

The Peak Interview

New Insights into Winning the Interview and
Getting the Job.

By Bill Burnett

3rd Edition Appendix

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Appendix

I have included some useful material here in the appendix to help you prepare for the best job interview of your life.

Creating Interview Stories

Stories provide the fabric into which you should weave relevant competencies and personal characteristics. In crafting these stories you should follow the *Made to Stick* model created by Chip and Dan Heath: S.U.C.C.E.S (Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Credible, Emotional, Story). I encourage you to get their book and read it. I think you will find it very helpful in creating great stories.

Overall, keep it simple. You want to be both concrete and credible as you weave into the narrative your competencies and characteristics. If you are a gifted storyteller, you may be able to create emotions in your listeners. You don't want to lose control of your own emotions. However, showing passion is a good thing. Keep the story short. I find that a story is longer when I tell it than when I write it. Time yourself actually telling the story. Generally, unless

the story is truly outstanding and you're a great storyteller keep it to less than two minutes if you can.

Start with an Outline

You want to be able to tell this story from active memory. Some people need to write the entire narrative of a story in order to feel they will be able to tell it well in an interview. If you need to write down the entire story do so. But start with an outline.

If you don't need to write down the entire story, don't. The story will come from your active memory. But do start with an outline. The outline ensures your story contains the right elements needed for the job interview.

You may use a format like the following to outline the story:

Story Name:
Problem or Opportunity:
Players:
Action:
Result:
Competencies:
Characteristics:
Unexpectedness:

Competencies and Character

Below we have chosen to limit ourselves to the top six competencies and the top six characteristics, generally relevant to most job openings. During personal job search you may identify other competencies and characteristics that are more relevant for your particular job search. Stories can often thread several competencies and several characteristics simultaneously.

Competencies	Character
Leadership	Honest
Problem Solving	Passionate
Teamwork	Self-confident
Management	Motivated
Communication	Reliable
Customer Focused	Efficient

In every case, story telling should use the active voice and avoid using the passive voice.

PASSIVE: “She was promoted by me on the spot.”

ACTIVE: “I promoted her on the spot.”

Below is a list of some words to you may use in describing action under these six competencies.

Leadership	Problem Solving	Team work	Management	Communication	Customer Focused
lead	problem solve	teamwork	administer	communicate	customer service
empower	analyze	affiliate	organize	advise	assist
engage	think	ally	carry out	broadcast	help
entrust	invent	band together	conduct	connect	courteous
enable	innovate	come aboard	command	contact	connect
induce	improve	partner	execute	convey	responsive
influence	develop	join	govern	persuade	advocate
recognize	devise	line up	head up	convince	aid
reward	adopt	plug into	oversee	entice	sponsor
show the way	synthesize	team up	run	assure	champion
grant	customer insight	throw in with	arrange	gain confidence	befriend
invest	mastermind	unite	systematize	sell	kindness
be out front	brainstorm	align	judge	coax	check
direct	calculate	enlist	arbitrate	convert	follow-up
head	formulate	follow	control	counsel	friendly

Unexpectedness

The hardest part of story telling is building in the ‘unexpectedness.’ You want to arouse interest in the listener and create anticipation. A simple way to do that is to start by identifying where that unexpectedness may lay hidden. It could be with the people involved, the action, or the result. For example:

- The people involved included an unusual character.
- A surprising person made a key contribution.
- The action taken was unusual.
- A side-effect was unanticipated, but turned out to be important.
- The result of the action was surprising.
- Pursued one direction and ended up taking a different one.

Usually you would try to set up the anticipation within the first two sentences. Recall the *ice cream* story earlier: “*I have a weakness for ice cream. I know it doesn’t sound like something that would impact my job, but it did.*” The listener now wants to know

how ice cream has this impact.

A little farther back in this appendix I talk about the 64 toughest interview questions and start a story with: “*Usually I’m adept at handling international situations but on a trip to Pakistan I did something very publicly for which I ended up being both ashamed and embarrassed.*” When you get to this story see if you can count the competencies and characteristics that are woven into the narrative.

You can build anticipation by starting with a phrase like: “*You wouldn’t expect that by simply changing how you describe what you’re currently doing would have a \$2 billion dollar impact on the bottom line, but for one of my clients that’s exactly what happened.*”

Or start with something like “*We thought that we had the best in class method for handling risk, but we learned the truth from the most unlikely source...*”

In the last story in the book about having your work criticized, the surprise is at the end of the story. It answers one question but sets up a follow-up question. In a way, it allows me to subtly take momentary control of the interview. This is a technique to get in a story you really want to tell.

