly over, the interviewer will or should ask if you have any questions. You may have none, which is fine, but don't ever ask about benefits, holidays, work hours, or vacation. Those are red flags that say you are less interested in the job, and only interested in days off. The last question or questions you should ask have to do with next steps. You need show interest in the position so ask:

“So, when do you expect to make your decision?”

Next, you want to ask for the job as in:

“Mr. Smith. I am very interested in this position, and would like to express my desire to work here. Just let me know what you need to decide I am the man for the job?”

Upon leaving, shake hands with the interviewer and shake their hand firmly, looking directly in their eyes.

Within seventy-two hours you need to send a thank you note to all of the interviewers that spent time with you. You can do so either via email, or take the time to go buy cards.

Do not procrastinate this step. You want to stay on their minds as they continue the interview process. Anything you can do to differentiate yourself may be what gets you the job.

Don't be creative or cute. Simply say:

Dear Mr. Jenkins,

I just wanted to thank you for your time last Tuesday. I really enjoyed learning about Acme and the opening in Marketing. I am very interested in the position and working at Acme.

Sincerely,

Michelle Anderson

You may not hear from any of them after the note, but don't worry. Some people suggest you might follow-up with Ms. Murphy in a week or so. I don't always suggest that because there is a fine line between showing interest and being annoying, so I will leave that decision to you. At this point, you have done everything you can do to show interest and getting the job. Good Luck!!

Part Five – The Offer

Congratulations!!! Ms. Murphy called to tell you that Mr. Jenkins was very impressed with you and wants to offer you the position. “Are you still interested?” she asks. You can hardly believe it and are swelling with pride and enthusiasm.

“Yes!” you tell her.

She is happy as well, and tells you she will be emailing you an offer letter within the hour.



So an hour later, you get the email. Inside it politely offers you the position of Marketing Analyst at Acme, Inc. The compensation is \$54,000 annually, a 25% annual bonus based on some personal goals, and the company's financial performance, and two weeks vacation. And, the entire offer is contingent upon you passing a criminal background check and credit report.

You are excited about the offer, but \$54,000 is a little less than you were expecting. And, what is this about a background check and credit report? What does *contingent* mean anyway?

If for any reason you are not happy with the offer, now is the time to negotiate.

Unless you are unemployed, you are in the driver's seat, and this is the only time you are going to have the leverage to do any negotiating. After you leave your job and take your new job, you have lost that leverage.

There is some risk in negotiating. The risk is that you will lose the offer, so you need to understand what you are putting at stake. But, if you are ready, I can tell how to do it.

Plus, never, ever accept a position contingent upon anything! Most employers make offers contingent upon meeting some conditions. For example, if they make the offer contingent upon passing a credit check, you need to know what passing means. Is passing the credit check mean having a certain credit score? Or never having had a foreclosure? And, if you accept the position, leave your current job and the new company does not like what the found in your credit report, they can and in many cases will terminate you.

The same goes for background checks. If you accept a contingent offer and they find something in a background check they don't like, you are history. Background checks and credit histories can take a few weeks to complete, which is why employers put the risk on you.

To remove these risks, you need to reply to the offer, or *counter* their offer. To counter the offer, you first need to be grateful for the offer that has been presented to you. Do not insult the offer, even if you feel insulted by theirs. Then, simply state what you want, something like this.

Dear Ms. Murphy,

Thank you very much for your offer of employment at Acme. I am very excited about accepting your offer, but after studying the market and based on my experience and current compensation, I would feel more comfortable with a starting salary of \$58,000 annually, a 25% annual bonus as described in your offer letter, and two weeks vacation annually, which I can take this year.

I would like to remove the contingencies from your offer and will accept the position after you have you completed the background check and credit report.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Michelle

I want to emphasize that you are taking some risk in that they may remove the offer altogether, but that happens so infrequently that I believe you are safe. At the end of the day, it is your call.

Part Six – Resigning and Your First Day

Congratulations again! You successfully negotiated your compensation package and all the checks have been done. You have accepted Acme's offer, and now you have to resign your current position and give your notice.

This is a very thing to do. If you are strong performer, your current boss is going to be surprised, and just a little hurt that you are leaving. To do this gracefully, you need to resign with class.



