

Chapter 8 Selling Yourself and Excelling at Your Interview

8.1 Executive Summary

- Your interview is your opportunity to allay your potential employer's fears and sell yourself.
- Show a positive attitude and demonstrate attributes and key competencies the employer is looking for.
- Thoroughly research the industry, the employer, and the interviewer to prepare answers to common interview questions.
- The employer will also research you. Prior to interviewing, Google yourself and look for any damaging or embarrassing information.

8.2 Using the Interview to Allay the Fears of Your Potential Employer

When employers hire an employee they are looking for many things. These include the ability to do the job well, an apparent understanding of the position and industry, a sense that the candidate will fit in and be happy with the job, and that the candidate will not leave after a short amount of time. Your interview is your opportunity to identify the potential concerns of the interviewer and address them head on.

One way to allay these concerns is to learn how to speak “corporate.” You can learn the language of the industry you are targeting by reading trade publications and job descriptions, joining relevant professional organizations, attending conferences and continuing education courses, going back to school, and—most importantly—through networking and being mentored. Being able to speak a prospective employer's language will make you a far more attractive potential employee because this will show your interest and familiarity with the field and indicate that the employer will not need to spend as much time getting you up to speed.

Consider the advice from a chief medical officer for a large health insurer who has interviewed and hired numerous physicians for non-clinical positions:

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Example 8.1: What the CMO at a large health insurer looks for in physicians he hires

There are several attributes that I would say I look for. The first and foremost is clinical credibility. You have to be what I would call a great clinician. You have to be a solid physician. You have to be up to date on your clinical skills. You have to know what is going on in your particular field. You don't have to know everything in every field, obviously, but you have to be aware of the latest advances, the drugs, the things going on in your field.

First and foremost is being a good clinician. Integrity is critical. We absolutely do not sacrifice anything relative to ethics or integrity or honesty. We look for people that can be team players. One of the differences between medicine and business is you have to be a team player in business, so we look for people who will be good team players. We look for people who will be humble. We look for people who can communicate very effectively to a wide variety of audiences, people who are good problem solvers, who can think critically, who can think on their feet and finally, who can listen.

Physicians like to talk and think that they can dominate everything. We want people who will step back and listen to what other people are saying.

After you've interviewed for many years, as I have, you kind of get a sense of is this person kind of someone that's going to fit in the business, [are they] going to fit within your medical team? I've interviewed people that within five minutes, I've known they're very arrogant and they're not going to be a good fit. I've interviewed people that I think will be good fits.

You never—the expression I use—you never can tell how someone's going to work out until you're either married to them or you work for them. And quite honestly, I've hired people that I've had to let go because they didn't work out...on the other hand, people that have come on board that we liked and did a great job—it wasn't for them. And they've had to leave because it didn't meet their expectations. So it works both ways.

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Physicians changing from clinical to non-clinical positions should carefully guard against negative comments about clinical medicine, their prior employers, overburdening paperwork/government regulations, long hours, unfair compensation, etc. Physicians who come off as “burned out,” disgruntled, or trying to “retire” to the corporate world stand little chance of success at their interview.

Looking to new challenges and being able to use the knowledge and skills developed in clinical practice appear more positive and are more attractive to employers.

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ATTRIBUTES FOR SUCCESS EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR

When you interview, consider the attributes for success SEAK faculty members suggest that employers look for. This will vary, of course, depending upon the precise position sought. For example, clinical credibility is not an issue if you want to become a stock broker, but it might be critical if you work for a health insurer.

Clinical Credibility: Position yourself with board certification and clinical experience. Be prepared to talk medicine at your interview. One of the reasons you may be hired is because as a doctor you will have inherent credibility with practitioners, the public, and others. You need to demonstrate at your interview that you have that credibility.

Personality: Likeable, interesting, extroverted people are far more likely to get hired. In the words of a physician who has hired dozens of doctors for work in industry:

Example 8.2: The importance of personality

You have to have a personality. It's that simple. You have to be likeable. You have to be interesting enough that somebody wants to sit with you. And how I judge that when I interview people, if I have to look at my watch and I can't wait for the interview to end, then I know. Why would a chairman of Mass General internal medicine want to sit there and look at you and talk to you, if you're just boring, you're boring or you're dreary or miserable, or you're just not interesting to be with? You have to have the interpersonal skills.

Teamwork: Being a team player is a must. Be prepared to cite examples of working successfully as a team leader and a team member to solve problems. Examples could be serving on task forces and committees. Employers look for people who won't step on toes and can navigate office politics.

Unassailable Integrity: You may be asked questions that subtly try to get a sense for your integrity level.

