



## Job Seeker's Guide

## Finding a job is tough...

The job search is usually frustrating, tiring and can leave you feeling angry, dejected and overwhelmed. Sometimes it might feel like all of the applications you've filled in and all resumes you've sent out must be gathering dust in some dark room somewhere.

If you've reached this level of disenchantment, we've got some good news: it's time to give up. Not the search, but your old strategy, which has only been delivering the same dissatisfying results. If you're completely fed up with the hunt, then let's start fresh from the ground up.

For those of you who are less easy to convince, let's back up a few steps. This manual is a comprehensive guide to get your career train back on track to success city. Though a re-evaluation and inventory of your value to a prospective employer, your resume and your current approach to job-seeking may seem like a waste of time, it's not. Returning to the basics will give you a fresh look at who you intrinsically are so that you can tailor what you offer to a specific potential employer. More than anything, an effort to start over will help you to see yourself, and the portfolio that you put forward, through the eyes of the people with the power to hire you. Because in every outreach to a company, you must always view your candidacy from their point of view, which means truly understanding what you bring to the table that will help them meet their needs.

In this guide you will:

- Engage in personal self-assessment
- Narrow the scope of your job search by ruling out positions that aren't right for you in the first place.
- Create or update your resume to present yourself in the most professional and appealing way.
- Leverage your network. "It's not what you know; it's who you know."
- Learn how to do effective research that will help you interview like a champion and make the best first impression that you possibly can.

# What kind of job is right for you?



The first thing we need to figure out is simple. Who are you? We don't need to know who you are in a profound, cosmic or spiritual sense, but we do need to know who you are when you go to work. As you read through the following sections, think honestly about not only the qualities you've exhibited in your professional life, but also what those qualities have allowed you to accomplish on the job. Hiring authorities know that the best barometer of a candidate's future success is based on their past success. Especially in today's economy, they most typically want someone who's done what they need, not someone who thinks they could do it. As you review the upcoming sections, know that there are no wrong answers, just indicators that will point you in the direction of the job that is the best fit for you.

## Taking Stock/Turning Inward

You might have heard of Root Cause Analysis (RCA) but probably never considered doing it on yourself. If you haven't heard of it before, RCA is based on examining our problems and patterns for their underlying causes, the root of the problem so to speak. Before going outward to find your next job, first turn inward and have the kind of discussion with yourself that focuses on your values, purpose and interests. Need help? Let Google be your guide here as you use these search strings (or variations of them): "assessing personal values," "assessing purpose," "assessing interests." Values and purpose speak to deeper guiding principles in life while interests bubble more to the surface. It helps to identify interests by looking back on your career and considering what interested you and disinterested you in prior jobs.

## Identifying Accomplishments

What your next employer will want to hear from you is what you accomplished in your most recent job. Think action verbs. What did you enhance, optimize, minimize, maximize, increase, decrease and so forth. How you accentuate your accomplishments will depend on what a particular job requires, but be sure you can cite specifics. Being able to show what you achieved in this way could well be the reason why you were hired instead of someone else. Always return to what we'll call "I and the data." In the job search process, don't refer so much to my group, our team or the department. Refer to yourself. What I did. Moreover, try to quantify your accomplishment by some metric...dollar value, number of times, the percentage... because it makes your achievement more concrete.

## Honing Your Elevator Pitch

As will be mentioned elsewhere in this guide, count on having to answer a question similar to "tell us about yourself." Your answer to this is called your elevator pitch, and while it may not make you, it could certainly break you should you botch it in an interview situation or networking event. The elevator pitch originated from the world of sales where reps were counseled that, should they be in the elevator with a prospect, they have a canned presentation of their product or service ready to deliver during the ride. As a job seeker, you need the same 60-90 second summation of who you are and what you do. Its length is important; it should be neither so short that it reveals nothing and almost raises suspicions about you because of its brevity, nor so long that you see someone's eyes either rolling or closing. Furthermore, it should be rehearsed (as should every single answer to prospective interview questions) so that you deliver it with the precision of a stage actor.

There are many tips available if you Google "job seeker elevator pitch." Indeed we could devote an entire article on this subject. Harvard Business School has a pitch builder on its website that can be found here:

[www.alumni.hbs.edu/careers/pitch](http://www.alumni.hbs.edu/careers/pitch)

# Some Things to Consider...

## Work to Live or Live to Work?

Unless you live on an idyllic, isolated farm or in some sort of self-sufficient bio-dome, you're going to need an income to live. How you go about this is absolutely up to you. For some people, a job is simply a way to pay the bills and afford them some means to live independently. A job or a career is always second in importance to what they want to do with the resources they gain from employment.