First, you need to write a resignation letter. In your letter, you want to be brief, but again be grateful. You want to leave on very good terms, so you want to be sure to tell your boss that you are sincerely grateful for everything he and the company have done for you, but that you are leaving to pursue a very good opportunity.

Write something like this:

Dear Jim,

I am officially tendering my resignation and providing you with the customary two weeks notice. I am very grateful for the many opportunities that you have afforded and it has been a pleasure working for you.

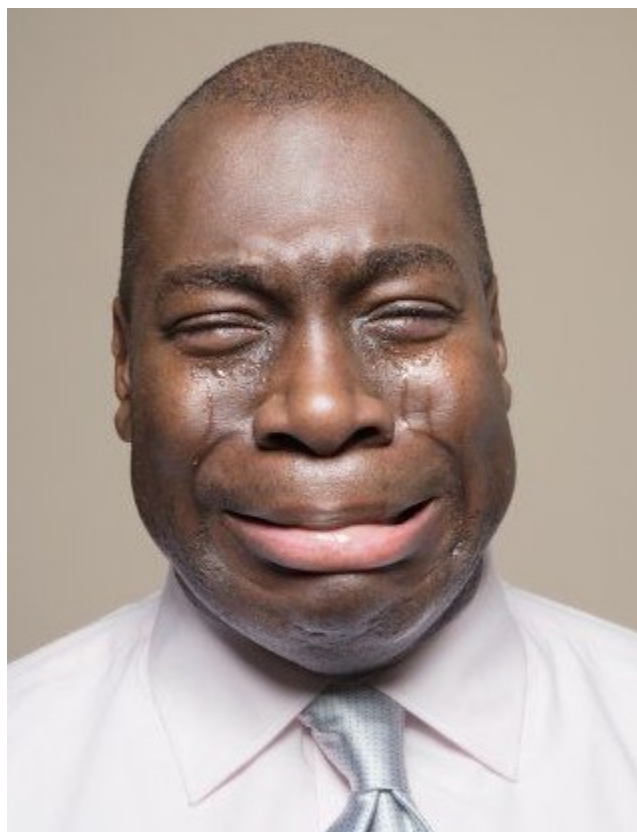
My last day is Friday, April 15th.

Sincerely,

Michelle Anderson

Michelle Anderson

Now, once he reads it, there are several reactions to it you need to be ready for. The first is pain. He may actually be upset that you are leaving and take it personally. If that occurs, be prepared for a counter-offer. It is up to you whether you take a counter-offer, but I strongly recommend against it. I think that accepting a counter-offer or intentionally using another company to negotiate a raise can only be used once, and often leaves a bad taste in the mouth of management.



The second reaction might be anger. “With everything I've done for you and this how you pay me back!?!” Don't react to that. Just listen, take it and leave his office as quickly as you can. Sometimes departing employees are asked to leave immediately. Don't take it personally, and it rarely happens.

And the last might be no reaction, which would probably hurt your feelings more than anything. Don't worry, this might not be the one you had hoped for, but might also be validation as to why you are leaving in the first place.

So once you resign, work your two weeks without trashing anyone. Don't tell of the guy you always wanted to. Don't say inappropriate things to the hot girl in Accounting because HR can't hurt you now. Don't believe for a minute that what you do at your current employer won't follow you to your new one because it will. Take the high ground.

When you have finally come to your last day, say your good-byes, and leave politely.

The first day of your new job is the most stressful at your new job. You may be full of self-doubt. You may have second thoughts about having left. You want to suddenly drive back to your old job and go to your old office, and see all of those old friends, but you won't.

Just take it easy on your first day. Be polite, try to remember a name or two, find out where the bathrooms are, the coffee pots, and the cafeteria. Everyone there has had a first day, so they will be very helpful and want you to acclimate as quickly as possible. Don't force any friendships, and try not to appear needy.

The best thing about first days is that they become second days.

Part Seven – The Conclusion

Well, I have given the benefit of my experience and my research. I remember reading a few articles years ago about interviewing, etc., but they were more geared toward the actual questions. I hope my version of this subject makes the process and information more real world and practical.

If you have any questions, you are always welcome to write me at mike.anderson@directyourcareer.com.

Well done!!

