

CAREER CORNER

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Sharon Givler, Director
Gwen Miller, Assist. Director
Susan Donmoyer, Assistant

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Change your views on Interviews

It's no secret. A good resume can open the door to an interview, but it's your personal presentation in the interview that determines if you'll secure the position for which you have applied.

Most every candidate for a job feels nervous on interview day. What will I be asked? What do they want? What if I don't know the answer to a question? You hope you are prepared for the interrogation that awaits you, but the knot in your stomach never seems to go away.

There is such a thing as good nervousness, you know. A little bit of stress helps many of us perform well. You cannot eliminate the jitters, but you can bring them under control by being well prepared.

What do you need to do?



First, *adjust your thinking.* An interview is not an interrogation; it's a conversation.

Second, remember that *you are not likely to be interviewing if the organization didn't think you could do the job.* Granted they still want to hear you speak about your skills and job knowledge, but if they didn't think you had the basics, you wouldn't even be there

Third, *learn to tell your story.* Actually, learn to tell many short stories about your accomplishments and contributions in the classroom, at your internship, on the soccer field or in your volunteer project. Show how you responded to a crisis, exhibited leadership, learned from a mistake, or functioned as part of a team.

Understand the Process

You may feel as though the job for which you have applied is literally THE PERFECT position for you. As you read the job description you mentally evaluated how everything you've done up to this point has prepared you to accomplish those specific job responsibilities. **You know it's a perfect fit - the rest is easy, right? Wrong.**

The reality is, many candidates feel the same way. Employers are left with a large stack of applications to sort through to find a few individuals with whom they would like to interview. Hopefully you will be one of those people; unfortunately, sometimes you are not. Or, you make it to the interview phase and feel you've presented yourself well, only to learn you were not selected for the position. So what happened? There is rarely one specific answer to that question - instead, it may be more helpful to gain a better understanding of some of the key factors concerning the interview process, as described in Tony Beshara's book, *Acing the Interview*.

- You need to sell your particular "features, advantages, and benefits" - what can you do for an employer that the other candidates can't?
- The most qualified candidate does NOT always get the job. The first 'threshold' to cross is to be qualified. But that doesn't matter unless you sell yourself well and interview better than everyone else.
- Prepare by researching for interviews. The more you demonstrate that you know about a company and the person doing the interviewing, the better you look.
- Have prepared questions.
- First impressions are critical. Whether you like it or not, study after study proves that interviewers adopt an opinion about a candidate in the first 15-20 seconds of the interview.
- Watch your body language. You should communicate openness; never be laid back!
- Delivery is important—your voice should be enthusiastic, focused, with a high degree of confidence.
- Give clear explanations; don't talk too much or too little.
- **Tell stories! (more on how to do this on the reverse side)**



Articulate Your Strengths

Who are you? What can you do? What do you know?

Every interview question, no matter how creatively worded or complexly designed, is basically asking one of these three questions. If you can respond in a way that highlights your skills and explains how you fit within the organization, you are much more likely to move ahead in the hiring process.

However, we have found that students often have difficulty articulating skills. For example:



- Inability to describe or define their skills
- Little or no understanding of the skills they possess
- Concern about the legitimacy of skills developed in non-paid experiences
- Insufficient knowledge of their strongest skills and the activities that draw on and cultivate those skills
- Perception that job-specific skills are the only ones that matter

It sometimes can help to think of your strengths/skills as falling into one of three areas, as outlined by the folks who developed *SkillScan*, a skills-focused career development tool.

Transferable / Functional / Liberal Arts Skills -

Actions taken to perform a task, transferable to different work functions and industries.

- Based on ability and aptitude.
- Expressed in verbs. (examples: organize; promote; analyze; write)

Personal Traits / Attitudes

Traits or personality characteristics that contribute to performing work.

- Developed in childhood and through life experience.
- Expressed in adjectives (examples: patient; diplomatic; results-oriented; independent)

Knowledge Based Skills

Knowledge of specific subjects, procedures and information necessary to perform particular tasks.

- Acquired through education, training and on-the-job experience. Expressed in nouns.
- Examples: accounting, Spanish, Personnel administration, contract management, PowerPoint

Keep these three groups of skills in mind when attempting to articulate your strengths in an interview. We also encourage you to take a look at the liberal arts skills (PDF) posted on the Career Services resource page for students at (www.lvc.edu/career-services).

Telling Your Story

Many employers use the behavioral based interviewing method of asking questions to encourage you to describe your experience. The assumption is your past performance in a job, activity, leadership role, service or class project will predict your future performance in the work place. So how do you describe your experiences? By telling your story!

When you tell a story you come alive. You smile, you relax; you use gestures to complement your words and your tone of voice becomes interesting to listen to. Overall, you are engaged with the interviewer and are providing them with illustrations of your communicative abilities, analytical skills, work ethic and teamwork skills. They want to hear about your interpersonal strengths and your success with taking initiative, solving problems, and keeping flexible. Well-told stories enable you to highlight your abilities in these areas.

A great technique to keep in mind to help you tell your story is the **S.T.A.R.** method:

Situation - Task - Action—Result

Situation/Task

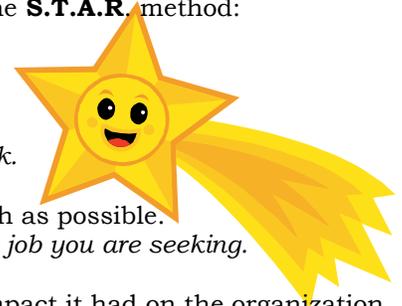
State the problem, need, opportunity or goal.
This provides the context for the actions you took.

Actions

State the key actions performed using action verbs as much as possible.
This helps to target your strengths/skills to the requirements of the job you are seeking.

Results

State the result and quantify the significance of your actions or qualify the impact it had on the organization.
This helps to demonstrate the significance of your actions.



Practice telling articulating your skills and telling YOUR story in a mock interview.