Your Cover Letter

It is better if you find a more direct way into the hiring manager's office. But sometimes this isn't possible and a cover letter becomes necessary. Make sure you are clear on what you would like to accomplish with the letter. In most cases your cover letter should entice the reader to want to know more about you. Your goal is a face-to-face interview.

I've seen many cover letters during my career. Most of them do nothing more than use up three paragraphs to say two things: my resumé is attached; and I'm interested in the job. Boring! However, I have also seen cover letters that are intriguing and create a reason for me to want to talk to the author. A friend of mine, who is in marketing, does this in a clever manner. He suggests that though he may not be the right match for this particular job, he has an extraordinary network of marketing professionals. And he would be delighted to recommend someone else who might be better suited for the job.

Here is some basic good advice around creating effective cover letters.

Don'ts:

- Don't explain why you are submitting the resumé, it's already obvious.
- Do not say why you are looking for a job.
- Don't say why you are out of work
- Don't discuss salary
- Don't even hint that you are desperate for work
- Don't say anything that rightly belongs in the resumé. If it belongs there, put it there. Customizing your resumé for each job is the smart thing to do.
- Don't waste your first paragraph writing a boring introduction. Use the first paragraph to grab the employer's attention; give the employer a reason to put you on the interview list.
- Don't depend on the employer to take action. Tell the employer when and how you will follow up. Then, do so. It is imperative that you follow up.
- Don't send a cover letter that contains any typos, misspellings, incorrect grammar or punctuation, smudges, or grease from breakfast.
- Don't say what the company can do for you, rather focus on what you can do for the company. Avoid using over-used words. Lists of these words are available on the internet, do a search for '**words to avoid on your resumé**'
- Negativity has no place in a cover letter.

Do's:

Be proactive by requesting an interview.

Use simple language and uncomplicated sentence structure.

Ruthlessly eliminate all unnecessary words.

Follow the journalist's credo: Write tight!

Write a cover letter that is unique and specific to you.

Be sure the potential employer knows how to reach you.

Use action verbs.

Be direct. In the first paragraph include the title of the position you are interested in pursuing.

Interview Questions to Ask the Hiring Manager

1. What is the greatest challenge someone will face in this job within the first 4 months?
2. What big challenges are you currently facing as the manager?
3. Over the next year or so, what is your vision for your department?
4. What are the areas where you are better than the competition, and where can you improve to beat the competition?
5. Why does your company out-compete your competitors?
6. Who are your customers?
7. In the future, what areas do you see this company moving into?
8. What attracted you to work for this organization?
9. How would you describe your company's culture?
10. What is it you like about working here?
11. How would you describe a typical workday for this position?
12. Is this a new position?
1. (If not) Where did the previous person move

- on to?
2. (If so) What caused you to open up this position?
 13. How many people do you have working in the department?
 14. How much travel is expected?
 15. Is relocation expense covered (If the job would require a move)?
 16. What's the prospect for growth and advancement?
 17. If you extended a job offer, how soon would you wish me to start?
 18. Would you tell me about the people I'd be working with?
 19. May I meet with any of the people in the department before accepting an offer of employment?
 20. How would you describe your management style?
 21. How do you communicate with your team?
 22. How do you like your people to communicate with you?
 23. What is the company's plan for the next five years, and how does your department fit into it?
 24. What are the skills and abilities you see as key for a person to succeed in this role?
 25. What personal characteristics do you most value in people who work for you?
 26. What in this job would you like to see improved?

27. How will my performance be measured?
28. Do outsiders have misconceptions about the company?
29. From all I can see, I'd really like to work here, and I believe I can be a strong addition to your group. What's the next step in the selection process?

Walk in with specific questions that show you've researched the company. (Obviously, some of these questions are appropriate in one setting and inappropriate in another.)

Social Networking Questions to Ask Face-to-Face

The best icebreaker is genuine interest in the person you are speaking with. Introduce yourself briefly, then focus on the other person. Be warm and smile. Do not let your eyes wander as you are conversing, but don't stare. Keep your full attention on the person. Listen. By listening, you get cues about what to talk about.

The questions below are designed to keep the conversation flowing in ways that focus the discussion around the person you are speaking with. These are just a sample. The best questions are the ones you invent yourself. The objective is to get the person to talk about themselves.