Humility: Don't be full of yourself in the interview. Be proud of your accomplishments without being a braggart. For example, if the interviewer comments: "I see you graduated *summa cum laude*. Will you be comfortable working for and with a lot of people who aren't nearly as

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smart as you?” A good answer might be, “I wouldn’t assume that I’m smarter. A big reason I was able to graduate summa is my work ethic. I am a very hard worker.” Here the doctor demonstrates humility while at the same time communicating a very desirable trait, that he is a hard worker.

Communication Skills: Communication skills are critical in many jobs. Demonstrate your communication skills in your interview. Position yourself to be a better communicator as part of your transition plan. Take every opportunity to teach, lecture, and serve as an expert. Consider joining Toastmasters.

Listen Carefully: Respond to the questions you have been asked and demonstrate that you are a good listener.

Change Agent: Be prepared to cite examples in your career where you were able to bring about positive change despite facing resistance and difficulties.

Translator: Speak colloquially when discussing medical terms (for example, say “collarbone” instead of “clavicle”).

Critical Thinking: You may be put on the spot to analyze a problem or situation. The idea is to see how you would think something through. For example, you may be asked, “How would you market a product that did X?” Be prepared for this.

Thoroughness: Make sure your CV or resume is mistake-free. Do your homework on the company and people interviewing you and seize opportunities to demonstrate this during your interview. For example, by asking questions such as, “I see that your company just came out with X product. Do you think I would have an opportunity to work on that?”

A “Self-Starter”: Cite publications, presentations, chairing meetings and committees, and examples of your ability to work without direct supervision.

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Stability: If you have changed jobs frequently, be prepared to explain why this was for advancement and not ambivalence.

Ability to Travel: Be prepared to mention how you enjoy a reasonable amount of travel.

Computer Literate: In many positions, knowledge of Excel would be a good talking point demonstrating business and quantitative skills. In any event, basic computer skills such as e-mail and word processing will almost always be required.

8.3 Interviewing Techniques

It is critical to research the company and the position as much as possible. This will demonstrate interest and a good work ethic. You will also then be prepared to best articulate what you can do for the company and why you are interested in the opportunity. It is the kiss of death in an interview to focus on your wanting to leave your current position and not how excited you are to help the new organization in a new role. Consider the following:

Example 8.3: Physician chief scientific officer gives interviewing advice

I think that for any interview you have to know as much as you can about the place where you are interviewing, and the position that you are interviewing for. When I did my interviews I made sure that I went on to the websites of the companies, I made sure I talked to some people, trying to find out about the company atmosphere, the type of position I would be stepping into, and I made sure it was something I wanted to do. When I went in to the interview, I was knowledgeable, I showed them and really demonstrated that I knew about the company, that I had at least a general sense of what the position was about, and I was very interested in it. I think that if you are sincere about what you want to do and show that, I think that especially for physicians who are making a career transition, if you are showing that you are excited about moving towards something instead of running away from something, I think that's very important. I'm now in a position where I interview, even more than interview, I speak to physicians all the time who are considering changing careers and what I hear a little bit too often is doctors who know they don't want to do what they're doing and they're considering making a jump that they don't really know enough about. I feel that they generally haven't researched it enough. You can tell when somebody comes across and talks to you about why they want to do the career that you are talking about. They come across as being excited about

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it, you get excited about it, and you want to work together. I think that's very important.

PREPARATION

Learn as much as possible about the prospective employer and the person(s) interviewing you.

Prospective Employer: The more you know, the better able you will be to:

- Answer and ask intelligent questions,
- Determine the values, skills, company culture, and talents the employer is looking for,
- Appear to be motivated,
- Align your competencies and transferable skills to the employer's mission statement, and
- Impress the interviewer with your research abilities, preparedness, and tenacity.

Research: Research the company by first going to their corporate Web site and studying it. When practicable, it is a good idea to print their entire site.

You will want to learn as much information as possible about the company. For example, if you were going to interview at a publicly traded pharmaceutical company, the Web site would likely include:

- company history,
- leadership,
- locations,
- treatments,
- products,
- R & D,
- products in the pipeline,
- news and press releases,
- careers,
- corporate culture,
- benefits,

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- job searches,
- codes of conduct,
- earnings,
- stock information,
- corporate governance,
- shareholder information,
- compliance, and much more.

The better prepared you are for your interview, the more likely you will be:

- relaxed,
- informed, and
- successful.

Highly motivated physicians will continue their due diligence on their prospective non-clinical position, their business, products, and future prospects.

Physicians who talk with past and current employees will likely find out information that is not generally publicly available. This insider's insight can be invaluable in evaluating a company and impressing the interviewer.

