



Ace Your Next Job Interview

Insider Secrets from a Human Resources Professional who Stutters



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As a person who stutters, I often struggled with job interviews. I agonized over every word, syllable, and sound. Everything had to come out perfectly, or so I thought. I carefully navigated through the cumbersome questions that I viewed as an enemy's weapons of artillery rather than viewing it as simply a getting to know you process. I can even remember downing a glass of wine before participating in a phone interview to calm my nerves. All of the stress and anxiety prevented me from enjoying the conversation and it led me to say only what I could say, rather than what I wanted to say. It's safe to say that I viewed job interviews as a necessary evil.

I decided that I needed to confront my fears head on by applying to hundreds of jobs for the sole purpose of desensitization. I had countless phone interviews and in-person interviews. It was very difficult in the beginning but I eventually grew excited to talk to recruiters and hiring managers while also learning how to successfully interview.

The skills I learned along the way helped me recently land a job as the Manager of Benefits & Compliance at the United Nations Foundation located in Washington, DC. And I'll tell you a secret – I loved the interview process! I came prepared and was ready to ace it with confidence and a smile. That's why I'm sharing helpful tips I've learned so you can ace your next interview.

Preparing for a Job Interview

Congratulations! Your resume was selected out of the huge pile of resumes that the company received. You are one step closer to getting that job you've been eyeing! Now, it's time to prepare for the interview stage.

Usually job interviews begin with a Phone Screen interview and then will advance into a series of in-person or online video interviews.

The Phone Screen Interview

Phone Screen Interviews are usually quick, about 10-30 minutes long, and are usually conducted by a recruiter. The recruiter has reviewed all the resumes and has identified your background as matching most of the qualifications the company is seeking. They want to ask you a few questions to gain more of an insight to see if you further match the qualities the company is looking for in a candidate. If all goes well, the next step will be a more in-depth interview.

Disclose or Not to Disclose?

I always suggest disclosing if you feel stuttering will prevent you from saying everything you want to say during the interview. Disclosing puts everyone on the same page. It lets the interviewer know what is happening, so they do not think that any pauses are the result of a bad phone reception or something else out-of-the-ordinary. Disclosing also takes the pressure off of you by giving yourself permission to stutter. It's a win-win situation.

Disclosure Tips

When the recruiter contacts you to set up the phone interview, you can respond by asking for extra time with the phone interview as a way to disclose your stutter. Your response doesn't have to be long—short and sweet does the trick. Here's an example:

"Thank you for reaching out to me regarding this position. I am excited to hear more about the role and how my background might benefit your organization. Would you mind scheduling a few extra minutes on the call for me? I stutter so I would like to make sure that I have ample time to speak with you to answer any questions you may have."

It's important for you to know the Americans with Disabilities Act requires companies to offer "reasonable accommodations" and this applies to both employees and candidates during the job interview phase.

Answering Standard Interview Questions

You will find it helpful to take notes on these standard interview questions and answer them referencing your background and experience. Rehearse your responses until they are loosely memorized. You do not have to know your responses word for word, knowing the gist of your responses will be fine.

First Impressions Matter

It is critical to make a good first impression with your interviewer. Put them at ease with a smile and a firm handshake. Introduce yourself by both your first and last name, so that the interviewer knows how to pronounce your name. Feel free to make some small talk such as the weather, the drive to the interview, how their day is going, etc. Forming a

quick bond before the interview starts puts both of you at ease and it makes them feel connected with you.

Tell Me about Yourself

Your response should not be about your personal life, where you grew up, who your best friend is, or what your hobbies are. Instead, the best response to this question is your elevator pitch to immediately 'wow' the interviewer. Briefly talk about your background, any credentials relevant to the position you might have, how many years of experience you have, and two or three of your biggest accomplishments that tie directly to what the job posting is looking for.

You can follow-up with the interviewer by asking them a question such as "What qualities are you looking for in a candidate for this position?" This will help keep the conversation flow going. Listen to their answer and then tailor a response about how you fit their description with your qualifications and background.

Why are you interested in this position?

When answering this question, remember receiving a job offer is a two-way street—the job benefits you and the company. Frame your response to explain how the position can benefit both you and the company.

This is your opportunity to talk about how your background fits this position and how your career goals tie to this position and the company. Your response can touch upon the following areas:

- Career advancement opportunity
- New career challenge
- Breaking into a new industry
- Assuming more responsibilities

You can also speak highly of the company with your response. If you know the company has a great culture, great leadership, or if there is something in the news about the company that excites you, mention it here. But make sure that you convey how you will contribute to the organization and how you will make the company benefit from hiring you for this role.

