

**VETERANS EDITION**



**Signs**  
of a  
**Great**



**INTERVIEW**

HOW TO TELL A STORY THAT SPEAKS FOR ITSELF

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## Signs of Great Gratitude

This book is dedicated to the people who serve our veterans through many wonderful transition assistance organizations. I am fortunate to have worked with many of these groups to help our vets on their career journey. There are simply too many people to name, but you know who are and I thank you. I'm particularly grateful for the passion and service exemplified in leaders from The Commit Foundation, American Corporate Partners (ACP), the SEAL Future Foundation, The Bob Woodruff Foundation, and the Navy Special Operations Foundation. If you are approaching military retirement or you're completing your service at any career stage, take a look at these organizations and other organizations which are doing great work to support you on your next career mission.

I've met with thousands of veterans through organizations like these and others. I can tell you, it's been the greatest privilege of my career to help serve those on active duty, veterans, reservists, and military spouses during their career transition. I have met some of the most interesting, talented people who really are making the world a better place.

Even the most capable leaders may feel less than fully prepared to make the transition from the military to the civilian workforce. I often relay the story of a recently-retired 2-star Army general I met with. He said to me, "Scott, when I got out of the military, I didn't even know how to buy a cell phone. In my decades of service, the Army has basically handed me every cell phone I have ever owned. How do you think I feel about writing a résumé or doing job interviews?!" He and many other capable,

intelligent, and driven service members are wise to take time to let experts help ensure their success in the transition.

It's a good idea to ask for help. Just as you demonstrated an ability to learn many new skills in the military, you may need to learn some new things to ensure a successful career transition to the private sector. The best indicator of future success is past success. As you transition from a successful career in service to our country, it's an honor for me to help you write the next successful chapter of your story.

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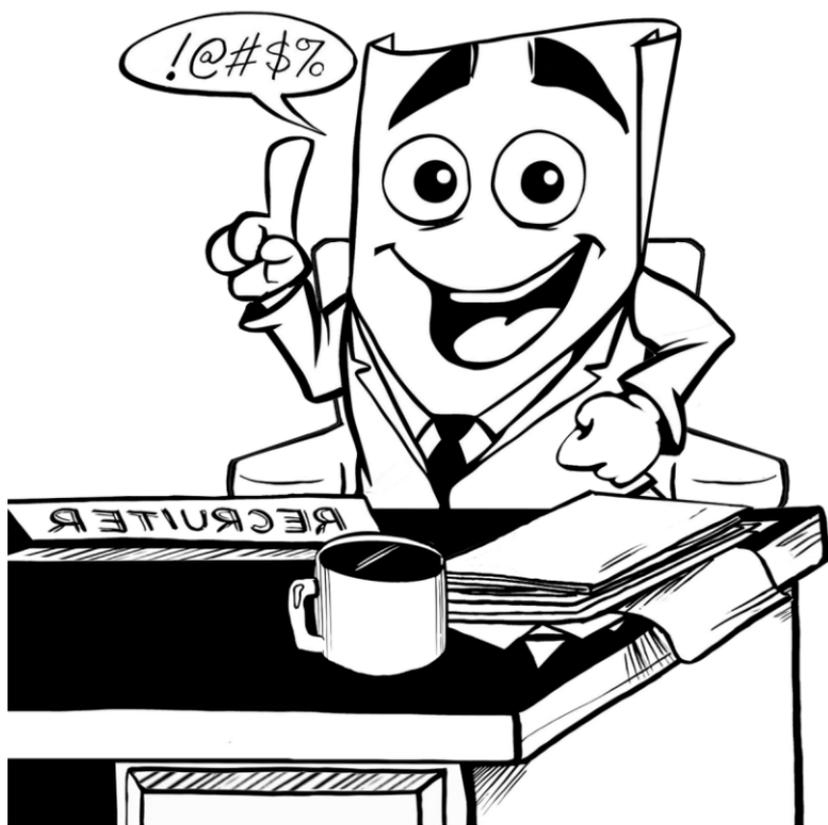
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## **PREFACE: LET ME TELL YOU A STORY...**

Thank you for picking up a copy of this book. By doing so, you've taken an important step to prepare for job interviews. If you're like most job applicants I've met, you probably don't like the interview process at all. You may completely dread it. Relax. I'm going to demystify and simplify the process for you. You'll learn how to easily use your life and work experience to create stories to speak for yourself in an interview using !@#\$%, the Signs of a Great Interview.