Additional information can be obtained about prospective employers by searching:

- Dun and Bradstreet reports
- SEC filings if a public company (EDGAR Database: visit www.Sec.gov)
- Better Business Bureaus
- RipOffReport.com
- Google (try typing in the company's name in quotes and adding words like "lawsuit," "bankruptcy," "layoffs," "restructuring," and "default")

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Prospective Interviewer: Learn as much as possible about the person who will conduct the interview. The more you know about the person, the better you will be able to:

- make a good first impression,
- connect personally,
- avoid alienating the interviewer, and
- demonstrate the personal style and professional skills sought and anticipate, prepare for, and excel at the questions you will be asked.

If possible, obtain and study the interviewer's resume or curriculum vitae. This document is often very revealing. You will also want to learn about the company's hiring process. For example:

- initial phone interview,
- personal interview, and
- group interview, etc.

Your interest and competence can be demonstrated through preparation. It is good advice to prepare as much as possible for your interviews. The time spent preparing can yield a huge return on investment. Consider the case of the neurologist who brought along a binder of his past IMEs when interviewing for a medical director position at an insurance company:

Example 8.4: Preparation for interview pays off for physician

The interview went pretty well. One thing I did that I thought would be helpful is, because I had the medical legal experience, I actually came in with a ring binder with cases that I had done in the past to have them reviewed to see my work product, basically. From what I heard later on, they were really impressed by it.

INTERVIEWER WILL RESEARCH YOU

Before your interview (before your job search begins too) it is a good idea to Google yourself. Any reasonable employer or recruiter will do the same. If you have listings on social networking sites or if you have a blog, you will want to make sure there is no content in these areas that is potentially embarrassing. In addition, if there is damaging content about

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you that you cannot control (for example, a news article) you want to at least be prepared to put these articles in their best light.

Your presence on the Internet can also, of course, be a benefit. If your name produces numerous hits of articles published, positions of importance, and other favorable material, this will reinforce your stature as a physician leader.

TAP THE INTERVIEWER'S X FACTOR

It is a good idea to get as much intelligence and do as much research as possible on the person interviewing you. The most common ways to get such information is to look at the bios on the company's Web site, check out social networking sites, do Internet searches on the person, and talk to your network to gather information. Once you have this information, you want to look for things that make the interviewer tick or that you have in common with the interviewer. The idea is to get the interviewer to like you and hit it off with you. Consider the following case examples:

Example 8.5: Showing a common interest

You discover through Googling the interviewer's name that the person interviewing you is active in veteran's affairs and the USO. Your father served in the Marine Corps. You want to bond with this person and for this person to like you. When he asks how you think you would get along in a hierarchical organization, you reply, "I don't think I'd have any problem with this. My father was a Marine Corps officer, so from a young age I became accustomed to following orders."

Example 8.6: Tapping the X Factor

You learn through your interviewer's social networking site that he has 5 children. When asked your three greatest accomplishments you state raising three well-adjusted children.

Example 8.7: Stroking the ego

You discover from online searching of old newspaper articles that the interviewer had won an industry award many years back. You congratulate the interviewer and tell her how impressed you were with this and how excited you would be to work with such a talented team. This shows your diligence and strokes the interviewer's ego.

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For many physicians, interviewing for a non-clinical position will be a completely new and somewhat foreign experience. These physicians may not have been interviewed for many years. For most physicians, this will be their first non-clinical interview since becoming a physician. Those who are prepared for their interviews are best positioned to excel.

NAILING YOUR INTERVIEW

Physicians who excel at their non-clinical interview are the ones who are able to articulate in a succinct fashion:

- What they bring to the table,
- How they can help the company, and
- Why they should be hired.

You should be able to expound upon each talking point you make with a specific example:

Example 8.8: Talking point—Good with deadlines

I am extremely good and diligent about deadlines. For example, at my hospital I wrote a 20-page monthly newsletter for 10 years, was never late with one issue, and won several awards for the quality of the newsletter.

Example 8.9: Talking point—Excellent communication skills

I pride myself on my excellent communication skills. For example, I have conducted numerous one- and two-day training sessions and, in fact, developed a “train the trainer” program for young physicians in my hospital.

ARTICULATING KEY COMPETENCIES

Prospective employers judge what *key competencies* the interviewee brings to the table. The three questions employers seek to answer at the interview are:

1. Can the prospective employee do the job?
2. Do I/we like him and connect with him?
3. Can we afford him?

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The interviewer will look for which core competencies the prospective employee brings to the interview:

Competency: Accountability

Definition: Takes personal responsibility for outcomes.