For others, career is everything. They may have a passion for the mission of their company, or, as they look up the career ladder, the prospect of personal advancement is incentive enough to show up every day.

Whichever extreme you gravitate toward, the one thing that you don't want is a job that's fundamentally not for you. As you read the following section, try to ask yourself "Would the position that I'm seeking make me miserable if I actually got it?"

Work to Live

or

Live to Work

## Working Solo or on a Team?

Many people love to telecommute and work solely from a home office. It allows them to focus on the job at hand and be highly productive or creative, without the distractions of a noisy office. However, telecommuting takes discipline, order and a well-defined home office space. Seeking only jobs allowing total or partial telecommuting may limit your possibilities. It also can limit your career advancement. Like it or not, you'll never build as much camaraderie working remotely as you will onsite, in the trenches with others. If you have the willpower and find you enjoy telecommuting, nothing's like working in pajamas.

Depending on your occupation, you may need more or less involvement with others. Software development needs team collaboration, but much of the work is also heads-down programming. Marketing functions are inherently team-driven, with give and take the accepted norm. Be true to yourself in this regard. Faking an overly cheery disposition and a team-oriented preference on interview day will undoubtedly come back to bite you if that's not who you are. There are only so many smiles a person like you can force before the effort of maintaining a sunny facade starts to take its toll.

More social individuals, who need a tight-knit work environment, on the other hand, must steer clear of jobs where collaboration is done electronically or not at all. For them, other people are more inspiring than distracting, the back and forth in meetings and brain storming sessions charging their mental batteries (not to suggest that more social folks are like robots). If you're a people person, seek out a position in a company where you'll be given the chance to collaborate with and potentially lead your team members. But be warned, the last thing this personality type needs is long days of longing for human contact while mixing chemicals in a basement laboratory or slaving over a hot computer in silence.

Remote

or

Office

## Where do You See Yourself in 5 years?

This is a common enough interview question that it's wise to have thought it through, which you may have already done in your self-assessment step. It probably would help if it's translated into what the questioner is most likely asking; i.e., "How does this position fit in with your overall short and medium-term career goals?"

Someone asking this wants to get a perspective of your career goals for yourself. They don't expect your answer to be written in stone but they would like to gauge how this job will impact your career. Hiring managers want employees with zest about a position and a fire in their belly. They want to see that you can envision the experience this job will provide you and where it may take you. They would like to know you're not taking the job out of desperation, because, if you are, you'll probably leave sooner than they would expect, and then they're back to filling this job again. Remember, new employees require investment.

Career Climber

or

Just Need a Job

## How Far are you Willing to Go?

How soon could you move to a new city? Do thoughts of leaving your friends and familiar surroundings fill you with dread or excitement? It's a question that a lot of employers will be asking. Being able to re-locate can put you at an advantage over those who can't handle a change in scenery. If you're willing to move for a new position, your job search can be on a national or even an international scale, increasing the likelihood of landing a position.

It's okay if you're not willing to leave the place that you live. The connections, both business and personal, that you've cultivated are undoubtedly stronger in than they would be in an entirely unfamiliar place. Staying local reduces the scope of your job search, but allows you to more effectively leverage your network connections to businesses in your area. When considering a re-lo, consider what advantages you'd have by sticking around. What do you have to lose? What do you stand to gain? To a similar extent your willingness to travel, sometimes travel extensively, is another way to increase your chances of being hired.

Re-Locate/Travel

or

Stay Put

## How Much Responsibility are You Comfortable With?

Do you stress out when pressures at work are high or can you keep your cool? Everyone would like to think that they can take the heat, but only you can decide if the ulcers and nervous tics are worth it. Can you manage a project or program, meet the milestones and ensure delivery of said work? Can you work in an even more intensive position involving an immutable deadline, be it an event or a publication date? Are you willing to take responsibility for a task's success or failure and be the hero or the scapegoat? When considering a position, really and honestly think about whether higher responsibility would mean higher stress in your life.

On the other hand, you might be the kind of person who has the vision and the delegation skills to carry a team through a demanding project. Perhaps the possibility of leadership and mentoring the people around you at your old job was what got you out of bed every morning. If a lack of managerial responsibility would make you feel disconnected or simply bored, make sure that any position you apply for at least has a defined and (hopefully) short path to a management position. Whatever the case, the last thing that you want is to trade a new job for your mental health.

Independent Contributor

or

Management

## Risk or Routine?

Risk and reward are fundamentally connected. This relationship can be seen all around us, from the long shot at the race track to the app designer who gets a multi-million buy-out. Though there's no such thing anymore as a truly "safe" company to work at, there's a big difference between a relatively stable firm and one that can go belly up at the first miss-step. Before you throw your hat in with some tech wizards with the next big idea, consider whether the possibility of failure (which is extremely high in startups) outweighs the potential rewards of success. Do you want to gamble on the merit of your company's ideas or would you rather put in work at a company more likely to stand the test of time?

