



FIVE STAR STAFFING  
&  
ACCOUNTING RECRUITERS  
ADMINISTRATIVE & ACCOUNTING PLACEMENTS

## FIVE STAR JOB INTERVIEWING

Success in one's company, industry, or position often depends on the ability to persuade others. You may make a pitch to a prospective employer to get a job, your boss to approve a project, or a prospective customer to become a current client. Ultimately, your effectiveness at getting others to understand and agree with your point of view can determine how far you climb the ladder. More importantly, it can also determine whether or not you even get to lay a hand on the ladder.

For many of us, interviewing poses the final, and perhaps most daunting obstacle to getting a job. Sometimes you are invited to an interview because there is a definite and specific position a company is trying to fill. In other situations, the company does not have a specific job opening, but rather, have been made curious enough by the materials you have presented (resume & cover letter) to meet you and explore ways in which their organization can utilize your skills.

In either situation, your goal for the meeting is to satisfy their concerns about your ability to do the job. However, and most importantly, it is an opportunity for *them* to talk to *you*. As a job seeker interviewing with decision-makers, you want them to talk about their needs, problems, and challenges. You make that happen through the questions you ask.

If there is an opening, what is the interviewer looking for? What does he/she really want? What type of a person will get along best with him/her? This information will allow you to develop a more accurate and targeted strategy for making your pitch in terms that will fit the company, make them *believe* that you are giving them the best deal, and make them *feel* good about hiring you.

### PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Before you go on an interview, you will need to research the interviewer, the department, the company, and the industry. A vast amount of information is available on the internet these days. The ideal starting point: the company's own website. Follow each link on the site and print off anything that interests you. Find their internal search engine. Enter the name(s) of the interviewer, the department, their products or services, the name of the president of the company, key words like *annual meeting*, *prospectus* (if they are publicly traded), *customer service*, *public relations*, or whatever else you can think of. Print off everything, because you won't begin to see the connections between everything until you have everything in front of you. Following this, the next step is to research the industry.

Some helpful web sites to use include:

- <http://stats.bls.gov/oco/cg/home.htm>
- <http://www.hoovers.com/free/>
- <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/business/companyresearch/>
- [http://www.quintcareers.com/researching\\_companies.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/researching_companies.html)

Once you have gathered your material research, sit down and read through all the information. Sort the sheets into piles of similar information. Next, highlight the key points on each sheet. Transfer and consolidate all the key points onto sheets of paper by topic. What additional questions does this uncover? What are the key problems of the industry? The company? The department? Prepare open-ended questions that probe into these problem areas. Write them on the back of a 3x5 index card. Make up a second card with the key information you find out in your research and bring it with you.

## IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF INTERVIEW

- **SCREENING:**  
First interviews; conducted in person, over the phone, or via webcam; used to determine if an applicant meets the minimum qualifications for a posted position
- **PHONE:**  
Form of screening interview conducted to save time, travel expense, etc. Be prepared, have your resume on hand, be professional, and smile when you talk (increases likelihood of sounding personable).
- **ONE ON ONE:**  
The most common interview format; could be conducted by an HR representative or a supervisor; focus is on questions that relate to the position they are trying to fill.
- **PANEL:**  
Group interview conducted by three or more people; panelists may come from different departments; ask questions that are relative to their department and the job demands.

## DRESS

See “Five Star’s Dress for Success.”

## FOR THE INTERVIEW

Preparation is the key to a good interview. Do everything you can to reduce your anxiety. Drive by the interview location a couple of days ahead of time to avoid getting lost. On the day of the interview, arrive ten minutes early. If you get there before that, sit out in the car and wait. You don’t want to appear over-anxious. Walk up to the receptionist and tell her/him, “Hello, My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am here for an interview with \_\_\_\_\_.” Do you happen to have some literature on the company I could read while I wait?” Now read it. You will find nine times out of ten that whatever they hand you will have information that will turn out to be useful in the interview.

## MAKING A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

There are four specific things you need to do in order to insure a good first impression:

1. Smile (show your teeth). Interviewing is hard work and you need to make it look easy.
2. Make direct eye contact. Even if you are interviewing with a committee, always look people in the eye. Pretend you are having a conversation with one or more members of your audience, then look at them and talk to them. Don't look at their mouths, or their chests, or their hair. Look only in their eyes and don't look away more than 50% of the time, even if this is uncomfortable and not what you would normally do.
3. Know and use their name. Call the day beforehand to confirm the appointment. Speak to the secretary and say, “Hello, this is \_\_\_\_\_, I am calling to confirm my 10 o’clock appointment with \_\_\_\_\_. Can you please tell me who will be attending other than \_\_\_\_\_?” If there is anyone else, get his/her name, title, and role in the company. Research that person as well. You will be amazed how often the secretary will give you this information, because so rarely does anyone ask this question. Chances are, no one will have told him or her not to give the information to you. In addition, if for some reason the meeting has been changed in some way, you will be informed.
4. Be the first person to extend your hand to be shaken and match their style of hand shake. You are demonstrating how well you fit in, so regardless of how the person shakes your hand, **match that style**. These four things need to be repeated at the close of the meeting as well. The interview is over, you walk to the door of their office, stop at the doorway (or at the exit door to the building or wherever the parting moment will occur) and repeat these same four steps exactly (smile, direct eye contact, use their name, and shake hands). Don’t forget!

## COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY USING STORIES

We live in a story-based society that uses such accounts to communicate rules, beliefs, and values. Over the generations, society has developed an innate ability to decipher and extrapolate meaning from the many details that stories offer. It is this very ability that job seekers must utilize to communicate meaning and potential to future

employers. Since the best predictor of future behavior is past performance, job seekers must be able to provide past accounts that demonstrate their ability to perform at a high level and bring value to a company.

Unfortunately, Western society has complicated matters by instilling upon us the belief that it is inappropriate to boast about ourselves and aggrandize our accomplishments. As a result, there is a tendency to downplay the significance of our efforts and depreciate our worth, the effect of which is an increased level of difficulty in thinking of stories to share about our accomplishments.

This is the point at which the acronym S.A.C. becomes a useful tool to the job seeker. S.A.C. stands for:

- **S**ituation
- **A**ction
- **C**onsequence

When you are telling a S.A.C. story, you are not bragging, but rather, telling a factual story. We need a way to present our stories in a short and concise manner fitting the time limitations of an interaction with a potential employer, yet one which will also do the job of communicating our potential.

Complete and review the sentence completion exercise below. Identify the accomplishments which are most closely related to the work you will do in your career of choice. Use the S.A.C. form on the next page to develop at least TEN stories about events/exercises/volunteer and work experiences before your interview.

## SENTENCE COMPLETION EXERCISE

Please complete as many of the following sentence fragments as you can. Quantify your examples using dollar amounts, time, percentages, or cost reductions, etc. as much as possible. From these examples you will be able to create stories to tell employers.

1. One time that I went beyond what was asked of me was:

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2. One time I solved a problem was when:

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3. One time I reduced complaints by:

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4. One time I improved a process or procedure was:

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5. One good thing my prior employer said about me in a performance review was:

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6. One time I dealt with an angry customer/client/co-worker by:

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7. One time I streamlined a program/project/operation by:

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8. One time I received a compliment or award for:

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9. One time I saved the company money by:

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10. One time I made the company money when:

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## **Situation-Action-Consequence Stories**

Review the sentence completion exercise you just completed. Identify the accomplishments, which are most closely related to the work you will do in your position of choice. Use this Situation-Action-Consequence form to develop at least three stories for your resume (also to be used during an interview).

**TITLE** \_\_\_\_\_

**SITUATION:** (Describe the problem, condition, situation, need, or challenge presented by this story.)

**ACTION:** (What did you do to complete the assignment, correct the problem, resolve the situation, or take advantage of an opportunity?)

**CONSEQUENCE:** (What were the results of your actions? Quantify the benefit wherever possible by presenting the result in dollars, percentages, decreases, increases, reductions, time, numbers of people or products, etc.)

**QUESTION:** Pick a topic covered by your S.A.C. and ask an open-ended question about that topic to help you learn additional information.

## GENERATING QUESTIONS TO ASK

Questions help you learn about available jobs as well as the companies themselves. Some job seekers seem to learn more and get further much more quickly in the interview than others. If you were to tape record the conversations of effective job seekers and analyze their conversations, you would find that the types of questions being asked are formed differently and cause company representatives to do more of the talking and reveal more important information. The most effective questions are ones that focus on the company's needs, problems and challenges. Sometimes you find out that they are not even aware that these issues are problems. Often you find that they are not devoting the time, energy, and resources to solving the problem. The crucial motivator is the moments at which you help them realize the costs for not solving these problems. Consequently, this is also the point at which they will hire you. Our goal in this lesson is to teach you the secrets of asking questions that focus on the needs, problems, and challenges of the organization.

## QUESTION COMPOSITION

Questions are either open or closed. Closed questions are ones that can be answered with a yes or no, or request specific information. Open questions cannot be answered by a yes or no and force the speaker to talk about a subject.