Talking Point: “You know, I take responsibility for the health and even the life of my patients on a daily basis. It is something I am very accustomed to.”

Competency: Adapting to Change

Definition: Is very flexible and adaptable; copes well with changes.

Talking Point: “When we moved to electronic records, I led the physicians’ committee to help accomplish this.”

Competency: Business Mindedness

Definition: Understands the nature of the company’s business and how his role affects the bottom line.

Talking Point: “I appreciate the fact that pharma has a responsibility to its stockholders and the general public.”

Competency: Communication

Definition: Express oneself well verbally.

Talking Point: “When people have trouble understanding what I am trying to express, I feel that the failure is on my end and will express myself in a clearer fashion.”

Competency: Conflict Management

Definition: Finds common ground to resolve issues.

Talking Point: “The issue is not who is right or wrong, but how we can reach a mutually satisfactory resolution.”

Competency: Cooperation and Collaboration

Definition: Works well with others to achieve business and team goals.

Talking Point: “Getting the best out of each employee and making the team stronger are two of my strengths.”

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Competency: Creating and Communicating Vision

Definition: Makes real to everyone inspiring a vision.

Talking Point: “Explaining what we are trying to accomplish, getting people to buy-in, and leading by example has worked well for me in the past.”

Competency: Critical Thinking

Definition: Develops solutions to business problems.

Talking Point: “Coming up with simple, elegant solutions is one of my strengths.”

Competency: Customer Focus

Definition: Concentrates on customers’ best interests.

Talking Point: “Teaching and educating customers as to what serves them best are the keys to customer focus.”

Competency: Dealing with Ambiguity

Definition: Embraces change and can comfortably handle risk and uncertainty.

Talking Point: “The ability to accept the ambiguity inherent in complex problems so you can move on the solutions is crucial for success.”

Competency: Detail-Oriented

Definition: Is meticulous and precise in approach; quality-conscious and thorough.

Talking Point: “I will take the time to make sure that my work product is accurate, mistake-free, and of the highest quality.”

Competency: Development

Definition: Improves oneself or others professionally.

Talking Point: “Making the others on the team you work with better employees, by mentoring them and sharing the credit is crucial to employee and team development.”

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Competency: Drive for Results

Definition: Consistently meets/exceeds goals; is action-oriented and passionate about the work; seizes opportunities.

Talking Point: “When I work on a project I follow the advice of Gene Kranz of mission control for Apollo 13: ‘Failure is not an option.’”

Competency: Functional Knowledge

Definition: Well-developed knowledge of own functional area of expertise.

Talking Point: “I am thought of as one of the 4-5 ‘go-to’ experts in the field.”

Competency: Influencing Others

Definition: Negotiates “win-win” outcomes in tough situations.

Talking Point: “The ability to negotiate solutions that satisfy all parties is a key to my past success.”

Competency: Initiative

Definition: Demonstrates self-motivation through action.

Talking Point: “I do not need or depend on others for motivation. That comes from within—the desire to succeed.”

Competency: Innovation

Definition: Generates creative new ideas.

Talking Point: “The ability to look at what everyone else looks at and see something different is what makes me creative.”

Competency: Integrity/Ethical Behavior

Definition: Is trustworthy and demonstrates strong personal and professional values.

Talking Point: “My word is my bond. That is the way I was brought up and continue to live my life.”

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Competency: Interpersonal Skills

Definition: Relates well to all kinds of people at all levels within and outside the organization.

Talking Point: “I truly enjoy getting input, perspectives, and ideas from others, and this shows.”

Competency: Leadership Potential

Definition: Motivates and inspires others.

Talking Point: “I motivate by example. I do not ask others to do what I would not, will not, could not, or have not done myself.”

Competency: Learning Attitude

Definition: Pursues learning with drive and vigor.

Talking Point: “Understanding that there is always more to learn is crucial to professional growth.”

Competency: Maintaining Composure/Flexibility

Definition: Is tolerant of people and processes, and can deal well with change and new information.

Talking Point: “Maturity is the ability to successfully deal with processes, people, and new information.”

Competency: Management Skills

Definition: Sets employee goals; coaches and monitors performance.

Talking Point: “I look at myself as the player/coach. My goal is to make the overall team stronger so we can work to achieve our goals.”

Competency: Managerial Courage

Definition: Doesn’t hold back; makes tough decisions even when those decisions are unpopular.

Talking Point: “In business, you often have to put the company and the project first and make tough calls that are not always popular.”

Competency: Motivating Others

Definition: Empowers others to succeed.

Talking Point: “Sharing credit graciously helps others succeed and they appreciate working with you.”