Fundamentally, any employer's goal during an interview is the same: identify the best talent for the job. The way you help them understand that you're the best candidate is by telling a great story. You don't need to be an author, a filmmaker, a poet, or a master of literary arts to weave a compelling story; you just need to be you. No matter how you feel about telling stories right now, this book is for you future storyteller! Your "once upon a time," starts now. Using the tools in this book will lead to your career "happily ever after."



At this moment you are deciding whether I'm the right person to help you with your upcoming job interviews. You're essentially asking me the age old interview question, "can you tell me a little about yourself?" So here's a little bit about *my* story. I'm a recruiter and expert on career transition. More specifically, I'm an expert in helping job seekers tell their stories on their résumés and in interviews. I long found that the most compelling candidates were those with the most interesting stories. Not only did their stories make them the most memorable candidate,

but they were able to tell how their experiences made them the best fit for the job.

I've heard *lots* of inspiring stories from people I hired. Their stories often made me laugh and got me excited about their future success. Some applicants told awe-inspiring stories about how they overcame unsurmountable obstacles even made me cry. The emotions we often shared together in the interview are part of what made recruiting a really awesome job. No matter what your story is we're going to work on leaving a positive, lasting impression in an interview.

Let's start this story together with a look at some numbers:

## 100

One hundred stands for the *Fortune 100* where I worked as a recruiter for many years. The *Fortune 100* represents some of the most competitive companies on earth, and some of the toughest places to get a great job. This includes companies like Apple, General Electric, Boeing, Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, Cisco Systems, Morgan Stanley, and other highly-competitive employers. My experience here taught me what makes candidates stand out in a really competitive environment. I'll share what I learned with you. And you'll see how to apply my insight to get a job in a top-ranked company, the public sector, or a small business.

## 5,000

Five thousand is the number of interviews I personally conducted before I stopped keeping count. (It's actually probably closer to 10,000!) I conducted interviews for about

thirty minutes at a time, eleven (or more) appointments per day, five days a week, over many years of my life. The candidate interviews ranged from jobs in front-line service, senior-level leadership, specialized technical roles, and lots more.

**1,000,000**

One million! That's probably about the number of résumés I've reviewed over the years, in hand and sometimes with the help of talent acquisition software. It's a realistic estimate when you consider that for each *Fortune 100* job posting online, it's not uncommon to have 100, 200, 300 candidates, or more click "Apply." It would be impossible to interview everyone who applies. So what I learned sorting through my share of the 1,000,000+ résumés is that only the people with the best résumés stand out and are invited to interview. I also learned that most candidates have no idea what I'm looking for on a résumé or how I use that information as a recruiter. So I wrote a book about it, *Signs of a Great Résumé: How to Write a Résumé that Speaks for Itself*. The book you're reading here is a follow-up to *Signs of a Great Résumé* to help you navigate the interview process using the same successful approach.

**#1**

*Signs of a Great Résumé* went on to become a #1 best-seller. I never thought that my simple guide to articulating the best parts of your experience on a résumé would reach so many people. I am humbled by its success. More than anything, I am proud that my insight and tips helped so many people get the jobs of their dreams.

Where did that experience lead me? To our final number...

The story of writing *Signs of a Great Résumé* took me all the way to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue – the White House – not once, but twice! Here’s how that story goes...

As I went on the book tour for the launch of *Signs of a Great Résumé*, I’d meet military veterans just about everywhere I went. They’d often say something like, “Writing résumés is different for us. People in the private sector don’t seem to understand the military veteran experience. I’m not sure how to help them understand it since I’ve been in the military my whole career. It’s like private sector recruiters don’t speak the same language we use in the military.” Initially my response was similar to other civilians. “I’ve never served. So I don’t fully speak the language either, but thanks for your service!” I continued to receive questions from vets, who shared they were having a hard time transitioning into private sector jobs after serving their country. I knew I had to do something to help.