CLOSED questions often begin with:

• Are	• Did
• Do	• Would
• Can	• Is
• Does	• Which

OPEN questions begin with:

• Who	• At what time
• What	• Tell me about
• When	• In what way
• Where	• In which way
• Why	• Describe
• How	• To what extent

Ultimately, the company will not hire you because you are a nice person or because they like your resume. They will however, extend an offer if they anticipate having a problem that you are able to help them remedy. It is the identification of these problems that poses the greatest difficulty to job seekers. Asking open ended and fact finding questions will help to target and address those critical needs.

## **SAMPLE PROBING QUESTIONS**

Here are examples of questions that may be useful to you as you prepare questions for companies you are interviewing. Identify about ten questions you like the best. Write them on a 3x5 card and take them to the interview with you.

1. What areas of the company do you believe offer the greatest opportunity for growth?
2. How has the growth of your company made it difficult to get tasks completed?
3. What is your current rate of turnover in this department?
4. To what extent has the rate of employee turnover caused problems for you?
5. How well do you feel your company is meeting customer needs?
6. What issues are you currently facing with staff productivity?
7. What are some of the services you'd like to offer customers, but can't right now?
8. How do you collect information on quality control efforts?
9. What programs or services are not cost-effective? Why?
10. What would you like to see employees do differently to save you money and improve profits?
11. How do you stay current on new developments in the field?
12. How do the results of this department affect the rest of the company?
13. What are the most difficult projects the company is currently working on?
14. How does your company compare to that of your competitors?
15. What are your goals for the future of the company?
16. How well do your current employees work together?
17. What types of problems/situations give the company the most trouble?
18. What would be the most difficult problem I would face if you offered me this job?
19. Tell me about the last time the company had to choose between producing a quality service and meeting a deadline.
20. Tell me about a current project where the company had to overcome major obstacles to get it completed
21. What types of situations cause your employees the greatest amount of stress?

## **GOING THE EXTRA MILE – HAVE A PORTFOLIO READY**

Often times, success in an interview are not determined solely by the things you have done right (dress, preparation, etc.). Remember that the many other candidates vying for the same job may also be employing the very same interview techniques. Thus, it is critical that you go “the extra mile” and raise your level of professionalism to set yourself apart. A portfolio can help you achieve this.

What is a Portfolio?

- Marketing tool that provides evidence of accomplishments, skills, and abilities.
- Documents the scope and quality of your experience and training.
- Serves as an organized collection of material that presents your personal and professional skills in a concrete way.

Reasons to Create a Portfolio:

- Demonstrates your work, provides samples, and projects productivity.
- Enhances credibility.
- Provides a competitive edge.

Format Options:

- Hard Copy
- CD-ROM
- Web link

What to Include:

- Table of Contents
- Career and Summary Goals
- Resumes (chronological and accomplishment)
- Work samples: projects, writing samples, etc.
- Awards and Honors (appraisals, etc)
- Letters of Recommendation
- Conferences, Workshops or Additional Training

Optional Additions:

- Publications
- Certifications/Licenses
- Audio/Visual

Portfolio Assembly

- Select a binder style based on the largest item to be included
- If using a 3 ring binder, select one with an insertable cover and spine
- Make a cover and spine label
- Use divider tabs for organization.

## **LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES**

If your sole criterion for evaluating your effectiveness as an interviewer is whether or not you get a specific offer, then you are likely to experience considerable disappointment. After all, there is always a great deal of rejection in sales, because you don't have that much control. Sometimes, in spite of all your preparation, and for reasons beyond your control, people don't buy. However, if you set a goal for making each interview the best one you have ever done and you strive to get several interviews for different jobs, you will find yourself with multiple job offers and a true sense of control over your future. Concentrate not only on simply getting through an interview, but also on improving your interview skills every time.



## ★ STAR TIP

It is not unusual for you to be blocked mentally and suddenly not be able to remember any of the questions or stories you prepared. At a time like this, it is a good idea to have notes available. However, instead of a notebook with a pad of paper, use 3x5 cards that will easily fit in your pocket or purse. Take one card with the names of all your stories listed. On the other side, write the key questions that you need to cover and other secondary topics that might lead to a useful discussion.

## **AFTER INTERVIEW PERSONAL QUESTIONNAIRE**

After each job interview and before you have even left the parking lot, while the details of the interview are fresh in your mind, answer these questions. (Use additional paper as necessary).

1. How did the interview go?
2. What did you do or say that you feel went well?
3. What did you do or say that you think needs improvement or practice?
4. What needs, challenges, or problems did you uncover?
5. What questions asked were you unprepared for?
6. What would you do differently to demonstrate your value?
7. How were you able to create a positive image?
8. Which answers to questions need to be shortened next time?
9. What seemed to be the interviewer's greatest area(s) of concern?
10. What could you have said to minimize or eliminate those concern(s)?

## **PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT - SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### SCREENING-OUT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Instructions:** Please write out and answer for each question as you would in an interview (Hint: Look for opportunities to tell stories.)