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Competency: Planning and Organizing

Definition: Uses time and resources efficiently to accomplish work objectives.

Talking Point: “Understanding the realities of the workplace, i.e., not always having the time or resources you would like, makes one a realist and forces you to work with what you do have.”

Competency: Priority and Goal Setting

Definition: Quickly discovers the source of problems and generates thoughtful, effective solutions.

Talking Point: “Spending sufficient time and thought to identify the problem is often crucial. Getting the right answer to the wrong questions is often the result of haste.”

Competency: Problem Solving

Definition: Takes control of challenging projects with foresight and implementation focus.

Talking Point: “To succeed you need to identify the problems, analyze the solutions, and implement the efficient solutions.”

Competency: Project Planning

Definition: Focuses effort on most important goals and objectives.

Talking Point: “Culling out secondary goals and concentrating time and resources to achieve core goals leads to success.”

Competency: Risk-Taking

Definition: Takes well-calculated business risks, learning from mistakes and false starts.

Talking Point: “The refusal to take calculated, well-thought-out risk results in inaction. Oftentimes the riskiest thing to do is nothing.”

Competency: Service Orientation

Definition: Committed to meeting and exceeding customer expectations.

Talking Point: “For 30 years I have strived to exceed the expectations of patients and I will continue to do so in the industry.”

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Competency: Strategic Ability

Definition: Is visionary; anticipates future consequences and trends.

Talking Point: “The ability to spot trends, learn from other industries, and translate that experience to your situation is crucial to success.”

Competency: Teamwork

Definition: Works well with others to achieve shared goals.

Talking Point: “Building a strong team that enjoys working together to achieve one goal is one of my strengths.”

Competency: Technical Knowledge and Proficiency

Definition: Accurately and consistently applies technical principles and practice to situations on the job.

Talking Point: “Continuing professional development is crucial to continue to be considered one of the ‘go-to’ persons in this industry.”

Competency: Time Management

Definition: Uses time effectively and efficiently, concentrating efforts on the most important priorities.

Talking Point: “I always tackle the most difficult job first each day. After that, all other projects are easy by comparison.”

Competency: Works Independently

Definition: High degree of comfort operating autonomously.¹

Talking Point: “Once asked to accomplish a task, you can consider it done, professionally, on-time or early, with the highest quality.”

8.4 Interview Questions

Physicians interviewing for their first non-clinical position should be prepared to actively listen to the questions they are asked.

Active listening involves listening carefully to the question that is being asked and also listening for what is implied in the question.

Practice active listening skills so that you can hear what is being said and also what is not being said.

¹ *501 Great Interview Questions for Employers and the Best Answers for Prospective Employees*, Pudmoroff, Atlantic Publishing Group, Pp. 275–280 (2005).

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Example 8.10: Figuring out what the interviewer really wants to know

Q. Do you think you have too much experience for this position?

Active Listening: The interviewer may be getting at one or more things:

1. Too old for the position,
2. May require too high a salary, and/or
3. May be bored with the position.

Artful Reply:

A. I don't think you can have too much positive experience. I look at this position as challenging and a step forward. I am willing to do what it takes to obtain and excel at this position.

Interview Questions to Prepare For: Physicians moving to non-clinical positions should be able to articulately answer the following questions. To excel at interviewing, practice these questions with a tape recorder or video camera. Work hard to remove unflattering verbal mannerisms, such as "umm." Listening to yourself or, even better, watching yourself, can be very revealing. It is one thing to say that you are articulate and a good communicator. It is quite another thing to prove it with your answers to an interviewer's questions. One good technique is to listen to the question and see it as if it was written on a white board.

Answering questions in a bulletpoint fashion with short, succinct, grammatically correct sentences will demonstrate your:

- Intellect,
- Ability to think on your feet,
- Knowledge of the subject, and
- Ability to communicate.

Example 8.11: Being well-prepared to answer an interview question

Q. What do you read to keep up with the information in the business world?

A. I have three main sources:

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1. *The Wall Street Journal*, cover to cover,
2. Business magazines like *Forbes*, *CEO*, *The Economist*, and the *Harvard Business Review*, and
3. Online business sites such as Bloomberg, BNET, CNN Money, and Business Week.

Some of the specific questions physicians need to be prepared to answer are listed below, along with potential answers. Keep in mind that the best answer for you depends upon your particular situation and the position you are applying for. A helpful technique is to produce a one- or two-page sheet of talking points prior to the interview and study them very closely. These talking points could include many points from your resume and other facts and accomplishments you can cite to allay the concerns of your prospective employer.