Risk

or

Security

## Do You Need Control?

Where do you draw the line between supervision and meddlesome micro-management? Being your own boss is comparable to your telecommute vs onsite work decision. It takes self-control, plus an entrepreneurial spirit and a highly sought-after skill, service or product. The reward is the only person telling you how to do your job will be found in a mirror. In most employer-employee relationships, someone else will be telling you what to do, perhaps how to do it, determining when you'll do it and citing when it's due. Can you roll with that? Or, do you find open-ended goals and directions too vague and intimidating? You must decide where in the spectrum you fall between being an individual contributor or an entrepreneur.

My Own Boss

or

Individual Contributor

## Back to School/ Advanced Degree/ Certification

All things being equal, for many technical, white collar and management jobs, higher education is valuable. Moreover, degrees from highly touted universities do carry weight. Of course there are exceptions, such as where brilliant engineers, designers and company founders elected not to graduate and succeed admirably (think Steve Jobs and Bill Gates). Certainly, employers today are highly interested in whether you have the skill sets to successfully perform the job, but many often value the critical thinking and soft skills that one gains from a higher education. If you lack such a degree, be very prepared during the interview process to demonstrate that it's not a handicap, as you point out what you've accomplished and what you can do for a company's future. Additional certifications demonstrate a penchant for lifelong learning and a willingness to grow one's expertise in their chosen profession. They speak positively to your motivation and discipline.

One thing is for sure, if you are unhappy with your current career path, there's no time like the present to change the course of your professional life. If that means investing in your education, it's much better to start sooner than later. Remember, though, that there's a lot that goes into starting over from the ground up. Are you willing to make a commitment that could span several years?

Stay the Course

or

New Territory



## Resources

Now that you've done some good introspection, here are a few tests to give you some more concrete answers. This personality test is simple and similar to the questions we've been asking so far in the guide. A few honest clicks will reveal some careers that match your temperament. The site also provides a directory of online classes available to help facilitate any career change you may be planning.

[Online Career Match](http://www.skillcow.com/) <http://www.skillcow.com/>

This following test is a little more extensive than the first, offering more in depth personality traits and displays where you fall on 4 unique spectrums of interaction. In addition to this, the test will display careers matched to your profile as well as a percentage compatibility for each.

[Online Career Match and Personality Test](http://www.careertest.net/types/definitions.htm) <http://www.careertest.net/types/definitions.htm>

Here's a tool for career exploration and job analysis. O\*NET OnLine has detailed descriptions of the world of work for use by job seekers, workforce development and HR professionals, graduates and employment-related research.

[onetonline.org](http://www.onetonline.org) [www.onetonline.org](http://www.onetonline.org)

And finally, a related website sponsored by the Department of Labor, in concert with the American Job Center Network will also be a great resource for you.

[careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org) [www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org)

# What are You Good at?



Now that you've done some thoughtful consideration about what you need out of your job, let's get a little more practical with your search. Sure, you may want to work two days a week from your houseboat, but do you have the skills to pay those bills? What is it exactly that you can do? The easiest way to answer this is to look at what you've already done professionally. While you might claim to be a great tenor, I'd have to hear some singing before I cast you in Spider Man on Ice. The same sort of tangible proof will be required of you wherever you go, mostly in the form of a resume.

## The Resume

You probably have an entire folder on your computer stuffed with dozens, even hundreds of slightly different versions of your resume, each one sort-of tailored to a different potential employer, each one probably unanswered. Don't despair, there are ways you can breathe new life into this battered document.

- Your resume represents you. Remember that in some cases your resume will be the only information that a company will have about you when they make their preliminary cuts from the pool of applicants. In other cases, an online interview may give you a competitive leg up by letting you actively prove yourself, as well as helping you learn more about the specifics of a position.
- Your resume must be perfect. We don't mean good; we mean diamond cut and sparkling clean. You'd be surprised at the number of resumes that employers receive with glaring mistakes in spelling, grammar and formatting. If you can't display high quality on the most important document of your career, you're unintentionally demonstrating to an employer that you don't do high quality work.
- Don't fall prey to unnecessary fanciness. Extra fluff won't help you impress anyone, it will just cause the reader to get bored, and that's bad. Let your experience speak for itself. The document that represents you must not only be mistake-free and descriptive, but also condensed.

Here are some helpful tools to make a new draft of your next resume or just to get you started if you're a beginner.

[Resume Examples for Different Industries](http://susanireland.com/resume/examples/career/)  
[susanireland.com/resume/examples/career/](http://susanireland.com/resume/examples/career/)

Not sure what to put under "experience"? This website has dozens of example resumes from a number of specific professions and industries (including executive and upper management examples).