I attended the Veterans Institute program along with many other civilians who were passionate about helping vets succeed in civilian careers. This program changed my life and I’m forever grateful to the talented team at Disney Institute who brought it to life. At the program, I learned some facts that backed up what I had long believed: veterans are some of our best employees in the civilian workforce, they’re often just not always the best-understood job candidates. That’s because being a job candidate is the one thing their military training didn’t really prepare them for. That’s where I knew I could give back. I followed up with a number of the contacts I met at the Veterans Institute and I began the journey of a lifetime.

I was personally invited to a meeting in the Office of First Lady Michelle Obama as part of what was then a program sponsored by the First Lady and the Second Lady Dr. Jill Biden to help veterans get to work. While in D.C. I also met with leaders from a program in the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff at the Pentagon. I had a simple question: "How can I help?" The conversations that sprung forth from the meetings in these hallowed halls led me on quite an adventure that still continues. This involves working with veteran service organizations and nonprofits where I developed a way to translate military career experience to the civilian workforce.

When I was ready to share this insight, I wrote a follow-up version of my best-selling book: *Signs of a Great Résumé: Veterans Edition*. Part of its launch included a fundraiser which sent one thousand copies of the book to military bases and organizations across the country. It went on to help hundreds of veterans, and I was recognized as a trusted expert on military-to-civilian résumés. To this day I am engaged as a consultant and resource for several nonprofit organizations serving the veteran community. Through those organizations I've worked one-on-one with hundreds of veterans, transitioning service members and their spouses. Each of their stories is amazing! They inspire me in so many ways. They taught me about the rare and exceptional qualities veterans bring to the civilian workforce. Most importantly I learned how to effectively teach them to tell their stories in ways civilian recruiters can understand.

Recently I was invited back to the White House by one of my clients who was a director on the National Security Council at the White House. He invited me back to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, this time during a different presidential administration than my first visit. My advocacy for vets knows no political boundaries

and when I was called to help I proudly returned to DC. While there I delivered a résumé and interview workshop for members of the White House Military Office. You'd probably know them as the folks who do many high-profile things like manage Camp David, handle the "nuclear football" briefcase, oversee Air Force One, and even manage the president's IT support (and yes, his Twitter account). Being invited to DC during multiple presidential administrations is an absolute career highlight and humbling experience.

I mention these moments as matters of fact and certainly imply no endorsement of any kind by the Department of Defense or any government entity or person. I have nothing but the utmost gratitude for the gracious invitations I've been extended. These important interactions have helped propel my advocacy for veterans in a way that has served our veteran community well. I've now helped thousands of veterans and military spouses all around to help articulate the most relevant parts of their military stories in a way that civilian recruiters like me can easily understand.

Now that you know a bit more about this book and my story, let's get back to you.



SECTION 1

**KNOW  
YOUR**





# SECTION 1

## KNOW YOUR !@#\$\$%

In Section 1 of this book, you'll learn the tools necessary to answer any interview question. My approach will act like a roadmap to guide your responses to any question. These tools will help you quickly get to the point and show why you're the best fit for the job.

Together we'll learn:

Every interview question is a version of **one simple question**, "Can you tell me a story about why you're a great fit for this job?"

How to form a response that's a version of **one simple answer**, "Yes, I've done that successfully. For example when I..."

How to use an example from your prepared **!@#\$\$% Story Card** that best illustrates your past success.

How to use **RATS** to make sure your story articulates results, actions, and task and situation, including Signs of a Great Interview.

When necessary, use the **Perspective Pivot** to steer a poorly phrased question toward a great story that's full of !@#\$\$%.

And finally, make sure your answer passes the **Smart 5<sup>th</sup> Grader Test**. Use simple language, broadcast good news only, and get to the point quickly.

In Section 2, we'll put your !@#\$% to work. I'll share some insight about questions you likely to hear, and other interview scenarios that may be on your mind. You'll also learn how to be successful before, during, and after an interview. This includes using the **!@#\$% QWERTY Card** system to help you follow up, continue improving interview performance, and get the job!

For now, let's learn very important tools which will help you stand out among your competition. I want you to know your !@#\$% - the Signs of a Great Interview.

# 1

## YOUR STORY BEGINS

**Once upon a time** ... there lived a job applicant who loved interviews. That's probably not the way your job search story begins. Any story that starts like that would have to be a fairy tale in a land of make believe. In the real world, I don't know many people who love job interviews on either side of the desk. That's right. Even some hiring managers dislike conducting interviews as much as candidates dislike being interviewed. So why do we do it? Simply put, we kinda have to.