Example 8.12: Sample question and answer #1

Q. Why should we hire a doctor for this non-medical position?

A. I have the skills and drive you are looking for and I will make you a lot of money.

Discussion: This simple, direct reply is particularly appropriate to a position in the financial industry looking for a self-starter.

Example 8.13: Sample question and answer #2

Q. Why did you decide to give up medicine as a career?

A. After 20 years of practice, I find that I am more and more interested in the management side of things. It gives me the opportunity to be more creative and to have a greater impact. I want to work in a field where I have unlimited growth potential if and when I prove myself.

Discussion: Here the physician emphasizes what he is moving toward as opposed to what he is leaving.

Example 8.14: Sample question and answer #3

Q. How will your medical training help you in this position?

A. A large part of the position, as I understand it, is reviewing marketing materials for medical accuracy. My medical training will be invaluable.

Discussion: The physician demonstrates an understanding of the position and is easily able to demonstrate how his medical training and expertise will help the company.

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Example 8.15: Sample question and answer #4

Q. What transferable skills do you have that will help you in this position?

A. Almost too many to list. Phenomenal work ethic. I routinely put in 70–80 hour work weeks now. Problem solver. Diagnose, treat, and don't make things worse. Calm under fire. I'm dealing with life and death on a daily basis and I don't lose my head. Communications. Every day I need to communicate with colleagues, management, patients, and many other players. Passion. I don't go half-in on anything. You don't get to become a doctor if you do.

Discussion: The physician indicates that he is a driven Type "A" personality used to dealing with difficult challenges. He is not a clock-watcher, but is a person who gets the job done.

Example 8.16: Sample question and answer #5

Q. Do you expect to make as much money in this position as you did in your previous position?

A. I expect to be paid largely on my performance and I expect to perform superbly.

Discussion: Here the physician is not shy about wanting to be paid well. He successfully ties in his financial desires to performance.

Example 8.17: Sample question and answer #6

Q. Will you be giving up your medical license?

A. No. There is no reason to do so and it could diminish my value to you as I may have less credibility with clients and key opinion leaders.

Discussion: The physician points out why it is to the employer's advantage for her to maintain her license.

Example 8.18: Sample question and answer #7

Q. How much money are you looking for?

A. I'd be happy to discuss that if and when you offer me a position and I know the details of the position.

Discussion: The physician will discuss money if he is offered the job and the job requirements are established and agreed upon.

Example 8.19: Sample question and answer #8

Q. If there was a medical emergency in the office, what would you do?

A. Everything I can to help out. The specifics would obviously depend on what exactly the medical emergency was.

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Discussion: The physician does not shy away from being helpful. The answer demonstrated common sense.

Example 8.20: Sample question and answer #9

Q. Tell me something about yourself not on your resume.

A. My proudest accomplishment is my family. I have a lovely wife and two small children. I will work extremely hard to see them taken care of.

Discussion: Here the physician talks about his family and the need to support them well. He ties his future hard work to his family's well-being, all but assuring he will work very hard.

Answering Open-Ended Questions: You need to be able to answer open-ended questions as well. Through the use of such questions, the interviewer is testing you to see:

- How articulate you are,
- If you can organize your thoughts and express them in a coherent manner,
- How selective you are and if you can answer in both a concise and complete fashion, and
- If you can answer with a beginning, a middle, and a conclusion while weaving in a crucial theme.

Example 8.21: Sample open-ended question #1

Q. Why don't you tell me about yourself?

A. I was born and raised in Brooklyn and was the first one in my family to go to college. I worked my way through college and medical school.

My wife Nancy and I met at medical school and we will have been married 24 years on November 1st of this year. Our two girls, Kathy and Staci, are doing very well at Wheaton College outside of Boston.

I practiced family medicine for 16 years and built up the practice to 10 physicians and 7,000 active patients. Over the last 4 years I moved over to administering and growing the practice full-time. I found that I loved the administrative duties. I obtained my MBA at night and sold the practice to my partners. I am very excited about your opportunity in administrative medicine at this hospital.

With my years of clinical practice and my administrative experience, I know I can make a real difference at this hospital.

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Discussion: The physician emphasizes his roots, achievements, solid family credentials, clinical experience, administrative experience, additional business training, and his passion for business.

Example 8.22: Sample open-ended question #2

Q. Why should I hire you?

A. These are six main reasons:

1. My credentials, clinical experience and business training all are an excellent fit for this position and the company.
2. I am a quick study and get along well with team members I work with. I have met the team here and I enjoyed talking with them and I know I would fit in.
3. I am an excellent public speaker and make powerful, memorable presentations.
4. My negotiation skills are superior and I can help this company immediately with the ongoing negotiations.
5. I have studied the job description and the company and I am excited about the opportunity to excel and grow.
6. I am available to travel and I actually enjoy it. The bottom line is I would do an excellent job for you.