[A Guide on Resume Templates](http://jobsearch.about.com/od/sampleresumes/qt/microtemplate.htm)    <http://jobsearch.about.com/od/sampleresumes/qt/microtemplate.htm>

This website will show you how to use Microsoft Word templates to create a professional and easy to read resume.

## The Cover Letter

At its core, the cover letter is intended to keep you from being screened out. A cover letter is a great place for you to put a personal touch on your application. It's where you can communicate more candidly to an employer just who you are as an employee and as a person. This is crucial if you don't have any contacts within the company.

- Tell them why you are a great candidate. The marks that you want to hit include: this is who I am; this is why I'm great as it relates to the specific requirements of this job; this is the information on my resume that proves that I'm accomplished and have the skills and experience you've cited.
- Specificity is key. Make yourself appear as "honed in" on the position as possible. Edit and re-edit your cover letter for each company to which you apply in order to reference your experience in the best way possible for each position.

[Instructional Page from Virginia Tech](http://www.career.vt.edu/jobsearchguide/coverlettersamples.html)    <http://www.career.vt.edu/jobsearchguide/coverlettersamples.html>

## When You are Asked for References...

In today's job market, one of the greatest ways to distinguish yourself from the masses is to have someone there to vouch for you. Knowing someone inside of a company that you are applying to is one of the greatest advantages you can hope for.

Check out your social media connections to see if one of your friends (and you truly should know them) is in a company that you're targeting.

- **Even if you don't have any job connections from friends or family, you're never alone.** You still have the chance to hand-pick a team of people who will sing your professional praises to each company that you apply to. Too good to be true? Well, they won't literally be singing as you walk into your interview, but they will provide you with a credibility that only a professional recommendation can. I am talking about your references. If you do this last section of your resume correctly, it can be one of your biggest assets.
- **Who you put down as a reference is important.** You don't want a rag-tag bunch of buddies from your barista days: you want the A-Team. Reaching out to former bosses, business partners and contacts in industries relevant to the job you're applying to is a must. Remember, this final portion of your resume is your chance to further present yourself as an accomplished, professional and likeable person based on the testimony of other professionals from your working past.
- **Always try to select references from the jobs that you've put down in the body of your resume to give your interviewer a more three-dimensional perspective on your work experience.**

**Also, don't forget to alert these people before you go into your interview.** Your reference being caught unawares or "not quite remembering which Alex you're talking about" is not good. You want to seem like the shining light of your reference's life, not a forgettable drone to be filed away with the other rejected candidates. In short: if you can convince an employer that you have a successful past, they will be more than willing to invest in your successful future.

# Refreshing and Leveraging Your Network



Networking is important and quite easy in this day and age. Here are some good tips for getting started on an online professional and social network.

## Got LinkedIn? [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com)

First time users should create an account and complete their employment history as well as any other information about yourself that LinkedIn suggests. Be sure you have uploaded a photo of yourself, one suited to a professional networking site, not your Facebook account. Remember, you're creating a professional marketing presence, and you want to make a distinctive branding statement. You WANT to be found on LinkedIn by the recruiters and HR people who scour the site.

Underneath your name, you can add a headline. You can be prosaic and simply list a job title. Better, though, to add some sizzle. For example, here's how a number of LinkedIn Recruitment Product Consultants have tweaked their headlines:

Transforming the way sales people sell

Talent Game Changer at **LinkedIn**

Driving customer success by helping connect top talent with opportunity!

Setting **LinkedIn** Users up for Success

Certainly these ad-styled headlines stand out. If you're creative enough, try and do the same. If stumped, do a search to see how other LinkedIn members, with the same job titles and skills as you, are describing themselves. In addition to their headlines, do you like other aspects of their overall profile? After you understand what makes for an appealing LinkedIn presence, swap in some of the same descriptive elements to your own profile.

Once you've finished optimizing your profile, start re-connecting with people from your past. They could be colleagues from former jobs, vendors, analysts, customers, classmates and professors.

## **Ask former supervisors, those you've supervised and peers for references and recommendations on LinkedIn.**

To do this: hover over Profile option at the top of the page to reveal a small drop-down menu. Select Recommendations from this menu.

Select the Request Recommendations tab.

Now you can select a position from your employment history and ask a former boss or colleague to write you a recommendation based on your past work.

**The point?** All of these recommendations add to your claim of credibility and professionalism as well as setting you apart from the crowd. You can try to jump start the recommendation by writing it yourself and sending it to your targeted recommender with a note like this. "Jack, I'm in job search mode, and would really value getting a recommendation from you, as you supervised me for four years. I know you're busy, so I've taken the liberty of writing some thoughts down for you to review."