1. What was your very first job?
2. If you could be anyone in history, who would you be?
3. If you had a million dollars to give away to a good cause, what cause would you choose? Why?
4. If you had one day to spend 10 million dollars, but could spend no more than 1 million on any single item, and the items had

- to be significantly different from each other, what would you buy?
5. If you could meet anyone alive in the world today, who would you pick? Why?
 6. If you could live at any time in the past, what period would you choose? Why?
 7. If you could be frozen and revitalized sometime in the future, when would you like to be awoken?
 8. If you discover your house is on fire and you can grab only one thing from the house, what would it be?
 9. If you could be remembered for one thing in your life, what would you like that to be?
 10. Out of all the books you've read in the past couple of years, which one would you recommend the most?
 11. Of all the different kinds of art you've been exposed to in your life, what one type appeals to you most?
 12. If you could live comfortably anywhere in the world, where would that be? Why?
 13. If you could pick anyone in the world to sit next to at a dinner party, who would that be?
 14. If you weren't doing the work you're doing now, what work would you most like to be doing?

Discovering Behaviors

If the interview is going to be a behavioral event interview you need to get some sense of what behaviors are valuable in the context of that job. Even if the interview does not turn out to be a behavioral event interview, you will benefit by knowing what behaviors are desired and including them in your stories. Start by parsing the job description.

At the beginning of the interview ask for permission to ask a couple of quick questions to help you clarify the position for which you are interviewing. Below are some ideas around behaviors but, as I've mentioned throughout this book, I encourage you to formulate your own strategies and your own questions.

Question	Focus
Judgement What sorts of decisions are key for the person in this job? You may need to explain this question more fully. The question concerns what types of judgements the job will require	Business People Technical Creative Analytic

<p>you to make. Are the key judgements around making business decisions, people decisions, technical choices, etc.</p>	
<p>Communication How is communication a factor in the job and who is involved? You want to get a sense of how crucial communication is for the job. By asking who is involved, you get the hiring manager to think about communication in a tangible way. If communication is crucial for the job, you want to include your strong communication skills in at least one of your stories.</p>	<p>Principle method: verbal email texting formal letter presentation</p>
<p>Impact When it comes to people leading change in the workplace, is the emphasis first on investigation and analysis, or is it on action and experimentation? You are trying to understand if the people in the company are expected to try lots of solutions and let the best one win, or are people expected to completely analyze the situation and then get approval to move forward.</p>	<p>Is the firm action oriented, or planning and analysis oriented.</p>
<p>Curiosity Does the company expect employees to pursue ongoing education? And if so, how does the company sponsor this? If the answer is yes to the first question, ask for examples of people in the department pursuing ongoing education. If all the examples are people pursuing MBA's with or without company sponsorship, then ask if there are other ways people</p>	<p>How is broad knowledge valued? If it is truly valued, the hiring manager will describe how he or she pursued ongoing</p>

<p>are pursuing new knowledge.</p>	<p>learning over the past year.</p>
<p>Innovation How does the company create competitive advantage? If the answer is ‘through innovation’, then follow-up with, “Is there a process to go through when an employee sees a customer problem that needs a better solution.” If the answer is something other than ‘innovation’ then problem solving may only be a small portion of the job.</p>	<p>Problem solving, creativity.</p>
<p>Courage/Risk Taking If an employee has an idea and takes it forward, and it is a success, who gets credited for the idea.? What if the idea fails, what are the consequences of that failure? If the consequences for the failure are negative, then you know that risk-takers must have courage to take a personal risk as well as a company risk.</p>	<p>Whose risk is it, mine or the company’s?</p>
<p>Passion If you were to rank passion, experience, or problem solving ability for this position, which would be most important, and which would be least important? If the answer is “passion,” then you know to express your passion in your answers to the interview questions.</p>	<p>Your tone of voice and body language will convey your passion. Know what to be</p>

	passionate about when the question comes up, “Tell me about...”
<p>Honesty/Candor If you are sitting in a meeting with your boss, and he or she says something you do not agree with, how do you raise your point of view? The answer may tell you something about the hierarchy. Also, the nature of job titles may also tell you something about what to expect. Terms like subordinate, senior, junior, chief, supervisor, and others that imply rank, often tell you that the hierarchy in the organization implies power and prestige. It will take more courage and tact to bring ideas forward in this kind of culture.</p>	If tact is key, include in a story how you were clever and tactful in presenting a dissenting view-point.

How to Answer The 64 Toughest Interview Questions

You can Google this to find the document. Here is a link that worked in October 2013:

<http://dev.fyicenter.com/Interview-Questions/Sixty-Four/>

It is quite a helpful document as it contains solid advice and many good tips on handling difficult questions.

However, you should take the point of view that the

answers suggested in this document are the answers your weakest competitors will present during their interviews. Go through each question and see if you can come up with a better answer. I have given a couple of examples below of how to do this.