Discussion: The physician here emphasizes his skills, experience, and core competencies. He reveals his abilities and passion and can hit the ground running.

Example 8.23: Sample open-ended question #3

Q. What are your major strengths?

A. Four areas I feel that are my major strengths are:

- Integrity—I have been told by many people I am the most honest person they have ever met.
- Reliability—Once I am given a project or assignment, I will see that it is completed on time, within budget, and in a high-quality fashion.
- Persistence—I do not like to fail and do not give up until the assignment is complete.
- Passion—I believe once you take on an assignment you excel when you really believe in it and love what you are doing.

Discussion: The physician hits some of the hot-button issues the interviewer is probably looking for.

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Example 8.24: Sample open-ended question #4

Q. What are your major weaknesses?

A. I am obsessive and drive myself pretty hard. My wife Sally is working on me to loosen up a bit.

I expect others around me to work at my same pace and with the same degree of dedication. I am gradually learning to temper my enthusiasm a bit and to be more understanding with my co-workers.

In the past I did not take much vacation time but again, with the help of Sally, I am seeing it is important to take time off and recharge.

Discussion: Here the physician frankly suggests a weakness that he hopes his prospective employer will actually see as a strength.

Example 8.25: Sample open-ended question #5

Q. What sort of pay do you expect to receive?

A. I expect to be paid competitively for this position based upon my experience and training. I would be happy with the higher end of your salary range. I understand about the benefits, bonus, and options and that also makes this position attractive to me and my family.

Discussion: The physician does not box herself into a salary demand. She sends the message that she expects to be well paid. The fact that her family is already on board is a plus as well.

Example 8.26: Sample open-ended question #6

Q. How does your previous experience relate to the jobs we have here?

A. Numerous ways. You're looking for someone who can bring people together and push through change. I've done that my whole career. Specifically...

Discussion: The physician is prepared to cite specific instances of how her experience will help the employer.

Example 8.27: Sample open-ended question #7

Q. What are your plans for the future?

A. To obtain this position and excel at it growing with the company. My husband was born 12 miles from corporate headquarters and he can't wait to move back home. I am prepared to make a long-term commitment to this company.

Discussion: The physician sends the strong message that she is in this for the long haul. The fact that her husband is strongly supportive drives the point home.

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Example 8.28: Sample open-ended question #8

Q. What will your former employers say about you?

A. If they weren't afraid of lawsuits, they'd say very positive things I am quite sure. As you know, because of the liability issues involved, most employers will only verify dates of employment. That said, I can certainly provide you with numerous colleagues as references.

Discussion: The interviewee demonstrates a sophisticated knowledge of risk management and business practices.

Example 8.29: Sample open-ended question #9

Q. Why are you looking for this sort of position and why here?

A. As you know, I practiced gastroenterology for 12 years. I have gotten to know and understand the importance of drug safety and have been on the speakers' bureau for Novartis and Schering Plough. I am also a bit of a software geek and programmer. The more I worked with the pharmaceutical industry, the more I enjoyed it and realized the impact I could have in patient safety. I am here because of my keen interest in drug safety software development, in which you are one of the international leaders. This is where it is happening for drug safety software and this is where I want to be.

Discussion: The physician lays out his reasons for career transition, his clinical and relevant experience, and his unique combination of talents that are a good fit for the employer.

Example 8.30: Sample open-ended question #10

Q. Why don't you tell me about your personal situation?²

A. I am married with a 5-year-old son and 2-year-old daughter. I have family roots here in Maine and would love to move back here.

Discussion: The physician simply and directly answers the question without getting into the propriety of the question. He does not ramble on and intentionally keeps his reply brief.

Example 8.31: Additional questions to be prepared to answer

Note: There are many effective answers to these questions. The most effective answers depend on your personal experiences, style, and the position you are applying for.

Q. What is your greatest accomplishment?

A. Two of them actually. My son Jimmy, aged 5, and my daughter Katie, aged 3.

² *Next-Day Job Interview: Prepare Tonight and Get the Job Tomorrow*, Farr, Jist Publishing, 2005, p. v (questions only).

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Q. Tell me more about your choice to change your career.

A. I think we've already covered that. I have developed arthritis and can no longer practice surgery, but I would like to continue to use my medical skills and knowledge. I have zero interest in retiring.

Q. What is the most important element you require in a job?

A. I don't know if there is any one thing that is most important. Some things that come to mind are that the job is challenging, collegiality of team members, and believing in the product.