**Reach out.** Use LinkedIn's email service to re-connect with old contacts and friends. Here's a good starting point for a message to go along with a friend/recommendation request or a short email:

Hello! It's great to see your name pop up on here. It's been ages, what are you up to these days? I've been doing \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_  
Cheers!  
Your name

Try to make your messages have somewhat of a personal feel to them even if you're sending them out to a lot of people. Nothing will help your chances of their responding more than sincerity.

**Let your contacts help you to find a job.** Now that you've created or expanded your professional network, stay active. Pay attention to what people are saying both on LinkedIn and in your real-life professional circles. Most of the time it's these people who will know about the next best opening and what will help you have a really good shot of landing the job. Consider the fact that at a typical company, referrals account for anywhere from 24-33% of all hires. The bottom line is that being a referral gives you a better shot at fitting in at the organization, and most importantly, at getting the job.

## **Join LinkedIn Groups**

Do an advanced search of Groups appropriate to your profession. Investigate what Groups others with your skills and experience have joined. Then become a participant in the discussion threads. Pose a question, answer someone else's. Show that you're a thought leader in your profession. You never know when some other Group member might say, "that was an interesting observation; I'm going to check out their profile."

## Find People With the Power to Hire You

Don't be limited to networking with those whom you know. Move out of your comfort zone and reach out to individuals who can assist you with your job search. Seek out people who, by their title, will likely have the power to hire you. If the job title of the person who is likely to hire you is Director of Marketing, find all those with the same or similar title within X miles of your zip code. What's important to you is getting on their radar. Introduce yourself via a connection request or by sending an email to their company. Here's a sample pitch letter to such a person:

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

I wanted to reach out and introduce myself. I'm currently investigating new opportunities and, based on your work at ABC company as a Job Title and my own work with XYZ company as a Job Title, you may know of opportunities either at ABC company or through your network. Would you be willing to have a brief phone call so that we can connect and get to know each other? Based on your participation in various groups and your overall tenure in our shared profession, there may also be others in your network to whom you might refer me.

I've taken the liberty of attaching my resume (or simply view my LinkedIn profile here).

Would you be available this week or next between 9-9:30am for a brief 15 minute call? I'd be happy to initiate the call, just let me know your direct number.

Sincerely,

Who Ever You Are

***Below are some ideas for giving something back in your email communication (paying it back as they say) in order that you stand out/differentiate yourself from others also asking for help:***

1. By the way, in your profile, I read about your involvement with lean thinking and continuous improvement initiatives at ABC company. Here's the link to a recent NY Times article about lean thinking and continuous improvement initiatives as well as a link to Bob Smith's blog, which regularly covers this subject.

2. By the way, I see that you're a graduate of BBB UNIVERSITY; Kudos to your school for:

\* winning its first bowl game in 10 years

\* doing some solid research in TOPIC that was published in this journal.

REGARDING THE ABOVE. ALL YOU WANT THE RECIPIENT TO COME AWAY WITH IS THAT YOU TOOK A REAL LOOK AT THEIR BACKGROUND/INTERESTS/ EDUCATION, ETC. AND TRIED TO FIND SOMETHING THAT WOULD BE USEFUL, INTERESTING, COMPLIMENTARY TO THEM.

## Got Twitter?

Oakland-based career coach Marty Nemko offers this advice for leveraging Twitter in your job search. Says Nemko:

Twitter, used wisely, can be a surprisingly helpful job-search tool.

"Follow" a dozen employers you would like to work for. Occasionally, retweet their tweets and make a smart or kind comment when possible.

After a while, send a message to one or more of them —"I have an idea I'd love to share with you. May I e-mail it to you?" With little effort, you've upped your chances of landing a job at their company.

## Attend Local Industry Meetings

Figure out who's who locally in your industry by attending meet-ups, conferences and seminars. These events are great places for learning about what's going on in your field as well as expanding your network. If you're unsure where to find these events, try LinkedIn or Meetup to find out where professionals in your industry are congregating, and then get out there and join them. Depending on your occupation, consider attending local Chamber of Commerce mixers. The same goes with Rotary, Kiwanis, Lion's and/or Toastmaster's organizations. The latter are more mission-oriented than business, unlike the Chamber. Nonetheless, these groups offer you an opportunity to connect with live human beings. Never forget, you're many times more likely to be hired via a connection and the referral that connection provides for you than an anonymous job board posting. Meeting people in this manner builds a relationship and gives you a unique opportunity to display your talents within the particular group.