Most employers (besides headhunting firms and staffing agencies) don't exist just for the pleasure of doing interviews and hiring people. There's a business to run beyond the interviews and people are required to run that business. When an employer is conducting an interview, it's because they are at a disadvantage. The employer is looking for the best solution to a

staffing problem. They have work to be done and they need someone to do it. It could be because someone left the company. They may need to hire more people to staff-up a growing operation. No matter what the reason, the employer needs talent.

I wish there was a magical, more pleasant and efficient way to assess who should get the job. I'd love to know whose knowledge, skills, and world view perfectly aligns with an available position. But there isn't. That's because there simply is no objective way to answer the subjective question, "who's the best candidate for the job?"

Interviews are not the best way to assess whether a candidate is a great fit for a job. Applicants and hiring managers would be happier if every employer could test you out on the job for a bit, and assess whether you're a great fit by seeing if you get along with the existing team. In fact in some workplaces it's possible a hiring manager would prefer to chat in a more casual setting like over lunch or coffee ... or happy hour! (Pro tip: Don't drink alcohol ever when applying for a job.) Unfortunately there's seldom time, energy, or money available to make those kinds of investments in the job search process. So what we're left to contend with is the imperfect conventional process of job posting, application, résumé review, and interviews. It's kind of like the "least worse" option – and therefore the way things have been done for years. The good news is by the time you're done reading this book, you'll feel more ready than ever to face the interview process. I'll teach you how to answer questions in a way that capitalizes on your life and work experience in a way that leaves a great impression, is responsive, and showcases your worth. You'll have great tools that will prepare you to speak for yourself using the *Signs of a Great Interview*.

Let's get a few housekeeping matters out of the way. I'm going to call the person applying for the job the "candidate" or "applicant" even when they may be doing informal interviews and might not yet have "applied" to the job. I'll cover more on "informational interviews" later. More than one applicant may be referred to as a "talent pool" or "available job seekers," or something like that.

A "job posting" is a modern "help wanted" advertisement, typically found online on an individual employer's web site or on job posting boards, or on websites specifically designed to help people find work and help employers find talent. A job posting is also sometimes called a vacancy announcement, job listing, opportunity, and a few other terms I'm sure. This is an informational tool created by me the recruiter based on what types of knowledge, skills, and qualifications are necessary for the ideal candidate to possess. I'll cover job postings in detail in the "Interview Cheat Sheet" chapter.

I'm typically going to call the person conducting your interview the "recruiter," just to keep things simple. I recognize you may be interviewing with an interviewer, a screener, a sourcer, a headhunter, a talent manager, or someone else whose title is not "recruiter." You may also be meeting with more than one person at a time and I'll specifically address these "panel interviews" later-on in this book too.

The "hiring manager" is typically your future boss and is the "client" of the recruiter. My job as a recruiter is to identify talent for the hiring manager. Some hiring managers entrust me to just do the whole hiring process on my own and send them their new employee. Most hiring managers want me to narrow the field of applicants and suggest a few top candidates for them to

interview. Recruiters typically narrow the field through methods like using an applicant tracking software to sort and scan résumés, doing phone screening interviews, or meeting with candidates one-on-one. When this is the case, a recruiter's job is to become the candidate's "sales agent" and pitch the candidate effectively to the boss who may then want to meet with or hire the candidate. At a small business, sometimes the owner is the recruiter AND the hiring manager.

I'm going to call the place you're applying "the organization," "employer," or "company," even though you may be applying to work with a solo entrepreneur, a government agency, a non-profit, a learning institution, or some other type of place.

To get started, let's imagine you've been invited to an interview. That's wonderful news that means a recruiter has identified you as a possible solution to their staffing problem. After considering your résumé, application, referral, and other available data, the employer wants to learn more. Instead of celebrating though most applicants get very nervous about an upcoming interview. An applicant may feel that they will be put under a microscope, and will be asked tricky question. Even worse some worry an interview is like a test they might fail, and the questions have definite right and wrong answers. Most applicants who get nervous articulate a feeling like the interview and job is theirs to lose.