Q. What has given you the most satisfaction at work?

A. Making dramatic positive differences in patients' lives.

Q. How would you describe your leadership style?

A. Lead by example. If you want people to work harder, be the first one in and the last one out. Also, don't take yourself too seriously and be a great listener.

Q. Tell me about an important written document you have completed.

A. I've published 3 books. I know how to write and how to stick through a project to completion.

Q. What is the best written proposal you have created?

A. That's hard to say. One that comes to mind is a recent proposal on cost reductions at our group. 7 of 8 recommendations were accepted and implemented and we saved 5% total on all our fixed expenses, which is really an extraordinary number.

Q. Describe a situation where you failed at work.

A. I attempted to get my partners to agree to hire an additional physician for the practice to reduce call for the younger physician. I failed the first 2 times I brought it up, but they eventually came around.

Q. How do you prepare to give a presentation?

A. Preparation is the key to a successful presentation. I determine what the audience is interested in and work hard to deliver meaningful content.

Q. What was the most successful presentation you gave?

A. One that comes to mind is the presentation to my partners on my proposed cost-cutting measures. I coherently and concisely made the pitch and was ready with answers to most of the concerns that were raised.

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Q. Describe a time in which you had a complex assignment at work and generated a solution.

A. I was tasked with finding an EHR solution for our office. I had to communicate with all the stakeholders, do complex analysis, make a recommendation, and then sell that recommendation to everyone involved. No easy task, but it was a great experience.

Q. Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventative methods.

A. I anticipated the housing bubble and was able to push through a sale and lease back of our medical building in 2007.

Q. Give me an example of a time you had to make a difficult decision and what you did.

A. This happens all the time. At one point we had two long-term employees who were at each other's throats and poisoning the entire staff. I made the decision that one had to go and I fired him. Not pleasant, but absolutely necessary.

Q. Tell me about a time you overcame great obstacles to achieve something significant.

A. I was planning on running the Boston Marathon to celebrate turning 40. When I was 38 I broke my leg and was laid up for 6 months. I still came back and finished in less than four hours.

Q. Give me an example of your working well under stress.

A. I was serving in Iraq in 2003 when they brought in a critical soldier with a live rocket-propelled grenade stuck in his abdomen and I had to remove it. I did and he survived.

Q. Tell me about a creative solution you had to a work problem.

A. I do expert witness consulting work and wanted to generate a higher volume of work. I decided to raise my prices, which would seem counterintuitive. Because the higher price has generated a higher perceived value, the volume of my work has increased markedly because lawyers think, "Hey, he charges a lot, he must be really good." You need to be prepared to think out of the box.

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8.5 Asking Questions at Your Interview

Physicians should be prepared to ask intelligent probing questions which demonstrate knowledge, insight, and preparation. Many of these should be prepared in advance of the interview. At least one or two should be inspired by the interview itself.

EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS TO ASK AT AN INTERVIEW

- Q. What do you like best and least about working here?
- Q. What is your turnover rate for physicians?
- Q. What are your plans to increase profitability?
- Q. Do you have any concerns about me that we haven't addressed?
- Q. Do you know what management's long-term plans are in terms of independence or merger?
- Q. Who would I be reporting to?
- Q. How many direct reports would I have and what level would they be?
- Q. How would you best describe the culture here?

8.6 Concluding the Interview and Sending a Thank You Note

When making your closing comments, consider covering three main points:

1. I can do this job and do it well.
2. I will excel at this position.
3. I will fit into the corporate culture and I will like it here.

Example 8.32: Sample parting words

Thank you so much. I think I'm exactly what you are looking for and would love to be part of your great team here.

Example 8.33: Sample parting words

I could make a big contribution for you right away. The types of things you need are exactly what I've done at...

Example 8.34: Sample parting words

I really like your management philosophy. It mirrors my own. I would fit in very well and welcome the opportunity to do so.

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Sending follow-up thank you e-mails to your interviewers is also a very good idea. Such an e-mail can also serve as an opportunity to address any issues that you feel may need clarification:

Example 8.35: Thank you e-mail

Charlie:

Thank you so much for having me in. I was very impressed with your organization. I feel strongly that I would do a superb job for you. I would be very excited at the opportunity.

Also, one thing I did want to mention is that I had chaired for 5 years the finance committee and building committee at my local synagogue. I forgot to mention that when you asked about management experience not on my resume.

Thank you again,
Steve

8.7 Conclusion

The physician who is well-prepared, comfortable with her experience, abilities, and competencies and makes a favorable impression will excel at her non-clinical interview.