What's also important, especially as it relates to Meetups or Chamber functions is continuity. Are you guaranteed to meet the person who ultimately will connect you with your next job at this month's meeting? No, and it may not happen for several months, so it's important to keep at it. Remember that all advertising is conducted as a campaign, not a single instance. It may take several events for you to meet and share with other attendees in the manner and to the degree that will impact your job search.



# Interview Time!



Now that your resume is buffed, polished and shined and your elite squad of references is poised at the ready by their phones, it's time to get down to the wire. That's right: it's interview time. Let's just assume that because you've done such a great job of applying that Mr. Hiring Manager from Great Company Inc. wants you to come in tomorrow for an interview. Now don't get nervous, but don't get over-confident either. As with most things, **the key to a successful interview is the middle ground: display calm and friendly confidence.**

**One of the most important aspects of preparing for an interview is doing your homework.** This means researching the company so you're current on their products/services and management, and can answer the question "So what do you know about us?"

**Check to see if each of your interviewers has a LinkedIn profile.** This can usually show you exactly who you're dealing with, what their former jobs were and how long they've been working in their current position. You can find what common ground you share with these individuals and get a feeling for the kinds of questions they might ask of you

**Interviewing well involves asking the interviewer informed and on-point questions.** You want to go to every interview with enough background to not only follow along, but to engage actively with whoever is asking the questions. The interview is a dialog; don't wait for the tail end of the interview to ask your questions.

# Strategies for Intelligent Interviewing

## Finding Your Areas of Weakness

As we've discussed previously, you'll want to review the job description and rehearse your answers about how you meet its specific requirements. Know in advance that the job spec likely is an idealized document that pinpoints the perfect candidate. Nonetheless, it's often all that you have to work with up-front. Against the spec, view your own candidacy objectively. If your work history were a statue, where would you see the weakness in the proportions or figure? When you find a weakness in your skills or experience, one strategy to employ during an interview is to bring it up before the interviewer does. You do this because when you raise the issue, rather than the interviewer, it mitigates some of the potential sting. Moreover, it removes the presence of the 500-pound gorilla in the room ~ letting you get on with your interview without all the anxiety from the holes in your work history.

Some examples:

"Bob, you may be wondering why someone like me, with 10 years of experience at a hierarchical organization like Oracle, would want to join a start-up with fewer than 25 people. Let me tell you why."

Alice, I see your job spec asks for experience with SAP's AP/AR modules. I have worked with an ERP system's AP/AR module, although not specifically with SAP's. Is that a deal killer?"

Now, in this instance, Alice may say it IS a deal killer because they were going to put you onsite with their top client, an SAP shop where you would need guru level skills from day one. If that's the case, so be it. However, Alice is more likely to say "It's not a deal killer, you'll need to come up to speed with SAP; however, I'm sure your other ERP experience will enable you to do that quickly."

**Should your initial interview be via the telephone** try to wear a headset. It frees up both hands; it allows you to keyboard or write if necessary; it allows you to stand, walk around, dissipate nervous energy. You can gesture and be far more animated. You, thus, will display greater zest and enthusiasm than you might if your hands were not free.

As previously noted, it's likely that the first question you'll be asked will serve as an ice breaker. It may be something along the lines of "so tell us about yourself." Leverage your "elevator pitch". You can also use a personal achievement to break the ice and stand out, demonstrate a key quality such as "fencing champion in your early 20's" showing a competitive nature. Use your judgment.

**After the ice is broken**, the interview can go in many directions, as conversations between individuals will do. As early in the interview as possible, however, you might try this approach: "Interviewer, I've looked at your job description and I'm prepared to answer questions about the requirements, but I know from experience that a job spec only tells part of the story in terms of your needs. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?"

**If the interviewer allows you to proceed, try and get the answers to these three questions:**

1. What's the real pain point here? What's not getting done that you need to get done?
2. What would you see as the top three challenges for someone taking on this role?
3. What characteristics would make someone a stand-out performer in this role...it would be their ability to do what?

Once you've gotten these answers, **the interviewer has essentially given you a roadmap to guide your behavior for the rest of the interview.** He's probably given you information not on the job spec. You're now able to focus on his specific needs and not veer off on some tangent. You can cite how you've addressed and resolved similar pain points; how you've faced and overcome similar challenges; you can display with your answers for the entire rest of the interview how you possess the attributes of a top performer.

**As the interview unfolds, ask thoughtful questions** about the position and how it factors into the overall work environment and mission of the company. Be sure to keep everything strictly business. Don't ask about anyone's marriage, sexual orientation, religion, politics or any sensitive topics. Some levity shows confidence, but getting too personal or nosy will probably get you into the reject pile before you know it. This might seem basic, but you'd be surprised how often an interviewee gets too up in somebody else's business.