1. Tell me about yourself. (Hint – Select four words that describe you and build an answer around them)
2. What do you know about our organization?
3. What are your qualifications for this position?
4. Tell me about a team project of which you are particularly proud of your contribution.
5. What aspects of this position interest you the most?
6. Why should we hire you?
7. What are your short and long term career goals? (Short-term is to make this transition, get into this field, and get this job. Long-term is to be an effective leader/manager and make a difference)

8. What are your greatest strengths?
9. What is your greatest weakness?
10. Tell me about your experience in school.
11. What are your salary requirements?
12. What else do you think I should know about you?

ANSWERING "WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST WEAKNESS?"

Ideally you want to answer every interview question in the positive. Because this question asks for negative information, it's difficult to answer correctly. Giving careful thought to your own uniqueness, you should try to come up with an answer that is both true and causes the interviewer to think well of you. Here are some examples.

1. I've been told that I set my standards for myself too high.
2. Sometimes I come on too strong with my ideas.
3. I'm something of a "workaholic" and need to develop a better balance between my commitment to the tasks I have taken on and my outside activities.
4. I've been known to get upset with others who are \_\_\_\_\_ (late to meetings, don't have their facts straight, obviously lying, lazy, take advantage of the system for their own personal gain, etc.)
5. I prefer to think of it not as an area of weakness, but as an area I am working to improve. For example, I would really like to improve my communication skills.
6. Sometimes I expect too much from those I work with.
7. I am a very detailed person and when I do problem-solving, I strive for the best answer I can find, when in fact something I come up with right away, would often work just as well.
8. Sometimes I'm impatient with people who are slow to grasp new ideas.
9. I have a strong need for organization and order. I have found that being a neat and tidy person can bother other people.
10. I'm a very creative person and sometimes others feel I'm trying to show them up when I come up with new ideas before they do.

## **JOB INTERVIEWING IN BRIEF - CHECKLIST**

### **I. PREPARATION**

- A. Identify the tasks you would perform on the job.
- B. Research the needs, problems, and challenges the company is facing that might cause them to hire you.
- C. Create at least ten open-ended questions probing into the issues you've identified to ask the interviewer.
- D. Identify what you have to offer the employer and how this position is a good fit for you.
- E. Create stories using the Situation, Action, Consequence (S.A.C.) format to demonstrate your ability to assist in solving the problems identified.
- F. Obtain a list of common interview questions and write out your answers.
- G. Practice answering these questions paying particular attention to your non-verbal body language.
- H. Review your resume and identify the questions it creates.
- I. Prepare a list of possible situations you might face on the job and how you would handle each one.
- J. Print off extra copies of what you submitted for the job (e.g., resume, application, etc.).
- K. What type of interview will you be having? How might that affect your preparation?
- L. Call the day before to confirm your appointment and find out with whom you will be meeting.
- M. Identify how employees in your area of the company dress to aid in your outfit decisions.
- N. Outline what you plan to do and say to create a great first and last impression.

### **II. SELLING YOURSELF IN THE INTERVIEW**

- A. Turn off your cell phone and leave it in the car.
- B. Your goal is to avoid being screened out.
- C. Visualize yourself being successful in the interview.
- D. Enter the office no more than ten minutes beforehand.
- E. Start the interview off right with a great first impression and a Five Star Greeting (see handout).
- F. Expect the interviewer to take notes during the meeting, but resist the urge to do so yourself.
- G. Create a discussion environment instead of a cross-examination environment by how you position yourself, your non-verbals, the questions you ask, and your efforts to put the interviewer at ease.
- H. Look for opportunities to give S.A.C.'s followed by probing questions.
- I. When you don't know how to answer a question, give them a S.A.C.
- J. Use their last question as an opportunity to summarize their needs, why they should hire you, and ASK for the job.
- K. Do not negotiate anything until they make you an offer – dodge salary questions until that point.
- L. End the interview with a strong last impression.

### **III. INTERVIEW FOLLOWUP**

- A. Write down what new things you learned about their needs, problems and challenges.
- B. Write down what you need to do differently at the next interview.
- C. Prepare an After-Interview Thank You letter for everyone who interviewed you.
- D. Be prepared to follow up with the interviewer using various forms – letter, email, and phone call – over time until a hiring decision is made but not to the extent that it will be seen as harassment.
- E. When calling the decision-maker, do not leave a message – keep control of the process by asking when would be a better time to reach him/her.



#### **STAR TIP**

The above suggestions are intended solely for personal use outside of the services of Five Star Staffing & Accounting Recruiters. All follow up communication with the client should be conducted through your Recruiting Manager. He/she will ensure that feedback is provided in a timely fashion.