I'd like to boost your confidence right away by reminding you that an interview means the hiring manager believes you are the solution to her problem. You could save the day by filling an open position, and applying your expertise. If you look at it that way, one could argue you have the upper hand in the interview. What a relief! And, if you approach each question by tying your

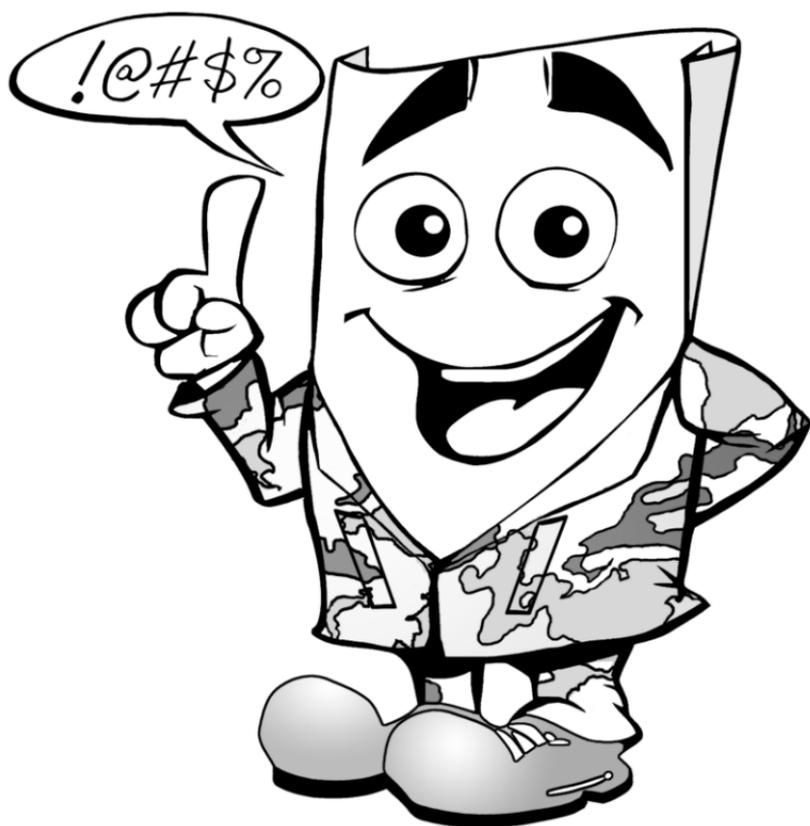
answer to a story of your past experience, how can your answer ever be wrong?! I'll talk more about this perspective and the technique to master it later in the book. Keep reading! I'm excited for you.

# 2

## SIGN LANGUAGE

You may be wondering why there's a cartoon résumé that looks like he might be cursing on the cover of this book. It's a nod to my first book *Signs of a Great Résumé* which became a best seller and went on to help thousands of people get the job of their dreams. A special edition called *Signs of a Great Résumé: Veterans Edition* followed and helped veterans, transitioning service members, reservists, and military spouses do the same.

The cartoon résumé is named "Résy," and he's not cursing. He's showing job applicants how to use a clever system I created known as the Signs of a Great Résumé. This system helps applicants showcase their experience using specific details about their past success in a way that stands out among competing applicants. I strongly encourage you to read my first book and create a résumé using the *Signs of a Great Résumé*. A polished résumé along with interview answers that feature past success in the same way is sure to push you to the top of the recruiter's list.



The main thing being evaluated by a recruiter in an interview is your ability to be successful on the job. As the old saying goes, “the best indicator of future success is past success.” That’s why the best way to show how you’re qualified in your future job is to tell stories that highlight your past successes. The *Signs of a Great Résumé* approach shows you how to fill your résumé with examples and specific details. The purpose of this book is to show how to use the same skills in an interview.

In essence, an applicant does best when she tells a story that says “Yes. I’ve successfully done that before, and here’s how ...” That is what we’ll learn to develop together, and what I mean when I say you’ll be able to tell a story that speaks for itself.

The best way to share the story of your past success with examples and specific details is to use the Signs of a Great Interview. The signs are represented by the symbols !@#\$. Each sign represents the following information and details that should be included on your résumé and in your interview answers.



They are:

- !** Any part of your experience that was “amazing!”
- @** Defining points, places, dates and things in your career
- #** Numbers that quantify and prove your past successes
- \$** The dollar value of your contributions
- %** Figures that easily show growth and results