**Know when to shut up.** Long windedness can be an interview killer. When a question is asked, answer it, and then keep silent. It allows the interviewer to ask a follow on question or to change the subject.

A great question to ask as the interview is winding down is this:

"Interviewer, now that you've had a chance to talk with me, where do you see my strengths, and where do you fear that I might be a little light?" You ask this hoping the interviewer will have enough moxie to answer the question, and especially reveal where they feel you might be a little light (i.e., weak), so that you can counter that perception while the interview is going on.

**A final question to ask, for your own peace of mind is "What is the next step in the process and who has the next action item?"**

## Mirroring Technique

A technique that lends itself to in-person interviews is called mirroring. It means you give back to the interviewer the same energy that the interviewer is giving off. We'll give you an example using the extreme. If your interviewer is the quintessential brash New Yorker – loud, over the top, highly expressive, lots of gestures – you cannot be timid, mild-mannered and soft-spoken in your own bearing. Psychologically there could be a disconnect, with the interviewer thinking to him/herself that you would not be a fit. Conversely, if your interviewer is mild-mannered and soft-spoken, you cannot be the New York personality type described above as it would be a disconnect in reverse. So, the experts suggest "mirroring" the energy you see being displayed by your interviewer.

If you're still feeling nervous after all of this preparation, here are several websites with oodles of sample questions, so that you can get familiar enough with all the standard questions to knock them out of the park.

### 3 Interview Questions That Reveal Everything

<http://www.inc.com/jeff-haden/3-interview-questions-that-reveal-everything.html>

### 23 Most Common Interview Questions and How to Answer Them

<http://www.wisebread.com/how-to-answer-23-of-the-most-common-interview-questions>

### 100 Potential Questions from Monster

<http://career-advice.monster.com/job-interview/interview-questions/100-potential-interview-questions/article.aspx>

## The Devil's in the Details

So, it's the night before the interview. Now that you've done all your research about the company you're interviewing for, what's next?

- **Clothes.** Unless specifically told not to by the interviewer, always dress up. This means a suit or at least dress slacks and a sport coat for men and pantsuit or equivalent for the ladies. Pick out what you're going to wear well before the day of your interview to ensure that you're out the door on time. (If necessary, have your outfit dry-cleaned and hanging at the ready. No one wants to worry about a wrinkled shirt while talking up their professional past.) Pay attention to your shoes. Shine them. If the heel is worn down invest a buck in a heel guard.
- **Bring something to the table.** Print out some copies of your resume for the interview and grab something professional to write on and an un-chewed-on pen. Make sure that you have the salaries from your last few jobs written down somewhere in the papers that you're bringing. (Salary negotiations are a whole different story, but it's good to have an exact figure if asked). Put these things in a folio or briefcase, because that looks better than a floral plastic folder coming out of a dirty backpack. Now you're ready for the big day.

It's the morning of your interview. Go ahead, breathe, it'll all be just fine! There's just a few more things to do.

- **Food and 'Fume.** If you're someone who typically wears perfume or after shave, skip it for the interview. An off-putting scent can derail your chances. Be sure to time your pre-interview meal so that you're neither in a food coma nor jittery from having eaten too many hours before the interview.
- **Arrive Early.** Make sure you've allotted enough time to get lost and still arrive with a little time to spare. The "correct" time to show up is 10 minutes early, because it apparently demonstrates both that you're a go-getter and that you're a cool enough customer to not show up half an hour early. Note that the interview begins as soon as you pull into the parking lot. You never know who might be observing you; therefore, you're on your best behavior.

Ultimately, the formal component of the interview will start when someone comes over and says "If you'll just follow me Mr/Ms Applicant, they're all waiting for you in The Chamber of Interviews." This is the moment you've been waiting for; it's your time to shine! You'll do great!

During your interview:

- **Don't forget your manners.** The fundamentals include: eye contact, strong handshakes, and refraining from profanity. If you're sitting and the interviewer or interviewers enter the room, stand up to greet them. "Like" and "um" should also be avoided like the plague. Make sure to spit out any gum long before you make first contact with a potential employer.
- **Notes & Names.** Definitely take notes during the interview. It's important to be engaged in the conversation and writing down important information shows that you're really listening. It means you mean business. The last thing to remember during the interview is to take down names, ask for business cards, or just generally find a way to contact your interviewers in the future.

## And Finally, The Hand Shake

The folks over at <http://www.littlethingsmatter.com/> had this to say about handshakes:

- If you're a male and are meeting a female, you should wait for her to extend her hand first. If she does not initiate a handshake, do not be offended.
- If you're a male and are meeting another male, you should always extend your hand first. This is a sign of confidence and self-assurance.
- If you're a female and are meeting a male, you should extend your hand first. Even though women are a significant part of the business world, men are still confused about proper behavior. Be mindful and extend your hand. This will put the man at ease and is also sign of your confidence and self-assurance.
- If you're a female and are meeting another female, my successful female friends tell me they always extend their hand first in a business setting.