Obviously your answers must be original and should target the requirements of the job. A subtle disclosure of a key ability in the middle of a story is more effective than simply declaring that you have a specific ability. It is more credible.

When you do create a story, remember to tell it to friendlies first and refine it as you go. Remember, throughout the interview, always project self confidence. Showing a lack of self confidence will cost you the job.

Example answers to beat the average:

Question 4 “Tell me about something you did – or failed to do – that you now feel a little ashamed of.”

THEIR BEST ANSWER: Pause for reflection, as if the question never occurred to you. Then say, “You know, I really can’t think of anything.” (Pause again, then add): “I would add that as a general management principle, I’ve found that the best way to avoid regrets is to avoid causing them in the first place. I practice one habit that helps me a great deal in this regard. At the end of each day, I mentally review the day’s events and

conversations to take a second look at the people and developments I'm involved with and do a double-check of what they're likely to be feeling. Sometimes I'll see things that do need more follow-up, whether a pat on the back, or maybe a five minute chat in someone's office to make sure we're clear on things..."

Was this believable? Wow, here is a question with a great opportunity to tell a good story. Why pass up the opportunity with a lame answer like the one above. The question isn't about being hugely ashamed, it is "a little ashamed." Spend some time and come up with a story about being ashamed. Here's mine:

Usually I'm adept at handling international situations but on a trip to Pakistan I did something very publicly for which I ended up being both ashamed and embarrassed I was visiting our new business in Karachi, Pakistan, and no one from the parent company had ever been to Pakistan. I'd been the point person for the home office team that put together the various things the local business needed to help them get going. The local owners took advantage of my visit to have a launch party with the press and a couple of hundred people at one of the top hotels in the city. After being interviewed by a couple of local newspapers and a television crew, I was a little surprised when they led me up onto the stage to sit with the owners and several local dignitaries. Then, speeches started. Since I did not know the local language, I took

my cues from those around me and applauded with enthusiasm when they did. At the end of the ceremony, the mayor completely surprised me, asked me to join him at the podium and gave me the Pakistani equivalent of the key to the city.

Afterwards, a member of the audience from the U.S. Embassy pulled me to one side and said, "I am guessing that you don't know what they were saying." I said I didn't. Then he said something that completely surprised me because it was a possibility that had never occurred to me.

He said, "Well they were talking about you actually, how you'd been instrumental in getting their business set up; how you'd repeatedly woken up in the middle of the night in the US in order to work with them during Pakistani business hours; how you'd tackled problems that would have been easy to solve in the US but were nearly impossible in Pakistan; that they wouldn't have a computer system if you hadn't found them one; and so on."

He then chided me with, "In Pakistan it is generally not appropriate to applaud oneself with such enthusiasm when you are the subject of praise."

I was ashamed that I might have embarrassed my host. But like all Pakistanis, when I apologized he said, "No, you mustn't apologize, everyone knows you don't speak Urdu, it was nothing." I heard later that they loved to

tell the story of my faux pas, and laugh and laugh. Even today I am still embarrassed, although I understand the humor.

This kind of answer is intended to reveal a lot about me, my work ethic, my humanity, my customer focus, my resourcefulness, and that I can laugh at myself, etc.

Question 16 “Tell me about a situation when your work was criticized.”

THEIR BEST ANSWERS: Begin by emphasizing the extremely positive feedback you’ve gotten throughout your career and (if it’s true) that your performance reviews have been uniformly excellent. Of course, no one is perfect and you always welcome suggestions on how to improve your performance. Then, give an example of a not-too-damaging learning experience from early in your career and relate the ways this lesson has since helped you. This demonstrates that you learned from the experience and the lesson is now one of the strongest breastplates in your suit of armor.

If you are pressed for a criticism from a recent position, choose something fairly trivial that in no way is essential to your successful performance. Add that you’ve learned from this, too, and over the past several years/months, it’s no longer an area of concern because you now make it a regular practice to...etc.

OK, this is not a bad answer, but it’s not interesting.