What is your biggest strength/weakness?

This line of questioning is being used less often by recruiters. However, you should still be prepared with straight forward answers that tie directly to the position.

Answering questions about what your strengths are usually easy. Choose one of your strong points in your career and talk about how that experience has prepared you for this role.

When answering what your weakness is, come up with something creative. No recruiter wants to hear the generic "I work too hard". Or worse, "I have no weakness". Everyone

has a weakness. Maybe it's time management, priority management, not being able to say no to others, etc. Always turn your negative into a positive by talking about how you are learning from it and overcoming it. Below is an example on how to spin a negative into a positive:

"I would say my weakness is that I can get overwhelmed at the beginning of large projects. I can feel stressed and anxious about the grandiosity of the task. However, I have found that if I organize and break down the project by timelines and deadlines, create a well-written plan to tackle it, and make milestones to accomplish, I feel much more in control of the project due to the organization of it. This helps me not only plan for the project better, but I also have a good grasp on it by being organized to accomplish the project in a timely manner."

How to end an interview

Always close your interview by reminding the interviewer that you want the position. Thank them by their name and state that you are very interested in the position. Your close to the interview can go something like this, "Thank you Michael for your time today. I believe my background and expertise are well suited for this position. I am definitely interested in this role and I am very excited about the possibility of working here."

Also, ask what the next steps and timeline are for the interview process. The interviewer should tell you if there are any other candidates being interviewed and what the timeline is for them to get back to you.

Thank you notes

After your interview(s), always send a thank you via email to each of your interviewers. If you do not have contact information for everyone, email the recruiter your individualized thank you emails and ask them to forward it on to the people who interviewed you.

In your thank you letters, make sure you mention these areas:

- Graciously thank them for their time
- Reference something from the interview that brought up an in-depth discussion, or bring up something that ties your background to the position
- Remind them again that you are very interested in this position

Use the STAR Method Throughout the Interview

It can be difficult to think of your responses quickly in a job interview. The **STAR** method is a simple way to frame your answers to behavioral questions by discussing a specific **S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction and **R**esult.

For example, suppose you were asked this question in an interview: **Talk about a time you faced a difficult customer and how did you handle it?**

S | describe the situation

"When I was a sales associate at XYZ corporation, I noticed that there was a large number of unhappy customers and it was negatively impacting sales."

T | explain the tasks you were responsible for in the situation

"I realized we needed to create a way for customers to express their feedback so I started researching ways to implement a customer feedback loop."

A | talk about the actions you took to overcome this challenge

"I recommended we integrate an online review system for customers to send in their feedback. I presented this idea to senior management and started forming a team to create the review system."

R | share the results of your action; the more specific, the better

"As a result of the customer feedback loop system being created, we were able to receive reviews and suggestions from customers. Our management team was able to learn about what improvements could be made and created changes within our department to improve the performance of our products. Our sales increased by 30% within 6 months, and we generated 40% first-time customers during this time."

Prepare for your job interview by thinking of 3-to-5 achievements and/or projects that tie directly to the job description. You can use this STAR method mentioned to illustrate your accomplishments.

More Interview Tips

- Arrive 10-15 minutes before your scheduled interview time. If there is a receptionist, be personable with them. It's common practice for the interviewing team to ask the receptionist about your behavior towards them.
- Think of the interviewer as just a conversation. The interviewer just wants to get to know you and your background. Picture them as a friend or someone you met in the grocery store, obviously still keeping the interview professional. View yourself on equal ground with the interviewer and you will feel more relaxed.
- Bring a notepad and pen with you as well as extra copies of your resume. Write down notes occasionally during the interview because this shows you are organized, prepared, and interested.
- Mirror the interviewers body language. Subconsciously, the interviewer will pick up on it and it will help build rapport.

- The interview conversation should be a two-way street. Don't let the interviewer do all of the talking, just like you should not be doing all of the talking. Prepare questions for the interview and find ways to weave them in during the conversation. You don't have to wait until the end of the interview to ask any questions.
- Show positivity, enthusiasm, and energy during your interview. Do not be negative about your current or previous roles. Smile throughout the interview and show your genuine passion for the job.

In conclusion, remember that if you are called for an interview, the company sees something positive in you! They believe you already have the qualifications to do the job. The company is just trying to ask you some more in-depth questions and determine if you are a good culture fit.

As long as you are prepared and confident for the interview you have nothing to worry about. Most importantly, try to have fun during the interview! Your passion and excitement will be contagious and they will subconsciously pick up on that. Good luck!



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