## Congratulations!

You did it! You knocked them out of the park with your professionalism, engaging questions and your overall great attitude. Now the only thing left to do is send your interviewers thank-you cards or emails. Your follow up email is your last chance to sell yourself and should not be wasted with fluff.

As with every communication you have during the interview phase...

- Write it with the hiring manager's needs, point of view, concerns, fears, in mind.
- Write it to be a selling document for yourself throughout the organization; reiterate why you're a top candidate.
- Write it so that the hiring manager would consider forwarding it to his/her supervisor, who's not yet met or talked to you, and, based on what you've written, that second person could conclude "X certainly knows what issues we're facing and is pretty specific about how s/he has helped resolve them during his/her career."

To achieve that, your email must be specific, detailed, what I call "meaty." It should contain no fluff. It should NOT focus on YOU.

Upon leaving (or hanging up from) your interview, you will know far more about the job and its requirements and opportunities than before the interview. Certainly, the questions you've asked should enable you to know:

- Why the position is open
- The hiring authority's pain points
- The top challenges for someone taking on the role
- What a top performer in the role would be able to do that would differentiate them from the average Joe
- Where the company is in the hiring process
- How many others are being considered
- How you stack up against them
- What reasons the company might be reluctant to bring you on board

***(Here's all you need to say from a courtesy standpoint in your email.)***

Dear Jack,

I enjoyed meeting (talking with) you today and learning about your needs for the Job Title position at ABC Company.

***(Here's your set up sentence to get into the beef...)***

Among my takeaways from our conversation are that ....

***(Now, here's where your email diverges based on what you have learned during your interview; below are some introductory phrases, but notice how each path always focuses on the hiring manager's point of view; tweak as you will. It's up to you to decide what your interviewer seemed most interested in finding in their ideal candidate...and thus...the qualities you should address and project.)***

- someone taking on this role, to hit the ground running, must be able to...
- based on our conversation, here's how I know I can help you...
- based on our conversation, here are three ways I can address the true pain point you cited...
- someone taking on this role should have faced and overcome challenges such as...
- someone taking on this role has prior experience mitigating/addressed pain points such as...
- someone taking on this role can very quickly address...
- someone taking on this role can very shortly address...
- someone taking on this role has been exposed to...
- someone taking on this role has mastered...
- someone taking on this role has eliminated...
- someone taking on this role possesses day-one skills in X, Y and Z...
- central to Company X's future is...
- core to your needs for Job Title will be...
- integral to the Company's (Engineering/Sales/Marketing etc.) success will be adding...

At this point in the email you now "pay off" one or more of the above statements with as much specificity as you can. If you cite an achievement, try to back it up with a metric...number of times, dollar value, percentage, etc.

***(Some examples of specifics could be that...someone taking on this role must be able to...)***

- Leverage proven ability to analyze, evaluate and evolve Microsoft-based enterprise software applications.
- Design, develop and support software for machine control applications involving multi-axis, hydraulic-based Linear Friction Welding (LFW) machines.
- Ensure that your responses to RFIs/RFPs are consistent, repeatable and flawless.
- Lead I.T. department technical training and help your engineers to effectively identify, debug, and resolve defects.
- Validate secure Android projects and encryption schemes.
- Generate media coverage in these specific industry verticals and journals.

If you have the ability to do so, you can even propose recommendations, projects, ideas that showcase your initiative and creativity. Every hiring manager on the planet wants an innovative thinker.

***(Close with something that effectively keeps the door open to you.)***

Thanks again for your time and, regardless of the outcome of your search, I thoroughly enjoyed our conversation and the opportunity to learn more about your organization

Sincerely,

You

Hopefully this has been an informative read on how to get back on the horse, so to speak, or how to take a ride for the very first time. We wish you all the luck there is in finding the right job for you, and hope that you seal the deal as soon as possible.

Happy hunting!



## About HireMojo

HireMojo ([www.hiremojo.com](http://www.hiremojo.com)) provides hiring software that makes hiring easy for thousands of businesses. Leveraging the power of a Software as a Service (SaaS) platform and incorporating most methods to find the best-fit candidates, HireMojo makes it possible to fill most jobs within a few weeks with the least amount of effort and cost. With a focus on helping companies under 1000 employees who represent over 75% of all the open jobs, HireMojo launched an initiative to drop unemployment in the United States by 10% by 12/31/14. Based in Larkspur, CA, HireMojo was launched in January 2013 to make the filling of nearly any job significantly easier, faster and at no or low cost.