Surely you've been criticized for something in a circumstance that makes for an interesting story. Here's mine:

Of course, with regard to my around-the-house projects I get frequent "constructive" criticism from my lovely wife, but no doubt you are looking for a workplace example. I can think of one time in particular. I'd been called into the CEO's office. At the time, he was three management levels above me, and I was surprised and, of course, nervous. He was known as a pretty tough boss. He began by saying he had received a call from the head of IT that I am planning some wild new change to one of our systems and he wanted an explanation. Well it was true. I set about explaining how during a working group meeting that I had convened, the group had looked at the system and the business model it supported and determined there was a better alternative model. I said it was only an idea at the moment and I was working to flush out the details. I then explained what we had in mind. After I'd explained the business model change, he looked at me in silence for what seemed forever. Finally he spoke. "Are you an idiot?" I figured it was a rhetorical question. He went on. "I have heard stupid ideas in my career but this takes the cake. Where the hell do you come up with this stuff! Get out of my office!" Which I did. It stung for a while. It's the kind of personal insult that cuts to the bone -- especially coming so strongly from the CEO. When I told the story to a colleague she said, "Well

your career here is clearly over!”
But in the end, it turned out great.

I stop here. In all likelihood the hiring manager is going to ask me what happened.

This is a good set-up. It is now a different question, and within the answer is the story of the biggest win of my career.

The Nurul Network

The Nurul Network is an example a list of what is going on. In the Chicago area where I live, Nurul E. keeps an updated list of activities going on in the area and send a periodic email to subscribers. If you want to subscribe send a note to Nurul at ne_atl@onebox.com

Here is a truncated version of Nurul's email:

FYI if not already seen, some upcoming happenings of note are listed below -- for the most part, in chronological date order.

-- They're an incomplete yet diverse mix of professional, cultural, social, free, and paid (\$) events

-- There are so many events conflicting in date/time, that choosing where to go is often hard. But you can do it!

-- Each event has a brief PREFIX CODE on event type, and an accompanying weblink for more info, where available.

One way to use this list is to first look at your own personal calendar, see what events fit your free days / time slots / budgets, and then plan accordingly. That's why so many items are listed so ahead of time, if possible -- so you have some notice to plan.

Thanks to those that contributed. Feel free to browse / attend / network as your respective busy schedules allow.

Best regards,

- Nurul E

Event Type PREFIX CODE LEGEND - A rough guide. Types

may overlap.

CUL = Cultural / artistic / music / theatrical / film / media

SOC = Social / party / recreational / sports / food / drink

BIZ = Business / professional / career / entrepreneurial / technical

EDU = Academic / learning / scientific / medical

CIV = Civic / political / geopolitical / charitable / faith

RSVP = Denotes that advance notice of attendance is required

\$ = Denotes paid event, # of \$ indicates # of digits in the payment amount

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===== ANNUAL or YEAR-ROUND

International Year of Statistics.

United Nations International Year of Water Cooperation

Lunar New Year is the Year of the Snake in the Chinese Zodiac

Check out the Social Impact and Buycott Apps

\* Some signs of the times:

- What's Next for the Sharing (P2P) Movement?

- Discussion of new book "The End of Big: How the Internet Makes David the New Goliath"

- Help our friend Juliet win a travel photo contest - vote for her submitted pic; no obligation

Are you a Socially Innovative Company / Enterprise? If so, fill out this survey to contribute to a directory:

----- SEPTEMBER --- ( what remains )-----

til - 09/30 - Chicago Neighborhood Festivals abound ( multiple dates/ venues )

til - 09/15 - CUL - Chicago Summerdance has FREE live music, dance, and instruction 4x weekly @ Downtown

All Summer & early fall - Free Movies @ Various venues indoors & out

09/12 - 22 - CUL – Chicago World Music Festival @ multiple dates / venues, ( some RSVP \$\$ )

09/16 - 22 - CUL - EXPO CHICAGO / SOFA Art Week & International art fair @ Navy Pier & various venues ( RSVP \$\$, free for Columbia College folks )

09/18 - 20 - CUL – STORY Conference / festival for creatives ( speakers include Alex Bogusky, etc. ) @ River North ( RSVP \$\$ )

09/19 - 22 - BIZ - Chicago Educational Startup Weekend EDU @ Loop ( RSVP \$\$ )

09/19 - 21 - CUL - UIC CESA Ethnic Studies Conference { Decolonizing Future Intellectual Legacies & Activist Practices } @ W. Side { RSVP \$\$\$ }  
... and Some related IL Humanities Council Events open to the public @ UIC ( RSVP )

09/23 - 27 - BIZ - Social Media Week Events (over 140+) @ Various Times / Venues / Price points ( RSVP \$\$ varies )

09/23 - CIV - UofC Politics talk {"The Centrist Manifesto" with Charles Wheelan} @ Hyde Park ( RSVP )

also 09/23 - CUL - Urban League Lecture and Performance { Ida Mae Gladney and the Great Migration } @ S... Side

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also 09/23 - BIZ - UofC Booth / Wharton alum talk { Consulting  
& Private Equity to Better Serve Shareholders} @ Loop ( RSVP